Equalities and Inclusion

Report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Recommended:

That OSCOM endorses the content of this Report.

SUMMARY:

- This report provides members with an update on matters relating to Equalities and Inclusion matters within the organisation since the date of the last report to OSCOM.
- Members are asked to endorse the content of the report.

1 Introduction

1.1 At the OSCOM away day Members were advised that an update on the areas of Equalities and Inclusion would be provided during the course of the year. OSCOM last received a report in April 2019, in a report headed 'Disability Review' which fed back on a programme of work focussed on developing mechanisms for review of equality issues as part of an evidence-led approach to decision-making. OSCOM endorsed the findings of the review.

2 Background

2.1 The Council's Equality Objectives are published as part of the Council's Corporate Plan. The current stated 2019-2023 objectives are:

Objective 1

To strengthen the Council's evidence-led approach for developing new policy and strategy. By developing a suite of engagement tools and clear processes that will enable the needs and views of people who share a protected characteristic are understood.

Objective 2

To strengthen the Council's approach to understanding the experience people have of the services they receive. We will develop ways in which the views of people who share a protected characteristic are sought as part of reviewing how services are provided.

The Equality Objectives are intentionally short and succinct, focussing on improving the Council's knowledge of its residents in order to most effectively deliver and target services and information and support effective decision-making, thereby contributing to improving quality of life across the Test Valley area.

2.2 These Equality Objectives in turn feed into the Council's Core Values also published as part of the Corporate Plan, one of which is 'Inclusiveness': ' we value diversity, promote equality of opportunity for all and ensure that our services are accessible to everyone in Test Valley'.

2.3 In order to assist compliance with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty and other Equality Act obligations, statistics are collated and published annually in relation to protected characteristics across the Borough.

2.4 The "Equality information" data published in March 2021 regarding protected characteristics across the Test Valley area was as follows:

(a) Gender – according to Hampshire Small Area Population forecast 2021 51.8% of Test Valley residents are women and 48.2% are men.

(b) Age – (Older) according to the Hampshire County Council Small Area Population Forecast for 2021:

i. 23.4% of the Test Valley population is over 65 years old.

ii. 55% of over 65s are women and 45% male.

iii. 64% of over 85s are women and 36% men.

(c) Age – (Younger) 18.9% of Test valley residents are 15 years of age or under and 48.8% of those aged 15 and under are girls and 51.2% boys.

(d) Ethnicity – according to the 2011 Census (we should have the 2021 Census results in 2022 to assist us) 92.6% of the population in Test Valley is White British and 7.4% from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. 72 different languages are spoken in Test Valley schools and 10% of pupils have English as an additional language.

(e) Gypsies and Travellers. At the time of the 2011 Census there were 153 people who identified as White Gypsies living in the Borough. According to the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service figures, 22 children from Gypsy or Roma backgrounds were attending Test Valley schools as at March 2021.

(f) Disability – According to 2011 figures there were 2,047 people with a disability or long-term illness living in the Borough.

(g) Religion – 67.8% of people living in Test valley have a religious belief or faith, whilst 25.1% claimed to have no religion, with 7.1% declining to specify. Of those who declared a religious belief, 96.9% said they were of the Christian faith. The second largest religious Group being followers of Islam at 0.6% of residents.

(h) LGBT – there are no statistics available about the number of gay and lesbian residents in the Borough. Stonewall estimates that there are 3.7 million lesbian, gay or bisexual people in the UK which is 5.8% of the population. Similarly, there are no reliable statistics for transgender people within Test Valley. A 2018 report by the Government Equalities Office states that there is 'no robust data on the UK trans population exists' although they estimate that there are approximately 200,000-500,000 trans people living in the UK.

It will be very interesting compiling and contrasting these statistics in 2022 when the results of the 2021 Census are known.

2.5 The Council also regularly compiles anonymised data to best ascertain the prevalence of protected characteristics within the Test Valley Borough Council workforce. An anonymised staff survey was undertaken in March 2021. Of the circa 500 employees at Test Valley Borough Council, 271 responses were received which revealed the following findings:

Q1. What is your age?

16-24	4.8%
25-34	11.1%
35-44	23.6%
45-54	28.8%
55-64	27.3%
65+	2.2%
Prefer not to say	2.2%

Q2. What is your gender?

Female	57.2%
Male	41%
Non-binary/third gender	0.0%
Other	0.4%
Prefer not to say	1.5%

Q3. Do you consider yourself to be transgender?

Yes	0.0%
No	96.6%
Prefer not to say	3.4%

Q4. What is your ethnic background?

White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	91.4%
White Gypsy/Irish Traveller	0%
Other white background	3.4%
Mixed/multiple ethnic group	2.3%
Black/African/Carribean/Black British	0.8%
Other ethic group	0%
Prefer not to say	2.3%

Q5. A disabled person is defined under the Equality Act 2010 as someone with a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Yes	3.7%
No	93.7%
Prefer not to say	2.6%

Q6. what is your sexual orientation?

Bisexual	1.5%
Gay/Lesbian	2.3%
Straight/heterosexual	91.7%
Other	0.4%
Prefer not to say	4.2%

Q7. What is your religion or belief (including non-belief)

Buddhism	0%
Christianity	50.8%
Hinduism	0.4%
Islam	0.8%
Judaism	0%
Sikhism	0%
No religion or belief	39.0%
Other	4.2%
Prefer not to say	4.9%

Q8. Are you married or in a civil partnership?

Yes	65.4%
No	31.2%
Prefer not to say	3.3%

Q9. Are you currently pregnant or on maternity leave?

Yes	1.1%
No	97%
Prefer not to say	1.9%

2.6 As part of its obligations and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 the Council (as an organisation employing 205 or more staff) is obliged to report on their gender pay gap. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average pay for all men and for all women within a workforce. NB this is different to equal pay, which relates to men and women being paid the same to do the same jobs, or work of equal value.

2.7 The Council is required to publish:

(i) the percentage gender difference in mean and median hourly pay rate.

(ii) the percentage of male and female employees who receive bonuses.

(iii) the percentage difference in mean and median bonus pay.

All are to be published for a 'snapshot' date which, in the case of the 2021 figures was 31 March 2020.

	Median	Mean
Single figure pay gap	-10.4%	2.1%

The median calculation of the single figure pay gap shows that the median female employee earns more than the median male employee. However the mean figure provides a different perspective of the average pay gap, showing that female employees are earning slightly less.

Nationally, the median pay gap is 15.5%, meaning that the UK''s female employees earn 84.5% of that earned by male employees.

2.8 At its meeting on 24 April 2019, OSCOM endorsed the findings of the Disability Review presented to it and recommended that Cabinet adopted the approach contained in the report when reviewing equality issues. That report embraced a focus-group approach, noting that to be effective, groups did not necessarily need to be large but support in hosting the sessions was key along with careful consideration of venue and timing. Further, that supporting staff and councillors to work with diverse groups was important and that again, tailored, well supported and appropriately facilitated sessions were key.

2.9 That ethos has continued and evolved since the date of the last report. As members will recall, Test Valley was one of the three Councils nationally selected to take part in the Innovation in Democracy programme, resulting in the Citizen's Assembly held in Romsey over two weekends in November 2019, the findings of which helped inform the Romsey South of Town Centre Masterplan and will help the next Local Plan and Romsey Future work.

2.10 The deliberative process with its in-depth local input and in particular the invaluable ability to hear first-hand lived experiences is an exciting take-away from the Citizen's Assembly. Officers and members are now giving active consideration to where the process – which can be appropriately scaled – can assist with ongoing work, projects and activities.

2.11 Councillor Hamilton, the Council's Equality and Diversity Member Champion continues to promote the use of new and existing models of engagement that ensure the voices of those with protected characteristics are heard as part of the Council's inclusive and importantly, evidence-led approach to decision making. Initial plans to hold an equalities workshop had to be put on hold as a result of the pandemic, but it is hoped that this can be brought back on track sooner rather than later, potentially using some elements of the deliberative process referred to above.

2.12 Throughout the Covid pandemic, Councillor Hamilton has continued to engage with differing communities virtually. Cllr Hamilton attended virtual meetings with the Romsey Disabled People's Partnership, sharing her knowledge and experience of disability awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by disabled residents during the pandemic.

2.13 Councillor Hamilton also attended the Westminster Insight Disability Digital Conference in June 2021 where speakers included the Disability Unit of the Cabinet Office, Disability Rights UK and Scope.

2.13.1 Throughout the pandemic the Council's Communications team has played a key role, running a radio, newspaper and social media advertising campaign to promote the local Covid support groups helping to assist the clinically extremely vulnerable during the pandemic as well as sharing links to Covid information in a range of languages and formats. The team also worked with the Community Team to produce a series of videos encouraging residents from the BAME communities to take the Covid vaccine following findings that certain ethnicities had a lower take-up rate. Eight community faith leaders took part in this initiative along with three local GPs.

2.13.2 The Communications team continue to work with designers and suppliers to ensure that documents and promotional material meet accessibility guidelines. The team has worked with Solent University on a project to review the Council's website in terms of design, layout and accessibility – this work is ongoing.

2.13.3 At the start of the pandemic, the Community team undertook a piece of work to identify the factors rendering people more vulnerable. Evidence showed an increased vulnerability in males, older age groups and the clinically extremely vulnerable. Consultation was undertaken with community leaders, disability groups, mental health charities, older persons support groups and youth groups to better understand the challenges faced by these groups during the pandemic. This facilitated a timely supply of translated resources, grant information and general support for local residents who may have been at increased risk.

2.13.4 Once the roll out of the vaccination began, work was undertaken with the Primary Care network to ensure that local diverse communities had equal and easy access to vaccination centres.

2.13.5 The Community team also secured funding for certain Covid-related projects including an i-pad lending scheme 'Test Valley Connected' in partnership with the Hampshire Learning in Libraries. The project aims to reduce digital exclusion through a lack of knowledge, confidence or appropriate technology – this could include the elderly, residents with a disability, those experiencing financial hardship or experiencing isolation.

2.13.6 The Communities and Leisure service's wider community inclusivity work has recently included:

(a) Establishing the Romsey Disabled People Partnership at the end of 2019. Recent successes of the group include establishing hour-long sessions at the Romsey Rapids for disabled users only.

(b) Andover and District Older Peoples Forum has been supported in moving to virtual platforms and producing newsletters for members. More recently, an intergenerational project with support from Test Valley Borough Council with a local primary school and care home to organise activities later in the year.

(c) The national Census took place in March 2021 and the Policy and Community Teams liaised with the Census Engagement Manager (CEM) to provide demographic insights and get appropriate messaging out to appropriate communities including translated resources and signposting to support if required. The Housing Team also supported the CEM to reach those without permanent dwellings. Test Valley far-exceeded the pre-Census target of 94% and was one of the best performing areas in the country.

(d) Engaging with partners on work with the Borough's diverse communities. One example is the Test Valley Arts Foundation who have created the 'Finding Friends' project which is a research, consultation and engagement project for members of ethnic minority populations in the Borough, aiming to explore how we can create and encourage more shared cultural experiences.

(e) Involvement, along with a local Member, resident and developer to enable the design of a swing for use by wheelchair using children in the local play area. The swing will be installed in October 2021.

(f) Supporting a consultation event with the Chinese community, coinciding with Chinese New Year, to gain insight about the needs of the community. One area of concern identified was the lack of written and/or spoken English in many residents. The Community Team arranged for a bespoke course with RCS to improve written English.

(g) In Romsey, community picnics are being organised in parks, enabling residents with dementia and their carers to meet safely (in a socially distanced fashion) in order to access advice and support from other key organisations e.g. Andover Mind.

(h) The Romsey Future Refresh consultation has ensured that engagement methods are used to reach all local communities. A well-being event has also been planned for anyone feeling nervous about getting back to normal as the Covid restrictions eased.

(i) Councillor Community Grants have been approved to support a number of projects that support key groups which have included older peoples groups, providers with a focus on pandemic-related social exclusion, the Andover Nepalese Community to support their cultural and education work and organisations supporting people living with a disability across all ages to fund activities and support.

2.13.7 Test Valley Borough Council's Housing Strategy and Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy ensures that the Council meets the needs of its most vulnerable communities. The Council pledged in 2018 that any local resident presenting to the Council for housing support who would otherwise sleep rough would be offered accommodation. This ideally placed the Council to implement the Government's 'Everyone in' initiative during the pandemic.

2.13.8 The Council's housing team helped 40 single people into accommodation in the initial lockdown period, thereby reducing Covid transmission risks for this vulnerable cohort.

2.13.9 The Housing Team continued to deliver its Disabled Facilities Grant during this period; supporting those with mobility needs to carry out adaptions, receiving 154 referrals for Disabled Facilities Grants over 2020/21.

2.13.10 During 2020/2021 the Council enabled the delivery of 296 new affordable homes including 179 rented units and 117 affordable home ownership units. Within this, 60 units were delivered at social rent to assist those on the lowest incomes. 18 affordable housing units delivered in the year were wheelchair accessible.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

3.1 Equality Objectives

3.2 Corporate Plan

4 Risk Management

4.1 A Risk Management questionnaire has been completed and indicted this report does not require a risk assessment because the issues covered by this report are not significant in terms of risk (in the context of this report).

5 Resource Implications

5.1 There are no resource implications of this report.

6 Legal Implications

6.1 The Council has equality obligations under the Equality Act 2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duty. This report explains how certain of those obligations are met.

7 Equality Issues

7.1 No equality issues arise out of this report itself.

8 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

8.1 This report aims up update Members on both the statutory reporting requirements of the Council along with many of the Council's equality and diversity related activities during the last two years both from Covid-related and 'business as usual' perspectives.

8.2 It is recommended that OSCOM endorse the content of this report.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D) None			
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	File Ref:	N/A
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