

Recommendation from Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26 November 2019

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which set out Dorset Council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion. It contained the Council's equality objectives which would ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and specifically the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Members noted that when the Council was established on 1 April 2019 Dorset County Council's policy had been adopted until such time as a policy for the new Council could be developed. Work on the new policy had started in January 2019 and this had included consultation involving HR, the Trade Unions and the Stonewall Charity. A workshop with the Trade Unions had been held on 5 November 2019 and a deadline for comments had been extended to 27 November 2019 at their request. An action plan to deliver the equality objectives was being developed and the Eqla had been completed and was in the process of being signed off. The process was being overseen by an Executive Advisory Panel chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Development and Change. Members' feedback was sought with a view to the policy being recommended for adoption by the Cabinet in December 2019. The Portfolio Holder had suggested that the sentence "the council ,,, policies" in paragraph 9.1 be replaced by "The policy will be reviewed on a regular basis by the relevant portfolio holder and will be taken through the committee process every three years to ensure that it reflects the latest legalisation, best practice and other council policies."

A number of questions were raised about the policy. In response it was noted that the only major difference between the previous Sovereign Councils' policies and the new policy was the inclusion of procurement and social value; undertaking Eqlas would help to understand impacts on different groups and the potential to mitigate these impacts; protected characteristics included learning disability, mental health, long term health conditions (over 12 months) and did not necessarily mean that the person was disabled; the additional characteristics identified in paragraph 4.8 of the policy would be considered as part of the decision making process; local characteristics were identified through demographics, discussions with Stonewall and talking to communities; there was a need to be able to engage with people, not necessarily through traditional methods; some of the local characteristics were national, not just local to Dorset; when services were being commissioned, it was the Council's duty to ensure that companies tendering adhered to equality duties and signed up to the Council's policies which was monitored through contract management; equality and diversity training should be mandatory for staff in order to ensure adherence and implementation of the policy; key performance indicators (KPI) were being developed and Stonewall would feedback on our results in participating in the Workplace Equality Index which could inform the work on KPIs; there was a need for the Council to improve data collection with regard to reasons for leaving the Council's employ, staff grievances and disciplinaries and this was included in action plan; staff support was available for those being harassed whilst undertaking their duties and for those wishing to take this further; and part of the EAP's task was to identify training for members and staff using various mediums.

Members also suggested that an annual report on statistics might be useful, including complaints against the Council and accolades.

Details of membership of the EAP were given and members asked for sight of the minutes of the first meeting held in September 2019.

It was noted that the completed Eqla would be presented at a future meeting.

With regard to recommendations to Cabinet, members agreed with the Portfolio Holder's amendment; suggested that the term "local characteristics" within the policy be changed to "Dorset Council's protected characteristics" and that a minimum of one key performance indicator be developed for equality and diversity once the Council Plan was finalised.

Resolved

1. That the minutes of the Executive Advisory Panel meeting held in September 2019 be emailed to members.
2. That the completed Eqla be presented to a future meeting.

Recommended

That the Cabinet adopt the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy subject to the following:-

- (a) That the sentence "the council ,, policies" in paragraph 9.1 be replaced by "The policy will be reviewed on a regular basis by the relevant portfolio holder and will be taken through the committee process every three years to ensure that it reflects the latest legalisation, best practice and other council policies."
- (b) That the term "local characteristics" be changed to "Dorset Council's protected characteristics".
- (c) That a minimum of one key performance indicator be developed for equality and diversity once the Council Plan was finalised.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy would ensure that the Council was delivering services fairly and meeting the needs of Dorset communities whilst also being a fair and inclusive employer.
2. The policy would ensure that the Council was meeting its statutory duties as contained in the Equality Act 2010.