

<b>26 March 2014</b>	<b>ITEM: 13</b>
<b>Council</b>	
<b>Annual Equality Report</b>	
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr Lynn Worrall, Portfolio Holder Communities	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non key
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Karen Wheeler, Head of Strategy	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Steve Cox, Assistant Chief Executive Officer	
<b>This report is Public</b>	
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To present Thurrock's Annual Equality Report	

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A wide range of regulatory frameworks promote equality and anti-discrimination in public sector services. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 introduces (at Reg 2) an obligation on the Council to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the duty imposed by section 149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010 (which related to the Public Sector Equality Duty). In light of this, Thurrock's Annual Equality Report has been prepared. This report provides information to all interested parties on our progress against our equality objectives. Whilst our equalities duty remains important and essential, this report also demonstrates how equality considerations have been mainstreamed into the work of all directorates.

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 Note the matters identified in the Annual Equality Report presented to Council.**
- 1.2 Agree that the report be published to meet the requirements of S.149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010.**

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1** The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on local authorities to promote equality of duty and eliminate discrimination. This is often referred to as the 'Equality Duty'. This duty applies to jobs, training, housing, education and the provision of goods, facilities and services. As a public authority we must publish our progress in regard of this duty on an annual basis.

### **3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:**

- 3.1 The Equality Act became law in October 2010. It replaced previous legislation (such as the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995). The Act aims to streamline equality requirements and ensure consistency in what organisations must do to comply with the law.
- 3.2 The Equality Act covers the same groups that were protected by previous equality legislation - age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity - but extends some protection to groups not previously covered, and also strengthens particular aspects of equality law.
- 3.3 On the 15th May 2012 the Government announced a Red Tape challenge. As part of this challenge the Government reviewed the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) – a legal obligation on public bodies to consider the impact of their decisions on different groups.
- 3.4 In September 2013 the review panel announced its findings with regard to the PSED. It concluded it was too early to make any changes to the Equality Act 2010, however “Public sector bodies must ensure they adopt a proportionate approach to compliance and not seek to ‘gold plate’ the public sector equality duty”.

### **REPORT HEADLINES**

- 3.5 Thurrock Council has many reasons to celebrate its achievements in promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. Often, these achievements reflect the efforts of a wider partnership, including the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector which is well placed to work alongside ward councillors and engagement mechanisms to ensure that what we do resonates with how people feel about where they live.
- 3.6 Community engagement increasingly informs how services are shaped, and there is increasing activity around the co-production of services between communities and the Council. Our efforts in this area were recognised in the Adult Social Care Peer Review 2013. Furthermore, the development of Community Hubs demonstrate our commitment to ensuring the voice of local people are heard, listened to and inform local services. Resident feedback endorses the South Ockendon Centre’s (SOC) approach to signposting, supporting and mentoring residents to navigate websites, consider the issues underneath many of the problems initially presented, and generally network in a safe, friendly environment. Volunteers are mobilised to help solve local issues, and residents have overwhelmingly welcomed this support often citing it as ‘life saving’.
- 3.7 SOC opened just as key welfare changes were introduced in April 2013. It embraced the challenge and was able to arrange direct advice and guidance to residents from the centre. Not only did this save residents travelling around

the Borough to resolve issues, they could also experience the new ways of working demonstrated through SOC first hand.

- 3.8 The economic challenges we face will continue to present difficult decisions for all public bodies in 2014. Much has already been achieved in 2013, by the Council and its partners, to consider the impact of welfare reform and the economic challenges faced by many of our residents. A Welfare Benefits Reform Task and Finish group met to look at the impact of welfare reform. Since then a project group has been established to work with partners to consider and plan for the support people will need to receive the right information to claim benefits. This continues to consider the specific impacts on different communities and how best to provide future support. Furthermore, Thurrock Council implemented the Local Living Wage to support lower paid employees.
- 3.9 The report also highlights many examples of how we are building cohesion between communities. Often, this has been achieved through events such as T-Fest and the Big Lunch, or community led events including the Black History Month concert organised by Trust. Breaking the barriers between communities has also been supported at a neighbourhood level. The introduction of Local Area Co-ordinators in three wards has not only directed vulnerable adults to relevant community networks rather than traditional services, but the programme has also built bridges between communities, challenging perceptions of how people live their lives.

### **MOVING FORWARD**

- 3.10 The economic challenges we face, coupled with demographic pressures are likely to add to the complexity of Thurrock's equality challenges. Some areas of our Borough represent stark differences in quality of life. In 2013 Overview and Scrutiny established a Task and Finish Group to consider whether a Fairness Commission should be established to progress equality issues in Thurrock. The Task and Finish Group has identified a wealth of evidence to suggest that levels of inequality exist in Thurrock. Although a decision on whether to establish a Fairness Commission has yet to be taken, it is clear that the work carried out by this Group will provide an excellent foundation for refreshing the Single Equality Scheme and priorities for the future.
- 3.11 There has been a 28% increase in Hate Crime reporting (October 2012 to September 2013) with 81% of hate crime racially motivated. This has been added to the Community Safety Partnership's priorities for 2014/15. Some of the actions being considered to address this include training Hate Crime Ambassadors and supporting community referral points as well as working with the police to promote a Hate Crime Campaign.
- 3.12 The Violence against Women and Girls Strategy 2012 continues to remain a priority for Thurrock. Reported sexual offences increased by 17% (October 2012 to September 2013). Tackling child exploitation, rape and honour based abuse are included within this priority.

- 3.13 Corporate support for equalities is based within a shared Strategy Service. This provides an opportunity to share best practice in two areas that face similar issues. A review of guidance for Equality Impact Assessment to build links with community engagement, as well as strengthening staff forums will be two future priorities.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- 4.1 This report aids the Council in meeting its Equality Duty and provides an opportunity to share work across the Council that contributes to equality and challenges discrimination.

#### **5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 This report has been subject to consultation with service areas and Directors.

#### **6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 The Annual Equality Report supports all council priorities, in particular our ambition to build pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities.

#### **7. IMPLICATIONS**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: Mike Jones  
Telephone and email: 01375 652772  
Mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

The financial costs associated with the publication of the Annual Equality Report will/can be met within existing resources.

##### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: Chris Pickering – Principal Solicitor  
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The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 introduces (at Reg 2) an obligation on the Council to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the duty imposed by section 149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010 (which relates to the Public Sector Equality Duty). The Annual Equality Report is therefore required by statute and is an important tool to ensure legal compliance and consideration must be given to any areas of reporting which are required. The council must ensure that all legal requirements are fulfilled including consultation and impact assessments.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: Teresa Evans  
Telephone and email: 01375 652930  
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The Council is under a statutory duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality and promote good relations. The Annual Equality Report provides a mechanism for review of progress in meeting the Equality Duty. It is anticipated that the publication of each annual report will open the council to scrutiny in relation to the progress being made locally to address inequality. This means that appropriate steps must be taken to demonstrate annual improvements in meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and advancing equality of opportunity.

### 7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

None

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- The Corporate Equality Framework:  
[https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/ce\\_2011.pdf](https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/ce_2011.pdf)
- Single Equality Scheme:  
[https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/single\\_equality\\_201204.pdf](https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/single_equality_201204.pdf)

### **APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Annual Equality Report

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