

Appendix 2

Review of the Corporate Equality Objectives **28th November 2014**

Introduction:

In April 2012, Harrow Council published eight equality objectives as required by the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). They were developed based on extensive research, consultation and evidence. These objectives must be reviewed at least every four years. However, the Council has decided to review its objectives a year early in order to bring the review process into alignment with the election cycle and enable the Corporate Equality Objectives to be integrated with the Corporate Plan.

Given the importance of the Equalities agenda to the Administration, there was felt to be a logic in merging the Council's Equality Objectives with the Corporate Plan, to give greater status to the Equality Objectives and at the same time rationalise the Council's policy framework. This is in line with the process other authorities have also adopted.

To review the objectives an online questionnaire was developed and made available over a period of 3 weeks to key stakeholders, all staff and all Councillors to complete and feed in their views. The following activity was undertaken:

- Hard copies were sent to all Members in the Green bags and followed up with an email.
- Internal communications went out regularly in the Staff Updates, Grapevine and on the Hub. An article was also supposed to have gone in the October edition of Purple Pages, but it was never released.
- Hard copies were sent to the Depot for staff with no internet access
- Specific communications also went out to all members of CEG, the ETG chairs and the Making a Difference Staff Group asking them to encourage staff to respond.
- Specific communications also went out to key stakeholders representing the protected characteristics and was followed up with phone calls. The following groups were approached:
 - Age UK
 - Senior Residents Association
 - Youth Parliament
 - HAD
 - MIND
 - Mencap
 - Harrow United Deaf Club
 - West London LGBT group
 - Mumsnet
 - NCT
 - Harrow Equalities Centre
 - Inter-faith Forum
 - Women's Centre

This report sets out the results of the questionnaire and puts forward some suggested amendments for discussion.

Outcome:

There were 82 responses to the questionnaire. Whilst 68% believed the objectives did not need to be altered, we did receive some compelling arguments for why some of the objectives should be amended. The full summary of the responses is included in Appendix 1.

In suggesting amendments to the objectives we have also taken into account comments received around simplifying the objectives, not making them too wordy and ranking them in order of priority according to the survey responses. There was a mixed response as to whether the objectives should be more specific and identify the particular protected characteristics or groups in the borough that the objective should be targeting or whether the objectives should apply to striving towards equality for all.

During the exercise we also received a lot of other comments. We have captured these in appendix 2 and would appreciate your thoughts on how best we can take them forward.

The following revisions to the Corporate Equality Objectives are therefore suggested and we would welcome your thoughts and views.

1. Protect vulnerable people from the harmful impact of crime, anti-social behaviour and abuse

This was the top priority with 93% saying it was still relevant to either an extremely large or large extent. No-one believed it was no longer relevant.

Feedback pointed to evidence from the Time to Change campaign about mental health stigma and how this is a major cause of discrimination in the community.

Suggestion: Amend objective to cover stigma

2. Develop a workforce that feels valued, respected and is reflective of the diverse community we serve

This was the second highest ranked objective with 91% of respondents saying it was relevant to either an extremely large or large extent.

Most of the comments relate to how we do this which will need to be reflected in the organisation's response to the staff survey and fed into the MADG group.

Suggestion: No Change

3. Deliver services which are accessible and welcoming to all communities and are capable of responding to the different needs and aspirations our customers have.

This was ranked third with 88% saying it was relevant to either an extremely large or large extent.

Again there were comments on how we do this and a range of suggestions for savings and efficiencies. The main comment is around given the changing role of the Council, this objective should not just be about the services we directly provide, but also about those we commission or support the voluntary sector or community to do for themselves.

Suggestion: Amend objective to read: Ensure all services delivered by or on behalf of the Council are accessible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of all communities

4. Improve opportunities for vulnerable young people through our corporate parenting role and individual support

This was the fourth ranked objective with 83% saying it was relevant to either an extremely large or large extent.

There was some comment that this should be about improving opportunity for all young people.

Suggestion: No Change

5. Minimise the impact on health inequalities and deprivation in the borough through partnership working

This was the fifth ranked objective with 79% saying it was relevant to either an extremely large or large extent.

There were a lot of comments on how we do this and the action we should be taking which would need to feed into the JSNA and Public Health team. Particular evidence was provided that pointed to the inequalities experienced by Harrow refugee communities (Somali, Afghan, Tamil, Iranian, Iraqi) in accessing mental health and social care services. And that the number of black African mental health inpatients were double the local population.

Suggestion: Amend objective to read: Minimise health inequalities and deprivation in the borough.

6. Celebrate the diversity of Harrow so the borough is an increasingly cohesive place where people from all communities get on well together.

This was ranked sixth with 74% saying it was relevant to either an extremely larger or large extent.

Respondents felt there were more important priorities than celebrating diversity, particularly in times when resource is an issue.

Suggestion: Amend the objective to read: Encourage pride in the diversity of our borough

7. Minimise the impact of budget cuts on equality groups (protected characteristics)

This was ranked seventh with 59% saying it was relevant to either an extremely larger or large extent.

Given the incorporation of the equality objectives into the Corporate Plan and the corporate priority about making a difference to the vulnerable, there is an opportunity to reflect the administration's desire to minimise the impact of budget cuts on the most vulnerable/equality groups as one of the principles underpinning our priorities in the plan.

Suggestion: Cover as a principle underpinning our priorities in the Corporate Plan

8. Support local businesses and residents in times of economic hardship

This was the lowest ranked objective with 58% saying it was relevant to either an extremely larger or large extent.

Most of the comments were reflecting that there was a difference between supporting businesses and supporting residents and that the objective should be strengthened. Evidence was provided about the groups in Harrow that experience disadvantage in accessing employment opportunities (those with mental health issues, Somali and Afghan women.) The reference to times of economic hardship was felt to be dated particularly as the objectives are being set for the period 2015 - 2019. Given the administrations priorities around regeneration and supporting the vulnerable and their pledge to create an additional 500 apprenticeships and jobs for young people, consideration should be given to amending the objective to focus more on skills and employment opportunities.

Suggestion: Amend the objective to read - Improve the skills and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

Actions & Next Steps:

We are now engaging with CEG, MADG, CSB, Ops Board, scrutiny and the political groups during December and early January to seek their feedback and input on the suggested amendments.

The final agreed Corporate Equality Objectives will then be incorporated into the Corporate Plan which will go to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council in February for approval before being published. The objectives would then not need to be reviewed again until 2019.

The aim is for the monitoring of the Corporate Equality Objectives to be aligned with the process for monitoring delivery of the Corporate Plan. In that measures for each objective will be agreed with directorates and integrated into the Council's overall performance scorecard. This is then reviewed quarterly through Improvement Boards and performance is reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny through the Council's Quarterly Strategic Performance Report. We should also ensure that if any specific or additional actions are agreed in order to deliver these objectives, that these are included in the Equalities Action Plan. We will continue to publish equality impact assessments, the annual employment profile and our annual statutory equalities information.

Appendix 2 contains an issues log which captures all of the other comments received during the exercise. We would welcome your input in completing this table and agreeing the best way to take these comments forward. Our intention is to send this appendix and the revised set of equality objectives out to everyone we approached to participate in the review as a way of closing the consultation loop and showing how their input has been taken into account.

Rachel Gapp
5th December 2014