

Council

14 JUNE 2018

Corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018 - 2022

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to:
- 1.2 Provide an overview to the Council of the feedback from engagement with staff, which helped to support the development of the Corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2018- 2022 and also incorporates feedback from elected members on previous drafts, including points raised for consideration by the Overview Select Committee at their meeting on 5 April 2018.
- 1.3 Request that the Council approve the Corporate Equality Strategy 2018 – 2022 and Action Plan, subject to any suggested amendments.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council;
 - a) Notes the content of the report and appendices; and
 - b) Approves the Corporate Equality Strategy 2018 – 2022 and Action Plan, subject to any suggested amendments by the Council.

3. Approach to developing the Strategy

- 3.1 The current strategy sets out our approach to meeting the general aims of our Public Sector Equality Duty and also what our equality priorities as an organisation are. Our consideration of key equality priorities or objectives is a specific aim of our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Accompanying our current strategy is an Equality and Diversity Charter which summarises our commitment to equality.
- 3.2 The approach taken in reviewing and refreshing the strategy (attached as Appendix A) was to consider key contextual factors such as the financial position of the Council; utilise data and evidence such as demographics and the most recent analysis of our workforce; draw on the knowledge and experience of the Equalities Team in their day to day work across the

organisation; and importantly to also engage with employees, as their day to day actions shape the extent to which we are able to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty. If we are striving, as an organisation, to seek to continue to address equality and diversity during a continued period of change (the city's changing demography as well as the decreased availability of resources for service provision), it will be the actions of our workforce in their day to day practice, which will achieve those outcomes. This report includes details of the feedback from staff engagement. Evidence such as the profile of the workforce has been the subject of an earlier report shared with the City Mayor and which went to Overview Select Committee in the autumn and can be found at

<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/g8062/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2002-Nov-2017%2017.30%20Overview%20Select%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

- 3.3 In addition to this, it is acknowledged that, in order to successfully embed the principles of the Strategy across the organisation, there needs to be some tangible outcomes supported by SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) actions. An action plan which supports the strategy, and is in keeping with the commitments outlined in the charter, has been developed and is presented in Appendix B.

4. Engagement - Staff Sessions, Staff Survey and Divisional Event

- 4.1 Staff were invited to attend one of five Equality Strategy and Action Plan Workshops. The workshops were spread over two dates and across two venues. They were promoted via face, face for noticeboards, via flyer for those sections of the organisation without access to a PC and via email. In total, 101 staff attended the sessions which were held at City Hall and Beaumont Leys Training Centre.
- 4.2 Attendees were given context around the work that the Equalities team do, the responsibilities that the Council has legally in terms of Equalities and which characteristics Equalities legislation covers. A warm up exercise was conducted to gather evidence about what attendees felt that Leicester City Council does well in terms of Equalities. The rationale for this was to see whether there was good practise in some areas that could be replicated across the organisation.
- 4.3 The attendees were then asked the following questions:

Services/ external priorities

- As a service user, or as someone delivering front line services, what are the barriers to the council offering accessible services which are responsive to and inclusive of people's individual needs? (Attendees

were then asked to put a tally next to what they thought the top 3 most significant barriers are. The issues which they thought should be prioritised.)

- What can realistically be done to remove or minimise the barriers that you have identified? What resources do we have available to help us do this?

Work force/ internal priorities

- What barriers do you think there are to ensuring that equality is embedded into the workplace?
(Attendees were then asked to put a tally next to what they thought the top 3 most significant barriers are. The issues which they thought should be prioritised.)
- What can realistically be done to remove or minimise the barriers that you have identified? What resources do we have available to us to support this?

- 4.4 The feedback was organised into general themes and the tallies were used as an indication of the level of priority assigned to each individual point by attendees.
- 4.5 In addition to the staff sessions, a survey was developed and promoted via face, face for notice boards, email and via the employee groups. The survey was primarily completed online and ran from the 14th November 2017 to the 1st December 2017. There were 43 online responses and 2 paper responses with a spread of respondents from across the organisation and across protected characteristics. The feedback from the survey was analysed in the same way as the feedback from the engagement sessions by organising it into general themes. The themes arising from the responses to the survey largely supported the evidence which was collated via the engagement sessions.
- 4.6 We also held a 'mini session' replicating the longer staff sessions at the Delivery, Communications and Political Governance divisional event in November 2017. The feedback from this was analysed in the same way as the longer staff sessions by organising the feedback into general themes. The divisional event did not include an opportunity to prioritise the issues in the same way as the staff sessions, due to time constraints. Approximately 110 staff members attended the divisional event.
- 4.7 The Action Plan takes into account the feedback that was given in the staff sessions, the Delivery, Communications and Political Governance divisional event feedback and the responses to the survey. An overview of some of the key areas of feedback are covered below:

Digital Transformation

- 4.8 Attendees/respondents were most concerned by the possible equalities and general implications of digital transformation, 'Channel Shift' and 'hard stops'. Channel shift is about transforming the way that people interact with the council and is about making greater use of digital channels, such as the website, rather than face to face contact or telephone. The aim is to reduce call volume and repeat calls and encourage self-service online. It is about making it easier for people to interact with the Council digitally. 'Hard stops' refers to those services where the primary method of interaction has been moved online and there is no option to interact via face to face or telephone, unless there is a need to do so because the service user is unable to use digital channels, due to additional needs such as a disability for example.
- 4.9 Digital transformation was the area that was identified by attendees/respondents as the biggest area of concern and the largest priority was given to it in the staff sessions (66 tallies). While some attendees/respondents felt that all service users should be able to contact via a range of channels according to their preference, the majority of comments focused on what the organisation puts into place for those who are unable to access online services, with many comments focusing on possible access issues in relation to the protected characteristics of age and disability. The majority of comments about online services talked about needing to make sure they are as 'accessible' and 'inclusive' as possible to enable people in using digital channels.
- 4.10 The solutions that attendees/ respondents provided focused on training for staff to both increase their digital skills and to increase their understanding and awareness of what support they can provide to service users and how to provide the support, introducing 'Digital Champions' (particularly in front facing roles in libraries, community centres etc.), better communicating the options that are available to service users, increasing service user involvement, upskilling/coaching service users where possible and appropriate to use digital channels, ensuring that the technology itself is accessible to the widest range of people, and slowing down the transition to online services in order to allow time for cultural change to take place. There were also suggestions to analyse more data by protected characteristic, in order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of moving to online channels as a default.
- 4.11 A concern around the accessibility of technology and the transition to online methods of communication (e.g. via the website) was raised at the Overview Select Committee meeting on 05.04.18. This was particularly in relation to older people who may find it more difficult or may not be as confident in using technology and those for whom English is not their first language. The actions identified in the plan to support people in improving their skills and to

increase participation are intended to help to address these potential issues and to ensure that the digital offer is as accessible and inclusive as possible.

- 4.12 Work has commenced with the Digital Transformation team to respond and develop the organisational approach to digital transformation, in light of the feedback.

Accessibility (excluding Digital Transformation)

- 4.13 Language barriers were raised as a concern and 40 attendees at the staff sessions chose to place it within their top three priorities. The solutions that were offered were to ensure we make use of the Plain English standard for Council forms and documents, provide translations in the most widely spoken languages, provide information in alternative formats, provide training for staff who speak languages in addition to English to become interpreters, classes and training sessions for service users to complete forms (including online forms), more ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses and providing a range of ways for people to learn English e.g. via community groups, conversation cafes, online. There were also suggestions which focused on raising staff awareness of what is available so that they are able to signpost service users to the most appropriate support. As a result of this feedback, the action plan includes an action to undertake a mapping exercise of the language support available within the city in order to identify gaps and to communicate the support available to service users with staff in order that they are able to effectively signpost. The council will continue to provide translation and interpretation in accordance with its agreed policy.

Organisational development and internal culture (including staff training, skills and wellbeing)

- 4.14 There were several comments about ensuring that the organisational culture is inclusive and that diversity is seen as an asset to the organisation. Some people felt that there was more work to be done to increase awareness and understanding of a wide range of cultures, perspectives and protected characteristics. Some suggestions that were offered were Equality awareness refresher training, promoting dates of significance and associated events that are taking place (internally and in the city) and using case studies or asking people with particular protected characteristics if they would be comfortable in sharing their experiences. There was feedback that, in order to challenge prejudices, biases and even unconscious biases, there needs to be a human element to the experience as attendees/ respondents generally felt that e-learning tends to focus more so on increasing someone's factual knowledge of a subject rather than having the impact that is required to influence peoples' values and behaviours. As part of this, the employee groups were identified as playing an important role. There were

also some suggestions about how we can ensure that the employee groups are promoted, particularly to new starters, via induction.

- 4.15 There were a number of comments specifically about increasing awareness of 'hidden' disabilities such as dyslexia, autism and mental health conditions. Most of these comments were internally focused on the work force's understanding of hidden disability. The suggestions made to raise awareness of these issues focused mainly on communications and training, in addition to increasing managers' understanding specifically in relation to reasonable adjustments. There was also a comment about staff members' learning styles and how this is accommodated in terms of supporting their development.
- 4.16 The feedback relating to 'hidden disabilities' was reiterated at the Overview Select Committee Meeting on 05.04.18. In response to specific feedback at the meeting, a commitment to raising awareness about dyspraxia has been added to the equality action plan.

Employee management

- 4.17 There was feedback about the importance of managers having an understanding of equalities issues and understanding how this can be applied to their approach. In order to gain a greater understanding of the areas where understanding can be developed, Human Resources will undertake a survey relating to the Dignity at Work Policy.

Policy, practise and workforce representation

- 4.18 Attendees/respondents generally felt that policies within the organisation are quite good, for example the Dignity at Work Policy and the Health and Wellbeing and Carer's passports. However, there were a number of attendees who fed back that there are sometimes inconsistencies as to how they are applied in different areas. It was also identified that we may not have adequate information about how effectively policies have been embedded and what difference they are making in the workplace, as there is a lack of monitoring in place.
- 4.19 There were some concerns raised by attendees/respondents in the sessions and via the survey about workforce representation, particularly in terms of representation of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) officers within senior roles. This is something which was identified in the most recent work force monitoring report and the actions which were identified at this stage have been transferred to the Equality Action Plan. Work force representation was an area where attendees at the staff sessions felt we were doing well in many (but not all) parts of the organisation and particularly in terms of the representation of women in senior roles. At the Overview and Select

Committee meeting on 05.04.18, it was highlighted that there are sometimes under representations of groups which are not traditionally under represented, for example there is an under representation of male employees in some areas which is not reflective of the service user group.

Fostering good relations and external culture

- 4.20 This was an area where attendees/respondents generally felt that the City Council are doing well. However, some did comment that the diversity of different communities and groups living within Leicester are not always well integrated and that there are some communities who are quite insular. There was a lot of positive feedback about events and festivals which bring people together in the City. Having said this, there was some feedback to suggest that there could be more diversity in the acts at some city council-owned venues. Whilst this is not included in the Action Plan, it will be fed back to the relevant area.

Physical environment, buildings and resource

- 4.21 There were a number of comments which focused upon physical access to buildings. Where feedback has been given in relation to a specific access issue, this will be raised with facilities management to explore whether there are any feasible options to be able to improve access.

Service Specific

- 4.22 Service specific feedback will be raised with the relevant areas for consideration.

General Feedback

- 4.23 There was a significant amount of feedback given which was not in relation to specific protected characteristics. For example, there was feedback about the access to opportunities for staff generally; the availability of training (not specifically equalities training) for all staff; ensuring that managers have the skills to be able to manage staff effectively and the differences in access to IT and emails in different sections of the organisation, which people felt hindered their ability to be able to keep up to date with organisational initiatives and news. Although this feedback was documented and will be fed back to the relevant areas, it has not been used to form the basis of the Equality Strategy and Action Plan which focuses more specifically on those characteristics which are protected under Equalities legislation.
- 4.24 When feedback is given to staff, following the introduction of the Equalities Strategy and Action Plan, we will also provide information to those who

attended the sessions about how their wider feedback has taken into account and who has been made aware of their feedback.

5. Corporate Equality Strategy 2018 – 2022 and Equality Action Plan 2018

5.1 The Corporate Equality Strategy and Action Plan have been developed to reflect the feedback received from staff and to reflect current trends and issues, including the current financial context, the possible equalities impacts of Brexit and deprivation including welfare reform.

5.2 The majority of the feedback was consistent with the queries, comments and suggestions that the Equalities Team respond to on a daily basis in supporting the organisation to embed good equalities practise and robustly assess the equalities implications of policy, practise and service change.

5.3 The proposed Corporate Equality Strategy 2018 – 2022 Strategy is attached as Appendix A. It sets out our approach for the next four years and covers;

- Scope of the Strategy
- Our vision and values
- Our commitment to equality and diversity
- Our legal responsibilities
- The current context and the challenges that we face as a city
- Our approach to embedding the principles of the strategy across the organisation and how the strategy will be monitored
- Governance arrangements

5.4 The proposed Equality Action Plan 2018 contains SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) actions which will support the organisation in embedding the principles of the Strategy. The Action Plan will be refreshed annually. It is attached as Appendix B.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 No significant financial implications are expected as a result of this report, although there will be some call on staff time and possibly some very small financial commitments out of service budgets – Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no direct employment legal implications arising from the report – Julia Slipper, Principal Lawyer, ext. 376855

7.2 There are no commercial legal implications arising from the report –
Mandeep Virdee, Solicitor (Commercial , Property & Planning Team), ext.
371422

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