

Equality Objectives 2016-2020

Introduction

This document summarises the results of the County Council's consultation about its draft equality objectives for 2016-20.

As part of our duties under the Equality Act 2010, we need to identify and publish at least one equality objective that will help us to demonstrate how we are meeting our equality duties.

Our equality objectives

In 2012, the council set equality objectives to identify priorities for our services, employment practices and ways of working. These objectives were based on consultation with service users, employees and partners working with individuals and protected groups. Responses from that consultation and analysis of our equality information, including our workforce information, highlighted key areas we needed to focus on to promote equality.

Each year we review our equality information and provide an update on our progress. These updates are published in our Equality Information reports on the council's Equality and Diversity webpage. We felt that some of the equality objectives identified in 2012 were still relevant for the Council so these were retained. The rationale for selecting each of our draft objectives for 2016-20 was available as part of the consultation information and is included below each objective along with the information we gathered from the consultation.

Draft objective 1

For council services to understand and respond to the specific equality needs of all our customers better, and improve recording and understanding of service use and experience between people from different protected groups.

90% of respondents supported this objective, 6% did not know and 4% disagreed.

We proposed that the aim of this objective remained unchanged. When we published our equality information in relation to service delivery and ways of working,

a number of actions were identified to strengthen how we collect and use equality data. We believe it is important to continue to work on this to ensure that our services are accessible and to help us better understand the experiences and outcomes for people with different protected characteristics who use those services. We need to continue to strengthen the way we collate and analyse equality information in relation to our services so that we can identify, and address, gaps. It is particularly important that we try to gather this data so that our decisions do not have an unintended impact on protected groups or people with protected characteristics. We need to improve how we explain why we collect equality data and how using this data can help us to make better decisions that will benefit everyone. We therefore want to continue improving our equality monitoring so we can identify and implement any improvement actions needed in relation to our policies and practices

It was suggested that we should include the word 'all' in front of 'customers' to make it clear that this objective applied to all customers. This suggestion has been accepted. We need to make it clear that when we are talking about all protected groups this means all of our customers or service users because everyone has at least one protected characteristic. While there was clear support for this objective there were a number of suggestions that the wording could be simplified to make the meaning clearer. These suggestions have been accepted and this objective has been reworded. Objective 1 will now be:

To ensure that our services are accessible for all customers we will improve collection of data about their experiences to help us improve our services for everyone in Northumberland.

Draft objective 2

To improve access to, and experience of, council services to help bring the life opportunities of disabled people, and in particular older disabled people, more closely into line with those of other groups in the community.

92% of respondents agreed with this objective, 4% did not know and 3% disagreed

Our evidence shows that disabled people and in particular older disabled people are experiencing more difficulties in accessing council services and other life opportunities than other groups in the community. We need to take targeted action to improve the experiences of disabled people and older disabled people. While there was a very high level of agreement with this objective, some people did not understand why this group had been singled out for action to improve their experiences. When publishing our Equality Information we will need to make the evidence of the gap in life opportunities between this group and other groups clearer to explain why these groups need additional support. We will still have a duty to take action to ensure that the needs of all other individuals and groups are considered.

It is important that disabled people are able to access the full range of mainstream services that non disabled people can and for our services to be accessible. We know, however, from engagement with different groups and individuals in the community including the Learning Disability Partnership Board, Older People's forums, Ageing Well project and some day services that some older disabled people continue to feel they experience barriers to using some mainstream council services. These barriers can be physical or attitudinal and can also arise from the way we communicate with people.

Northumberland has a higher proportion of people aged over 65 compared with regional and national statistics (Census 2011). There is a strong link between age and disability with the chances of a person becoming disabled increasing as they grow older.

Over the last few years we have made progress, particularly in relation to adult health and social care services through our partnership working with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. This helps to us identify and respond to the needs of disabled people, particularly older disabled people, however further work is required therefore we continue to see this objective as a priority and proposed to leave it unchanged. Our residents' survey found that one in three residents (35%) gives help or support to relatives, friends or neighbours because those people have a disability or a health condition related to old age. More women are carers (37%) and most carers are aged 45-64 years old (44%). Many carers also have a long term illness or disability themselves (41% vs 33% who do not). By retaining this objective we are also seeking to identify and address the needs of carers. We have reworded this objective slightly to make the meaning clearer and objective 2 will now be:

To improve access to, and the experience of, council services for disabled people, and in particular older disabled people, to help bring their life opportunities more closely into line with those of other groups in the community.

Draft objective 3

Foster an accessible and inclusive working environment for all our staff

92% of respondents agreed with this objective, 6% did not know and 2% disagreed.

The council, like other public sector organisations, is facing a period of significant change and development as a result of austerity measures. To continue meeting the challenges facing us, we need to change the way we work to make best use of our office accommodation and to provide the business functions that support our front-line services as efficiently as possible. These new ways of working will inevitably have an impact on our staff, including where they work and how they work. We aim, therefore, to ensure changes to our ways of working are implemented fairly

with any potential detrimental impacts on staff being identified as early as we can and mitigated wherever possible. Equality considerations will be integral to any decisions we take about changes to our structure, how we allocate resources to our work and how we embed new ways of working.

We will continue to put training and support in place to ensure our managers have the right skills and capabilities to support our workforce during this period of change.

Although more work is needed, we have improved our workforce diversity monitoring information with an increase in declaration rates from 46% of all staff to 56% per cent. This gives us a clearer picture of our workforce's diversity profile. We will continue to encourage members of staff to provide this information and will explain why we are requesting the information and how the information will be used. Even though our workforce information shows the majority of staff consider Northumberland County Council to be a good or very good employer, we know that we need to do more to support our disabled employees as well as those with caring responsibilities. In an earlier survey, many of our lesbian, gay and bisexual staff (LGB) were less satisfied with the council as an employer. We have taken steps to tackle the issues raised and also established a policy to support staff undergoing gender reassignment. Last year the Council was assessed by Stonewall, a leading LGB organisation, as being a top 50 employer for LGB staff. We have seen an increase in the proportion of our employees who declare that they have a disability and we also know our workforce is ageing. To enable us to deliver services in the future we will need to ensure we have a balanced workforce, therefore we need to increase the proportion of our employees aged 16 to 34 years. To support this we have introduced apprenticeships and graduate recruitment opportunities. We assess the potential impact of our business improvement activities regarding new ways of working and representatives from our staff disability and LGBT staff groups are part of the council's working champions group. We are carrying out assessments on proposed improvements to our ways of working and using these to build equality considerations into proposals.

Recently, the council restructured its senior management team to provide the leadership needed to take the organisation forward over the next few years. The council is improving the way it communicates and engages with staff and aims to create a welcoming environment that supports effective working whilst recognising and encouraging diversity.

We will continue to invest in our people and to identify opportunities, within the financial constraints we face, to enable them to develop. We will ensure fair access to learning to help ensure all of our employees can realise their potential.

There was a suggestion that this objective should be extended to cover the workplace culture. Staff who responded felt that there could be more involvement

with them to help identify how proportionate and sustainable reductions can be achieved in the most appropriate areas of their work. They also felt that service development should be included as an item for team meetings.

In light of the responses we received, this objective has been reworded so objective 3 is now:

Promote and foster an accessible and inclusive culture and working environment for all our staff

Draft objective 4

To work with communities to tackle hate crime and continue to be an active member of the Safer Northumberland Partnership

92% of respondents agreed with this objective, 5% did not know and 2% disagreed.

One of our previous objectives was to make it easier to report hate crime. The council, through working with the Safer Northumberland Partnership and other agencies, has made progress in achieving this. The Safer Northumberland Partnership has contributed to the development of a network of safe reporting centres and people can report hate crime on our website as well as directly to Northumbria Police using a variety of different reporting routes. There is also a hate crime “app” for mobile devices that can be downloaded and used to make it easier to report an incident. Although reported incidents of hate crime are low we do know from the Home Office in [An Overview of Hate Crime in England and Wales Report](#) published in 2013, and other evidence, that many incidents are not reported. This can be for a number of different reasons, for example some people think nothing can be done or they don’t want to use up valuable resources. In some cases they may feel that an incident will not be treated seriously or they think they just have to tolerate verbal abuse. At a hate crime conference hosted by the council in July 2015, people who had experienced hate crime talked about the terrible impact this can have on people’s lives and how it can undermine their feeling of safety in the community. For these reasons we think it is important to continue to make tackling hate crime a priority which is why we propose to update our earlier objective. We want to work with our partners to raise awareness of what a hate crime or incident actually is and we need to build confidence in people so they can report incidents. We need to continue to support the Safer Northumberland Partnership to ensure people who experience hate crime receive appropriate support and are able to develop effective strategies to tackle incidents.

There was broad support for this objective and a suggestion that the objective should be reworded. It was suggested that membership of the Safer Northumberland Partnership was an action rather than an objective. It was also suggested that there was a need for specific measurable and achievable targets in relation to hate crime.

This will be addressed in more detail through the supporting action plan for this objective. There was also one response that felt that hate crime should not be an objective as incidences of reported Hate Crimes in Northumberland are very low. The majority of responses however, supported this as an objective and a number of people gave examples of their personal experiences of hate incidents that they had experienced stressing the importance of continuing to promote reporting and for a need to support for people who had been targeted. Some members of our staff requested additional training and information about hate incidents and crimes.

After listening to suggestions we have changed the wording of objective 4 to:

Work with communities to prevent hate incidents and crimes and encourage reporting.

Consultation

The consultation ran from 24 November 2015 until 29 January 2016 and was made available via an online survey with information in alternative formats including easy read, large print and printed forms available on request.

We published the consultation on the County Council website and encouraged participation by contacting local groups, organisations and networks who had a potential interest. We also contacted housing providers and information was also given through local and social media.

We received 226 responses to the consultation. 10 of these were from organisations including: groups that represented migrants, black and minority ethnic residents, staff, people who identify as LGBT, and older and younger people and disabled people. 38 responses were given in an alternative format. 54% of respondents were female, 44% male 3% preferred not to say. 4 respondents preferred to use their own term and gave feedback which will be taken into account in designing future monitoring forms. The profile of respondents to the religion or belief, disability and ethnic group questions are given below in tables 1-3.

Table 1 - Responses to religion or belief question

No religion	85 (40%)
Buddhist	2 (1%)
Hindu	0 (0%)
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	112 (53%)
Jewish	1 (0%)
Muslim	1 (0%)
Sikh	1 (0%)
Prefer not to say	9 (4%)

Table 2 - Responses by ethnic group

White	Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	Asian / Asian British	Total responses
214 (97%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	220

Table 3 - Responses to the question “Do you consider yourself to have a disability?”

Yes	No	Prefer not to say	Responses
49 (22%)	165 (75%)	7 (3%)	221

Additional comments on the objectives

Specific comments and suggestions have been considered under each of the objectives but there were also some additional comments. We received some suggestions that as a person’s socio-economic position or level of income has a huge impact on future opportunities that this should be included as a protected characteristic and there should be a specific equality objective in relation to this. This is not currently a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, so was not covered in this consultation. The council does, however, recognise the importance of this issue and has used its powers under the Public Service (Social Value) Act 2012 to consider how services they commission can improve economic and social wellbeing and tackle social inclusion. The council is also responding to the need to

tackle income deprivation and social exclusion through its corporate strategy and economic policies.

There was a suggestion that the council could use neighbourhood and community networks to identify those suffering from poverty or neglect because of age or race and this suggestion has been shared with the Locality Inclusion Support Teams. It was also suggested that migrant workers should be considered as a protected group but this group is already protected under the Equality Act 2010 through the Race Protected Characteristic which includes people of different nationalities.

In addition to specific comments on the Equality Objectives a number of other suggestions and comments were received during the consultation. These comments have been summarised under the headings below.

Communication

There was a suggestion that more information needs to be provided to the local community about the work of the Council through local press coverage, newsletter and through voluntary and community groups and that there is also a need to raise awareness of how people can be involved in decisions that affect local communities. It was suggested that the Council provide more information for individuals and communities about how the Council advertises consultation routes for key decisions and enables people to be able to make suggestions about improvements to services or budget savings.

Service improvement suggestions

A number of suggestions were received for improving services and these have been passed to the relevant team to consider how they can respond. The VCS assembly will be asked to consider the suggestion that there is a continuing need to support a Deaf and disability forum in Northumberland.

The following list contains comments and suggestions for service improvement made by respondents to the consultation:

- *Need to improve local facilities for autistic people in the teen - 30's age group and make more information available for this group.*
- *There is a need to improve services for people with hearing impairments.*
- *There is a need for projects to eliminate language barriers and isolation for people who do not have English as a first language.*
- *Improvements are needed to sports equipment (curling) at one of our sports centres.*
- *Residents in rural areas continue to struggle with transport links and broadband issues and many are not able to utilise online facilities, so consideration needs to be given to providing services in these areas. It was suggested that this might be possible through mobile services equipped with*

IT equipment to enable people to pay rent, council tax, search for homes. This would also be a good way to share information about NCC and what is going on in local areas. There were several responses from residents in the west of the county, in particular, who feel isolated from council services.

- *Suggest that the bus subsidy should be redistributed so that more rural areas could have access to a bus service The Council should consider how they can make services more accessible so that staff are closer to the communities they serve.*
- *Guidance notes for people applying for concessionary bus passes needs to be more detailed and give examples of the information that needs to be provided.*
- *Local community centres and groups working with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are struggling to continue their work due to a change in funding remits.*
- *Use new ways of working to make best use of new IT to enable staff to be more flexible in the way they work across Northumberland to improve access for customers and businesses which could lead to improvements in services.*
- *More pooling of resources between the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group and Health services to help protect service users from the full impact of austerity measures.*
- *Some staff felt that they need more training on the equality impact assessment (EIA) process and that more consultation needs to be undertaken with representatives of protected groups and more information needs to be provided about how EIA's are published.*
- *It would be useful for staff to have further training and information about meeting the needs of customers with learning disabilities.*
- *There was a request for information about the work the Council was doing on issues like gender reassignment and making services more accessible and inclusive for lesbian, gay, bi and trans people. It was also suggested that on Council equality monitoring forms people should be given the option to choose alternative terms rather than just male or female.*
- *Suggestion that "Humanist" be included as an option on the equality monitoring form and that the needs of this group of people should be considered in service and policy development.*

Achieving our equality objectives for 2016-20

The draft objectives, with amendments identified above, have been adopted. We are required to publish and regularly update an action plan setting out how we aim to achieve each objective and this plan will be developed taking into account the suggestions received and priorities identified during the consultation. It will be available on the [Equality and Diversity page](#) of the council's website.

We will also take the following action in response to service improvement suggestions:

- We will review our guidance on equality monitoring
- sporting equipment request has been forwarded to Active Northumberland
- An LGBT action plan has been developed and will be monitored by the council's Equality Diversity and Human Rights Steering group.
- The council has adopted a gender reassignment policy and is reviewing policies to ensure they are LGBT inclusive.
- Training has been offered to staff on the equality impact assessment process, information on equality impact assessment is available on the county council's Equality and Diversity webpage. Equality impact assessments are published with council reports and are included in council meeting papers.
- Information for staff and opportunities for training about hate crime will be made available.

Ongoing Monitoring

Northumberland County Council operates a model in which equality and diversity sits within individual service areas so they can consider and apply equality requirements in their spheres of activity. The Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Steering Group (EDHRSG) has been established to help the council and to support service areas to ensure public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010 are met. The group is currently comprised of elected Members representing all four political groupings, officers representing different teams and a trade union representative. This group will monitor the progress of the council in meeting these equality objectives.

The Council will share the progress of this through the publication of our equality information each year.

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