

53. Equality Objectives 2020-24

The Principal Policy Officer:

- a. presented a report to Equality and Diversity Group outlining the proposed Equality Objectives 2020-24 for members' consideration and comments prior to forwarding to Executive and Full Council for approval
- b. reminded members of the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998, which included the annual publication of equality information and setting at least one measurable Equality Objective every four years
- c. highlighted that the Equality Objectives Action Plan had been monitored on a regular basis by the Equality and Diversity Group with actions being added and amended as necessary, over the 2016 – 2020 period the following progress had been made:
 - 59 Actions had been completed.
 - 49 Actions had been started and were ongoing.
 - 5 Actions had been removed.
- d. reported that only key actions in any one year were included in the annual action plan, therefore, some but not all ongoing actions were carried forward to the following year and those actions which had been removed either became redundant due to changes in procedures or due to investigation were found to be impractical to implement
- e. advised on a wide range of actions that had been completed over the four year period, as detailed at paragraph 4.4 of the report, further information was available in the annual Equality Journal which provided equality information and also a summary of equality work undertaken during the year
- f. drew members attention to paragraph 5.3 of the report detailing the development timetable for the 2020-2024 Equality Objectives
- g. advised that following feedback from members, staff, residents, tenant panels and the Third Sector, the Equality Objectives would remain broadly the same, to read as follows:
 1. Our services are accessible and do not discriminate on any unjustifiable grounds.
 2. Local communities, partner organisations and stakeholders are empowered to influence the way our services are provided to them.
 3. Equality and diversity is at the heart of decision making at all levels within the city council.
 4. Our workforce at all levels reflects the makeup of the local community.

5. Equalities, Social Inclusion and Community Cohesion have all improved within our communities.

- h. provided a general summary of comments received from the consultation process outlined at Appendices A and B of the report
- i. highlighted that the annual equality action plans would be developed through service plans, focussed on delivery of our new strategic plan Vision 2025, thus ensuring equality actions were closely aligned to our priorities and aspirations
- j. invited members' questions and comments.

Members commented and received relevant responses as follows.

- **Comment:** If a staff perception existed that employees were appointed to posts due to protected characteristics, it needed to be made clear this was not the case. This could lead to a particular person appointed being discriminated against due to this false perception.
- **Response:** The council would be acting unlawfully if it recruited staff in this way. The best person for the job was appointed to vacant posts.
- **Response:** A communication to all staff would emphasise that equality and diversity was practised at all times, however, this did not mean that certain applicants would be appointed to a particular post due to a protected characteristic. Our priority was at all times to operate a level playing field.
- **Comment:** Many people feeding back into the consultation questionnaire were not aware of the Equality Objectives.
- **Response:** The comments were received as anonymous.
- **Response:** The responses to the questionnaire had been reviewed by Corporate Management Team (CMT) and as a result it was agreed that a working group be set up to review the responses to the questionnaire including the comments received and to agree appropriate actions moving forward, including discussion with the Chair of Equality and Diversity Group. Awareness training would also be included.
- **Comment:** There had been limited response from the voluntary sector.
- **Response:** There had only been one response from the voluntary sector. Officers had offered a separate presentation to ask for further feedback.
- **Comment:** It was disappointing to see only 21 staff responses to the equality objectives consultation exercise.
- **Response:** Agreed. Sometimes people only responded to questionnaires if they had an issue or it could be that staff were not made sufficiently aware of the questionnaire. The Working Group would discuss this and identify how we could improve the response rate for the future.

- **Comment:** Perhaps the Citizens Panel needed greater youth representation on it.
- **Response:** The Citizens Panel was reviewed from time to time to ensure it was age balanced, however we could not dictate who chose to respond to questionnaires which tended to be older people. The issue was how to communicate most effectively in a manner to seek the views of both young and older members.
- **Question:** Was there a better way of communicating with staff other than by e mail?
- **Response:** City People was used to reach staff employees. Officers would look at consulting in a more meaningful way wherever possible
- **Comment by Chair:** There was a lack of engagement in Equality and Diversity across work forces in general, not just within this organisation. Consultation was the key to making an employee feel valued. Training and engagement was important to break down barriers to level up the playing field.
- **Response:** HR were in the process of conducting training sessions to staff at management level to be delivered by the end of March 2020. There was a dedicated focus on recruitment/selection at these workshops. Manager briefings had also been introduced.

RESOLVED that:

1. The proposed Draft Equality Objectives as set out in Paragraph 7.1 of the report for a four year period from April 2020 to March 2024 be forwarded to Executive for consideration and approval for adoption by Full Council.
2. Feedback from the Working Group set up to review the comments received from the Equality Objectives staff questionnaire be provided to the next meeting of the Equality and Diversity Group, also to be fed into the Equality Action Plan.