

Forward Plan reference number: FP/370/04/22

Report title: Approval of Equality Objectives 2022-25 and Equality Policy Statement	
Report to: Cabinet	
Report author: Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance	
Date: 24 May 2022	For: Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 Tackling Inequalities is one of the central pillars of Everyone's Essex that runs throughout our 20 commitments, our focus on levelling up, and our principles around how we will achieve whole population outcomes and deliver excellent services in order to improve the life chances for Essex residents.
- 1.2 Our equality objectives underpin the delivery of Everyone's Essex by setting out clear areas of focus and specific actions for how we will work with our communities and partners to address inequalities in our communities and level up life chances for residents. Our equality objectives also set clear actions for Essex County Council as a major employer and system leader.
- 1.3 Each equality objective is set out with accompanying supporting activity to aid delivery, some of which have been drawn directly from the commitments already identified within Everyone's Essex. The delivery of these activities will be tracked and monitored with performance metrics that will be developed against key deliverables and published at regular intervals.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree the draft Equality Objectives as at appendix 1.
- 2.2 Agree the Equality Policy Statement as at appendix 3.

3 Background and Proposal

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to demonstrate that they are advancing equality under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Under the legislation Councils are required to produce at least one Equality Objective every four years to demonstrate how they will eliminate discrimination and advance equality.

- 3.2 In addition to the requirements outlined by legislation when setting equality objectives, they should also be closely tied to the strategic priorities of the Council. Objectives should also be based on robust data and evidence of need.
- 3.3 The Council has to publish one or more objectives it thinks it should achieve to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.4 The purpose of setting equality objectives is to help public authorities to better perform the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty, focusing on the outcomes to be achieved. Equality objectives help focus attention on the priority equality issues within an organisation in order to deliver improvements in policy making, service delivery and employment.
- 3.5 ECC's last set of equality objectives helped the organisation to achieve a number of outcomes. Examples of these can be found in the Organisation Plan [Plans and strategies: Organisation plan: 2021 to 2022 - Essex County Council](#). Page 40-42.
- 3.6 We are proposing two equality objectives for the 2022-2025 period - tying into the lifespan of Everyone's Essex. These are outlined in Appendix 1. The first of these objectives is aimed at focusing our work to tackle inequalities within communities whilst the second is focused on the corporate equality health of the organisation. Under each of these objectives are a number of specific sub-objectives that outline how we will achieve our main objectives.
- 3.7 With respect to the externally focussed objectives, a public consultation took place between 14 February and 20 March 2022 asking for views on the community-focused equality objectives and related activity. This was supported by information providing context and background as to why these issues are important to the Council. The consultation was hosted online and shared with partner organisations through networks such as Essex Partners, Essex Faith Covenant Steering Group, Essex Equality Network and the Hate Crime Strategic Partnership. A press release was published, details were posted across ECC social media platforms and an article appeared in Your Essex magazine. A word version of the consultation is included within the background papers.
- 3.8 In total 36 responses were received. Of these, 31 were replying as individuals and 5 on behalf of organisations. Details of the responses to the consultation are set out in appendix 2. A word version of the consultation questions and supporting information is provided in the background papers to this report.
- 3.9 Of the responses received, most were supportive of our approach and there were no specific comments disagreeing with the objectives or suggesting alternatives. There was broad support for each sub-objective with no suggested changes to the focus of each one. The substantive issues raised included identifying priority

cohorts (which are included in the strategies or plans aligned to each of the sub-objectives), on individual experiences and on areas not related to protected characteristics (e.g. poverty). Therefore, no amendments to the objectives or sub-objectives are considered necessary.

- 3.10 With respect to the internally focussed objective and sub-objectives, these have been discussed by senior leaders and have been formulated following a number of engagement events with employee networks etc
- 3.11 The draft **Essex County Council Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy Statement** is at appendix 3. The policy needs to be revised on a regular basis, and this revision reflects the commitment to advancing equality that is central to Everyone's Essex. The policy itself recognises the importance of tackling discrimination and advancing equality between different groups in the community, whilst also addressing the diverse needs of individuals. It also covers the council's own employment policies and practices, the provision of services and public functions, and our system leadership role in tackling deprivation and inequality.

4 Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision:
- Enjoy life into old age
 - Provide an equal foundation for every child
 - Strengthen communities through participation
 - Connect us to each other and the world
 - Share prosperity with everyone
- 4.2 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':
- A strong, inclusive and sustainable economy
 - A high quality environment
 - Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
 - A good place for children and families to grow
- 4.3. This report also links to the 'Everyone's Essex' principle of "Service Excellence", in particular:
- Addressing the causes that drive demand
 - Collaborating with partners
 - Empowering communities

5 Options

Option 1 (preferred)

- 5.1 The proposed Equality Objectives 2022-2025 be approved and be published on the Council website and a monitoring framework be established to report on

progress against the identified activity. This will ensure that the Council remains compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Option 2

- 5.2 To amend the draft Equality Objectives 2022-25 and related activity. Any delay would mean that the council would be without any agreed equality objectives. Another round of consultation may also be required.

6 Issues for consideration

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

6.2 Legal implications

- 6.2.1 The general public sector equality duty is set out in section 7 of the report.

- 6.2.2 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 the Council must prepare and publish at least one equality objective once every four years. These must be **SPECIFIC and MEASURABLE**. It is therefore crucial that the sub-objectives form part of the objectives as they meet this criterion.

7 Equality and Diversity Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (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 including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 7.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic. The Council has extensive data and research on equalities issues and outcomes in Essex. Data on inequalities was part of the overall data analysis that has underpinned the development of our new equality objectives and is reflected in particular in framing areas of focus that sit underneath the community focused objective. The Equality Policy Statement will ensure that a clear organisational commitment to equality and inclusion is provided.

8 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft equality objectives 2022-25

Appendix 2 – Consultation responses

Appendix 3 - Draft Essex County Council Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy Statement

Appendix 4 - Equality Impact Assessment

9. List of Background papers

Word version of full consultation document