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Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee – Items tabled at meeting

Wednesday, 4 March 2020

Part 1

Item

6. Single Equalities Framework – draft referral

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Single Equality Framework 2020-24 Recommendations

Safer and Stronger O&S Select Committee | 04.03.2020

Councillor Juliet Campbell (Chair) & Councillor James Rathbone (Vice Chair)

The Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee recommends that;

1. A more proactive approach should be taken to address the Public Sector Equality Duty.
 2. Equality objectives should be readily understandable to the public.
 3. Equality objectives should be specific, achievable and measurable.
 4. Equality objectives should identify areas of work via which improvements in equality can be made.
 5. These areas of work should identify the relevant protected characteristic/s it intends to benefit, the measures via which success can be evaluated, and be specific on which organisation is responsible for leadership in this area of work.
 6. Whilst specific and targeted work to improve equality is needed, meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty and addressing the equality objectives is a collective duty of the whole Council; every decision should further equality and improve fairness, and be evaluated as recommended by the SEF using the equality objectives and prisms.
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The Committee welcomes the proposed Single Equality Framework 2020-24 (SEF) which presents an approach to evaluating policy proposals and Council decisions. The identification of both equalities objectives and prisms via which they must be considered provides a clear framework within which officers can conduct their work, and if adopted should ensure a consistent approach is taken across the Council.

Whilst conducting the Committee's ongoing review "How Lewisham Council embeds Equalities across its service delivery" we have seen many examples of how officers are already considering equalities in policy development, strategic planning, service design and commissioning. We have been impressed at the quality of this work and the diligence of the officer's responsible for it. We are confident that due regard to equalities is embedded into Council decision making.

The proposed Single Equality Framework 2020-24 (SEF) clearly meets the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act 2010 to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years. The proposed SEF does not however reflect the approach to equality objectives which the Committee intends to recommend to Mayor and Cabinet. We have seen examples of other Local Authorities that are taking a more proactive approach to addressing the PSED and improving equality, and the Committee believes this approach would better suit the needs of Lewisham.

It is the Committee's intention to provide comprehensive recommendations relating to Lewisham Council's approach equalities as part of the final report of this review, but unfortunately this work is not yet complete. As such we are making specific recommendations relating to the SEF as part of the pre-decision scrutiny process, so that they may be considered by Mayor and Cabinet at their meeting on the 25th of March 2020 prior to the deadline for adoption of new equality objectives on April 1st 2020.

It is our view that the five equalities objectives identified by the SEF represent broad thematic aspirations, rather than specific objectives with clear plans for delivery over the next four years. This is intentional, as paragraphs eleven and twelve of the report clearly state;

11. The Single Equality Framework is not a strategy or a plan; rather, it is a lens through which to test and assess the process through which the Council does things and a way for it to better understand whether it is doing them in the right way. However, arrangements are being made to design an assurance framework of proxy indicators based on the broader aims of this framework. This will help to ensure that evidence of the effective application of the Framework can be tested.

12. The Single Equality Framework objectives are set at an intentionally high-level and are intended to ensure that every resident regardless of their background can recognise themselves or the experience of others in them.

Whilst we understand the logic of this approach, we do not feel that it reflects the Committee's recommended approach for improving equality in the borough. The final report of our review will reflect our preferred direction of travel for the council. We intend to recommend an approach to equalities similar to that taken by Glasgow City Council, which we consider to be proactive and effective in meeting the identified needs of residents.

The equality objectives are presented in more detail in the SEF statement itself, but paragraph fourteen of the report summarises the five proposed equality objectives for Lewisham Council;

14. The draft equality objectives for the Council's Single Equality Framework are as follows:

- Promote access to opportunities for the seldom heard
- Tackle socio-economic inequality affecting the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the borough
- Improve the quality of life of residents by tackling preventable illnesses and diseases
- Promote Lewisham as a borough of inclusion for all
- Promote active citizenship and social responsibility

We are concerned that these objectives will not be understood by most residents, who will not see themselves or the experiences of others reflected in them. Terminology such as "active citizenship and social responsibility" does not have a clear and common meaning, and the more extensive descriptions in the SEF do not provide sufficient additional clarity. The Democracy Review conducted by Lewisham Council identified that the use of jargon and unnecessarily complex language is a barrier to residents engaging with the Council, and we would like to see the proposed SEF reflect that understanding and learning.

We are also concerned that these objectives are so high-level that they have limitations in reducing inequalities at an organisational level. We do not believe this is the correct approach to take when setting equality objectives; the objectives should be specific, realistically defined, achievable and measurable. Addressing these objectives to reduce inequality in Lewisham needs to be approached via targeted and proactive action.

The third equality objective is in our opinion the strongest, precisely because it shares the approach we are recommending. "Improve the quality of life of residents by tackling preventable illnesses and diseases" is

clear in its purpose and meaning, and has specific achievable and measurable outcomes. The four areas of work identified with it share this clarity. We believe that this should form the basis upon which the other equality objectives are redrafted in line with the proactive approach we are recommending.

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