

## REPORT OF THE CABINET

### C. EQUALITY STRATEGY 2016 – 2020

#### **Introduction**

1. This report concerns the proposed Equality Strategy 2016 - 2020 and the supporting Equality Action Plan for 2016-17.

#### **Background**

2. The Equalities Strategy is referred to in the Constitution as being part of the Council's Policy Framework and, as such, requires the approval of the full Council.
3. The Equality Act received royal assent on 6 April 2010 but many of the provisions of the Act were brought into effect through the Public Sector Equality Duty in April 2011. The Act outlines three core duties which require public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
  - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
4. The County Council is required to produce an Equality Strategy to show how it is meeting its statutory duties regarding equality and diversity. The current Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy was adopted by the County Council in May 2013. It was agreed that the Strategy would be reviewed every three years and refreshed to take account of any new (or significantly changed) equalities legislation and best practice.

#### **Equality Strategy 2016-2020**

5. The proposed Equality Strategy 2016-2020 (Appendix A) provides a policy context for the Council's activity around equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights. It sets out how the Council will meet its legislative duty and the intention to develop equal and fair decision making processes, policies and services for all employees and residents.
6. The Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed in line with the Council's statutory duty to prepare and publish one or more equality objective/s at least every four years.
7. The Strategy takes into account the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's legislative requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), developments in relation to the contents of the previous Strategy, and the Authority's equality-related work over the course of the last three years.

### **Equality Action Plan 2016-2017**

8. The proposed Equality Action Plan 2016-17 (Appendix B) supports the overarching aims of the Strategy. It will be reviewed and updated annually, however there are some areas of long-term work which are likely to continue in future action plans.
9. An Annual Report on progress against the 2015/16 action plan will be presented to the Council's Equalities Board and reported to members as necessary. Authorising the Chief Executive to review and update Action Plan each year will enable progress to be monitored regularly and work adjusted as necessary in the light of changing circumstances. The Equalities Board will lead on the operational review and delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan on behalf of the Chief Executive.
10. The Action Plan is largely based on areas of specific need which have been identified by, for example, workforce representation analysis, results of the Staff Survey 2015, feedback from the workers' groups, demographic information about the population of Leicestershire and feedback given during the consultation period.
11. The Council's aim is to strengthen an evidence based approach to identifying areas of work and specific actions, allowing it to target work where it is needed most and to monitor more effectively its progress in identified areas. By concentrating on areas of work where the equalities impact or risk is potentially higher, it can continue to maintain the highest standard of outcome in the most cost effective way.

### **Key areas covered by the Equality Action Plan 2016-2017**

#### **Equality monitoring**

12. The Council has previously committed to annually reviewing workforce equality targets for disability, race, gender and sexual orientation with quarterly reporting of workforce representation targets to Chief Officers.
13. There are key improvements that can be made to the quality, accessibility, usefulness and comprehensiveness of the data available. The improved use of evidence to underpin Equalities policy work will ensure that any intervention, positive action initiative or training can be targeted at areas where there is a demonstrated need. The overall aim is to increase the likelihood that targeted interventions are effective and make a significant difference.
14. In some areas, more detailed analysis may be required. For example, workforce representation analysis highlights where there is disproportionate representation, but does not give reasons for this (for example, whether under representation is as a result of an issue in recruitment, opportunities for development, or retention). The Action Plan includes an on-going commitment to identify areas where more detailed analysis is needed and to respond to any issues that are identified.

### **Self-declaration**

15. Without comprehensive data on the protected characteristics of the workforce, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from workforce analysis. In order to improve such data the Council needs to improve rates of self-declaration, particularly for protected characteristics that has a low rate of declaration such as sexual orientation.
16. Engagement with the Workers' Groups highlighted the need to improve self-declaration rates as a priority. The three emerging themes identified were:
  - The need to build trust, particularly in terms of confidentiality of information and how personal data is used.
  - That a stigma might still be attached to declaring particular protected characteristics.
  - A lack of understanding by staff as to why self-declaration is important.
17. The Action Plan identifies specific actions to respond to these concerns, for example, to develop and implement a communications plan and to develop a guidance and information sheet responding to the issues raised by the Workers' Groups in relation to self-declaration.

### **Gender Identity and Self Declaration**

18. Currently, there is no workforce monitoring around gender identity. One of the areas of future work identified as part of Leicestershire County Council's 2015 Stonewall Equality Index submission was to increase levels of self-declaration around gender identity, a sensitive area of work which requires careful consideration. Therefore, the Action Plan commits to starting to build a foundation for addressing some of the inequalities faced by trans people (a trans person is a person whose gender identity does not match the biological sex that they were assigned at birth), by including gender identity as an option for self-declaration.

### **Supporting employees who have a disability**

19. Evidence suggests that more support may be required to ensure that members of staff who have a disability feel equally valued. The Council plans to take an approach which champions the benefits of a diverse workforce, with a focus on disability. This includes actions around recruitment, positive action initiatives, awareness raising and the review of relevant policies and procedures.

### **Developing, delivering and reviewing services**

20. The Council has maintained its commitment to EHRIAs (Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments) as a means of identifying whether any new or significantly changed policies, practices, procedures, functions and services may have an adverse impact on a particular community or group of people and whether the human rights of individuals may be affected.

21. The Council values the basic human rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998. A focus on human rights and key values, such as dignity and respect, can lead to better, more informed decisions. It will continue to ensure that human rights are integral in the development, delivery and review of services, in particular when service reductions need to be considered.
22. The Human Rights Act 1988 sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals in the UK have access to. They include:
- right to life
  - freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment
  - right to liberty and security
  - freedom from slavery and forced labour
  - right to a fair trial
  - no punishment without law
  - respect for your private and family life, home and correspondence
  - freedom of thought, belief and religion
  - freedom of expression
  - freedom of assembly and association
  - right to marry and start a family
  - protection from discrimination in respect of these rights and freedoms
  - right to peaceful enjoyment of your property
  - right to education
  - right to participate in free elections
23. There is an ever increasing emphasis being placed on the Human Rights agenda and its links to equality and diversity, with the expectation that authorities will be explicit as to how they are ensuring that people's human rights are being met. Human rights were a key component of the Equality Strategy 2013-2016 and the link between human rights agenda and equality and diversity has been strengthened with a human rights approach being embedded in the EHRIA process. The Action Plan re-states the Council's commitment to this.
24. The Action Plan also identifies the need to develop ways to support an understanding of and commitment to equality, diversity and human rights, where services which have previously been delivered by the Council have been taken on by voluntary community groups, for example libraries.
25. The Council aims to strengthen its approach to scrutinising, signing off and quality assuring EHRIAs by identifying good practice within its departments and extending and embedding this across the organisation. A template for the review of improvement plans will be developed which will be based upon the best examples from departments.

### **Commissioning services**

26. Specific and measurable actions are included in the Action Plan, in order to ensure that requirements are rigorously applied in the commissioning of services. One key action will be to develop a template for procurement which

includes Equality and Human Rights requirements and is used consistently as part of the procurement process. The Council will ensure that equalities monitoring data is collected consistently by commissioned service providers and tested against mitigation actions recorded in EHRIAs.

### **Access to information**

27. An on-going area of work is to ensure that information about services continues to be accessible to all by providing information in a range of languages and formats and promoting the interpretation and translation service. The Action Plan identifies the need to ensure that the Deaf Community is included in this.

### **Community engagement**

28. The Action Plan makes a continued commitment to engage with communities, particularly those who may not typically choose or have the opportunity to engage, for example the gypsy and travelling community and the Deaf community.
29. The Council has an effective internal Communication Plan and is committed to replicating this externally. This may include opportunities for joint communications with 'shared hashtags' on Twitter which would increase the social media reach of key messages.

### **Safe and cohesive communities**

30. This section of the Action Plan links to other areas of the Council's work, for example hate incident reduction monitoring and the Prevent agenda, and these will continue to be supported.

### **Partnership working**

31. The Council will continue to work collaboratively with partners to achieve shared aims.

### **Organisational structures and leadership**

32. Actions relating to organisational structures and leadership are identified throughout the Action Plan. The overarching principle is that the Council will demonstrate organisational leadership in all of its equalities work and has a strong commitment to the equalities and human rights agenda from staff at all levels throughout the organisation.

### **Consultation**

33. The draft Strategy and draft Action Plan were the subject of a 5-week consultation exercise which took place from 25<sup>th</sup> April to 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016. The online consultation was open to anyone who wished to comment on the Strategy and/or Action Plan. There was also a link on the Council's 'Have Your Say' consultation pages to a British Sign Language Video explaining the

main aims of the draft Equality Strategy 2016-2020. All the documents (draft Strategy, draft Action Plan and consultation questionnaire) were available in different formats and languages upon request.

34. There were 50 responses to the consultation questionnaire. There was also one email response, as well as group meetings arranged with the Leicester/Shire Deaf Forum and over 50's Deaf group to gain peoples' comments.
35. Of the 50 respondents to the consultation questionnaire, 76% were responding in the role of an employee of Leicestershire County Council, 18% were responding in the role of member of the public and 4% were responding as a representative of a voluntary sector organisation, charity or community group and 2% chose 'Other' and commented that they were responding in the role of tax payer. The aims of the Strategy were supported by a great majority of respondents.

A detailed report on the consultation exercise is attached as Appendix C to this report.

### **Relevant Impact Assessments**

#### **Equal Opportunities Implications**

36. An Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy has been completed as part of its development and is attached, for information, at Appendix D to this report.

#### **Consideration by Cabinet and Scrutiny**

37. The proposed Strategy was considered by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 15 June, 2013 when it was commended to the Cabinet.
38. At the meeting of the Cabinet on 17 June 2013 the Strategy was approved for submission to the County Council. The Cabinet also authorised the Chief Executive, following consultation with the Cabinet Lead Member for Equalities to update and approve the Equality Action Plan annually, in line with the policies of the Equality Strategy.

### **(Motion to be moved**

**That the Equality Strategy 2016 – 2020 as referred to in Section C of the report of the Cabinet and Appendix A thereto be approved.)**

### **Background Papers**

Leicestershire County Council Equality Strategy 2013 – 16  
<http://ow.ly/108BgG>

Equality and Human Rights Commission 'The Essential Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty'

<http://ow.ly/108Bvx>

Report to the Cabinet 17<sup>th</sup> June 2016 –Equality Strategy and Equality Action Plan  
2016-2020

<http://ow.ly/UBHM301mB74>

### **Appendices**

Appendix A: Leicestershire County Council Equality Strategy 2016-2020

Appendix B: Equality Action Plan 2016-2017

Appendix C: Draft Equality Strategy 2016-20 Consultation Findings Report

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