

Appendices: 1



## CABINET REPORT

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Equalities Report</b>
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**AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC**

<b>Cabinet Meeting Date:</b>	22 February 2012
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Listed on Forward Plan:</b>	Yes
<b>Within Policy:</b>	Yes
<b>Policy Document:</b>	Yes
<b>Directorate:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Accountable Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Brandon Eldred
<b>Ward(s)</b>	All

### 1. Purpose

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- 1.1 The Council needs to replace Single Equality Scheme 2008 to 2011 with a new document for 2012 to 2015 which recognises and shows due regard to the new legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The purpose of this report is to seek adoption of the new document by Cabinet. The new document is called "Our Approach to Equalities".
- 1.2 The Report also proposes corporate equality objectives, as required under the Equality Act 2010, to be incorporated within the Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 Finally, the report updates Cabinet on other work on equalities by the Council since the last report.

## **2. Recommendations**

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Cabinet is recommended to

- 2.1 approve and adopt the attached document “Our Approach to Equalities” as the new equality strategy document for 2012 to 2015;
- 2.2 approve the corporate priority equality objectives to be incorporated in the Corporate Plan 2012-15, taking account of feedback through the current Budget Consultation and needs identified through the development of the Corporate and Service Plans;
- 2.3 To delegate the setting of targets and measures to deliver the proposed Corporate Equality Objectives as set out in this report to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder;
- 2.4 note progress on equalities within the Council.

## **3. Issues and Choices**

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### **3.1 Report Background**

#### **3.1.1 The legal duties**

- 3.1.2 The Equality Act 2010 came into force, mostly from 1 October 2010, with further duties for the public sector and others providing ‘public functions’ from April 2011 and compliance requirements to be met from end of January 2012.
- 3.1.3 The new legal duties do not require councils to have a Single Equality Scheme but do place duties on councils to integrate due regard to equalities into their work and to publish details of equality data and the impacts of their policies and practices.

#### **3.1.4 The Equality Framework for Local Government**

- 3.1.5 The Equality Framework for Local Government supports Councils to meet their equality duties and to provide services efficiently. It is used by almost all councils. There is no charge. It is now integrated into equalities peer review.
- 3.1.6 The Council continues to work towards its ambition of achieving “Excellent” status within the Equalities Framework. Staff are encouraged to link using the equalities system to other performance monitoring activities which helps to ensure continuity, as does further staff training.

### **3.2 The Equality Strategy - “Our Approach to Equalities”**

- 3.2.1 Members of Northampton Forums networks were involved in developing and helping in the first phase of consultation for a new equality strategy. Meetings, for example with Northampton Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning People’s Forum and Northampton Pensioners’ Forum, helped to identify things people wanted and things people disliked about proposed and existing approaches, and enabled the consultation plans to be shaped taking

these into account.

- 3.2.2 Consultation on the Council's Budget 2012-13 included discussions with members of Forums about the budget proposals and any equalities concerns. The consultation paper included questions about equalities too. This sought to ensure that the planning of service delivery for 2012-15 takes into account needs in terms of people's protected characteristics from the earliest stages.
- 3.2.3 Other consultation and engagement activities in 2011-12 which were taken into account including the findings of the Community Safety Priorities consultation, discussions about hate crime in a number of forums, and findings of the Northampton Borough Council Employee Opinion Survey.
- 3.2.4 Regard was had to the development of the Northampton Borough Council Corporate Plan and priorities identified within it, to ensure that equality objectives were identified as part of an integrated approach.
- 3.2.5 These factors and involvement of service areas within the Council helped shape a document "Our Approach to Equalities" (**Appendix**). This gives a concise but meaningful description of the Council's approach which engages people and maximises readability, and which aims to help people understand about the population of Northampton and the ways the Council works.
- 3.2.6 Regard was had to best practice elsewhere, where it was noted that very long documents were not really accessible, while overly short documents might raise fears of attempting to hide information. Hence this is a shorter and more accessible document than the lengthy single equality scheme which, while aiming to be transparent, seems to have been too long for most people to read or find helpful.
- 3.2.7 The former separate Corporate Equalities Action Plan is replaced by ensuring equalities objectives are an integral part of all service planning with corporate equality objectives to be identified in an appendix of "Our Approach to Equalities" and also within the Corporate Plan. This will support effective working towards achieving those objectives, and reinforce that equalities is everyone's business.
- 3.2.8 The new document gives an overview signposting to other constitutional, policy and strategy documents, and includes references to benchmarks used to measure organisational performance e.g. Investors In People. It does not try to do it all itself. Web presence on the internet at [www.northampton.gov.uk/equality](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/equality) guides staff and the public in a transparent way about equality impact assessments, monitoring and links to documents which help to show how the council's ways of working impact on people and to information about the population.

### **3.3 Corporate Plan, Service Planning and equality duties compliance**

- 3.3.1 The corporate equality objectives in the equality strategy documents have been developed with due regard to, and alongside, development of the Corporate Plan 2012-15 and the corporate Budget Consultation 2012.

- 3.3.2 The Service Planning approaches introduced in 2011 are being used again in 2012. These specifically prompt and guide services to have regard to their equalities duties – both with regard to implementing the Corporate Plan and the corporate objectives contained within it, and also with regard to service-specific equality objectives which may, for example, be identified through equalities analysis in equality impact assessments.
- 3.3.3 The draft service plans will be challenged in relation to equalities aspects, and help offered to support services in setting appropriate objectives and identifying what they need to publish.
- 3.3.4 The Council's services have been reviewing their equalities data and impact assessments, and have been publishing to the Equality web pages on the website. Budget options were subjected to equality impact assessment and these were published as part of the consultation process, with services requested to review and as appropriate revise their assessments in light of consultation responses in order to support councillors as decision-makers.

### **3.4 Corporate Equality Objectives**

- 3.4.1 The Council is required to have corporate equality objectives from April 2012. It is suggested that these should be relatively broad, though still measurable; they will be supported by more detailed objectives within service plans. Three such corporate objectives are proposed below, arising from analysis of current issues and recent consultation.
- 3.4.2 Targets and measures to deliver these objectives will also be required. These are being developed following the next phase of service planning. It is suggested that agreement of those targets and measures be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder.
- 3.4.3 **Proposed Corporate Equality Objective: A Modern and Diverse Workforce**
- 3.4.3.1 The Council published its first Workforce Equality Monitoring report in July 2011. It includes equality objectives agreed by Management Board which it is proposed should form actions to achieve a corporate objective for having a modern and diverse workforce.
- 3.4.3.2 The report publishes equality data in line with national compliance guidance from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission. It is published in the Equality web pages on the internet at [www.northampton.gov.uk/equality](http://www.northampton.gov.uk/equality).
- 3.4.3.3 The report should be updated annually enabling detailed due regard to be had to evidence including employee opinion surveys, information about complaints and appraisals, and information from Stonewall Workplace Index reporting and feedback. The updated reports should show progress against the objectives.
- 3.4.3.4 It is suggested that the new equality strategy as published for April 2012 should have as an objective:

- **to deliver a modern and diverse workforce** with detailed actions beneath that focusing on the outcome of the Workforce Equality Monitoring Report.

### **3.4.4 Proposed Corporate Equality Objective: Preventing and Tackling Hate Crime**

- 3.4.4.1 A number of different consultation and engagement mechanisms have identified the need for more to be done to improve how hate crime is dealt with by the Council and in its work with partner organisations. These have included
- the Community Safety Priorities Consultation – which led to identification of the need for hate crime to be one of the countywide and borough-wide priorities from 2012;
  - work by a Northampton Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee Panel responding to a public request for looking into the need to improve how hate crime is dealt with by the Council;
  - surveys done by Northampton Youth Forum finding that over 90% of respondents wanted more done about homophobia and bullying and which were followed by considerable interest in the Stamp out Hate Crime campaign (which initially sought to raise awareness of the concept of hate crime and has begun to look at the needs to improve approaches and attitudes towards reporting);
  - discussions at various forum meetings which have kept Hate Crime on the agenda.
- 3.4.4.2 Nationally reports have also shown that, for example, there is a lack of awareness of disablist hate crime. It is noted that proposals to reduce Police staffing, operation of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the availability of legal aid may also tend to increase the onus on the Council to do better in preventing and tackling hate crime.
- 3.4.4.3 It is recommended that there be a corporate equality objective to achieve:
- **A place where visitors and residents from all communities feel safe, secure and protected with low levels of crime** with detailed actions beneath that focusing on tackling and reporting hate crime.

### **3.4.5 Proposed Corporate Equality Objective: Improving support to vulnerable people**

- 3.4.5.1 Many of the Council's priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan deal with the wellbeing of vulnerable people. The current economic pressures on both the community and the Council make it even more important to focus on those in particular need or experiencing barriers to equal participation.
- 3.4.5.2 For example, the development of the Gateway service is a very relevant service for the Council's equality duties compliance. Working in a multi-skilled, multi-disciplinary way, it brings together high priority, highly relevant aspects of the Council's work in a partnership approach. It is important that this is seen to be transparent and accountable, with its significance noted

at the corporate level.

- 3.4.5.3 It is recommended that there be a corporate equality objective to ensure that::
- **All services are fair, accessible and responsive to individual needs** with detailed actions beneath that focusing on vulnerable people and the opportunities of the Gateway project.

### **3.5 Other Equality Developments**

#### **3.5.1 Workforce and Councillor training to help implement the duties**

3.5.2 Training and guidance has been delivered throughout 2011 to ensure everyone in management and leadership roles is aware of compliance requirements. Work continues to further improve the framework of training to be offered and required of different roles in the Council from 2012.

3.5.3 In January, June, July and December 2011 and January 2012 sessions were held for councillors.

#### **3.5.4 Publishing and accessibility**

3.5.5 The Corporate Webmaster group repeatedly considered the challenges of the needs to publish in accessible formats and the limitations of existing technology across the Council. Where possible the group looked at how to maximise more accessible content.

3.5.6 Discussions have taken place with appropriate officers in the Information Technology service to ensure that in looking to update the website, there will be specific consideration about the need to publish equalities data and impact assessments, and to improve navigation and accessibility of documents themselves.

3.5.7 The committee management system (modern.gov) has been improved at no cost to the Council to allow publishing of documents in accessible formats. More work has begun on improving the templates used for publishing. There will be an opportunity for further improvement to the committee management system once new software is installed; this should further enhance the ability of the Council to publish documents for its meetings in accessible formats easily.

#### **3.5.8 Promoting participation through disability access**

3.5.9 The DisabledGo access guide has been updated. The contract for the coming three years has been renegotiated to give better value for money within existing costs. There are opportunities for local businesses to advertise in the guide and to sponsor it – which could potentially benefit the businesses, draw in more trade to the town and reduce costs of providing the guide for the Council going forward.

3.5.10 The One Stop Shop has been transformed, and services there now have 'Louder than Words' accreditation.

3.5.11 Signage about induction loops has been improved around the Guildhall

3.5.12 The Council's Museums Service has been undertaking work to improve their accessibility and their reach to under-participating audiences as part of modernisation works.

### 3.5.13 **Stonewall**

3.5.14 The Council has continued its participation in the Stonewall Workplace Index and Diversity Champions scheme, and currently awaits the findings from the 2011 self-assessment and staff surveys.

3.5.15 Northampton Youth Forum's "Stamp out Hate Crime " campaign has been identified by Stonewall as inspirational work which they have shared with others to encourage organisations to support this type of approach.

### 3.5.16 **Forums**

3.5.17 The Council is required to have effective forums for engaging with equality stakeholders under the Equality Framework for Local Government. Some of their work has gained national and regional recognition in 2011, particularly the Stamp out Hate Crime campaign, intergenerational volunteering at Heritage Open Days and youth involvement in Holocaust Memorial Day activities.

3.5.18 The Forums have continued to develop their use of social media networking and low cost informal face to face contact outside of formal public meetings. A fuller account of the achievements of the forums was reported to Cabinet at its January meeting.

## 3.6 **Choices (Options)**

3.6.1 Recommended – that Cabinet choose to approve the equality strategy 'Our Approach to Equality', with measures and targets for equality objectives to be published by April 2012.

3.6.2 Cabinet could reject the strategy in whole or in part, or propose alternative corporate objectives. The risk here is that delay in publishing the strategy and objectives could lead to the Council failing to meet its statutory obligations. The proposed document has been developed with a thorough consideration of the Council's position and the community it serves. Hence rejecting the document is not recommended.

## 4. **Implications (including financial implications)**

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### 4.1 **Policy**

The Report will enable the Council to continue to comply with its equality duties.

### 4.2 **Resources and Risk**

There are no financial implications. The risk of not approving the equality strategy is that as of the end of January 2012 the Council may be at risk of compliance action.

#### **4.3 Legal**

The adoption of the new equality strategy will help the Council to meet its legal duties on equalities under the Equality Act 2010. The strategy and the equality objectives due to be published within it by April 2012 will be updated annually as part of ongoing equalities compliance.

#### **4.4 Equality**

The new equality strategy should help the Council to promote equality and meet its duties, with appropriate due regard. There should not be anyone disadvantaged as a result of it.. The approaches set out within it are subject to specific equalities assessment, sometimes including through external benchmarking such as the Investors In People standard. The corporate equality objectives have been identified through consideration of a range of types of information, consultation and engagement. Beneath the corporate level, service plans will continue, in line with the approaches set out in the strategy, to identify the equality impacts of their policies and practices and to seek to address these appropriately through service planning and actions, including continuing to develop equality impact assessments with equality stakeholders and publishing equality impact assessments from consultation onwards to inform decision-making.

#### **4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)**

Various members of staff, councillors and the public including some members of Forums networks have contributed to the consultations mentioned in this Cabinet Report.

#### **4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes**

The proposal to adopt the new equality strategy enables the council to meet its equality duties. These pervade all its priorities and in particular responding to your needs.

### **5. Background Papers**

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#### **5.1 'Our Approach to Equalities' (Appendix)**

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