

## CABINET

11 July 2017

<b>Title:</b> Equality and Diversity Strategy	
<b>Report of the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Cohesion</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> All wards	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes
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<b>Accountable Director:</b> Tom Hook, Director of Strategy and Programmes	
<b>Accountable Strategic Director:</b> Chris Naylor, Chief Executive	
<b>Summary</b> <p>The Single Equalities Scheme 2012-2016 has expired and will be replaced by a new Equality and Diversity Strategy that will set new priorities for where we want to make an impact over the next few years to close equality gaps for all residents and ensure fair access to services. The Strategy is a key part of the Council's policy framework, and the Equality Act 2010 requires that the Council must have in such a strategy.</p> <p>Over the winter period a 10-week consultation was conducted to gather the views of partners, staff, and residents about where we should prioritise activity. Using the responses from that consultation, the Strategy and Performance Team, with direct input from relevant service blocks, has developed the Strategy at Appendix 1 which Cabinet is asked to agree.</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b> <p>The Cabinet is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) Adopt the Equality and Diversity Strategy at Appendix 1 to the report; and</li><li>(ii) Note that monitoring of the delivery of the Strategy and its actions will take place annually through the Corporate Performance Group.</li></ul>	
<b>Reason(s)</b> <p>By replacing the Single Equalities Scheme 2012-2016 with the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017-2021 the Council continues to meet its public sector equalities duties under the Equality Act 2010; specifically this includes compliance with the regulation for public sector organisations to set equality and diversity objectives at least every four years. Furthermore, the Strategy and its proposed actions contributes towards improving outcomes for residents by closing equality gaps and ensuring fair access to services.</p>	

## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. The 'general equality duty' was introduced to help local authorities (and all other public authorities) avoid discriminatory practices and integrate equality into their core business. It requires that public authorities are taking steps to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic<sup>1</sup> and those who do not;
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 1.2. Local authorities must apply this duty to their employees and those impacted by the policies and practices of the authority. Furthermore, the authority must have regard to the nine protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010, and in doing so:
  - remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people with protected characteristics due to having that characteristic
  - take steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics that are different from people who do not have that characteristic (including taking account of a disability)
  - encourage protected groups to participate in public life and in any other activity where participation is disproportionately low.
- 1.3. As part of the 'general equality duty' of the Equality Act 2010, local authorities must prepare and publish one or more equality objectives at least every four years.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4. To continue to comply with the Equality Act 2010 the Council must develop a new strategy for meeting the general equality duty. It is for this reason this report is presented to Cabinet.

## 2. Context

- 2.1. The Equality and Diversity Strategy has been developed in a challenging context of reduced budgets and large scale transformation of council services and functions. The Strategy is particularly influenced by, and seeks to dovetail with these important agendas:

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<sup>1</sup> The nine protected characteristics are as follows:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity status
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Ethnicity
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

<sup>2</sup> The Single Equalities Scheme, which is now expired, was developed to meet this legal obligation when it came in effect on 06 April 2012.

### **Transformation programmes**

Ambition 2020 is the Council's wholesale transformation programme to create a sustainable organisation that can live within its means; tackle the challenges the borough faces; respond to the Growth Commission findings and deliver the Council's vision. The programme will trigger significant re-configurations of services and functions to achieve £63 million of savings. Managing change and transitioning to new service delivery models will require a sensitive approach to equality and diversity.

### **Growth Commission**

The Growth Commission made recommendations about how to maximise the contribution of the borough to the London economy; generating growth in Barking and Dagenham in a way that benefits all residents. There were more than 100 recommendations, covering issues including housing, inclusive growth, regeneration, and civic culture.

### **Borough Manifesto**

The Borough Manifesto is a collaborative, place-based, resident-led vision of the future of Barking and Dagenham. It is a set of aspirations and targets, jointly owned by public, private, community and voluntary sector organisations, setting out how the Borough should move forward over the next 20 years. A major theme of the Manifesto is fairness and removing barriers to equality.

## **3. About the Strategy**

- 3.1. The Strategy primarily aims to improve outcomes for residents by setting actions to address known equality and diversity issues faced by our population covering several important domains that have an impact on outcomes such as housing, employment, health, and education.
- 3.2. It is also concerned with how the Council operates and uses instruments, functions and tools at its disposal, such as commissioning, data and intelligence, and equalities impact assessments to systematically ensure the council has a robust approach to equality and diversity.
- 3.3. As well as advancing equality and diversity for people affected by the Council's policies and service delivery, the public sector equality duty includes employees of the organisation. The Strategy therefore outlines our approach as an employer and sets objectives specific to our workforce.
- 3.4. The Strategy is divided into four main objectives, each with sub-objectives and proposed actions. Following the introductory commentary, contextual information, and the methodology for developing the Strategy, the document is structured as follows:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Sub-objective</b>
Improve outcomes for all	Improve educational attainment
	Reduce hate crime and intervene where hostility surfaces
	Tackle health inequalities

Objective	Sub-objective
	Protect everyone from domestic violence and abuse
No-one left behind	Harness economic growth and use regeneration as a tool to improve outcomes
	Help and support working age residents into employment
	Ensure there are suitable and good homes for everyone
Fair and open service delivery	Make best use of insight and intelligence
	Ensure that commissioning decisions reflect the needs of service users
	Ensure equalities impact assessments are carried out, and that this is done to a high standard
	Engage with residents and stakeholders on service design and delivery
Exemplar employer	Ensure that employment processes and conditions are free from discrimination
	Maintain status as a 'Disability Confident' employer and remove barriers for people with impairments
	Improve diversity in the workforce so that it represents and reflects the community it serves

- 3.5. The Strategy acts as an umbrella document with the specific purpose to articulate our priorities for the next period (2017-2021) and bring together a suite of actions (some of which will be reflected in other policies and strategies) that demonstrate how we will be working to improve equality and diversity for our population. The Strategy has links to the Council's wider policy framework and, to make these links clear, at the end of each section the Strategy signposts to where more detailed plans and actions can be found on that topic or issue which will include more granular level detail about equalities and diversity priorities and actions.
- 3.6. The Strategy is not a definitive or exhaustive about our approach to equality and diversity. The entirety of our approach is contained within all of our policies, plans and strategies, and each service block of the Council is responsible for meeting equalities and diversity duties. The Strategy expresses how equality and diversity is embedded in everything we do and mission-critical to delivering the Council's strategic priorities.

## **4. Consultation**

- 4.1. On 1st November 2016, we launched a 10-week consultation to seek the views of people who live and work in the borough about what our priorities and objectives should be with regard to equality and diversity, and to give people the opportunity to highlight issues and problems that the Strategy should seek to address.
- 4.2. Members of the public were invited to respond to the consultation by completing an online questionnaire which was available on the Council's consultation portal. Stakeholders could also respond by submitting hardcopies by post or by e-mailing the Strategy and Performance Team. The consultation document was displayed in local libraries and children's centres and downloadable from the Council's website. An easy read version of the consultation information and questionnaire was developed to ensure accessibility; this was used to engage people with learning disabilities and people who have English as a second language.
- 4.3. The public consultation closed on 13th January 2017. In total, there were 29 responses.
- 4.4. Separately and taking a more targeted approach, the Council wrote to partners and voluntary sector groups and organisations directly. As well as inviting them to respond to the public consultation, the Strategy and Performance Team attended local groups and forums to discuss the consultation and get input from stakeholders. Through this approach we were able to engage the following groups and forums:
  - Barking and Dagenham Ethnic Minority Forum
  - Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum
  - Barking and Dagenham LGBT Network
  - Barking and Dagenham Youth Forum
  - Learning Disability Partnership Board
  - International Day of Disabled People (consultation workshop hosted by the Sycamore Trust)
- 4.5. Council staff were consulted separately about how the Council meets its equality duties as an organisation and service provider, and how it treats staff as an employer. All staff were invited to respond to the Staff Temperature Check survey, which is a consultation mechanism used by HR to measure staff satisfaction in several domains including wellbeing, fairness, communications, and equality. Additional questions, specific to the Equality and Diversity Strategy, were included to engage staff about where and how we can improve our approach to equalities, diversity, fairness and inclusion. The Staff Temperature Check was completed by 750 members of staff (21% of all council employees).
- 4.6. Responses from the consultation are summarised in Appendix 2.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: Lance Porteous, Principal Accountant

- 5.1. The Strategy aligns with existing plans and strategies as well as emerging policies and programmes within the organisation. It will therefore be possible to deliver the Strategy within the existing budgets held by the service blocks who own the actions and who will be responsible for delivery.

## 6. Legal Implications

Implications completed by: Dr Paul Field, Senior Governance Lawyer

- 6.1. The Equality Act 2010 requires that we, as a local authority, must consider all individuals when carrying out our day-to-day work. This includes shaping policy, delivering services and how we treat our employees.
- 6.2. More broadly, under the Equality Act, we must ensure that we are taking steps to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - 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.
- 6.3. This Strategy sets out our approach to meeting the duties of the Equality Act 2010. The Strategy is a significant piece of the Council's overall policy framework and cuts across all other policies, plans and strategies which are service specific in meeting these overarching equality and diversity duties.
- 6.4. The Strategy is due to expire again in 2021, when by law we will be required to set new equalities objectives. In the meantime, it is recommended that the actions of the Strategy are reviewed annually by Corporate Performance Group who will monitor delivery progress and be able to set new objectives as appropriate to keep the Strategy up-to-date and abreast of new developments or responsibilities.

## 7. Other Implications

- 7.1. **Risk Management** - To ensure oversight and to measure progress the Strategy and Performance Team will compile annual progress reports to Corporate Performance Group. Action owners from relevant service blocks will contribute to this report by providing updates on actions apportioned to them and they will be held to account for delivery.
- 7.2. **Contractual Issues** - There are no direct contract or procurement implications for this Strategy. However, Cabinet should note that the Council's Contract Rules comply with the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 and the Council's Social Value Policy. This means that before starting a procurement process officers should consider how what is proposed to be procured might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Council's area; and how, in conducting the process of procurement, it might act with a view to securing that improvement. Improving outcomes for residents and equalities and diversity is therefore embedded in the Council's procurement process.
- 7.3. **Staffing Issues** - The Staff Temperature Check was used to engage staff in the development of the Strategy and the findings of the consultation have informed the actions and priorities. Objective four of the Equality and Diversity Strategy focuses exclusively on the Council as an employer and proposes actions to improve equality, fairness, inclusion, and diversity. The Strategy supplements the Council's Equalities in Employment Policy which is the primary policy through which the Council articulates its equalities and diversity responsibilities as an employer.

In-line with the Equalities in Employment Policy, the Equality and Diversity Strategy highlights the need to enable and support disabled employees, improve the diversity of the workforce, ensure we provide family-friendly working arrangements, and ensure employment processes and practices are fair and free from discrimination. The Strategy highlights the Council's Investor in People status and 'Disability Confident' employer accreditation as evidence in support of our strong track-record as a fair and equal employer.

**7.4. Corporate Policy and Customer Impact** - Objective 3 of the Strategy (Fair and open service delivery) outlines how we ensure equality and diversity is considered in policy development, service design, decision-making, and operational service delivery. This is achieved through the use of:

- data and intelligence to understand the population's needs and characteristics
- equalities impact assessments to systematically consider the impacts of proposals and policies on the population, and those with protected characteristics.
- commissioning to develop service provision which meets the needs of service users
- consultation and engagement to involve residents in service design and decision-making processes.

By strengthening our approaches in these areas we drive continuous improvement in service delivery and advance our understanding of the community and how we must develop services and functions to meet their needs and deliver better outcomes.

**7.5. Health Issues** - The Strategy proposes a suite of actions to tackle health inequalities and focuses on closing the life expectancy and healthy life expectancy gap, where Barking and Dagenham is behind national and regional averages. These actions directly relate to the wider agenda for improving the health of our population principally set out in the borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The Strategy takes a comprehensive approach to health and wellbeing and is concerned with addressing the wider socio-economic determinants of health. It therefore proposes actions related to education, employment, housing, and regeneration.

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

**List of appendices:**

- Appendix 1: Equality and Diversity Strategy