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| This report is public | |
| Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plans – Inclusive Communities and Services | |
| Committee | Overview & Scrutiny |
| Date of Committee | 12 March 2024 |
| Portfolio Holder presenting the report | Councillor Gemma Coton, EDI working group Chair / Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Portfolio Holder Corporate Services |
| Date Portfolio Holder agreed report | 13 February 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 inclusive communities and services, which are set out in its Equalities Framework, Including Everyone.

1. Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To review the draft action plans for Inclusive Communities and Inclusive Services and provide comments for the Executive to consider at its 8 April 2024 meeting.
- 1.2 To recommend to the Executive that there is a delegation of authority to the Assistant Director for Customer Focus to make minor amendments to the agreed Inclusive Communities and Services Action Plans in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Chair of the 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. Appendices 1 – 3 reflects the Working Group’s deliberations.

Implications & Impact Assessments

| Implications | Commentary | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------------|---|
| Finance | <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 20 February 2024</p> <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> | | | |
| Legal | <p>Vanessa Wilson, Legal Services Paralegal, 20 February 2024</p> <p>The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as outlined in the report.</p> <p>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> | | | |
| Risk Management | <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 08 February 2024</p> <p>Through the approval, and subsequent delivery, of the proposed EDI action plans we aim to be on the right path to deliver against our EDI commitments, mitigating any risks that could arise due to inaction. Any risks associated to the delivery of all action plans will be managed through the correspondent service operational risk and escalated to the Leadership Risk Register as and when deemed necessary.</p> | | | |
| Impact Assessments | Positive | Neutral | Negative | Commentary |
| Equality Impact | X | | | <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance & Insight Team Leader, 08 February 2024</p> <p>The council is already meeting its statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. These actions plans aim to enable us to go above and beyond these obligations and strengthen our capacity to promote equality across protected characteristics.</p> |
| A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality? | X | | | |

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| 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 | | Jo Miskin, Climate Action Manager, 20 February 2024 There is no climate nor environmental arising impact directly from this report |
| ICT & Digital Impact | | X | | N/A |
| Data Impact | | X | | The implementation of these plans 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 | Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the Inclusive Communities and Services Action Plans at their meeting on 12 March 2024. | | | |
| 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 financial year: Inclusive Communities, Inclusive Services, and Inclusive Workplace.
- 3.7 In June 2023, Overview & Scrutiny and Personnel Committees agreed that the EDI Working Group should continue to meet in the new financial year, when it will oversee the implementation of these plans and help shape the annual improvement plans.
- 3.8 The members of the Group for 2023/24 are Cllrs Patrick Clarke, Gemma Coton, Chukwudi Okeke, Lynne Parsons, Rob Pattenden, and Chris Pruden. At the first meeting, Cllr Coton was elected as the Group's chair. Cllr Okeke stepped down from the Working Group in November 2023, no substitute was selected.
- 3.9 Over the course of nine meetings, the Group reviewed the background, issues, and delivery of the existing plans; during Q3 2023-24 the group reviewed the progress of all plans and proposed new actions for 2024-25. Annexes 1 - 3 reflects that work.

- 3.10 Personnel Committee signed off the Inclusive Workplace action plan at its meeting on February 7, 2024, to be approved by Executive together with the other two action plans on 8 April 2024.

4. Details

Inclusive Communities

- 4.1 Having reviewed a list of community groups relevant to the protected characteristics the council has contact with. The Working Group noted that though these relationships are wide ranging, it included relatively few groups whose focus is ethnicity or national identity. The Working Group felt effort should be made to balance this out. They also felt that an equivalent exercise to assess the quality of the relationship the council has with community groups.
- 4.2 A series of reports on the results of the 2021 Census have been prepared for Cherwell and selected parishes and are being updated as the Office for National Statistics publishes further results. Continuous information gathering and sharing activities are being developed to make sure services are aware of any data gaps and services can direct resources to those who need them most.
- 4.3 The Wellbeing strategy was completed and adopted in Q3 2023/24. As a result, the review of the community development scheme will now commence.
- 4.4 The Assistant Director of Wellbeing and the Resettlement Manager also briefed the EDI working group on the council's work to support the resettlement of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in order to elicit their feedback and suggestions. The recruitment of supporting staff for the resettlement team is now in complete.
- 4.5 Procurement strategy was agreed by Executive on 02 October 2023, EDI implications were considered by the relevant officer to make sure adherence to our equalities, diversity and inclusion commitments, an Equalities Impact Assessment was completed as part of the development of the new strategy.
- 4.6 To identify scope for improving our outreach to young people, the Cherwell Young People, Play & Wellbeing partnership was delivered in September 2022. EDI discussions were had with partners with an emphasis on engaging young people in decision making and developing initiatives in the district to make them inclusive for all. The Working Group was pleased by the extent of the opportunities Cherwell District Council offers to young people to engage in sports, physical activities, arts, culture, and meals. However, they wish to see greater priority given to encouraging and facilitating young people in Cherwell to volunteer and contribute to local voluntary and community groups. The Working Group believes that the council should not view young people simply as potential recipients of our services, but as potential active participants in our communities. Volunteering and otherwise actively engaging in local civil society can benefit both young people themselves and the

Cherwell community as whole. For individuals, *“volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing, including improved life satisfaction, increased happiness and decreases in symptoms of depression”*¹. There is also evidence that *“young volunteers value meeting people and making friends through their volunteering”* and welcomed *“an opportunity to make friends with people from different backgrounds and cultures and helped to build understanding and community cohesion”*². It also appears that volunteering reduces crime and anti-social behaviour³. It would also expand the pool of volunteers available to local community groups and ensure those groups have an organic link to the young people within their areas.

- 4.7 The Working Group felt that as the elected representatives of the district, it will do a lot to promote EDI if Cherwell has a more diverse range of councillors. Though the selection of councillors and the people who put themselves forward as candidates is ultimately a matter for electors and, in most cases, political parties. However, the Working Group believes that there is a potential role for the council to use its communications capacity to raise awareness of the role of councillors and routes to becoming a councillor targeted at underrepresented groups.
- 4.8 The Strategic Partnerships review has concluded. An Equalities Impact Assessment was conducted as part of this exercise. As a result, the scope to strengthen partnership plans has been identified. The Working Group has requested to have access to the proposed recommendations of the review implemented, during 2024/25.

Inclusive Services

- 4.9 The Working Group feels that it is important that to the extent possible language barriers or visual or hearing impairments do not prevent residents or customers from accessing council services, information about its operation, or the local democratic process. At the same time, members are mindful of the resource and logistical constraints that make certain interventions difficult to deliver in all circumstances. Therefore, the Working Group is proposing recommendations that expand accessibility in a manner targeted to increase uptake, as well as to make it more widely known what adjustments are already on offer. An agreement of a new translations and alternative formats policy would provide the opportunity to develop a consistent approach across the council.
- 4.10 The Working Group believes that conducting an access audit of major council buildings would provide an opportunity to gain an external perspective with

¹ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/news/article/volunteering-linked-to-improved-life-satisfaction-happiness-and-quality-of-life>

²

<https://network.youthmusic.org.uk/file/6177/download?token=cCz49SwM#:~:text=Overall%20the%20evidence%20suggests%20that,perceived%20improvement%20in%20their%20employability.&text=Volunteering%20can%20have%20benefits%20for%20young%20people's%20personal%20development.>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5116440/>

specialist knowledge on whether there are barriers to EDI arising from the design or operation of our buildings might create barriers to inclusive services.

- 4.11 The Working Group believes Equalities Impact Assessments are an important tool for applying EDI principles in specific cases and for habituating council staff and elected representatives to integrating them into decision making. They are pleased to see these routinely being used to evaluate proposed changes. However, in the coming year they wish to see them applied more widely to understanding the status quo.

Inclusive workforce

- 4.12 The Working Group reviewed and updated the actions for the Inclusive Workforce action plan between December 2023 and January 2024, with the support from officers including the attendance of the Assistant Director for Human Resources.
- 4.13 The Action plan was presented and approved by Personnel Committee on 07 February 2024. Please find the action plan in appendix 3.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The alternative would be to continue to deliver the current action plans. This option has been rejected as its prudent as this 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
- 6.2 The Inclusive Communities, Inclusive Services, and Inclusive Workplaces Action Plans provide a structure in which this can be delivered and a basis on which work to deliver these commitments can be undertaken.

Decision Information

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| Key Decision | Financial Threshold Met: | No |
| | Community Impact Threshold Met: | No |

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

Document Information

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| Appendices | |
| Appendix 1 | Inclusive Communities Action Plan 2024/25 |
| Appendix 2 | Inclusive Services Action Plan 2024/25 |
| Appendix 3 | Inclusive Workplace Action Plan 2024/25 |
| Appendix 4 | Including Everyone Framework |
| Background Papers | None |
| Reference Papers | None |
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