

From: Roger Gough, Leader of the Council
David Cockburn, Corporate Director of Strategic and Corporate Services

To: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 19 January 2022

Subject: Annual Equality and Diversity Report 2020-21

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Corporate Management Team

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Summary:

This report sets out progress against Kent County Council's Equality and Human Rights Policy and Objectives, which is a statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010.

Recommendation:

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to approve the Annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2020-21, attached as Appendix A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 149 of the Equality act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which came into force in April 2011. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the following:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act;
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
 - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, sex and sexual orientation);
 - d. Publish an Annual Equality and Diversity Report by 31 January the following year.
- 1.2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Local Authorities were not required to publish a report for the year covering 2019-20. However, this reprieve was lifted in 2021, with an expectation that a report for 2020-21 would be published in accordance with the PSED requirements. The report appended to this paper discharges the council's statutory duty to produce and publish an annual Equality and Diversity Report.

2. Annual Review

- 2.1 Due to the circumstances of the past 21 months of Kent County Council (KCC) operating under challenging conditions while it responds to and puts in place recovery from the pandemic, the report has been compiled differently to previous years. The directorates have not been required to produce their own reports for their respective cabinet committees; instead information has been sought directly from KCC's services via the Corporate Equality Group's directorate representatives to inform the 2020-21 annual report.
- 2.2 The annual report draws together the directorates' activity that contributed towards KCC's equality objectives during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. These 2016-2020 objectives were extended into 2021 due to the pandemic. As with previous years, the report aligns the objectives to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's six 'domains' that are important to people's quality of life:
- Work
 - Education
 - Living Standards
 - Health
 - Justice & Personal Security
 - Participation
- 2.3 The review of KCC's activity in upholding the PSED and progress towards our equality objectives shows that despite 2020-21 being an extremely challenging and unprecedented year, services were committed to placing equalities centrally to their planning and delivery. For many services, responding to and planning recovery for COVID-19 replaced their 'business as usual'; however, they ensured that their measures and initiatives either took into account or specifically supported those with protected characteristics. This applied not just to outward facing services, but also to those supporting our own staff.
- 2.4 Digital access to services and activities played a large role in this, for example, Adult Social Care & Health's (ASCH) Kara video phones were rolled out to vulnerable residents such as older people and those with disabilities to enable them to access social care and family members during lockdown and shielding. Virtual Day Centres were created to provide activities to recipients via Skype and social media, with activity packs delivered to those unable to access digital services. The digital loan scheme also helped service users without access to the internet, with Libraries. Registration & Archives (LRA) loaning their tablets to contribute to the ASCH scheme.
- 2.5 For those services unable to be run during lockdown, services adapted, often with a focus on mental health and wellbeing: LRA created a befriending service for its older and vulnerable customers who would normally access the Home Library Service, and for Children's services, the 'Toy Scheme' was created to provide toys and equipment for disabled children and young people to ease the pressure caused by the suspension of in-person support services during lockdown. Public Health commissioners supported the redeploying of staff from services unable to continue, such as Stop Smoking services, to provide wellbeing calls for vulnerable clients accessing Drug and Alcohol

services. And a support service was created for young people experiencing complex grief through bereavement.

- 2.6 Activities during 2020-21, including those non-Covid related, demonstrated a focus on equality and diversity data to deliver services. Economic Development's teams are increasingly using data about the protected characteristics of clients and businesses to focus and improve access to and marketing of their business loan schemes and business support services to underrepresented groups, such as female-led businesses or businesses led by people who are from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds. Adult Social Care is using data to gain better understanding of protected characteristics within communities to improve services, and the Live Well Kent and Medway service for community health and wellbeing uses its knowledge of local communities' demography to tailor its services; for example, offering culturally sensitive listening and information services and staff with Asian languages in communities with high proportions of people from BME backgrounds.
- 2.7 A key part of demonstrating how KCC is upholding its PSED duties is evidencing its consideration of equalities through Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs). Analysis of committee papers during 2020-21 showed that an impressive 94.5% of papers mentioned equalities, a significant increase on previous years, while 56% had an EqIA attached and 14% had a link to an EqIA included. These figures are also an improvement on previous years, but a smaller one – there is still work to do to ensure all such reports, particularly those for Key Decisions include evidence that equalities issues have been considered.

3. Looking Ahead

- 3.1 The new EqIA App was developed during 2020 and launched earlier this year. Designed to streamline the process of completing an EqIA and securing its sign-off, this should help improve the completion of EqIAs. Feedback will be sought from staff who have used the App to help evolve the process where needed to continue supporting KCC's approach to fulfilling its PSED duties. Underpinning the App is its dashboard, which should provide improved analysis and become integral to maintaining oversight of the Council's EqIAs. Work will take place in the New Year to introduce the dashboard to the Corporate Management Team and KCC's Corporate Equality Group so that it can be used to identify trends and areas for focus.
- 3.2 2022 will also see the development of a new set of KCC equality objectives to replace the current ones which were extended due to the Pandemic. The plan is to refresh the equality objectives in conjunction with the development of KCC's new Strategic Statement, which will be developed, consulted on and published in 2022. It is our intention to embed the equality objectives within KCC's new Strategic Statement so as to integrate them within the council's strategic priorities, rather than being seen as separate to them.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010), the Council is required to publish an Annual Equality and Diversity Report by 31 January the following year.

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1 As the Annual Equality and Diversity Report relates to performance monitoring on the previous year's work there is no requirement to undertake an EqIA. However, it is anticipated that learning from the report will have a positive impact for all protected groups under the Equality Act 2010.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Annual Report for 2020-21 highlights that KCC's services worked hard to ensure that equality and diversity considerations remained central to service planning and delivery, in spite of and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report shows that services have prioritised supporting residents and service users through the pandemic, taking particular care to ensure that adapted services and new initiatives catered to include those with protected characteristics or ensure they were not excluded. The particular focus on both physical and digital accessibility is of particular note, as is the underpinning theme of supporting residents' and service users' mental health and wellbeing during such a challenging period. As services adapt to new approaches to 'business as usual' through the ongoing pandemic, the momentum needs to remain so that KCC's services remain inclusive and accessible. KCC's new approach to the EqIA process and its monitoring will help focus the organisation on areas for improvement.

8. Recommendation(s):

- 8.1 **Cabinet Committee** - The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse the Annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2020-21, attached as Appendix A.

9. Contact details

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