

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
AND SCRUTINY SUB-
COMMITTEES**

Date of Meeting:	6 November 2013
Subject:	Corporate Equalities Objectives – Annual Progress Report
Responsible Officer:	Alex Dewsnap Divisional Director Strategic Commissioning
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	All
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Annual Equalities Progress Report

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report provides an update on our progress against the Council's Equality Objectives which were adopted by Cabinet in April 2012. It also updates the committee on our progress against the Excellent Level of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

Recommendations:

Performance and Finance committee are asked to:

- Note the progress made against our Corporate Equality Objectives and the

Excellent Level of the EFLG;

- Note the revised performance measures to support the Equality Objectives for 2013/14
- Agree to receive annual reports on our progress against the Corporate Equality Objectives in order to quality assure and provide challenge to further improve our performance in mainstreaming equalities across the organisation.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

1. Harrow is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse boroughs in London with people of many different backgrounds and life experiences living side by side. It is the richness of this diversity, and the positive impact that it has on the borough and the community, that helps make Harrow such a great place to live, work and visit. The borough's diversity is something to value and encourage and this report highlights the Council's commitment to maintaining and building on our strengths by ensuring equality and diversity is integral to everything we do.
2. Harrow's diverse population generates a range of needs and expectations all of which the Council has to understand in order to provide appropriate services. As resources become scarcer, it is even more important to understand the community, their needs and aspirations and to be able to provide the right services at the right time.

Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty

3. The Equality Act contains a range of rights, powers and obligations to help the drive towards equality. The Act aims to strengthen and simplify the equality law that was already in place, such as the Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act.
4. Section 149 of the Act introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need 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; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
5. The new PSED replaces the previous three Public Sector Equality Duties – for race, disability and gender - and now covers Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) Religion or Belief (includes lack of belief), Sex and Sexual Orientation.
6. It also applies to Marriage and Civil Partnership but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.
7. The PSED is supported by specific duties which are intended to help public authorities to meet its requirements. Public authorities covered by the specific duties are required to:
 - Publish by the 31st January each year information to demonstrate their compliance with the general equality duty; and

- Prepare and publish by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter one or more equality objectives.

Collate and Publish Equalities Information

8. In order to meet the first requirement of the PSED, a number of local authorities have published spreadsheets containing equalities data about their service users and workforce, whilst others have agreed to continue to publish their annual equality in employment report relating to their workforce and Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) as required by the previous duties.

9. Although this approach meets the requirements, the Council decided to publish its equalities data in a more constructive way.

10. In order to ensure that the data published is easy to understand and to ensure transparency with regard to progress in addressing inequality and delivering services reflective of the needs of our community, the Council prepared and published equalities information/data in the form of a narrative document 'Our Harrow, Our Story'.

10. This is a narrative of the services and projects delivered by the Council which not only support the Corporate Priorities but address inequality, advances equality of opportunity and fosters good relations. The document includes real life case studies of service users and is supported by a set of Appendices which hold the data.

11. In 2012 the Equality and Human Rights Commission undertook a review of how public services generally complied with the requirement to publish data and singled out Harrow Council as the best practice exemplar for the transparency and ease of access to the data that we provided. This year's compilation is available together with the data it supports at http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/863/public_sector_equality_duty

Developing and Publishing Equality Objectives

12. In order to meet the second requirement of the PSED, 'Equality Objectives' were developed based on the research and consultation undertaken and the equalities information/data published.

13. The draft Equality Objectives were the subject of public consultation including an online questionnaire for staff and elected members and a separate questionnaire for members of the public, service users, voluntary and community groups, partners and stakeholders and the questionnaire was also sent out to the Residents Panel. As part of the consultation workshops for staff and voluntary and community groups, partners and stakeholders also took place. A cross party briefing was also held for elected members. The consultation produced support for the proposed Objectives which were adopted by Cabinet in April 2012.

14. The objectives support the Corporate Plan and progress towards them is measured by a number of indicators identified by Directorates through their Service Planning process.

Measuring our Performance against the Corporate Equality Objectives

15. In line with the existing performance process, directorates produce quarterly progress reports against their directorate scorecards for the Improvement Boards. These form the basis of annual progress reports. This will not only mainstream equalities within existing processes and service plans but also adhere to the COUNT (collate once use numerous times) principle.

Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

16. The EFLG superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and is a performance and improvement framework to enable local authorities to embed and mainstream equalities across the organisation. The EFLG has three (developing, achieving and excellent) levels and it builds on and develops the work councils have done on the old ESLG. The Council made a commitment of working towards and achieving the 'Excellent' level of the new Framework.

17. There has since been a review of the EFLG, which was published in March 2012 and which has changed the framework substantially from the first edition. As a result of this review, there has been a pan-London round up of which Councils are seeking accreditation. Although a number of authorities have adopted the Framework to embed good practice, mainstream equalities and maintain the high visibility of equalities within their communities, only a couple of authorities have sought accreditation.

18. Accreditation, while potentially recognising achievement against a fixed set of outcomes, only provides a snapshot of performance. It also costs in excess of £10,000 in fees and a significant amount in staff time gathering and collating information and evidence. An alternative approach and one favoured by a majority of London Boroughs is to adopt the Framework as a tool to measure on a continuous basis improvements and progress. This approach maintains momentum in mainstreaming equalities policy and practice without the risk of focussing attention on an assessment to the detriment of sustained progress.

19. In December 2012, the Council decided no longer to seek to obtain 'accreditation' against the Excellent level of the Framework. The Council's adoption of stretching Equality Objectives, the transparency with which data has been and will continue to be published and work to bring equalities performance within the remit of Improvement Boards all demonstrates a commitment to the wider equalities agenda which would not be diminished by opting for an internal and ongoing challenge rather than a snapshot assessment. It was also agreed that the Performance and Finance Sub-Committee would be the vehicle for overseeing our progress.

Our Progress and Way Forward

20. The attached report (Appendix 1) highlights the progress made in the last year (2012/13) against our Equality Objectives as well as the 'Excellent' level of the EFLG.

21. The report also recommends a number of actions which can be taken forward to continue our progress towards the 'Excellent' level of the Framework.

Financial Implications

5. All costs are contained within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

6. Included in the body of the report

Environmental Impact

7. There are no direct environmental impacts of this decision.

Risk Management Implications

8. There are no direct risk management implications of this decision.

Equalities implications

9. The 'Equality Objectives' will address inequality, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations and help the Council to comply with the statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty introduced by the Equality Act 2010.

Corporate Priorities

10. The 'Equality Objectives' support all the Council's Corporate Priorities.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Steve Tingle.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 21.10.13		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 24.10.13		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Mohammed Ilyas, Policy officer, Equality and Diversity Ext.2322

Background Papers:

'Our Harrow, Our Story'

http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/863/public_sector_equality_duty