

Report of Assistant Chief Executive – Citizens and Communities

Report to Executive Board

Date: 9th March 2016

Subject: Equality Framework

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. To provide Executive Board with the outcome of the reaccreditation of the council against the Equality Framework for Local Government at excellent level.
2. The Equality Framework for Local Government is a performance improvement and benchmarking tool. The framework is the national standard for measuring an organisation's commitment and ability to mainstream equality and is facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA).
3. The council received formal confirmation in late January 2016 that they had been reaccredited at the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

Recommendations

4. Executive Board is recommended to note the reaccreditation of the council as an Excellent local authority in the Equality Framework for Local Government, and the development of an Equality Framework improvement plan, delivery of which will be overseen by the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) with support from the Equality and Diversity Board and the Member Champions Equality Group.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report sets out the outcome of the council's reaccreditation against the Equality Framework for Local Government at excellent level (the highest available).

2 Background information

- 2.1 The Equality Framework for Local Government is a performance improvement and benchmarking tool. The framework is the national standard for measuring an organisation's commitment and ability to mainstream equality and is facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- 2.2 Overall performance on equality and diversity is assessed across 5 areas of performance:
- Knowing your communities and equality mapping,
 - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment,
 - Community engagement and satisfaction,
 - Responsive services and customer care,
 - A modern and diverse workforce
- 2.3 The Equality Framework is designed to allow council's to benchmark their performance against, two levels of performance - Achieving and Excellent.
- 2.4 The council first achieved 'Excellent' in 2011 and we have continued to use the principles of the framework to support our equality ambitions. It was agreed that the council would apply for reaccreditation at the 'Excellent' level in 2015.
- 2.5 Executive Board considered the Equality Framework narrative report in October 2015. The narrative formed part of our overall submission and was supported by the self-assessment, key evidence and story-boards. These were used to provide a 'snap shot' of the breadth of equality activity undertaken across the organisation demonstrating improved outcomes.
- 2.6 The reassessment of the council's work against the Equality Framework took place in November 2015. A team of external peers assessed the council's self-assessment, narrative, and supporting documents. They also met with Elected Members, members of staff, partners and community organisations and attended the annual Equality Assembly conference.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The council received formal confirmation in late January 2016 that they had been reaccredited at the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. A group of external peer assessors validated the council's approach to equality. The council received feedback that the peer assessment team were "impressed by what it saw and had no hesitation about awarding the 'Excellent' level to Leeds City Council and looks forward to working with the council in future to help the rest of the sector continue to meet diverse needs and address inequalities."

3.2 Leeds is one of only two council's in the country to achieve reaccreditation at the 'Excellent' level.

3.3 The summary of key findings from the LGA (which are attached with the confirmation from the LGA as Appendix A) are:

- Without a doubt Leeds City Council is an 'Excellent' authority and no moderation of this decision was required;
- Staff expressed their pride in working for the council and how much they enjoyed being ambassadors for the City;
- The preparation and organisation of the challenge was viewed as a positive experience by the peers and the approach (which was seen as excellent practice) will be recommended to other local authorities, and;
- The peer assessors have confidence that Leeds is able to sustain their approach due to having strong foundations, with strong and committed leadership at both member and officer levels.

3.3 The peer assessors identified a range of notable strengths, which include:

- The vision of a compassionate City and Council is much more than rhetoric and was seen in the behaviour of elected members and officers. The team felt that this is quite rare and that other councils could learn from this approach;
- The City benefits from effective partnerships and good practice;
- The organisational culture and ethos of the council is very positive and constructive;
- There is a strong focus on communities and addressing inequalities; and
- The development of community hubs, which are helping to ensure diverse needs, are met, as well as, empowering communities.

3.4 The reaccreditation of Leeds City Council at the excellent level shows that the council were able to demonstrate that by focussing on the needs of individuals and communities they have improved service provision and achieved budget targets. The peer assessors also stated that they felt that the council are able to sustain their approach to equality in the future as they have strong foundations, with strong leadership at elected member and officer levels.

3.5 The strong relationships which the council has developed and sustained with a range of community groups and other local organisations were also identified as extremely positive.

4 Next Steps

4.1 The feedback from the LGA outlined the positive work that the council has been undertaking and identified a range of notable strengths. A summary of the main ones have been outlined in 3.3.

4.2 The LGA were explicit in its feedback that *the "council knows and understands its communities by working with them. It is an organisation strongly committed to supporting its communities, delivering appropriate services in the right location, and by the right people. After years of change, particularly in light of the economic*

climate, the council has developed into a confident, stable and yet flexible organisation, with empowered, capable and committed staff who are knowledgeable and skilled, encouraged to continue to develop and explore creative ways to deliver services.”

- 4.3 Leeds City Council is recognised nationally for its work on tackling inequalities, which support the Best City/Best Council ambition.
- 4.4 To achieve our ambition to be a compassionate city and tackle inequalities we want to fully understand where inequalities continue to exist and work restoratively with communities to address these and ensure our services are truly accessible.
- 4.5 By using the equality framework as an improvement tool means we can continually develop and strengthen our approach. It allows us to demonstrate that we know and understand our communities which enable us to provide residents and customers with locally tailored services, such as, employment support, debt and benefit advice and health and wellbeing services.
- 4.6 We can build on the culture of constructive challenge that has developed, for example, the Member Champions Equality Group and the approach to Scrutiny which helps the council to achieve the best possible outcomes for people who live and work in the City.
- 4.7 Continuing to ensure that there is a high level of awareness amongst members and officers about both service specific and broad-reaching strategic issues, which have an impact on addressing inequalities.
- 4.8 The peer assessors highlighted that partner’s feel valued, engaged and listened to and want to work with the council. They identified that addressing inequalities is less about documents and strategies and more about real work with partners. This approach should be developed further and build on the notable strengths that were identified, for example, devolving services to Community Hubs demonstrates successful partnership working and empowering staff from different agencies to provide appropriate services locally.
- 4.9 The LGA in their feedback outlined some areas for consideration/improvement and a draft improvement plan is in the process of being developed. The improvement plan will be approved by the council’s Equality and Diversity Board in February 2016 with it also being reported to the Member Champions Equality Group.
- 4.10 The two key areas for improvement that have been identified as areas for improvement are:-
 - Ensure consistent and timely communication on addressing inequalities throughout the organisation including how appraisals can be used to improve this
 - Consider how the council evaluates the impact of its work on tackling inequalities
- 4.11 These areas for improvement outlined will enhance a range of work that the council currently undertakes on equality and ensures that we are able to

maintain momentum for the next reaccreditation given it will be more challenging next time if we are to continue to demonstrate a trend of improvement. The council recognises that it has some significant achievements but is far from complacent and is aware of the continued challenges it faces in tackling inequalities.

4.12 The current work includes the implementation of the council's Equality Improvement Priorities 2016 – 2020 which were approved by Executive Board in October 2015. As well as, a range of activity that is already mapped out to help the council become a more inclusive employer and workplace. These include:-

- Setting inclusion and diversity objectives for the Corporate Leadership Team and Best Council Leadership Team for 2016
- Improving promotion and communication of the council's workforce equality challenges
- Developing inclusive people policies
- Building on our LGB and T* work to improve our rating in the Stonewall Top 100 Employers Index 2017 (the council increased its rating by 47 places in the 2016 index.)
- Making staff voice and involvement a priority for 2016
- Continuing to support an annual programme of events and activities linked to key diversity dates, for example, World Aids Day, LGB and T* History month, Carers week, Autism week
- Changing behaviour through training and raising awareness and skill levels around inclusion, diversity and unconscious bias via a new improved training offer, mandatory training, e learning, manager challenge and induction
- Taking all opportunities to build a workforce (at all levels) that reflects all communities in Leeds.

4.13 This improvement work will also support the work which has been undertaken on the Best Council Plan 2016/17 and the continued aim of reducing inequalities but articulates this more firmly around the integrated concepts of promoting economic growth and of being a compassionate city, with everything the council does having a clear focus on tackling poverty and inequalities.

5 Corporate Considerations

5.1 Consultation and Engagement

5.1.1 This report provides an update on the outcome of the peer reaccreditation for the equality framework. As such it is not subject to consultation.

5.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

5.2.1 As an update report focussing on equality that does not lead to a decision and equality impact assessment is not required.

5.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

5.3.1 The actions arising from the Framework reaccreditation will support the Equality Improvement Priorities which sit alongside the council priorities and are an integral part of the renewed ambition to be a compassionate city that tackles poverty and reduces the inequalities that still exist.

5.4 Resources and value for money

5.4.1 There are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

5.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

5.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.5.2 This report does not contain any confidential or exempted information and is subject to call-in.

5.6 Risk Management

5.6.1 Any risks associated with specific priorities are addressed as part of service delivery.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The outcome of the council's reaccreditation as 'Excellent' confirms that the approach to equality is having a positive impact on individuals and communities. However, it also identifies areas of improvement which need to be addressed in order to maintain momentum and will complement existing work to tackle inequalities and poverty.

6.2 It is proposed that the council's Equality and Diversity Board which is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) is tasked with the implementation of the improvement plan when finalised.

6.3 In addition the Member Champions Equality Group, who also received positive feedback from the LGA for the role they play in challenging the council's progress against the Equality Improvement Priorities, will also take on a challenge role for the equality framework improvement actions.

7 Recommendations

7.1 Executive Board is recommended to note the reaccreditation of the council as an Excellent local authority in the Equality Framework for Local Government, and the development of an Equality Framework improvement plan, delivery of which will be overseen by the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) with support from the Equality and Diversity Board and the Member Champions Equality Group.

8 Background documents¹

8.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.