

**COMMENTS BY THE SCRUTINY COMMISSION ON THE DRAFT EQUALITY
STRATEGY 2020-24**

Extract from the Commission minutes of 11th March 2020

79. Consultation on the Equality Strategy 2020 - 2024 and Proposed Outcomes.

The Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought its views on the draft Equality Strategy 2020-24, provided details of the outcome of engagement and consultation and set out the principal actions proposed on the 2020-21 Action Plan. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were raised:

- (i) Members welcomed the draft Strategy and felt that the work done to date by the County Council was encouraging. It was suggested that further consideration be given to consistency of language, for example to use 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)' throughout and to refer to 'people with disabilities' rather than 'disabled people'. It was also suggested that there was currently a lack of clarity in the draft Strategy between 'equity' and 'equality'. It was important to define these terms and be clear that the focus was on equity of outcome. Officers undertook to do this before the final version of the Strategy was submitted to the Cabinet. The foreword would also be reviewed to remove reference to Brexit.
- (ii) It was noted that the next national census would be undertaken in 2021 and that data relating to protected characteristics would be updated following this. However, the Council had a duty to publish a Strategy and would not be able to wait for the census results. It was confirmed that, once available, the results would be taken into account through the annual action plans.
- (iii) In response to a query, it was confirmed that age discrimination had not been identified as an area of concern and was not a priority area within the Strategy. The age profile of County Council staff was similar to that of other Local Authorities; there were challenges in attracting younger staff although work on career pathways, retention and initiatives such as the Apprenticeship Levy were helping to address this.
- (iv) The target for BAME staff representation was based on data for both Leicestershire and Leicester City, as this reflected travel to work patterns. Employment data was regularly monitored to ensure that all ethnic groups were represented fairly. Currently, BAME staff were under-represented at a senior level, as were female staff, so these were areas of focus within the Equality

Strategy and action plan. Positive action, such as targeted advertising of posts, could be taken although ultimately appointments must be made on merit.

- (v) With regard to the consultation, members felt that every effort had been made to reach out to as many people as possible and that the groups targeted were appropriate, but that the numbers of responses to the survey, even allowing for some to be from groups rather than individuals, was disappointing. It was suggested that the consultation process and principles used by the County Council could be an agenda item for a future meeting of the Commission.
- (vi) Some concern was expressed that, through the focus on hidden disabilities, the County Council was asking staff to disclose information that they would rather not share. Reassurance was given that the focus was on giving managers the right support to manage staff. A contrasting view regarding the importance of collecting data and monitoring it to measure outcomes and track the success of the Strategy was also expressed.
- (vii) Members emphasised the importance of supporting people with disabilities and non-visible disabilities into work. This was felt to be a particular issue for young people who were in education until the age of 25 and were therefore missing out on work experience.
- (viii) It was confirmed that the County Council had a Trans Policy in place. This was an area where the Council was still developing its understanding and an area of increasing focus for the Stonewall charity.
- (ix) A view was expressed that young people tended not to notice whether people had protected characteristics and that perhaps a Strategy which categorised people into different groups could create a problem by emphasising differences. However, it was confirmed that the Strategy was focused on equity of outcome and creating a 'level playing field' for all groups of people. In addition, its content was derived from the legislative requirements.
- (x) It would be important to refer to human rights responsibilities as well as the rights themselves. The Human Rights Act stated that human rights were only applicable to those who did not infringe on others' rights. It was agreed that this would be referenced in the Strategy.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the comments now made be submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting on 28 April;
- (b) That the Council's approach to consultation be considered at a future meeting of the Commission.

Drafting amendments made to the Strategy to reflect the Commission's comments

- a. Reconsider references to 'Black' workers groups to be more inclusive – the Council's Black Workers' Group has changed its name since the strategy was first drafted to the BAME Network and this has been incorporated into the final Strategy.
- b. Check current advice on the use of 'disabled people' versus 'people with disabilities' – the Council follows the social model of disability under which the preferred collective term is 'disabled people' and, for specific disabilities, people with a learning disability, mental health condition, visual or hearing impairment and the Strategy reflects this practice.
- c. Reconsider the use of 'hidden disabilities' to be clearer that the strategy refers to non-visible disability, not disabilities that people choose not to declare – this term does not occur in the Strategy but has been used at events organised by the Disabled Workers' Group.
- d. Review the document to ensure it is consistent when referring to equity and equality, to provide definitions of both and clarity on the Council's approach – this has been clarified in the Strategy.
- e. Include a note of people's responsibilities under the Human Rights Act not to infringe other people's rights – this has been added to the Strategy
- f. The Religion chart on Page 36 has no number beside the "Null and not obtained" category – this has been corrected
- g. The reference in the foreword to the UK's exit from the European Union should be considered for removal – this has been removed.

This page is intentionally left blank