

# ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

## OVERVIEW SELECT COMMITTEE

23 MARCH 2021

### PART A : REPORT

<b>SUBJECT:</b> Equalities & Diversity Update
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<b>EXTN:</b> 37580
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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Arun is a diverse district containing a wide mix of ages, abilities, ethnicities and people with many other different characteristics. This report sets out an overview of what Arun District Council has in place to create and sustain an inclusive environment where equality of treatment and opportunity for employees, potential employees, users of Council services and those wish to access council services is both accepted and expected.

#### 1 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) That a consultant is appointed to carry out an in-depth Equality and Diversity Survey and advise on a best practice action plan for the Council
- b) That the Group Head of Policy be given delegated powers to appoint this resource within the available budget
- c) That the Council takes full account of Equalities and Diversity in the development of the new Corporate Plan 2022- 2027

#### 2 BACKGROUND:

Equalities and diversity is a very wide and important area for the Council which should be taken into account and fundamental in everything we do. For ease of understanding the report has been split into a number of sections and includes links to a number of key documents which members can also refer to. The Council's Equalities and Diversity Policy can be found on our website at [Equality & Diversity | Arun District Council](#) along with the other documents and covers corporate governance, employment, access to services and partnerships and contractors. The Policy will be updated as part of the proposed Equalities and Diversity review.

All Councillors and employees are responsible for Equalities and Diversity

## **Equality Legislation**

The equality framework for Local Government is enshrined in two key documents, these are the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Equality Act 2010 sets out the nine legally protected characteristics which are: age, disability, gender and gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. This Act challenges organisations to understand how these characteristics and the relationship between them, explains difficulties and opportunities arising from the diversity of local areas. Organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The full text of these documents can be found on our website.

Although not covered by legislation there are clearly many other characteristics that we must consider when providing local services which help us to understand the differences in outcomes and opportunities experienced by people in different communities in key areas of life such as health, education, community safety, housing, access to work and so on. Socio-economic status will also affect life chances

## **Corporate Governance**

The Public Sector Equality Duty sets out six principles which public sector organisations should comply with. They are that:

- Decision makers must be made aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the identified goals.  
*(including members as the ultimate decision makers for the Council).*
- The due regard duty must be fulfilled before and at the time that a particular policy is being considered by the public authority in question.  
*(The decision cannot be justified after it has been taken).*
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind.
- The duty imposed on public authorities ... is a non-delegable duty.
- The duty is a continuing one.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions in public authorities to keep an adequate record showing that they had actually considered their ... duties and pondered relevant questions.

A consideration of any existing, or potential equality issues is a starting point for all Council policies and decisions and, in some cases, an Equality Impact Assessment can

also be utilised. As members know the standard committee report template includes a line under section 5 covering human rights and equalities, although the expectation is that services consider equalities issues at a very early stage as an integral part of any service planning and decision making however minor. Even where a formal Equality Impact Assessment is not considered to be necessary there is an expectation that authorities can demonstrate that equalities issues have been taken into account. Officers should be mindful of this when reporting.

## **Employment**

From the start of the employment relationship at recruitment stage there is a focus on fairness. This includes:

- Recruitment adverts that include the opportunity to work flexibly
- In-house recruitment training that covers discrimination
- The introduction of an applicant tracking system that removes personal data from the shortlisting process
- Streamlining our recruitment process and advertising mediums to assist in attracting younger applicants
- A fundamental review of posts requiring criminal records checks

There is regular training for all staff including :

- Mandatory equalities training for all staff.
- E-learning equalities training for all new starters.
- Career coaching services available to staff and offered to staff returning from maternity leave
- Introduction of work experience for existing staff to encourage women in particular to consider career changes
- Confidence training for all staff but aimed at women in particular
- Opportunities for long distance or online training for staff with caring responsibilities
- Many training opportunities to ensure that our services are as accessible as possible to the widest range of service users, covering such areas as mental health awareness, specialist communication skills etc

Annual monitoring of employment takes place and the report for 2019-20 gives a very clear analysis of recruitment and the overall staff profile:  
<https://www.arun.gov.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjm4n15926.docx&ver=16437>

In addition to this a staff survey identifying the barriers to employment and progression at Arun District Council was completed in 2017/18

Robust and transparent employment policies are key to supporting the organisation and the main ones are Dignity at Work, Flexible Working, a number of family friendly policies. These are all on the Equalities page on the website.

## **Member Training**

Equalities training is provided regularly for members. Most recently there was an induction session which all members were invited to, following local elections in 2019. There was a further, very well received training session in early in 2020, which mirrored compulsory sessions held for staff, although this was not compulsory for members.

## **Service Delivery**

Wherever possible communications and service delivery should be conducted in a way that meets service users needs. This report does not cover the detail of how individual services achieve this, but describes a number of corporate approaches / strategies which should be shared by all services, now and as we move forward. Two of the most important of these in the context of equalities are the Digital Strategy and the Customer Services Strategy

The approach to equalities set out in the Digital Strategy includes a new website:

- Website accessibility falls under the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 and applies to all public sector websites - we are working towards this, although still have issues with the volume of work involved in converting all our PDF files to a fully accessible format.
- An accessible website can help people with disabilities participate more actively, improve their life experience and promote greater inclusion. The new Arun website will be accessible for as many customers as possible including those with vision, hearing, motor and cognitive issues. This is due to go live in Summer 2021
- Text on the website is being re-written so that it is easier / clearer to read and more understandable for different reading audiences, we are optimising colour contrasts for those with visual impairments, making improvements to support screen readers better and ensuring the browsing experience is good no matter what type of device is being used.
- We are also building new digital services such as the planning notification service and electronic newsletters and these are based on best practice and user research carried out by Government Digital Services (GDS) Team who test the components via user personas with different needs.
- Webchat has been implemented on the main website for those users that are unable to access services through visiting us and where using the phone is difficult.

We also work with AccessAble to provide online access guides via our website, including detailed access guides for venues in the Arun District and detailed guided maps for popular pedestrian routes.

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/arundel-bognor-regis-and-littlehampton>

The Customer Services Strategy is due to go to Cabinet on 22 March 2021. The Vision and Aims include a number of statements which explicitly support our accessibility aims for customers:

- encouraging all our staff to 'think customer' before acting
- invest in training for our staff to understand how to deliver the best customer care
- being committed to treating people fairly, to respect privacy and dignity and to pay attention to people who need more support
- continue to develop online services which are easy to access using any device, quick to use and available whenever they are needed
- asking customers for their feedback and use this feedback to improve our services
- promote self-reliance whilst continuing to support those that need our help.
- consult with focus groups to understand and accommodate access needs and assist with adapting our services wellbeing of people in the district.

The strategy also recognises issues around digital exclusion and that we must allow for people who don't have access to the internet at home, and which may mean that they can't access our information and services online. Where needed we will help people who don't have access to the internet by providing support to use it at venues across the District including assisted self-serve.

As a result of the pandemic, there have also been positive developments in terms of community engagement. In addition to work we already do within the community, the pandemic gave all local authorities, working in conjunction with other organisations, a much greater incentive and financial support to actively seek out and work with a number of hard to reach groups in our community. It is hoped that this will lead to more sustainable initiatives in the future.

### **Contractors**

We ensure that any company wanting to bid for Council services is a practitioner of good equality and diversity in both their employment and service delivery. We do this by asking equalities questions during the tender or bid process and if responses do not satisfy the Council's criteria, the firm may not be shortlisted or awarded a contract.

We also ensure compliance after the award, by including equality-based conditions in all contracts. As a minimum, suppliers or contractors must have an equal opportunities policy and keep it in force for the duration of the contract to comply with statutory obligations. We will also ensure that all contractors directly supplying goods and services or executing works for, or on behalf of, the Council comply with the terms of equality policy.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst it might seem to be an obvious statement, our employees really are our greatest resource and our employment and recruitment policies must reflect our commitment to equalities and best practice. The Council continues to monitor employment issues closely and make regular changes to policies as required legally or to improve the working environment and opportunities for staff and therefore the motivation and retention of those staff. The pandemic is likely to make flexibility a major factor in attracting and retaining staff who in many cases will be able to do their job virtually, so will no longer be tied to employers in a certain geographic location.

All of our services work hard individually to understand and engage with residents, customers and visitors and deliver responsive services. Although we believe we have a

good understanding of the issues facing our different communities we do not have the overview across all services which we need to be confident that we are meeting the needs of those communities. An in-depth review of Equalities and Diversity across all services will require external specialist resource. The Group Head of Corporate Services has confirmed that a budget of £10,000 will be available in 2021/2022 for this purpose.

## 2. PROPOSALS

- a) That a consultant is appointed carry out an in-depth Equality and Diversity Survey and advise on a best practice action plan for the Council
- b) That the Group Head of Policy be given delegated powers to appoint this resource within the available budget
- c) That the Council takes full account of Equalities and Diversity in the development of the new Corporate Plan 2022- 2027

## 3. OPTIONS

The Council does not have the internal resource to carry out a full Equalities and Diversity survey either in terms of officer time or specialist background. This is particularly important if we are to develop a meaningful action plan which meets our legal and best practice obligations. The appointment of a consultant is therefore the only practical way forward if members wish to proceed with this work.

## 4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		x
Relevant District Ward Councillors		x
Other groups/persons (please specify)		x
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial		x
Legal		x
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	x	
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		x
Sustainability		x
Asset Management/Property/Land		x
Technology		x
Safeguarding		x
Other (please explain)		x

**6. IMPLICATIONS:**

Arun District Council must ensure that its approach to Equalities & diversity is regularly reviewed and actions taken to remedy any shortfalls

**7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:**

To brief members on Arun's approach to Equalities and Diversity and identify future actions needed to move this forward

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Link to Equalities page on the Arun website [Equality & Diversity | Arun District Council](#)