

Information/Discussion Paper

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 26 February 2024

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed.

1. Why has this come to scrutiny?

- 1.1 To enable the Committee to feed into the developing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and associated Action Plan.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.
- 2.2 It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it's unlawful to treat someone.

- 2.3 It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

These are called 'protected characteristics'

- 2.4 In addition, the Act includes a specific [public sector Equality Duty](#) (PSED). Which provides that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

- 2.5 It also requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- advance equality of opportunity
- foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group

- 3.1** As part of our compliance with the PSED the Council has recently formed an employee Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working group. This group is a cross section of employees who have come together to carry out a full review of the Councils compliance and to develop our approach to ED&I.
- 3.2** To date the group have had one meeting which focused around developing its working principles and starting to build out the draft policy and action plan. Further meetings are scheduled but the group felt it was important to get early input from members.
- 3.3** The purpose of the group is:
- To create and champion a culture that actively promotes equality, diversity and inclusion in our Council, tackling inequality together and resulting in positive change.
 - Play a central role in helping our Council act on and achieve the objectives that are set out in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
 - Deliver our Action Plan and report progress annually to Cabinet.
 - To engage, listen and learn from our communities and work with them, partners and stakeholders to foster a culture of embracing difference and deliver services that work well for everyone.
- 3.4** Once the group is more established it is intended that membership will be expanded to include the member Equality Champions.

4. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Draft Policy

- 4.1** The Council policy aims to set out how Cheltenham Borough Council will tackle inequality and foster an inclusive workplace and inclusive communities, as the borough continues to grow, develop, and create new opportunities for everyone in Cheltenham.
- 4.2** It confirms that we will work with our partners to create fairer opportunities for everyone in the borough, support residents, service users and council employees to fulfil their potential and treat all members of our diverse community with respect, actively involving people from all groups in shaping the decisions that affect the services they receive, the places they live in or the organisation in which they work.
- 4.3** The policy explains the expectations on our workforce, as we work together to design and deliver services to create a vibrant and inclusive borough. The policy applies to all who represent the Council in any capacity including elected members, employees, volunteers, agency workers and consultants. It will also apply to suppliers, sub-contractors and partners in our supply chain.
- 4.4** The policy as written is very much in its infancy and members' thoughts, comments, observations and proposed additions/amendments are very much welcomed. Following consultation with members, it is intended to undertake wider consultation with our communities before finalising the policy for adoption.
- 4.5** A copy of the draft policy is attached at Appendix A.

5. Action Plan

- 5.1 The Council acknowledges that there is more that can be done in demonstrating compliance with the PSED to members, employees and our communities. Therefore, an action plan has been developed which sets out a number of actions the council will take/have taken between December 2023 and March 2025.
- 5.2 The action plan is a live document and members' input into it is welcomed.
- 5.3 A copy of the draft action plan is attached at Appendix B.

6. Equality Impact Assessments

- 6.1 As part of our PSED the Council is required to carry out equality impact assessments whenever a policy/service or function is reviewed, changed, developed or removed. This is to ensure that the impacts are taken into consideration as part of the decision-making process.
- 6.2 The current form is difficult to navigate which increases the risk that due consideration is not given to equality impacts. It is therefore proposed to move to a two-stage approach.
- 6.3 Stage 1 will require the completion of a screening template and will help establish whether a full assessment is needed. This should be done at an early stage of the process so that it is part of policy development.
- 6.4 Stage 2 is the full assessment and seeks to identify the equality considerations that have been taken into account including any mitigating actions proposed and ensures decisions are based on evidence. The assessment will need to be agreed with the appropriate Head of Service or Director and should be included on the decision-making report, along with commentary on the assessment in the main body of the report.
- 6.5 A copy of the proposed form is attached at Appendix C and again members input into this developing piece of work is welcomed.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked for their feedback on the draft policy, action plan and equality impact assessment template. This can be given verbally at the meeting or via email. Members are requested to provide any feedback by no later than the end of March 2024.
- 7.2 Once members' feedback has been considered by the working group and any amendments made, the policy will then be subject to consultation with our communities before being finalised for approval and adoption.

Background Papers	None
Contact Officer	Claire Hughes, Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer claire.hughes@cheltenham.gov.uk
Accountability	Councillor Rowena Hay, Leader of the Council

