

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Update on Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan

Date: 5 October 2023

Author: Interim Corporate Director

Wards Affected

All Wards

Purpose

To update members on the progress made across the Council on the Equality and Diversity Framework and action plan as well as other work undertaken in relation to improving equality and diversity in the provision of Council services since the adoption of the Equality and Diversity policy in 2021.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

THAT Cabinet:

- 1) Notes the work undertaken on the Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan and the wider work undertaken by officers and members to strengthen the Council's approach to equality and diversity in the performance of its functions.

1 Background

- 1.1 In October 2021, Cabinet approved the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy document along with the Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan for 2021-2024. These documents were approved following two rounds of public consultation which can be found at Appendix 1. This report provides an update on work carried out under the policy and progress against the Equality Framework and Action plan. A detailed progress report against equality actions taken from the Council's performance management

system is attached at Appendix 2. This report sets out more broadly the achievements under the policy and framework since implementation and references future actions to be completed. Whilst the framework was initially to run until March 2023, due to the time taken to complete 2 consultations on the framework, this timescale was extended in August 2022 and the framework and action plan now run until March 2024.

1.2 The Equality Policy references the need to report annually to Cabinet on progress. Since adoption of the framework in October 2021, this is the first annual report to be presented to Cabinet. Work has been monitored closely by the Strategic Equality and Diversity Group and the Equality Officer Group but due to capacity and changes in officer roles, this is the first opportunity to present progress to Cabinet.

1.3 **Strategic Equality and Diversity Group**

The policy document sets out the responsibilities for equality and diversity within the Council and references a Strategic Equality and Diversity group (SEGD) with membership consisting of the Leader and Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder and Policy Adviser with responsibility for equalities, a member from each opposition group, the Chief Executive and Director responsible for Equalities. This group met for the first time in August 2022 and has since met on a quarterly basis. The group, chaired originally by the Portfolio Holder for Young People and Equalities and from May 2023 the Portfolio Holder for Life Chances and Vulnerability, oversee, support and monitor the progress of the Equality Framework and Action Plan as well as working with officers and Corporate Management Team to progress other corporate initiatives to improve equality and diversity across the organisation. The SEDG have engaged with stakeholders including the Fire Service to look at different organisations and their approach to equality and diversity. In particular, the following initiatives and work streams have been developed and supported by the SEDG since the launch of the framework:

- The development of a staff equalities network within the Council. This was pioneered by the group following presentations from the Fire Service on their own staff networks. Work continues with the support of Human Resources to develop this network.
- Inputting to the Council's Communications Strategy to ensure it is representative and inclusive.
- Assisted in the preparation of an Equality and Diversity Member training briefing note to supplement online equality and diversity training for members which was promoted by the group.
- Raised issues from residents within different protected characteristics to ensure Council Services were inclusive including accessibility

issues for those less able to access services digitally, which was fed to appropriate services areas.

- Commissioned and received a review of equality and diversity within leisure services which is now being rolled out to all service areas to encourage improvement.
- Engaged in the establishment of the Council's Social Mobility Commission which is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Vulnerability and Life Chances.
- Supported Dementia friendly training for staff.
- Supported a funded project for a Windrush event.
- Considered the Council's role in supporting care leavers in the borough. This is an ongoing piece of work, but SEDG have encouraged reporting of the Council's current arrangements to Cabinet.
- Scrutinised Census data.

Supported officers in the delivery of a number of work streams including, pronoun usage in emails, equality training for staff, the development of changing places facilities and review of equality related complaints.

1.4 **Officer Equality Group**

This officer group was established in March 2023 to support SEDG and co-ordinate different equality related work across the organisation. The group review the framework and action plan and equality complaints, providing updates to SEDG and Corporate Management team (CMT). The group have delivered the following:

- Staff guidance on the use of pronouns
- Member's Equality briefing note
- Member's and staff Human Rights briefing note
- Monitored completion of equality and diversity training
- Updated CMT on any corporate equality issues from SEDG or other sources.

1.5 **Training**

The Council rolled out an online Equality and Diversity Training module

for staff in 2022, all staff are required to complete the training and to ensure accountability, those who do not complete within a reasonable timescale may face disciplinary action. This training was also provided for Members following the election in May 2023 and was accompanied by a briefing note. Members of Appointments and Conditions of service Committee also received training on recruitment and selection processes to ensure inclusivity. Staff were all offered mental health awareness training and in Customer Services, more bespoke training on mental health was delivered in 2021. Dementia Friendly Training was offered to staff in 2022. Staff have also been briefed during staff briefings on the progress of the Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan.

1.6 **Equality Framework and Action Plan**

The Equality Framework and Action Plan was developed taking into account the Local Government Association Equality framework for Local Government. The plan set out the actions the Council had already taken to deliver good equality outcomes and the activity the Council needed to progress to secure further improvement. The framework is divided into the following themes:

- Understanding and working with your communities
- Leadership and organisational commitment
- Responsive services and customer care
- Diverse and engaged workforce

1.7 At the time of adoption there were 70 equality actions under the framework. These have been monitored through the Council's performance management software as well as the officer equality group and SEDG. At the time of writing 10 actions and 5 sub actions are outstanding but the majority are in progress. This is considered to be an excellent achievement particularly given that there has been no additional resource to support the equality actions. Some of the completed actions are highlighted below with full details contained in Appendix 2 (please note since publication of Appendix 2 further actions have been completed):

- Delivery of training for staff and members.
- Increased collection of equality data through consultation responses.
- Increased collection of equality data for frontline services through revised customer surveys.
- Revision of Equality Impact Assessments and guidance.

- Publication of equality objectives in the Gedling Plan for 2023-27.
- Training of Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee on recruitment and selection including unconscious bias.
- Publication of updated census data for staff on the intranet.
- Improved accessibility at elections following requirements of Election Act 2022.
- The establishment of Customer Outreach sessions in the community to improve engagement with residents.
- Separately categorising equality related complaints from the complaints and compliments system.
- Consideration for equality in development of event plans.
- Promotion of Seniors and Youth council.
- The procurement of webchat with translation capabilities to improve customer engagement.

- 1.8 The outstanding actions on the framework are due for completion by March 2024, at which point the current framework will expire. The majority of outstanding actions relate to contract and procurement matters and the conclusion of social value in procurement and wiser service delivery. Part of these actions will be encompassed in the Council's Procurement Strategy once completed. An updated framework and review of the Equality and Diversity policy will commence in early 2024 and this review also forms part of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for January 2024.
- 1.9 Outside the actions on the framework, a number of other equality matters have been highlighted through the SEDG. In particular, some other local authorities have taken motions to Council to include care leavers as a voluntary additional protected characteristic within their organisations, including the definition of care leavers within their own equality policies and frameworks. Care leavers are not currently listed in the Equality Act 2010 as a separate protected characteristic.
- 1.10 Whilst the County Council has overall responsibility for those living in care, the County Council has a Partnership Strategy for Looked after Children and Care Leaver's 2022-25, to which Gedling Borough Council are a signatory. This strategy seeks to enhance opportunity for care leavers and encourages partners to act proactively in taking opportunities to promote and act in the best interests of care leavers.
- 1.11 Gedling have historically taken a proactive approach to supporting care leavers, and have schemes in place for a "looked after" person (care leaver) between the age of 16-25 as follows:
- Council tax – if the care leaver lives alone, they get a 100% Council

tax discount. If they live with another person who is not a care leaver, the care leaver is disregarded for Council tax purposes. For example, should the care leaver live with just one other person who pays the council tax that person would receive the 25% single person discount. There are currently 47 care leavers in the borough receiving this discount.

- Leisure – The Council offers free DNA membership for care leavers aged 16-25. Nottinghamshire County Council make the referral to the Council. There are currently 43 people on this scheme. GBC receive about 12 referrals to this scheme a year.

It has been recognised by SEDG that the actions currently undertaken by the Council provide support for this group, however further work is underway to consider what further measures could be taken at the Council for those leaving care.

- 1.12 It should be noted that whilst both officer and member resource has been deployed to support the development of the Equality and Diversity framework and Action Plan, no additional, dedicated resource has been provided. The Council must ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and has maintained its statutory responsibilities in terms of the publication of Equality objectives in the Gedling Plan 2023-27 as well as publicising data on gender pay gap.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that Cabinet note the work undertaken by officers and members in relation to the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, framework and Action Plan.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 This information could not be reported; however, it is considered important that members are informed of the progress against the Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan and the Council's policy document references reporting to members.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 In terms of the financial implications, there are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Whilst the support offered through Council tax and Leisure for care leavers does result in a reduction in income for the Council this is considered proportionate to the outcomes achieved and was approved separately.

- 4.2 As indicated, there is no dedicated resource associated with the equality agenda and the work and associated budgets form part of approved budgets within service areas.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory duty to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The policy, framework and action plan demonstrate how the Council seeks to comply with its Public Sector Equality Duty. In addition, the SEDG receive updates on any relevant case law or significant legislative changes to ensure compliance with equality law.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 By its nature this report seeks to update members of the Council's work to strengthen equality of access to services for residents and staff.

7 Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 There are no carbon reduction/sustainability implications arising from this report.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Equality and Diversity policy, framework and Action Plan
Appendix 2 – Performance report on framework and Action Plan (Quarter 1)

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 None

10 Reasons for Recommendations

- 10.1 To alert the Executive to the work undertaken on the Council's Equality and Diversity Framework and Action Plan.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Drafted by the Monitoring Officer