



CABINET – 22 OCTOBER 2019

**DRAFT EQUALITY STRATEGY 2020-24 AND PROGRESS REPORT
FOR 2016-2020**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the progress made in respect of equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights against the Council's 2016-20 Equality Strategy; and to seek approval to commence consultation on a draft Equality Strategy for the period 2020-24.
2. The Equality Strategy provides a framework for the Council's equalities activities and is supported by annual action plans. A summary of the progress made over the duration of the 2016-20 Equality Strategy is detailed in Part B of the report and the draft Equality Strategy for 2020-24 appended.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The work and achievements in promoting equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights under the eight corporate equalities objectives which were agreed in 2016 and which form the basis of the Equality Strategy 2016-20 be noted;
 - (b) The Council's draft Equality Strategy 2020-24 be approved for consultation.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Council is required under the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010 to publish information to show compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and to set and publish specific, measurable equality objectives at least every four years.
5. To provide continued oversight of work undertaken under the current Equality Strategy 2016-20.

6. To enable formal consultation on the draft Equality Strategy 2020-24 to be undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

7. Subject to approval by the Cabinet, consultation with Council staff, elected members and the public on the draft Equality Strategy 2020-24 will commence at the end of October for 12 weeks.
8. The draft Strategy will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 27th January and its comments will be incorporated into the consultation findings which will be reported to the Cabinet on 28th April 2020. It is intended that the Equality Strategy 2020-24 will be submitted to the County Council for approval at its meeting on 13th May 2020.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. The Equality Act received Royal Assent on 6th April 2010 but many of its provisions were brought into effect through the Public Sector Equality Duty in April 2011. The Act outlines three core duties which require public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - i. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - ii. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - iii. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
10. The Council is required to produce an Equality Strategy to demonstrate how it is meeting its statutory duties regarding equality and diversity. The current Equality Strategy was approved by the County Council in June 2016. The Chief Executive, following consultation with the Chair of the Equalities Board and the Cabinet Lead Member, was authorised to review, update and approve the equality action plans each year to deliver the objectives agreed under the strategy. This enabled work to be monitored and amended as necessary in response to changing circumstances. The Council will be asked to agree a similar arrangement when it considers the final version of the Strategy.

Resource Implications

11. There are no immediate resource implications arising from this report. The Strategy will be progressed utilising existing resources.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

12. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

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PART B

Background

13. The Equality Act sets out three core duties for public bodies and the County Council is required to produce an Equality Strategy to evidence how it is meeting these core duties.
14. Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, local authorities must also:
 - Prepare and publish one or more objectives they think they should achieve to do any of the things mentioned in the aims of the general equality duty, by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter (by April 2020)
 - Ensure that those objectives are specific and measurable
 - Publish those objectives in such a manner that they are accessible to the public.

Progress against the Equality Strategy 2016-2020

15. The principle followed by the Equality Strategy 2016-20 was to develop a more evidence- and risk-based approach to the Council's equalities work so that people and groups with protected characteristics are helped in a proportionate and prioritised way to meet their needs. This provided greater clarity on meeting the Council's key ongoing equality responsibilities and enabled action planning to be more focussed on specific, identified equality issues and targets.
16. The Council strives to achieve the same level of representation of those with protected characteristics within its workforce as within the combined Leicestershire County and Leicester City labour market. The long-term trend for most indicators is positive or stable and work continues to promote the Council's reputation as an equal opportunity employer. In the 2019 staff survey, 92.9% of the workforce agree the Council is committed to equality and diversity and 93.5% agree that the Council is a good employer.
17. Other progress over the current strategy is as follows:
 - Leicestershire County Council maintained a Top 100 placing in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index for the tenth consecutive year in 2019 as one of the top five councils represented in the Index. It also achieved the top county council and local government organisation in 2017 as well as winning an award for the best LGBT+ staff network. The Council also gained its highest ever ranking of third in the Stonewall Education Index 2019 for its work in tackling anti-LGBT+ bullying in schools.
 - Measures to improve recruitment and satisfaction included refreshing and promoting the Council's representative panels policy scheme for BME staff, and updating information, training and guidance for managers on supporting

disabled staff. The Council has also worked with partners across the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland region on personal and professional development opportunities for health and social care sector staff to improve service delivery and quality for protected characteristic groups. Other successful inclusion initiatives included hosting a disabled graduate internship under the Leonard Cheshire Disability 'Change 100' programme and arranging for British Sign Language taster training for two cohorts of staff to improve contact with Deaf service users and / or colleagues.

- Partnership working with the Leicester Shire Equalities Forum and the Leicester LGBT Centre to develop an LGBT+ Inclusion Award scheme which was launched in September 2019. This award provides visible recognition for organisations across the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland region for their commitment to LGBT+ inclusive practices. It is particularly targeted at small local businesses and organisations who would be unlikely to participate in the Stonewall benchmarking processes.
- New face-to-face training has been delivered to help staff and Member understanding of the Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) process by which the Council demonstrates how its policies and decisions are compliant with equalities legislation. Ensuring that staff engage and are familiar with equalities processes remains a key area of ongoing work particularly in relation to informing decision makers, equality monitoring and meeting accessible information standards.
- The Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group has provided support and challenge to significant service reviews such as Home to School Transport, the Early Help Review, Integrated Lifestyle Service proposals, Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy, the preparation of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Adult Social Care Fee Review.
- Publication of gender pay gap data showing a reduction of the mean gender pay gap (the difference between the mean hourly pay of full-time employees) between female and male employees from 18% in 2017, when gender pay gap reporting was introduced, to 12% in 2018 and a reduction in the median gender pay gap (the difference between the median hourly rate of pay for full-time employees) from 20% in 2017 to 9% in 2018.
- The Council's staff groups (LGBT+ Staff Network, Black Workers' Group, Disabled Workers' Group) held conferences and awareness events involving outside speakers to provide group members and other attending staff a different perspective on the event themes. This included a series of events throughout 2018-19 to specifically celebrate the LGBT+ Staff Network's 10th Anniversary and a conference to focus on the spectrum of hidden disabilities.
- Development of a Trans Equality Policy giving managers and Trans employees practical information on support processes available to them in the workplace as well as promoting Trans inclusivity and protection from discrimination generally for Trans residents and service users.

- Organisation of annual commemorative and public events including Member representation for Holocaust Memorial Day, Srebrenica Memorial Week (2017) and Raising the Rainbow Flag in LGBT+ History Month and on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.
- Holding Leicestershire Inter Faith Forum public events on the relationship between faith and community cohesion with Professor Ted Cantle, Founder of the iCoCo Foundation as keynote speaker (2017) and on faith, identity and belief in a changing world with the Bishop of Loughborough, Rt. Rev. Guli Francis-Dehqani as keynote speaker (2019).

Equality Strategy 2020-2024

18. The draft Equality Strategy has been reviewed and refreshed in line with the Council's statutory duty to prepare and publish one or more equality objective/s at least every four years. Therefore, the draft Equality Strategy covers the period 2020 to 2024.
19. The draft Equality Strategy 2020-2024 (appended) provides a policy context for the County Council's activity around equality, diversity, inclusion, community cohesion and human rights. It sets out how the County Council will meet its legislative duty and the intention to develop equal and fair decision-making processes, policies and services for all employees and residents. The new strategy also emphasises the need to strive for fairness and equality in the life chances for all of Leicestershire's residents, focussing on the strategic outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan.
20. The corporate Equalities Board, chaired by the Assistant Director of Corporate Resources with assistant director or head of service level representation from each department and representatives of the Council's three Workers' Groups, has reviewed the effectiveness of the Council's current equalities structure and processes against the delivery of key objectives, the ability to respond to identified weaknesses and concerns, and how these could be aligned with the council's new outcomes-based strategic approach.
21. The review was structured around the five performance areas of the Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG) which are:
 - i. Knowing communities
 - ii. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
 - iii. Involving communities
 - iv. Responsive communities and customer care
 - v. A skilled and committed workforce
22. The draft Strategy considers the Equality Act 2010 and the County Council's legislative requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The revisions to the Strategy are based on the performance monitoring against the current strategy, engagement to date with targeted internal and external stakeholders and best practice from other local authorities.

23. An introductory section outlines how the Council meets its statutory duties through a number of 'business as usual' processes such as Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments and Gender Pay Gap reporting, allowing the action plan to be targeted on a smaller number of actions focussed on improvement activity.
24. The three previous aims have been reduced to two; one focussed on the internal working of the Council to support the achievement of the equality objectives and maintaining the Council's reputation of high performance and a second focussed on how the Council aims to improve equalities for the population of Leicestershire as a whole. The internal aim will encompass actions around workforce representation and development which were previously covered under a specific aim.
25. The revised aims are:
 - i. Leicestershire County Council will continue to be recognised for its leadership and high performance in advancing equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity and inclusion.
 - ii. Leicestershire County Council wants Leicestershire to be a place where there is equality of opportunity and good relations with and within its communities.
26. The aims are supported by a set of broad objectives aligned to the Equalities Framework for Local Government. These are:

The Council will:

 - i. Improve its understanding of the people it serves to make informed, evidence-based decisions which deliver the best outcomes for all
 - ii. Foster good relations with and within its communities; inform and involve its citizens to increase participation, particularly of under-represented groups
 - iii. Deliver inclusive and responsive services to improve equality of outcomes and satisfaction amongst the people it serves
 - iv. Show leadership, work with others and celebrate and promote Leicestershire's success
 - v. Develop a skilled and committed workforce that reflects Leicestershire's communities
27. Annual action plans will be developed to allow specific objectives to be set which prioritise action on areas that require improvement. These will be updated and revised as progress is achieved and actions are completed. When the County Council is presented with the final Equality Strategy 2020-2024 in May 2020 it will be asked to approve a delegation in order for the Chief Executive to produce annual action plans, following consultation with the Lead member for Equalities.

Consultation

28. Subject to the Cabinet's agreement, the draft Equalities Strategy will be the subject of a 12-week consultation exercise, commencing towards the end of October. Appropriate and targeted engagement mechanisms will be organised to involve a wide range of stakeholders and encourage representation.
29. Leicestershire County Council staff will be consulted via the intranet and internal feedback sessions. County Councillors will also be consulted along with engagement with the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, and people with protected characteristics who use the Council's services. Formal public consultation will also be undertaken via the Council's "Have Your Say" webpage which will be promoted on the County Council's website and through social media. The draft Strategy will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 27th January 2020.
30. Partners and key stakeholders including the Leicester Shire Equalities Forum (equalities leads from organisations across Leicestershire including the NHS, Universities, Police, and district councils), Parish Councils and specific community groups will be made aware of the consultation and encouraged to respond via direct mailing alerts and notifications / engagement through existing equality networks.
31. The draft Strategy will be provided in accessible formats including Easy Read, British Sign Language and audio video summary.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

32. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) screening has been completed on the draft Equality Strategy 2020-24 to inform the approach to engagement and consultation. The aim of the Equality Strategy is to ensure that the County Council fulfils its general and specific duties under the various equalities legislation and meets the requirements to provide a consistent and coherent approach to achieving equality and diversity for each of the protected characteristics.
33. The Equality Strategy is likely to have a positive impact on equality objectives and a full EHRIA would not therefore normally be required. However, to demonstrate commitment and best practice, a full assessment will be completed and included for consideration along with the final Strategy in 2020.

Appendix

Draft Leicestershire County Council Equality Strategy 2020-2024.

Background Papers

Report to the County Council, 29 June 2016, Equality Strategy 2016-20

<https://bit.ly/2AYZETn>

Leicestershire County Council Equality Strategy 2016-20 <https://bit.ly/2VC4cID>