

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 2 DECEMBER 2021

DRAFT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY

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. BACKGROUND AND MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This report follows on from the Equality and Diversity Progress Update report (October 2021), which highlighted positive steps that the Council has made in improving access to services, co-ordinating community response to hate crime incidents, celebrating diversity through a range of events and activities, and increasing training and guidance for Council employees.
- 1.2 This previous report also led to Cabinet approving a recommendation to condemn and speak out against any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion or any other characteristic protected by the Equality Act 2010, and to formally adopt the International Holocaust Memorial Alliance (IHMA) working definition of Antisemitism, and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia.
- 1.3 Cabinet also recognised that despite the good progress that has been made, there is much more that we want to do as an organisation, and so pledged to bring forward a new draft Equality & Diversity Strategy, which accompanies this report.
- 1.4 The attached draft strategy sets out the Councils revised approach to equality and diversity through a new 4-year strategy that replaces the existing Equality Policy. It takes account of our legal duties and responsibilities and also the type of culture we want to promote throughout our workforce and in the way that we treat our residents and customers.
- 1.5 The strategy is currently in draft form and includes a clear commitment, vision and new set of objectives all of which will be driven by a supporting action plan that the Council will report against on an annual basis.
- 1.6 The intention is for this strategy to inform and complement, not duplicate other strategies, many of which focus on reducing inequality too.
- 1.7 The draft strategy includes four main areas of focus:
 - Leading our organisation and communities;
 - Supporting our workforce and elected members;
 - Serving our customers;
 - Celebrating and promoting diversity.

- 2. RECOMMENDATIONS**
- 2.1 That Cabinet note the new draft Equality & Diversity Strategy and approve this draft as the basis for further community engagement.**
- 2.2 That Cabinet endorses the approach to public accountability by agreeing to publish our new equality objectives in the revised Council Plan once finalised;**
- 2.3 That Cabinet agrees to annual progress reporting against the Strategy and Action Plan;**
- 2.4 That Cabinet agrees to the Council appointing an independent facilitator to carry out further engagement within our communities before the strategy is finalised (as set out in section 4.6).**

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	Costs associated with engagement and consultation activities will be met from existing budgets and reserves. Any financial implications identified from changes made to the final Strategy and Action Plan following consultation will be detailed in the report to Cabinet in April 2022. MLB 21.10.21
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

		<p>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.</p> <p>The implementation of this new strategy will assist the Council to demonstrate that it is complying with its legal duties and ensure progress is measurable against its objectives.</p> <p>RP 18.10.21</p>
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 The Council has been working on a new strategy that sets out our approach to equality and diversity. As a large local employer, and provider and commissioner of services, we want to go over and above our legal responsibilities. We want the many and diverse communities of Telford and Wrekin lying at the heart of everything we do, the decisions we make and the services we provide.
- 4.1.2 We have reviewed our data, considered local issues, taken account of people's needs and had some initial conversations with employees and residents to support the development of this work. We have also looked at best practice examples across local government.
- 4.1.3 The Council's culture and values also play an important role in the development of this strategy.

4.2 Vision and Objectives

- 4.2.1 The Council is committed to opposing unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in all that it does. To drive and embed this, the new strategy needs a clear and workable vision for the whole council and the communities it serves along with a set of meaningful and realistic equality objectives for the short, medium and long term that will be achieved through a number of different strategies. We are therefore proposing:

4.2.2 Our Vision:

An inclusive and open Council that works with local residents, organisations, partners and employees to build communities that are great places to live and work – where our leaders are committed to equality, and take positive action to ensure that everyone feels they belong - diversity is celebrated and thrives at all levels of our organisation, and that every community can access the services and support they need.

4.2.3 Our Objectives:

- **Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment** – we will lead the Council in an inclusive and visible way with zero tolerance of any form of discrimination. We will also encourage, inform and engage with our partners and the rest of the borough on this agenda;
- **Diverse workforce** – we will be recognised as an employer of choice, working proactively to ensure that our workforce reflects the communities we serve, and that all employees are supported to achieve their full potential;
- **Accessible and responsive services** – we will encourage all service areas to better understand our communities and actively engage with local people and organisations to help people participate in decision-making, and get involved in public life. We will design, commission and deliver services that offer the best possible customer experience and that are accessible to all;
- **Celebrating diversity** – we will advance equality and positive relationships by promoting and celebrating diversity.

4.3 Public accountability

To demonstrate our leadership and commitment to this agenda we are proposing publication of our vision and objectives in the revised Council Plan so they can be monitored and reported on each year. This will be in addition to the full Strategy and Action Plan being accessible from the Equality & Diversity web page on the Council's website.

4.4 Priority areas for action

To capture everything set out in our vision and objectives, the Strategy will be split into 4 priority areas:

4.4.1 Leading our organisation and communities – which is all about:

- **Ownership** – top level commitment from Council Leaders and champions that will help drive the agenda throughout the Council
- **Initial impact analysis is carried out** at the start of any new proposals being developed.
- **Full equality impact assessments are carried out** where proposals are likely to impact significantly – either financially or on particular groups within our communities.
- **Decision making is evidence based in everything we do** – for example policy/strategy development, Cabinet Reports, Scrutiny reports, procurement specifications and service procedures.

4.4.2 Supporting our workforce and elected members - which is all about:

- Becoming a more **diverse and inclusive employer**
- Ensuring **all of our employees will have opportunities to be heard** and inform what we do as an organisation
- Ensuring our **learning and development** offer enables our workforce to have the **awareness, knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity**

4.4.3 Serving our customers

We deliver a lot of our services to a lot of customers on a daily basis with many customers coming from different backgrounds and having different needs.

It is important to recognise that in a lot of cases, we are the only provider for some of these services so our customers don't always have a choice to go elsewhere. So this section is all about:

- **Better understanding who our customers are and what their needs are**
- **Improving relationships with those who face barriers accessing our services or have specific needs in the borough**
- **Making sure all Council services are accessible to all, regardless of their needs** (including physical accessibility, digital accessibility, translation and interpretation) – actions to improve accessibility of services will be detailed in the updated Customer Strategy.

4.4.4 Celebrating and promoting diversity of the borough

By recognising and raising awareness of the different communities in Telford and Wrekin and celebrating the different cultures and faiths. This focusses on:

- **Awareness raising campaigns** - organised by the Council or in partnership with local community groups (see **Appendix 4**)
- **Hosting events** – to celebrate diversity (see **Appendix 4**)
- **Co-ordination of the different cultures and faiths** – to support the Council with service planning, and keeping officers/members informed

4.4.5 To give you a flavour of the work we are already doing around awareness raising, inclusion and celebrating diversity here are some examples of recent events we have taken part in:

South Asian Heritage Month

The Council's Multicultural Development Team supported this campaign in our schools and with the wider community. Working with Telford and Wrekin Interfaith Council they held workshops to promote key messages around Equality and Diversity with a focus on cultural diversity. Pupils were asked 'what is my identity?' getting them to reflect on what being British truly is today – thinking about their faiths, the types of food they eat and the different cultures and communities that are living together in the UK and why mutual respect is so important.

Adult Mental Health Event on 21 October 2021

The 'Calm cafe' provides low level emotional and mental support and has been running in Telford for almost 2 years. Working to amend the stereotype that the black communities are hard to reach and difficult to engage with our adult mental health social care workers along with Telford Mind organised an event to celebrate these communities and have open conversations with them about mental health issues. The event was opened by Telford's Mayor and included guest speakers who talked about their lived experiences. Caribbean cuisine was provided by local caterers and a number of activities were held including African Drummers who ran a workshop for participants.



Pictured: Rob Wilson (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer), The Mayor, Cllr Amrik Jhawar and Sherrel Fikeis from Onevoice

At the same time we used the opportunity to have conversations with attendees on how to continue engaging with these communities around mental health issues. Just over 100 people attended and we are now looking to employ 2 engagement workers to continue with this important work.

UK Disability History Month

Running until 18 December 2021, the Council is currently promoting this campaign and has arranged a number of events throughout the period to promote the rights of people with disabilities and their struggle for equality.

Examples include a Chatty Café, an Experts by Experience Panel (being held at the Independent Living Centre) and a chance to hear from Sinclair Thomas - a local Paralympian who represented Great Britain at the Paralympic Games in 2000 and 2004. He will be talking about his life experience as a wheelchair user and answering questions afterwards.



4.5 Engagement on the draft Strategy

- 4.5.1 We have already started to engage with a range of stakeholders on this strategy. We conducted initial engagement with some groups including the Council's internal Black Lives Matter Group, Employee Engagement Group and Telford & Wrekin Interfaith Council. We updated them on the development of the draft strategy and sought their views on the main proposals. The groups welcomed us involving them at this stage and endorsed the overall direction of the strategy.

- 4.5.2 As customers and employees are a key focus it was important that we linked in with the reviews of the Customer Strategy and new Workforce Strategy and as such have had regular discussions with the service leads in these areas.
- 4.5.3 The Equality and Diversity Steering Group has also been kept informed and has acted as a sounding board on the development of the action plan.
- 4.5.4 More recently we have also sought specialist external advice from David Weaver, a former Home Office Advisor, who ran a facilitated a discussion with the Council's Senior Management Team and Cabinet in June. This was followed by a workshop with the Equality and Diversity Steering Group in September to look at progress with the Strategy so far and to inform the development of the vision and objectives.

4.6 Next Steps

- 4.6.1 Whilst a lot of consideration has already been given to the strategy and supporting action plan, there is more engagement needed to make sure it truly reflects the needs and feedback of our local communities, organisations and partners as well as from our workforce. We are therefore proposing to continue working with David Weaver, to facilitate a series of engagement workshops on the Council's behalf.
- 4.6.2 We hold a stakeholder list containing contact details for a range of voluntary and community groups and business partners as well as harder to reach groups that we will approach to engage with. Once the engagement has been completed we will use the feedback to inform the final strategy and action plan and bring a report back to Cabinet for approval.
- 4.6.3 The proposed timeline to finalise the strategy is:
- Community engagement – to be completed by mid-February 2022
 - EDI Steering Group to consider feedback from this consultation and make appropriate changes to the final Strategy and Action Plan – by early March 2022
 - Report for Cabinet - April 2022

5 PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 5.6 None.

6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.6 Equality and Diversity Progress Update Report (presented to Cabinet on 7 October 2021).