

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Equalities & Young People
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EQUALITY DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ACTION PLAN AND ANNUAL REPORT – PROGRESS UPDATE

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report the annual summary of progress made on the eighteen actions set out in the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) action plan 2024/25, and agree the proposed EDI Action Plan for 2025/26.
- 1.2 To also report the annual overview of key demographic resident and workforce information within the Equality & Diversity Report 2024/25.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Acknowledge the delivery of actions detailed in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 2024–25 Progress Report (Appendix A), which contribute significantly to embedding and exemplifying Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles throughout Stevenage Borough Council.
- 2.2 Approve and endorse the revised 19 actions in the 2025/26 version of the EDI Action Plan (Appendix B) to ensure future infrastructure is in place to support the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan’s cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- 2.3 Agree the publication of the latest annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2024/2025 (Appendix C) and utilise this data to help enhance community

understanding, and shape services to represent the needs of the local population.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 EDI ACTION PLAN

- 3.1.1 In March 2022, the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy and Strategy (2022-2026) were approved by the Executive.
- 3.1.2 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.
- 3.1.3 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. As a result, the council agreed six EDI policy objectives to aligned with the modules:
- 1) We will understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively.
 - 2) We will actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups, and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion.
 - 3) We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chain(s).
 - 4) We will use local data to shape services so that the needs of our diverse population are met.
 - 5) We aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels so that our communities are represented.
 - 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.
- 3.1.4 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.
- 3.1.5 18 actions sat within the six objectives in 2024/25 and covered a variety of projects and programmes, as outlined in section four and in Appendix A.

3.2 STEVENAGE EQUALITIES COMMISSION

- 3.2.1 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.
- 3.2.2 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.
- 3.2.3 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 Councillors and the Senior Leadership Team to be then included in Stevenage Borough Council's updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.

- 3.2.4 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.
- 3.2.5 Funding for this was secured in April 2024 and activity is underway to formalise the group as a multi-stakeholder cooperative.
- 3.2.6 The continued development of the Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group has been captured and monitored as part of the EDI Action Plan.
- 3.2.7 Significant progress has been made since its inclusion in the action plan, and has been actively supported by Stevenage Borough Council throughout, especially as it looks to become a Multi-Stakeholder Cooperative. This is outlined in more detail in within Appendix A.

3.3 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY REPORT

- 3.3.2 Within the EDI Policy and Strategy 2022-26, the council reaffirmed its commitment to fulfilling the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). As part of this, the council agreed to annually published equality information relating to people with protected characteristics (employees, service users, and residents), including gender pay gap information about the council's workforce demographics. This information is presented in the Equality and Diversity Report 2024/2025 (Appendix C).
- 3.3.3 The data in the annual Equality and Diversity Report is used by the council to help understand the demographics of the community, and consequently help design and shape services that represent the needs of the local population.
- 3.3.4 The majority of the statistics included in this report are from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census, carried over from the 2022-23 report rendition of this report, alongside newly published population estimates and other relevant data. These statistics then enable demographic trends to be identified against the nine protected characteristics within Stevenage, and comparisons made to both Hertfordshire and England, as well as against the previous 2011 census to demonstrate how communities have evolved and changed over the last 10 years.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 In January 2024, the Cabinet agreed the new Making Stevenage Even Better (MSEB) Corporate Plan until 2027. This included a cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI). The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan and the annual Equality and Diversity Report both exemplify the cross-cutting EDI theme embedded within the MSEB framework. They contribute to the establishment of a 'golden thread' of EDI throughout Stevenage Borough Council, demonstrating a clear and consistent link between service delivery and the council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

4.2 EDI ACTION PLAN

- 4.2.2 In particular, by taking this approach the council has streamlined how progress is communicated to Members and residents alike through collating all EDI-related activities into one EDI Action Plan.
- 4.2.3 As part of its second rendition, 18 actions sat within the EDI Action Plan in 2024/25 and covered a variety of projects and programmes. Action owners provided quarterly updates on the development of each item. These updates were then cascaded to the Officer Equality Group (OEG) on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing monitoring and consultation. These updates are summarised within the EDI Action Plan 24-25 Progress Report (Appendix A).
- 4.2.4 A few key highlights to note from the EDI Action Plan in the past year include the renewal of the council's So Safe Community Safety Strategy; an improved suite of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs); the Stevenage Equalities Commission taking steps to become a Multi Stakeholder Co-operative; continued successful collaborations with the Healthy Stevenage and Mission 44 Partnerships; a 2024 gender pay gap of -0.98 compared to 3.73 in 2023; and the council hosting and supporting a range of equality-driven activities. Further details on these projects can be found in Appendix A and B.
- 4.2.5 As well as the quarterly updates, the progress report also includes relevant background information, an overview of linked consultation and monitoring activities, and a look to next year's proposed EDI Action Plan for 2025-26 (Appendix B).
- 4.2.6 The proposed EDI Action Plan 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 EFLG self-assessment considerations, as well as a few new additions.
- 4.2.7 Changes to the EDI Action Plan for 2025-26 include:
- 19 identified actions which span the protected characteristic groups and are aligned with the six EDI policy objectives.
 - Actions 1b and 5a from last year will be combined as they both address the monitoring of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) through the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan Cross-Cutting Theme. Further details on the amalgamation of these actions can be found in section two of the progress report (Appendix A).
 - The introduction of two new actions:
 - 3c: Through Age Friendly Stevenage work, embed inclusive engagement with older people from diverse backgrounds to inform and shape Age-Friendly Stevenage priorities and services.
 - 6d: The council will integrate and implement technology to promote digital inclusion and support neurodiverse staff members to ensure accessibility for all.
- 4.2.8 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 so EDI is distinctly embedded across services.
- 4.2.9 As with previous years, a nominated individual from each responsible business area will provide quarterly progress updates during 2025/26. Progress against actions will then be coordinated and recorded in an action plan tracker, which

will be maintained and monitored by the Corporate Policy and Performance Team.

- 4.2.10 Then 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 the Officer Equality Group and the Equality & Diversity Governance Group on a quarterly basis. Further, as above, a report setting out progress on the EDI Action Plan 2025-26 will be presented to the Cabinet again next year too.
- 4.2.11 Acknowledging the progress made so far within the EDI Action Plan, and endorsing next year's proposed actions will help to ensure this EDI cross-cutting MSEB theme is reinforced and upheld across Stevenage Borough Council services.

4.3 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY REPORT

- 4.3.2 Further, agreeing the contents of the latest annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2024/2025 will help enhance community understanding, and shape services to represent the needs of the local population.
- 4.3.3 While the majority of data presented in this year's report has been retained from the 2022–23 edition, reflecting the continued relevance of the 2021 ONS Census, a range of updated statistics has been incorporated to provide a more current and comprehensive overview of both the town and the council's workforce. This includes refreshed data on population density, life expectancy, languages spoken, live birth rates, earnings by residence and workplace geography, and apprenticeship figures. Additionally, the latest council data has been used to update sections on Benefits Claimants, Community Safety, and Workforce Information.
- 4.3.4 Through this report, the council is able to understand the make-up of the town and workforce, so that services are fair, accessible, and open to everyone who needs them. The purpose of this report is to demonstrate this understanding and offer insight to officers, members, and residents alike to inform decision-making going forward.
- 4.3.5 As in previous years, a fully designed version of the report has been commissioned through our internal design services and will be published online for the public via the SBC external website.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the actions within the EDI Action Plan 25-26 over the coming year will need to identify and consider any resulting financial implications.

5.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for delivering the actions within the EDI Action Plan 25-26 over the coming year will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications.

5.3 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.3.1 This report directly contains equality, diversity and inclusion items, any consequent implications are discussed within this report or within the Appendices.

5.4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the council in agreeing the recommendation(s). However, officers responsible for delivering the actions within the EDI Action Plan 25-26 over the coming year will need to consider any risk implications that arise.
- 5.4.2 The council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the council's objectives and internal control processes and provides good governance assurance.

5.5 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.5.1 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, however officers responsible for delivering the actions within the EDI Action Plan 25-26 over the coming year will need to consider any climate change considerations that arise.

6 APPENDICES

- Appendix A - EDI Action Plan 2024-25 Progress Report
- Appendix B - EDI Action Plan 2025-26
- Appendix C - Equality and Diversity Report 2024/2025