
EQUALITY POLICY AND OBJECTIVE(S) CONSULTATION

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Leader and all Cabinet Members
Councillor Bill Dixon, Leader
Councillor Stephen Harker, Efficiency and Resources Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Ada Burns, Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek members' approval to commence consultation on the draft equality policy and objective. The report aims to inform members of the reasons why a new equality policy and objective(s) are required, and the approach taken to develop the draft versions.

Summary

2. Darlington Borough Council's current equality policy and objectives are due to be refreshed.
3. Whilst it is not statutory for the council to have an equality policy, it is considered best practice and demonstrates the council's commitment to meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The council is required to publish a minimum of one equality objective every 4 years.
4. Following a period of pre-consultation engagement with relevant local stakeholders, representing each of the recognised nine protected characteristics where possible, a new draft equality policy and objective(s) have been developed, incorporating the feedback and recommendations collected during this engagement period.
5. There was broad agreement from those stakeholders engaged with during the pre-consultation that the draft policy and objective(s) are a positive approach that demonstrate real commitment to the equalities agenda.

Recommendation

6. Cabinet is asked consider and agree the content of the draft equality policy and objective 2017-21 (**Appendix B**) for consultation

Reasons

7. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The Council needs to meet the PSED, as set out within the Equality Act 2010.
 - (b) Publishing an equality policy containing the council's equality objective(s) is the most efficient and effective way of complying with the PSED.

Ada Burns
Chief Executive

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Natasha Telfer: Extension 6083

S17 Crime and Disorder	The draft equality policy and objective(s) seek to support social cohesion and therefore reduce the risk of related crime and disorder, such as hate crime.
Health and Well Being	The draft policy and objective(s) seek to support equality of access to service delivered and commissioned by the council.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	The draft policy and objective(s) seek to spread best practice regarding diversity, across all protected characteristics. The draft objective(s) also support increasing the diversity of the council workforce and ensuring that officers have increased awareness of the importance of, and issues concerning, equality and diversity.
Wards Affected	There are no wards identified as being particularly impacted upon as a result of this decision.
Groups Affected	All residents of the borough will be consulted, with specific focus being given to those individuals with a protected characteristic.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The draft policy and objective(s) support delivery of the priorities set out in One Darlington Perfectly Placed by providing a framework to ensure decision-making is fair and transparent.
Efficiency	The draft policy and objective(s) seek to ensure that the approach to equalities is proportionate and efficient whilst meeting legal requirements and reducing the risk of legal challenge.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no direct impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington Borough Council is required to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as established by the Equality Act 2010.
9. Legal compliance with the PSED is reinforced by specific duties that support and aid the general duty. The specific duties that the council must comply with are:
 - (a) To publish and prepare one or more equality objective(s) a minimum of once every four years, and
 - (b) To publish information annually known as equality analysis.
10. Producing and publishing a specific equality policy is not a legal requirement under the general duty, however it is considered best practice. The policy gives visibility and affirms the council's commitment to equality and in promoting compliance with the public sector equality duty. It also helps set out the council's approach and its equality objective(s).
11. The current equality scheme is an integral part of the council's wider commitment, as outlined in One Darlington Perfectly Placed, to tackle inequality and narrow the gaps in health, attainment, prosperity and quality of life.
12. Darlington Borough Council's corporate equality policy needs to be refreshed and updated, in order to ensure compliance with the public sector equality duty and to promote the vision of One Darlington Perfectly Placed.
13. The council is required by law to have at least one equalities objective. Four objectives were included in the current scheme and these need to be reviewed.

Work undertaken to date

14. A draft equality policy and objective(s) for 2017-21, based on the current versions but taking into account the significantly reduced resource available to dedicate to equalities compared to when the original policy was produced in 2012, were compiled by Legal services.
15. A pre-consultation period of stakeholder engagement on the content of draft policy produced by Legal services has been undertaken in order to:
 - (a) secure support and buy-in to the development of a new equality policy and objective(s) and, eventually, the ongoing implementation of the policy
 - (b) review and strengthen the proposed objective(s).
16. A report detailing findings and recommendations resulting from this engagement is appended to this report at **Appendix A**.

17. Feedback gathered from stakeholders has been used to update the draft equality policy and objective. This version, which is recommended for consultation, is appended to this report at **Appendix B**.
18. A report outlining the results of a mapping and scoping exercise undertaken by officers into the issues raised during the pre-consultation stakeholder engagement is appended to this report at **Appendix C**.

Proposed Approach for Consultation

19. Subject to members' approval, it is proposed that public consultation on the draft equality policy and objective 2017-21, run for six weeks (8th November 2017 – 3rd January 2018).
20. Following consideration of this report by Cabinet, consultation with Scrutiny Committee Members on the details of the draft equality policy and objective 2017-21 will be undertaken via the normal Scrutiny process.

Financial Implications

21. The financial implications of the draft equality policy is estimated to be in the region of £2,500, to deliver a small number of specialist workshops for key staff and Members and to produce training materials for the wider workforce.

Legal Implications

22. The council needs to meet the PSED, as set out within the Equality Act 2010. As part of meeting this duty, the council must publish a minimum of one equality duty every four years.

Equalities considerations

23. Engagement with stakeholders representing the majority of the nine protected characteristics has been undertaken during the pre-consultation period. Whilst it has not been possible to meet with all protected characteristic groups, and therefore obtain their feedback on the draft policy, further engagement will be sought during the formal consultation period.
24. The aim of the revised equality policy and objective(s) is to enable the council to meet the requirements of the PSED within the Equality Act 2010. Formal consultation on the draft policy and objective(s) will ensure the final versions are fully reflective of local views and priorities, and that development of the policy is undertaken in a fair and transparent way.

Conclusion

25. The council's equality policy and objectives are due to be refreshed. An updated version of both, incorporating feedback from local key stakeholders, has been produced and, to ensure compliance with the PSED, it is recommended Cabinet approve the commencement of a public consultation period on this draft equality policy and objective(s).