

This report is public	
Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plans – Inclusive Workplace	
Committee	Personnel Committee
Date of Committee	7 February 2024
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	30 January 2024
Report of	Assistant Director – Customer Focus

Purpose of report

To seek the committee's approval of the draft action plan for delivering the council's equality, diversity and inclusion commitments for creating an inclusive workplace, which are set out in its Equalities Framework, Including Everyone.

1. Recommendations

The Personnel Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To consider, endorse and recommend to Executive the action plan for an Inclusive Workplace for 2024/25 (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 To delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Customer Focus to make minor amendments to the agreed action plans in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Chair of the Equalities Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Council has agreed to action plans that help it implement its commitments to promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). These included the Inclusive Workplace action plan which covers the council's role as an employer. All three action plans covered the 2023/24 municipal year. Therefore, they are reaching the end of their allotted timescale.
- 2.2 The EDI Working Group, composed of councillors from the Overview & Scrutiny and Personnel Committees, has continued to meet during 2023/24 in order to review the progress in implementing the EDI action plans and propose revised actions for 2024/25. Appendix 1 – Inclusive Workplace 2024/25 reflects the Working Group's deliberations.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	<p>The action plans can be delivered from within existing budgets and staffing resources. If their implementation give rise to proposals that would require additional resources then these would be authorised separately.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 26 January 2024</p>			
Legal	<p>The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as outlined in the report. Specific duties for the Council also include the requirement to develop and publish equality objectives and to annually publish actions under way or planned to meet the requirements of the PSED.</p> <p>Risks associated with the delivery of the action plan should be monitored and managed through the governance arrangements.</p> <p>Vanessa Wilson, Legal Services Paralegal, 26 January 2024</p>			
Risk Management	<p>Through the approval, and subsequent delivery, of an Inclusive Workplace action plan we aim to be on the right path to deliver against our EDI commitments, mitigating any risks that could arise due to inaction, such as possible barriers to recruiting and retaining the most capable workforce, and the risk this would pose to the effectiveness of the council's operations.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader, 26 January 2024</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact	X			<p>The council is already meeting its statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. So these actions plans will demonstrate how we plan to deliver our commitment to go above and beyond our legal obligations. The action plans enable us to go above and beyond these obligations and strengthen our capacity to promote equality across protected characteristics.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader, 26 January 2024</p>
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			

B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			
Climate & Environmental Impact		X		Mark Mills, Policy Development Officer, 26 January 2024 None
ICT & Digital Impact		X		N/A
Data Impact		X		The implementation of this plan rests on using publicly available data (in particular from the 2021 Census) and the results of the regular Pulse Surveys of the council's workforce. Participation in the Pulse Surveys is optional, results are anonymised and held securely.
Procurement & subsidy		X		N/A
Council Priorities	Healthy, resilient and engaged communities			
Human Resources	The action plans can be delivered from within staffing resources. If their implementation gives rise to proposals that would require additional resources, then these would be authorised separately.			
Property	None at this stage. If adjustments are recommended as a result of the proposed accessibility audits, these would be considered separately and a fresh decision would be required.			
Consultation & Engagement	None			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 requires all public bodies including councils to take extra steps to stop discrimination. This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

- 3.2 The duty means having to consider equality as part of our daily business and sets out specific requirements for achieving this, which are to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - Foster good relationships between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not,
 - Set and publish equality objectives at least every four years and,
 - Publish information at least annually, to show how we comply with the Equality Duty including information about employees and to people who are affected by our policies and procedures.
- 3.3 In 2020, the Council agreed an equalities framework, 'Including Everyone', which it co-produced with Oxfordshire County Council. This framework was to capture our statutory obligations but also our commitments to going beyond what the law expects, to deliver inclusive communities, services and an inclusive workforce.
- 3.4 In keeping with this Including Everyone encompasses the protected characteristics sets out in the Equality Act: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. However, it also commits the council will also consider the impact our decisions have on people living with social deprivation, in rural communities, those leaving care, carers, and those in our armed forces community.
- 3.5 In early 2023, an EDI Working Group was formed to refresh the action plan that had been created to underpin the framework so that it reflected Cherwell as a single council and also the significant progress that had been made since it was developed. The Working Group was composed of members from both the Overview and Scrutiny and Personnel committees.
- 3.6 Three actions plans were developed for the 2023/2024 municipal year: Inclusive Communities, Inclusive Services, and Inclusive Workplace.
- 3.7 The Inclusive Workplace Action Plan was endorsed by Personnel Committee on Wednesday 15 March 2023 and, along with the Inclusive Communities and Services Action Plans, agreed by the Executive on Monday 3 April 2023.
- 3.8 In June 2023, the Overview & Scrutiny and Personnel Committees agreed that the EDI Working Group should continue to meet in the new municipal year, to oversee the implementation of these plans and help shape the annual improvement plans.
- 3.9 The members of the Group for 2023/24 were Councillors Patrick Clarke, Gemma Coton, Chukwudi Okeke, Lynne Parsons, Rob Pattenden, and Chris Pruden. At the first meeting, Councillor Coton was elected as the Group's chair. Councillor Okeke left the Working Group in November 2023.
- 3.10 Over the course of nine meetings, the Working Group reviewed the background issues and then reviewed and refined drafts of the three action plans. Appendix 1 reflects that work.

- 3.11 The Overview and Scrutiny committee will consider the Inclusive Communities and The Services Action Plans on 12 March and will be asked to recommend them to the Executive on 3 April for agreement.

4. Details

- 4.1 The Inclusive Workplace Action Plan is structured around the EDI commitments made in the Including Everyone Framework. For each of these is a desired outcome agreed as part of the 2023/24 action plan to provide an endpoint for this workstream. As the intention of the action plans is regularly build upon existing progress, the same outcomes are used in the 2024/25 action plan.
- 4.2 As a result of the previous action plan, the demographic information on the council's workforce has now been split by grade and department. The Working Group felt this was a valuable exercise. It is important to understand not only whether recruitment into the council is fair and inclusive, but also whether the same can be said of senior positions and particular services. Given this the Working Group wishes to see this exercise repeated annually.
- 4.3 The Working Group is satisfied that the Council's internal communications convey an organisational commitment to EDI principles. The Working Group wish to see this built on with regular updates on the networks and virtual social groups for employees interested in particular causes and a communication plan for development opportunities for the council's workforce. They believe that these actions would help ensure that Cherwell employees can better identify and highlight ways to improve the council's delivery of EDI principles, as well as ensuring that all employees have a fair opportunity to seek promotion to more senior levels.
- 4.4 The Working Group believes that conducting an access audit of major council buildings would provide an opportunity to gain an external perspective with specialist knowledge on whether there are barriers to EDI arising from the design or operation of our buildings.
- 4.5 The Working Group is pleased that all Cherwell employees complete mandatory training on EDI in the workplace. They support the delivery of additional specialised training for managers and training to equip all employees with tools to address the unconscious associations and stereotypes that may lead them to treat people differently or not address the needs of people on the basis of their protected characteristics.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below:

Option 1: To continue to deliver the current action plan. This option has been rejected as it was written to reflect the situation at the start of 2023/24 and does not account for delivery since then, notably the actions already delivered.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The council is committed to going above and beyond our statutory responsibilities in creating inclusive communities and services and an inclusive workforce. To do this effectively we need to have the right resources and infrastructure in place to:
- capture the latest EDI data and trends
 - use the data available to identify and address any barriers
 - ensure EDI implications are identified and considered at the earliest opportunities through our service planning and decision making processes
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- 6.2 The Inclusive Communities, Inclusive Services, and Inclusive Workplaces Action Plans provides a structure in which this can be delivered and a basis on which further specific, substantive work on this topic can be delivered.

Decision Information

Key Decision	N/A
Subject to Call in	N/A
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Inclusive Workplace Action Plan 2024/25
Appendix 2	Including Everyone Framework
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
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