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| Committee: | Overview and Scrutiny Commission |
| Date: | 11 March 2014 |
| Subject: | Progress report on implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17 |
| Lead officer: | Yvette Stanley, Director Children, Schools and families |
| Lead member: | Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities |
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Recommendations: That Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

- A. Note and comment on the progress made on the implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17.
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with a progress report on the implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17.

2. DETAILS

Background

Progress on the implementation of the Equality Strategy and action plan

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires the local authority, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not. “Protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 2.2 The Equality Act 2010 also requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years to demonstrate how it will meet the PSED. The equality strategy outlines the Council’s ‘Equality Objectives’ as the following five themes:
- Tackling Inequality
 - Service Access
 - Improving Engagement
 - Promoting Community Cohesion
 - Workforce Development
- 2.3 Council approved the Equality Strategy 2013-17 in February 2013. The strategy is a four-year strategy that sets out what we will do to tackle discrimination and inequality and promote equal opportunities in Merton. The strategy also sets out the council’s equalities objectives as required by the Equality Act 2010.

- 2.4 The Equality Strategy Action Plan sets out the actions we will take to meet our equality priorities both corporately and departmentally.
- 2.5 The approach of the strategy is a departure from the structure of the previous Corporate Equality Scheme. Instead of including objectives against each protected characteristic, generic themes have been identified and they in turn were informed by using available statistical evidence and priorities highlighted in departmental service plans.
- 2.6 Delivery against the Equality Strategy action plan is monitored by the Corporate Equality Steering Group through regular updates from departmental equality representatives, and the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minority Organisations also monitors implementation of the strategy.

Progress to date

- 2.7 The Equality Strategy action plan (attached at Appendix I) includes activities that are linked to departmental service plans.
- 2.8 Key developments to note include:
- A workshop was held to brief commissioning and procurement staff on embedding equalities considerations into the procurement process. All contracts include equalities considerations that are assessed at tender evaluation
 - Detailed analysis of the census data has fed into the Policy Network and departments are being given information to aid them to support service planning and consider the implication of demographic change on future service needs.
 - All fire fighters in Merton have now been trained and referral pathways are now being finalised to enable them to signpost residents that may want support to lead healthy lifestyles e.g. stop smoking.
 - Merton's School Improvement Service continues to give support to schools to improve achievement levels for all and to close the gap in achievements for target groups. Merton school achievement data for the 2012/13 academic year shows a rise in the attainment of 5+GCSEs A*-C to 63%; this is above the national average of 59%. At key stage 2, Pupil Premium pupils, and Looked After Children (LAC) in Merton schools, exceed the national average for their groups in progress and attainment. Merton's BME pupils also exceed the national average for their group with the exception of Black pupils who are below national for progress in maths and for key stage 2 attainment, and 'mixed' pupils who are also below for the latter. At key stage 4, Pupil Premium pupils are above national for progress, and for attainment of 5+GCSEs A*-C. Looked after children are above national for progress. BME pupils' attainment is above national for their ethnic group, with the exception of Black pupils (56% compared to 58% nationally). Non-statemented pupils' (School Action) progress and attainment is above national groups.

- Merton's Short Breaks Service continues to work to ensure sufficient and suitable short breaks provision to enable parents and carers of disabled children to continue to care, and/or provide more effective care for their child, and so that disabled children and young people have the chance to do something they enjoy. Work in 13/14 has focused on developing and updating the written statement of short breaks offer and preparation for the offer of individual budgets from April 2014. The team has managed to ensure improved take-up of the on site service at Cricket Green Special School by Tamil parents. Equalities work is now focusing on a needs analysis of provision segmenting take up by 'race' and by type of disability.
- Our Children's Centre services continue to work to increase take up of services by families from deprived areas, in order to improve outcomes for all young children in the foundation years, with a focus on those most requiring additional support to secure good outcomes. The take up of services overall by target families, and the completion rate of evidence based parenting programmes, are both on track to meet end of year targets. The Children's Centre offer includes a service specifically for Polish families and for Tamil families, and these are both well used. The take-up rate of 2 year old funded nursery places is increasing and work is focused on raising awareness of the programme amongst parents and practitioners.
- Our Access to Resources team works to increase the capacity of local placements to meet the needs of Looked After Children (LAC). Being placed locally gives looked after children the best chance of continuing in the same school, and having appropriate contact with family and friends. The LAC Placements Sufficiency Strategy 2012 identified a number of actions for improvement based on an analysis of data from March 2012. Actions included a need for more foster carers for teenagers, and for Asian children. The refreshed strategy (2014/15) based on March and September 2013 data shows that: fewer children are placed more than 20 miles from Merton, in spite of an overall increase in the number of LAC; more teenagers (age 11-15) are placed locally; more Asian children are placed locally; and the proportion of Asian or Asian British foster carers is in line with the looked after child population. The strategy has informed a refreshed improvement action plan for the coming year.

- We continue to support the range of participation opportunities for young people to ensure that they have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, and develop skills and confidence to make a positive contribution. Our young advisors programme has trained a new set of advisors this year to focus on health and well-being matters in the borough. The 'One Mitcham' Young Advisors were awarded the 'best new team' award by the National Young Advisors Charity, and have been supported to feedback issues on anti-social behaviour to a number of MPs. The work of the Young Advisors has included: Mitcham regeneration; the refresh of the Merton Community Plan; youth volunteering strategy; health and well-being; and anti-bullying. Merton's Youth Parliament meets every 2 weeks and is following a schedule of discussions on a range of topics. They were involved in a formal debate with local council party leaders and other local MPs on a range of issues of importance to young people. This year the Your Shout group for young people with learning disabilities has contributed issues to the Transition Review, finalised a leaflet to promote their work and encourage broader membership of the group, and started work on a DVD which will be used to raise awareness of issues for disabled young people. Our Children in Care Council (CICC) for looked after children (LAC) now has a set programme of regular meetings in each school holiday; levels of attendance have also improved. Meetings this year have focused on reviewing and improving the CICC website to improve LAC children and young people's access to information. Care leavers have been involved in a range of activities including independence courses, driving experience, work experience, and a summer day trip.
- Merton's Youth Justice Service continues to implement programmes to ensure high risk children and young people, and their families, take part in interventions which prevent the onset of anti social behaviour and youth offending, and reoffending. Current data shows that first time entrants to the youth justice service is set to be below the target set for the year.
- The roll out of the Schools and libraries Reading initiative has been implemented in 26 schools to date with 9826 children signed up and actively using their local library.
- HealthWatch was a key partner in the Merton Partnership conference on health inequalities
- We currently have 31 Apprentices in Merton (4 of whom were Looked After Children)

2.9 The following areas are a key focus for the remainder of 2013/14 and will continue to be addressed in 2014/15:

- Improve outreach to Small/Medium Enterprises and BAME organisations
- Increase the take up of learner support fund to support childcare costs
- Raise awareness of mental health issues to ensure all employees and managers have an understanding of the impact in the workplace
- Raise the priority for disabled access to Raynes Park and Motspur Park stations with Network Rail
- Utilising Census data to inform service planning

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3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to prepare and publish equality objectives and subsequently at least four-yearly. Failure to do so would mean the Council is not fulfilling its legal obligations and could be subject to legal action.

4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

The Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities will be given a progress report on the Equality Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Delivery of the Equality Strategy action plan is within existing resources.

6. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 On 6 April 2011 the Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires the Local Authority, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not. “Protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 6.2 Delivery of the commitments in the Equality Strategy action plan and the publication of an Equality Strategy setting out our equality objectives fulfil the Council’s legal obligations relating to equalities legislation.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 By setting out its equalities commitments in the Equality Strategy the Council is re-affirming its commitment to human rights, equality and community cohesion.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There is a risk of increased hate crime activity directed towards certain groups if there is no commitment to eliminate discrimination and harassment.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There is a risk to the Council’s reputation if it fails to produce and publish equalities objectives. Additionally there is a risk of claims of discrimination based on age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

10. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix I – Progress update of the Equality Strategy 2013-17 Action Plan

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Equality Strategy 2013-17

http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/plansandpolicies/equality_strategy_2013-17_final_v2.pdf

