

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda
Item No.

Report of Executive Director (Transformation)

To

Cabinet

On

22nd February 2022

Report prepared by: Angela Dress Policy & Research Officer

Equality Statement, Objectives and Commitments - 2022-2026 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion in the Everyday

Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member: Councillor Gilbert
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report recommends a new statement-led set of Equality Objectives based on the findings from consultation and recommends that these objectives are reported in the planned Corporate Plan document. This process fulfils our compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act of 2010 which requires public sector organisations to abide by a set of Equality Objectives that are to be renewed every 4 years.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet are asked to agree:

- 2.1 That the new Equality Objectives be sharper, smarter, and conducive to demonstrable progress in equalities policies and practice across the Council
- 2.2 To endorse the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Statement and Equality Objectives that have been informed and shaped by responses to a Your Say Southend Survey and meetings with multiple community organisations to gain their views. To recognise that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought inequalities across communities into sharp relief.
- 2.3 That in addition to the required 4-yearly refresh, the Equality Objectives are reviewed on an annual basis by the Corporate Equality Steering Group (CESG) as per the Terms of Reference for that group (**Appendix 1**) in order to keep the Objectives at the forefront of Council equalities policy making and practices, thereby evidencing the Council's fulfilment of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 2.4 That Commitments be set against each Objective to demonstrate progress made on an annual basis, with the Commitments to be reviewed/reset by CESG at their annual review.

- 2.5 That the Equality Objectives be referenced in the Corporate Plan with the intention that the Council will be reporting on its performance against the new Equality Objectives.
- 2.6 This process is seen as foundational and iterative to demonstrate the scale of our ambition across the 4-year period prior to the renewal of the Objectives in 2026.

3. Background

3.1 The Equality Duty requires that the organisation must have due regard for the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation for those who have a protected characteristic. The 9 protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability (including those associated with disabled people, i.e. carers)
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (including ethnic or national origins, colour, or nationality)
- religion or belief (including no religion or belief)
- sex
- sexual orientation

An additional three characteristics have been added by SBC:

- Looked after Children
- Socio-Economic status
- Intersectionality

3.2 The Equality Objectives at Southend Borough Council were last renewed in 2017, and currently say:

- Our workforce feels valued, respected and is reflective of the diverse communities it serves.
- We continue to improve outcomes for all (including vulnerable people and marginalised) communities by ensuring services are fully accessible and responsive to differing needs of service users.
- Partnership working helps to support our aims and vision along with the objectives of Southend Partnerships to improve the quality of life, prosperity and life chances for people in the Borough.
- The diversity of Southend is celebrated, and the Borough is an increasingly cohesive place where people from all communities get on well

3.3 In November 2021, a survey was launched to ask residents and staff what they considered were the priority equality issues. In addition, various conversations took place with protected characteristic groups to understand more about their equality, diversity, and inclusion issues. This information is summarised below and has informed the new EDI Statement and recommended Equality Objectives.

4. The Survey

4.1 A survey was run on the Your Say Southend (YSS) platform, going live on November 19th, 2021, and closing on January 3rd 2022. This can be found at **Appendix 2**.

4.2 The survey was promoted to staff via internal comms (Intranet, Snapshot comms emails) and Views on Sea pieces from the Chief Executive and the Policy team. In addition, specific communications reached out to staff forums and Councillors.

4.3 Externally the survey was promoted via social media and advertised in local libraries. It was included in the SAVS newsletter and A Better Start Southend comms.

4.4 There were 117 respondents, 55.2% of these were Southend Borough Council Employees. Full respondent demography can be seen in **Appendix 3**. Key points are summarised below.

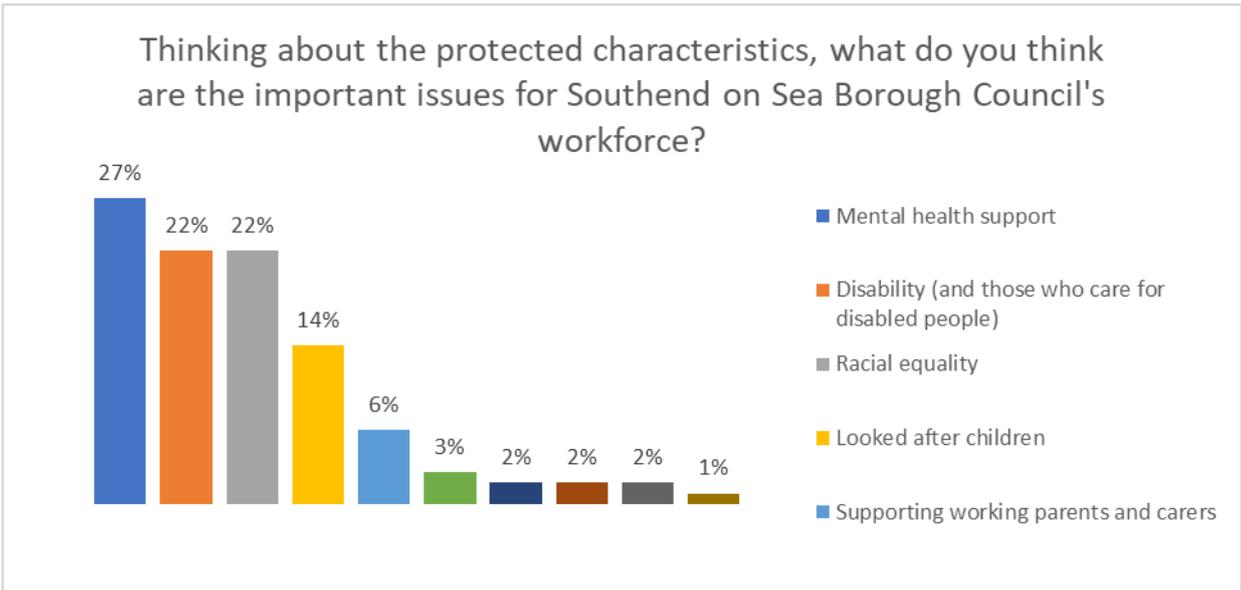
4.5 The survey asked respondents to rank the importance of a range of equalities issues across the following areas:

- Workforce
- Access to Services
- Cohesive Community

4.6 Survey Results:

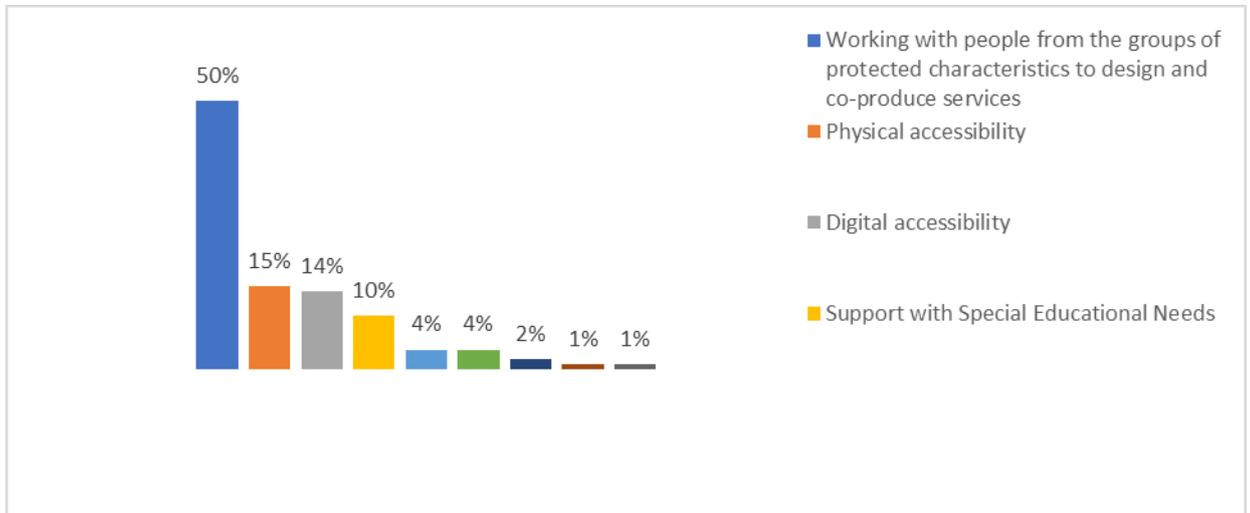
Workforce: Top 3 priorities are:

- Mental Health Support- 26.61%
- Racial Equality – 22.02%
- Disability – 22.%



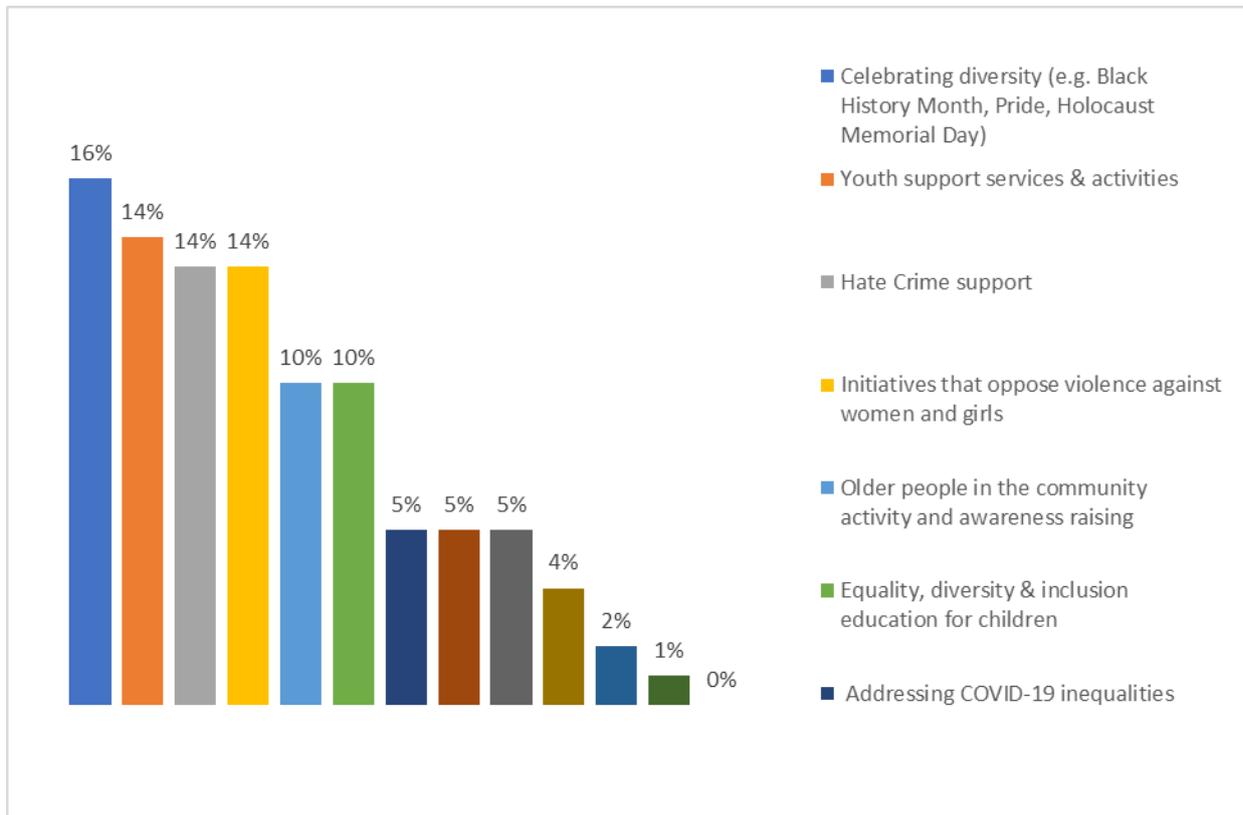
4.7 Access to Services: Top 3 priorities are:

- Working with people from the groups of protected characteristics to design and co-produce services – 49.5%
- Physical Accessibility – 15.3%
- Digital Accessibility – 14.4%



4.8 Cohesive Community: The top 4 priorities are:

- Celebrating Diversity (e.g. Black History Month, Pride, Holocaust Memorial Day) -16.2%
- Youth Support Services & Activities – 14.4%
- Hate Crime Support – 13.5%
- Initiatives that Oppose Violence against Women and Girls – 13.5%



5. Local Community Organisations

5.1 In addition to the survey, several local community organisations were contacted to hold discussions to capture their views, including:

- A Better Start Southend
- Pride
- Youth Pride
- Transpire
- Age Concern
- Southend Care
- Southend Carers
- Southend YMCA
- Southend Citizen's Advice Bureau
- South Essex Homes

A full list of all organisations contacted can be found in **Appendix 4**.

5.2 The meetings provided an opportunity to listen to the views of local community grass roots organisations around the equalities agenda. A number of key themes emerged as listed below: (Full meeting notes can be found in **Appendix 5**).

- Concerns across the board that this was a “tick-box” exercise for the Councils and that nothing would come of it.
- Accessibility of Services

- Digital Literacy
- Need for universal and targeted services
- Services should be person-centred and flexible
- Value of Diversity should be recognised
- LA to recognise its leadership role in EDI
- Importance of lived experience in co-production
- Where to go in Southend for help with EDI issues - Need to Lead and publicise/signpost
- Importance of partnership working and the need for more holistic/systemic approaches
- Around age – sense that both the young and the elderly are “invisible”

6. SBC EDI Statement and new Objectives

6.1 A statement has been written alongside the Equality Objectives in order to capture the range of views expressed by both the survey and the meetings with stakeholders. This approach enables the objectives themselves to be smarter and the opportunity to detail tangible and specific activity which will take place to meet them: our commitments.

6.2 EDI Statement:

Southend on Sea Borough/City Council is committed to ensuring the principles of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are embedded into the everyday lives of its workforce and residents, bringing policies to life and bringing EDI into sharper focus. The Council strives for accessible services to be delivered in a systemic way with compassion, dignity, and respect, in line with our Values and Behaviours.

The Council actively celebrates the value that a diversity of perspectives brings, and we proactively seek common goals that connect and unify us all – together we are stronger.

As an inclusive Local Authority, we welcome the opportunity to work with residents from all groups of protected characteristics to design, co-produce and deliver services that work for all. Collaborative, partnership working is the way to achieve this.

We are Working to Make Lives Better.

7. Objectives:

Workforce – To support and enhance resilience in a workforce that is representative of our communities

Commitment 2022-23

- Example: Role of Mental Health First Aiders to be highlighted and promoted.
- Example: Staff training around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion will be strengthened to raise awareness and enhance service delivery.

Access to Services – To provide support in accessing services for all, accommodating diverse needs, and promoting inclusion at all levels, including a developed digital literacy offer.

Commitment: 2022-23

- Example: Refreshed Equality Analysis programme to aid the embedding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues into Council Policy making

Cohesive Community – To raise awareness of the richness in diversity, by celebrating our communities' differences and what unites us.

Commitment: 2022-23

- Example: Promote the Community Investment Fund and Community Grants, Community Builders and Asset-based Community Development

Partnership Working – To seek opportunities to co-produce, co-design and to bring lived experience into policy making, strategy development and implementation/service delivery

Commitment: 2022-23

- Example: Implementation of Street Prostitution Strategy for women

8. Accountability

8.1 The embedding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) into all Council processes, will be strengthened in the following ways:

- A quarterly EDI Newsletter to be circulated, updating staff on all EDI-related projects across the Council
- Spotlight on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to be incorporated into quarterly Health Check
- Included as a standing item update on agendas for Departmental Management and Corporate Management Teams meetings on a quarterly basis

- Included as a standing item update on Cabinet Agendas
- Commitments for each Objective to be renewed on an annual basis by CESG, creating a dynamic and agile process whereby progress against each Objective can be measured. Annual reset of Commitments to be approved by Cabinet.

10. Corporate Implications

10.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map

Links with:

Active and Involved – Community Cohesion

Opportunity and Prosperity – equality of opportunity for all

Connected and Smart – importance of Digital Literacy

10.2 Financial Implications

None at this time.

10.3 Legal Implications –

Demonstrates compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty Act of 2010

10.4 People Implications

None at this time.

10.5 Property Implications -

None.

10.6 Consultation

As described above.

10.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications-

Equality Analysis to follow.

10.8 Risk Assessment

None at this time.

10.9 Value for Money

10.10 Community Safety Implications

10.11 Environmental Impact

11. Background Papers

There are no background papers to this report.

12. Appendices

- 12.1 Appendix 1: CESG Terms of reference**
- 12.2 Appendix 2: Equality Objectives Survey**
- 12.3 Appendix 3: Survey Demographic Data**
- 12.4 Appendix 4: Stakeholders Contacted**
- 12.5 Appendix 5: Stakeholder Meetings**