

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
COUNCIL

**AGENDA
ITEM NO**

18 MARCH 2021

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Report Title	DRAFT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY AND EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2021 - 25
Purpose of Report	To approve the Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Equality Objectives for the period 2021 – 2025 for public consultation
Decision(s)	<p>Council RESOLVES to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Approve the Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Equality Objectives 2021 – 2025 for public consultation; b. Approve the formation of a permanent Equality Working Group with the appointment of Elected Members to the group at the Council’s AGM; and c. Require officers to report annually to Council on progress made against delivering the Equality Objectives and publish the report on the Council’s website.
Consultation and Feedback	<p>The Draft Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy and Equality Objectives have been developed in consultation with the Equality Working Group and Group Leaders have also been consulted.</p> <p>Neither the Equality Act 2010 nor the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 require the Council to consult on the Equality Objectives before they are published. However, it is proposed that a public consultation is undertaken for full transparency and to provide an opportunity for community engagement.</p>
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Options	1. Members could choose not to approve the draft policy to go out to consultation. At this stage, the policy is only in draft and as such, before a final version can be approved the views of residents, communities and stakeholders is considered to be necessary to ensure the policy is fit for purpose.
Background Papers	None

Appendices	Appendix A – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2021-2025 Appendix B – Equality Objectives and Action Plan Appendix C – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy Glossary Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment Appendix E – Equality Profile by Protected Characteristics			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy sets out the Council’s commitment to achieving the main aims of the Equality Act 2010 and to demonstrate how the Council, when carrying out its functions, will have due regard to the public sector equality duty and the need to:
- 1.1.1** Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the equality legislation;
 - 1.1.2** Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
 - 1.1.3** Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
- 1.2** A protected characteristic under the Act is any of the following: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 1.3** The Council’s EDI Policy was last updated in 2018 and to be compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty, the new draft EDI Policy will incorporate within it, the requirements to publish Equality Objectives which address the three aims of the Equality Duty.

2. DRAFT POLICY & EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

- 2.1** The draft Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (Appendix A) sets out our organisational commitment to equality and diversity and how it will be embedded across the Council. The Policy outlines the progress made during 2020/21 and the proposed Equality Objectives for 2021-25.
- 2.2** The Equality Objectives have been developed to reflect the Council as an employer, a service provider, a leader and a community facilitator. The three key objectives proposed are aligned to the strategic themes of the Equality Framework for Local Government which is a resource produced by the Local Government Association to help Councils think about how they can advance equality and eliminate discrimination.
- 2.3** The framework enables understanding of how well we know communities, our commitment to diversity, the services delivered, customer care and a skilled workforce.

2.4 The three key objectives proposed are:

Community	Listen and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Improve data collection, publish it often, and use it to make decisions that focus on the needs of all our communities. ➤ Ensure people are engaged, involved and consulted. ➤ Ensure our services are designed in an accessible and inclusive way.
Leadership & Organisational Commitment	Actively champion our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and tackle inequality together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Embed equality into our services and procurement in a meaningful way that uses feedback to improve. ➤ Quality check decisions that impact disadvantaged groups and compare them so we can make improvements.
Workforce	Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Equip our workforce, including our leadership to meet the needs of the community we serve. ➤ Take actions agreed in our Organisational Development Plan and resulting from equality workforce monitoring. ➤ Ensure that our employees feel equal and included and are not subject to any unfair disadvantage regardless of their background and/or characteristics.

2.5 The Equality Objectives are supported by an Action Plan for the period 2021 to 2022 (Appendix B) to aid implementation. The Action Plan and progress towards the Equality Objectives will be kept under review and progress will be reported to Council annually, at this time the actions will be adjusted as required for the following year in order for the Council to meet the Equality Objectives by 2025.

2.6 National evidence to date has identified a disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic for groupings including Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) communities, faith communities, younger people, older people, and people with disabilities. These groupings all fall within the Protected Characteristic groupings under the Equality Act 2010.

2.7 The Equality Objectives and Action Plan seek to address the inequalities emerging to date across a range of groupings and communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. EQUALITY WORKING GROUP

3.1 An Equality Working Group was established in September 2020. Membership includes elected members, officers from the HR, Policy & Governance, Customer Services and Youth Work teams.

3.2 The Working Group have met frequently over the past six months to review evidence and focus efforts on identifying actions to tackle inequalities. The primary aim of the Working

Group was to review the Council's current approach to equality and diversity and review the current Equality and Diversity Policy.

- 3.3** The Equality Working Group have completed this principal aim by producing the draft Policy and developing the Equality Objectives and Action Plan. The Working Group will now have a central role to play in scrutinising performance in delivering the Equality Objectives, embed equality across all council policies and services and ensuring engagement with our communities and workforce. For this important work to continue, it is proposed that elected members are appointed to the Equality Working Group after the May 2021 Elections at the Council's AGM.
- 3.4** Following the appointment of elected members at the Council's AGM, membership of the Working Group will also expand to include an officer from the Health and Wellbeing Team and the Terms of Reference will be revised.

4. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1** Acknowledging and embracing feedback prior to final approval is an important aspect of getting equality and diversity actions to be effective. Public consultation on the draft policy and objectives will be undertaken after the May 2021 Elections to ensure the opinions of our communities and residents are considered.
- 4.2** The consultation will be promoted using a range of methods including social media and the Council website. We will also consult with Parish and Town Councils, Community Hubs and with a variety of groups and boards which represent the range of protected characteristics within the district.
- 4.3** Following the public consultation, the final Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Equality Objectives 2021-25 will return to Council for approval.
- 4.4** Engagement and consultation on equality issues will continue to be developed with the Equality Working Group. In relation to employee engagement, work is underway to ensure that the newly formed staff equality networks through the appointment of Equality Champions are able to inform the Council's equality agenda and actions.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1** Stroud District Council is determined to advance equality for all by demonstrating its commitment to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across all council policies, programmes and services. The Council's proposed Equality Objectives and Action Plan set out how this commitment will be delivered.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

The Council's proposed Equality Objectives are currently anticipated to be delivered within the existing budgets for each service area and therefore create no additional financial implications for the council.

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6.2 Legal Implications

Approval of the publication of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives will ensure the Council is seeking to be compliant with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty provided by section 149 of that Act.

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6.3 Equality Implications

The Council has statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality. The Council also has a specific duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people. The Council's proposed EDI Policy and Equality Objectives help the Council to address the causes of inequality and promote fairness and inclusion across all its functions.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken (Appendix D).

6.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.