

CABINET

Agenda Item: 07

Ward: N/A

Portfolio: Corporate Services

Report Author(s): Cllr Philip Ham and Cllr John Parham

Meeting Date: 10th April 2017

SUBJECT: Equality Objectives 2016 – 2018 - Update

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	Seen by:	Name	Date
Report Sign off	Chief Executive/ Deputy Chief Executive(s)	Donna Nolan and Tracy Aarons	15/03/17
	Legal	Alex Kershaw-Moore	14/03/17
	Finance	Paul Deal	02/03/17
	Group Manager	Sara Skirton	15/03/17
	Portfolio Holder	Cllr Philip Ham and Cllr John Parham	15/03/17
	Ward Member(s)	All	N/A
	Summary:	Mendip District Council [MDC] is required by statute to review and establish organisational equality objectives. Our current objectives run from April 2016 to April 2018. This report outlines the progress made so far on these objectives.	
Recommendation:	Cabinet is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note and endorse the current progress on the Equality Objectives. • note key findings from the engagement event with equality communities within Somerset. • identify any additional support and guidance they would require around equality and diversity. 		
Direct and/or indirect impact on service delivery to our customers and communities:	It is intended that these objectives will inform improvements in the delivery of services to customers and communities.		
Contribution to Corporate Priorities:	The Equality Objectives indirectly contribute to all of the Council's Priorities and particularly contribute to the overall wellbeing of Mendip's Communities.		
Legal Implications:	The objectives and the information gathered for them contribute to the Council's compliance with the Equality Act 2010. Failure to adopt Objectives or to collect data to support them could find the Council in breach of the Equality Act 2010.		
Financial Implications:	It is envisaged that there will be minimal cost implications connected with delivering the equality objectives. What funding is required will be provided through the current equality and service budgets and where appropriate external funding.		

Impact on Service Plans:	Group Managers will be asked to identify actions to support the objectives as part of the service planning process
Value for Money:	At the moment there is no financial implications attached to the Objectives. Their purpose is to empower individuals and communities in the areas identified.
Equalities Implications:	The adoption and monitoring of Equality Objectives helps ensure that the needs of all protected groups are taken into account in service delivery.
Risk Assessment and Adverse Impact on Corporate Actions:	None from this report.
Scrutiny Recommendation (if any)	Scrutiny endorsed the recommendations identified above. Scrutiny requested that consideration was given to consistent Human Resource (HR) going forward. They felt that a consistent individual providing HR resource would enable staff to build a relationship and help with the implementation of actions identified to support the equality objectives.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Legislative Background**

The Equality Act sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) that includes the General and Specific Equality Duties.

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It also requires public bodies to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

These Duties are supported by Specific Equality Duties. The specific duties require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives at least every four years.

1.2 The Equality Act identifies who is protected under the legislation and refers to them as Protected Characteristics. They are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Locally we have also recognised the following characteristics:

- Carers
- Military status
- Rurality
- Low income

This report does not change the status for any of the protected characteristics.

BACKGROUND

2.0 **Progress on Equality Objectives 2016 – 2018**

2.1 The following outlines the progress made on the Council's Equality Objectives over the last year. More detail on the specific actions underpinning the Objectives is given in the accompanying appendices.

- Improve vulnerable people's access to secure accommodation in

Mendip working with Housing associations and the Gypsy and Traveller community.

- This Objective is currently 50% complete
- Improve the Council's engagement with equality communities and groups within Mendip. This is to improve the Council's understanding of its community and its needs.
 - This Objective is currently 15% complete
- Work with older and younger people to understand the options available for them when applying or working for Mendip District Council. This will include opportunities for apprentices, career progression, support for managers around retirement and informed career planning.
 - This Objective is currently 15% complete. This objective will be reviewed with Capita on the best way forward.

2.2 Additionally to these the following Objectives are being considered collectively through the Somerset Equality Officers Group (SEOG).

- Equality communities are able to access services how they need to in a cost effective and appropriate way
 - This Objective is currently 0% complete
- Equality communities and individuals feel able and empowered to contribute to the democratic process and decisions that affect them.
 - This Objective is currently 25% complete

2.3 Additionally during the year the Member Equality Steering Group members identified Mental Health as a key health issue and one that is misunderstood and discriminated against. As a consequence a Mental Health action plan has been created and a Member Champion has been appointed to provide focus on this area.

3.0 Feedback from Equality Engagement Event 15th September 2016

3.1 On the 15th September 2016 the Public Sector (police, fire, health and local government) in Somerset ran the second joint engagement event with equality communities (communities within Somerset related to the protected characteristics for example Age UK, Chinese community, Compass Disability) in Somerset. The communities were asked for their thoughts on two areas:

- Comment on an Accessibility Standard and Commitment Statement
- What makes digital accessible to you?

3.2 The key themes that emerged were as follows:

- Comments on the Accessibility Standard and Commitment Statement
 - Councils need to be honest and clear when they interact with people and customers.
 - When communicating Councils need to use Plain English, make British Sign Language interpreters available and think about the font size used.
 - The cost and availability of translation and interpretation services can be an issue for Voluntary and Community organisations.

- Training for staff on accessibility and understanding Equality and Diversity
- A public declaration of commitment through visible logos
- Website – needs to be more buttons and less text.

3.3

- What makes digital accessible to you?
 - Understanding where to access cheaper equipment and access to the internet
 - Making sure that how different services are accessed is clear for members of the public
 - At the moment people don't seem to be aware of connecting Devon and Somerset and what it is actually delivering
 - There is a connection between IT skills and employment. Young people appear to not be given the IT skills needed to get job opportunities.
 - There is a gap around computer skills support available for those that have lost employment. This is particularly relevant for those in their 40's or 50's who were in employment that didn't require computer skills.
 - There is an assumption that people have printers but a growing number of people are accessing the internet through other means (smart phone/tablet) or do not have a printer due to the additional cost.
 - Poor search engines can make peoples use of the internet frustrating. This can mean that they end up using the phone or face to face instead.

3.4

From the engagement event and feedback within our organisations it became clear that people did not require another commitment statement. What was needed was a set of actions that could support the existing objective of "Equality communities are able to access services how they need to in a cost effective and appropriate way".

3.5

Actions that were agreed for adoption going forward by all Public Bodies in Somerset are:

- Arrange a training and promotion session on accessibility and Plain English and what this means for staff and customers
- Review public facing documents and correspondence for readability and suggest amendments as and when needed.
- Work with communities and local translation services to establish if a community and voluntary sector translation service can be delivered in Somerset.
- Promotion in October Your Somerset (Somerset County Councils newspaper to all residents) of where customers can get access to the internet, printing and what support is available
- Arrange 3 consultation sessions with customers on the effectiveness of our websites and the search criteria that they use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to:

- note and endorse the current progress on the Equality Objectives.

- note key findings from the engagement event with equality communities within Somerset.
- identify any additional support and guidance they would require around equality and diversity.

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Background Papers

- Appendix 1 - Equality Objectives 2016 - 2018 Action Plan
- Appendix 2 - Accessibility Standard and Commitment Statement (this was the discussion document used at the engagement event in September 2016)
- Full feedback on the engagement event can be found here: <http://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/workingwithpartners>