



CABINET – 11 FEBRUARY 2022

BECOMING AN ANTI-RACIST ORGANISATION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to propose that Leicestershire County Council makes a clear commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the proposal that Leicestershire County Council makes a clear commitment to becoming an anti-racist organisation be recommended to full Council.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. Whilst the County Council is rightly proud of its record on race relations and complies with the Public Sector Equality Duties enshrined in the Equality Act 2010, the formal commitment for the Council to become an anti-racist organisation will emphasise its commitment to taking a positive and proactive approach to ensure that any concerns or perceptions of unfairness or discrimination with employment and service delivery are systematically addressed and resolved. The Council will demonstrate leadership and transparency in making this commitment, which will be backed by a systematic Action Plan and dedicated resources to drive implementation.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. The County Council's Employment Committee considered a report on the matter at its meeting on the 3 February. Its comments will be reported to the Cabinet.
5. Subject to the Cabinet's approval, the County Council will consider a report on the matter at its next meeting on 23 February 2022.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

6. The County Council's Equalities Strategy 2020-24, agreed by the County Council on 8 July 2020, sets out how the Council aims to ensure that

everyone can access high quality services designed to meet their individual needs.

7. Diversity and inclusion is also a key part of the County Council's People Strategy 2020 – 2024, which was approved by the Employment Committee on 4 February 2021.
8. In the summer of 2021, the Council became a signatory of the Race at Work Charter. This Charter commits the Authority to seven "calls to action" on race equality within the workplace.

Resource Implications

9. Support to deliver the required initiatives to fulfil the Council's commitment as an anti-racist organisation will be met from existing resources.

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PART B

Background

10. The 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 has established a strong structure for supporting equalities issues including Departmental Equalities Group, staff networks, management training and a Lead Member for Community, Staff relations and Equality. 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.
11. Nevertheless, an external review of the barriers to progression for BAME staff in 2020 identified a number of concerns in relation to the leadership culture and race equality and whether staff development was targeted enough. There was also concerns as to how some issues relating to racism were being addressed, or were not being addressed.
12. Recent data on the Council's staff profile shows that whilst it 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. This is show in the attached Appendix. 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, for instance it is not known what proportion of these incidents relate to race.

Becoming an anti-racist organisation

13. In the summer of 2021, the Council became a signatory of the Race at Work Charter. This committed the Council to seven "calls to action".
 - Appoint an Executive Lead for race
 - Capture ethnicity data and publicise progress
 - Commit at Board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying
 - Make clear that supporting equality in the workplace is the responsibility of all leaders and managers.
 - Take action that supports ethnic minority career progression
 - Support race inclusion allies in the workplace
 - Include Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse-led-enterprise in supply chains

14. The Director of Children and Family Services took on the responsibility of Executive Lead for race issues and established an officer task group to develop an Action Plan. The group involved representatives from service departments, relevant officers in Policy, Human Resources 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.
15. 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 or actual 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 and beyond.
16. It can 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. It is 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.
17. A key element of the anti-racist 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, access support, and link with relevant policies and procedures.
18. 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 including the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group 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 the workplace or community settings.
19. 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

20. As stated above, an officer task group has developed an Action Plan to progress this work, with progress reported to the Corporate Equalities Board. The Action Plan, which has been developed alongside the Black, Asian and Multi-Ethnic staff network, 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.
21. 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 the County Council's approach integrity. It is therefore proposed that this commitment is approved by full Council.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

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. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been undertaken and indicated that the proposal would have a positive impact on all the above.

Background Papers

Report to the Employment Committee – 3 February 2022 – Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation

<https://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s166310/FINAL%20EC%20Becoming%20an%20Anti-Racist%20Organisation%206.pdf>

Appendix

BAME staff by pay grade October 2021. Ethnicity profile of applicants 2017-2020

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