

This Report will be made public on 9 March 2021



Report Number **C/20/84**

To: Cabinet
Date: 17 March 2020
Status: Non Key Decision
Director: Charlotte Spendley, Director – Corporate Services
Cabinet Member: Councillor Jennifer Hollingsbee – Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Communities

SUBJECT: EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

SUMMARY: The Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty on the council to prepare and publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report is therefore presented for consideration and approval prior to publication.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The council needs to ensure that it meets the statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The report demonstrates the council's commitment to positively contributing to the advancement of equality and good relations, summarises the activities undertaken in 2019/20 to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, and highlights the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services, and increase customer satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/20/84.
2. To consider and approve the draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report outlined in Appendix 1.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 created a Public Sector Equality Duty. In essence, this duty requires public authorities to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be taken into account when making decisions and reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services. While compliance is a legal obligation, the duty should be viewed as beneficial for organisations; the aims of better informed public sector decision-making and policy development should lead to services that effectively and appropriately meet diverse user needs and to increased customer satisfaction.
- 1.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty is made up of a general equality duty, which is the overarching requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and 'specific duties', which are designed to ensure public authorities meet the general equality duty.
- 1.3 The general equality duty came into force in April 2011 and states that in the exercise of their functions a public authority must have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristic and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Having due regard for fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The Act states that compliance with the equality duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

- 1.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act, which are:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender Reassignment
 - Pregnancy and Maternity

- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership¹.

2. THE ANNUAL EQUALITY & DIVERSITY REPORT

- 2.1 The 'specific duties' outline a statutory requirement for public authorities to publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty (outlined in paragraph 1.3).
- 2.2 The current publication is over 12 months old so an updated version is now required.
- 2.3 This annual report has therefore been updated in order to demonstrate the council's compliance with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and commitment to its principles. The report:
 - Provides a range of demographic and socio-economic information. This can be used to understand more about the needs of our local communities and those that may be affected by council services, policies and practices and in order to inform decision-making and policy development.
 - Demonstrates how the council has engaged with the community, taken actions to enable better understanding of different customer needs and ways to support them, and considered potential equality and diversity implications prior to making decisions.
 - Outlines the activities the council has undertaken over the past year to promote equality, diversity and inclusion amongst its workforce, Members and within the community, and the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction.
- 2.4 The 'specific duties' also outline the requirement for the council to prepare and publish equality objectives that it thinks it should achieve in order to meet the general equality duty every four years. These equality objectives are outlined in the council's current Equality and Diversity Policy (2016-2020) and reproduced in section 6 of the Equality & Diversity Annual Report (Appendix 1).

¹ Only the first aim of the general equality duty applies to this characteristic, meaning that public authorities need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status in the workplace. The other aims (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.

- 2.5 Once considered and approved by Cabinet, the Equality and Diversity Annual Report will be published on the Equality and Diversity page of the council's website.

3. IMPACT ON CORPORATE STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 Specific actions that have taken place in 2019/20 in support of the delivery of the Corporate Plan are highlighted in the annual report (Appendix 1). The council has a number of strategies, policies and strategic projects in place to meet the current and anticipated needs of a diverse district and will continue to use this type of information to inform service design, policy development and future decision-making.

- 3.2 The 'Understanding our Communities' section of the annual Equality & Diversity report (Appendix 1) provides demographic and socio-economic information that outlines the district's diversity. The report then highlights the activities that have taken place in 2019/20 to support these different customer needs, to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and the positive measures that have taken place to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction. Areas of note include:

- The annual Lifeline customer satisfaction survey continues to demonstrate a high quality of service with 98% of users agreeing that it represents 'excellent service' and 'good value for money'.
- We have continued to support charities, voluntary and community groups through awarding 201 Ward Grants, provided over £55,000 of funding for community projects through our Local Children's Partnership Group, and awarded Grant Agreements to organisations that support vulnerable residents and the health and wellbeing across the district, including Folkestone Sports Centre Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The Folkestone & Hythe Community Safety Partnership played a key role in supporting the Young Persons Community Safety Conference where over 900 young people learned about the dangers of knife crime, drugs and gangs.
- Over 600 children from 18 schools across the district attended the Safety in Action Day and over 30 local children took part in the Tall Ships Programme.
- The Folkestone Community Works Programme has continued to address issues faced by the most vulnerable in the district by continuing to fund projects that are working to improve access to services and opportunities for businesses and residents within the Central and East Folkestone wards. Funding from the programme is providing 1-2-1 support services to help residents who are unemployed and are finding it hard to navigate their way back to work.
- The council's achievements have continued to be recognised through the successful reapplication of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation and being awarded with additional compliance plusses following assessment in November 2019. A total of 12 compliance plusses were awarded for the following factors, including: the mapping of services to make sure they are effective in meeting the needs of

customers, implementing changes to letter and website communications as result of customer feedback and staff 'going the extra mile' to meet customer needs.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Failure to fulfil statutory obligations imposed by Public Sector Equality Duty	High	Low	Preparation and publication of Equality & Diversity Annual Report

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

Legal implications and the council's statutory obligations are set out in the body of the report.

5.2 Finance Officer's Comments (LW)

There are no direct financial implications associated with the report

5.3 Human Resources (RB)

There are no direct Human Resource implications emanating from this report.

5.4 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

The report provides information that may support informed decision making, outlines the council's achievements in advancing equality in 2019/20, and fulfils the council's statutory obligations.

5.5 Communications (KA)

This updated E&D report (and appendices) highlights the great work of the council over the past financial year. While much of the detail of this report have been publicised across our media platforms already, this report should be shared widely once approved to underline the sterling work reported in this document.

6. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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Performance and Improvement Specialist

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2019-20