

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan.

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CORE SERVICES TO CABINET 6th SEPTEMBER 2017

Equality Scheme 2015-18 Annual Report July 2016 to July 2017

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.**
- 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 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, commissioner, 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 the 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. EQUALITY SCHEME ACHIEVEMENTS

5.1 The first year of the new Equality Scheme focused on ensuring Council services developed appropriate actions plans to achieve the various objectives outlined in the Scheme. These are monitored and reported regularly to directorate management teams.

5.2 In the second year of the Scheme we have concentrated on implementing these plans and having an impact on the outcomes and measures outlined for each. This has resulted in the development of a number of projects and innovations to help the Council achieve its equality objectives:

- ✓ The “ConnectAbility” pilot project will enable people with communication disabilities to contact the Council more easily. This pilot will begin by developing

more accessible communication channels with Deaf people, such as BSL Video Relay and text messaging services, and greater support to access services on-line, initially for Council Tax and Council Tax Benefit. The learning from this pilot will then be used to enable more customers to self-serve and manage their Council business independently.

- ✓ The Council has successfully applied for a Home Office grant to help support the integration of new arrivals to the borough. The funding will be used to deliver a project focused on targeting poor-quality private rented accommodation, used mainly by new arrivals; to tackle rogue landlords and potential exploitation and to improve the physical environment for all residents.
- ✓ Improved process for embedding equality impact assessments into project planning, budget efficiencies, strategies and policies – now over 80% of these are considered to have a robust Equality Impact Assessment process.
- ✓ A “Purple Ribbon” campaign to raise awareness of Hate Crime involved over 1000 people, mainly children and young people, discussing hate crime in school or college and writing messages of support and solidarity for victims.
- ✓ The Council and the equality forums have continued to widen their reach and involvement, working with other groups and forums such as Wednesday Voice, Dementia Action Alliance, Red Cross and the conversation classes to ensure the widest possible engagement with diverse communities and those who experience the greatest barriers to equal outcomes. For example, a Conversation Class has begun a series of visits to key attractions and amenities in Barnsley, providing feedback on how these could be more accessible and inclusive to new arrivals and attracting new visitors and audiences in the process.

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. The activities over the past 12 months have also been defined by the increased joint-working and cooperation between the forums. Some notable landmarks over the last year include:

- ✓ All five partners continue to jointly contribute towards the funding and coordination of support and engagement activity with the network of equality forums.
- ✓ The Barnsley LGBT Forum organised and hosted a month-long, multi-event festival during February 2017 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. The festival attracted visitors and contributors from across the region to join the activities and festivities.
- ✓ The Better Barnsley programme and the Purple Flag initiative, to promote a safe and inclusive evening and night-time economy, have both benefited from the participation of the equality forums in the “In Town” Group. This group enables relevant officers to consult with diverse communities in an engaging and inclusive way.

- ✓ The Council hosted, with a wide range of partners and employers two Jobs and Skills event for diverse communities in Barnsley. These events enabled people to find out about how to apply for jobs, training and apprenticeships, with advice and guidance available on overcoming the barriers they can sometimes face. The success and learning from these events have encouraged those involved to plan a further Jobs and Skills Diversity Event later this year.
- ✓ In the autumn the Equality Forums came together to present to health commissioners and providers the findings of their discussions and research into the experiences of diverse groups when accessing health services in Barnsley.
- ✓ The My Barnsley Too Forum hosted a mini-festival in June, called the Barnsley Fest-Able, at the Metrodome. Over 120 disabled people attended to have a go at a wide variety of artistic, cultural and sporting activities – Zumba, bowling, drumming, comedy, drama, arts etc. The Forum now plans to go on and build an annual disability festival in Barnsley that is at the heart of the borough's cultural programme.

6. EQUALITY SCHEME CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

- 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 quality of data we hold on our employees' diversity is poor. We only know whether about half of all staff are disabled or not, about two thirds regarding their ethnicity and only one quarter for their sexual orientation. This means we cannot be confident whether or not our efforts to improve workforce diversity are proving effective or not. We will therefore be planning improvements to our employee database so we can keep this information confidentially and up to date for all employees.
- 6.3 Barnsley has seen significant increases in the number of reported hate crimes and incidents over the last year. There was a marked increase after the result of the vote to leave the EU, and may have also been affected following terrorist attacks in London and Manchester. We are currently updating the Hate and Harassment Strategy and will work with the local community to see what else can be done to protect local people from hate crime and to encourage reporting.
- 6.4 Further work is needed to ensure there are continued good relations between different communities in Barnsley. We have seen an increased number of new arrivals to the borough, mainly migrant workers from Eastern Europe who make a significant contribution to the local economy, to local community groups and community life. Most new arrivals also work really hard to learn English, fitting in language and conversation classes alongside their shift-work and caring responsibilities for example. Nonetheless we are aware that new arrivals can have an important impact on local services and differences in culture, and the lack of knowledge about local procedures and customs can cause conflict with other local residents. We will continue to help new arrivals to understand local rules and customs and to integrate with the local communities they now live within.

- 6.5 The Council will continue its efforts 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 service 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 need to make sure they only approve the plans if the relevant equality impacts have been embedded and explained.
- 6.6 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) requires 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.

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. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The Equality Scheme Annual Report will be promoted to employees, partners, the Equality Forums and other stakeholders in the first instance as they are the primary audience.

16. CONSULTATIONS

16.1 The Equality Scheme Annual Report has been developed based upon discussions with the relevant Service Directors and Managers and the Equality Forums.

17. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

17.1 The Equality Scheme contributes towards each of the Outcomes of the Corporate Plan and the Annual Report updates Cabinet on the progress being made and the plans for the next 12 months.

18. LIST OF APPENDICES

18.1 Appendix 1: Equality Scheme Annual Report

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