

Cabinet – 20 March 2024

Cabinet Report – Public Sector Equality Duty Annual Report 2023/24

Portfolio: Councillor Bird – Leader

Related portfolios: All

Service: Council Wide

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

- 1.1 The report presents the draft Equalities Annual report in compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty for consideration and approval. The report highlights the progress made over the last year in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the Council showcasing best practice and case studies from services across the authority and working with our communities.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty places a requirement on Councils to publish their equality objectives and outline work and activities that have been undertaken to demonstrate their compliance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council must prepare a report and information to be published by 31 March outlining our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion achievements and highlighting our aims for the following year.
- 2.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty Annual report contains a range of activities and case studies from across the Council showcasing the great work in fostering good relations, promoting equality of opportunity, and ensuring we have an inclusive and diverse workforce. It further outlines the planned work to ensure we have robust officer governance, a clear and coherent strategy and delivery framework aligned to the Equality Framework for Local Government and effective processes in place to ensure consideration of Equality in Council decision making.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet note and celebrate the successes highlighted by the Equalities Annual report.

3.2. That Cabinet approve the Council's Annual report and note the future plans and work already underway to strengthen EDI across the Council.

4. Report detail - know

4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that equality and diversity are considered and embedded across our services and functions. This is required by the Equality Act 2010 which legally protects people from discrimination in society and within the workforce.

4.2 The Equality Act is supported by the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires that public bodies such as Councils consider how people will be affected by decisions and services and to ensure that public services meet the needs of all different groups of people.

4.3 Under the Equality Act Councils also have specific duties and must:

- publish information to demonstrate their compliance with the Equality Duty annually. This information must include information relating to employees.
- prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives (at least every four years) which will help us further any of the aims of the Equality Duty.

4.4 In compliance with this specific duty the Council must publish its workforce equalities information and an annual report outlining the current Equality objectives and how the Council has been fulfilling its general obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

4.5 This report contains the current equality objectives and case studies highlighting how the Council has fulfilled its obligations. Workforce data is in preparation concurrently and will be published alongside this report on the Council website to ensure full compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

4.6 The Council's current equality objectives are:

1. We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work.
2. We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues.
3. We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels.
4. We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive, and collaborative.
5. We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded.

We are currently reviewing these objectives as part of work to develop a new overarching EDI strategy, delivery plan and as we refresh our Council Plan for 2025

4.7 Highlights from the Annual report include:

- Armed Forces Day celebrations in June 2023 to show support and commitment to our armed forces contribution to Walsall life.
- Lichfield Hub library hosted a successful pop-up session for Black history month at the Civic centre giving staff an opportunity to hear stories, borrow books and benefit from learning around black history and lived experiences.
- The Roma health mediation projects works across the borough to support those from Roma, Gypsy or Traveler communities who have complex needs to navigate the health and care system.
- Walsall Arboretum hosted a fantastic carers festival in June to champion and support carers wellbeing.
- Behavioural insight has been used through research with expectant and new mums to understand local barriers to choices around infant feeding. This insight will be hugely beneficial to help our services support families and their choices for their children.
- Walsall Connected has reached over 14,000 residents across communities to access vital support and services.
- The Council this year launched its workforce strategy to ensure there is support, training, and opportunities for development of staff across the Council.
- The Council has successful staff networks where staff with equality characteristics can come together and have a voice. A survey was launched earlier this year to gauge interest in the development and expansion of existing networks, establish new networks to increase the voice for our staff across the Council.
- The Equality Champions programme has been successful in developing 40 champions across all Directorates of the Council. Champions are trained and supported to act as ambassadors for EDI within their directorates.

4.8 Future plans highlighted in this report include:

- The development of a new EDI strategy to bring together our work across strategy, workforce and resilient communities (community cohesion) into one coherent framework with clear objectives and deliverables.
- Review of Council governance and refresh of EDI governance to ensure service and customer have a clear role in shaping the EDI work across the Council.
- Development of staff networks to ensure all staff can have a voice.

Risk management

- 4.9 There are no significant risks associated with the EDI Annual report. The draft EDI strategy that is in development will outline new objectives and approaches for the Council against EDI to ensure compliance.

Financial implications

- 4.10 There are no direct financial implications related to the report.

Legal implications

- 4.11 There are no direct legal implications from this report. The draft EDI strategy that is in development will outline new objectives and approaches for the Council against EDI to ensure compliance.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.12 There are no direct procurement implications from this report.

Property implications

- 4.13 There are no direct property implications from this report.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.14 There are no direct implications in this report.

Staffing implications

- 4.15 There are no direct staffing implications from this report, the workforce equality data is being prepared for concurrent publication by end of March in line with our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.16 Our EDI activities highlighted in this report strengthen the delivery of Our Council Plan and We are Walsall 2040 borough plan which both have reducing inequalities and addressing social justice at their heart.
- 4.17 The planned EDI strategy will be aligned to the new Council Plan which will have EDI as a core foundational principle at its heart to ensure we remain focussed on reducing inequalities.

Climate Change

- 4.18 There are no direct implications.

Consultation

- 4.19 The report highlights that a new EDI strategy is in development. This will be shaped from extensive staff, community, and customer feedback and subject to a formal consultation later this year.

5. Decide

The report presents a draft Equalities annual report for consideration and approval by Cabinet.

6. Respond

The Council is already undertaking programmes and activities that strengthen EDI across the Council. This existing and planned work will continue alongside some new actions identified through the EDI strategy. Governance for EDI sits with the Corporate Equalities Group with a line up to Corporate Management Team to ensure strategic fit with wider corporate priorities.

7. Review

The EDI report is an annual document highlighting our progress towards our equality objectives. Throughout the coming months we will be reviewing and mapping gaps in delivery against the new (in development) EDI strategy.

Background papers –

Annexes:

Appendix 1 Draft PSED Equality Annual report

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Signed

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20 March 2024



Signed

Councillor M Bird
Leader of the Council

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