TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL
CABINET – 7 OCTOBER 2021
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY UPDATE
REPORT OF DIRECTOR: COMMUNITIES, CUSTOMER AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES
LEAD CABINET MEMBER – CLLR PAUL WATLING, CABINET MEMBER FOR CO-OPERATIVE COMMUNITIES, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1.   SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

1.1   This report summarises how the Council has increased its focus on equality and diversity by improving access to services and establishing a Trusted Panel to co-ordinate the community's response to hate crime incidents. It highlights how local organisations have come together, with the Council, to celebrate diversity through community events and school workshops, with thousands of children across Telford & Wrekin getting involved. Improvements have also been made within the Council, with more equality and diversity training, guidance and support being provided to employees.

1.2   The Council is committed to continuing to promote equality and diversity, both to our workforce and across the wider community. Future plans will be developed in consultation with local residents through a new Equality & Diversity Strategy. This report also clearly sets out the Council's condemnation of unlawful discrimination of any kind, and proposes the formal adoption of nationally recognised definitions of Antisemitism and Islamophobia. This proposal is supported by a number of community organisations.

2.   RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet notes progress to date in promoting equality and diversity, as set out in Section 4.2 of this report;

2.2 That Cabinet approves the next steps proposed in Section 4.3 of this report;

2.3 That Cabinet resolves to condemn and speak out against any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or any other characteristic protected by the Equality Act 2010;

2.4 That Cabinet endorses and adopts the definitions of Antisemitism and Islamophobia, as set out in Appendix 1 of this report, and grants delegated authority to the Director: Communities, Customer and Commercial Services in consultation with the lead Cabinet Member for Co-operative Communities, Engagement and Partnerships to update the Council's policies to this effect.

3.   SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Co-operative Council priority objective(s)?	
	Yes	A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The proposals in this report will benefit people with a range of protected characteristics (specific aspects of a person's identify defined by the Equality Act 2010 – see Protected characteristics	Equality and Human Rights Commission (equalityhumanrights.com)
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Timescales are set out in Section 4.3 of this report	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	The majority of actions taken in this report have been resourced through existing budgets and have mainly been in the form of officer time. An additional grant was received from MHCLG in 2020/21 totalling £50k for Community Champions which covered costs outlined in paragraph 4.2.2. The Council's Events Team and budget have also contributed towards delivering outcomes outlined in this report. The cost of developing the Council's Equality & Diversity Strategy will be met from within existing budgets. MLB 09/09/21
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	The Council is required, when carrying out its duties, to have due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act'.) It must strive to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act. The Council must advance equality of opportunity between those who do and do not share a protected characteristic under the Act. The Council must also foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The recommendations in this report are one way in which the Council can demonstrate it is complying with its legal duties. RP 09/09/21
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	As well as benefiting people with a range of protected characteristics, and helping to ensure

		that the Council meets its legal duties as set out above, the proposals in this report should contribute to improving community safety and cohesion.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	Borough wide impact

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

4.1 Background

4.1.1 As a large local employer, and provider and commissioner of services, we are committed to promoting equality and diversity. We want to go over and above our legal responsibilities, and build a culture where the diversity of our workforce and communities is positively valued and celebrated. As part of our vision to Protect, Care and Invest to create a better borough, we are focused on building strong communities, tackling inequalities, and opposing discrimination across our borough.

4.1.2 The challenges we have faced during the Covid pandemic have highlighted the importance of communities working together and being able to access services, and the key role that a diverse range of community groups and volunteers have played. The Black Lives Matter movement has further raised awareness of the importance of equality and diversity and the need to continue to build on the strong foundation we already have in the borough.

4.1.3 Whilst Telford & Wrekin is overall a thriving, growing place, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities. In recent surveys, 68% of residents agreed that people in their neighbourhood get on well together (Residents Survey 2020), and 90% of Council employees felt that the Council respects its employees irrespective of their ethnicity, sexuality, religion or disabilities (Employee Survey 2020), however we recognise that people's views and experiences differ, and that this is an important issue for many residents and employees.

4.1.4 Equality and diversity have been at the heart of the Council's co-operative values for the last ten years. However, as our population grows and becomes more diverse, it is now more important than ever for us to understand people's needs and to take positive action to meet these. This report provides an update on recent progress, and sets out recommended next steps.

4.2 Progress Update

a) Community

4.2.1 As part of developing our new Customer Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in January 2021, we consulted customers about how we could make Council

services more accessible for all. This included engaging with a wide range of groups, including the Telford & Wrekin Interfaith Council (TWIC), our Deaf Community Group and the Making it Real Board (Adult Social Care customers). A number of improvements have been put in place to respond to the feedback and suggestions from customers, for example we have:

- ➢ Brought together information about how we support access to Council services on one new web-page (see Supporting access to services - Supporting access to services - Telford & Wrekin Council);
- ➢ Tested the accessibility of Council services through mystery customer visits with 88% of mystery customers scoring the accessibility of Council buildings as 8 or higher;
- ➢ Reviewed Council Web-pages to ensure that they meet new accessibility standards;
- ➢ Developed new Customer Service Excellence guidance for employees, providing information on how to communicate positively with a diverse range of customers, for example people with hidden disabilities such as autism;
- ➢ Redesigned our Customer Contract following concerns that the colour contrast might make this difficult to read for some customers;
- ➢ Increased the choice of channels for customers to contact the Council, including web-chat and an automated chat-bot, whilst still offering a choice of more traditional options, such as telephone.

4.2.2   Throughout the Covid pandemic, we have particularly focused on ensuring that all residents were kept informed about key public health messages. With the help of TWIC, Telford and Wrekin Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) and Signal (a charity working with people who are deaf or have hearing loss), we produced a series of videos and translations in different community languages, including British Sign Language. Topics covered included community support, testing and vaccinations. This work has been recognised as national best practice by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and led to us securing grant funding to recruit community champion volunteers who are continuing to promote public health services to their communities.

4.2.3   Following a hate crime committed against a Sikh pupil in November 2020, the Council engaged with young people, schools, community leaders and key partners such as the Police. This resulted in a new Trusted Panel being set up, who now review, co-ordinate and provide rapid responses (within 24 hours of an referral) to reports of serious incidents under the legislation laid out in the Equality Act, 2010, which protects people against discrimination because of the protected characteristics that we all have (see Protected characteristics | Equality and Human Rights Commission (equalityhumanrights.com). The Panel is chaired by the Council's Cabinet Member for Co-operative Communities, Partnership and Engagement with membership of the Panel being flexible depending on the nature of the incident.

4.2.4   In addition, the Council's Multi-Cultural Development Service (MCDS) have been providing free equality and diversity training to staff in schools, and are also enabling all schools to easily report racist incidents to the Council through an updated system, so that effective support can be provided.

4.2.5   In parallel with this work to respond to discrimination and hate crime, we have also been positively raising awareness of and celebrating the diverse communities we have in Telford & Wrekin. In October 2020, we worked in partnership with the Telford Afro-Caribbean Resource Centre (TAARC), West Mercia Police, and the Police Crime Commissioner, to mark Black History Month. This involved 1,755 primary and secondary school pupils taking part in Black History workshops and 555 pupils entering an art competition to depict icons of black history. The celebrations culminated in a live-streamed virtual event at The Place in Oakengates, viewed by more than 500 people.

Black History Showcase   *South Asian Heritage Workshop*

4.2.6   Other events we have supported include Holocaust Memorial Day (January 2021) and South Asian Heritage Month (July/August 2021). The latter involved working with TWIC, the City of Wolverhampton Council and the Children's Society, to deliver a wide programme of virtual talks and activities, from a live cook along to a Q&A session with local South Asian businesswomen. More than 2,400 children also took part in school workshops.

4.2.7   This work has led to the development of a diversity calendar that highlights significant dates for all protected characteristics. Since June 2021, we have used the calendar to raise awareness of diversity, linking in with 11 local and national events, such as LGBTQ+ Pride Month and Learning Disability Week. A recent example is the lighting up of the Southwater One building in September 2021 to mark Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, at the request of the Harry Johnson Trust, a Shropshire-based charity. We have also used our events programme as a way of celebrating different cultures, for example as part of the Balloon Fiesta parade in August 2021.

Promoting Childhood Cancer Awareness Month   Balloon Fiesta in Southwater

b) Workforce

4.2.8   Looking at our approach as an employer, we updated our Equal Opportunities Charter and Employment Equality Promise in October 2019. This included a number of commitments, such as a guaranteed interview for applicants with a disability who meet the essential requirements of a post.

4.2.9   In July 2020, following the death of George Floyd, a new Black Lives Matter (BLM) Steering Group was established by and for employees. This group has been very proactive in suggesting and leading positive change. We also set up an internal Equality and Diversity Working Group to take a strategic lead in driving improvement across the Council. Most recently, a new LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning) employee group is currently being formed.

4.2.10 This has led to a number of improvements including:

➢ Increasing the range and take-up of equality and diversity training – equality awareness training is now mandatory for all employees, and a number of additional training courses have been introduced, covering topics ranging from unconscious bias (stereotypes about certain groups of people that people unconsciously form) to LGBTQ awareness. To date, more than 3,500 courses have been completed by Council employees;
➢ Raising awareness of equality & diversity amongst managers and employees through presentations by the BLM Steering Group to the Leadership Forum and other groups, a workshop with the Senior Management Team and Cabinet, and a number of panel discussions, for example for International Women's Day in March 2021;
➢ Developing new Intranet pages with links to a range of information and resources;
➢ Providing safe spaces for employees to discuss issues and support for employees to report any form of discrimination as well as developing the Council's response to individual protected characteristics, the new groups also have peer support from the BLM Steering Group Co-Chair / Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer;

- ➢ Developing a draft zero tolerance policy;
- ➢ More regular workforce monitoring and reporting – the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Cabinet now receive monthly reports showing a breakdown of each Directorate's workforce by age and ethnicity.

4.3 Next Steps

4.3.1 Whilst Section 4.2 sets out the positive progress that has been made, there is still much more that we want to do. In addition, the Council's existing Equalities Policy has not been updated for a number of years.

4.3.2 Work has therefore started to develop a new Equality & Diversity Strategy. We have already started to engage with a range of internal stakeholders, including the Senior Management Team, Cabinet, the BLM Steering Group, Employee Panel, and the Equality & Diversity Group. We are also seeking specialist external advice from David Weaver, a former Home Office Advisor, who was involved in the establishment of the MacPherson Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and represented the Government on the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

4.3.3 The next stage will be to bring the draft strategy to Cabinet in December 2021, followed by engagement with residents, community groups and partner organisations, such as the NHS and others involved in the Integrated Care System (ICS). The strategy will be updated to reflect the community's feedback.

4.3.4 In advance of the strategy being finalised, the Council wants to make a clear statement that we are fundamentally opposed to and deplore unlawful discrimination of any kind, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia.   It is therefore proposed that the Council formally adopts the International Holocaust Memorial Alliance (IHMA) working definition of Antisemitism, and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia.

4.3.5 The IHMA definition of Antisemitism, along with the examples set out in Appendix 1, has become the standard definition adopted by the UK Government, and the 31 countries that comprise the IHMA. The APPG definition on British Muslims, also in Appendix 1, is emerging as the predominant definition nationally. A report from the Muslim Council of Britain published in March 2021 demonstrated the wide acceptance of the definition, which has also been endorsed by the majority of UK political parties, a growing number of local authorities, and the Local Government Association.

As is stated both definitions neither prevents criticism of Israeli or Muslim country governments. For example it is not considered antisemitic to criticise or call for action against the Israeli government for human rights abuse of Palestinians or to support the idea of a two state solution to the Middle East crisis. Neither is it islamaphobic to criticise or call for action against Muslim country governments for human rights abuses to their own civilians or those of other countries."

4.3.6 The proposal to adopt these definitions has been shared with a range of community leaders and organisations, including TWIC, the Shropshire Islamic Foundation, Regent Street Mosque, the Telford & Wrekin Muslim Forum and a representative of the Jewish Community. All were supportive, and have offered to also give their feedback on the draft strategy.

5.   PREVIOUS MINUTES

5.1   None.

6.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1   None.

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Appendix 1 – Definitions of Antisemitism and Islamophobia

a) International Holocaust Memorial Alliance (IHMA) Definition of Antisemitism

In the spirit of the Stockholm Declaration that states: "With humanity still scarred by …antisemitism and xenophobia the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils" the committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial called the IHRA Plenary in Budapest 2015 to adopt the following working definition of antisemitism.

On 26 May 2016, the Plenary in Bucharest decided to:

> **"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of Antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."**

The following examples may serve as illustrations:

Manifestations might include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. However, criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as Anti-Semitic. Antisemitism frequently charges Jews with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for "why things go wrong." It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

Contemporary examples of Antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Anti-Semitic acts are criminal when they are so defined by law (for example, denial of the Holocaust or distribution of Anti-Semitic materials in some countries).

Criminal acts are Anti-Semitic when the targets of attacks, whether they are people or property – such as buildings, schools, places of worship and cemeteries – are selected because they are, or are perceived to be, Jewish or linked to Jews.

Anti-Semitic discrimination is the denial to Jews of opportunities or services available to others and is illegal in many countries.

b) All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) of British Muslims Definition of Islamophobia

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims was established on 18 July 2017 to build on the work of the APPG on Islamophobia, but with a wider remit to examine a broad range of issues that British Muslims care about, and are affected by.
APPGs are composed of Members of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They are informal, cross-party groups that have no official status within Parliament, are not accorded any powers by Parliament or any of its Committees, and are independent of Government.
Following two years of consultation, on 27 November 2018, the APPG on British Muslims published a report titled "Islamophobia Defined: the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia."
This report contained the following definition:

> **"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."**

Contemporary examples of Islamophobia in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in encounters between religions and non-religions in the public sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, instigating or justifying the killing or harming of Muslims in the name of a racist/ fascist ideology, or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims as such, or of Muslims as a collective group, such as, especially but not exclusively, conspiracies about Muslim entryism in politics, government or other societal institutions; the myth of Muslim identity having a unique propensity for terrorism, and claims of a demographic 'threat' posed by Muslims or of a 'Muslim takeover'.
- Accusing Muslims as a group of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Muslim person or group of Muslim individuals, or even for acts committed by non-Muslims.
- Accusing Muslims as a group, or Muslim majority states, of inventing or exaggerating Islamophobia, ethnic cleansing or genocide perpetrated against Muslims.
- Accusing Muslim citizens of being more loyal to the 'Ummah' (transnational Muslim community) or to their countries of origin, or to the alleged priorities of Muslims worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Denying Muslim populations the right to self-determination e.g., by claiming that the existence of an independent Palestine or Kashmir is a terrorist endeavour.
- Applying double standards by requiring of Muslims behaviours that are not expected or demanded of any other groups in society, e.g. loyalty tests.

- Using the symbols and images associated with classic Islamophobia (e.g. Muhammed being a paedophile, claims of Muslims spreading Islam by the sword or subjugating minority groups under their rule) to characterize Muslims as being 'sex groomers', inherently violent or incapable of living harmoniously in plural societies.
- Holding Muslims collectively responsible for the actions of any Muslim majority state, whether secular or constitutionally Islamic.