

Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 21 February 2024

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Progress Update



Councillor Alan White, Leader of the Council said,

“This is a question of promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for residents across the county as well as within the county council.

“Our work so far demonstrates ways we successfully help people join our communities and find employment, and we are committed to continuing this progress.”

Report Summary:

This report and the attached Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Delivery Plan reviews our progress in 2023 and provides proposed areas of focus for 2024 to further strengthen our approach to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion both within the organisation and across Staffordshire.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Note the progress of the Council’s work to further strengthen its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, including delivery of the action plan.
- b. Note the Council's Gender Pay Gap report and Workforce profile as reported in April 2023.
- c. Provide comments and feedback on the emerging priorities for 2024/25 as part of the Council’s continued commitment to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

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Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services

Reasons for Recommendations:

Background

1. Everyone having the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy, is at the core of the Council's vision. The Council's ongoing work to deliver against its agreed equality, diversity and inclusion principles and objectives continues to further strengthen the Council's approach to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion both within the organisation and across Staffordshire.
2. The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to show that they are advancing the equalities agenda under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Specific requirements on Councils include publishing at least one Equality Objective every four years, as well as key information through the annual Gender Pay Gap report and Workforce Profile on 1st April each year, to demonstrate how they will eliminate discrimination and advance equality.
3. As previously reported to the Committee, a great deal of work was undertaken during 2021 to review the Council's approach to delivering

against the Public Sector Equality Duty. It was recognised that equality considerations are embedded across the organisation with a strong corporate focus on responding to, and addressing the Gender Pay Gap, together with improving collection and analysis of the workforce profile data. Key information through the Gender Pay Gap report and Workforce Profile is published annually on 1st April. A range of other activities and initiatives were also identified as having a significant impact on tackling inequalities both within the Council and wider communities across Staffordshire.

4. It was however acknowledged that more could be done to strengthen the Council's approach. Therefore, in December 2021 Cabinet agreed to adopt a new set of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles and objectives, along with an associated action plan.
5. Progress against the action plan was reported to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny in December 2022 and Cabinet in February 2023. In response to feedback the EDI action plan was strengthened to include more comprehensive review dates for the strategies in place. The action plan can be reviewed at Appendix 1.
6. A draft of this EDI progress report was discussed with Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 December 2023. The Committee noted both the progress made to deliver against the Council's EDI principles, objectives and delivery plan and the Council's Gender Pay Gap and Workforce Profile report.
7. The Committee requested that work experience for care leavers be encouraged with partners. The Committee also requested further information on the employment broker service which has been provided.

Principles and Objectives 2021-2023

8. It is proposed that the Principles and Objectives that were agreed in 2021 remain current and that we continue to work towards these in the next twelve months.

Principles:

- a. Staffordshire is a place where there is equality of opportunity for all, regardless of circumstances.
- b. Staffordshire County Council is an inclusive and diverse employer, where our people feel they have the opportunity to succeed and progress.
- c. Staffordshire County Council develops and delivers services that are inclusive and accessible to all.

Objectives:

- a. Review and strengthen our recruitment and retention processes and practices.
- b. Review and strengthen our EDI training offer to employees.
- c. Strengthen our approach to engaging and collaborating with our workforce and communities on EDI issues.
- d. Raise awareness of and celebrate diversity.

Year 2 Review 2023/2024

9. During the last twelve months we have continued the work to meet our principles and objectives. Of the 22 core EDI deliverables within the current action plan, a recent performance assessment confirms that 6 have been completed and 13 are ongoing, with 3 priority deliverables identified as a key focus for this year.
10. This section summarises our in-year key highlights and achievements across the organisation.
 - a. A new **Gender Pay Gap and Workforce Profile report** was published on 1st April 2023, detailing our data and the steps we are taking to develop a more diverse and inclusive workforce, and in turn, improving our gender pay gap. The latest report can be viewed at Appendix 2 and will be refreshed on 1st April 2024.
 - b. The new **Translation and Interpretation** contract, based on a one-stop shop delivery model, that enables officers to access telephone, video, face-to-face interpretation and written translation services, continues to work well. Periodic reviews and performance monitoring takes place ensuring our services are accessible to all our communities. The service has helped support people arriving from Ukraine and Afghanistan to resettle in Staffordshire by enabling the Council to carry out safe and well visits and to signpost to and provide information, advice and guidance. During the last 12 months, the contract has fulfilled 1,044 service requests and has supported with the provision of 26 different languages.
 - c. The Council's **Community Impact Assessment (CIA)** policy forms a critical component of our decision-making processes. Key developments include the inclusion of the Armed Forces community as a key group to consider when undertaking CIAs, to ensure they are treated fairly and face no disadvantage when accessing services. In addition, joint work has taken place with Public Health to promote the completion of Health Impact Assessments within the CIA process, and

a review of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) CIA was also carried out to ensure consideration of cumulative impacts of key MTFS savings proposals on communities, places and our most vulnerable residents.

- d. A **range of communications activities**, promoting key dates and events, has taken place throughout the last year to celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion. Activities aligned to this include signposting colleagues to further information and opportunities to get involved.
- e. A new **equality, diversity and inclusion mandatory e-learning module** for our staff is being commissioned, alongside an e-product to support hiring managers to deliver inclusive and accessible recruitment. These will launch in 2024 and deliver an improved learner experience, supported with the latest information and guidance for all staff. Throughout 2023, 1424 members of staff completed the current e-learning which is an increase from 813 in 2022. This increase has been partially due to the launch of our mandatory training dashboard which means managers can see their direct and indirect reports mandatory training progress. Following the launch of the new product, future training numbers will be monitored and communications targeted as appropriate.
- f. **Staff Network Guidance** has been developed and launched on StaffSpace to support staff to set-up and manage employee groups. The guidance sets out what staff networks are, key things to consider when establishing a network, together with resources such as case studies and templates to provide further support.
- g. EDI is an important factor throughout the **refreshed 2023 – 2027 People Strategy** and is specifically highlighted within the promoting a positive working environment pillar, which states that ‘we will foster a feeling of belonging, embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into what we do’.
- h. Following the launch of an **inclusive and representative employer brand** in 2021, recent recruitment campaigns are promoting the Council as an attractive and inclusive employer with the aim of reaching more diverse candidates.
- i. Implementation of an **Applicant Tracking System (‘WeRecruit’)**, which has significantly reduced the time and effort required for recruitment activities. This not only improves the experience for both candidates and hiring managers, but also enhances the overall reputation of the Council as an employer of choice. Since the launch of WeRecruit, there has been:

- i. Over 15,600 registered new candidates, receiving over 21,200 applications.
 - ii. Average applications per advert currently standing at 22.4 an increase by over 6 compared to the average at the end of 22/23.
 - iii. An increase in the number of male applications from 26.9% to 31.6% and increased LGBTQ applications from 6.8% to 7.9%. Increase in the number of under 30 applicants from 17.8% to 20.5%.
 - iv. Filled 1077 positions over 12 months – 89.75 average per month. 68% have been filled by external applicants 32% by internal applicants. New starters reporting a positive experience of the recruitment process average score 8.4/10.
 - v. A decrease in the time to hire from 49.3 to 43.8 days. Voluntary turnover is currently 6.8% from 8.4% in 2022/23, and retention after 1 year is up from 77.6% in 22/23 to 83.1%.
11. In line with our People Strategy, the key driver to attract and retain exceptional talent is our **careers website**, known as the "shop window" of our organisation. The improvements to our career website have been informed by extensive research, both internally and externally, which identified several key themes that prospective employees value in a career's website:
 - a. **Understanding Benefits and Flexibility:** Candidates want comprehensive information about the benefits and flexibility we offer, recognising the importance of work-life balance and employee well-being.
 - b. **Authentic Insights:** Prospective employees seek to hear from real individuals within the organisation to gain a genuine understanding of our workplace culture and atmosphere.
 - c. **Clarity of Purpose:** Candidates value clarity about the roles they would undertake within the organisation, emphasizing the significance of understanding their contributions.
 - d. **EDI Commitment:** It is essential for our careers website to effectively communicate our commitment to EDI. Prospective employees desire a clear demonstration of our dedication to creating an inclusive workplace.
 - e. **Representation and Diversity:** Candidates wish to see authentic representations of our diverse workforce, allowing them to envision themselves as part of our organisation.
12. The evolution of our careers website will play a pivotal role in our ongoing efforts to attract and engage the right talent, reinforcing our status as an employer of choice.

13. A '**Directory of Opportunities**' for care leavers is being developed to increase exciting opportunities such as work experience, taster days, apprenticeships and employment within the Council to enhance their long-term engagement with education, training and employment. The aspiration is that every directorate will offer something to a care leaver. The aim of the 'directory of opportunities' is to have one document which sets out what support our care leavers can expect to receive and what opportunities there are within the Council.
14. The Council has offered the County Solicitor up to support the mentoring programme of the **Law Society's Diversity Access Scheme** which is designed to address key barriers to the solicitors' profession faced by those from less advantaged backgrounds. This offer also includes the Council having a presence on the Law Society Diversity and Inclusion working group.
15. Continued to achieve good levels of **diversity across our Apprentice population** when compared with the wider SCC workforce. This is helping to ensure that we are providing nationally recognised qualifications to people from diverse or under-represented backgrounds.
16. Following the implementation of an **Anti-Harassment and Bullying Policy** in September 2022, there has been a small number of cases raised under this policy in the first year, as this policy continues to be embedded.
17. As an employer we are responsible under the Equality Act 2010 to make '**reasonable adjustments**' to ensure that any substantial disadvantage to our employees is avoided. It is also important that we support all our employees to be the best they can be and enable people to easily access adjustments where this will support them to carry out their role. A multidisciplinary team including People Services, ICT and Health and Safety colleagues, are reviewing and improving our processes and associated guidance for managers and people who need to access adjustments.
18. **Supported job seekers facing barriers to employment** to secure work experience placements enabling progression into paid work through the Council's Staffordshire Jobs and Careers Brokerage Team. Open Door Staffordshire is an employability programme that provides job seekers, furthest from the labour market, with structured work experience within SCC and external organisations to provide employability and work ethic skills as a stepping stone towards employment. Since its launch in 2010, over 2,000 candidates with significant challenges to employment have been supported to ensure a successful placement and many to achieve successful paid employment. Staffordshire Jobs and Careers have strong

relationships with many partners, businesses and local authorities to support Staffordshire residents into paid employment including: DWP, Ex-Service personnel, custodial establishments, Care sector, homeless, SEND, young people and Careers, and many more.

19. As part of the drugs, alcohol and complex needs agenda, a **Co-Production Group** has been established, which includes people with lived experience (mainly members of the local recovery communities). The group is designed to ensure wider participation of people in the strategic decision-making process and contributing to a long-term shift towards more meaningful engagement with communities. One of the issues the group will be supporting over the next few months concerns drug-related deaths that are disproportionately high among women.
20. The **Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Strategy** has committed to the recruitment and retention of a social care workforce that is representative of the local population. This involves recruiting an inclusive workforce that is representative of the diversity of the local population, including those in senior roles. The approach has been aligned to the NHS 'Leadership for a collaborative and inclusive future'. The partnership will promote 'recruitment best practice', review the training and support needs of our workforce and consider the provision of training, as appropriate, and co-ordinate and support with targeted recruitment campaigns.
21. Over the last year Health and Care have launched two new joint strategies with the Integrated Care Board (ICB): **'Living my Best Life': Joint Strategy for Disabled and Neurodivergent people in Staffordshire 2023-2028** and **Good Mental Health in Staffordshire 2023-2028**. In developing both strategies, around 1100 people responded to our surveys and around 130 people met virtually or in person, in focus groups, and at engagement events to share their thoughts on what our priorities should be for disabled and neurodivergent people, for people with mental health problems, and for helping people to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing. Responses were provided from across the County, all gender, sexual orientation, ethnic groups, and people with lived experience, carers, communities and people working in health and social care. All the feedback has been incorporated in to both the final strategies and the associated action plans to support the delivery of the strategy outcomes. Both strategies recognise the inequalities some groups of people experience and seek to identify outcomes and actions that will help to address those and achieve greater equality for everyone in Staffordshire.
22. Over the last year Health and Care have been working with EI&S with the aim of **improving the numbers of people with disabilities in**

Staffordshire in employment. In particular we recognised that we wanted to increase the numbers of people with a learning disability, who adult social care work with, to gain employment or valuable work experience. An employment broker was recruited early in 2023 to help develop a supported employment offer for disabled people in Staffordshire, working with the social care workforce, employers, partners and disabled people to create more equal job opportunities. In addition to working with a number of disabled people to find employment, the specialist employment broker will be helping the Council to develop more inclusive recruitment to ensure adjustments are provided for neurodiverse applicants, increasing awareness of Access to Work, developing links with supported internships and travel training initiatives to enable more people to access work.

23. **Staffordshire's Co-Production Promise** for the children and family's system has been launched, as well as the creation of a toolkit to support those people responsible for providing services to enable them to do co-production well. This has given us a common understanding of how we work together to share responsibility for providing support, sharing power by working with those receiving that support at every step, so that the help provided is as good as it can be and makes life better. Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) led on this work with the content of the Promise co-produced by local children, young people, parents, carers, adults and professionals from across the system.
24. A senior 'sponsor' has been identified to participate and represent the Council in the Integrated Care System **Workforce Race Equality Standard Champions programme (WRES)**. The programme is designed to support meaningful and lasting change to race equality within the systems workforce. Participants will gain a deep understanding of WRES, acquire tools to drive change, and thrive in diverse settings, with mandatory training modules and a strong support structure, enabling sponsors to elevate their role as a 'WRES Champion' to be a catalyst for empowerment and change.
25. In addition, the Council is also engaging in the Integrated Care System **Reciprocal Mentoring for Inclusion Scheme** which will involve a series of five training dates/modules being delivered over an 18-month period to allow mentoring partnerships to meet and flourish. The objectives of the scheme are to:
 - a. Further the ICS's goal to delivering meaningful and lasting change to race equality within our workforce through the fostering of good relations in a safe environment between senior leaders and staff

members who do not share the same protected characteristic of ethnicity and heritage.

- b. Increase confidence among colleagues in talking about race.
- c. Create a greater understanding of shared lived experiences.
- d. Support in the development of allies.
- e. Enhance the understanding of accountability for race equity.
- f. Influence career development opportunities for under-represented groups.

26. Staffordshire Highways Strategic Partnership As the Council's strategic partner Amey have developed a wide range of EDI initiatives, programmes and affinity groups that are available and benefit the Staffordshire Highways workforce, including:

- a. Women in leadership - promoting fairness and opportunity for women in the workforce
- b. Multi-cultural leadership and Multi-cultural network – supporting black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups
- c. Wellbeing network – promoting physical/mental wellbeing, supported by our network of Wellbeing Ambassadors and Mental Health First Aiders
- d. Inclusion network – supporting diversity/inclusion in our business via our network of Inclusion Ambassadors
- e. Neurodiversity network – supporting neurological differences in our employees, such as autism, Asperger's syndrome and learning difficulties etc
- f. PRIDE network – supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans individuals
- g. Armed Forces network, supporting services leavers and veterans
- h. STEM Ambassador network – allowing staff to inspire young people to pursue engineering careers and STEM fields

27. Since the partnership between SCC and Amey was formed in October 2014 the following EDI highlights have been made:

- a. Working with the Council Amey have developed a 12-week paid work experience placement for care leavers - Three care leavers joined the first cohort with one going on to be offered a full-time permanent position;
- b. 58 individuals who were facing barriers to employment have been assisted with training and experience opportunities; and
- c. 40 individuals have been supported through the 'open door' programme, with 28 securing full-time employment; and
- d. Working with the Council Amey hosted its first 'journey to work' event in April 2022, followed by two further Staffordshire events in 2023 and now rolled out nationally. Journey to work provides those furthest

from the labour market with the job search skills and support they need to secure employment. At the first Staffordshire event 18% of attendees were offered jobs on the day, 36% percent were offered interviews and temporary jobs and 14% were offered jobs after the event. A case study sharing good this practise was delivered to the national ADEPT autumn conference in 2022.

Looking Ahead to 2024/25

28. Reflecting on work undertaken during 2023/24, there is opportunity to build on existing work to date, to further strengthen the Council's approach to the delivery of equality, diversity and inclusion.
29. Set out below are a number of proposed areas of focus for 2024/25.
30. The **LGA Equality Framework for Local Government** (EFLG) will be utilised as a tool to informally self-assess the Council's progress on strengthening our approach to EDI. The results will inform the development of a refreshed action plan and set of strategic principles and objectives for 2024/25.
31. Continue to improve the **recording of protected characteristics** in MyHR, which will in turn improve the accuracy of our workforce profile and enable the targeted recruitment and improvement of employment policies that will enhance the diversity of our workforce and reduce the gender pay gap.
32. Equality, diversity and inclusion will continue to be a prominent thread throughout the **new People Strategy 2023-27** and will be an integral consideration to the design and delivery of people and culture related activities. During the roll-out of the new strategy in 2024, People Services will continue to encourage everyone to play a role in its delivery, promoting inclusion across the organisation.
33. Further development of **recruitment and employment policies**, demonstrating a strong organisational commitment to EDI, will provide the Council with a significant competitive advantage in an increasingly challenging talent market.
34. In January 2024 we will be incorporating **Digital ID Checks** into our recruitment process. As part of our commitment to enhance the security, speed up background checks and streamline our hiring process, this innovative verification method will offer a reliable way to confirm the identities of our potential hires. We will be using a WME procured platform which is government approved and will maintain data security and privacy.

35. Embed a **new equality, diversity and inclusion mandatory e-learning programme** across the organisation, including an on-going campaign to increase completion of the mandatory training following its launch. This includes supporting colleagues without digital access to complete the mandatory training. These colleagues will be provided with a new printed brochure containing the key information they need to be aware of with respect to EDI in the workplace.
36. In addition, we will develop new digital products for the **We Welcome induction** process to help describe what inclusion means at SCC and provide updated self-access resources and materials to help colleagues understand how they can create more inclusive teams and working environments.
37. Engage and collaborate with a range of staff groups to inform the development of a new **workforce led communications approach** and set of activities for 2024, promoting key dates and events that celebrate diversity.
38. Continued work to ensure **apprenticeships** provide nationally recognised work-based qualifications to people from diverse and under-represented backgrounds, via a new and holistic apprenticeship strategy that will help us create more early career and entry level opportunities.
39. We are currently developing our new **management development** offer for 2023-27. This provides an opportunity to incorporate content to support our EDI ambitions and to ensure managers understand their role in creating an inclusive and positive working environment for all colleagues.
40. Our new **How we Work and How we Lead** documents have recently launched. These principles were created following extensive consultation across SCC and provide an articulation of how we can work and lead in service of our values and to deliver the very best for Staffordshire. As we embed and further adopt these principles, they will help to ensure we are working inclusively and being mindful of EDI in all that we do.
41. **Love learning** campaign – as part of the 12-month Love Learning campaign we have dedicated a month in Q1 of 2024 to focus on EDI. This month will bring to life several key areas within EDI, promoting and embedding them through a variety of learning initiatives that are designed to appeal to as many people as possible. This includes a focus on understanding neurodiversity, mixed cultures in the workplace, microaggressions and a diversity book club. We will also be working with colleagues across the organisation to highlight some of the great work

that is being undertaken in the directorates and to bring new and relevant topics in ED&I to the fore during the learning campaign.

42. We will take the learning from the Integrated Care System Workforce **Race Equality Standard Champions programme and Reciprocal Mentoring Scheme for Inclusion** to further develop and explore the opportunity for other joint programmes of work or opportunities to align our ambitions.
43. **Staffordshire Highways Strategic Partnership** will sustain and further develop EDI opportunities, building a new plan for 2024-29, including:
 - a. Continue to work with the Social Care Leavers Team to provide opportunities for vulnerable and looked after children;
 - b. Continue to work with 'open door' providing opportunities for those facing barriers to employment; and
 - c. Each year run at least 2 'journey to work' events around Staffordshire providing rewarding career opportunities in highways and infrastructure for local people
44. The work on access to **reasonable adjustments** for people to support them in their role will continue in 2024/25, with the aim of improving processes and guidance. As part of this work a review of accessibility tools, support and training will take place to agree standardised solutions as far as possible including a review of Microsoft accessibility aids that integrate well and simplify the support and maintenance of such software.

Delivery and Governance

45. The officer Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group within Corporate Services continues to meet, which brings together lead senior officers, to co-ordinate, collaborate and monitor progress against the EDI action plan. In November 2023, this group was expanded to include representatives from across each Directorate area, to ensure a cross organisation approach to diversity and inclusion. Refreshed terms of reference have also been agreed in line with refreshed membership.
46. The EDI action plan is overseen by the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Corporate Services.
47. This area of work also features as a key deliverable within the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan, with progress routinely reported on a quarterly basis through the Integrated Performance Management process. In addition, Cabinet and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is

provided with an annual monitoring report that evidences progress against the action plan and wider equalities work for further oversight and scrutiny.

Link to Strategic Plan

48. The Council's commitment to promote EDI is a core part of our Strategic Plan and one of the four 'How We Work' statements. Therefore, ongoing work to deliver equality, diversity and inclusion, and ensure diversity of our workforce, is key to the delivery of all strategic priorities.

Legal Implications

49. Paragraph 3 of this report outlines the Council's legal requirements. The progress of the EDI delivery plan set out in this report, and the adoption of the proposed Principles and Objectives will contribute towards meeting our legal requirements.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

50. Should any further budget be required to support EDI activities this will be sourced from local service budgets or a business case will be prepared to request further investment.

Climate Change Implications

51. Although there are no direct climate change implications resulting as a result of the recommendations set out within this report, it is recognised that there may be indirect impacts, the service will work to reduce any impacts that are identified as part of a wider commitment to tackling climate change.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2022/2023
Appendix 2 – Gender Pay Gap and Workforce Profile Report March 2023
Community Impact Assessment

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