

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

21 March 2024

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Annual Review

Report of: Deborah Woodcock - Executive Director Children's Services

Report Reference No: CP/31/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update members on progress against delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025.
- 2 The work to deliver the strategy this period has continued to build upon progress already made in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) within the Council, and furthered the plans to continue to promote and advance EDI, throughout Cheshire East.
- 3 The EDI strategy is a key strategy for the Council as its ambitions pervade all that we do in relation to residents and staff. The strategy supports our corporate plan vision of an Open, Fair and Green Cheshire East. It particularly promotes our “fair” vision of reducing inequalities, promoting fairness and opportunity for all and support for our most vulnerable residents.

Executive Summary

- 4 Progress has been made to implement the EDI strategy during 2022/23 and the accompanying action plan contains 29 actions, 13 of these have been achieved (45%), 13 (45%) of these have been partially achieved and only 3 (10%) have not yet been progressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress in delivering the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and highlight any areas of risk, challenge and good practice.
2. Receive an updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy following the update to the Cheshire East Plan.

Background

- 5 The EDI strategy was approved in April 2021 by the former Cabinet. It sets out refreshed ambitions and objectives as part of the duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and to improve public services for everyone. The strategy sets the vision to ensure that Cheshire East is an area of equal opportunity where everyone has a fair chance, and people from all backgrounds take part in community life.
- 6 The EDI strategy sets out five key objectives, which are:
- 7 **Include** – listen and involve all voices
- 8 **Inspire** – celebrate and promote diversity and the positive opportunities it brings
- 9 **Integrate** – deliver and promote accessible services for all
- 10 **Inform** – empower people to respectfully challenge discriminatory and poor behaviour
- 11 **Impact** – support and deliver meaningful change
- 12 To support the delivery of the plan, a workplan was developed to document the key actions proposed to deliver the ambitions of the plan. The plan has been delivered and led collectively from officers across the Council. Progress against the plan has been presented to and considered by the EDI Board, chaired by Deborah Woodcock (Executive Director Children's Services). Membership of the board includes the Member Champion for EDI Cllr Stuart Gardiner.
- 13 The Board has oversight of all EDI activity at the Council. Every Directorate within the Council has an EDI Board, which reports into the Council EDI Board. The Directorate Boards consider EDI activities,

challenges and awareness days in relation to the specific service areas within each Directorate.

- 14 The Council has 5 active staff network groups, these are: VibranCE, the Early Careers Staff Network Group, the Differently Abled Network, the Women's Network and the Armed Forces network. The organisation is also supported by EDI Champions.
- 15 The Champions are staff who are committed to creating a culture of tolerance, kindness and inclusivity at Cheshire East Council. Champions commit to undertaking a series of EDI related training courses and meet as a group to raise any issues coming from the workforce, and to feedback on any suggested improvements, which can then be discussed at the EDI Board.
- 16 A "stock take" review of the EDI strategy was undertaken in December 2023 which has provided an opportunity to assess progress made to date in delivering the identified actions to implement the ambitions of the strategy. This is captured in detail in **Appendix 1**.
- 17 The review of progress allows the Council to ensure that the actions are progressing to plan and are meeting the agreed aims and objectives of the EDI strategy. The review also offers an opportunity to identify areas of good progress, and areas which may benefit from accelerated focus.
- 18 In summary, 45% of actions have been achieved, 45% have been partially achieved and 10% have not yet been progressed.
- 19 Highlights in the progression of the strategy are as follows:
- 20 **Include**
- 21 Young employers' and veterans' networks are now established.
- 22 External equality contacts have been collated and are now included within the equality impact assessment toolkit.
- 23 Following the creation of a cross council group, a consultation and engagement toolkit has been drafted and now informs consultation and engagement development. This has been made available on the Centranet. An equality impact assessment toolkit has also been made available to support improved equalities assessment of change.
- 24 The Customer Experience strategy is being redesigned and will include EDI objectives.
- 25 Regular meetings with CHALC are being held to ensure that material is widely distributed.

26 **Inspire**

27 The Communities team now have a bespoke team that work with minority groups. The Cohesion team primarily support migrant populations and veterans but this work is being expanded.

28 Cheshire East Council will participate in the Cheshire Equality Leads Forum to work effectively with partners.

29 Ward profiles have been made available and shared to provide current data on communities across the borough.

30 The Differently Abled Group are reviewing guidance for workplace adjustments.

31 The Hidden disability staff network group meet regularly and has a good level of membership.

32 The group are now seeking accreditation to the Disability Confident Employer scheme.

33 **Integrate**

34 The EIA template and guidance has been updated and is now accompanied by an Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit.

35 A learning lounge training module has been developed and will now provide further guidance around how to complete an assessment.

36 Equality is a clause within all council contracts and standard terms and conditions available of CE website.

37 Annual social value survey – questions asked about suppliers apprising their supply chain.

38 New contract management system includes policies to be held centrally against the supplier and performance indicators added.

39 **Inform**

40 We have supported 700 Ukrainians during 2022/23 and have supported over 400 Afghans over the last two years.

41 We have a network of Connected Community place for local people to connect and gather information. We have plans in 2023/24 for these

venues to become more culturally competent in terms of reaching out to various cohorts.

42 Impact

- 43 A new EDI board chair is now in place and the board has been refreshed. This refresh takes into account the establishment of a new boards in each directorate within the Council, with the new members being nominated from each directorate board.
- 44 EDI boards have been established in each directorate and they meet on a regular basis.
- 45 Issues and communication feed into and out of the directorate boards into the Council EDI board.
- 46 The EDI Board receives regular updates from directorates and EDI Board members attend directorate meetings.

Consultation and Engagement

- 47 Consultation was undertaken to inform the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy in 2020/21. The outcome of the consultation can be found via the following link: [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Consultation results](#)

Reasons for Recommendations

- 48 The EDI strategy outlined our ambitions to reduce inequalities and promote fairness for all and supports achievement of our Corporate Plan. Oversight of progress of implementation of the objectives of the strategy is part of the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.

Other Options Considered

- 49 Not applicable.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 50 The strategy, and its associated workplan, have been developed in the context of our obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

- 51 The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires the council to:
- 52 Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- 53 Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 54 Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 55 There are no direct financial implications of this report. Areas identified for acceleration will be subject to a Business Case being submitted, in order to provide any necessary funding.

Policy

- 56 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy is a key policy document for the Council and supports the Corporate Plan. Alongside our Open, Fair and Green commitment, the Council recognises that promoting equality, diversity and inclusion will improve public services for everyone.
- 57 Equality for all residents, stakeholders and employees aligns with our Open, Fair and Green objectives and is an assumed theme within the Vision and aims of the Corporate Plan.

An open and enabling organisation	A council which empowers and cares about people	A thriving and sustainable place
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 58 The EDI strategy sets the vision and objectives for the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 59 The strategy aims to increase inclusion and promote equality of opportunity and tackle inequality for all residents. Equalities analysis for the borough was carried out in the development of this strategy.
- 60 As individual policy changes take place as a result of this strategy they will be subject to separate Equality Impact Assessments.
- 61 The Objective Delivery Plan will be subject to ongoing equality analysis.

Human Resources

62 There are no direct human resources implications of this report.

Risk Management

63 There are no key risks identified in relation to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion strategy. There have been some low-level risks identified in relation to the pace of progress. However, risks continue to be managed by the EDI Board and mitigating actions developed to manage any emerging risks.

Rural Communities

64 The “integrate” objective of the EDI strategy focuses on delivering and promoting accessible services for all. Rural communities should be positively impacted by implementation of the strategy.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

65 Children and Young People and Cared for Children should be positively impacted by the implementation of the EDI strategy. They are particularly considered in relation to the “include” objective, which refers to “listen and involve all voices”.

Public Health

- Progression of the EDI strategy promotes and supports public health. The strategy commits to strive to provide equal life opportunities for all residents. These include not only those with protected characteristics but also those who may be disadvantaged through socio-economic factors, such as employment opportunities, physical and mental health and access to educational opportunities.

Climate Change

66 The EDI strategy was developed in accordance with the “green” priority of the Corporate Plan.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix 1 – EDI Strategy Progress Review
Background Papers:	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Annual review 2022 – 2023