

Publication of updated equality scheme

Report number:	CAB/WS/21/001	
Report to and date:	Portfolio Holder Decision	25 January 2021
Cabinet member:	Councillor Robert Everitt Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities Telephone: 01284 769000 Email: robert.everitt@westsuffolk.gov.uk	
Lead officer:	Davina Howes Assistant Director (Families and Communities) Telephone: 01284 757070 Email: davina.howes@westsuffolk.gov.uk	

Decisions Plan: **Notice of Intention providing the purpose of the decision and the date in which the decision is expected to be made has been published on 15 January 2021.**

Wards impacted: **All**

Recommendations: **It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Families and Communities approves the adoption of an updated equality scheme (Appendix C to Report number: CAB/WS/21/001) and commits to reviewing and or updating the scheme as required to reflect any legislative or societal changes.**

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 As a public body, the council has a number of duties under equalities legislation. West Suffolk's current response is outlined on our [Equality and diversity webpage](#) and the equality scheme, which was adopted in 2015. It is good practice to review our compliance periodically as legislation, guidance and case law have changed since the scheme was written in 2015, in particular around gender pay gap reporting.
- 1.2 A health check of the council's corporate compliance with equalities legislation was carried out by the Corporate Policy Team and reviewed by the Leadership Team on 17 November 2020. The purpose of this health check was to advise on how the council's equality scheme complied with statutory guidance, incorporated best practice from other authorities and to highlight areas for potential improvement.
- 1.3 It should be emphasised that the scope of this health check was limited to the council's corporate compliance with the public sector equality duty and **does not** cover activities that are planned or underway in the Families and Communities, HR or other teams around supporting greater diversity and inclusion in the community or workforce.

2. Proposals within this report

- 2.1 The health check carried out by officers confirmed that West Suffolk Council was complying with its duties under equalities legislation, and that few changes were needed to the equality scheme. It also identified a small number of technical changes that were needed to ensure the scheme remained current. These changes have been made to the document attached at Appendix A (changes shown in tracked changes, with tracked changes to this appendix attached at Appendix B).
- 2.2 It is therefore proposed that the Portfolio Holder approves the adoption of the updated equality scheme (Appendix C to this report (version without tracked changes) with its appendix as Appendix D) and commits to reviewing and or updating it as required to reflect any legislative or societal changes.
- 2.3 As part of the health check, officers also worked on a new guidance note for the completion of equality impact assessments (EqIAs). While not compulsory, EqIAs are a helpful way of assessing the equalities impacts of new policies, projects and proposals. The new guidance note is included as an appendix to the revised draft document, as Appendix D in this report.

3. Alternative options that have been considered

- 3.1 An alternative option would be to continue the use of our current Equality Scheme dated for 2015 to 2020. This **is not recommended** as the previous approval only covered the period to 2020, and there are updates to legislation and information referred to, such as objectives of the Strategy Framework (2020-2024).

4. Consultation and engagement undertaken

- 4.1 In carrying out the health check, the Corporate Policy Team engaged with officers in HR, Communications, Housing Options, Customer Services, Licensing and Anglia Revenues Partnership, to discuss their current role in supporting the council's compliance with the public sector equality duty.
- 4.2 Officers also researched best practice from other councils in collecting and publishing equalities data.

5. Risks associated with the proposals

- 5.1 Not complying effectively with the public sector equality duty would put West Suffolk Council at risk of legal challenge and would pose the risk of not supporting its residents, families and communities in its delivery of services.

6. Implications arising from the proposals

- 6.1 Financial – no implications
- 6.2 Legal compliance – Approving recommended action ensures legal compliance with the equality act and public sector equality duty.
- 6.3 Personal data processing – section 4.2 and 4.3 of the draft equality scheme covers the issues of publishing data on the protected characteristics of service users. This process will continue to be carried out in line with data protection legislation.
- 6.4 Equalities – Updating the scheme to improve use of EqIA to assess the wider impacts of decisions on those with protected characteristics.
- 6.5 Crime and disorder – no implications.
- 6.6 Environment or sustainability – no implications.

- 6.7 HR or staffing – the scheme covers elements of HR practice, such as the Disability Confident scheme and ensuring fairness in recruitment. No changes are proposed to these areas.
- 6.8 Changes to existing policies – Change to equality scheme
- 6.9 External organisations (such as businesses, community groups) – by carrying out EqIAs, the council will continue to ensure that the different needs and views of businesses and community groups continue to be taken into account.

7. Appendices referenced in this report

- 7.1 Appendix A – equality scheme 2015 (showing changes)
- 7.2 Appendix B – equality scheme 2015 Appendix A (showing changes to EqIA)
- 7.3 Appendix C – draft equality scheme 2021
- 7.4 Appendix D – draft equality scheme 2021 Appendix A

8. Background documents associated with this report

[Equality scheme 2015-2020](#)