

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Gateshead Council Equality Objectives 2021-22

**REPORT OF:** Darren Collins, Strategic Director Resources & Digital

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed equality objective for 2021-22, the aim of which is to improve the Council's understanding of the needs of Gateshead residents and its workforce with protected characteristics, in order to deliver the council's Thrive pledges and policy objectives of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Our equalities work aims to address the challenges of inequality across Gateshead, and to demonstrate the Council's compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

### **Background**

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a requirement on public bodies to demonstrate compliance with each part of the PSED. This requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct which is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
3. As a public sector organisation, we also have to meet two specific duties:
  - to publish information to demonstrate how we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty; and,
  - to prepare and publish equality objectives (at least every four years).

### **Gateshead Context for new Equality Objectives 2021-22**

4. Since publication of the current set of equality objectives in 2016, the Council has adopted an entirely new strategic context. We refreshed the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, adopted Thrive as our strategic approach, and agreed a new long-term Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
5. The Thrive agenda is driven by the desire to tackle inequalities and arises from the principles of fairness and improving the quality of life for everyone in Gateshead. This aligns the Council's Policy Framework with advancing equality of opportunity for all and celebrating the diversity of our workforce and communities. This is supported by the corporate equalities approach across all groups and services.

## **Proposed Equality Objective for 2021-22**

6. To make full use of the 2021 Census to update and improve our knowledge and understanding of the extent of particular protected characteristics within the Gateshead population.
7. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there is a significant amount of planned qualitative and quantitative research taking place over the next 6-12 months to help the Council better understand the issues and impact faced by all our residents and vulnerable communities.
8. It is proposed that for 2021-22 the Council focuses on delivery of a single equality objective;  
**to establish an equality baseline and deeper understanding of the issues and needs for Gateshead by protected characteristic; to include our residents and our workforce, to support delivery of our strategic approach Thrive and the Council pledges;**
  - **put people and families at the heart of everything we do,**
  - **tackle inequality so people have a fair chance, support our communities to support themselves and each other,**
  - **invest in our economy to provide opportunities for employment, innovation and growth, and**
  - **work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead.**
9. During 2021-22 the Council will also continue to undertake current planned work and activities to help us deliver Thrive and tackle inequalities. These include;
  - covid-19 response work to support the vulnerable and those in crisis and Recovery planning for Gateshead post Covid-19.
  - delivery against the Health and Wellbeing strategy priorities.
  - developing and implementing future locality arrangements.
  - support for our workforce to develop resilience and mental health and wellbeing.

## **Future Equalities Approach**

10. Once the evidence base for protected characteristics in Gateshead is established we will then need to develop and consult on future equality objectives.
11. Key to this would be a Council-wide approach to delivering equalities so that specific actions and progress can be monitored by embedding equalities within the new Performance Management and Improvement Framework and demonstrating impact on our residents and workforce. The overall purpose of the approach is to ensure the council delivers against Thrive and Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities.
12. A review of the Corporate Equalities Framework and relaunch of integrated impact assessments across the Council would also form part of this work to help embed equalities within and across all council services.

## **Recommendation**

13. Cabinet is asked to approve the equality objective proposed for 2021-22;

To establish an equality baseline and deeper understanding of the issues and needs for Gateshead by protected characteristic; to include our residents and our workforce, in order to support delivery of our strategic approach Thrive and the Council pledges.

For the following reason:

To demonstrate the Council's commitment to tackling inequality in Gateshead, whilst ensuring compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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### Policy Context

1. The Council's strategic approach Thrive and the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy has outlined the challenges faced by Gateshead in terms of inequality. The proposed equality objective has been developed to improve our knowledge and understanding of these inequalities for people with protected characteristics in Gateshead and to support the delivery of the shared outcomes described within the Council Policy Framework.

### Background

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a requirement on public bodies to demonstrate compliance with each part of the PSED. This requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct which is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These are often referred to as the three aims of the general equality duty.

3. As a public sector organisation, we also have to meet two specific duties;
  - to publish information to demonstrate how we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty; and,
  - to prepare and publish equality objectives (at least every four years).

The specific duties are intended to help organisations improve performance on the general duty, by improving focus and transparency

4. Since the introduction of the specific duties in 2012, the Council has committed to and reported against two sets of equality objectives.
5. We meet the requirement to publish information on compliance with the PSED through our annual Equality and Diversity Report. The current annual report for 2020 is published on the council's website.
6. We also follow best practice and undertake Integrated Impact Assessments to consider the actual or potential impact of council strategies, policies, services or budget proposals on people and their surroundings. They also ensure the decision-making process is transparent and help to mitigate any impact on people with protected characteristics.

### Gateshead Context for new Equality Objectives 2021-22

7. Since publication of the current set of equality objectives in 2016, the Council has adopted an entirely new strategic context. We refreshed the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, adopted Thrive as our strategic approach, and agreed a new long-term Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

8. The Thrive agenda is driven by the desire to tackle inequalities and arises from the principles of fairness and improving the quality of life for everyone in Gateshead. This aligns the Council's Policy Framework with advancing equality of opportunity for all and celebrating the diversity of our workforce and communities. This is supported by the corporate equalities approach across all groups and services.
9. We are developing a new Corporate Performance Management and Improvement Framework (PMIF). This will better reflect the priorities of the Council enable it to manage performance and demonstrate delivery against Thrive priorities including inequality.
10. We need to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Gateshead and its residents and develop a recovery plan to tackle growing inequalities and deliver the Thrive agenda.
11. Currently The Gateshead Housing Company (TGHC) work towards achieving a set of equality objectives and report equality information and data as required to meet the PSED. Alignment of equality objectives, reporting and data will be undertaken within the Council from April 2021 following the reintegration of housing and property management services.
12. Work is also ongoing to review the Council's Workforce Strategy, which will include actions relating to equalities in the workforce. The current council workforce profile by protected characteristic is published in our annual report taken from employee data.

### **Proposal for 2021-22**

13. To make full use of the timely opportunity presented by the 2021 Census, which is the source for much of the current Gateshead Equality Profile. Our knowledge of the extent of particular protected characteristics within the Gateshead population is, in some cases, 10 years out of date. We will analyse the emerging data and enhance our knowledge and understanding of our residents including by their protected characteristics. A draft timetable of census data releases will be published by ONS in July 2021.
14. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic there is a significant amount of planned qualitative and quantitative research taking place over the next 6-12 months to help the Council better understand the impact faced by all our residents and vulnerable communities. This includes;
  - Gateshead Household Survey (March 2021)
  - University of Durham research project – impact of Covid on vulnerable households in Gateshead
  - Public Health embedded research projects
  - Partner and stakeholder commissioned research (NELEP & others)
  - Communities and localities research
  - My HR&Payroll data – council and TGHC workforce
15. It is proposed that for 2021-22 the Council focuses on delivery of a single equality objective;

**to establish an equality baseline and deeper understanding of the issues and needs for Gateshead by protected characteristic; to include our residents and our workforce, in order to support delivery of our strategic approach Thrive and the council pledges;**

- **put people and families at the heart of everything we do,**
- **tackle inequality so people have a fair chance, support our communities to support themselves and each other,**
- **invest in our economy to provide opportunities for employment, innovation and growth, and**
- **work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead.**

16. During 2021-22 the Council will also continue to undertake current planned work and activities to help us deliver Thrive and tackle inequalities. These include;
  - Covid-19 response work to support the vulnerable and those in crisis and Recovery planning for Gateshead post Covid-19.
  - delivery against the Health and Wellbeing strategy priorities
  - developing and implementing future locality arrangements
  - support for our workforce to develop resilience and good mental health and wellbeing.
17. This will replace the current [Gateshead Equalities Profile](#) and actions will also include work to update our workforce information held on all employees (including TGHC employees returning to the Council) and their protected characteristics.

### **Future Equality Objectives 2022-23**

18. Once the evidence base for protected characteristics in Gateshead is updated, we will then need to develop and consult on future equality objectives.
19. A review of the Corporate Equalities Framework and relaunch of integrated impact assessments across the Council would also form part of this work to help embed equalities within and across all council services.

### **Governance, responsibilities & implementation**

20. This is an opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of equalities across the whole of the Council, including how we deliver equalities going forward through a refocused Corporate Equalities Framework.
21. The role of Service Directors across the Council to be a key part of this work to help shape, develop and deliver against equality objectives through service delivery.
22. Key to implementation of this would be a Council-wide approach to delivering equalities so that specific actions and progress can be monitored by embedding equalities within the new PMIF and demonstrating impact on our residents and workforce. The overall purpose of the approach is to ensure the council delivers against Thrive and Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities.

## **Consultation**

23. Consultation has taken place with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, as well as the Support Cabinet Member for Diversity and Equalities.

## **Alternative Options**

24. There are no alternative options with regard to the report as the recommendation supports the Council's specific duty to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **Implications of Recommended Option**

### **25. Resources**

- a) **Financial Implications** – There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
- b) **Human Resource Implications** – The equality objective relating to the workforce will support the Council's ability to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- c) **Property Implications** – There are no property implications arising directly from this report.

26. **Risk Management Implications** – There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report.

27. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – The equality objective has been developed with the aim of improving the lives of Gateshead's residents with protected characteristics.

28. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising directly as a result of this report.

29. **Health Implications** – There are no direct health implications arising directly as a result of this report.

30. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no direct climate emergency and sustainability implications arising directly as a result of this report.

31. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no direct human rights implications arising directly as a result of this report.

32. **Ward implications** – There are no direct area and ward implications arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Background Information**

33. The following background papers have been used to inform this report:

- Objectives and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities, Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020