



SIGNED OFF BY	Head of Corporate Policy
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TO	Executive
DATE	Thursday, 5 December 2019
EXECUTIVE MEMBER	Leader of the Council

KEY DECISION REQUIRED	Y
WARDS AFFECTED	All Wards

SUBJECT	Equality Objectives 2020-2024
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RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That the Executive agree the proposed Equality Objectives at paragraph 9 and Annex 1 for the period 2020-2024**

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Equality Act 2010 requires that a local authority prepares and publishes one or more objectives that it thinks it should achieve to discharge its general equality duty to eliminate prohibited conduct, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share protected characteristic and those who do not.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council's current Equality Objectives were prepared in 2012. They therefore require updating, particularly due to the increased emphasis on fairness and inclusivity in the Council's new corporate plan 'Reigate & Banstead 2025' (included elsewhere on this meeting's agenda).

Equality of opportunity is an important part of the Council's service delivery and internal processes, and good progress has been made since the 2012 objectives were agreed. A revised set of objectives has now been prepared, taking into account progress made in relation to our current objectives and feedback from across the organisation.

The revised objectives are presented at paragraph 9 of this report and in Annex 1. They reflect the opportunity for the Council to take a more positive approach to understanding - and meeting the needs of - those with protected characteristics, as well as fostering social

inclusion more generally.

Subject to agreement of the proposed objectives by the Executive, an operational-level action plan will be prepared. Progress in relation to the objectives will be reported annually alongside the corporate plan annual progress report.

Executive has authority to approve the above recommendations

STATUTORY POWERS

1. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) places a general duty on public authorities (including local authorities) to have due regard to the need to:
 - a. Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
 - c. Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
2. This duty applies across all the Council's activities, including statutory service provision, provision of non-statutory services and the Council's internal operations.
3. The Act defines the relevant 'protected characteristics' as:
 - a. Age
 - b. Disability
 - c. Gender reassignment
 - d. Pregnancy and maternity
 - e. Race
 - f. Religion or belief
 - g. Sex; and
 - h. Sexual orientation
4. Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, a local authority must prepare and publish one or more objectives it thinks it should achieve to do any of the things mentioned in the three general duties of the Act.

KEY INFORMATION

Context

5. The Council's current Equality Objectives are:
 - a. To improve the Council's equality data evidence base
 - b. To communicate effectively, especially with regard to accessibility
 - c. To actively encourage resident / customer involvement in service development / delivery especially with regard to accessibility

d. Fairness in employment

6. The objectives were last reviewed in 2012, and therefore require updating. Further justification exists with an increased emphasis on equality of opportunity within Reigate & Banstead 2025 (the Council's new corporate plan), elsewhere on this meeting's agenda, which states:

"...it is important that we treat our residents and other customers in a fair and inclusive way..."

And

"...we will seek to eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination, victimisation and harassment which are under the control of the Council and promote equality of opportunity and good relations within and between all communities".

Revised objectives

7. Equality issues, and equality of opportunity, is an important part of the Council's service delivery and internal processes, and good progress has been made since the 2012 objectives were agreed.
8. A revised and updated series of objectives has been prepared following an informal review of how we currently discharge our equality duty, and using guidance published by the Local Government Association. This explored a range of considerations, including how data and intelligence is used, internal policies and procedures, service design and delivery, and engagement with partners and communities.
9. A revised set of Equality Objectives is included at **Annex 1**. The proposed new objectives are:
- a. **Using data and local intelligence better:** Continue to improve our equality data, use of local intelligence and data insight to inform future service planning and formal decision making
 - b. **Supporting good community relations:** Develop a greater focus on promoting social inclusivity across all the Council's services and fostering good community relations
 - c. **Accessible information and services:** Ensure that Council services, information, consultation and engagement opportunities remain accessible to all residents, particularly those with protected characteristics
 - d. **Working for the Council:** Continue to seek opportunities to build inclusivity into the Council's internal policies and procedures.
10. These build on progress made in delivering our existing objectives but also reflect the opportunity for the Council to take a more positive approach to understanding and meeting the needs of those with protected characteristics and fostering social inclusion more generally.
11. **Annex 1** also includes information about what success for each objective would look like, and how (in general terms) the Council will take forward work in these areas. Subject to agreement of the proposed Equality Objectives by the Executive, an operational-level action plan will be prepared by Heads of Service to develop these ideas further.
12. It is proposed that progress in relation to the new Equality Objectives is reported annually alongside the corporate plan annual progress report. This report would be

provided to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Executive and published on the Council website.

OPTIONS

13. The following options are available to the Executive:
 - a. Option 1: Agree to adopt the proposed new Equality Objectives. This option is recommended. It will ensure that the Council is compliant with equality legislation and is taking a positive approach to continuing to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and foster good community relations.
 - b. Option 2: Do not agree the proposed new Equality Objectives. This option is not recommended as it represents a missed opportunity to demonstrate the Council's commitment to equality issues; and means that our published Equality Objectives will be out-of-date.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. The statutory requirements for the Council in relation to equality legislation are set out in paragraphs 1 to 4 of this report.
15. The Council is required to publish equality objectives at least every four years. In addition, it is required to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the public sector equality duty annually and include within this (general) information about those who have protected characteristics within the organisation and who are affected by its policies and practices.
16. Updated Equality Objectives, supported by the proposals for an operational action plan and performance reporting alongside the corporate plan, will ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory duties.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

17. No direct financial implications have been identified.
18. Once developed, the supporting action plan may require financial expenditure or investment to deliver. In this event, one off activities may be funded by revenue reserves or amendments to the capital programme as appropriate. Proposals for ongoing service-related expenditure will be incorporated within the annual service and financial planning process.
19. The equality impacts of new budget proposals will continue to be considered as part of the annual service and financial planning process.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

20. An Equality Impact Screening Assessment has been carried out on the proposed Equality Objectives. Given the focus of the objectives on delivering our public equality duty, this concludes that the objectives will have a positive impact on all protected characteristic groups.
21. It does, however, identify that the positive impact of activity in this area can be improved as follows:

- a. In delivering the accompanying action plan, the opportunity exists to gather more (and more in-depth) data and intelligence about, and feedback from, those with protected characteristics in the borough and workforce, and about their needs.
- b. The review of Equality Objectives provides an opportunity to also review how equality information is communicated to residents, service users, decision-makers and the workforce, including the information that is available on the Council's website and intranet.

COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS

22. Subject to agreement by the Executive, the revised Equality Objectives will be published on the Council's website. At the same time, a review is being undertaken of equality information on the website to ensure it is up-to-date and easy to use.
23. The new Equality Objectives will also be shared with representatives of protected characteristic groups operating in and across the borough.
24. The proposed new Objectives include reference to continuing to ensure that the information published by the Council, and our consultations, remain accessible to all residents, particularly those with protected characteristics. As part of the equality impact assessment process, opportunities for engagement with protected characteristic groups should be considered throughout the service, project or policy design process.

RISK MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

25. No specific risk management considerations have been identified in relation to the recommendations or information contained within this report. However, it is worth noting that some of the Council's strategic and operational risks have the potential to impact on the most vulnerable within our communities including those with protected characteristics. Specific impacts (and opportunities for avoiding or mitigating these) will be considered through the Council's service and financial planning and other decision-making processes.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

26. No other implications have been identified.

CONSULTATION

27. Informal consultation has been undertaken with Heads of Service, other key officers and members of the Executive. Account has also been taken of the responses to the recent draft corporate plan consultation, which included feedback on equality issues.
28. As noted above, as part of our service planning, project and policy design process, the equality impact of new proposals is assessed, and this includes considering opportunities for engagement with protected characteristic groups. Further consultation and engagement will be undertaken as appropriate in delivering activities within the action plan.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

29. Whilst primarily meeting the statutory duties outlined above, the adoption of new Equality Objectives will also assist in the delivery of the new corporate plan, Reigate & Banstead 2025 (for consideration elsewhere on this meeting agenda).

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Corporate Plan (Reigate & Banstead 2025): www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/rbbc2025
2. Reigate & Banstead Equality Scheme and Objectives 2012-2016: http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/info/20306/equality/288/equality_objectives
3. Equality Impact Assessment