

Annual Equalities Report

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| Corporate Priority: | Excellent Services positively impacting on our communities. |
| Relevant Ward Member(s): | All |
| Date of consultation with Ward Member(s): | N/A |
| Exempt Information: | No |

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide an update to Council on the progress against our Equality objectives and the work undertaken to meet our public sector equality duty as required by equality legislation, including compliance with the Equality Act 2020, Human Rights Act 1998, the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 1.2 This is demonstrated through progress measured against the Council's Equalities Action Plan.

2 Recommendation

That Committee:

- 2.1 **Notes and comments as appropriate on the progress made in meeting the Council's equalities duties and commitments as outlined in this report.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council publishes a Single Equality Scheme (SES) which covers all our legal duties as required by The Equality Act 2010. The SES sets out the Council's objectives and approach to advancing equality and diversity, fostering good relations and in tackling

discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The current scheme was approved by Council in December 2019 and covers the period 2020-2024.

- 3.2 As the Single Equality Scheme is included within the Council's Constitution, updates against progress and changes to the scheme are required to be presented to full Council for approval.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council is required by legislation to set one or more specific equality objectives every four years through the Single Equality Scheme (SES). The current approved SES covers the period 2020-2024.
- 4.2 The 4 Equality Objectives for the period 2020-2024 are set out below:
- a) Objective 1: Engage and communicate in appropriate and accessible ways
 - b) Objective 2: Develop and support a diverse workforce (being recognised as an employer of choice)
 - c) Objective 3: Ensure services are in place or commissioned which are inclusive and responsive
 - d) Objective 4: Foster good relations with and within the community (understanding difference and celebrating diversity)
- 4.3 The Equality Scheme's main delivery mechanism is through the Action Plan which is based on a number of actions designed to deliver the four objectives noted above.
- 4.4 The report considers the progress to date against the 4 objectives. Progress against each objective is included within the Action Plan (Appendix 1 ED Action Plan)

5 Main Considerations

5.1 Covid 19 impact and other in-year impacts

- 5.1.1 This year has seen a continuation of Covid related workload that has impacted on our ability to progress as quickly as originally intended.

5.2 Public Sector Equality Duty

- 5.2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) needs to be embedded throughout the Council - this is achieved by compliance with our policies and procedures. The PSED provides three key areas of focus. These are:
- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
 - c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 5.2.2 Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) help to demonstrate the Council is meeting the PSED: throughout the year, these have been completed and passed on to our Check and Challenge group. This helps to ensure the PSED is met and allows us to produce

evidence, if required, that 'due regard' has been paid to new service or changes to existing ones.

5.3 Corporate Equalities Group and Action Plan

5.3.1 The Corporate Equalities Group has continued to meet throughout the year, monitoring the progress of the Action Plan and also the additional project work.

5.3.2 With progress noted for most actions, and a considerable number of completed actions, the Equality Action Plan is on course to be completed well before the end of the SES in 2024.

5.4 The Council takes its responsibilities as an employer and as a community leader seriously. As such, it is important that we strive to continuously challenge ourselves on this agenda to go above and beyond just meeting our statutory responsibilities. As part of this we have also committed to champion and raise awareness and understanding of four specific equality strands. These four strands are:

- a) Race: Anti-Racism Motion
- b) Neurodiversity
- c) Sexual Orientation – LGBTQ+
- d) Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities

5.4.2 Although progress on these have seen a delay due to Covid 19, we have already designed and working towards the Race and Neurodiversity strands. As the anti-racism work includes racism directed at minority ethnic groups, the Gypsy Roma and Traveller Community are also included within this.

5.5 Race: Anti-Racism Motion

5.5.1 Consultation meetings took place with Council staff to discuss topics relating to anti-racism and assist us with understanding how to best address the specific challenges that were identified. The overwhelming theme that ran through the discussions was enabling staff to have the confidence and tools to have constructive conversations if they hear or witness language or behaviour related to anti-racism and racism directed at ethnic minority groups.

5.5.2 Community Conversations is a project designed by Nottinghamshire City Council and evaluated by Nottingham Trent University. The project aims to provide people with the skills and courage to call out discriminatory language and address prejudice. We have been adapting their training packs to put together a local training package for Melton Borough Council staff

5.5.3 Once staff have received the training, we will be looking to further adapt and extend this to Members and potentially consider how we can use our learning to increase community cohesion as part of a wider campaign in 2022.

5.5.4 In September 2020, Scrutiny Committee established two Response and Recovery Task and Finish Groups focussed on the impacts of Covid 19 on People and Place. Both reports and associated recommendations will be published on the Melton Borough Council website. The 'People' Task and Finish Group considered the Anti-Racism motion and made a specific recommendation in relation to Equality and Diversity. This recommendation was accepted by Cabinet in 2021 and will be incorporated into the Equalities Action Plan.

“The Council should review existing processes for monitoring its treatment of BAME residents and ensuring that BAME residents are treated fairly. This should include looking to make improvements where required”.

5.6 **Neurodiversity**

- 5.6.1 The Benefits of a Neurodiverse Workforce, is a project looking to promote the skills and abilities of those who are neurodiverse, (this includes those with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Mood Disorders and Personality Disorders among others.)
- 5.6.2 Led by our Human Resources colleagues, we will review our support for neurodiverse staff, training managers in the positive aspects of neurodiversity and then moving on to promote greater awareness within local businesses, this project will shine a light on the importance of a diverse workforce and specifically on recruiting and retaining neurodiverse staff. This work underpins our values of We Care, We innovate, We Achieve and has been a significant consideration in the development of the Council's Way We Work strategy.

5.7 **National Disability Strategy 2021**

- 5.7.1 The Government has published a National Disability Strategy, which focussed on the main issues as felt by disabled people. It is important that the Council is aware of this Strategy and the impact it may have on the Council.

a) While at home

Only 1 in 10 homes in England have at least one adaptation for disabled people

b) When commuting

Just a quarter of train stations have step-free access between all platforms

c) At work or in education

There remains more than a 28 percentage point gap in the employment rate of working age disabled people compared with working age non-disabled people.

While the proportion of disabled people with a degree has increased from 15.9% in 2013 to 2014 to 23.0% in 2019 to 2020, the gap between disabled people and non-disabled people has not narrowed.

d) When shopping or getting about

2 in 5 disabled people had experienced difficulties shopping around for products or services, with reported barriers including a lack of appropriate facilities (16%), difficulty using public transport (15%), and difficulty moving around premises (13%).

e) When accessing public services online

When tested in September 2020, the websites of nine of the 10 most populated English county councils did not meet accessibility standards.

f) In feeling connected to others

Disabled people are more than 3 times more likely than non-disabled people to often or always feel lonely, with wellbeing rates for disabled people consistently lower than for non-disabled people.

Disabled people more often indicated that the impact of the pandemic had affected their well-being more than non-disabled people.

The disparity in wellbeing and loneliness between disabled and non-disabled people has not improved since 2013 to 2014.

- 5.7.2 To help ensure disabled people can play a full role in society the Government aims to:
- a) Bring forward legislation to remove historic barriers to participation in public life.
 - b) Use the honours system to better recognise the exceptional contribution of disabled people to the UK.
 - c) Explore how best to support disabled candidates standing for election.
 - d) Inspire social change across the UK through new public awareness raising campaigns.
 - e) Improve access to justice.
 - f) Publish a new cross-government strategy to tackle the crime and disorder that undermines the quality of life for everyone, including disability hate crime.
- 5.7.3 As a Council, we are already holders of the “Positive about Disabled People” symbol that reflects our commitment to this agenda. We are ready to embrace ongoing and future changes that challenge us to do more. Updates will be added to the Action Plan as the strategy develops.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1 The work detailed in this report forms the response to the Council’s statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010, The Human Rights Act 1998 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Failure to undertake the items contained in this report may leave the Council open to legal challenge.
- 6.2 Council would also need to be aware of the impending proposed changes to the Public Sector Equality which is likely to see a fundamental shift and move away from being solely focused on protected characteristics.
- 6.3 Full details of this are still pending and we have had no further developments to report following the update provided to Council last year.
- 6.4 In summary, the government’s new stance on equalities is going to be delivered under “Fight for Fairness” with three core aims:
- a) Delivering fairness through modernisation, increased choice and openness.
 - b) Concentrating on research and data, rather than campaigning and listening to those with the loudest voices.
 - c) Taking our biggest and broadest look yet at the challenges we face, including the all too neglected scourge of geographic inequality
- 6.4.2 Plus 4 core principles:
- a) Freedom
 - b) Choice
 - c) Opportunity
 - d) Individual humanity and dignity

- 6.4.3 The impact of these changes is likely to be significant but is difficult to plan ahead right now without a full understanding of how this will change how we deliver Equalities work in the future.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 A full consultation on the 4-year Single Equality Scheme took place prior to its implementation and the results of this were included in the Council report of December 2019.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 The Corporate Equalities Group will continue to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan.
- 8.2 The Council's Equalities Champion has been designated as Councillor Freer (Portfolio Holder for Climate, Access and Environment) who will work alongside the Council's Lead Officers and the Corporate Equalities Group to monitor delivery of the objectives set out in the Corporate Equalities Policy
- 8.3 Equalities Training is considered for inclusion in the Member Development Programme which is currently being developed for 2022.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no changes to the financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

Financial Implications reviewed by: David Scott – Corporate Services Manager (deputy s151 officer)

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 The Council is required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out within the Equality Act 2010 in carrying out their functions and must have regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:
- 10.1.1 (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
 - 10.1.2 (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - 10.1.3 (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 10.2 In accordance with Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, the Council is required to publish information to demonstrate their compliance with the public sector equality duty every 12 months. This report is drafted in compliance with that legal obligation.

This report ensures the organisation meets its legislative requirements under equalities legislation, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and outlines annual progress on the equality agenda.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

- 11.1 The Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives are specifically designed to address inequalities faced by employees and the community of Melton.
- 11.2 A key tool in addressing this is the undertaking of an equality impact assessment (EIA). Through our Check and Challenge group, we have successfully promoted a positive step change towards consideration of Equality Impact during policy development and not as an “after-thought”. The focus on this continues and we are increasingly seeing the equality impact conversations taking place at conception stage. An example of putting this into practice will be in the development of a new housing allocations policy.

12 Community Safety Implications

- 12.1 The Council specifically has a duty to ‘foster good relations with and within the community’ and has a number of actions to help address any community safety issues. The Council in its role as a local leader will set a positive example in relation to promoting diversity and equality issues publicly and proactively. This includes the regular monitoring of harassment and hate crimes to address issues within the principles of recognising such behaviours are both a cause and effect of other vulnerabilities and therefore need to be addressed through a more holistic and qualitative approach.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

- 13.1 None.

14 Other Implications (where significant)

- 14.1 None.

15 Risk & Mitigation

| Risk No | Risk Description | Likelihood | Impact | Risk |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1 | The Council may still fail to meet its equality obligations by failing to follow the identified actions within the plan or failing to give ‘due regard’ to equality considerations during operational or policy developments. | Very Low | Critical | Medium Risk |

| | | Impact / Consequences | | | |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| | | Negligible | Marginal | Critical | Catastrophic |
| Likelihood | Score/ definition | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | 6 Very High | | | | |
| | 5 High | | | | |
| | 4 Significant | | | | |
| | 3 Low | | | | |
| | 2 Very Low | | | 1 | |
| | 1 Almost impossible | | | | |

| Risk No | Mitigation |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | The Corporate Equalities Group is set up to mitigate against this risk and to ensure there is a first point of escalation for concerns relating to our equality obligations. |

16 Background Papers

16.1 None

17 Appendices

17.1 Appendix 1 – Corporate Equalities Group Terms of Reference

17.2 Appendix 2 – Equalities Action Plan

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| Report Author: | Aysha Rahman , [Leisure Culture and People Manager] |
| Report Author Contact Details: | [07890 534836] [arahman@melton.gov.uk] |
| Chief Officer Responsible: | Michelle Howard , Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive) |
| Chief Officer Contact Details: | 01664 504322 mhoward@melton.gov.uk |