

Scrutiny Board Scrutiny Board (Strategy & Resources)

Scrutiny Board Statement: Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)



Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board 2023/24



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Leeds City Council Workforce EDI

Background: The Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board, chaired by Cllr Asghar Khan, has had a long standing focus on the Council's approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the workplace and has considered a series of reports as part of its work programme since the 2020/21 municipal year. This interest evolved into a dual approach that has involved check and challenge on the Council's approach corporately to EDI and listening to lived experiences of staff at the Council by considering evidence from the Council's 7 staff networks. The lived experience focussed sessions took place in January and December 2022 and most recently on 19 February 2024. Through these each network has had two opportunities to set out their views on the Council's approach to EDI and the progress made to ensure everyone is treated fairly in the workplace and has an opportunity to progress and succeed at the Council.

Attendees: Alongside Scrutiny Board members, the following attendees were present at the meeting on 19 February 2024:

- Tom Riordan, Chief Executive
- Mariana Pexton, Director of Strategy and Resources
- Andy Dodman, Chief Officer – HR
- John Ebo, Head of HR – EDI
- Vanessa Wenham, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (FTSUG)
- Cllr Debra Coupar, Executive Member for Resources
- Kat Denvir, LGBT+ Network Lead
- Terry Pycroft, DAWN Network Lead
- Maisie Roberts, DAWN Network
- Lydia Anchen, Women's Voice Network Lead
- Carole Gentles, Race Equality Network Co-Chair
- Hayley Lloyd-Henry, Race Equality Network Co-Chair
- Mej Chaudhry, Carers Network Lead
- Helen Saunders, Healthy Minds Network Lead
- Sasha Walton, Career Advancement Network Lead

Recommendation: The Executive Board is asked to consider the conclusions of the Scrutiny Board (Strategy and Resources) as set out in this report. In line with Procedure Rules, the Executive is asked to provide a response indicating what action (if any) it proposes to take and to publish its response.

Key Conclusions

1

The Networks — Staff Networks are playing a valuable and valued role within the Council providing a range of activities and events, influencing policy and check and challenge on the activity of the authority as it implements new EDI initiatives and seeks to create a more representative workforce. The Board welcomes the commitment to support the work of the networks through measures such as ensuring allocated facility time for network leads, where capacity and business requirements allow, and believes the networks should continue to contribute to this agenda by playing a lead role in areas such as the recruitment task and finish group. Understanding the lived experiences of colleagues is a key aspect of this work and will underscore the positive feedback received from, for example the staff survey.

2

Digital Divide — Subject to the ongoing financial challenge, for change to reach all areas of the Council's workforce more work needs to be done on bridging the digital divide to facilitate more input and the sharing of new initiatives and approaches with frontline staff, some of whom do not have regular access to IT equipment. It is recognised that some services do this well and there are ongoing efforts to bridge the digital divide through face to face events and more engagement with staff generally. However, the development and deployment of new opportunities through the Core Business Transformation Programme is welcomed but needs to be delivered as quickly as possible to facilitate this. For example, the development of a new app to be used on personal mobile devices could be a significant step forward.

3

Data — There has been good progress in terms of data, monitoring and benchmarking not least development of the Leeds City Council EDI Data Dashboard. Use of data could be taken a step further, within the resource envelope available, and used to benchmark the Council against other organisations, where comparison is available, to address specific asks by some of the staff networks such as the Women's Voice and Race Equality networks. Enhanced use of data will also enable the Authority to more clearly measure success and progress in the future.

4

Organisational Culture — The establishment of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (FTSUG) role is a significant step in terms of developing a freedom to speak up culture within the Council. Progress has clearly been made, set against a challenging financial backdrop, but it is noted that there is more to do on culture and the Board would be keen to receive a further report on this in the next municipal year to facilitate check and challenge on culture and the progress that has been made.

5

Impact of Training — The 'Be Your Best' Manager Training Programme, targeting 2,200 appraising managers has contributed to significant progress on EDI through the 5 step mandatory training programme and should be commended. Whilst noting that managers are accountable for sharing this practice within their teams, and the positive responses received on EDI in the most recent staff survey, the Board would be interested in understanding the difference the training programme has made to practice 'on the ground' and whether it has impacted in areas such as number of grievance cases or other measurable data.

6

Aspiring Leaders— The Board welcomes the Aspiring Leaders Programme and in particular the use of data to inform the programme and where it should be targeted, in terms of under represented groups at senior levels of management. It is noted that this is not a 'job guarantee scheme' but would be interested to receive an update on the success of the 18 month programme once it completes in 2026.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

Consideration of EDI by the Board

Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board has considered Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues for a number of years initiated by a report in February 2021 that responded to the Black Lives Matter Movement and the disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on ethnically diverse communities. The interest of the Board evolved into consideration of a range of issues including the Joint Race Equality Action Plan 2021-23, the Disability and Carers Equality Action Plan 2021-23 and hearing direct feedback from staff networks on their members' lived experiences working for Leeds City Council.

These lived experience sessions took place in January and December 2022 and then most recently in February 2024 and have provided staff networks with two opportunities to provide feedback to the scrutiny board and senior officers of the Council including the Chief Executive. In addition to this the Board has considered an item on the Council's workforce approach to EDI in March 2023 to facilitate check and challenge of the approach and overall journey the Council is on in terms of its approach to EDI.

Financial Challenge

This work has been carried out during a time of significant financial challenge with a shrinking financial envelope and reducing staffing resources to implement the agenda. Given these circumstances the Board welcomes the progress that has been made and believes that the ongoing work adds significant value to the Council in terms of employee satisfaction which in turn could positively impact sickness rates, enhance productivity and reduce employee dispute through process such as grievance.

Throughout consideration of these issues the Board has been aware of the impact of budgetary challenge on this policy approach and that it is a potential limiting factor in terms of available staff resource within Human Resources to support the programme. Despite this it is also noted that significant progress has been made and this is backed up by the comments made by the staff networks and how they have been able to impact policy and provide challenge in an open and transparent environment.

Wider EDI Issues Considered

In addition to the conclusions reached The Board has considered and provided comment on a range of issues, including a number of significant developments in recent years, the following briefly summarises these:

- The term 'BAME', when the staff networks first attended the term 'BAME' was still widely used. Board members were keen for this to change and noted that point during consideration of these items. As a consequence this term has now been replaced and although not directly connected, the BAME staff network is now known as the Race Equality Network.



Summary of Issues Considered by the Scrutiny Board

- The Zero-tolerance policy approach to racism was developed during consideration of these issues at scrutiny and received support from the Board as a key area for development and implementation.
- Support for the provision of individual budgets for each staff network to support their activity.
- Consideration and backing for the development of Mental Health First Aiders and the Mental Health First Aiders conference and the work of the Healthy Minds network in targeting an issue that contributes significantly to staff absence.
- Consideration and support for the development of the five key workforce themes on EDI: Recruitment and initial welcome; Progression; Training for staff and managers; Speaking up and zero tolerance; Data and monitoring.
- The review of the Grievance Procedure in 2022 and the four themes that emerged:
 - ⇒ Timeliness – acting quicker and earlier to resolve conflict and reduce time taken to complete the process.
 - ⇒ Accountability – actively demonstrate, evidence and report on positive change.
 - ⇒ Behaviours – managers to provide stronger leadership at service and local levels to tackle behaviours in a timely manner.
 - ⇒ Consistency of approach – ensuring consistency across the organisation in discharging our duty of care as well as ensuring due process.
- Understanding of data on the Council's workforce and comparison with Census data for Leeds to understand whether the workforce is representative of the Leeds population and providing check and challenge in areas where there is more to do.
- Regular updates and check and challenge of the Be Your Best Manager EDI training programme.

Other Contributors

The attendance from the February 2024 meeting is noted at the front of this statement but it is also important to note that other key contributions from:

Cllr James Lewis, Leader of Council

Cllr Mary Harland, Executive Member for Communities

Comment from the Chair

Cllr Asghar Khan, Chair of the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board, said:

“The diversity found in communities across Leeds is one of our city’s strengths and we should be proud of the work we are doing to ensure that the Council’s workforce represents that diversity. We have heard from our staff networks about their lived experiences working for the Council and their contributions have highlighted that whilst we have made progress there is still more work to do on EDI and tackling inequality. Lastly, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed, we have heard from colleagues at all levels right up to senior leadership and I think this has shown that EDI is still a work in progress but that it is at the centre of our workforce strategies and plans.”

Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board

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