

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HUMAN RESOURCES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS TO CABINET 24th AUGUST 2016

Equality Scheme 2015-18

Annual Report June 2016

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 In June 2015 Cabinet approved the adoption of a new three year Equality Scheme (2015-18) for the Council. The Annual Report updates Cabinet as to the progress made towards achieving the equality objectives and implementing the associated action plans as identified in the Scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 **Approve the Equality Scheme Annual Report (June 2016).**
- 2.2 **Note the progress made towards the equality objectives**
- 2.3 **Consider the key achievements and challenges identified in the Annual Report and support the priorities for the year ahead.**

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The current Equality Scheme (2015-18) is the third such Equality Scheme for the Council. The implementation of the previous Schemes resulted in the Council making significant improvements to the way it embedded equality and diversity into its day to day activities, its service delivery and planning and performance management processes. More importantly over the life time of the Schemes the Council made important improvements to its services to help challenge and reduce inequality for local people.
- 3.2 However the legislative, policy and financial context within which our work on equality must be developed and implemented has changed markedly in recent years. Likewise the diversity of the borough continues to change and attitudes and expectations develop also. A new scheme therefore needs to be cognisant of these changes, and responsive to the significantly reduced resources that the Council can call upon. The current Equality Scheme seeks to address these new challenges

whilst continuing to make real progress in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in the Council, in our service delivery and in the opportunities available for local people.

4. PURPOSE OF THE EQUALITY SCHEME

4.1 The Equality Scheme details how the Council will put its Equality and Diversity Policy into practice and to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty.

4.2 The Council recognises that all individuals have fundamental human rights and welcomes the diversity of the community living, working and learning in the Borough. As a service provider, community leader and major employer the Council is committed to promoting equality and tackling social exclusion and, as such, will integrate equality into all its activities, having due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity; and
- Promote good relations between all groups irrespective of their disability, race, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, trans gender status, age or marital status.

4.3 These are the three aims associated with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the equality priorities and objectives outlined in this Scheme will enable us to make progress on each of these aims.

4.4 The Scheme:

- Outlines the key challenges that we face as an authority in achieving these three aims;
- Identifies those areas that we consider priorities for addressing (where the greatest inequalities exist that we can have a positive impact upon); and
- Describes how we will make sure we deliver on our plans to promote equality and meet our objectives.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS OF EQUALITY SCHEME (2015-18)

5.1 The first year of the new Equality Scheme has focused on ensuring relevant Council services develop appropriate actions plans to achieve the various objectives outlined in the Scheme. These are now all in place and progress is reported regularly to directorate management teams.

5.2 In the second year of the Scheme we would now expect to see significant progress being made with the action plans and these having an impact on the outcomes and measures outlined for each.

5.3 The Equality Forums have continued to provide invaluable support to the Council in its work to deliver the equality priorities and objectives described in the Scheme. Some notable landmarks over the last year include:

- ✓ Five major partners agreed to jointly contribute towards the funding and coordination of support and engagement activity with the network of equality forums.
- ✓ The Gender Equality Forum held a Reclaim the Night march in December. This involved a diverse group of people (women and men) raising awareness of sexual harassment and how to report it, supporting our Hate and Harassment Strategy objectives.
- ✓ The My Barnsley Too Disability Forum held a “Tarn Takeover Day” to celebrate the International Day of Disabled People and to enable local disabled people to find out and have their say about the ongoing developments in the town centre. The day involved a large number of disabled people with a wide variety of different impairments and provided valuable feedback for those involved in work to improve access and inclusion in the town centre.
- ✓ In March the Council organised an event with the Deaf Forum and Healthwatch to discuss with Deaf people their experiences of accessing social care and equipment services. This has led to several good ideas about improving customer access but possibly most importantly has resulted in a number of Deaf people volunteering to be trained in care work (which is now underway).
- ✓ The Barnsley Together Forum for Race Equality has made effective links with new arrivals to the borough and encouraged them to become involved in the forum and to engage with local services. This has led to a wide range of issues being identified such as the problems faced by people with language needs accessing GP services and understanding their housing options.
- ✓ The implementation of the Scheme has resulted in the development of innovations to help the Council achieve its equality objectives:
 - ✓ To make services more accessible and inclusive a British Sign Language video has been produced to help Deaf people understand how to recycle their waste which will hopefully be repeated in other service areas such as social care.
 - ✓ To help ensure the town centre becomes a vibrant welcoming place for everyone the My Barnsley Too forum prepared a comprehensive report on the barriers faced by disabled people using public transport in Barnsley. A coordinated response is being developed across different Council services and relevant issues being raised with neighbouring authorities to discuss within the City Region.
 - ✓ A new approach has also been developed to the challenge faced by the increase in new arrivals to the borough. This identifies the need to support the integration of new arrivals, to build cohesion and to reduce community tensions, primarily through working closely with these communities in local areas.

- ✓ Plans have been developed in partnership with the LGBT Forum to host a major festival in Barnsley to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The festival (to be called “Pride Over Prejudice”) will celebrate the LGBT community and life in Barnsley and encourage people from across the region to visit the wide variety of events, activities and performances which will make up the festival.

6. CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR EQUALITY SCHEME (2015-18)

- 6.1 Despite these achievements there are a number of significant challenges the Council faces if it is to achieve its equality objectives.
- 6.2 The increase in new arrivals has both positive and negative impacts on the local area. It boosts the local economy and provides much needed skills and energy to the local labour market and increases the potential for business start-ups. However new arrivals can also create pressure on local communities and services which can in turn develop tensions in local areas and neighbourhoods. These tensions must be reduced by promoting integration and support services for the affected communities. The positives need to be maximised by ensuring the new arrivals can contribute fully to the local economy and cultural life.
- 6.3 The Council continues its efforts over the next four years to develop its vision for Future Council, which will mean new ways of working and delivering services that encourage independence and can be delivered in more innovative and cost-effective ways. Plans and proposals to remodel services must be developed with due consideration given to the potential impact on diverse communities. The Equality and Inclusion function will provide support to Business Units as they develop these plans to ensure the “equality impact” is given due consideration whilst ensuring the process for doing so is timely and proportionate to the risks involved. Decision-makers at all levels will make sure they approve the plans only if the relevant equality impacts have been embedded and explained.
- 6.4 The ongoing efforts to promote channel shift (ie encouraging customers to “self-serve” via the website for example rather than visiting an office to seek help from a Council officer) require the promotion of digital inclusion and an associated reduction in access of face to face and telephone services. However, whilst this channel shift can have very positive impacts on some diverse communities, in others it can lead to greater social exclusion and create barriers to accessing key public services. Care needs to be taken when implementing plans for channel shift so those most in need of support from public services are not left behind in the process.
- 6.5 The Council’s workforce does not reflect the diversity of the local population. The success rates of job applicants suggests that some groups of applicants experience significant barriers when seeking opportunities with the Council. These barriers are difficult to identify and often harder to find effective ways to remove or at least reduce them. Nonetheless if we are to have a workforce that is an integral part of the local community then we must continue to improve our workforce diversity. This

means employing more disabled people, more BME people and by breaking down gender-related barriers to employment.

6.6 The equality forums continue to develop and grow. However their potential is limited by the lack of commitment and funding beyond the next 12 months. This year has seen a number of partners reduce their financial contributions which will have an associated impact on the forums themselves and the engagement activity being carried out. There is a strong need for a longer term funding relationship to be developed between the partner agencies and the equality forums.

6.7 The growing awareness and understanding of transgender issues means that customers and employees will be more willing to declare their trans status and expect higher levels of service and support as a result. We need to prepare for this by ensuring the trans community in Barnsley can engage effectively with services and by developing a suitable Gender Identity policy and employee development / awareness programme.

7. LOCAL AREA IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The actions associated with the equality priorities will help to support the development of the Local Area Plans and build on communities' abilities to be more involved and promote independence.

8. COMPATIBILITY WITH EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

8.1 The recommendations in the report do not interfere with the Convention Rights and are in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998.

9. PROMOTING EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

9.1 The purpose of the Equality Scheme is to promote equality and challenge discrimination in the fields of both employment and service delivery and to ensure the Local Authority meets its obligations under equalities legislation.

10. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

10.1 Whilst this report is focused on promoting equality and as such will help reduce social inequalities which are recognised as a contributing factor towards crime, this is not its prime purpose, and nor is there anything further that could be included in this report to reduce crime.

10.2 The report does include reference to hate crimes and makes it a priority to challenge and prevent these.

11. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

11.1 There are no implications for biodiversity within the report.

12. RISK ASSESSMENT ISSUES INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 12.1 Implementing the Equality Scheme will assist the Council to meet its obligations under relevant equalities legislation (as detailed within the Scheme).
- 12.2 This will support our control measures for the Strategic Risk Register (3023), “failure to engage stakeholders”.
- 12.3 There are no Health and Safety implications associated with the report.
- 12.4 There is a reputational risk for the Council if it fails to deliver improvements on the Equality Priorities highlighted in the Scheme.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

14. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The Scheme includes reference to the need to further improve workforce diversity, a long-standing commitment of the Council and well-embedded within the existing Workforce Development Strategy.

15. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 15.1 Appendix 1: Equality Scheme Annual Report (June 2016)

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