

**REPORT TO:** SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** 14 FEBRUARY 2023

**TITLE:** IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSIVITY POLICY

**LEAD OFFICER:** SIMON HILL, DIRECTOR OF GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES

**CONTRIBUTING OFFICER:** NATASHA TERRELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GOVERNANCE, HR & LEGAL

**RECOMMENDED that:**

- A** The progress of the Council against its own and LGA frameworks are noted.
- B** The Committee consider:
- (i) any further information that they might require; and
  - (ii) Any recommendations to be made to the Cabinet or Portfolio Holder.

**BACKGROUND**

1. The Committee requested in June 2022 for a review of progress on equalities matters. The request can be found here: [Implementation of equality diversity and inclusion policy.pdf \(harlow.gov.uk\)](https://www.harlow.gov.uk/media/10000/Implementation_of_equality_diversity_and_inclusion_policy.pdf)
2. The Equality Act 2010 challenges organisations to know how age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex, and sexual orientation describe the experiences of local communities, both individually and collectively. Thinking about the relationship between these 'protected characteristics' explains the difficulties and opportunities arising from the diversity of local areas. They are a reminder that the consequences of difference on effective service delivery cannot be avoided either for the provider or the user.
3. Organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty 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.

4. The Council already has a number of policies and procedures which enable it to meet the requirements placed upon it by the Public Sector Equality Duty created by the Act. The Council recently refreshed its policy (2021) which brought forward an action plan and a number of improvements.
5. The Council sets out, within its adopted policy, three key equality, diversity and inclusivity objectives. These are:
  - Our services are accessible to everyone and do not discriminate on any unjustifiable ground.
  - Our services seek to meet the needs of our customers and local communities can influence our services.
  - Equality, diversity and inclusivity is championed within the Council and our workforce, at all levels, is representative of the local community.
6. This report updates the position and details how the work envisaged in the plan is being addressed.

## **ISSUES/PROPOSALS**

7. The Council's Work Plan (attached) has been RAG rated and shows those items within the original plan that have been achieved. This has been despite the pandemic in the interim which refocused the Council's activities.
8. It is, however, worth setting out the range of Pandemic responses, particularly as many of the services were aimed at those with protected characteristics. The council took on the running of the Harlow Community Hub, working in partnership with Rainbow Services, to provide instant support to people in Harlow who were self-isolating, had COVID-19 or were classed as clinically extremely vulnerable. Support offered included ensuring that people had access to food and any medication that was needed.
9. During the pandemic, the hub:
  - Answered over 4,500 calls from residents.
  - Made over 9,300 welfare calls to vulnerable residents to see how they are doing.
  - Answered 500 calls from residents who needed advice, were lonely or concerned about the welfare of someone else.
  - Supported 1,700 residents by referring them to other partner agencies for help.
  - Helped with 773 general food enquiries and 875 requests from people who needed help with collecting essential food shopping.
  - Collected 664 prescriptions for those unable to collect them with 356 referrals made to GoodSAM for prescriptions.

## **Work Plan Development**

10. As a development, the Council's equalities work has been the subject to a further assessment by officers against the Local Government Association (LGA) Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), which assists a review and improvement of the Council's performance for people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010.

11. Their Assessment Framework has three levels of achievement, namely:
- Developing - The developing level criteria contain the basic building blocks for each priority. An organisation at the Developing level has made an organisational commitment to improving equality. It is putting in place processes to deliver on equality issues and is working towards meeting or is meeting the statutory requirements.
  - Achieving - An organisation at the Achieving level has policies, processes and procedures in place and is delivering some good equality outcomes. It is not only meeting but can demonstrate exceeding statutory requirements.
  - Excellent - An organisation at the Excellent level has mainstreamed equality throughout the organisation and can demonstrate that it is delivering significant outcomes across its services that are making a difference in its communities. The organisation not only exceeds statutory requirements but is an exemplar council for equality and diversity in the local government and wider public sector..
12. Our review suggests that Harlow has good evidence in the ‘Developing’ and ‘Achieving’ Categories. A summary of items that evidence our effectiveness in line with that framework are split into five areas:
- Collecting and sharing information
  - Analysing and using data and information
  - Effective community engagement
  - Fostering good community relations
  - Participation in public life
13. The Actions that align to that framework are below with reference to our own workplan where appropriate. It is intended that we move toward the Council aligning to the national framework.

### **Collecting and sharing information**

14. Policy and Performance (P&P) access the data collected by other parties such as the Office for National Statistics (NOMIS) / LG Inform / Public Health. The data obtained is wide ranging and covers the population, housing, health, economic data (i.e., employment & unemployment, economic activity) of Harlow. The data is used to update Harlow’s Ward Profiles, respond to requests from officers and support strategic work/activity. The data obtained is anonymous and does not fall within the scope of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations).
15. The Council will be analysing 2021 Census information to understand the changes in the community from an equality’s perspective, compared to the last 2011 Census.
16. Through HR, the Council collect data about the profile of its staff, which could be used to identify staff with protected characteristics, and any gaps in the data.

17. As part of the “2020 Harlow Together” project, the Council worked in partnership with other local community groups to instruct the Anglia Ruskin University to complete research into social integration and ethnic and culturally diverse groups in Harlow. The data obtained is anonymous and not effected by GDPR . This is available for staff in planning service changes etc.
18. The Council is compliant with GDPR legislation when collecting, analysing and storing data and information and has a strong officer group on.
19. The Councillors and MP have an enquiry system which allows us to log their requests. This system is only used for logging data but should also feed into the Complaints system ensure positive and proactive learning from complaints (Action 2.2) As the individuals approach the MP or Councillors Direct, this is covered by GDPR.

### **Analysing and using data and information**

20. In accordance with the Equality and Diversity Action Plan, the Council has updated its complaints procedure and encourage customers to use the complaints system (Action 2.1) and to ensure positive and proactive learning from complaints (Action 2.2), trends in information are considered at Management Board Level.
21. In accordance with the Equality and Diversity Action Plan, the Council aims to involve residents, stakeholders and the Youth Council in development of Council services (Action 2.4) by using a central database of local community groups when consulting.
22. The Decision-Making Tree / Screening process and Equality Impact Assessment (Action 1.1) are used when dealing with service provision, policies and procedures where the PSED is a significant factor. A formal process is in place to ensure officers undertake a primary review of the impact of their projects on those with the identified characteristics, process flags to the officer whether a full EQIA is required, in with the standards required.
23. All Committee reports demonstrate the requirement that equality duties have been considered and the EIA included in the report if necessary (Action 1.4). These are reflected in the comments of the Director of Governance and Corporate Services.
24. In accordance with the Equality and Diversity Action Plan (Action 2.5), the Council continues to develop its information base in terms of the socio-economic profile of the district and publish this information annually in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Information Report.
25. Data is obtained from the Census and used for updating Harlow’s Ward Profile, by P&P this is helpful in understanding the demographics and deprivation of the wards. Officers are in discussion with County colleagues on how data can be

used to help service design. Key outcomes will be made available for use by the community.

### **Effective community engagement**

26. The Council has adopted the Community Engagement Strategy sets out how the council will make sure everyone feels included, listened to and involved in council decision making. One of the main objectives of this strategy is to create a culture in the council where all councillors and council officers recognise the importance of inclusive engagement and consultation with residents. The strategy sets out several opportunities for the wider community to be involved and have their say.
27. We are also committed to making our communications in print and digital format more accessible and inclusive.
28. The Council also advertises opportunities for consultation in many ways including various social media channels and as part of the quarterly Harlow Times publication.

### **Fostering good community relations**

29. The Harlow Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board has a range of partners on its board which strengthens partnerships working across Harlow and builds community relationships. It delivers on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The boards set priorities and partners/subgroups work together to achieve this in tackling Equality, Mental Health, isolation and loneliness across Harlow's community.
30. The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Investigation Process feeds into the Anti-Social Behaviour Corporate Policy. Hate Crime incidents are referred to the Police via the Hate Crime Officer, who chairs the Hate Crime Subgroup and coordinates the Promotional side to raise awareness of Hate Crime and to encourage reporting and understand Hate Crime Awareness.
31. The Civic Centre is a J9 Safe Spaces for Domestic Abuse victims and Harlow Playhouse is a J9 Theatre. Staff there have completed gender awareness training, hold Senior and safe socials, and is a Hate Crime incident reporting centre.
32. The Council has representatives which are actively involved with Essex Police's Harlow Independent Advisory Group (IAG) which meets regularly to discuss the work completed by Essex Police and raise any concerns.
33. The Police and Community Safety Team provide an Annual Report and presentation to the Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will consider the information provide and ask questions of each organisation. In 2022, the Committee also approached the public to give them the opportunity to raise any questions. Overall, the Council's Community Safety Team and Essex Police have a strong working partnership.

34. The Council will reinstate the Community Forum to promote dialogue between officers and representatives of the town's diverse communities.

### **Participation in public life**

35. The Council is committed to promoting equality in all its activities including the provision of its services and employment of its staff. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 came into force on 31 March 2017. The Regulations require public authorities with 250 or more employees to publish specific information about differences in pay between male and female employees and workers-based set pay periods. The council publishes its Gender Pay Gap Report annually on the government gender pay gap website and its own see [Gender Pay Gap Report 2021 \(published March 2022\)](#) for the most recent reported information. It is also made available to all council employees and workers.
36. E-learning Training on equality impact assessments has been facilitated with outside suppliers and will be delivered across the Council to those officers that have been identified as having roles that might need to assess new or existing services against the PSED.
37. Equalities matters are discussed at the senior levels within the authority and feature on the agenda of Wider Leadership Team meetings (WLT) meetings.
38. Developing an accessible website and enabling as many people as possible to be able to use it. For example, enabling users to:
- i) change colours, contrast levels and fonts
  - ii) zoom in up to 300% without the text spilling off the screen
  - iii) navigate most of the website using just a keyboard
  - iv) navigate most of the website using speech recognition software
  - v) listen to most of the website using a screen reader (including the most recent versions of JAWS, NVDA and Voiceover)
  - vi) the website text is written as plain and simple as possible to understand.
39. An Equalities audit was recently undertaken. An Action plan for recommended changes has been monitored by Audit and Standards and has now been completed.
40. The Council supports the Youth Council to represent the views and opinions of young people in the town and the Constitution has recently been updated to reflect to allow the Youth Council the opportunity to ask questions to Full Council.
41. Councillors are appointed to outside bodies annually to represent the Council across the town and county to groups such as Active Harlow Partnership, Age concern and CAB, Harlow Homelessness Prevention Partnership, Harlow Occupational Health service, Safer Harlow Partnership, Young Concern Trust.

42. The above provide only a snapshot of work undertaken since the work plan was agreed, many more services play an important part in the Council's Community Leadership role. This work is built on the legacy work started by Frances Mason
43. Members are requested to receive the report and indicate whether they require any further information or wish to make any recommendations to the Cabinet.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Strategic Growth and Regeneration**

None specific.

**Author: Andrew Bramidge, Chief Executive**

### **Finance**

None specific.

**Author: Simon Freeman, Deputy to the Chief Executive and Director of Finance**

### **Housing**

None specific.

**Author: Andrew Murray, Director of Housing**

### **Communities and Environment**

None specific.

**Author: Jane Greer, Director of Communities and Environment**

### **Governance and Corporate Services**

The report sets out progress by the Council in meeting the statutory requirements laid in out in the Equalities Act 2010, that being : An authority must when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.

**Author: Simon Hill, Director of Governance and Corporate Services**

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Equality Action Plan

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

None.