

This Report will be made public on 12 March 2024



Report Number **C/23/95**

To: Cabinet
Date: 20 March 2024
Status: Non-Key Decision
Director: Amandeep Khroud – Assistant Director:
Governance and Law
Cabinet Member: Councillor Mike Blakemore – Cabinet Member for
Community and Collaboration

SUBJECT: EQUALITY & DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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 2022-23 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/23/95.
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 2022-23 year.
- 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 2022-23 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 2022-23 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 reapplication of the Customer Service Excellence accreditation in September 2022. The accreditation is a government standard developed to offer a practical tool for driving customer-focused change within organisations. The independent assessor continues to be very impressed with our commitment to deliver excellent customer service and awarded us 16 'compliance plus' scores as part of his assessment. This is the highest number of compliance pluses awarded to us in one go.
- The Housing Service has gone from strength to strength and continues to work towards our vision of: ***An excellent, digitally enabled service that is easy to deal with and where tenants (customers) are at the heart of everything we do.*** Key areas of work included:
 - A re-launch and strengthening of the Independent Living Forum, where tenant representatives of the sheltered (elderly) housing service meet to discuss issues relevant to them.
 - Spending over £477,000 on aids and adaptations to help council tenants with disabilities to live safely and comfortably in their homes.
 - The launch of Housing Online, a tenant access sign up portal allowing tenants to carry out a number of functions themselves, such as reporting a repair or making online payments to their account, viewing and downloading rent statements and updating their contact details. Almost 20% of our tenants have so far signed up to Housing Online.
 - Delivering a total of 103 new affordable homes with partners for rent and shared ownership continuing to boost the supply of much needed homes in the district.
 - 308 hospital admissions prevented or hospital discharges accelerated as a result of Private Sector Housing Team and partner intervention.
 - Bringing 50 long term empty homes within the district back into use.
 - Improved 437 private sector homes for local people as a result of enforcement action and the provision of the Disabled Facilities Grant, Winter Warmth and Home Safe loans.
- The council hosted an annual 'Meet the Funders' event on 22nd September 2022. The event attracted over 80 attendees who had the opportunity to hear from funders including the National Lottery Community Fund, Kent

Community Foundation, Crowd Fund Kent and Roger De Haan Charitable Trust. Attendees were able to book 15-minute face to face meetings with funders to discuss their project funding needs.

- The district hosted the eighth annual Kent & Medway Civilian Military Armed Forces Covenant Conference in June 2022. The event was attended by more than 150 people, including serving and former personnel from all the services, public sector and other organisations, including service charities. The theme of the day, organised by the Kent & Medway Civilian Partnership Board, was promoting a greater understanding and awareness of the needs of the armed forces community. Service children, housing, homelessness, employment and service charities were all discussed. There was also an update on the new Armed Forces Act and what it means in practice.
- The council continued to support the District Food Network (DFN). The Network is chaired by an independent member of the community working with the Rainbow centre. The group meets once every two months and has supported delivery of the Community Fridge, the Hythe Pantry and other food-related projects, including supporting the delivery of UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) work. In February 2023, the council supported the Food For Thought workshop at Three Hills which brought together organisations to network and to discuss food poverty reduction initiatives including plans for the mobile foodbank to agree locations etc.
- A total of 168 Ward Grants, totaling over £89,000, have benefitted local charities and community groups, further enhancing the council's involvement with local communities, and assisted with the delivery of efficient and effective projects and services to ward areas.
- Renewal of Annual Grant funding for the following local community organisations including The Sports Trust, Folkestone Sport Centre Trust, Active Sport Kent, Folkestone Quarterhouse, Academy FM and Citizens Advice Bureau.
- The council successfully bid for funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The welfare team administer the element of this funding that focusses on interventions to reduce the cost of living, including through measures to improve energy efficiency, and combat fuel poverty and climate change. Elements of this scheme have been developed following smaller projects and demand through previous rounds of Household Support Fund such as the bed project, boiler support and provision of white goods. These areas have also been identified when liaising with residents and partner agencies, demonstrating that the scheme is being delivered in response to resident need. Since launch of the scheme in February 2023 to end of March 2023 a total of 200 households were provided support totalling £44,563.
- Continued Support of the Crowdfund Kent Scheme launched by Kent County Council to contribute match funding to local projects that participate via the Spacehive Crowdfunding platform. Some of the funded projects the council contributed to in 2022/23 include:
 - Touchbase Community Garden, providing improvements to an outdoor space for people with disabilities and neuro-diverse conditions, including creating a sensory garden, to improve wellbeing.
 - Folkestone Sea Sauna, which aims to promote exercise in the district by making sea swimming more accessible and affordable.

- Tables for Sellindge Sports and Social Club, allowing the club to restart events and activities paused during the pandemic, particularly focusing on encouraging vulnerable people to participate in activities and reduce loneliness.
- The Folkestone and Hythe Community Safety Partnership has continued to progress key activity including the administration of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) funding to deliver projects to vulnerable and diverse communities across the district during the year. These included:
 - Ask Angela Safe Spaces – This involved working with Bouverie Place to Develop a safe place for members of the public. This started from a conversation with Bouverie Place to provide safeguarding awareness and support due to it being a risk location for suicides. Local shops have joined the scheme and we have created a safe space for people to access for any reason they may need.
 - Year 9 Safety Conference held at the Leas Cliff Hall in Folkestone. The engaged with over 900 young people, providing awareness and support from PREVENT, Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), Kent Police and Domestic Abuse awareness,

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 (LK)

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 2022-23, and fulfils the council's statutory obligations.

5.5 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 (2022/23). 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:

Gavin Edwards

Senior Performance Officer

Tel: 01303 85 3436

Email: gavin.edwards@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2022-23