

<b>As a Community Leader - We will engage with residents in an open and meaningful way</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress update</b>
Delivering the Communications and Engagement Strategy Action Plan	<p>The Communications and Engagement Strategy was adopted in 2015. The action plan will be revised this year following feedback from the Resident Survey. The following actions identified have been delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications are written in plain English to maximise clarity and understanding;</li> <li>• Pictorial guides have been produced for services including recycling and benefits for residents with special literacy requirements or language barriers;</li> <li>• Designed materials adhere to guidelines such as minimum font size which take account of visual impairment requirements;</li> <li>• Imagery in designed material reflect a variety of ages, genders and backgrounds;</li> <li>• Liaised with the Kent Association for the blind on designed material to ensure legibility;</li> <li>• Large print versions of documents have been produced for residents on request;</li> <li>• Translations of material are offered as required;</li> <li>• Communication is via a variety of channels including print, online, social media, face-to-face and events across the borough to cater for multiple needs and demographics;</li> <li>• Two-way communications are carried out via social media, face-to face and events to enable residents to have their say and influence decisions;</li> <li>• Support is provided to community forums and groups to encourage interaction with community life and involvement with decision making; and</li> <li>• Consultation on major decisions are promoted across the borough.</li> </ul>
Embedding the principles of consultation and engagement (as set out in the Communications and Engagement Strategy).	The Communication Team and the Policy and Information Team provide support to services across the Council on consultations on a range of areas This includes ensuring that equalities questions are addressed, the right methodology is used and consultations are promoted properly. There is room for improvement still here and

	<p>following the appointment of a new Communications team, the teams will be working together to develop a new process for undertaking consultations and raising awareness with Unit Managers.</p>
<p>Undertaking a Resident Survey to identify how residents feel about the Council</p>	<p>The Resident Survey was undertaken between September and December 2015. 2,008 responses were received with a balance of responses across all wards. The survey saw:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increase in respondents from 18-24 year olds, traditionally a low responding group;</li> <li>• BME groups were slightly underrepresented at 3% of respondents in comparison to just under 6% of the borough;</li> <li>• 22% of responders considered themselves to have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity in comparison to 16% for the Borough; and</li> <li>• 14% acted as a carer on either a full or part time basis in comparison to 10% for the borough as a whole.</li> </ul> <p>The results of the Resident Survey have been analysed by ward and demographic using Acorn Customer Insight Tools and an Action Plan is under development. Some of the insight provided includes:</p> <p>In terms of satisfaction with the local areas as a place to live:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residents from BME backgrounds were significantly more satisfied (+18%) than residents from white backgrounds</li> </ul> <p>Extent that residents feel they belong to their local area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2013, 25 to 34 year olds experienced the lowest sense of belonging. This has increased by 9% in 2015, 35 to 44 year olds now have the lowest sense of belonging.</li> </ul>
<p>Use customer tools (Acorn) to gain insight into the communities within</p>	<p>The results of the Residents Survey have been analysed using Acorn Customer Insight Tools and this information will be provided to services. The communication and</p>

<p>Maidstone and how to engage them.</p>	<p>engagement plan for 2016-17 will be developed based on the resident survey.</p> <p>The Policy and Information Team are starting to roll out the tool to other services and have just completed work for the Customer Service Improvement Programme, identifying who accesses our frontline services.</p>
<p>Ensuring the information and advice we provide uses language this is clear and concise.</p>	<p>The following training has been provided across the authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Services Training (The Customer Experience, drama based training delivered by Theatre&amp; ); and</li> <li>• Customer Friendly Writing course</li> </ul> <p>Theatre&amp; were commissioned to develop and run 3-hour customer service training sessions at the Hazlitt Theatre Exchange Studio. All staff and managers were required to attend a session. The training was interactive and delegates were actively involved. The Customer Experience workshop was designed to encourage staff to consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How we can all work together effectively to ensure we deliver Excellence in Customer Service;</li> <li>• How much we think we are individually involved in the Customer Experience; and</li> <li>• What happens if we don't get it right and what can we do about it.</li> </ul> <p>The Customer Experience addressed Equality and Diversity issues. Through role play unacceptable behaviours which are outside the Council's core values were addressed. Staff were shown how to effectively handle such scenarios should they arise.</p> <p>A current workstream of the business improvement team is improving outgoing correspondence to residents. The team are working with the departments to help ensure that letters sent are clearer, more concise and easier to understand. Work has already been undertaken with Council Tax, Benefits and Environmental Enforcement.</p>

**Appendix A****Equality Objectives 2015-19  
Progress update -  
Actions and Measurements**

<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Current Performance</b>
Resident Survey Percentage of residents that feel the Council keeps them well informed about the services and benefits it provides.	56% (down 11% since 2013)
Percentage of residents that agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area	31% (up 8% since 2013)
Percentage of Parishes that are satisfied with the level of communication and engagement they have with MBC	A Parish Liaison Officer was appointed at the end of 2015. This new role will be responsible for carrying out an annual survey of parishes to establish levels of satisfaction; enabling the Council to improve communication and engagement in this area.

<b>As a Service Provider – We will ensure our services are inclusive, accessible and support residents and customers</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Current Performance</b>
Undertaking Equality Impact Assessments when making a change to policy or service	<p>All reports are reviewed by the Policy and Information team to ensure an EQIA has been completed if a change of Policy or change to service delivery is being proposed.</p> <p>There is work to be undertaken across the organisation raise awareness and consideration of equalities impacts at the earliest opportunity</p>
Reviewing the equality information we collect to develop our understanding of our service users	<p>This is an ongoing customer insight workstream of the Policy and Information team. The findings of the Equality Data Review, carried out in 2015 as part of the development of the current Equalities Objectives, will be revisited to establish a more cohesive approach across the Council for collection of equalities data.</p> <p>The review found that there were gaps in the data currently collected, making it hard to assess inequality without quality data. The review identified that there was no 'one size fits all' in terms of equalities questions but question formats could be more consistent. For example, the format of age group bracket questions used in various consultation exercises should be consistent with the Resident's Survey.</p>
Raise staff awareness of equality and diversity issues that are relevant to Maidstone's communities	<p>All staff undertook Equality and Diversity training in February and September 2012. Further work needs to be undertaken to maintain awareness through stakeholder management, Equality Impact Assessments and promotion of ELMs training. Equalities and Diversity training is now mandatory to new starters via ELMs e-learning.</p>
Promote the Financial Inclusion Forum to partners and third sector as an opportunity for sharing best practice and networking	<p>Working in collaboration across Maidstone's public, private and voluntary sectors to reduce financial exclusion, increase financial capability and provide improved access to sustainable money and debt advice and improved access to financial services. The following has been delivered in the past year via this forum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dementia awareness training for partners via the Alzheimer's Society to help</li> </ul>

**Equality Objectives 2015-19  
Progress update -  
Actions and Measurements**

	<p>when dealing with residents living with dementia to manage finances; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A web page has been created for the forum and put onto the Council’s website</li> </ul>
<p>Delivering the Customer Service Improvement Programme</p>	<p>The following initiatives have been delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment system, assisted digital points, free Wi-Fi and free council phones introduced in Gateway;</li> <li>• The introduction of more online forms. A number of online forms have been launched on the website for Housing Benefits. This includes a form to upload proofs for benefits claims which means that residents no longer need to visit the Gateway or pay to post their proofs. This form is used by around 20% of those who have to submit proofs. An online form for residents who need to renew parking permits has also been launched. This was used by 68% people who renewed permits in January/February 2016;</li> <li>• Improving letters. Letters and emails to residents must be easy to understand. Council Tax bills and other standard letters were simplified in 2015. As a result contact made with the Council following receipt of Council Tax bills was reduced by a third. Benefits letters have also been revised and a simpler annual statement was sent out to all Benefits customers in March;</li> <li>• The Transformation team have provided support to Environmental Enforcement, the Museum, Parking, Environmental Services, Waste and Recycling, Revenues and Benefits and Bereavement Services to help them improve the services they offer to customers; and</li> <li>• Reducing failure demand (when people contact the Council when something has been done incorrectly or the right information has not been provided; this is demand driven by failure, or what was avoidable contact). Making letters simpler is one way of reducing failure demand. Also being introduced is failure demand monitoring of all services delivered by the Customer Services team so it can be understood where things are going wrong and improve our service to all our customers.</li> </ul>

**Equality Objectives 2015-19  
Progress update -  
Actions and Measurements**

	<p>The Customer Service Improvement Programme (CSIP) is delivered by the Transformation Team and is now in its third year, working with services across the Council to improve service delivery. The CSIP is currently being reviewed and a new programme is being developed.</p>
Take up of training	<p>The new ELMs e-learning system has just been implemented and data will be collected from this for the next update. All staff should have undertaken Equality and Diversity training. It is mandatory that all new staff undertake this training as part of their induction.</p> <p>It was mandatory for all staff to undertake the Equality and Diversity training offered in February and September 2012.</p>
Increased level of equality information	<p>This is an ongoing customer insight workstream of the Policy and Information team (and related to the Action 'Reviewing the equality information we collect to develop our understanding of our service users'). The findings of the Equality Data Review, carried out in 2015 as part of the development of the current Equalities Objectives, will be revisited to establish a more cohesive approach across the Council for collection of equalities data.</p> <p>The review found that there were gaps in the data currently collected, making it hard to assess inequality without quality data. The review identified that there was no 'one size fits all' in terms of equalities questions but question formats could be more consistent. For example, the format of age group bracket questions used in various consultation exercises should be consistent with the Resident's Survey.</p>
Membership of Maidstone Financial Capability Partnership (formerly titled Financial Inclusion Forum)	<p>There are 33 different organisations signed up to the partnership. Two sub groups have been set up; Money and Crisis Sub Group and an Education Sub Group.</p>
Monitoring of channel shift indicators	<p>Channel Shift indicators show the change in contact channels (telephone, email, face to face and internet). This is monitored by overall and by service. From 2014/15 to 2015/16 the shift in the way in which resident's access services is as follows:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visits to Gateway – reduced from 6.4% to 3.8%;</li><li>• Visits to Website – increased from 76.85 to 81.3%; and</li><li>• Contacts made by telephone – reduced from 15.7% to 14.9%.</li></ul>
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**Equality Objectives 2015-19  
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<b>As an Employer – to have a workforce that feel valued and respected</b>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress update</b>
Delivering the Workforce Strategy	The Workforce Strategy aligns the needs and priorities of the organisation with those of the workforce. The Strategy will be aligned to the current Strategic Plan which sets out the Council’s core values which includes Equality. The Workforce Strategy is currently being refreshed, to be adopted in 2016/17 Municipal Year.
Undertaking the Investors in People (IIP) assessment and actions identified for improvement	The Equality and Diversity aspect of the review was rated very positively as part of the assessment when it was undertaken in 2013. There is no IIP action Plan, however the IIP assessment is due to be undertaken in December 2016. The new standard has an engagement survey as a compulsory part of the process which will be used to provide progress on the well-being of the organisation.
Continue to deliver One Council briefings	<p>One Council is designed to bring the whole organisation together. It is used to inform staff on organisational changes and to create a sense of unity and belonging across the organisation. It forms part of the package of well-being activities offered to staff. The last session in January include a Bowling completion. The briefing in June 2015 included a number of different taster sessions from cooking to meditation.</p> <p>Eight One Council briefing sessions have been delivered since 2012. The most recent One Council briefing took place in January 2016 at Lockmeadow. Feedback showed it to be the most successful to date (as shown):</p>

**Equality Objectives 2015-19  
Progress update -  
Actions and Measurements**

	<table border="1"> <caption>Estimated data from the facial expression chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Date</th> <th>Smiley face (%)</th> <th>Straight face (%)</th> <th>Sad face (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Apr-12</td> <td>65</td> <td>25</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nov-12</td> <td>62</td> <td>30</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Apr-13</td> <td>38</td> <td>45</td> <td>17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct-13</td> <td>55</td> <td>35</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May-14</td> <td>60</td> <td>30</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct-14</td> <td>65</td> <td>28</td> <td>7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jun-15</td> <td>75</td> <td>15</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jan-16</td> <td>82</td> <td>13</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date	Smiley face (%)	Straight face (%)	Sad face (%)	Apr-12	65	25	10	Nov-12	62	30	8	Apr-13	38	45	17	Oct-13	55	35	10	May-14	60	30	10	Oct-14	65	28	7	Jun-15	75	15	10	Jan-16	82	13	5
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<p>Offering opportunities for staff in relation to wellbeing and work/life balance</p>	<p>The Health and Well-Being offer was brought together in an informative booklet produced in 2016 for staff. This was circulated electronically and is available on the intranet for reference. Health and Well-Being Opportunities detailed and included are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Assistance Programme</li> <li>• Occupation Health – Health Matters</li> <li>• Maidstone Leisure Centre</li> <li>• Employee Volunteer Policy</li> <li>• Eye Tests and Glasses</li> <li>• Flu Vaccinations</li> <li>• Benenden Health Care</li> <li>• Yoga Glasses</li> <li>• Tea and Coffee facilities (Maidstone House)</li> <li>• Pool Bikes</li> <li>• Cycle to Work Scheme</li> <li>• Sports and Social Scheme</li> <li>• Strive Awards Ceremony</li> </ul>																																				

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Actions and Measurements**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSSC Sports</li> <li>• Massage</li> </ul> <p>In addition to this is the Council’s flexible working policy which is available to all staff to help ensure a work/life balance.</p>
Stress Survey	<p>High Levels of stress were identified in some parts of the organisation in the last Stress Survey. As a result the Council has focused on improving health and Well-being and alongside one council briefings, team brief activities and training for managers which includes facilitations skills, performance management training and 360 degree feedback to help ensure people know the organisational purpose know they contribute. This is to continue for a sustained period so that when the Stress Survey is undertaken again, an accurate assessment of the success of these activities can be undertaken.</p>
Best Companies Survey	<p>The Best Companies Survey was last undertaken in 2014, it showed the organisation was continuing to experience high levels of stress (following the Stress Survey in 2012). The Council is focusing on improving the Health and Well-Being of staff and ensuring staff understand the organisation’s purpose how they fit in. There are no immediate plans to undertake this survey.</p>
IIP Assessment	<p>The Council was assessed as ‘silver’ in December 2013. The next assessment is due in December 2016. The new standard has an Engagement Survey as a compulsory part of the process. This will be used to measure progress on reducing stress and improving the well-being of staff.</p>