

## **Appendix E. Revised Equality Objectives and Progress Update**

Over the past 12 months, we have made significant progress towards strengthening the Council's approach to equalities, recruiting a new Equalities and Community Engagement Officer, who came into post in May. This work has focused on developing an updated set of equality objectives and strengthening our equality impact assessment process. Together, these help to strengthen and embed the importance of equalities as a key consideration in our decision making and in how we work with and for our residents. We present a summary of these key pieces of work here as we start to implement them across the organisation.

### **Equality Objectives**

A final update of the 2018-2022 equality objectives was undertaken, with input from the relevant service areas. A number of the previous objectives, particularly those around EQIAs, engagement and the workforce, either relate to ongoing projects or have continuing relevance and so have rolled over to the new objectives. Confirmation has been received from the service areas involved that the remaining objectives have been completed and none have been left unresolved.

The development of the new objectives drew upon the previous objectives; the LGA's Equality Framework; the Corporate Plan; discussion with colleagues across the Council; and engagement with residents and community organisations.

Five overarching objectives were defined, drawing largely on the structure of the LGA's Equality Framework, as follows:

- Investigating and engaging
- Cultural and organisational change
- Integrating equalities into service delivery
- Reducing inequalities within the borough
- Workforce diversity and inclusion

Within each objective, specific 'activities' have been identified to enable us to monitor our progress towards that objective and to ensure that the Council can be held accountable on its commitment to equality. The progress on the objectives and their associated activities will be reviewed on at least an annual basis.

One activity under Objective 2 seeks to establish clear political and officer leadership on equalities, in part through creating a greater role for the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Panel with the equalities agenda. This activity commits to providing members of the Panel with briefings on key equalities issues and activities so that they have an opportunity to raise issues which would benefit from further scrutiny, and creates another mechanism by which the Council's improvements in the area of equality can be monitored and driven forwards.

Another of the activities, which has been carried over from the previous set of equality objectives is the improvement of RBWM's equality impact assessments. Further information on this piece of work is provided below.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge identified a need to improve RBWM's use of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs). EQIAs are critical to our ability to fulfil our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty and to ensure that our policies and decisions take into account the diverse needs of the Borough's residents. To this end, a review was carried out of the RBWM EQIA template and process and the following actions were undertaken.

The improvements made to EQIAs comprise:

1. Changes to the EQIA process
2. Improvements to the EQIA template
3. Introduction of a bespoke template for budget papers
4. Creation of an equalities evidence matrix
5. Development of training and support materials

### **1. Changes to the EQIA process**

Completed EQIAs are now added as appendices to the relevant reports and published as part of the report, rather than being published separately on our website. This change has made the process more efficient and places the EQIA within its appropriate context.

The process of equality impact assessment would benefit from being carried out at an earlier stage within the development of policies/plans/strategies than is often the case, so that there is a greater potential for the assessments to feed into the development process and serve a greater function as a decision-making tool. The EQIA review has taken place alongside a process to rationalise and streamline the creation of strategies within the council. This has provided a valuable opportunity to embed the practice of conducting EQIAs at an earlier and more appropriate stage.

### **2. Improvements to the EQIA template**

A new EQIA template has been created, which is designed to be more user-friendly and encourage more in depth and better quality assessments. The development of this template was informed by a review of the templates used by other local authorities; by engagement with equality leads at other local councils; and by discussion with colleagues in service areas including Public Health and Procurement.

The revised form is accompanied by an extended guidance document, which acts both as a step-by-step guide to completing an EQIA and an explanation of the importance of EQIAs within the wider equality duty of the Council.

### **3. Introduction of a bespoke template for budget papers**

The budget-setting process has specific challenges and demands for the equality impact assessment process, due to the volume of proposals; the potential for cumulative impact; and the importance of effective EQIAs in supporting and justifying the decisions being made. In collaboration with colleagues in Finance, a

bespoke EQIA template was created for budget savings proposals, allowing multiple proposals with a shared 'theme' to be assessed on a single form and using a condensed version of the new template. This makes the process more efficient and provides more meaningful context for individual proposals.

#### **4. Creation of an equalities evidence matrix**

In order to support and promote the use of EQIAs as an evidence-based decision-making tool, an 'Equalities Evidence Matrix' has been created. This allows users to explore the intersections between the protected characteristics and various service areas and topics. The matrix highlights the main equalities considerations that need to be taken into account and provides key data and statistics which can be incorporated into an EQIA. There have been opportunities for individual services to contribute service level data into the matrix. This has provided a valuable local perspective, as well as identifying areas where the collection and monitoring of equalities data could be strengthened.

#### **5. Development of training and support materials**

The introduction of an updated template, a new evidence matrix and an adjusted process will be accompanied by supporting training materials one one-to-one assistance. The guidance document is intended to provide some of this information and support. In addition, opportunities will be sought to promote the new EQIA at service team meetings and through internal communications such as the Borough Bulletin.

The EQIA review process has highlighted the need for training and guidance for those reading and reviewing EQIAs, as well as for those who contribute to and complete the assessments themselves. Training materials will therefore be developed for elected Members, to support their understanding of the purpose and significance of EQIAs within Cabinet and committee reports.

## Equality Objectives

### **Objective 1: Investigate and strengthen our understanding of the nature of inequality, disadvantage, and discrimination in RBWM**

*Outcome: A stronger understanding of the nature of equality, disadvantage, and discrimination in RBWM*

#### **1.1 Activities: Strengthen the council's insights and evidence on inequalities and disadvantage**

- Develop a stronger, cross-council evidence base on inequality and disadvantage in the borough through Phase 1 of the Inequalities Project.
- Analyse and use information from census, the Residents Survey, to strengthen our understanding of the nature and impact of inequalities.
- Strengthen performance measures on equalities within the Corporate Plan and across Service Plans and contract monitoring.

#### **1.2 Activities: Strengthen relationships with diverse groups in our communities, and specifically those with, or representing those with, protected characteristics**

- Build and maintain relationships with groups who reflect the diversity of the community and represent the protected characteristics, including the Disability and Inclusion Forum, the Older Persons' Advisory Forum, KickBack and the interfaith WAM Community Forum.
- Develop a better understanding of the diversity of local faiths and cultures and take advantage of festivals, awareness events and celebration days to celebrate that diversity through external communications and engagement.
- Continue to empower and engage with the community through the Embedding Community Response programme and initiatives such as the World Cafés.

#### **1.3 Activities: Ensure engagement activities are inclusive and provide opportunities for community involvement in decision making**

- Support the identification of appropriate stakeholders to contribute to engagement activities that seek to improve equality and inclusion.
- Develop an engagement framework which can be used by RBWM staff to understand the different levels of engagement (i.e. informing, consulting, participating, co-producing) and identify opportunities for community engagement and participation.
- Undertake effective and mutually beneficial engagement activities, with a focus on ensuring that those with protected characteristics and from under-represented communities are encouraged to participate and have their voices heard.
- Communicate information in an inclusive way, taking account of the language and format preferences/needs of different groups

**Objective 2: Acknowledge and respond to the equality impacts of our emerging proposals and seek to mitigate any adverse impacts where possible, whilst maximising positive impacts**

*Outcome: An organisation focused on reducing inequalities*

**2.1 Activities: Embed a greater awareness of equalities across the organisation**

- Promote an evidence-based narrative around inequalities in RBWM and raise the profile of equalities work
- Engage with colleagues and partners to share insights gained from inequalities data gathering and communicate where findings have relevance for a certain service and area of work.

**2.2 Activities: Improve the consistency and quality of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) to influence and support decision-making**

- Develop comprehensive guidance in relation to EqIA development, including training and support for officers and elected members
- Improve the use of evidence to support EqIAs through an Equalities Evidence Matrix and targeted support to services to ensure equality impacts are assessed and reflected in key decisions
- Ensure that appropriate action plans are developed in cases where EqIAs identify negative equality impacts and monitor the delivery of these mitigating actions
- Review and improve the efficiency of the EqIA development process by grouping relevant papers under a single EqIA, particularly those relating to the budget
- Embed EqIAs into the early development of policies, strategies and related projects to improve their potential impact on decision-making
- Promote the use of EqIAs as iterative documents which should be reviewed and updated over the course of the development and delivery of a policy/strategy/project
- Include 'Children in care/Care leavers' alongside other protected characteristics, in recognition of the council's responsibilities as Corporate Parent

**2.3 Activities: Establish clear political and officer leadership on equalities**

- Elected members demonstrate personal knowledge and understanding of local communities and demonstrate a public commitment to reducing inequality, fostering good community relations and challenging discrimination.
- Provide briefings and reports to councillors, including the Corporate Oversight and Scrutiny Panel, on key equalities issues and activities
- Mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion training is provided for elected members as part of new member induction and on an ongoing annual basis.
- Support members to be more effective in their ward work and aware of the diversity of the communities they represent
- Mandatory attendance on KickBack's Total Respect Training for members of the Corporate Parenting Forum, and attendance encouraged for other officers and Members as part of their role as a Corporate Parent

### **Objective 3: Integrate equality considerations into planning and procurement processes, in order to deliver services effectively for all communities**

*Outcome: A council which delivers services effectively for all its communities*

#### **3.1 Activities: Ensure that the accessibility of physical and digital spaces and resources is considered in the planning and delivery of policies and services**

- Ensure that digital and printed resources continue to meet accessibility requirements
- Consider the impact of the digitisation of key resources and services and aim to mitigate any negative or exclusionary impacts
- Ensure that the Report It tool is effective and inclusive for reporting accessibility issues
- Develop a Customer Strategy which serves all members of our diverse community

#### **3.2 Activities: Strengthen the incorporation of equality considerations within the development of KPIs as part of the pre-procurement process**

- Use EqIAs consistently within pre-procurement to ensure that any equality considerations are identified at an early stage
- Ensure that appropriate KPIs are developed and monitored, where potential equality impacts have been identified
- Encourage ongoing monitoring of recruitment-related equality considerations by suppliers and partners

#### **3.3 Activities: Integrate equality objectives into planned service outcomes**

- Integrate equality objectives into organisational strategies and plans, including the Corporate Plan and its associated goals
- Demonstrate evidence of a link between equality objectives, business planning and performance management
- Service plans monitored to ensure equality objectives are met, with action taken if risks to achievement are identified

#### **3.4 Activities: Develop a stronger, community-based approach to prevent and reduce inequalities**

- Strengthen our approach to preventing and reducing inequalities through community-based solutions as identified in Phase 2 of the Inequalities Project

## **Objective 4: Reduce inequalities within the borough**

*Outcome: A reduction in inequalities within the borough, focused particularly upon the following priorities which are also goals within the Corporate Plan:*

### **4.1 Activities: An increase in the proportion of women and girls who feel safe in the borough, including through a safe, thriving night-time economy (Existing Corporate Plan goal)**

- Continue the White Ribbon communication campaign and/or work towards White Ribbon accreditation
- Use Residents Survey data to assess women and girls' perception of safety in their local area

### **4.2 Activities: An increase in the attainment ranking for children in care, SEND and children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) in GCSE English and Maths (Existing Corporate Plan goal)**

- Increase the number of children in care, SEND and children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieving Grade 4 English and Maths at GCSE. 2022 data will be used to set the baseline

### **4.3 Activities: More people with learning disabilities live in their own homes or with their families, increasing the proportion by 10 percent points by 2025 (Existing Corporate Plan goal)**

- Increase the percentage of working age learning disabled clients who are living in their own home to 82.4% by 2025 (from a baseline of 72.4% in March 2020)
- Improve outcomes for adults with a learning disability in settled accommodation by improving their safety, reducing their risk of social exclusion and promoting a positive experience of social care

### **4.4 Activities: Help to reduce the impact of cost of living rises on our residents, with a focus on those most at risk, through targeted financial and practical support (New Corporate Plan goal)**

- Key activities under this goal will include:
  - Delivery of a range of central government grants, including Energy and Council Tax rebates
  - Here to Help campaign
  - Household Support Fund delivery – partnership approach
  - Warm Spaces Network
  - Forthcoming work on budgeting skills through the Multiply Fund
- Incorporate socio-economic considerations into EqIAs alongside protected characteristics

#### **4.5 Activities: Embed accessibility into the planning and design of our streetscape, buildings and public spaces (New Corporate Plan goal)**

- Engage with communities most likely to experience accessibility issues, specifically people with long term conditions, disabilities and age-related mobility problems, to identify priorities and establish where accessibility improvements have the greatest impact
- Identify an annual allocation of capital funding to be spent on accessibility priorities, based on analysis of need.
- Reviewing public transport accessibility as part of the new Local Transport Plan
- Incorporate an engagement step into the capital design process, giving the Disability and Inclusion Forum the opportunity to provide feedback on accessibility at the planning stage
- Seek to expand the AccessAble online accessibility guide to Maidenhead town centre, and reviewing the provision of changing places.

#### **4.6 Activities: Ensure that every child in the borough is able to experience positive outcomes in childhood, through healthy living, readiness to learn, and positive parenting, and support targeted at those most at risk (New Corporate Plan goal)**

- Key activities and metrics are set out in the new Children and Young People's Plan and will include:
  - Improve school readiness in disadvantaged children, particularly those who are eligible for Free School Meals
  - Reduce differences between wards/communities in the proportion of children who are overweight or obese.



**Objective 5: Recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve and ensure our people feel valued and respected**

*Outcome: A diverse workforce, reflective of the communities we serve, in which all colleagues feel equally valued and respected*

**5.1 Activities: Continue to encourage and welcome increasing numbers of job applications from candidates with disabilities, who are care leavers, and from the Armed Forces community**

- Continue to encourage and welcome job applications from disabled candidates using the Disability Confident Scheme (current accreditation runs until October 2025), which guarantees disabled applicants who meet the minimum job criteria an interview.
- Provide support and opportunities to ex-military and reservists, as holders of the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award
- Provide training and employment opportunities to Borough care leavers in our capacity as Corporate Parent

**5.2 Activities: Seek to understand the needs of employees with protected characteristics through engagement with employee networks and data gathering through staff surveys and personal diversity records**

- Continue to support the Council's organisational intelligence capability in relation to protected characteristics data through the update of records of existing employee (which recently saw an 89% response rate) and through information collected about protected characteristics from job applicants as part of the Applicant Tracking System (ATS)
- Improve the number of staff who provide information about their ethnicity and religion. The workforce profile for 21/22 identified that there has been a slight increase in the number of staff who prefer not to provide this information.
- Continue to work with the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion staff network to promote a culture of inclusion and to develop wellbeing support relevant to our workforce.

**5.3 Activities: Deliver a range of measures to improve opportunities for those who want to combine work with family or caring responsibilities**

- Continue to offer a wide range of flexible working options including a flexi-time scheme, part-time working, term-time only working, nine-day fortnights, remote working, and flexible retirement. Since March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the majority of the workforce working from home and therefore flexibility and employee wellbeing has been at the forefront of supporting all our staff but particularly those with caring responsibilities.
- Continue to support employees who are Foster Carers through additional paid leave and to support families with military connections as an employer holding a Gold Award of the Armed Forces Covenant.

- Maintain the ‘family friendly’ policies which are part of the Members Allowances scheme, including a Dependants’ Carer’s Allowance, and maternity, adoption and paternity leave.

#### **5.4 Activities: Commit to becoming an anti-racist organisation**

- Create an environment where all members of staff feel able to be their authentic selves in the workplace
- Explore the use of Reverse Mentoring as a means of promoting awareness of diversity and equality issues with senior management
- Strengthen the requirement to ensure diversity in all recruitment panels
- Review employee-related policies and procedures to ensure they contain no bias or discrimination
- Review corporate policies and decisions through an anti-racist lens using tools such as Equality Impact Assessments