

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Update

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
CLT	21 November 2023
Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee	5 December 2023
Cabinet	20 December 2023

Will this be a Key Decision?	No
Urgency	Not Applicable
Final Decision-Maker	CABINET
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance.
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier, Insight, Communities and Governance Manager, Orla Sweeney, Senior Policy and Communities Officer.
Classification	Public
Wards affected	ALL

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the current Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which was agreed by Cabinet in January 2023.

New actions have been developed in consultation with Officers and Members. It is important that we have an up-to-date Plan to reflect the current challenges faced by residents and staff so that the Council can deliver on its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives.

Purpose of Report

To note the update on the current EDI objectives and Action Plan.

To consider and agree the new actions for 2023/24.

This report makes the following recommendations to the Cabinet:

1. That the progress on the current EDI Objectives and Action Plan at Appendix 1 to the report and highlighted at paras 2.4 to 2.5 be noted.
2. That the recommended actions for the Equalities Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report and highlighted at paras 2.6 to 2.13 be agreed.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – Annual Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council’s overall achievement of its aims in the delivery of its strategic plan objectives.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The report recommendations help deliver the achievement of cross cutting objectives: Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced and Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Risk Management	Please refer to paragraph 5.1 of the report.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Financial	The majority of the proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Legal	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council’s duties under Equality Act 2010. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of Equality Act 2010.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Information Governance	The recommendations do not impact personal information (as defined in UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018) the Council processes. However, some of the actions in the revised Action Plan could result in the collection and	Anna Collier Insight Communities and

	processing of personal data. Should this be the case, the Information Governance Team will be asked to review the processing of personal data affected and the associated will be updated accordingly, including a data protection impact assessment.	Governance Manager
Equalities	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of the Equality Act 2010. We recognise the recommendations may have varying impacts on different communities within Maidstone. Therefore, we will complete a separate equalities impact assessments at project level.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Crime and Disorder	Training in cultural competencies is likely to have a positive impact on crime and disorder in terms of understanding challenges faced by new and existing communities.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Procurement	No impact identified.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and it has been identified that there are actions that will support delivery of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan.	Anna Collier Insight Communities and Governance Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Equality Act (2010) Section 149 creates the single public sector Equality Duty and specific duties which are set out in secondary legislation. The Council is required to have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy,

reviewed every 3 years and a robust Action Plan. This is reported on and updated annually.

2.2 The Policy sets out the Council's three objectives:

- **Community Leader** – To lead by example, to ensure every individual resident is connected and supported.
- **Employer** – To lead a diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the Borough of Maidstone where residents and colleagues feel safe, confident and empowered to challenge and bring about change.
- **Service Provider** – To deliver inclusive services in accordance with the Council's values.

2.3 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan is in place to deliver these objectives and is refreshed on an annual basis. It is informed by service led insight and is reflective of current workstreams. The Action Plan is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer Group.

Overview of Progress on Current Action Plan

2.4 An overview of progress made this year is outlined below and detailed in full at Appendix 1.

As a Service Provider

- The 9 protected characteristics were expanded to include Poverty and the Armed Forces to help ensure the Council considers all vulnerable groups as part of its decision making, particularly in relation to financial exclusion.
- The EqIA template document and guidance was updated to support data led decision making.
- High-level Census 2021 data was published on dashboards on the Council's website. Unit Managers, Wider Leadership Team, Inclusion Board and EDI staff group were informed on how to use Census data to understand resident need.

As an Employer

- The Council's first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Staff Survey was carried out. This survey provides a baseline understanding of the organisation's diversity and allows us to explore and respond to unknown staff need. For example, the survey identified that almost a third of staff who responded to the survey had carer responsibilities. This has been added as an action in the new Plan for exploration.
- EDI Training programme for staff delivered. Modules included: Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Hidden Disabilities.
- Mental Health Support continues to be provided. This has included training and development of Mental Health first aiders.

As a Community Leader

- Ongoing Homelessness Prevention work continued with the OneView project. This has also included working with Golding Homes to deliver hardship payments to those in financial hardship.
- Additional project areas using OneView were identified including Violence Reduction, Health Inequalities, Food Insecurity and Damp and Mould.
- The Digital training and support suite became operational at Trinity House.
- EDI staff group was expanded to include more frontline service areas to ensure the knowledge base and perspective is broadened.
- Events were delivered to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups on funding advice and guidance. External speakers at the last event included: Space Hive - Crowd Fund Kent, National Lottery, ReferKent, Shepway Community Larder and Imago Community. A further event was scheduled for November 2023.
- Two further rounds of Household Support Grant funding have led to additional funding being allocated to the VCS and Parishes, increasing access to food and fuel support for vulnerable communities.

2.5 Some actions continue into this year's Plan to meet ongoing need. For example, the 'no wrong door' project, OneView and the Welfare Officer role which is the point of contact for those experiencing immediate financial need and support.

Development of Revised Action Plan

2.6 The full Action Plan for 2023-34 can be seen at Appendix 2.

2.7 Actions to support delivery of the Action Plan which reflect the Council's roles as a 'Community Leader' and a 'Service Provider' have been informed by discussions with key service areas and reflect new or ongoing workstreams that support the Council's EDI objectives.

2.8 In addition, the current EDI Policy and Action Plan has been audited by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Whilst the findings were positive, it was identified that more work could be done to analyse service user data to ensure we can see if our services are inclusive and accessible and that this data should be published on our website.

2.9 As a result, demographic data analysed by age, ethnicity, economic activity and disability that we have collected when carrying out consultation will be available on the website and refreshed annually. In addition to this, a project is proposed to review services across the Council collecting EDI data and make publicly available. Both projects have been included as new actions in the Action Plan update (Appendix 1).

2.10 It is important that the role of elected Members, the community knowledge they provide, and the residents they represent is recognised and supported. Cabinet have considered actions to support Councillors in the role. In addition to ensuring that training such as the Cultural Competencies is available to Members, the following actions have been included:

- Implement a new Member survey to ensure all new Members have equitable access to support and resources for their role.
- Provide Members with access to profiles of their local communities to inform their work.

2.11 The EDI Action Plan states, in its overarching commitments, that the Council will take an evidence-based approach to supporting financial inclusion. This commitment was first included in the Action Plan in response to recovery from the pandemic and supported delivery of the Financial Inclusion Strategy. The current Financial Inclusion Strategy is under review. The review is data led and being informed by the LIFT Dashboard, Community Insight Tool alongside wider measurements of Poverty and disadvantage are informing the strategy aims and workstreams. The Strategy will seek to respond to the wider determinants of financial exclusion affecting residents in Maidstone.

2.12 The results of the staff Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) survey have been used to develop actions under the Council's role 'as an employer.' The survey identified areas of focus that may not otherwise have emerged for example almost a third (27%) of staff have caring responsibilities, A follow up Carer's survey is required to understand what type of support staff need at work.

2.13 The survey also identified religious and cultural diversity within the organisation. For example, for 5% of staff, English is not their first language. The existing actions relating to Cultural Competencies training and a Diversity Calendar remain in the Action Plan with some additional actions identified as next steps. This includes a team talk for staff on significant dates and how these could be celebrated.

2.14 New actions are identified in the refreshed Workforce Strategy to support Inclusion and Belonging for staff.

Next Steps

2.15 Once approved by Cabinet the updated Action Plan will be published on our website and shared with responsible Officers to ensure actions are delivered. The Action Plan will continue to be monitored by the EDI Officer Group and updates on the Plan will be reported to the Cabinet Member.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The report asks Cabinet to note the EDI Action Plan update and consider and agree the revised actions.
- 3.2 Alternatively, the Cabinet could choose to add or remove actions for the Action Plan or ask for additional work to be completed. Cabinet could choose not to have an EDI Action Plan, however this would not be recommended as it would be a significant risk to the Council demonstrating how it is delivering against its equality objectives and compliance with the public sector equality duty.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That Cabinet note the EDI Action Plan update and consider and agree the revised actions. The Action Plan has been shaped by key Officers, conversations with Members and feedback from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.
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5. RISK

- 5.1 The Council's responsibilities as a Public Sector Authority are set out in the Equality Act 2010. The Annual Update report provides an opportunity for the Council to review its progress against its objectives and ensure they are still fit for purpose. Not taking this opportunity to review progress and respond to the needs of its staff and residents could cause reputational damage to the Council and we would not be fulfilling our responsibilities under the Act.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Progress on the existing EDI Action Plan has been monitored by the Staff EDI Officer Group. The results of the staff EDI survey were used to inform discussions with Wider Leadership Team and the staff EDI Officer Group on actions to include in the Action Plan to support the 'as an Employer' objective.
- 6.2 This matter was considered by the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee at its meeting on 5 December 2023. Members thanked the Officers for a comprehensive and succinct report and supported the recommendations. It was suggested that a timeline for the delivery of the actions would be helpful, and the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts indicated that this would be added to Appendix 2.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Once approved by Cabinet the updated Action Plan will be published on our website and shared with responsible Officers to ensure actions are delivered. The Action Plan will continue to be monitored by the EDI Officer Group and updates on the Plan will be reported to the Cabinet Member.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Progress against actions 2022/23.
 - Appendix 2: Action Plan 2023/24
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None