

SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME

Cabinet Members: Cllr Nikki Woollatt, Cabinet Member for Working Environment and Support Services

Responsible Officer: Matthew Page, Corporate Manager for People, Performance & Waste

Reason for Report: To provide Members with an update on action taken to help meet the Council's statutory duties under the Equality Act (2010).

RECOMMENDATION(S): That Members recommend to Cabinet that they approve the Single Equality Scheme together with the Equality Objectives for 2023/24.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Equality Objectives reflect Corporate Plan aims under the Community and Corporate priorities.

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: The Single Equality scheme contributes to the Council's complying with the Equality Act (2010). Failure to adopt Equality Objectives or to collect relevant data could lead to the Council being in breach of the Equality Act 2010.

Risk Assessment: Approving the Single Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives helps to ensure the council meets its legal responsibilities in relation to equality.

Equality Impact Assessment: The adoption and monitoring of Equality Objectives helps to ensure that the needs of all protected groups are taken into account in service delivery.

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

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Equality Act (2010) replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with the aim of simplifying the law and removing inconsistencies. The Act places a requirement on public bodies to demonstrate compliance with each part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

1.2 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.

- 1.3 Underpinning the General Duties are Specific Duties which require public authorities to:
- Publish information that demonstrates how the authority is meeting the General Duty (updating this at least annually).
 - Publish one or more specific and measurable objectives to achieve the General Duty (updating these at least every four years).
 - Publish the information and objectives in an accessible way, so that the public can see for themselves how the authority is performing.
- 1.4 'Information' includes that relating to the protected characteristics of employees and other people affected by policies and practices:
- Workforce profiles (this can include data about recruitment, training, promotion, flexible working, maternity returners, grievance/issues, dismissal, leavers, service, pay, satisfaction, Members). Only applies where the organisation has more than 150 employees.
 - Service user/community profiles (this can include information about outcomes such as health, safety and wellbeing, achievement such as skills and education, access to services, satisfaction, complaints, feedback, demographics).
- 1.5 Case law 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 must apply this duty to the carrying out of any functions of a public body not just statutory functions.
- 1.6 Local authorities also have specific duties under the Act to publish Equality Information annually and 'Equality Objectives' at least every four years. All such information is either included in this report or signposted to. The council's [Equality webpages](#) will be updated in 2023/24 to better promote this information.
- 1.7 The Single Equality Scheme has been reviewed and updated by officers (Appendix 1). This is a detailed policy document which sets out the council's approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. This document has been revised and updated for 2023/24. Significant changes have been made to Section 3 "Understanding Our Community" given the most recent data releases at a district level from the Census 2021.
- 1.8 Mid Devon District Council is a member of the [Devon Joint Declaration for Equality](#). The declaration demonstrates our commitment to the achievement of equality and fairness for all people in the county and our district and recognises the importance and benefits of an equal society and will behave in ways that reflect an equal society.
- 1.9 The Council wants to understand the needs and views of our residents and people working in our district. We have a dedicated [web page](#) to access all our consultations and welcome residents to participate.
- 1.10 Whilst we aim to provide high-quality services to all who live or work in the Mid Devon area, we recognise people may wish to complain, or pay a compliment to our officers or give us suggestions on how we could improve a service. Full details are available on our [website](#) using a number of different mediums.

2.0 Progress to meet our Equality Objectives

- 2.1 In 2022/23, the council had five Equality Objectives, these were:
1. Meeting the needs of an aging population
 2. Overcoming the problems faced by vulnerable individuals caused by rural isolation
 3. Overcoming the effects of multiple disadvantage in families with complex needs
 4. To continue to concentrate on mental health issues within MDDC and the wider community
 5. Secure decent digital connectivity for all of Mid Devon (Corporate Plan aim).
- 2.2 Progress to meet these Equality Objectives in 2022/23 is detailed at Appendix 2.
- 2.3 There are no proposed changes to the Equality Objectives for 2023/24. An action plan will be developed in year by the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Group.
- 2.4 We publish information on our website about our [pay policy](#) and [pay supplement policy](#). Within our pay policy we include reporting on the council's gender pay gap, this is included below for ease of reference:

	Mean Average Hourly Rate	Median Average Hourly Rate
Male	£14.38	£12.92
Female	£14.36	£12.92
HMRC % Gap	0.14%	0%

- 2.5 The mean gender pay gap for the whole economy (according to the October 2022 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures) is 15.4%. At 0.14% Mid Devon District Council's mean gender pay gap is significantly lower than that for the whole economy

3.0 Further Updates on Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion

- 3.1 The Equality Forum was reformed as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group in 2022. This group contains both council officers and elected members. It met in December 2022 and February 2023 and has principally been focussed on the review of the Single Equality Scheme and the Equality Objectives. The EDI Group will meet quarterly and is chaired by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager.
- 3.2 The EDI Group has responsibility for delivering three recommendations from the Spotlight review "Does Local Government Work for Women". Following discussions with the Local Government Association (LGA), the recommendation is that the Member Champion role is adopted as part of a cabinet position (following elections in May 2023). A role description has been drafted. Two other recommendations will be worked upon once a Member Champion is identified:
- That the Council supports and facilitates the building of councillor networks, in particular between women councillors and councillors with families or caring responsibilities to grow peer to peer support.
 - That further research is carried out into member experience of equality in the Council

- 3.3 In 2023, Mid Devon District Council has signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme to be recognised as a Disability Confident Committed employer.
- 3.4 Following a recommendation from an internal audit, the Equality Impact Assessment process will be reviewed in 2023/24 to ensure it meets current best practice.
- 3.5 Through the Changing Places grant fund, the council has been awarded more than £150,000 to improve our existing disabled toilet provision at each of our leisure centres.

Contact for more Information: Matthew Page, Corporate Manager for People, Performance & Waste mpage@middevon.gov.uk; Dr Steve Carr, Corporate Performance and Improvement Manager, scarr@middevon.gov.uk

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