

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Equalities
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EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) ACTION PLAN AND PROGRESS REPORT

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<KEY DECISION>

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to highlight the progress made in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across the council since the introduction of the EDI Action Plan for 2023-24, whilst also looking to the council's proposed EDI actions for next year as part of the EDI Action Plan for 2024-25.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the progress in the delivery of the EDI Action Plan in 2023-2024 (Appendix A), be noted and agreed.
- 2.2 That the revised EDI Action Plan for 2024-25 (Appendix B) be noted and agreed, and that the Strategic Director (RP) be given delegated authority to agree a final version of the action plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Stronger Communities and the Leader of the Council.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2022, the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy and Strategy (2022-2026) were approved by the Executive.
- 3.2 The EDI Policy set out the council's commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and the Equality Act (2010). The EDI Strategy set out how the council would progress equality, diversity and inclusion across the community and workforce.
- 3.3 Developed by the Local Government Association (LGA), the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) helps organisations identify and map areas for improvement against best practice EDI requirements. There are 121 criteria in total that fit across four modules, then the council's previously agreed six EDI policy objectives below are each aligned with a module:
 - 3.3.1 We will understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively.
 - 3.3.2 We will actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups, and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion.
 - 3.3.3 We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chain(s).
 - 3.3.4 We will use local data to shape services so that the needs of our diverse population are met.
 - 3.3.5 We aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels so that our communities are represented.
 - 3.3.6 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.
- 3.4 The council has made significant progress under these six objectives in advancing equality across the community and its workforce through the implementation of the EDI Action Plan.
- 3.5 15 actions sat within the six objectives in 2023/24 and covered a variety of projects and programmes.

Stevenage Equalities Commission

- 3.6 In May 2020, Stevenage Borough Council Members voted to support the formation of an independent Equalities Commission to represent the needs of ethnically diverse communities in the town.
- 3.7 The Stevenage Equalities Commission was made up of 20 equal members of strategic bodies representing services within the town and community members and was Chaired by Errol John who was nominated by members of the Commission.
- 3.8 The culmination of this two-year piece of work was a report and a set of recommendations that both sit alongside an action plan. These were all presented to Counsellors and the Senior Leadership Team to be then included

in Stevenage Borough Councils, updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.

- 3.9 Following these initial activities, the Commission's members have been working towards the implementation of the recommendation outlined in the original review as well as seeking external funding to establish a legacy group.
- 3.10 Funding for this was secured in April 2024 and activity is underway to formalise the group as a multi-stakeholder cooperative by March 2025.
- 3.11 As part of the 2024/25 action plan the continued development of the Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group will be captured and monitored. This is detailed in section 4 below.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

EDI Action Plan 23-24 Progress Report

- 4.1 To ensure consistent monitoring and oversight of all 15 actions in 2023/24, teams provided quarterly updates on the development of each item.
- 4.2 These updates were then cascaded to the Officer Equality Group (OEG) and Equality and Diversity Governance Group (EDGG) on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing monitoring and consultation. These updates are summarised within the EDI Action Plan 23-24 Progress Report (Appendix A).
- 4.3 Key highlights include:
 - Closely working with Hertfordshire Constabulary to offer greater support to victims of domestic abuse as part of the council's So Safe Community Safety Strategy.
 - The development of an improved Resident Engagement Strategy & Framework that places a heavier focus on capturing the broader tenant voice.
 - Analysis of the council's Tenant Perception Survey broken down by protected characteristic groups from the 2023/24 sample of 1,000 Stevenage residents.
 - Continued successful collaboration within the Healthy Stevenage Partnership.
 - A downward gender pay gap trend of 3.73 for 2023, compared to 4.23 in 2022.
 - The council hosting and supporting a range of equality-driven events in 2023-24 both internally and externally.
- 4.4 As well as the quarterly updates, the progress report includes relevant background information, and an overview of consultation and monitoring activities with officers, members and residents to ensure the actions were meaningful to local people and their communities. A look to next year's proposed EDI Action Plan for 2024-25 is also provided.

EDI Action Plan 2024-25

- 4.5 The EDI Action Plan (2024-2025) (Appendix B) brings together all strands of EDI work across existing Council strategies, services, and programmes. This includes the recommendations from the Stevenage Equalities Commission, strategic partnerships with Healthy Stevenage and Mission 44, and the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) self-assessment considerations.
- 4.6 18 clear actions have been identified for 2024-25 which span a variety of protected characteristic groups and are aligned with the council's six previously outlined EDI policy objectives.
- 4.7 The plan also aligns with changes to legislation, including the Consumer Standards set out by the Regulator for Social Housing which came into effect in April 2024. Particularly focused on the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. The steps the council are taking to continue to build on our understanding and engagement with tenant's continues to be captured under action 2a.
- 4.8 Residents, Members and Officers were all consulted on the development of these actions and were given the opportunity to flag any emerging inequality issues for consideration during community groups and on social media.
- 4.9 Of the actions identified, 12 are carrying over from last year as activities are ongoing, then the following six actions have been identified as new additions to the action plan for 2024/25. Whilst some of these activities are already in place, they had not been incorporated into the 2023/24 iteration of the action plan:
 - 4.8.1 3c: Through our ongoing partnership with Mission 44, the council will provide opportunities for young people to engage with STEM Education and careers, with a particular focus on those who are facing social injustice. This is linked to the councils wider commitments around Enterprise & Skills which is focused on ensuring that Stevenage residents are able to make the most of the opportunities on their doorstep.
 - 4.8.2 5a: Through the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan, the council has committed to the cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This will encourage staff to consider the impact on equalities when designing and delivering services.
 - 4.8.3 5b: Following Cabinet approval of the Workforce Strategy 2024-27, the council will have committed to the inclusion of Diversity and Inclusion as a key theme and will use this to continue to develop its response to improving the diversity of the organisation.
 - 4.8.4 6b: The council will support the creation of an LGBTQ+ staff network group to ensure an inclusive workplace through encouraging discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding.
 - 4.8.5 6c: The council will explore the possibility of establishing a Neurodiversity staff network group to ensure an inclusive

workplace is in place and informed by discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding.

- 4.8.6 6d: The council will continue to promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture and following the results of the 2024 All Staff Pulse Survey, will develop specific corporate actions to advance inclusion and wellbeing amongst staff.
- 4.10 The continued development of the Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group has its activity captured through actions 1c and 2c of the 2024/25 Action Plan.
- 4.10.1 1c: 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 findings of the SEC.
- 4.10.2 2c: 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.
- 4.11 A nominated individual from each responsible business area will continue to provide quarterly progress updates, as per last year. Progress against actions will then be coordinated and recorded in an action plan tracker which will be maintained by the Corporate Policy and Performance Team.
- 4.12 As set out in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy (2022-2026) and to help ensure that progress against actions continues to be monitored, the EDI Action Plan will be updated and presented to OEG and EDGG on a quarterly basis.
- 4.13 A report setting out progress made within the EDI Action Plan 2024-25 will be presented to the Cabinet next year, in line with the annual commitment.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. The projects identified as part of the Action Plan are delivered under the Council's existing programmes of work, thereby reducing the need to identify additional budget and resource. This also ensures that the activities and ambitions in the action plan are realistic and attainable, and that EDI is clearly embedded across services.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan will support the Council in meeting its public sector equality duty.
- 5.3 The duty is a statutory requirement imposed by section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. It requires the Council (and other authorities), in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 5.4 The relevant protected characteristics that section 149 of the Equality Act covers is age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, officers responsible for delivering the actions over the coming year and implementing any improvement activity set out within this report will need to identify and consider any risk implications that arise.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.6 The Council declared a climate change emergency in June 2019 with a resolution to work towards a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2030. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report, except for those activities that seek to have a positive impact in this area.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.7 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report, although the EDI Action Plan outlines where positive action has been taken to advance equality, diversity and inclusion across our workforce and the community. Where necessary, Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are completed for programmes, projects, service changes and improvement activity identified.

6 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 EDI Action Plan (2023-2024)

7 APPENDICES

- A EDI Action Plan 23-24 Progress Report
B EDI Action Plan (2024-2025)