

Agenda item 4

For decision – Equalities at Frome Town Council: strengthening our approach

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Summary

The council is committed to strengthening its approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by embedding it across all areas of work. While compliance with legislation is essential, highlighting existing good practice and identifying areas for improvement are key to developing our approach. This report contains three objectives which together will ensure we achieve compliance while enabling us to understand the equality impacts of our work on people with protected characteristics and effectively consider these in decision-making.

Background

The updated Council Plan reflects our vision for an inclusive town in which everyone feels welcome and able to participate. With our continued growth as a council comes the need to ensure our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (hereafter Equalities) is both robust and embedded across all areas of our work. This supports our vision by helping us to understand and respond to the needs of residents with protected characteristics, ensuring decisions are supported by available evidence. Whilst there is a need to comply with equality legislation, it is also important that we identify areas for development and make explicit the good work we already do in this area. This report proposes three objectives to strengthen our approach. Together, these objectives will help us to:

- Tighten our response and evidence compliance with the Equality Act (2010).
- Build Equalities thinking into our decision-making and demonstrate best practice.
- Improve understanding and confidence internally and externally around what can be seen as sensitive or difficult issues affecting protected groups.
- Continue to identify and reduce barriers to participation of protected and other locally relevant groups.

Objective 1: meet our statutory duties under Equalities legislation

It's important to note that thinking and action around equalities already features heavily in our work. We constantly strive to understand who we are not hearing from, try new ways to amplify those voices and ensure we do not create disadvantage. However, there is now a need to be more explicit and consistent about this. FTC is required to comply with the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) (2011) in relation to its services and functions. This is a specific duty on public authorities in the Equality Act and requires us to understand and take account of the impact of our decisions on people with protected characteristics. We should consider all protected groups, although not all will be impacted every time, and we can use data to understand what these are whilst acknowledging that identities are intersectional. The nine characteristics are:

- age
- disability

- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership

The Duty is split into General and Specific Duties. The General Duty requires us to have *due regard* to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share and those who do not share a protected characteristic.

To achieve compliance, we should consider how we will have due regard. This involves consciously thinking about the aims of the duty in decision making, deciding *when* it is proportionate to take further action to understand and mitigate impacts, and when it is not. Generally, further action is required when changes to policies or services, significant financial decisions or new projects are proposed. The two further objectives in this report detail how we can strengthen and evidence our response to the General Duty.

The Specific Duties are designed to support the General Duty. They are:

- To publish information annually on our compliance with the General Duty with regard to people affected by our policies and practices.

This could take the form of an equalities report within the council's annual report.

- To publish one or more equality objectives at least every 4 years.

These should usually reflect known gaps, disparities or community needs highlighted through our work and be specific and measurable.

It is recommended that relevant workplace policies reflect that we understand and are responding to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

We also have an anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in accessing our services and facilities as well as workplace adjustments we endeavour to make.

Objective 2: As part of our Improvement Plan, strengthen our approach to understanding equality impacts in decision making.

Recent projects have highlighted a need to develop a more consistent approach to help us understand, evidence and mitigate the impacts of significant decisions on protected groups. One way to achieve this is to develop an Equality Impact Screening/Assessment tool or EIA to support informed decision-making. This is considered best practice and would help us to:

- Comply (and evidence compliance) with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- Decide if we have enough information to understand impacts on relevant groups.
- Fill gaps in understanding and mitigate impacts on relevant groups
- Highlight positive impacts on relevant groups

Part of developing an EIA tool will involve deciding when it's appropriate to use and when it isn't. Not all decisions will have significant equalities implications. An effective EIA should not be onerous but simple to use and support decision-making.

Since equality impact assessment should be adopted across the council's work, this will be linked to the council's Improvement Plan and external expertise may be sought to commission the development of this process.

Objective 3: Identify where we could further improve, embed and evidence our equalities approach across the council's work as part of an Equalities Action Plan

Beyond our statutory duties there are many areas of good practice *and* opportunities for development around equalities issues. These require further thinking and discussion internally to understand the gaps in knowledge and confidence and work towards a consistent approach across the council - a golden thread of equalities. Areas for development will be set out in an Equalities Action Plan, to include a recommendation for two Equalities Objectives to be adopted and reported on. This process could be supported by the [Equalities Framework for Local Government](#). Areas for development could be, but are not limited to:

Training and support

- Review staff/Cllr Equalities training and create opportunities to improve knowledge and confidence around the needs of protected groups and other locally relevant groups.
- Consider becoming a [Disability Confident employer](#).
- Build on our work with community organisations by supporting them with their equalities approaches, especially around gaps identified through our research.

Facilities and open spaces

- Better use targeted research and engagement at the earliest opportunity to understand the impacts on protected groups when we propose significant changes to open spaces.
- Comply with our duty to make reasonable adjustments by continuing to improve the accessibility of our buildings, council meetings and open spaces.
- Understand how we can leverage better access for disabled people to the town's facilities and businesses.

Commissioning and procurement

- Prioritise commissioning which invests in activities and services that support our equality objectives, targets protected groups and fosters good relations between groups, especially those identified through research and data.
- Ensure our contractors and partners support and reflect our equalities approach.
- Use our grant funding process to ensure organisations we fund are proactive about equalities issues that affect their work and those they support.

Communications and engagement

- Use our digital platform to target specific equalities issues or groups and understand gaps in data.
- Introduce critical friends to appraise/advise us on our equalities work and check our progress against our equality objectives, such as a lived experience panel of residents.

- Harness participatory grant making to target protected groups and other locally relevant groups and test participation bursaries to reduce barriers to taking part.

Consultation and feedback

At some point we will need to engage with stakeholders around future equalities objectives. A report will be brought back to Operations & Assets Committee in August 2026. As part of our Improvement Plan, there will be regular updates on the implementation of this action plan for Operations & Assets Committee and Council.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

- This would link to Aim 1 of the Council Plan, Grow community wellbeing and Aim 5, Bold & Effective Council
- No links to the MTFP

Financial and Risk Implications

- Risks would arise from not having an Equalities Impact Assessment process.
- There is a budget in place for a stakeholder bursary to remove barriers to participation.

Legal / HR Implications

- Public Sector Equality Duty sets out our responsibilities.
- Awareness training will be necessary and the HR Team are giving thought to how this can be implemented

Equalities Implications

The recommendations within this report will strengthen our approach to addressing our equalities duties.

Community Safety Implications

Adoption of the approach set out in this report will help to foster positive relationships between groups in the community

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

None

Health and Safety Implications

None

Background Papers

See the report above for useful links

Report Sign-Off

Hannah Stopford, Community and Partnerships Development Manager 03/03/26

Peter Wheelhouse, Acting Town Clerk 03/03/26

Recommendation

Delegate to the Acting Town Clerk to work with relevant staff to achieve the following objectives:

1. Ensure the council is meeting its statutory duties in relation to equality legislation.

This includes measures to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty, ensure relevant policies are fit for purpose, and strive to meet our duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in accessing our services and facilities.

2. As part of our Improvement Plan, strengthen our approach to understanding equality impacts in decision-making.

This involves developing an equality impact screening/assessment tool, deciding when it should be used and embedding it within decision-making across the council.

3. Identify where we could further improve, embed and evidence our equalities approach across the council's work as part of an Equalities Action Plan.

This involves identifying areas for development, building confidence and embedding an equalities approach across all areas of our work as a service provider and employer. The Equalities Framework for Local Government may be used to support this.

4. Approve the adoption of objectives 2 and 3 above as interim equality objectives and report back to Operations & Assets Committee to approve the Equalities Action Plan.