

Key Decision - No

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: **Equality Position**

Meeting/Date: Employment Panel 15/09/21

Executive Portfolio: Councillor David Keane Executive Councillor for
Corporate Services

Report by: Jo Lancaster

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council's current position with regards to having due regard to Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Recommendation(s):

The Panel is invited to comment on the Equality Position Paper and approve the proportionate and Huntingdonshire focused response to fulfilling our statutory obligations around Equality.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the Council's position with regards to equalities and recommend an option to ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council needs to demonstrate due regard to Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The PSED entails having due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
 - Advance Equality of Opportunity
 - Foster good relations

Specific duties were introduced in June 2011, to assist public authorities in the better performance of the PSED. Specific Duties mean that the Council will need to publish:

- Equality objectives, at least every four years
- Information to demonstrate their compliance with the equality duty, at least annually.

The latter will need to include, in particular, information relating to our employees and others affected by Council policies and practices such as service users.

- 2.2 Equalities was a responsibility of the Corporate Team, when this team disbanded around October 2019, partial responsibilities for equalities and workforce went to HR, leaving a gap around corporate responsibility for updating corporate strategy/policy.
- 2.3 The last Corporate Equalities Report was Jan 2016 (for 2015) which contained equality objectives for 2015/19. Other more recent activities include an HR Equality Policy, approved by Members in 2018 and a report on Gender Pay Gap, published in 2021 which has been published annually, except for 2020 when need to publish was suspended due to Covid. To ensure compliance with PSED, the Council will need to provide an annual equality workforce monitoring report i.e. breakdown of staff by protected characteristics. Workforce data is already reported quarterly (age/pay, age/leavers, gender/pay) moving forward this will be amended to include where possible, the other protected characteristics.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS

- 3.1 We are currently working on refreshing our approach to equalities, our equality objectives will need to show how HDC will meet the aims of the General and Specific Equality Duty during the period 2021-24.
- 3.2 A number of options are available to us:
- **Option 1** - Create a separate four-year Equality Scheme
 - **Option 2** – Link our equality objectives to our corporate plan
 - **Option 3** – Adopt a short position statement with a small number of equality objectives

- 3.3 There is no obligation to have a separate and distinct equality policy as long as the Council has identified equality objectives and can demonstrate compliance with the other specific duties. It is recommended that the Council adopts Option 2. This would be the more proportionate and efficient approach as our Corporate Plan already provides a clear direction for what we are doing and why we are doing it. It sets out what we aim to achieve in addition to the provision of core statutory services and also provides the framework for evaluating the council's performance.
- 3.4 An assessment has been undertaken of approaches adopted by our 'nearest neighbours'. Some authorities have a separate Equality Scheme; many have a small number of broad equality objectives and many link their equality objectives to actions within their Corporate Plan.
- 3.5 The Council is already demonstrating its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion in our Corporate Plan, particularly through the **People, Place and Becoming a more customer focused organisation** priorities. However, it is not currently reporting annually on progress with specific equality objectives/actions.
- 3.6 It is recommended that HR sponsor equality objectives and manage activities moving forward.

4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory obligation to demonstrate compliance with the PSED, the adoption of Option 2 with an annual report on progress to senior officers and Members ensures the Council is complying with its statutory duties. Although a pragmatic and proportionate approach, it will require resources to establish, with an ongoing resource to monitor and report on performance data.
- 4.2 This refresh is an opportunity to establish Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) and assurance process which will provide the framework moving forward to ensure our decision-making process are fair and do not create any unnecessary barriers.
- 4.2 The Equality & Human Rights Commission is responsible for regulating the PSED, if a public authority does not publish equality information as required by the specific duty regulations, they risk being subject to legal challenge (including enforcement action by the Commission), as well as potential damage to reputation.

5. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

[See Corporate Plan](#)

- 5.1 Equalities links to the following Strategic Priorities within the Corporate Plan – People, Place and Becoming a more Customer Focused Organisation.

6. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 6.1 The Council should take a proportionate and effective response to statutory and business requirements. Members are invited to note the Equality Position Paper and endorse the recommended approach.

7. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 Proposed action plan

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Appendix 1

Proposed Equalities Action Plan 2021/25

Priority Actions
People
Support people to improve their health and well-being (7 priority actions for 20/21)
Develop a flexible and skilled local workforce (1 key action for 20/21)
Develop stronger and more resilient communities to enable people to help themselves (4 priority actions for 20/21)
Place
Create, protect, and enhance our safe and clean built and green environment (<i>identify priority actions that have direct equality links for 21/25</i>)
Accelerate business growth and investment (<i>identify priority actions that have direct equality links for 21/25</i>)
Support development of infrastructure to enable growth (<i>identify priority actions that have direct equality links for 21/25</i>)
Improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs, and community facilities to meet current and future need (<i>identify priority actions that have direct equality links for 21/25</i>)
Becoming a more Customer Focused Organisation
Develop our understanding of customer and resident needs and demands
Other
Covid Recovery work (to be identified)
Re-establish EIAs and assurance process
Review process for collection of data e.g. equality monitoring (service users, consultation & engagement etc)
Leadership commitment to champion equality issues (internally & externally)
Review of council policies to ensure equality embedded within them (e.g. Code of Conduct, Pay Processes, HR policies, Safeguarding, Whistleblowing etc)