

**Equalities Objectives and Action Plan – Update**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Anna Collier, Policy and Information Manager Orla Sweeney, Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

**Executive Summary**

This report provides an update on the current Equalities Objectives and Action Plan. A revised Action Plan is proposed to communicate the Council's current position and response to COVID-19 and its ongoing commitment to tackling disadvantage and supporting inclusion and diversity within its communities. This report is for decision.

**Purpose of Report**

To note the update and agree the revised document for decision.

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. To note the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan update at appendix 1 to the report.
2. To agree the revised Equalities Objectives and Action Plan at appendix 2.
3. To note the inclusion of a new protected characteristic in the equalities impact assessment (outlined in paragraphs 2.17 to 2.19).

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy and Resources Committee	21 July 2020

# Equalities Objectives and Action Plan – Update

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <p>Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council’s ability to achieve all four strategic priorities.</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>The report recommendations support the achievements of ‘Heritage is Respected’, ‘Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduce and ‘Deprivation and Social Mobility are Improved’ cross cutting objectives by proposing actions which support their delivery.</p>	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Risk Management</b>	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 in the report.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Financial</b>	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

<b>Legal</b>	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the Public Sector Equalities Duty. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Equality Act 2010.	Legal Team
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment.	Policy & Information Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	No impact identified.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
<b>Procurement</b>	No impact identified	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

## **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Equalities Policy approved by Committee in 2017 sets out the way in which the Council will fulfil its Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010.
- 2.2 The Equalities Policy, objectives and action plan communicate the Council's long-term commitment to tackling disadvantage and promoting inclusion and diversity in Maidstone.
- 2.3 Diversity is not only an asset to our community, it is a defining characteristic of our time, affecting every element of our society. In our globally connected world, the need to understand the impact and dynamics of diversity in local areas is more important now than ever before.

- 2.4 In 2020 diversity and equality issues that have come to the fore relate to race and differential impacts of the COVID-19 impacts on different groups in our communities.
- 2.5 The Black Lives Matter movement has been given added profile by the death in the USA of George Floyd. Recent demonstrations and associated debates about the role of historical figures and memorials in the UK have sparked counter protests and divisive debate that could translate into local community tensions. This has not been our experience in Maidstone. A local BLM protest was held peacefully here in June. Councillors in Maidstone borough play an important role as the eyes and ears of their communities, engaging with residents and sharing concerns about specific local tensions and provide positive routes for engagement.
- 2.6 The impact of BLM highlights the continuing need for open and honest conversation between those deeply affected by racism within our own society and those, including public service providers like the borough council, who are committed to learning more, understanding more and changing the way they think and act to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment.
- 2.7 This provides an opportunity for the Council, as a Community Leader, Employer and Service provider to develop further our work to meet the council's vision of a borough that works for everyone. The Council's objectives and revised action plan will continue the Council's ability to understand and support the diverse needs of its community and staff and remain in a position to lead and respond to change.
- 2.8 COVID-19 experience and data at a national level suggest differential impacts which reflect and reinforce health inequalities and particularly adverse impacts for Black and Minority Ethnic communities. Development of understanding on this topic is at an early stage; data for local impact for Kent and Maidstone borough will need to be analysed carefully for us to develop an understanding of local impact and to inform our work and role in reducing health inequalities. As community leaders councillors know and understand their communities and have demonstrated that they are well placed to help ensure that messages around support packages reach those who might need them. It is important that the council reviews the impact of COVID-19 and its response to the pandemic to collect lessons learnt and identify how future emergency responses can be strengthened.
- 2.9 The Equalities objectives and action plan are reviewed, and progress is reported on an annual basis. This report (and appendices) provides:
- An update on the existing actions identified to deliver the objectives set (Appendix 1)
  - A revised set of actions to consider and agree for 2020/21 (Appendix 2)
  - Background to the Equalities Impact Assessment and inclusion of an additional characteristic

### Update on existing actions

2.10 The previous set of actions were developed with departments across the organisation, reflecting their current workstreams and areas where development was required.

2.11 These actions are detailed at appendix 1 along with an update on progress. Nine actions were previously identified across the Council's three roles, Community Leader, Employer and Service Provider:

- Overall, action taken across the organisation has been positive. In terms of accessibility standards, the focus was on meeting the timescales set for the EU accessibility standards for public sector websites set by Government. The initial deadlines have been met and work is continuing to meet the pending September 2020 deadline.
- Consultation remains strong and engagement with the community voluntary sector has been consistent. The Council undertook 14 surveys in 2019-20 with robust reporting and analysis provided which underpins decision making and informs us on our demographic, who we are reaching and who we need to focus on reaching.
- The inclusion of the Armed Forces Covenant in the Equalities Action Plan has proved positive. In 2019, The Armed Forces Officer Champion attended a Government Consultation at the MOD and contributed to the development of a 'Strategy for our Veterans UK.'
- Dementia training was rolled out successfully across the organisation and work has started on evaluating the Link from a dementia friendly perspective. This work will provide a basis for work on the accessibility of our public spaces. The Museum has held Dementia Friendly openings. There are now early opening on four Sundays a year to allow free entry to People living with Dementia and a guest to explore the museum and temporary exhibitions in a quiet, unhurried way and enjoy a tea and biscuit afterwards.
- The Museum has also held art workshops for the blind in association with Art UK. These sessions encouraged people with visual impairments and visual disabilities to explore sculpture from the museum's collection and to make their own in clay.
- It has held sessions with an LGBTQ+ youth group, to explore identity and museum collections and this is part of an ongoing film project about their experiences.
- The Museum is forming a Black, Asian and minority advisory panel with a first full meeting in the Autumn to agree Terms of Reference.
- The ongoing programme of work at the Museum will form an important part of the new equalities objectives and action plan.

### New actions to deliver the Council's equalities objectives.

- 2.12 The Equalities action plan has been redesigned around the existing roles and objectives. However, the context about the importance of its role as Community Leader, Employer and Service Provider is now clearly communicated and this is then linked to the actions that will be taken to support delivery of each role and objective.
- 2.13 This approach has made it easier to clearly illustrate what the Council's drivers are for ensuring its Public Sector Equality Duty is met in a transparent manner.
- 2.14 It is important that staff understand how the work they do contributes to the delivery of these objectives and in relation to the organisational aims, set out in the Strategic Plan.
- 2.15 The actions in the revised document are positive commitments based on insight. They are matters identified as being of importance to Maidstone where the Council can positively impact the lives of Maidstone residents.
- 2.16 As a Council, we are responsive to local needs as well as national impacts which now include responding to the impacts of a global pandemic and continuing to lead and respond to the diverse needs of our communities. In identifying where our commitment lies, we can more easily focus action and achieve outcomes. This connection to the delivery of our strategic priorities and is also reflected in the revised equalities objectives and actions.

### Background to the Equalities Impact Assessment and inclusion of new characteristic

- 2.17 The revised Equality Impact Assessment, in line with legislation, is required to consider the nine protected strands or characteristics. Other strands or characteristics can be considered, and this is advocated by bodies including the Consultation Institute and can be seen in impact assessments undertaken by other local authorities.
- 2.18 The Equalities Impact Assessment is due to be refreshed and is included as an action in the revised action plan at appendix 2. As we respond to COVID-19 and move towards a recovery phase, it is important now, more than ever, to be able to consider hidden needs. Poverty is a barrier to social mobility. It is one of the Council's cross-cutting strategic priorities and there is an opportunity to ensure it is a holistic consideration as part of our decision-making process by including it in the Equality Impact Assessment.
- 2.19 This is an evidence-based assessment and requires decision makers to look at Social Mobility Index Indicators and other data sources available when considering impacts. It will provide an opportunity to make mitigations at an early stage and therefore demonstrate a commitment by the Council to influence the effect of poverty on the most disadvantaged within our communities.
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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 Keep the current the Equalities Objectives and Action Plan. This is not recommended as, whilst there have been no legislative changes and the current actions have mostly been achieved, there have been national events that could have extreme and negative impacts on groups already facing disadvantage in our community. It is essential that the Council responds positively and demonstrates through its Equalities action plan. Not updating the plan would mean that the Council is taking no formal activities to meet its Equality Duty.
  - 3.2 The Council could decide to do nothing, this course of action is not recommended because the Council has a legislative responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
  - 3.3 Approve the revised Equalities Objectives and Action Plan (as detailed in Appendix 2) to enable the organisation to continue to improve on the way in which it fulfils the Public Sector Equalities Duty.
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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 To approve the new objectives and actions as detailed in Appendix 2.
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### **5. RISK**

- 5.1 The report is an information report, providing an update on the progress made on actions agreed by Committee. The recommendations made are either actions which are natural next steps to those already agreed or in terms of the new objectives – raising the profile and complementing streams of work that have already been agreed.
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### **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

- 6.1 If agreed by Committee, the document will be made available on the intranet and internet for staff and residents.
- 6.2 The action plan will continue to be monitored by the Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer.

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## **7. REPORT APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Equalities Objective and Action Plan 2017-21 - Update
  - Appendix 2: Revised Equalities Objective and Action Plan 2017-21
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