

**Committee:** Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities

**Date:** 07 June 2016

Agenda item:

Wards: All

**Subject:** Progress report on implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17

Lead officer: John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships

Lead member: Councillor Edith Macauley, Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities

Forward Plan reference number: n/a

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**Recommendations:** That Members of the JCC:

- A. Note and comment on the progress made on the implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17.
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## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide the JCC with a progress report on the implementation of the Equality Strategy 2013-17.

## 2. DETAILS

### Background

#### Progress on the implementation of the Equality Strategy and action plan

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires the local authority, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not. “Protected characteristics” are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 2.2 The Equality Act 2010 also requires the council to publish equality objectives every four years to demonstrate how it will meet the PSED. The equality strategy outlines the Council’s ‘Equality Objectives’ as the following five themes:
- Tackling Inequality
  - Service Access
  - Improving Engagement
  - Promoting Community Cohesion
  - Workforce Development

- 2.3 Council approved the four-year strategy in February 2013. It sets out what we will do to tackle discrimination and inequality and promote equal opportunities in Merton. The strategy also sets out the council's equalities objectives as required by the Equality Act 2010.
- 2.4 The Equality Strategy Action Plan sets out the actions we will take to meet our equality priorities both corporately and departmentally.
- 2.5 The approach of the strategy is a departure from the structure of the previous Corporate Equality Scheme. Instead of including objectives against each protected characteristic, generic themes have been identified and they in turn were informed by using available statistical evidence and priorities highlighted in departmental service plans.
- 2.6 Delivery against the Equality Strategy action plan is monitored by the Corporate Equality Steering Group through regular updates from departmental equality representatives, and the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minority Organisations also monitors implementation of the strategy.

#### **Progress to date**

- 2.7 The Equality Strategy action plan (attached at Appendix I) includes activities that are linked to departmental service plans.
- 2.8 Key developments to note include:
- **Merton School Improvement (MSI) Service** continued its programme of support and challenge to schools to identify, track and accelerate progress made by individual pupils from target groups. Identified secondary schools have been supported to implement English support targeted to **Bangladeshi** and **Asian-Other** pupils. The achievement of Bangladeshi and Asian Other pupils improved in the 2014 outcomes - there is a three year upward trend in outcomes at KS2 and at KS4 which are well above national averages. Expected progress made by Bangladeshi pupils in English rose from 63% in 2013 to 92% in 2014; similarly 'Asian Other' pupils expected progress improved from 76% to 87%. These two cohorts achieved higher levels of expected progress in English between KS2 and KS4 compared to all Merton pupils in 2014 (81%).
  - **20% of Looked after Children (LAC)** achieved 5 GCSEs A\*-C or equivalent (incl. English & Maths) in 2013-14 which is above the national LAC average of 15%. The Virtual School for LAC continues to monitor pupil level progress on an at least termly basis through the collection of data and attendance at Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings. The service has started to analyse the impact of its 1:1 funded tuition to ensure that resources are maximised to improve pupil outcomes.
  - Over 2014-15, A range of commissioned preventative services continue to be available for children and young people with disabilities including family-based overnight **short breaks**, weekend clubs offering activities and excursions, a holiday play scheme for children with complex needs, and a parent carer support service and parent forum. Brightwell Children's Home was judged as providing an 'outstanding' quality of care and as being 'good' overall in its last Ofsted inspection in July 2014 and supported 433 children during the financial year above the target of 372. The **Local Offer** went live on the 1<sup>st</sup> of

September 2014. A Local Offer Steering Group has been set up to ensure that Merton is meeting the requirements in relation to this aspect of work.

- **Children's Centre services** showed good take-up by families from deprived areas (77.7%) exceeding the 75% minimum target. Families from the target areas engaged with a wide range of activities including access to play and stay and early education groups, job club, child health services, midwifery and antenatal as well as targeted home visiting services. Over 2014-15, 917 children accessed the central government funding for disadvantaged 2 year olds. This significantly exceeded the target of 705 with the steady increase a result of assertive outreach and targeted campaigns. The **Early Years service's** work with providers increased the number delivering funded 2 year old places to 98 at the end of the year. The Early Years service also continued to work with nurseries in target schools to implement strategies to support boys and children from deprived areas to improve outcomes, maintain improvements and further close gaps in attainment. Results for 2013-14 (reported in 2014-15) showed that 44% of **Free School Meal (FSM) children** achieved a 'good level of development' (GLD) in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – an 11% increase on last year. 45.8% of boys from deprived areas achieved a GLD - a 7.8% increase compared to last year. The
- The Recruitment and Assessment Team recruited 10 **in-house foster carers** in 2014-15 of which 6 were from target groups. The largest need for carers centred on teenagers and siblings. The carers recruited for teenagers were directed to the service through three targeted recruitment campaigns including a demographically targeted door drop, print advertising and the use of internal recruitment materials. All three campaigns had a strong message in accordance with the need for carers for the 11+ age group. During the year, an analysis of LAC placement stability identified that boys aged 10–15 of white British heritage were most likely to disrupt in their placements. Learning from this report was cascaded to continuously improve practice.
- Activities to support and develop **participation and governance opportunities** continued to take place over 2014-15 to enable children and young people to have a voice in service delivery and design. Some highlights included:
  - A group of young people from a range of **youth forums** and the **youth service** were supported to take part in the re- commissioning process for the new risk and resilience service by visiting providers and interviewing young people, users and adults. This influenced contracts and fed back into the decision-making process and is an excellent example of services shaped with reference to young people's views.
  - The **Children in Care Council (CiCC)** were involved in helping to refresh the Children in Care and Care Leavers charter, inputting into the Care Leavers Strategy 2015-18, reviewing the LAC Pack and identified specifications for a new information website. CiCC also took part in reviewing the LAC review forms and 'Let's Talk' booklets.
  - The **'Your Shout'** group for children and young people with learning disabilities has fed into management discussions around aspects of the C&F Act including the Local Offer and preparation for adulthood. The group also

made a short-film to show people what it is like to be a young person with a disability for which they won a 'Positive for Youth' award.

- At the end of 2014-15, there were 32 Young Advisors and 14 Young Inspectors trained and active. There were 35 members of Merton Youth Parliament (and others).
- There was a 32% reduction of **First-Time Entrants (FTE)** to the Youth Justice System (YJS) compared to last year. The 2014-15 outcome was 60 FTE against an anticipated number of up to 80. The rate of re-offending remains in line with the national average. Work on youth crime prevention concentrated on early intervention and prevention methods centred on working in a more holistic way addressing both young people's and families needs. This was delivered through a range of group and 1:1 interventions which included a focus on parenting capacity, mental health and other environmental factors. The work within **Transforming Families** and the **Youth Justice Team**, in particular, meant that interventions could be provided as early as possible in order to ensure that escalations in a young person's behaviour and/or offending are dealt with as quickly as possible. Geographically, there has been a focus on areas in the East of the borough which are generally more deprived.
- CSF continues to deliver its Equalities and Community Cohesion Action (ECCA) Plan for 2015-16 with an end-of-year report due in June. The ECCA Plan will be refreshed for 2016-17 with new actions stemming from the service planning process currently underway. CSF will continue to plan around and work within the established priorities and corporate activities for the coming year.
- The use of equality analysis is embedded in the service planning process and savings proposals have been accompanied by an assessment of the impact of proposed changes on the protected characteristics.
- **Black, Asian and Minority Voice** was launched on 4 February and will provide a strategic voice for the borough's BAME community. The organisation is developing priorities to discuss with the council and partner agencies.
- The Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender Forum has been revitalised and the committee is developing a work programme to progress issues facing the community. The first public meeting will be held on 26 April at Vestry Hall.
- The launch of **Volunteer Merton**, a new online portal that seamlessly links up volunteers with volunteer opportunities through a digital platform. This will make it much simpler and quicker to link volunteers to actual volunteering opportunities
- We have signed up to **ValueYou**: a new accreditation scheme to recognise individuals who have delivered over 100 hours of volunteering and offer them discount cards at local businesses.
- Public Health has commissioned Merton Chamber of Commerce to deliver support to business in Merton who would like to support their staff, including working towards the **London Healthy Workplace Charter**.
- We currently have **28 Apprentices in Merton**, 60% have either go on to higher education or acquire employment internally/externally.

- The **Schools and libraries Reading initiative** has been implemented in 39 schools with 15,995 children signed up and actively using their local library. Further roll out targeting the final four schools is planned in the coming months.

2.9 The following areas will continue to be addressed in 2016/17:

- Improve outreach to Small/Medium Enterprises and BAME organisations – initial workshops will be held with the voluntary sector in April and May. The learning from these will be evaluated and used to inform SME workshops.
- Maintain focus on raising attainment and narrowing achievement gaps with a focus on vulnerable groups at risk of poorer outcomes.
- Plan and deliver integrated advice and support services for children and young people with SEN and disabilities.
- Continue to emphasise the safeguarding of particular groups of vulnerable children including those at risk of CSE, missing from home/care/education, VAWG and PREVENT.
- Promote stability and permanence for Looked after Children through procurement of sufficient and suitable placement options.
- Continue to develop meaningful engagement opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to feedback and influence service improvement.
- Increase young people's engagement in diversionary activities that enable positive outcomes into adulthood.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

3.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to prepare and publish equality objectives and subsequently at least four-yearly. Failure to do so would mean the Council is not fulfilling its legal obligations and could be subject to legal action.

### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

The Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities will be given a progress report on the Equality Strategy.

### **5. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Delivery of the Equality Strategy action plan is within existing resources.

### **6. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 On 6 April 2011 the Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires the Local Authority, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a "protected characteristic" and those who do not. "Protected characteristics" are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

6.2 Delivery of the commitments in the Equality Strategy action plan and the publication of an Equality Strategy setting out our equality objectives fulfil the Council's legal obligations relating to equalities legislation.

**7. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 By setting out its equalities commitments in the Equality Strategy the Council is re-affirming its commitment to human rights, equality and community cohesion.

**8. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There is a risk of increased hate crime activity directed towards certain groups if there is no commitment to eliminate discrimination and harassment.

**9. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There is a risk to the Council's reputation if it fails to produce and publish equalities objectives. Additionally there is a risk of claims of discrimination based on age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

**10. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

- Appendix I – Progress update of the Equality Strategy 2013-17 Action Plan

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Equality Strategy 2013-17

[http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/plansandpolicies/equality\\_strategy\\_2013-17\\_final\\_v2.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/council/plansandpolicies/equality_strategy_2013-17_final_v2.pdf)