

ITEM 8.1**Overview and Scrutiny Briefing Note**

Title	Corporate equality objectives 2012-16		
Report of the	Senior Policy Officer		
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Report to	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Date	13th September 2016

Introduction

Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council is required, in the exercise of its functions to give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

These three requirements are known collectively as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

In 2012, the Council published its two corporate equality objectives, as required by the Equality Act 2010. The number of objectives were deliberately kept to a minimum to ensure that focus would be maintained, and concentrated on supporting better decision making. These objectives are as follows:

- To improve the Council's evidence base in respect of residents and staff.
- To make sure that residents can have involvement in how we develop and deliver our services.

Each objective is accompanied by a number of expected outcomes. This report sets out how we have delivered against each of these objectives and their expected outcomes.

Main focus of the document**Background**

The Council is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all. As a service provide and employer we are committed to ensuring fair treatment and equal access to our services, information and employment. This means that everyone can expect

the same standards of treatment, regardless of their gender, disability, race, ethnic or national origin, age, religion or belief, maternity or paternity status, or sexual orientation.

This commitment to equality and diversity is a key component of our Corporate Plan 2015-19: Investing in Test Valley. Our vision is to be an organisation of excellence committed to improving the quality of life of all the people in Test Valley. This vision is underpinned by our values, which include inclusiveness.

Inclusiveness is woven into the fabric of our Corporate Plan, which governs the delivery and development of our services. Through extensive consultation our communities told us what was important to them, and we developed our Plan accordingly, in order to respond to their most pressing concerns whilst ensuring that our plans concentrate on meeting the needs of individuals and groups in our communities.

The Council's ongoing commitment to the principles of equality and diversity is also reflected in the work that has been done to deliver on the two corporate equality objectives. This work is outlined below.

Objective 1: to improve the Council's evidence base in respect of residents and staff

We will improve knowledge of our staff, including ensuring staff are satisfied with the Council as an employer and attracting applications for vacancies from a diverse range of individuals

Current staff

The Council prides itself on being a learning organisation and is proactive in helping staff to develop their skills, knowledge, experience and professional qualifications, either to do their role more effectively or to help them prepare for their next career move. Learning is provided in a variety of ways and starts from a comprehensive induction when staff first join the Council. Each member of staff has their own annual Personal Development Plan and managers and staff work together during the year to ensure this learning takes place.

Learning takes a variety of forms and ranges from simply trying new tasks through to secondments, project work, leading on new initiatives, e-learning, lunch-and-learn sessions, attendance at courses and seminars, and financial and time support for technical and professional achievement of qualifications. Additionally, a range of management and leadership support is available to those who are aspiring to be managers, as well as for more senior staff where strong leadership skills are needed. This is all underpinned by coaching training, as part of the Council's plan to be a coaching organisation. This approach ensures that all staff, regardless of protected characteristics, are supported and encouraged to develop their skills, knowledge and experience, and that managers understand the needs and aspirations of their staff.

As well as supporting staff in their career development, it is recognised that the Council must support members of staff to maintain a positive work/life balance. Therefore, the Council offers flexible working to enable carers to work whilst caring for children and other family members, and will consider all requests for part time work patterns.

Through the childcare vouchers scheme, working parents can opt to exchange part of their salary for childcare vouchers. Exempt from tax and NI contributions, childcare vouchers are used to pay for any form of registered or approved childcare, including nurseries, nannies and before and after school clubs.

In 2015 the new annual staff survey was launched. This includes a set of ten 'barometer' questions that remain the same each year, as well as additional questions on specific areas of interest or pertinent issues. The ten set questions allow trends in staff satisfaction to be monitored from year to year.

The results of the survey are reported for the Council overall, as well as by service. If any areas are highlighted as requiring improvement at a service level, an action plan is drawn up by the relevant Head of Service and Human Resources so that steps can be taken to improve workplace satisfaction.

The staff survey allows overall staff satisfaction to be monitored and provides members of staff an opportunity to anonymously voice concerns. By understanding how staff are feeling at work, the Council can ensure that it responds to the needs of its staff and continues to operate as an inclusive and responsive employer.

2015's staff survey received responses from 58% of staff members, and in 2016 this response rate rose to 62%. Since 2015, the Council has seen an overall improvement in staff satisfaction

Recruitment

The Council recognises that people take many different routes into employment. Therefore, we are looking to expand our apprentice, intern and work experience programme to encourage more younger people to discover the benefits and opportunities that working for local government provides. However, we recognise that it is not only young people who can benefit from this programme, and we welcome applications from all ages.

We want to encourage disabled applicants to apply for our jobs, so we are proud to have been granted the "two ticks" symbol by Jobcentre Plus. This means that we have agreed to take action to meet five commitments regarding the employment, retention, training and career development of disabled employees.

It is a corporate policy that all job interviews are to be conducted by a panel, with at least one member of staff who does not work in the recruiting service sitting on the panel. This is to ensure that interviews are conducted in a fair manner and that candidates are assessed objectively.

A new recruitment portal has recently been launched with the view to attracting applications from a wider and more diverse range of people.

We will improve knowledge of our residents

A set of 24 ward profiles have been developed with Councillors which contain demographic information about Test Valley's wards and residents. Additionally, a set of parish profiles are being produced to compliment the ward profiles and provide demographic information at parish level, and a borough-wide profile is produced each year which provides a demographic overview of the population of Test Valley.

As well as the ward, parish and borough profiles, a report is published in January each year which provides a statistical overview of equality and diversity in the borough. This document provides information on each of the protected characteristics for residents of the borough, as well as for Council staff, Valley Leisure members and customer of The Lights.

These profiles are updated regularly, and provide Members, officers and members of the public the opportunity to easily access and understand data relating to equality and diversity across the borough.

Our services are accessible and do not discriminate on any unjustifiable grounds

The Council's Customer Charter states that "we will ensure everyone has equal access to our services". The Council recognises that different methods of access may be required for all residents to receive the same level of service.

For customers who wish to speak directly to officers, the Council provides a Minicom service for those who are hard of hearing. Additionally, alterations have been made to the reception areas at Beech Hurst in Andover and the Former Magistrates' Court in Romsey to make it more accessible and user friendly for people with a variety of disabilities.

All public facing documents are available in large print for those who require it, and The Big Word translation services company is used to translate Council publications into foreign languages where necessary.

The Council is creating more opportunities for customers to access Council services online and outside of core working hours. The Digital Transformation Strategy 2016-19 outlines the way in which the Council is redesigning its services to be agile and respond to changes in customer needs and behaviour. By investing in digital transformation we are working to ensure that Test Valley's residents are able to access information and services at a time and place that suits them, and in an easily accessible manner. The introduction of our new digital portal, My Test Valley, has already seen a marked increase in digital transactions, and provides an accessible alternative to face-to-face or over the phone contact with the Council.

Where our standard approach to service delivery does not provide equal access then appropriate methods of service delivery are adopted. For example, Environmental Services offer assisted bin collections to our residents who are not able to present their waste at the kerbside for collection.

We will develop a training package for staff and Councillors

Since 2011, training sessions on the Equality Act 2010 have been hosted for new members of staff joining the Council. In 2014, a new equalities and diversity training session was developed for new staff as part of the corporate induction programme. These training sessions introduce new staff to the importance that the Council places on equality and diversity, and provides them with the knowledge and tools to embed the principles of equality and diversity in their work.

Alongside the officer session, a new equalities and diversity training session has been designed for Councillors as part of the Empowering Communities programme. This training session aids Members by providing an overview of the legislative framework that governs matters of equality and diversity and offering guidance on adopting the Public Sector Equality Duty in their community Councillor role.

Objective 2: to make sure that residents can have involvement in how we develop and deliver our services.

People involved in consultation with the Council broadly reflect the population of the borough, and opportunities to get involved in consultation are made available to the widest possible audience.

We are always looking at ways to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to engage in public consultation, and that residents with protected characteristics are proportionally represented.

As part of the development of the Corporate Plan 2015-19, wide ranging consultations took place with local people during the summer of 2014. Councillors and officers spoke to more than 1,000 people across the borough to ask them what issues were important to them and what the Council should focus on for the next four years. The demographics of respondents were monitored to ensure that the respondents broadly reflected the borough population as a whole.

Test Valley's two largest community planning projects, Romsey Future and Andover Vision, use innovative engagement techniques to ensure that as broad a range of people are involved as possible. Members and officers have spoken to people at a wide range of community events, schools and youth groups and on market days in order to understand residents' views on the future of their towns. Additionally, both Romsey Future and Andover Vision offer many different ways in which to become involved – including by sitting on the Co-ordinating Group and working on individual project areas in Romsey, and attending working groups in Andover – which allows people to commit to as much or as little involvement as they choose. The continued dialogue with members of the community that characterises both Romsey Future and Andover Vision ensures that both partnerships continue to reflect the diverse range of views and aspirations of the towns' residents.

As well as working in and with our communities to ensure broad and inclusive consultation, many of our community consultations are also done online. This provides an additional method of interaction with Council consultation, ensuring that communication with our residents is as accessible as possible.

We use customer insight to appropriately target individuals and groups to increase participation in consultation

Customer insight has been used to complement the demographic profiles in order to target service provision across a number of projects, most notably by Environmental Services in their work to increase recycling and reduce the number of bin fires. It has also been used to ensure that consultation responses broadly represent the different communities across Test Valley.

Communities understand the make-up of their own local population and can use this information to develop their own community plans

The Council has been successful in obtaining £30,000 from the Department for Communities and Local Government to fund initial work with parishes to produce Neighbourhood Development Plans. This initial work includes the creation of a Test Valley Toolkit to help parishes decide which method of community planning is most appropriate for their area, as well as practical advice and support. Additionally, the Council have been successful in recruiting a Neighbourhood Planning Officer to support communities through their community planning process. Parish plans have been created in response to the need of communities to understand the make-up of their own local population, and the pathfinder parishes that have been the first to undertake neighbourhood planning have assisted in the creation of these profiles to ensure that they are of use to community groups.

The creation of community plans will in turn help us to deliver on our objective to improve our knowledge of our residents. The planning process requires extensive consultation with residents to be undertaken, as well as the production of a detailed housing analysis. By encouraging empowerment of communities in such a way, we will develop a better understanding of our communities' aspirations and needs to complement our demographic understanding provided by the borough, ward and parish profiles.

Equality impact assessments (EqIAs) are carried out earlier in the project cycle and are actively used by decision makers.

Traditionally EqIAs have been carried out at the point of decision making. However, the recruitment of two new Project Managers and their relocation into the Chief Executive's Service working alongside Policy Officers represents an opportunity to introduce EqIAs into the project initiation phase of the project planning framework, as well into the service planning cycle. This will ensure that matters of equality and diversity are considered at the project development stage.

Conclusion

Over the past four years extensive work has been done to deliver on the Council's corporate equality objectives. This work will continue to be built upon to ensure that Test Valley Borough Council continues to be an inclusive organisation, both in terms of its staff and the communities that it serves.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	0		
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