

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Community Safety and Equalities
Date 18 July 2023



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION ACTION PLAN (2023 – 2024)

KEY DECISION

Authors Sally Norman | 07566 788339
Charlotte Bott
Gemma Maret | 01438 242397

Lead Officers Rob Gregory | 2568

1 PURPOSE

1.1 This report presents Stevenage Borough Council’s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 2023 -2024 (Appendix A), the recommendations of the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) (Appendix B – Part 1) and the SEC Legacy Group Action Plan (Appendix B – Part 2).

- 1.2 The Council's EDI Action Plan sets out the activities the Council will undertake to advance equality, diversity and inclusion across its services, communities and workforce between August 2023 and August 2024.
- 1.3 The SEC Recommendation Report sets out the findings of the SEC, which was a Commission set-up in 2021 to assess the nature, extent, and impact of racism in Stevenage. This community led approach has resulted in the documentation of the observations and perceptions of the communities impacted by racial disparity in Stevenage, and a set of recommendations for Commission partners to help address the challenges identified.
- 1.4 The SEC Legacy Group Action Plan sets out the activities that the independent Legacy Group will implement over the next 12 months in response to the findings of the SEC.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:
 - 2.1.1 Approve the EDI Action Plan 2023-2024 (Appendix A)
 - 2.1.2 Agree that an EDI progress report and updated EDI Action Plan is brought back to Executive in Autumn 2024.
 - 2.1.3 Note the SEC Recommendations Report and SEC Legacy Group Action Plan (Appendix B – Part 1 and 2)

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council's EDI Policy and Strategy (2022-2026)

- 3.1.1 In March 2022, the Executive approved the EDI Policy and Strategy (2022-2026). In the policy, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Equality Act (2010). The Council committed to:
 - the publication of six clear, updated equality objectives every four years

- annual publication of equality information relating to people with protected characteristics (employees, services users, and residents), including gender pay gap information about its workforce
- the completion and publication of Equality Impact Assessments when there is a new or revised policy, procedure, function, or service
- building upon the 'Inclusion and Wellbeing' theme of the Workforce Strategy: Future Town Future People (2020-2023) and further engagement with staff to nurture a progressive, inclusive safe and healthy working environment.

3.1.3 The EDI Strategy set out the Council's ambitions to go beyond the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and Equality Act (2010). Central to this approach was the Council's commitment to implementing an annual EDI Action Plan which would bring together all strands of EDI work across existing Council strategies, services, and programmes, ensuring that a clear link between the Council's policy objectives and projects could be established.

3.1.4 The identification of existing projects and programmes as part of the Action Plan has helped demonstrate the significant amount of EDI work already taking place across the Council. By identifying existing programmes, the need to identify additional budget has been reduced, and the Council can be assured that its 6 policy objectives are not only being delivered, but that the activities in the Action Plan are embedded and realistic.

3.2 The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) Self-Assessment

3.2.1 Key to the mapping of existing projects and programmes has been the self-assessment of Council EDI activity against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The purpose of the EFLG is to help organisations review and improve performance against 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' criteria. The Council had previously assessed itself against the 'Achieving' level.

3.2.2 Under the Achieving Level criteria of the EFLG there are 4 modules, 17 themes and 121 criteria in total. The green bubbles in Figure 1 show the 4 modules of

the EFLG. Each of the Council's 6 Stevenage Borough Council EDI policy objectives (white bubbles) are aligned with a module.

3.2.3 The Officers undertaking the self-assessment were required to provide specific examples of existing or future activities against modules and themes within the framework. The work was completed over a period of 10 weeks. The aim of the exercise was to find good examples of where the Council had fulfilled 'achieving level' criteria, and the future activities or plans in place.

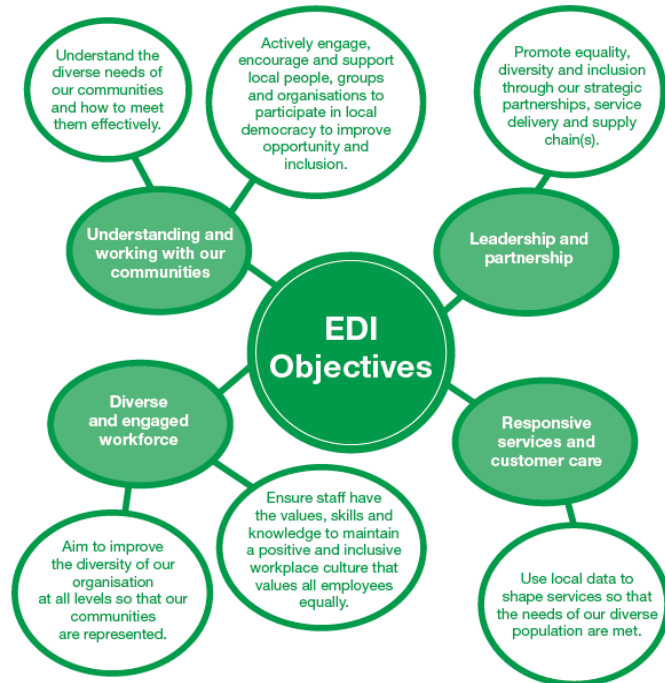


Figure 1

3.2.4 The outcome of the ELFG work indicated that whilst the Council comfortably continue to fulfil the Achieving Level criteria, there are 2 areas where it may seek to develop its response, these are:

- the review of Equality Impact Assessments as part of the service planning cycle to inform decision-making and the wider understanding of existing and future community needs
- the extent to which the Council's procured services inform and help to uphold and implement its equality objectives

Both of the above activities are currently being delivered through existing corporate functions; and by introducing an action to explore coordination and utilisation of the information it will be possible to improve insight into these areas and inform decision-making in future.

3.3 Equality & Diversity Annual Report (2021-2022)

3.3.1 The Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2021-2022 indicates that Stevenage is a diverse town representing a number of protected characteristic groups, this includes:

- 25% of Stevenage residents were from an ethnic minority compared to 20.2% in England
- Stevenage has a younger population when compared with both Hertfordshire and England with an increase of 4.6% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 7.7% in children aged under 15 years, since 2011
- 23.9% of households in Stevenage included a person with a long-term health problem or disability
- There are 8,550 unpaid carers in Stevenage which represents 10.2% of the population

3.3.2 The demographic data in the Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2021-2022 demonstrates the diversity of Stevenage, and it is important the actions in the Action Plan seek to advance equality across all groups. For example, Stevenage has a high number of young people, an action to provide support to children as part of the Healthy Stevenage Place-Based Health Inequalities Project will help improve the Council's understanding of the needs of young people and how to meet those needs effectively. Further details about the types of projects being delivered as part of the Action Plan are contained within section 4 of this report.

3.4. Consultation and Monitoring

3.4.1 The Action Plan has been shared for comment with Officers and Members of the Equality & Diversity Governance Group (EDGG) and the Officer Equality Group (OEG). Both groups been very positive about the areas of focus and have welcomed the identification of existing projects and programmes to help demonstrate work in this area. By bringing together the good work already happening in the services the Council will seek to add value where there is an opportunity. For example, working in partnership with HR to deliver the Focus Group sessions for staff.

- 3.4.2 To test that the actions in the Action Plan are meaningful to local people, attendees at the Stevenage International Day were asked to provide their views on the proposed actions and flag any emerging inequality issues for consideration. The majority of people responded that they could not identify any inequality issues outside of the areas described. For those that could, these were linked to services outside of the Council's control, for example Special Educational Needs provision in schools. Respondents felt that the activities identified in the Action Plan had the right focus and breadth.
- 3.4.3 Ongoing engagement activities with partners and residents as part of delivery of the Action Plan is a key element to making sure that dialogue with residents, community groups and staff is maintained. This is central to advancing the Council's EDI work and why updates through social media and attendance at community events will continue throughout the lifecycle of the Action Plan.
- 3.4.4 To support the Council's approach to engagement and communication, specific analysis of social media, websites, and other local authority communications has been undertaken. Analysis shows that the Council publish more posts on both Facebook and YouTube in relation to equality, diversity, and inclusion, when compared with larger local authorities. For larger authorities who do have a strong online EDI presence, this is understood to be in response to their use of clear, impactful, and engaging images (such as those used as part of its Stevenage Annual Report). This suggests that infographics are a tool that could be used to help communicate the Council's EDI progress, and this will be a key consideration in the forthcoming development of the Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2022/2023.
- 3.4.5 The Action Plan will be monitored by the OEG on a quarterly basis and regular updates provided to the EDGG. To demonstrate progress against the EDI objectives, an Annual EDI Progress Report will be presented to the Executive in July 2024. The Progress Report will be published on the Council website and promoted through social media.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 Approval of an EDI Action Plan fulfils the commitment the Council made in its EDI Strategy (2022-2026) to strive beyond the fulfilment of its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), and to meaningfully advance equality, diversity and inclusion ambitions across services, communities, and the workforce for the next four years. By identifying existing EDI projects that are already being delivered in the services the Council is committing to realistic and attainable outcomes. This approach will help ensure that EDI is embedded across services going forward.
- 4.2 The EDI Action Plan (2023-2024) consists of 15 EDI actions each aligned with one of the Council's six EDI policy objectives:

Objective 1: We will understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively

- 4.3 **Action 1a: Community Safety – ‘The Council will continue to foster good community relations and social cohesion through the Community Safety Strategy programme of work’**

To further help understand the needs of the community the Council will continue to work closely with partners and residents to foster good community relations and social cohesion through the So Safe Community Safety Strategy programme of work. A project particularly relevant to the policy objective is the North Herts Deprivation Project being delivered through Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA). This project is supporting schools by providing domestic abuse training for teachers, onsite support and onward referrals for families who are experiencing domestic abuse, and provision of food bank services. An equivalent project is due to be launched in St Nicholas in June 2023. Representation from the Police Hate Crime lead will build upon the project aims to improve social cohesion and inclusion in the community. The data captured as part of this work will be used to inform the Council's understanding

of hate crime in Stevenage and future actions within the So Safe Community Safety Strategy.

4.4 Action 1b: EqIA Service Plan Monitoring – ‘The Council will review its approach to how the Equality Impact Assessments through Service Plans are monitored, and how the information is used to inform decision making and the wider understanding of existing and future community needs’.

As part of its approach to understanding the diverse needs of the community, the Council will review its approach to Service Plan monitoring and how the Equality Impact Assessment information is used to inform decision-making. EqIAs are working documents which are owned, monitored, and updated by Council services. Sharing information about forthcoming EqIAs as part of their annual Service Plan will help inform the Council’s understanding of upcoming EDI considerations, and approach to workload planning. These findings will be shared with the OEG and the EDGG for discussion. This is a new action identified in response to the self-assessment against the EFLG best practice framework.

4.5 Action 1c: SEC Legacy Group – ‘The Council will continue to champion the work of the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) through the facilitation of the SEC Legacy Group. The Legacy Group will work with partners for 12 months to deliver meaningful change in response to the initial findings of the SEC.’

The SEC was set up in April 2021 following a motion carried by the Council to address racial disparity in Stevenage and to assess the nature, extent, and impact of racism in the town. The recommendations of the SEC (Appendix B – Part 1) indicate that further work with partners to identify next steps and opportunities for joint working is welcomed. The SEC Legacy Group will be facilitated by the Council for a 12-month period and a Legacy Group Action Plan setting out the main activities of the group is included in Appendix B (Part 2).

Objective 2: We will actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups, and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion

- 4.6 **Action 2a: Housing Management Forum – ‘The Council will strengthen the voice of tenants and leaseholders, including consideration of people’s differing needs, through the development and implementation of a Housing Management Forum’**

Tenants and Leaseholders will be encouraged to raise issues and provide challenge to housing policy and procedural changes. In establishing the Forum, agency for protected characteristic groups will be promoted.

- 4.7 **Action 2b: Digital Engagement – ‘Digital engagement through the Cooperative Neighbourhoods programme of work (e.g., Proptech funding) will help shape the approach to the development of local community plans and provide opportunities for people, including those who share protected characteristics, to participate in local democracy’**

The analysis will be used alongside Resident and Tenant Survey findings to inform project, policy, and infrastructure spending at a local level. A further period of digital engagement is due to take place in Summer 2023, and the Council will explore how protected characteristic groups can be further engaged.

- 4.8 **Action 2c: Civic Leadership Programme ‘The Council and its partners will work together to establish a Civic Leadership Programme that targets and provides support for underrepresented communities who are interested in political representation and standing for public roles.’**

Targeting underrepresented communities who are interested in standing for public roles through a Civic Leadership Programme was an initiative put forward as part of the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) discussions. The Commission included membership from local Borough Councillors, County Councillors, and former Councillors, and this was a proposal that received widespread support.

Objective 3: We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chains

4.9 Action 3a: Social Value Procurement – ‘The Council will review the extent to which its procured services inform and help to uphold and implement our equality objectives’

The Council will look to explore how the themes, outcomes and measures captured in the social value portal currently inform understanding of community needs. EDI social measures of interest would include monitoring improved opportunities for disadvantaged people; improved employability of young people; and initiatives throughout the supply chain to identify and manage the risk of modern slavery. The findings will inform understanding of the impact of social value procurement on the advancement of EDI locally. This is a new action identified in response to the self-assessment against the EFLG best practice framework.

4.10 Action 3b: Healthy Stevenage – ‘Through its Healthy Stevenage Partnership, the Council will continue to promote activities and events that reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of Stevenage residents.’

The Healthy Stevenage Partnership's objective is to work collaboratively to improve health, promote wellbeing, and reduce health-based inequalities locally. Examples of existing projects that inform this agenda include the Stevenage Place-Based Health Inequalities Project which is focused on reducing the stigma of mental health, the Saracens Project which seeks to tackle low self-esteem in girls, and partnership work to help improve how the Council can effectively utilise partners project demographic data to shape future activities.

Objective 4: We will use local data to shape services so that the needs of the diverse population are met

- 4.11 **Action 4a: The Equality & Diversity Annual Report – ‘The Council will publish the Equality & Diversity Report 2022/2023 and use the information it contains to help shape its services so that the needs of the diverse population are met’**

In 2022/23, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will publish further tranches of census 2021 data and the new information will be used by the Council to shape services, programmes and projects which reflect the changing needs of the community. The OEG will be central to communicating the findings of the E&D Report 2022/2023 to the services and developing (in parallel) an EDI Action Plan for 2024-2025.

- 4.12 **Action 4b: Gender Pay Gap – ‘The Council will publish the Gender Pay Gap report 2022 and use it to inform its findings to inform its review of the Workforce Strategy and gender pay parity in the workforce’**

The Council’s most recent Gender Pay Gap report (31st March 2022) indicated a gender pay difference of 4.23%, which is a reduction from 8.22% in 2017. The Council is committed to using the findings of the report to further inform its continuing focus on inclusive recruitment and retention practices as part of the wider Workforce Strategy.

- 4.13 **Action 4c: Workforce Data – ‘The Council will continue to review its workforce data and explore opportunities to collate specific ethnicity data that can help identify and address key issues.’**

The Council will explore opportunities to collate specific ethnicity data upon review of their workforce data. This action was added in response to a discussion at a Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) meeting which suggested that there was a significant absence of local data on ethnicity trends. Recording of this data is currently not a statutory requirement, nor is there national guidance on the approach, however opportunities to record such data alongside other existing protected characteristic will be explored by the Council.

Objective 5: We aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels to be representative of our communities

- 4.14 **Action 5a: Build upon the ambitions of the Workforce Strategy – ‘As part of its planned review of the Workforce Strategy (2020-23) the Council, informed as well by the findings of the 2022 recruitment audit and national best practice guidance, will continue to develop its response to improving the diversity of the organisation.’**

The Council will continue to build upon the ambitions of the Inclusion and Wellbeing Theme of the Workforce Strategy: Future Town Future People (2020-2023). This will be achieved by using the findings of the recruitment audit in 2022 to inform targeted action around career development and retention strategies for under-represented groups. The Council will also consider Government guidance and best practice schemes including but not limited to:

- the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) guidance on voluntarily ethnicity pay gap reporting
- Government’s ‘Inclusive Britain’ report (March 2022) and the Government Equalities Office updated guidance on positive action (Dec 2022) which seeks to support employers and industry sectors to create opportunity for groups that are underestimated in their workforce

Objective 6: We are committed to ensuring our staff have the values, skills, and knowledge to maintain a positive and inclusive workplace culture that values all employees equally

- 4.15 **Action 6a: Review EDI E-learning Modules – ‘The Council will review the equality induction eLearning package and introduce an updated module on equality, diversity and inclusion’**

To increase staff knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion, the Council will review the equality induction eLearning package and introduce an updated module on protected characteristics. By reviewing learning the Council will build upon the current training package, ensuring staff have clear expectations of inclusivity ambitions.

- 4.16 **Action 6b: EqIA Toolkit Review and Training – ‘The Council will review the EqIA Toolkit and provide updated guidance and training to business units, as well as exploring the addition of an independent review process for EqIAs going forward.’**

The Council will continue to provide guidance to staff on the EqIA process, this will be underpinned by a review the EqIA Toolkit and the publication of updated guidance and training to staff. The introduction of EqIA monitoring as part of Service Plan reporting will allow the Council to plan EqIA workload and improve how it currently supports staff through the process. The independent review aspect of this action was added in response to discussions with members of the Stevenage Equalities Commission.

- 4.17 **Action 6c: Champion Workshops – ‘The Council will work with the Officer Equality Group (OEG) to develop individual-led ‘Champion’ workshops that focus on particular EDI subjects. The purpose of the events will be to share understanding and raise awareness.’**

The Council will work with the OEG to develop focused workshops on particular EDI subjects to raise awareness and understanding of each topic. The Council will also, in partnership with the OEG, facilitate bi-monthly staff focus meetings to discuss subjects such as Health, Gender Pay Gap, Gender Bias and Work/Life Balance. This will also be informed by the findings of the Spring 2023 Inclusion Survey.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.1.1 The activities identified as a result of the Action Plan are incorporated in existing budgets and resource.

6.2 Legal Implications

6.2.1 The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy sets out the Council's commitment to meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This includes the publication of equality information relating to people with protected characteristics (employees, services users, and residents) every year. The Equality & Diversity Report 2021/2022 presented as part of this report fulfils part of the PSED.

6.3 Risk Implications

6.3.1 If the Council does not fulfil its Public Sector Equality Duty, then there would be reputational and financial risks in regard to compliance with the Equality Act (2010). Commitment to the activities in the Action Plan, specifically those that are a requirement of the PSED, mitigate these risks.

6.4 Policy Implications

6.4.1 The EDI Policy (2022) and its objectives are applicable to all policies, strategies and plans across the Council. The basis for the publication of an EDI Action Plan exists within the EDI Strategy 2022-2026.

6.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

6.5.1 The proposed activities and actions will primarily be delivered as part of the core responsibilities of staff within the relevant services. Any unforeseen implications for staff resulting from the implementation of this action plan will be fully considered at an appropriate time, and with consultation and engagement as required.

6.6 Human Resources

6.6.1 The proposed recommendations will bring together the existing and forthcoming workforce EDI activities as set out in the Workforce Strategy: Future Town Future People (2020-2023). This approach seeks to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion activities across the workforce.

8.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

8.7.1 The EDI Action Plan and E&D Annual Report, underpinned by the EDI Policy & Strategy, are key parts of how the Council demonstrate and furthers its commitment to promoting equal opportunity. The Action Plan includes a range of actions that are designed to challenge discrimination, advance equality, diversity, and inclusion, and ensure that impacts on protected characteristic groups are considered throughout all stages of the Council's decision-making process.

8.8 Service Delivery Implications

8.8.1 Service delivery implications will emerge through implementation, development, and agreement of the EDI Action Plan. It is anticipated that the approach to delivery, engagement and governance will continue to sit within the current operating model.

8.9 Community Safety Implications

8.9.1 The So Safe Community Safety Strategy 2021-2024 has a core objective of tackling hate crime and promoting community cohesion. This has been embedded into the Stevenage Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Action Plan and is captured within the EDI Action Plan. It is anticipated that this work will have positive implications for community safety aims.

8.10 Safeguarding Children Implications

8.10.1 It is anticipated that the Action Plan will have positive implications for safeguarding children, enhancing our approach to engaging with young people, and fulfilment of our responsibilities under the Children Act (2004).

8.11 Other Corporate Implications

8.11.1 Communications: To promote openness and transparency, the EDI Action Plan (2023-2024) and Equality & Diversity Annual Report (2021/2022) will be published on the Council website and promoted to residents through social media campaigns.

Background documents

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy (2022-2026)

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/equality-and-diversity/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2022-2026.pdf>

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (2022-2026)

<https://mysbc.invostra.com/file/5434/download/Equality%252C%2520Diversity%2520and%2520Inclusion%2520Policy%25202022%2520-%25202026.pdf>

Equality & Diversity Annual Report (2021-2022)

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/equality-and-diversity/equality-and-diversity-report-2021-22.pdf>

Community Safety Strategy (2021-2024)

<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s28848/CSC%20-%20Appendix%20A%20-%20SoSafe%20Community%20Safety%20Strategy%202021.pdf>

Gender Pay Gap Report – 31st March 2022

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/council-and-democracy/data-transparency/gender-pay-gap-31-march-2022.pdf>

The Equality Act (2010)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The Public Sector Equality Duty

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality->

Workforce Strategy: Future Town Future People (2020-2023)

<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s26597/Item%204%20-%20Workforce%20Strategy.pdf>

APPENDICES

- A. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan (2022-2024)
- B. Part 1. SEC Recommendations Report
 - Part 2. SEC Legacy Group Action Plan

Table of Abbreviations

| | |
|------|---|
| BEIS | Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy |
| E&D | Equality & Diversity |
| EDGG | Equality & Diversity Governance Group |
| EDI | Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion |
| EFLG | Equality Framework for Local Government |
| EqIA | Equality Impact Assessment |
| NIHR | National Institute Health Research |
| OEG | Officer Equality Group |
| ONS | Office for National Statistics |
| PSED | Public Sector Equality Duty |
| SEC | Stevenage Equalities Commission |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |