

Report

Report to:	Equal Opportunities Forum
Date of Meeting:	11 November 2020
Report by:	Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Annual Report on Mainstreaming Equalities and Diversity – Finance and Corporate Resources
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ advise the Forum of the strategic and operational work being undertaken and planned by Finance and Corporate Resources to meet the commitments within 'South Lanarkshire Working for You' Mainstreaming Equalities Report 2017 to 2021

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the work being undertaken by Finance and Corporate Resources in terms of mainstreaming equalities, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) is responsible for supporting and developing strategies to meet the Council's commitment and statutory duties on equality and diversity, both within the Resource and Council-wide. This is in the Council's role both as an employer and as a provider of services. This is a complex area of work that has increased greatly in recent years.
- 3.2 The Public Sector Specific Duties, as previously reported to the Forum, outline the key responsibilities for public bodies and include statutory requirements to report against equality outcomes and to continue to evidence that decisions relating to policy and practice are properly assessed against the general duties of eliminating, advancing and fostering.
- 3.3 The first four-year cycle for the Specific Duties ended in April 2017. The Scottish Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) have reviewed the impact the Duties are having on improving the delivery of services and employment practices. The outcome of this review was expected to be published in autumn 2019, however, at the point of writing this is still outstanding. The review may result in changes to the requirements of the Duty; this will not affect the requirements for Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) reporting in April 2021.

4. Resource and Service Planning

4.1 The Resource Plan identifies the Resource's corporate responsibility regarding equalities and diversity as a headline priority. Objectives noted are:-

- ◆ lead partnership approaches to tackling the causes and effects of poverty and equality
- ◆ deliver effective employability services to support economic recovery
- ◆ embed equalities and workforce planning in recovery process
- ◆ promote equality and the wellbeing of staff
- ◆ improve the skills, flexibility, and capacity of the workforce
- ◆ deepening community engagement
- ◆ facilitate communication and consultation on the Council, its policies, and its services

4.2 Officers from the Resource provide both lead and support roles for several equalities related working groups, networks and forums including:-

- ◆ the Corporate Equality and Diversity Working Group and any of its short life groups, e.g. on equality impact assessment
- ◆ the network of Resource Diversity Liaison Officers who monitor recruitment and provide advice to managers on equality issues in employment and the employee forums
- ◆ the co-ordination of the Employee Network – Caring, Disability, Ethnicity and LGBT Matters
- ◆ Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire and the Older People's Assembly
- ◆ partnership working arrangements with other public agencies and the voluntary sector e.g. the Diversity Monitoring Group (DMG), the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership (incorporating the South Lanarkshire Access Panel) and the Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group (LEMAG)
- ◆ the Community Engagement Co-ordination Group which is a partner wide group
- ◆ performance improvement through continued achievement of external standards such as Investors in People (IIP) and Customer Service Excellence (CSE)

5. COVID-19 Impacts

5.1 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted across all Council services and in response to this there has been a need to reduce/amend some services and transform the way in which these are being delivered. This action allows physical distancing measures and taking account of higher than usual absence levels; and to concentrate resources on key frontline services.

5.2 As part of the response, the Council took on an extensive range of new services to support our communities, including the most vulnerable, in response to the pandemic including:-

- ◆ Childcare hubs, caring for the children of key workers
- ◆ Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) hub and distribution to the care sector
- ◆ Shielding/Wellbeing contact centre and the support requirements identified through this

5.3 Several equality/inequality issues have been identified during the lockdown period including:-

- ◆ communications issues affecting people with learning disabilities, groups with communication difficulties, those with limited English language skills
- ◆ general issues including Domestic Violence, Hate Crime, ability to observe religious practice at end of life/funeral
- ◆ low income, working age men, young people
- ◆ social care considering issues related to learning disability, people with autism, deaf/hard of hearing, partially sighted/blind, long term health conditions, asylum seekers, traveller communities, homeless people

5.4 It has been difficult to meet/consult with people since March, alternative methods have been explored including the use of online technology. A positive example of this is the online meetings of the British Sign Language (BSL) Steering Group, this highlighted issues for consideration including limitations in the use of online presentations and the sharing of documents onscreen. Interpreters need to be briefed appropriately prior to the meeting and, importantly, require to always be visible onscreen.

6. Mainstreaming Equalities

6.1 The Council meets its statutory duties by ensuring that equality and diversity issues are effectively “mainstreamed” and built into its strategic planning and performance monitoring.

6.2 In our strategy we indicated that this can be achieved by:-

- ◆ carrying out a process of “impact assessment” for any new policy/practice or change to policy/practice which is relevant to the duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination or harassment. Our online toolkit has facilitated approximately 845 assessments
- ◆ requiring each Resource to identify how it will mainstream equalities and its commitments in this area in its Resource/Service Plan. This can be evidenced through Resources having equalities as a standing item on the agenda of Resource/Senior Management Team meetings and Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs). It is further evidenced through their annual reporting to this Forum and in the updates they provided as part of the 2019 mainstreaming equalities progress report

6.3 Whilst leading on the mainstreaming framework for the Council, the Resource has also addressed its own mainstreaming issues within its service areas. A brief overview of some of this work is provided below.

6.4 **Administration and Legal Services:** In addition to its support to elected members and the Council’s decision-making process, Administration and Legal Services has responsibility for administering the electoral process and the provision of grants to community groups and voluntary organisations. Some specific developments in the past year have been:-

- ◆ the service provides ongoing and regular legal advice and briefing sessions for officers across the Council in relation to employment and service delivery matters. Since January 2016, the Licensing and Registration service has made disability awareness training mandatory for all new taxi licence applications. During the last six months this training has ceased and alternative delivery methods are being explored

6.5 **Communications and Strategy:** Promotes our commitment to equality and diversity externally and internally. It provides access to information on Council services, oversees the co-ordination of Resource and Service Planning and takes the lead role in promoting the work of the Council through the media, the design of publicity material and the development of the Council website. This is a vital area of equality and diversity work. The Council's commitment to equality must be communicated effectively both to employees and members of the community. Some examples of its contribution to the Equality and Diversity Strategy in last year have been:-

- ◆ Resource planning guidance has specific reference to equalities and reinforces commitment for Resources to consider equalities issues within their planning process
- ◆ a continued approach to improving the accessibility of the Council's website and complying with new legislation and industry accessibility standards. Accessibility is tested using online tools as well as citizens and the website has an application which reads out text for those with visual impairments or for those whose first language is not English. The Service develops new forms and content with the customer in mind and tests early with members of our community, including those with disabilities

6.6 **Consultation, Involvement and Engagement** are a key aspect to the impact assessment process which Resources undertake on all existing and new strategy, policy and procedure development. Finance and Corporate Resources has led the way in improving the ways in which Resources consult and engage with the South Lanarkshire community.

6.6.1 The Community Engagement Team works with communities to help them identify and meet their local priorities. They work together with members of the Community Planning Partnership who are working together to make South Lanarkshire a better place to live and work. The aim is to work with communities to deliver better services targeted at reducing poverty and tackling inequalities and deprivation across South Lanarkshire.

6.6.2 Activities to note include:-

- ◆ progressing work around reviewing the structures for the Community Planning Partnership. The team will continue to work with communities to develop appropriate ways for them to be involved in decision making at neighbourhood, locality, and strategic levels. The Annual Improvement Outcomes Report for 2019/2020 is complete and was published by end September 2020
- ◆ a new Community Participation and Engagement Strategy has been approved and work is ongoing to translate the strategy into BSL

6.6.3 During the pandemic and the corresponding lockdown, the team supported the community and third sector partnerships and linked in those needing assistance from the wellbeing helpline with the help available in their community. Benefits identified from this work include:-

- ◆ developing stronger links with community groups
- ◆ increasing the numbers of volunteers within the area
- ◆ creating locality partnerships and networks where organisations are working together to address local need

- 6.6.4 Locality coordination networks were established in each of the four South Lanarkshire areas and comprised of local authority community development staff, staff from our Third Sector Interface VASLan, and a range of local voluntary and community sector organisations. The partnerships included food banks, Citizens Advice Bureaus (CABs), Community Anchor Organisations and other groups such as churches and other voluntary organisations. This has helped to make sure people's needs are met, including appropriate employment and income maximisation advice and support with other areas of life such as mental wellbeing and feeling connected. Work is ongoing with these networks to help them adapt as the situation changes, including planning for the forthcoming winter and the potential impact of Brexit where possible.
- 6.6.5 Neighbourhood Planning focuses support on the areas in South Lanarkshire facing the greatest inequalities of outcome, engaging with communities to identify priorities and solutions which they can work on alongside delivery partners. Although it is not possible to meet face to face with communities at present, progress on neighbourhood planning has continued virtually with stakeholders. Cambuslang East, Burnhill and Fairhill Plans have now been completed.
- 6.6.6 Work continues with stakeholders in the existing neighbourhood planning areas of Hillhouse/Udston/Burnbank, Springhall and Whitlawburn and Strutherhill and Birkenshaw, as well as Blantyre and Larkhall as a whole, both of which have created their own Plans. Funding was secured in all these areas through the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund by third sector community anchor organisations, which helped to support the resilience in the areas and continues to build upon the ambitions of the plans and the capacity of the communities.

7. Partnerships

- 7.1 The Resource supports several partnerships including:-
- 7.2 **Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire:** Works as a multi-agency partnership that involves people aged 50+ from the local community in meaningful engagement to enable them to influence the policy and service provision of partner agencies. In addition to an Executive Group and an Operational Group that delivers a series of responsive focus and consultation groups, the project delivers four Older People's Assemblies on behalf of South Lanarkshire Council. The events are chaired by the Spokesperson for older people and take place in the four key localities of South Lanarkshire.
- 7.2.1 Activities of note have included:-
- ◆ Men's shed development and Mobile Men's Shed Project – Seniors Together is the lead agency for the support and development of men's sheds in South Lanarkshire. With funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, a Mobile Men's Shed Project is being delivered to assist in reducing loneliness and isolation in older men. Further support is provided to assist local communities to develop their own static sheds and ongoing support is provided to those sheds currently up and running in South Lanarkshire; this has now resulted in the establishment of more static sheds with a new total of 12 sheds in South Lanarkshire. Every shed has its own individual membership with an average of 50 men registered at each
 - ◆ one shed in Stonehouse is now going through the Asset Transfer process

7.2.2 Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Seniors Together is now required to deliver the project remotely. This has meant that staff are staying in touch with members and older citizens and encouraging them to keep busy and stay well remotely using social media platforms such as:-

- ◆ WhatsApp
- ◆ Zoom
- ◆ email
- ◆ Facebook

7.2.3 To ensure continued engagement and that no one slips back into isolation due to the office being closed and events not taking place, the project staff delivered training and support sessions in the use of Social Media, and facilitated weekly chats using Facebook rooms and WhatsApp. This meant that members could stay in touch with and look out for each other.

7.2.4 The Seniors Together Facebook page often has a reach of more than 1000 people since this new way of working and it has proven to be an excellent way to communicate with older people and prevent loneliness and isolation. Older people were encouraged to share photographs of their hobbies, gardens and exercise tips to ensure that communication continued and essential information is shared with them during the lockdown period

7.2.5. A successful bid was submitted to Connecting Scotland for 75 devices which the project has been able to distribute to older people who had no technology enabling them to 'join the Seniors Together conversation' and activities and events online due to this government initiative and a little help from the project.

7.2.6 The main priority for action for Seniors Together going forward is to generate interest and work with partners to create an age friendly South Lanarkshire that is a great place to grow older. An Age-friendly Community is a place where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives. These places make it possible for people to continue to stay in their homes, participate in the activities that they value and contribute to their communities for as long as possible.

7.2.7 The Seniors Together newsletter 'The Chronicle Lockdown Edition' was delivered to 700 older people in South Lanarkshire during August and September. This provided helpful information on a range of topics relevant for older people, including essential Coronavirus information, from organisations such as Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Care and Repair, Seniors Together and South Lanarkshire Council. Feedback received was excellent and a further edition is being planned for the winter with essential inserts of factsheets for older people.

7.3. **South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership (incorporating the South Lanarkshire Access Panel):** A user led partnership that brings together the Council, NHS Lanarkshire, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other local agencies with representatives from the voluntary sector. The objective of the group is to improve communication between the organisations and the community and to give people with disabilities an opportunity to influence policy and service provision. Several specialist sub-groups exist to discuss specific issues relating to planning/building control and access issues, housing, health, and licensing of taxis.

Face to face meetings of the Partnership have been on pause during the last nine months, however, this will re-start as an online meeting.

- 7.4 **Diversity Monitoring Group (DMG):** The partnership work of the Group continues to ensure that matters surrounding harassment and discrimination within the community are being dealt with fairly and that work is ongoing to reduce the incidences of hate crime.

8. **Performance Measurement**

- 8.1 Improvements to capture equalities related data on service provision are ongoing. All public services are under pressure as they continue to respond to COVID-19 and ensure the delivery of essential services, and South Lanarkshire Council is no exception. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on our ability to continue to deliver services to our normal standards, including consultation activities. As mentioned above, the use of online technologies for consultation and the impact assessment process are driving these changes forward. Some of the progress in the past year has included:-

- ◆ successful online meeting of the BSL Steering Group
- ◆ Seniors Togethers' facilitated weekly chats using Facebook rooms and WhatsApp
- ◆ maintenance of the "Customer Service Excellence" standard
- ◆ supporting the members on this Forum with regular reports and updates on changes to legislation and its implications for the Council as well as co-ordinating the programme of Resource annual reports
- ◆ supporting the work of the Council through:-
 - ◆ the employee development process and training programmes including the vocational development programme
 - ◆ development of a new learn online course - transgender awareness
- ◆ partnership working with Trade Unions to deliver a mental health and wellbeing awareness session

9. **Employment**

- 9.1 **Personnel Services:** The Council depends on the competence and commitment of its employees to deliver its services and has always aimed to be an "employer of choice". This has been underpinned by the partnership working agreement with the trade unions and Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) members who make a valuable and important contribution to the corporate Equality and Diversity Working Group. The Council's employment strategies and approach to joint working are consistently recognised externally.
- 9.2 Equal pay is always a constant focus of attention and the Resource is working in the best interests of the Council to ensure that we have a fair and equitable pay structure and evaluation scheme.
- 9.3 Regarding our Statutory Performance Indicators in relation to the percentage of women coming in the top 5% of salaries, women now make up 51.98% of our employees in this range. The increase in these figures is due to the significant number of females who have received an increment or have been regraded, thus increasing their earnings at the grades included in the top 5%.

- 9.4 A particular focus of work is in relation to attracting and engaging people who identify their ethnic origin as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (defined as all ethnic groups except White ethnic groups)). We started this process with a survey that has been issued to current employees, candidates who have been unsuccessful in securing a council job and organisations who support people who identify their ethnic background as BAME. Respondents have been invited to self-nominate to take part in online focus groups to further explore the issues. Response rates have been low; however, several people have volunteered to be part of a follow-up focus group. Evaluation of the survey results is underway. Findings from the survey will be used to improve the recruitment process and will be reported to the appropriate committees.

10. Employee Development and Vocational Training Programmes

- 10.1 Commitment to promoting equality of opportunity is a core competence for all employees. Equality and diversity issues are included in all training and development activities from induction and corporate policy courses, to management development programmes. This is in addition to equality specific training on disability, impact assessment, Deaf Awareness and British Sign Language.
- 10.2 When recruiting for the Modern Apprentice programme, we include positive about disability messages in all adverts, diverse images are used on marketing materials and we have an increased use of Social Media to promote any vacancies. Any participants who fall into the looked after care leavers are tracked to ensure positive destinations following the programme. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) now offer enhanced funding for care leavers and people with disabilities and/or health issues and/or learning disabilities.
- 10.3 South Lanarkshire Council's Supported Employment Team delivers 4 employability programmes supporting young people with significant additional support needs and or communication disorders such as autism. One of the programmes work with young people in their transition from school to employment, education, or training with an aftercare support for 1 year to sustain these destinations. The other is a Social Inclusion Project, a gaming café in the evenings promoting communication to clients with autism. This is currently delivered online due to the current climate. Post school we offer employability training and support in to paid employment through a one-year employer-led internship model at Hairmyres Hospital called Project SEARCH with various partners – NHS Lanarkshire, New College Lanarkshire and ISS Facilities Management. This project has been suspended for the current year due to COVID-19, however, still working with clients remotely, and hoping to resume for summer 2021. The team also delivers a two-year course run in partnership with New College Lanarkshire at The Coalyard Tearoom and Laundry based in Larkhall and in community cafes. This provides participants with the opportunity to gain experience, skills and many qualifications with the aim of gaining paid employment. Again, due to current circumstances, this project will be adapted with new vocational areas to suit the government guidelines.

11. Communication/Support

- 11.1 The Employee Network is an ongoing area of work whose aim is to raise awareness of the Council's equality commitment both internally to employees as well as to the community. Each of the four themes can be attended by any employee and the Network is there to not only provide support to individuals but also to influence the work of the Council, shaping policies and practice. Face to face meetings of the Network have been on pause during the last nine months, however, these will re-start as online meetings.

- 11.2 The Council is committed to promoting its values externally. This is shown through its continued support for a range of voluntary organisations such as Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group (LEMAG), projects such as Seniors Together and partnership working arrangements such as the DMG, the Disability Partnership and the South Lanarkshire Access Panel. Work with these organisations to raise public awareness of equality issues will continue and their support in developing our equality outcomes now and in the future is key to the success the Council will have in improving the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire.

12. Finance and Information Technology Services

- 12.1 Information Technology provides a critical support function to all Resources of the Council as the single provider of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
- 12.2 Finance Services conducted its annual budget consultation exercise in November 2019 to engage with a wide variety of community members and representative groups. This included the South Lanarkshire Youth Council, employee forums, Disability Partnership and Access Panel, as well as Seniors Together and the Citizens Panel. Attendance at the sessions show continued support for the approach and methods the Council is using to make savings as well as support for the Council's revised priorities. Consideration will be given on how to effectively engage with people in relation to the 2021/2022 budget.

13. Action Plan

- 13.1 During 2021 the Council will continue to develop its partnership working to ensure that good practice in the area of equalities is shared and to ensure that we share a similar vision in relation to the Equality Act and the Scottish specific duties.
- 13.2 In terms of the British Sign Language (BSL) Plan, work towards achieving the actions contained in the action plan will continue to be co-ordinated with North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire and will include input from the D/deaf and Deaf/blind community of Lanarkshire. Links will also be made to the SeeHear Strategy Action Plan.
- 13.3 The second Gaelic Language Plan was approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig on 21 April 2020 and is now published on the Council's website in English and Gaelic. Work is ongoing to progress the actions in the Plan as required by Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. As part of the Plan, an eLearning awareness session is now available on Learn on Line.
- 13.4 Work has started for the publication of the next edition of the Equality Mainstreaming Report. There is a statutory requirement for all public authorities to publish a set of equality outcomes and to 'mainstream equalities' into the way in which services are planned, organised and delivered. This is required by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (the Regulations) also impose 'specific duties' upon Scottish public authorities to publish a set of equality outcomes and a report showing progress being made in 'mainstreaming' equality. This report is required to show the progress being made by public authorities in making towards achievement of the equality outcomes set in 2017 as well as publication of a new set of equality outcomes.
- 13.5 We will continue to work across Resources and with communities to remove barriers highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic shown throughout the report.

14. Employee Implications

- 14.1 As outlined in the report, the Equal Opportunities Policy and accompanying legislation has implications for the Council as an employer and work here is reflected in the Council's employment and training strategies as described above.

15. Financial Implications

- 15.1 As equalities considerations are being "mainstreamed", they will be contained within existing resources. This position will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as the Resource Action Plan is developed.

16. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 16.1 There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

17. Other Implications

- 17.1 The risk to the Council is that, if the Resource does not have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, it may lead to non-compliance with equalities legislation. The consequence of this could be an unlimited financial penalty.

18. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 18.1 This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function, or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 18.2 There was also no requirement to undertake any consultation in terms of the information contained in this report.

Paul Manning

Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

14 October 2020

Link(s) to Council Values/Ambitions/Objectives

- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable
- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Working with and respecting others
- ◆ Excellent employer
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Ambitious, self-aware and improving

Previous References

- ◆ Equal Opportunities Forum - 21 August 2019

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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