

Appendix 1

People and Health Overview Committee 14 December 2020 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Draft Strategy and Action Plan

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr P Wharf, Corporate Development and Change

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: [M Prosser, Chief Executive](#)

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Report Status: [Public](#)

Recommendation:

- That Cabinet adopt the draft equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and action plan (attached at appendix 1);
- Note the findings of the public consultation; and
- Note the timetable for decision-making by Cabinet in January 2021.

Reason for Recommendation:

As a public body, we have both a legal and a moral duty to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

1. Executive Summary

Dorset Council has worked on a number of projects to understand and advance equality, diversity and inclusion since its inception in April 2019. These include internal activities that relate to the council as an employer; and external services that we deliver to individuals and communities. These include the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, the Gender Pay Gap Trailblazer work with Unison, the Syrian Resettlement Programme, the co-production of services in Children's

Services and an assessment into the impact of COVID-19 on Dorset's most vulnerable communities.

While there have been pockets of positive activity, the new council has not yet agreed a vision in relation to EDI; or reached out to partners to establish this as part of its culture and how it hopes to work with partners and communities in future.

During the consultation it was suggested that equality, diversity and inclusion lost visibility as a result of local government reorganisation, and that opportunities to show commitment and leadership were missed. The strategy and action plan brings together the council's activities on equality, diversity and inclusion; puts them into a nationally recognised structure and starts building a performance framework by which progress can be measured.

It is hoped that, by working with partners, and voluntary and community organisations; the strategy and action plan will move beyond a series of initiatives and act as a catalyst for wider cultural change.

2. Financial Implications

None in relation to this report.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

The need for an EDI strategy and action plan was given greater urgency as a result of the pandemic, where evidence has shown that COVID-19 does not affect all population groups equally. Many analyses have shown that older age, deprivation, ethnicity, males and geographical areas are associated with a greater risk of infection and mortality.

4. Climate implications

None in relation to this report.

5. Other Implications

None in relation to this report.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)

The draft EqIA is attached at appendix 2. The purpose of the strategy and action plan is to improve the council's work on equality, diversity and inclusion.

8. Appendices

- i. Equality, diversity and inclusion draft strategy and action plan
- ii. Draft EqIA

9. Background and pre-consultation activity

9.1 Three pre-consultation meetings were held to inform the draft documents and contribute towards the formal consultation process. The consultees included the Trades Unions, employees, and partner organisations, including Dorset Race Equality Council, Dorset & Wiltshire Deaf Association, Dorset Polish Centre, Dorset Mental Health Forum, Help and Kindness and others.

9.2 Pre consultation comments included:

"If organisations don't proactively, willingly and deliberately include, they automatically exclude" (voluntary organisation)

"Equality, diversity and inclusion lost visibility during local government re-organisation, and the council missed some opportunities to speak up, like over the Black Lives Matter movement" (employee comment).

This message also came up in initial conversations with voluntary sector representatives, one of whom said *"there's been an absence of reflective practice and honesty by the council"*. On the topic of the council being relatively new, one Trade Union colleague said:

"The new council can set an example – a good way of doing that would be to adopt gender-neutral language".

9.3 The pre-consultation meetings indicated a clear desire amongst voluntary and community sector organisations, employees and partners for the council, to show strong and sustained leadership around EDI and to work with others in doing so. As one voluntary organisation said *'equality doesn't end with legal compliance. It's an ongoing journey, and we want to be on it together'*.

10. Consultation findings

- 10.1 61 responses were received to the written consultation. The responses showed that:
- 29% of respondents felt the council addresses EDI well or very well at present
 - 56% felt the draft strategy was a good document to guide the council's actions in future
 - 54% of respondents agreed that the action plan was a good document to guide the council's actions in the future
- 10.2 In addition to the written consultation, officers had more detailed consultation meetings with voluntary and community organisations and the Trades Unions. Many helpful additions were suggested for the action plan, including:
- Refer to Project Weymouth and Portland that is currently being researched (several comments were made about poverty and housing in Weymouth and Portland)
 - Work with the Trades Unions to promote EDI training opportunities
 - Look for equality champions amongst employees whose work isn't computer-based (cleaners, rangers, wardens etc)
 - Look at complaints data to understand EDI complaints
 - Undertake regular employee surveys to review how well the council is implementing the strategy and action plan
 - Continue to ask voluntary and community organisations how they think the council is doing on EDI (essentially using this consultation as a benchmark and a monitoring process)
 - Work with commissioning and procurement to ensure local suppliers are considering EDI issues
- 10.3 Several people commented that the action plan was too high level and not SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited). This was a conscious decision, as explained in the consultation document, and a more detailed action plan will be developed in conjunction with the portfolio holder and officers once cabinet has adopted the strategy and this high-level action plan; this will be approved by cabinet, delivered and developed by officers and an annual report will be reported to cabinet.
- 10.4 Some suggestions were made that haven't been included in the action plan, specifically:

- Introduce mandatory training in schools and colleges (omitted because schools are independent of the council - similar suggestions were made relating to visitors, town and parish councils and private sector businesses which were omitted for the same reason).
- Just stop doing it altogether (rejected because we have a legal and moral duty to do it, and there was clearly a very strong appetite for the council to do more rather than less).
- Weymouth needs to be smartened up, the area by the train station looks shoddy and run down (omitted because it's outside of the scope of this work).
- Make EDI training mandatory (omitted because it is already).
- Contradictory statements (too many actions in the action plan and not enough actions).

10.5 Perhaps inevitably, many of the suggestions were either far-reaching and/or focussed on very specific issues. Aspirations and actions that are deliverable within the current constraints have been included in the strategy and action plan, recognising that this is a starting point for further work. All comments have been tracked in a 'you said/we did' spreadsheet which will be shared with services and with the organisations and partners that contributed, in order that everyone can track individual suggestions.

10.6 One residents said *"it's all too easy to have a policy, strategy or vision, but they are of the moment. They are out of date the moment they hit the press. Do something and do it well; small/short, consistent, iterative improvement cycles that don't cost huge in terms of time, money or resources"*.

10.7 The action plan has been written with this approach in mind, but we recognise that this is as much about cultural change as it is about taking specific actions. As one respondent said *'success is measured where diversity is in the warp and weft of the culture, attitude and values, not in a schedule of actions'*.

10.8 Some specific comments were made in relation to economic disadvantage, the provision of housing, how the council buys goods and services, and working with schools and young people. These will be shared with the services, but the council has an Economic Growth Strategy, Procurement Strategy, a Children and Young People's Plan, and housing policies which won't be replicated in the EDI strategy. Officers will work together where these measures overlap through the employee steering group and shared performance measures.

11. Ongoing engagement and monitoring of the strategy and action plan

11.1 18 respondents said they would like to be involved in monitoring the strategy and action plan going forward. It is suggested that this happens through the Dorset Forum for Equality and Diversity. The council will also be including several EDI performance measures in its performance management and monitoring processes, including:

- A regular employee survey (HIVE) looking at how well the council is delivering the strategy and action plan
- Dorset Council's score for the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index
- The percentage of employees who declare additional personal data
- The number of Diversity Champions and allies who support EDI within the council

11.2 We will also continue to ask partners how well we address equality, diversity and inclusion as a council to identify if we are making suitable progress. It is recognised that this as a systems leadership issue and the council needs to work on a multi-agency basis and engage communities to promote better understanding and awareness of what it means to be a diverse society.

11.3 The draft strategy, action plan and proposed measures will go to Cabinet on 19 January 2021.

[Please do not delete the footnote.](#)

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.