

## **SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME**

**Cabinet Members:** Cllrs Nikki Woollatt and Dennis Knowles  
**Responsible Officer:** Catherine Yandle, Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security

**Reason for Report:** To remind Members of the Council's statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010, and to seek Members' approval for the revised Single Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** That Members recommend to Cabinet that they approve the Single Equality Scheme together with the Equality Objectives for 2021-22.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** The Equality Objectives reflect Corporate Plan aims under the Community and Corporate priorities. The new proposed equality objective is a specific 2020-224 Corporate Plan aim.

**Financial Implications:** The Single Equality Scheme does not have any financial implications itself beyond those identified in individual service's equality impact assessments.

**Legal Implications:** Not complying with the Council's statutory duties with regard to equality could open the Council to legal challenge.

**Risk Assessment:** Approving the Single Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives reduces the risk of legal challenge.

**Equality Impact Assessment:** Equality issues are the subject of this report.

**Impact on Climate Change:** No impacts identified for this report.

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 local authorities have a duty to have 'due regard' to:

Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;

Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

1.2 The way a local authority shows it has 'due regard' is by evidencing how the Single Equality Scheme indicates how this should be done. (Appendix A attached).

- 1.3 Case law over the last few years has clarified that considerations of equality should not only be placed at the centre of policy development but that bodies subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty, of which we are one, must apply this duty to the carrying out of any functions of a public body not just statutory functions.
- 1.4 Local authorities also have specific duties under the Act to publish Equality Information annually and 'Equality Objectives' at least every four years. The Equality Information is available on the Mid Devon District Council website Equality pages.
- 1.5 The Single Equality Scheme is relevant to staff, Members and the wider community.

## **2.0 Equality Objectives and Progress this year**

- 2.1 The Council's 'Equality Objective' set 2 years ago was to review the work, and work towards the revival, of the Corporate Equality Forum.
- 2.2 This year we have had 3 meetings of the Equality Forum, 2 remotely, with staff and 3 Councillors, and would look to extend the group to external interested parties, when the Covid situation allows, in 2021/22.
- 2.3 At the November meeting of the Community PDG a working group was set up to look at the Communications and Engagement Strategy before it was formally presented to the PDG. One of the reasons for this was that it would help pick up the request in Motion 564 brought to the Council meeting on 28 October which asked that the Community PDG identify and discuss approaches to reaching hard-to-reach communities in Mid Devon.
- 2.4 An additional equality objective set last year was to look in more depth at mental health issues again, in view of the pandemic, there has been little progress particularly in the community. However the Housing Service, with the help of Leisure staff, have had over 2,000 contacts with vulnerable customers.
- 2.5 One of the suggestions at the Equality Forum in December 2020 was that in response to the remote and flexible working impacts on staff and Members the Council needs to get plans and reassurance in place for the eventual return to office. This will be pursued with Human Resources and the Council's Health and Safety Officer.
- 2.6 Regular articles have been posted in The Link regarding wellbeing and mental health since June and good feedback was received regarding staff support via a survey conducted early in the pandemic.
- 2.7 Internal Audit is in the process of completing an audit on safe operations for staff during the Covid-19 emergency which included support for staff. They did a survey too which had 110 responses and they are now beginning to analyse the results but early results are encouraging.
- 2.8 Another suggestion from the Equality Forum was to add an Equality Objective re digital connectivity/accessibility. This is a Corporate Plan aim, an identified

priority in the Single Equality Scheme and its importance has been highlighted by the pandemic.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

3.1 That the Community PDG recommends to Cabinet that they approve the Single Equality Scheme together with the Equality Objectives for 2021-22.

3.2 The two Equality Objectives being:

1. To continue to concentrate on mental health issues within MDDC and the wider community.
2. Secure decent digital connectivity for all of Mid Devon (Corporate Plan aim).

**Contact for more Information:** Catherine Yandle, Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security

**Circulation of the Report:** Members of Community PDG, Cabinet Members, Leadership Team