

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Date: 24 April 2019

Wards: All

Subject:

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children, Schools and Families

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

Contact officer: Evereth Willis, Equality and Community Cohesion Officer

Recommendations:

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1. That Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission note and comment on the progress made on the implementation of the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To provide the Overview and Scrutiny Commission with a progress report on the implementation of the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21.

2 DETAILS

- 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 six themes:
 - a. To ensure key plans and strategies narrow the gap between different communities in the borough;
 - b. Improve equality of access to services for disadvantaged groups;
 - c. Ensure regeneration plans increase the opportunity for all Merton’s residents to fulfil their educational, health and economic potential, participate in the renewal of the borough and create a health promoting environment;
 - d. Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together ;

- e. Encourage recruitment from all sections of the community , actively promote staff development and career progression opportunities and embed equalities across the organisation;
 - f. Fulfil our statutory duties and ensure protected groups are effectively engaged when we change our services.
- 2.3. The objectives aim to narrow the gap in outcomes between residents, in particular between the East and West of the borough. A cross-departmental approach has been taken to deliver some of the commitments such as Hate Crime and Domestic Violence.
- 2.4. Council approved the Equality Strategy 2017-21 in March 2017. The strategy is a four-year strategy that sets out what we will do to tackle discrimination and inequality and promote equal opportunities and community cohesion in Merton.
- 2.5. The accompanying action plan sets out the actions we will take to meet our equality priorities both corporately and departmentally.
- 2.6. The activity in the action plan is closely linked to the council's performance framework as commitments are aligned with departmental service plans. This will ensure the strategy is embedded in service plans across the council to ensure effective implementation. The aim is to set smart targets and, where no baseline information exists, improving data collection and analysis will itself become a target.

Progress on the implementation of the strategy

Overall, the update in Appendix 1 shows good progress has been made to implement the commitments in the Equality Strategy, in particular key achievements to note include:

- An increase in library usage by 11-16 year olds from a CR4 postcode, there are now 4,006 users amongst this cohort.
- A Social Value Toolkit has been launched and will give Commissioners opportunities to use the local labour supply and/or apprenticeships when major contracts (such as highways) are being procured.
- To support the financial inclusion work the Council has funded 50% of the cost for the Citizens Advice Bureau to employ a Welfare Disabilities Advisor.
- The Local Welfare Support Scheme has continued to provide support to residents.
- A new Strategic Partner programme was launched on 1 April 2019 to provide grants of £4 million from 2019-22 to local voluntary sector organisations who support our most vulnerable and marginalised communities.
- Our schools continue to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups. At Key Stage 4 the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has narrowed in the Progress 8 indicator from 0.62 to 0.47 with this cohort achieving a score of 0.12.
- A new 'Positive Behaviour Support' policy has been developed with an associated training programme which has supported the reduction of exclusions related to challenging behaviour. The number of permanent exclusions in secondary schools decreased significantly – below the most

recent national, London and outer London comparators. These results are against a national rising trend of permanent exclusions.

- During 2017/18 the provision of housing advice and assistance has successfully prevented homelessness in 465 cases (exceeding the target of 450).
- The Merton Autism Strategy has been developed and published. A time limited Autism Partnership steering Group has been established to implement the action plan and a Merton Autism profile has also been developed which will be published shortly.
- A Health Needs Profile on disability has been produced to inform commissioners, ensuring disability needs and issues are considered in the commissioning of services. The profile will also be useful to voluntary and community organisations, as evidence when bidding for funding.
- The 'assisted waste' collection service has been promoted as part of the direct communication to every household in advance of the service change which was introduced in October 2018. This was again promoted as part of the information pack which accompanied the new wheelie bins.
- All controlled crossings on borough roads adhere to the regulation and are DDA compliant. TfL have also completed their review and administered remedial works at all signalised junctions.
- Our community cohesion work has supported a second faith organisation (Wimbledon Synagogue) to sponsor a Syrian Refugee family through the Community Sponsorship Scheme.
- Over the 2017-18 academic year, the proportions of young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), or whose status is unknown, again fell and were significantly better than national averages.
- Key workers from the My Futures team have continued to provide a range of group and individual 1:1 work as well as various other support through joint working to improve outcomes for at-risk young people and those who are NEET.
- Merton has been successful in a bid for the Home Office Early Intervention Youth Fund that will deliver 'Responsive Community Engagement' where there are concerns about anti-social behaviour, 'hot spots' and increasing violence. The team will be co-located in the Adolescent and Family Service and work alongside existing provision to increase capacity to respond swiftly to these concerns and divert young people from the criminal justice system.

2.7 In addition to continuing to address the commitments in the equality strategy, the following areas will be focused on in 2019/20:

- Reduce the gap in the percentage of obese 10-11 year olds between East and West Merton, through reducing obesity amongst children in east Merton.
- Increase Adult Education course take up by 25% in deprived wards by delivering a focussed employability and family learning offer.
- Continue to press for step free access at West Barnes and Motspur Park stations under the 'Access for all' funding programme
- Embed the new waste collection service and focus on assisted collections and ensuring pavements remain free of wheeled bins.

- Develop a refreshed Sustainable Communities Plan with the aim of increasing levels of social capital in our most deprived wards

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.

3.2.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

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

5 TIMETABLE

5.1. None.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Delivery of the Equality and Community Strategy 2017-21 action plan is within existing resources.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. 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.

Delivery of the commitments in the Equality Strategy action plan and the publication of an Equality Strategy setting out our equality objectives assists with working to fulfil the Council’s on-going legal obligations relating to equalities legislation.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

8.1. By setting out its equalities commitments in the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21 the Council is re-affirming its commitment to human rights, equality and community cohesion.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. 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.

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

- Appendix 1 – Progress update of the Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21 Action Plan

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1. Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy 2017-21.

[HTTPS://WWW2.MERTON.GOV.UK/COUNCIL/PLANSANDPOLICIES/EQUALITY-STRATEGY.HTM](https://www2.merton.gov.uk/council/plansandpolicies/equality-strategy.htm)

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