

This Report will be made public on 14 March 2023



Report Number **C/22/103**

To: Cabinet
Date: 22 March 2023
Status: Non-Key Decision
Director: Amandeep Khroud – Assistant Director:
Governance and Law
Cabinet Member: Councillor Jennifer Hollingsbee – Deputy Leader &
Cabinet Member for Communities

SUBJECT: EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

SUMMARY: The Equality Act 2010 places a statutory duty on the council to prepare and publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report is therefore presented for consideration and approval prior to publication.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

The council needs to ensure that it meets the statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The report demonstrates the council's commitment to positively contributing to the advancement of equality and good relations, summarises the activities undertaken in 2021-22 to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, and highlights the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services, and increase customer satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report C/22/103.
2. To consider and approve the draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report outlined in Appendix 1.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 created a Public Sector Equality Duty. In essence, this duty requires public authorities to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be taken into account when making decisions and reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services. While compliance is a legal obligation, the duty should be viewed as beneficial for organisations; the aims of better informed public sector decision-making and policy development should lead to services that effectively and appropriately meet diverse user needs and to increased customer satisfaction.
- 1.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty is made up of a general equality duty, which is the overarching requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty, and 'specific duties', which are designed to ensure public authorities meet the general equality duty.
- 1.3 The general equality duty came into force in April 2011 and states that in the exercise of their functions a public authority must have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Having due regard for fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The Act states that compliance with the equality duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

- 1.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act, which are:
 - Age
 - Disability
 - Gender Reassignment
 - Pregnancy and Maternity

- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership¹.

2. THE ANNUAL EQUALITY & DIVERSITY REPORT

- 2.1 The 'specific duties' outline a statutory requirement for public authorities to publish information annually to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty (outlined in paragraph 1.3).
- 2.2 The current publication is over 12 months old so an updated version is now required. This report has been presented much later than anticipated during the year due to a time lag in the publication of some data sets used for the report from external sources that reflect the 2021/22 year, notably the 2021 Census results that have been incorporated into this edition report where available.
- 2.3 This annual report has therefore been updated in order to demonstrate the council's compliance with the general Public Sector Equality Duty and commitment to its principles. The report:
- Provides a range of demographic and socio-economic information. This can be used to understand more about the needs of our local communities and those that may be affected by council services, policies and practices and in order to inform decision-making and policy development.
 - Demonstrates how the council has engaged with the community, taken actions to enable better understanding of different customer needs and ways to support them, and considered potential equality and diversity implications prior to making decisions.
 - Outlines the activities the council has undertaken over the past year to promote equality, diversity and inclusion amongst its workforce, Members and within the community, and the positive measures that have been taken to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction.
- 2.4 The 'specific duties' also outline the requirement for the council to prepare and publish equality objectives that it thinks it should achieve in order to meet the general equality duty every four years. These equality objectives are outlined in the council's current Equality and Diversity Policy (2021-25) and reproduced in section 6 of the Equality & Diversity Annual Report (Appendix 1).

¹ Only the first aim of the general equality duty applies to this characteristic, meaning that public authorities need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status in the workplace. The other aims (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.

- 2.5 Once considered and approved by Cabinet, the Equality and Diversity Annual Report will be published on the Equality and Diversity page of the council's website.

3. IMPACT ON CORPORATE STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 A number of actions have taken place in 2021-22 in support of the delivery of the Corporate Plan and these are highlighted in the annual report (Appendix 1). The council has a number of strategies, policies and strategic projects in place to meet the current and anticipated needs of a diverse district and will continue to use this type of information to inform service design, policy development and future decision-making.

- 3.2 The report highlights activities that have taken place in 2021-22 to support different customer needs, to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and the positive measures that have taken place to remove barriers, improve access to services and increase customer satisfaction. Areas of note include:

- The successful retention of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation and being awarded with two additional compliance plusses following assessment in September 2021. One of the additional compliance plusses was awarded in particular for: Increasing use of real time analytics to fully understand the needs and expectations of customers.
- Following the reintroduction of Housing Landlord Service back into the council in October 2020, work has been undertaken during the year to embed and develop the service including:
 - The development and launch of the new Strategic Tenants Advisory Panel – a group of council tenants from a wide variety of backgrounds, including people with disabilities and from different ethnic backgrounds, who work with senior officers at a strategic level to scrutinise performance and to hold the landlord to account.
 - A new Tenant Engagement Strategy has been developed and the associated Action Plan to ensure tenant engagement work develops and increases.
 - Spending over £500,000 on aids and adaptations to help council tenants with disabilities to live safely and comfortably in their homes.
- Following the creation of a dedicated Welfare Team within the council in 2019 to support customers and signpost them appropriately, the team have administered a number of different Government funding streams to maximize and target support to the most vulnerable qualifying residents during the year. Funding streams have enabled payments to be made from the: NHS Test and Trace (self-isolation), Household Support, Discretionary Housing and Council tax financial support funds.
- The rebuilding of the My Account service to be “mobile first” in order to reflect customers’ needs. Improvements were also made to the customer journey in the year that included improved functionality for reporting missed bins and the continued development of online forms to allow

customers to access more council services online at the touch of a button.

- The Council achieving a Gold Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme during the year and is now recognised with the highest award for its role in employing and supporting persons who serve and protect our country.
- Supporting communities to re-engage back into society and seek ongoing help as a result of the pandemic through the allocation of Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) towards community projects including: Age UK Hythe & Lyminge Winter Grants scheme, Citizens Advice Bureau's COVID Recovery Support and The Rainbow Centre's Healthy Food Support programme.
- We have continued to support charities, voluntary and community groups through awarding 190 Ward Grants, provided over £50,000 of funding for community projects through our Local Children's Partnership Group, and awarded Grant Agreements to organisations that support vulnerable residents and health and wellbeing across the district, including Folkestone Sports Centre Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The Folkestone Community Works Programme has continued to address issues faced by the most vulnerable in the district by funding projects that are working to improve access to services and opportunities for businesses and residents within the Central and East Folkestone wards. During the year, council-funded projects have provided professional support for residents who decided their route to economic independence was through self-employment, or had a need to supplement their income by creating a 'tabletop' business by using a skill or hobby to generate additional income.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
Failure to fulfil statutory obligations imposed by Public Sector Equality Duty	High	Low	Preparation and publication of Equality & Diversity Annual Report

5. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

5.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

Legal implications and the council's statutory obligations are set out in the body of the report.

5.2 Finance Officer's Comments (LW)

There are no direct financial implications associated with the report

5.3 Human Resources (RB)

There are no direct Human Resource implications emanating from this report.

5.4 **Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)**

The report provides information that may support informed decision making, outlines the council's achievements in advancing equality in 2021-22, and fulfils the council's statutory obligations.

5.5 **Communications (KA)**

Many of the very positive aspects of the Equality and Diversity report have already been communicated externally. There is, however, a refreshed positive impact to be gained by listing all the elements together whilst communicating the report's publication.

5.6 **Climate Change (AT)**

No direct impacts arising from the publication of this report (Appendix 1), as the report is a factual update on activity over the last monitoring year (2021/22). However, several of the projects detailed in the report have the potential to impact positively on climate change considerations, such as bringing long-term empty homes back into use, which will reduce the use of resources in construction, and funding for the community hubs and Citizens Advice Bureau, which has the potential to alleviate fuel poverty.

6. **CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2021-22