

Council Plan Equality Impact Assessment

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In April 2012, an Equality Impact Assessment was conducted on the previous **Council Plan**. This assessment analysed the options set out in the plan, which was subject to subsequent public consultation. This highlighted some disconnection between the outcomes and people's priorities and needs. It recommended that the plan should have regard to the needs of the community as highlighted by the evidence. This was addressed through adoption of a number of Equality Objectives as part of the adopted Equality Scheme 2012, many of which are now reflected in the objectives of this plan.

This Equality Impact Assessment is of the proposed plan as submitted to Council. Under equality legislation, the Council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and
- foster good relations between different groups.

'Due regard' is required in the decision-making as well as the implementation process. Assessing the proposed objectives is the means by which we show 'due regard'.

1. People affected

The Council Plan affects all current and potential residents of Milton Keynes.

2. Summary

This assessment looks at the sixteen goals in the plan, recognising that they can be regarded in three ways:

- Seven (7) priorities link direct to a relevant equality objective. These are Budget, Housing, Homelessness, Education and Skills, Adult Health and Social Care, Children, and Mental Health.

- Three (3) priorities are not directly relevant to an equality objective, but serve a more general purpose. These are Waste, Highways and Transport.
- Six (6) priorities set the context in which equality can occur, requiring further consideration of equality within the implementation processes. These are Regional Working, Economy, Environment, Regeneration, European Destination City and Partnerships.

3. Detail

Looking at the priorities as they are set out in the plan:

a) Those priorities directly relevant to equality

Budget – Milton Keynes Council is one of the few public bodies that routinely impact assesses its Medium-Term Financial Plan. This has been the practice since 2010, using a modified ‘traffic’ light system to highlight those areas where adjustments can be made.

Housing – Homelessness has featured in equality objectives since 2010. The level of homelessness is only one of two objectives that have increased over the last 5 years. Homelessness has also been highlighted as one of the main equality challenges in various assessments. In this priority, the work to deliver more adapted housing should be a sub-priority, as has housing for care leavers.

Education and Skills – Education and skills have featured in various forms in the council’s plans. There has been a observable change from proxy forms of equality that sought to see racial differences or attainment in schools to seeing skills and education as ensuring that everyone, young or old, has access to the skills and training they need to be successful.

Adult Health and Social Care – independent living has featured in the equality objectives since 2010. However, equality is best served in the recognition that modernised Adult Care services are essential to meeting the growing demand from demographic changes, focusing on community-based and preventative services. This means putting power

into the hands of service users so they can make their own decisions about the services they want.

Children - protecting our vulnerable children from harm and neglect, providing support so every child has the opportunity to succeed is fundamental to equality. It is important that objectives and targets are created to support progress in making this happen.

Mental Health - Mental health is everyone's business – individuals, families, employers, educators and communities all need to play their part. Good mental health and resilience are fundamental to physical health, relationships, education, work and to achieving potential. Good mental health and wellbeing also bring wider social and economic benefits. In terms of equality, this may mean supporting people to care for their own mental health and that of others, and to challenge the blight of stigma and discrimination. The council has objectives for employment, for education, for safety and crime reduction, for reducing drug and alcohol dependency and homelessness, and these cannot be achieved without improvements in mental health.

b) Those priorities not directly relevant to equality

Three areas are not directly related to equalities and therefore the equality objectives, these are waste, highways and transport. However, there are aspects of these that can be very important for people with different equality aspects. People with disability and older people often rely on an accessible transport system.

c) Those priorities that set the context in which equality can occur

The remaining six priorities of the plan reveal the context upon which many of the equality objectives will be delivered. These are Regional Working, Economy, Environment, Regeneration, European Destination City and Partnerships.

These will use the following principles:

- Good analysis - identifying where the outcomes and opportunities gaps are for different communities, including those sharing the protected characteristics

- Strategic leadership – both political and managerial – establishing a strong vision for equality and improving equality outcomes
- Responsive to local people - meeting the needs of a diverse range of local communities and individuals
- Involve local people - in developing their policies and evaluating their effectiveness

Armed Forces Covenant Impact

In line with the Council's covenant to consider the impact of its policies on the Armed forces and those who have served in them, this assessment finds the following.

- Relocation within Milton Keynes continues to be a challenge for those from the Armed Services, especially as no preference can be given in the housing process. However further support and guidance can be given and links from the website.
- Mental Health requires better understanding and research to ensure that Armed forces mental health is understood within local Mental Health commissioning.
- The council signposts people from the armed services and ex-servicemen/women to education and skills opportunities through its voluntary sector partners.

It is important that this focus in these three areas are maintained within the council plan implementation

Recommendation:

That the practice of assessment on the budget continues, addressing the impact not just on the equality groups, but also more generally for those who are vulnerable due to their characteristics or situation.

That the council continues with the plan, adopting the seven relevant priorities as the Council's statutory equality objectives and ensuring that the six 'context' priorities are further assessed during the implementation stages, unless this has already been completed.

Further impact assessment will accompany the implementation of the Council Plan.