



EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 3 FEBRUARY 2022

BECOMING AN ANTI-RACIST ORGANISATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Employment Committee regarding the proposal for Leicestershire County Council to make a formal commitment to become an anti-racist organisation.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Leicestershire County Council's Equalities Strategy 2020-24 was agreed by the County Council on 8 July 2020. It sets out how the Council aims to ensure that everyone can access high quality services designed to meet their individual needs.
3. Diversity and Inclusion is also a key aspect of Leicestershire County Council's People Strategy 2020 – 2024. This Strategy was approved by the Employment Committee on 4 February 2021.
4. Leicestershire County Council is a signatory to the Race at Work Charter. This Charter commits the Authority to seven "calls to action" on race equality.

Background

5. The recent Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated that the legacy of slavery, colonialism and institutional racism still has an impact on the lives of Black, Asian and Multi-Ethnic people (BAME) in the community. The Council is rightly proud of its record on race relations and the majority of staff agree that the organisation is an employer that is committed to equality and diversity (92.8% in staff survey 2021). The Council complies with the Public Sector Equality Duties enshrined in the Equality Act 2010.
6. Nevertheless, a 2020 external review of the barriers to progression for BAME staff found that there were a number of perceptions in relation to the leadership culture, whether development was targeted enough, and

concerns regarding how some issues relating to racism were being addressed, or were not being addressed.

7. Recent data on the staff profile shows that whilst the Council has relatively high levels of employment for people from BAME backgrounds at between 17-30% of roles up to middle management, this reduces to less than 10% at senior management levels. This is backed by data indicating that BAME candidates are less likely to be successful at interview than their counterparts (see Appendix A). The 2021 staff survey also evidenced that 28% of staff experienced some form of discrimination within the last 12 months, and 8% experienced bullying or harassment. Community reporting of hate crimes to the Police has also increased by 29% in the past year across Leicestershire. This data needs further analysis and interpretation, but it is valuable to take action now to address these worrying trends.
8. In May 2021, The Cabinet agreed, as a statement of intent, that the Council would sign up to the Race at Work Charter. This committed the Council to seven “calls to action”. The first of these was to appoint an Executive Lead for Race. The Director of Children and Family Services took on this responsibility and established an officer task group to develop an Action Plan. The group involved representatives from service departments, relevant officers in Policy, HR and Learning and Development, and representatives from the BAME staff network. The group formed the view that a strong commitment to “anti-racism” was required in addition to action to address issues around progression and the commitments of the Race at Work Charter.

Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation

9. Becoming an anti-racist organisation means moving beyond meeting statutory requirements. An anti-racist organisation seeks to engage on issues of race, ethnicity, and racism. It recognises historical injustices, and that this legacy may still continue to influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. As an anti-racist organisation, the Council will be proactive in developing a culture which values the business benefits of ethnic diversity, celebrates the contribution of people of colour, and takes clear, decisive action to tackle racist incidents, behaviour, and attitudes. The benefits include higher staff morale and a greater sense of belonging for all communities of Leicestershire.
10. In making this commitment, the Council is not stating that it is, or has been, racist. Rather, it is making a commitment to be pro-active in addressing any perceived inequalities, and to foster a culture which is open, transparent and celebrates the contribution of people of colour to its workforce and the wider community of Leicestershire.
11. It could be argued that Council should take a strong “anti-discrimination” stance on all issues, not just race. Whilst this case has merit, the task group took the view that the particular historical and cultural legacy of

racism required a specific response which recognised the distinctive nature of the oppression and reflected the experiences of staff and communities. The task group also appreciated that “BAME” is a broad term which does not fully capture the range of identities of those who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Nevertheless, it is a term in current usage and has been adopted by the staff network.

12. A key element of the approach is to follow a “zero-tolerance” approach to harassment and bullying. This does not mean that anyone who expresses an opinion or acts in a manner that might be considered racist should be instantly refused a service or have their contract of employment terminated. Rather, it is that such attitudes should not be allowed to pass without challenge, and that there should be opportunities for reflection and learning. This should be the responsibility of the organisation, not the victim. There should be proportionate sanctions if required which consider the Council’s legal obligations to provide services to the public and protect the welfare of staff. Work has been undertaken recently to provide managers and staff with clear routes to report incidents, to access support, and also links with relevant policies and procedures.
13. The Council has an important statutory duty and role to promote community cohesion and foster good relations between different groups. A key element of this approach will involve engaging with ethnic minority communities and celebrating the contribution of people of colour to the economic, social and cultural life of Leicestershire. It will also be about providing leadership and challenge for organisations that work in partnership with the Council -to encourage a wider discussion and action to address issues of perceived discrimination or harassment within workplace or community settings.
14. The recent news coverage of situation Mr Azeem Rafiq faced at Yorkshire Cricket Club has highlighted the damage that can be done to individuals and institutions if issues of racial harassment and bullying are not systematically and transparently addressed.

Action Plan and next steps

15. Alongside the proposal for the County Council to formally commit to become an anti-racist organisation, the task group has developed an Action Plan to progress work as part of the Council’s commitment to the Race at Work Charter, with progress reported to the Corporate Equalities Board. The Action Plan covers three main themes: leadership and management, workplace and culture, and community and partnerships.
 - a. Leadership and management: Political and managerial commitment and leadership on anti-racism. Clear communication on this commitment externally and internally.

- b. Workplace and culture: Developing a BAME staff development programme, reporting on staffing and recruitment, anti-racism training, support for the BAME staff network.
 - c. Community and Partnership: Building relationships with schools and community groups. Working with providers and suppliers. Celebrating the achievement of BAME people in the community.
16. Other local authorities have made similar commitments to anti-racism. Examples include Cambridgeshire County Council, the London Borough of Hackney, Brighton and Hove City Council and Oxford City Council. There is endorsement for these commitments from each Council's political leadership. The direct leadership and involvement of Members of the Council will be required to give this approach integrity.

Consultation

17. There has been specific consultation and engagement with the Black, Asian and Multi-Ethnic staff network in the development of this commitment and Action Plan. The network is fully supportive of these proposals. Engagement is also planned with the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group which contains representatives from Leicestershire's diverse communities.

Resource Implications

18. Funding for this work will be covered from existing resources.

Timetable for Decisions

19. The proposal will be presented to the Cabinet on 11 February and the County Council on 23 February.

Recommendations

20. It is recommended that the Employment Committee approve the proposal to become an anti-racist organisation for submission to the County Council meeting on 23 February, subject to the views of the Cabinet.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

21. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications/Other Impact Assessments

22. The proposal seeks to enhance the Council's delivery and reputation on equalities and human rights by making a clear commitment to addressing issues of race equality in employment, service delivery and community cohesion.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: BAME staff by pay grade October 2021. Ethnicity profile of applicants for positions within Leicestershire County Council 2017-2020.

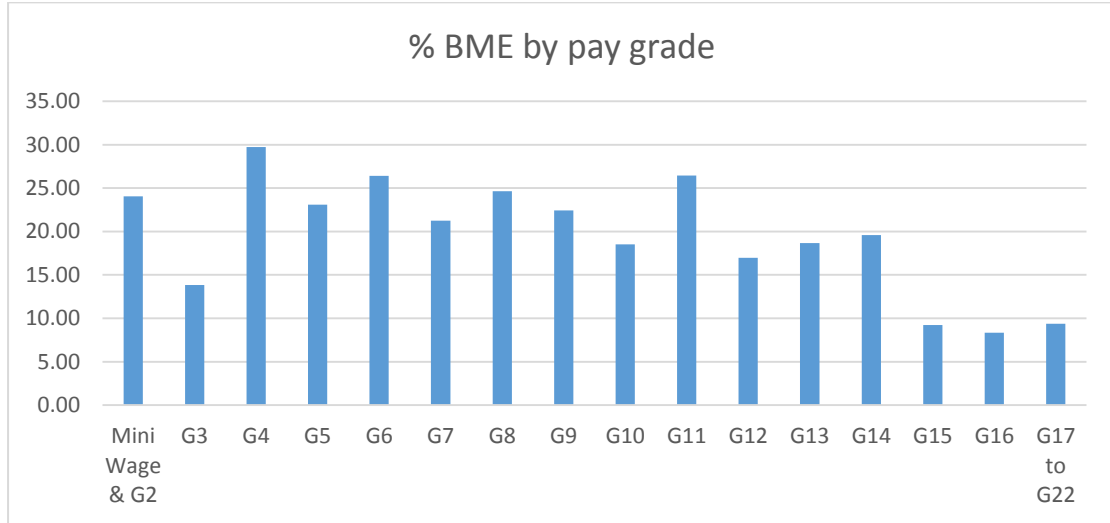
Officer contacts

Gordon McFarlane
Assistant Director – Corporate Resources
Tel: 0116 305 6123
Email: Gordon.mcfarlane@leics.gov.uk

Leon Charikar,
Policy Manager (Equalities and Community Engagement), Chief Executive's
Department
Tel: 0116 305 1336
Email: leon.charikar@leics.gov.uk

Appendix A

BAME staff by pay grade October 2021.



Ethnicity profile of applicants 2017-2020.

