

CABINET

15 February 2016

Title: Gender Equality Charter	
Report of the Leader of the Council	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: All	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Divisional Director: Tom Hook, Divisional Director Strategy and Programmes	
Accountable Director: Jonathan Bunt, Strategic Director for Finance and Investment	
Summary This report provides the background and the development process for the Gender Equality Charter. The Council has a very clear vision regarding community leadership which allows pride, respect, and cohesion to develop across the borough. To this end, recognising the local needs of the different equality groups within the community is a vital step in developing a tolerant, safe and equal society. The Charter has been developed as a set of promises/ actions to improve gender equality. It is intended that the Council will be the first organisation to sign up to the Charter with a pro-active campaign to encourage other local organisations, businesses and individuals to sign up. The Charter is specifically aimed at improving equality for women within the community.	
Recommendation(s) Cabinet is recommended to: (i) Adopt the Gender Equality Charter and Action Plan at Appendix A to the report; and (ii) Agree to Launch the Charter during Women's Empowerment month in March 2016.	
Reason(s) This Charter will support the Council's commitment to equalities and demonstrate how the Council is implementing its responsibility with regards to the Equality Act 2010. It will also support the delivery of the vision and priorities namely Encouraging civic pride by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building pride, respect and cohesion across our borough• Promoting a welcoming, safe, and resilient community• Building civic responsibility and help residents shape their quality of life .	

It will also support the aims set down in **Enabling social responsibility** notably

- Support residents to take responsibility for themselves, their homes and their community
- Protect the most vulnerable, keeping adults and children healthy and safe

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Council is committed to ensuring equality is taken seriously and that the work which is out carried out on equalities makes a real difference. To this end a unique approach of recognising the local needs of different protected characteristic (Equality Act 2010) has been developed to give specific attention each year to a protected characteristic.
- 1.2 In 2015, the idea for Gender Equality Charter grew out of the very successful White Ribbon Day campaign as whilst women's confidence in reporting violence and the help available had improved discussions with local women indicated there was still much to do to tackle discrimination and abuse.
- 1.3 Members indicated clearly that they wanted a Charter to be produced with local people and decided to work on this throughout 2015 with a view to producing a charter and launching it during Women's Empowerment Month 2016. Recognising the limited internal capacity on equalities, the Fawcett Society, an independent membership charity with a focus on advancing women's rights and equality in Britain, was commissioned to lead on this work. The project was organised in a number of phases over the last year building towards the formal launch of the Charter:

PHASE 1- Scoping

- Scoping exercise to determine key stakeholders
- Initial engagement with key stakeholders, design consultation process
- Use consultation process to agree charter commitments with stakeholders

PHASE 2- Development

- Seek internal buy-in for Charter in departments
- Develop action plan for Charter
- Develop resources around Charter as required

PHASE 3- Sign up

- To achieve sign up from organisations, institutions and individuals

PHASE 4- Launch

- Launch Charter through a series of events linked to the themes in the Charter

- 1.4 The Charter needed to be based on community engagement reflecting the views and experiences of women in the borough –‘how does it feel to be a woman in Barking and Dagenham?’ The approach was informal, supportive, targeting different communities and tackled the barriers for personal growth. The details of the extensive period of consultation are set out in Appendix B detailing both the quantitative and qualitative exercises which took place.

2. Proposal and Issues

- 2.1 The findings from the consultation formed the basis of the Charter commitments and associated actions. This was developed with officers, the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), the Chamber of Commerce and Members. It will support moving gender equality forward and have a positive impact on the lives of women in the borough.
- 2.2 The main themes of the Charter and key intended actions reflect the key areas that women face nationally, internationally and locally:
- Violence against women;
 - Economic inequality due to caring responsibilities;
 - Culture (in particular the impact of gender stereotyping); and
 - Poor representation in public life.
- 2.3 It is planned for the Charter to be launched during March as part of Women's Empowerment Month. At the event the local authority, local businesses and community will be asked to sign up to the Charter and support the implementation of the action plan. This launch event is currently being planned to ensure it receives the coverage it deserves to raise awareness of the issues.
- 2.4 It is important to recognise that the pledges in the Charter and associated actions will need to be delivered in partnership with schools, the chamber of commerce, VCS, and the community. An essential part will be monitoring of the actions to ensure these lead to actual improvements in outcomes for gender equality and this is listed itself as a specific action.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 Appendix C sets out the extensive consultation undertaken in the development of the Charter. The list of consultees was as follows:
- Barking Community and Voluntary Services
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - LBBD Aim Higher education group
 - LBBD Community Safety Partnership team
 - LBBD Health and Personal Development Advisor | Education, Youth and Childcare
 - A selection of secondary schools
 - LBBD Integrated Youth Services
 - A women's group in Marks Gate
 - LBBD employment and skills
 - Cllr Tarry with an particular interest in economic issues
 - Cllr Bright Women's and Gender equality champion
 - LBBD Clinical Commissioning Group
- 3.2 Focus groups took place with:
- 15 childcare centre users
 - 5 parent representatives
 - 10 leaders from the women's voluntary and community sector in B&D

- 20 AS Level pupils from a B&D secondary school

3.3 In addition the Council ran a consultation on the portal which achieved 162 responses. Members were given the opportunity to respond

4. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Jon Bunt, Strategic Director Finance and Investment

4.1 There are potential cost implications of a number of the proposed actions. In some cases these activities already exist and are in the base budget or can be delivered within existing budgets in services. Other activities will require the identification of funding, either internal or external ahead of being initiated.

5. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: Chris Pickering, Principal Solicitor

5.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a general duty on all local authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The development of this Charter will demonstrate our commitment to our general duty in relation to a specific protected characteristic.

6. Other Implications

6.1 **Corporate Policy and Customer Impact** - This Charter links with the work of the number of plans and schemes. Several schemes focus on tackling gender equality issues. This includes violence against women including the Community Safety Strategy which aims to prevent and reduce domestic violence and sexual violence; the Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy 2011 - 15 also aims to achieve "raised awareness of how to address the issue in schools and colleges; The Growth Strategy commitment to create new jobs; The Carers strategy is supportive of the need for more flexible working opportunities. Implementing the action plan will have a positive impact and improve gender equality with the borough.

6.2 **Safeguarding Children** – The Charter's action plan identifies positive work within schools to tackle gender inequality/ stereotyping and violence against women and young girls

6.3 **Health Issues** – The JSNA recognises the importance of carers as is one of the key focuses. The Carers Strategy is supportive of the need for more flexible working opportunities. Gender based violence contribute to ill health, action which work towards eliminating violence against women and young girls will have a positive impact of the health and wellbeing of women within our community.

Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report: None

List of appendices:

- **Appendix A** - Gender Equality Charter and Plan of Action
- **Appendix B** - Background and context to the Gender Equality Charter
- **Appendix C** - Gender Equality Charter Consultation and Results