

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF CABINET

Decision Made: 20 December 2023

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Update

Issue for Decision

The 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.

Decision Made

That:

1. 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 in the report be noted; and
2. The recommended actions for the Equalities Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report and highlighted at paras 2.6 to 2.13 in the report be agreed.

Reasons for Decision

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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

The full Action Plan for 2023-34 can be seen at Appendix 2 to the report.

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.

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.

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 to the report).

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

Next Steps

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.

Communities Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee Feedback

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 this has been included in Appendix 2 to the report.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

To add or remove actions for the Action Plan or to ask for additional work to be completed. Alternatively, we could have chosen not to have an EDI Action Plan. This was rejected 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.

Background Papers

None

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.

Signed:  _____
Councillor Paul Cooper, Deputy Leader of the Council

Full details of both the report for the decision taken above and any consideration by the relevant Policy Advisory Committee can be found at the following area of the [website](#)

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm on 8 January 2024**