

Committee: Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities

Date: 7 September 2021

Agenda item:

Wards: All

Subject: Refresh of the Equality Strategy

Lead officer: John Dimmer, Interim Head of Policy and Improvement

Lead member: Cllr Marsie Skeete, Cabinet Member for Women and Equalities.

Contact officer: Evereth Wills, Equality and Community Cohesion Officer

Recommendations:

- A. Notes the timeline for refreshing the strategy
 - B. Contributes to developing the equality objectives and actions
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Council's Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21 expired in March 2021. The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years to demonstrate how it will meet the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 1.2. This report recommends an approach to developing a new Equality Strategy for the Council and suggests possible issues to focus on as a priority. It is proposed to rename the new strategy, calling it an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. This aligns with the Administration's current priorities and will incorporate actions that contribute positively to community cohesion in the borough.
- 1.3. The report also recommends adopting an Equality Charter that will be developed alongside the strategy, but will be a standalone document.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. The refreshed strategy needs to meet legislative requirements to publish equality objectives every four years.

Approach

- 2.4. The refreshed strategy will outline 5-10 objectives. Each objective has equalities outcomes that are linked to service plans. This approach enables equalities outcomes to be aligned with departmental service plans and is the approach taken for the current strategy that has worked well.
- 2.5. It is proposed that the strategy be informed by:

1. Evidence of existing inequalities in the borough and opportunities to continue to narrow the gap in outcomes for disadvantaged.
 2. The findings from the Your Merton engagement that will provide analysis of residents' experience of life in Merton, their experience of the pandemic and their aspirations for the future.
 3. Learning from the Covid-19 pandemic that has highlighted issues such as:
 - a. Health inequalities
 - b. Digital exclusion
 - c. Food poverty
 4. Findings from the research commissioned by the Health and Wellbeing Board looking at the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on protected groups, in particular ethnicity, age and disability.
 5. Issues raised through the Black Lives Matter protests
 6. Implementing the Local Outbreak Management Plan
 7. The learning and recommendations of the Workforce Race Equality Standards pilot
 8. The work of the Transforming How We Work With Communities project to increase community resilience and delay / prevent demand for acute services.
- 2.6 It is proposed to change the scope of the Equality Strategy slightly with a focus on equalities, diversity and inclusion which is in keeping with the priorities of the administration. This removes the focus on community cohesion but equality, diversity and inclusion are key drivers for a cohesive community. Equality, diversity and inclusion are terms that are clearly understood and align with our own in-house approach.
- 2.7 Alongside the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy we propose to develop an Equality Charter that sets out and communicates in a clear and straight forward way the principles that underpin our approach and the key objectives.
- 2.8 The strategy will be monitored by the Corporate Equality Steering Group, Corporate Management Team, Departmental Management Teams, an annual update to the JCC and to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.
- 2.9 The strategy will outline the Equality Analysis process to embed it into our decision- making and change management processes.

Next steps

- 2.10 DMTs will be approached with a view to identifying the high level priorities linked to service plans and the Recovery and Modernisation programme.

The outline of the refreshed strategy (appendix I) will form part of the discussion.

- 2.11 The Equality Charter will be developed alongside the strategy. Appendix II outlines a draft Equality Charter.
- 2.12 The JCC is asked to comment on the approach to developing the strategy and contribute to developing its objectives.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to prepare and publish equality objectives and subsequently at least four-yearly. Not having an Equality Strategy would put the Council at risk of legal challenge and potentially damage the Council's reputation.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Consultation will include internal and external stakeholders. DMTs will be approached to suggest objectives linked to departmental and service plans. Consultation will also be undertaken with the Senior Leadership Team, the Race Equality Network, Trade Unions, the JCC and Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. Appendix III outlines the time table for the refreshed strategy.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The strategy will be delivered within existing resources.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. 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, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.2. In developing the Equality Strategy and objectives consideration will need to be given to the PSED in respect of each of the protected characteristics. Delivery of the commitments in the Equality Strategy action plan and the publication of an Equality Strategy setting out our equality objectives will

contribute to fulfilling the Council's legal obligations relating to equalities legislation.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

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

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. 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.

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

Appendix I - Outline of the refreshed strategy

Appendix II - Draft Equality Charter

Appendix III - Timeline for producing the refreshed strategy

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. Equality Strategy 2017-21

- 12.2. [HTTPS://WWW2.MERTON.GOV.UK/COUNCIL/PLANSANDPOLICIES/EQUALITY-STRATEGY.HTM](https://www2.merton.gov.uk/council/plansandpolicies/equality-strategy.htm)

Appendix I

Outline for the Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy

1. Introduction
2. Merton the place
 - Demographics
 - Local issues
 - Your Merton data analysis
3. About the council
Our Commitment - Equality Charter
4. Objectives and priorities
 - Health Inequality – Local Outbreak Management Plan, BAME Voice and Mencap reports
 - Workforce Race Equality Standards
 - Black Lives Matter
 - Your Merton
 - Education inequality
 - Recruiting staff to be representative of the population
 - Include the Housing strategy
 - Transforming How We Work Together With Communities
5. Equality Analysis
6. How will performance be measured?
 - Corporate Equality Steering Group
 - Departmental Equality Steering Groups
 - Reports to Departmental Management Teams
 - Reports to Corporate Management Team
 - Annual update to Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities

- Annual update Overview and Scrutiny Commission

7. Implementation Plan

Appendix II

Draft Equality Charter

We are committed to making a real difference by:

- Making Merton a welcoming borough where everyone feels they belong
- Inspiring trust and confidence in all the borough has to offer
- Recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity
- Listening to and understanding the diverse needs of all people
- Building good relations and understanding between people
- Creating a fairer borough through promoting inclusion, participation and equal access
- Challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimisation
- Eliminating barriers, encouraging a growth mind-set, raising aspirations and creating opportunities for growth beyond limit.

As an organisation we will:

- Actively promote equality
- Work with partners and the community to make our information, services and products more accessible and inclusive
- Put equal opportunity at the heart of our recruitment, employee development and service delivery
- Continually review the diversity of our workforce and ensure it's representative of our local community across all levels
- Address all allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation
- Promote good relations between people from different backgrounds
- Share good equality practice with our partners
- Measure and share our progress and success.

Appendix III

Timeline for producing Revised Equality Diversity and inclusion Strategy 1 June 2021 – 31 March 2022

Action/Task	Lead Officer	By When
1. Review the approach to the new strategy	Evereth Willis/Departmental Representatives	7 June 2021
2. Take a report to CMT	Evereth Willis	June/July 2021
3. Departments to provide key equality priorities and themes.	Departmental Representatives	July to October 2021
4. Attend DMTs	Evereth Willis	September 2021
5. Attend SLTs	Evereth Willis	October 2021
6. Outline document to be presented at CESG meeting.	Evereth Willis	October 2021
7. First draft of the strategy to be written	Evereth Willis	31 October 2021
8. Consultation draft to CMT	Evereth Willis	November 2021
9. Consultation draft to go to Overview and Scrutiny Commission	Chris Lee/Evereth Willis	November 2021
10. Draft document out for public consultation	Evereth Willis	November 2021 - 31 January 2022
11. Draft strategy to go to LSG	Evereth Willis	January 2022
12. Final draft document to CMT	Evereth Willis	February 2022
13. Final draft document to Cabinet as a key decision	John Dimmer/ Evereth Willis	20 March 2022
14. Document to be presented to Council for adoption	John Dimmer/ Evereth Willis	April 2022
15. Launch and publicity for new objectives	Evereth Willis /Communications	April/May 2022
16. Launch of the Equality Charter	Evereth Willis /Communications	April/May 2022

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