

A refreshed approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Date: 8th February 2023

Report of: Director of Communities, Housing and Environment and Director of Resources

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

A refreshed approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, including a Vision Statement and Action Plan, have been developed to move us 'up a gear' on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda. It supports the strategic policy and governance already in place around this agenda including our Equality and Diversity Policy, Due Regard (Equality Impact Assessment process), Equality Improvement Priorities and Equality Annual Report, the Corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board and policies around employment, procurement and partnership working. This report sets out the rationale for having a vision and action plan now and the difference this will make to the delivery of positive outcomes.

The Best City Ambition is our vision for the future of Leeds. At its heart is our mission to tackle poverty and inequality and improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Leeds their home.

Our ambition is for Leeds to be a city that is fair and just, that recognises and embraces people's different needs, situations and ambitions. A city where the barriers that limit what people can do will be removed, and everyone will be enabled to be their best. For this to happen, we all need to take responsibility for our actions and behaviours and contribute positively to change. Although the council has legal responsibilities concerned with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, we want to do more on this agenda because it is the right thing to do and there is a need to do more over and beyond statutory requirements. Delivery of a successful programme around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is essential to support our Best City Ambitions.

#TeamLeeds is everyone coming together to play a part – people who live here, who work here, the council, its services and all partners. It's everyone's business.

Recommendations

- a) Executive Board is asked to adopt the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Vision and Action Plan for 2023 - 2025.
- b) Executive Board is asked to note the proposals for new performance reporting against the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda.

- c) Executive Board is asked to note the responsibility of the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment, and Director of Resources for leading this work through the Council's Safer Stronger Communities and Human Resources teams.

What is this report about?

1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda covers the 9 protected characteristics that include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
2. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion can be summarised as:
 - **Equality** - Of opportunity. Our obligation to eliminate unlawful discrimination and prejudice.
 - **Diversity** - Understanding, respecting, valuing and embracing difference and applying this to our employment and service delivery.
 - **Inclusion** - The work we do to achieve equality whilst respecting diversity. This means including everyone so that they can make a positive and active contribution to life in the city.
3. Leeds is a large and diverse city with just under 812,000 people residing here, including increasing numbers of people from ethnic minority backgrounds and those born overseas with approximately 200 languages being spoken across the city. Reflecting national trends, the size of the city's population aged 70 and upwards is growing rapidly, although there has also been a significant increase in the population of children and young people, particularly in our inner-city areas against the national overall trend.
4. High level employment monitoring data indicates 15% of Leeds City Council colleagues identifying as from ethnic minority backgrounds, over 800 colleagues (6%) formally identifying as disabled and over 3% identifying as LGBT+. At senior levels (JNC grade and above), 58% of staff are female, 13% identify as from an ethnic minority, 6% disabled and 4% LGBT+.
5. Our **Equality Improvement Priorities Plan 2021 to 2025** sets out the agreed approach to embed equality and diversity and the specific actions taken to remove barriers that prevent people from fully participating in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the city.
6. However, there has been a notable societal shift with significant events over the past two years, not least the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement, the increasing awareness of violence against women and girls, the inequalities exacerbated and exposed by the Coronavirus pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, the ongoing impact of Brexit, and a significant rise in the reporting of hate crimes against protected characteristic groups. This has raised expectations, with strong calls for greater and faster change. We see this shift as a positive opportunity, and we are keen to **step up a gear**.
7. As an important next step, the Vision Statement (appendix 1) is accompanied by an action plan (appendix 2) that sets out **three areas for action** covering the council's role as:
 - **An employer** driving the workforce agenda based on the council's values.
 - **A service deliverer/provider**, including commissioning and contracting, based on the council's values.

- **A partner in supporting communities to thrive**, based on the Best City Team Leeds approach.
- 8. By building on the good work we already do and using the insight from a broad range of stakeholders, we aim to target our actions and resources in the right areas. The views of Leeds communities, local people, our partners, council teams and employees are crucially important to success. These views have shaped the action plan and will continue to do so moving forward, with our Equality Assembly, Equality Hubs and Staff Networks playing a key role alongside the many valuable and varied engagement channels that we have in Leeds.
- 9. The action plan will be kept under regular review to ensure it stays relevant to the changing times we live in. We will report progress against the action plan every year via the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report in July alongside the annual performance report. It will remain **a fluid document** to account for any significant events that require a more tailored and specialist intervention.
- 10. The council has been at the forefront of progressing the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda for several decades. As the second largest local authority, it has taken a lead on developing tools to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work across the organisation and in our work with partners. The council has twice been rated 'Excellent' following peer review under the Equality Framework for Local Government previously run by the Local Government Association. However, it is apparent that, for a variety of reasons, many challenges continue, and **further work is required** to take us forward with an **increased focus on this agenda**.
- 11. The councils **recent corporate peer review** outlined **several key strengths** and some **recommendations for improvement**.

Strengths included:

- The EDI agenda has high profile and commitment internally and externally
- There are many examples of successful delivery around the EDI agenda
- External partners including the Equality Hubs described being proud of the councils approach, which is open, transparent and responsive
- The councils zero tolerance ambition around discrimination
- The councils workforce EDI plan and the development of the new wider vision and action plan to include communities and service delivery
- The councils equality staff networks
- The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

Recommendations:

- Build on the success of the Equality Hubs and Representatives and strengthen senior officer leadership
- Be more comprehensive and consistent in corporate decision making and ensure robust expert input

- 12. Early results from the 2021 census results show that the city is **becoming increasingly diverse** with more people from ethnic minority groups, larger numbers observing minority faiths or identifying with no faith, more people who were born overseas, significant numbers of disabled people and, for the first time, data on sexual orientation and gender identity showing an above national average number of people as identifying as LGBT+.
- 13. The last decade has seen the city and nation face **multiple significant challenges** which have often **impacted disproportionately** on people from protected groups including economic challenges resulting in austerity, Brexit and community tensions, a rise in hate crime, the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.

14. The Equality Act has been in place since 2010 and **communities expect a faster and more clearly outcome-based focus** moving forward. Disabled people still struggle to access buildings and services because barriers remain in place. Discrimination against people based on race and sexual orientation continues to take place in society. Women and girls face increasing discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence. People from across the protected characteristics are still under-represented in positions of authority and in multiple sectors of the economy and society.

What impact will this proposal have?

15. In addition to the top five priorities for each of the three sections of the action plan (Employment, Service Delivery, and Communities) the plan **sets out the key issues to focus upon**, our principles for service delivery, why it is good for business, our workforce and our communities and areas to take action against.

16. The actions proposed fall within the **Public Sector Equality Duty** which states: 'A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- **eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation** and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- **advance equality of opportunity** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- **foster good relations** between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

17. Making the progress we want to on our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda, both within the council and for the city, is vital if we are to realise the vision for the future of Leeds set out in the Best City Ambition. The Ambition is built on the idea of Team Leeds, with **everyone able to have their voice heard**, shape their city, and play their full part in building its future. **Removing the structural, cultural, and other barriers** which prevent people from being able to do this is imperative to tackle poverty and inequality.

18. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is fundamental in underpinning the priorities set out through the three pillars of the Ambition too. The negative impacts on people and communities of failing to recognise, value and embrace diversity and difference are now well-understood. We know that marginalised people and communities are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes.

19. In the labour market and within individual organisations we see the difference factors, including gender and ethnicity, can still have on wages and career progression opportunities.

20. Many of the lowest income and/or most diverse communities are often those experiencing the greatest impacts of climate change – both in Leeds and around the world. On all of these matters, work is progressing to address the challenges we face in line with the Best City Ambition, and a clear vision and action plan around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion will serve to further strengthen these efforts.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

21. A draft version of the Vision and Action Plan was consulted on with a **wide range of stakeholders** including equality Lead Members, the Equality Assembly/Equality Hubs, Equality Staff Networks, The Corporate and Directorate Equality Boards, Trade Unions, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, West Yorkshire Combined Authority Equality lead and the Safer and Stronger Communities Team Extended Leadership Team.

What are the resource implications?

22. There are **no specific financial implications** relating to the adoption of the Vision and Action Plan. However, in order to deliver against the 15 actions identified in the Action Plan and the wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ambitions of the council there will be some **staffing resource required** associated with the proposals across all service areas.

23. There is already a **network of staff across all services** who act as leads for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda as well as Equality Boards for each Directorate. It is expected that this network will play an ongoing role in the delivery of the Vision and Action Plan.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

24. Failure to deliver positive change and outcomes on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda has a range of risks associated with it

25. There is a **risk of legal challenge and judicial review** if the council fails to give due regard to, or discriminates in, the delivery of services or as an employer which comes with the potential for financial penalty.

26. There are also **risks to the council's reputation** with citizens and partners should it not be seen to address issues concerned with Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion seriously, and more proactively.

27. In addition, the council will be **unable to deliver vital services effectively** to all communities if it fails to consider pertinent Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion issues.

What are the legal implications?

28. The council is required to abide by the **Equality Act 2010** and, in particular, the Public Sector Equality Duty which broadly requires us to, in the exercise of our functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

29. The plans to step up a gear were discussed and developed over a 9-month period during 2022 as a collaboration between Safer and Stronger Communities Team, HR and the Chief Executive's Office. The proposed Vision and Action Plan incorporate a range of aspirations against an extensive and detailed agenda in one cohesive approach with the intention being that this work will underpin the Best City Ambition.

How will success be measured?

30. There are 5 specific priorities across each strand of work which will be formally reported against as part of the annual Equality Report to Executive Board. These are outlined below:

People and Communities	Service Delivery	The Council as an Employer
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen and develop our community engagement approach including the review and development of the Equality Assembly and Equality Hubs. 2. Celebrate the diversity of our city and its people and communities through supporting a programme of activity for International Months, Weeks and Days. 3. Develop our third sector infrastructure which focuses on equality, diversity, inclusion and migration and hate crime. 4. Widen our partnerships at city, West Yorkshire, regional, national and international level to ensure we can continue to be a leader in EDI and associated work, and incorporate best practice wherever possible. 5. Deliver a cohesion strategy for the city 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and strengthen our approach to 'giving due regard' to equality, diversity and inclusion with an improved focus on monitoring outcomes and reporting these. 2. Deliver the councils Equality Improvement Priorities which can be found at www.leeds.gov.uk/equality 3. Strengthen our governance arrangements at all levels of the council and improve transparent and accessible reporting so we can clearly show progress against our priorities. 4. Improve how we communicate key messages, priorities and programmes to all council staff to ensure everyone can contribute to the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda. 5. Focus on the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the long term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on people and communities through all of our service delivery. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment and initial welcome – making our approaches more inclusive. 2. Progression – supporting people to progress. 3. Training for staff and managers – getting the offer right, and ensuring everyone engages. 4. Speaking up and zero tolerance – tackling discrimination and unacceptable behaviour. 5. Data and Monitoring – being clear about the difference we are making.

that brings together key stakeholders and agendas and builds on our work around the Intercultural Cities Programme.		
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What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

31. The action plan sets out an initial timeframe to 2025 as this is in line with our statutory Equality Improvement Priorities which must be reviewed and refreshed on a 4-year cycle and are due for review again in 2025. The Director of Communities, Housing and Environment, and Director of Resources will assume responsibility for the implementation and progress against the Vision and Action Plan.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Vision
- Appendix 2 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

Background papers

- N/A