



Leicester
City Council

Overview Select Committee

Equality Action Plan 2018/19 Progress Update and Draft Equality Action Plan 2019/20

Date: 19th September 2019

Lead director: Miranda Cannon

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report authors: Hannah Watkins, Equalities Manager
- Author contact details: Hannah.watkins@leicester.gov.uk tel. 0116 454 5811
- Report version number: 2

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress against actions identified in the Equality Action Plan 2018/19 and an overview of the draft refreshed action plan for 2019/20.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee notes and makes comment on the progress made against the previous year's action plan
- 2.2 That the Committee notes and makes comment on the draft action plan for 2019/20.

3 Background Information

- 3.1 In 2018, Leicester City Council agreed its [corporate equalities strategy](#) which set out the council's commitment for progressing equality, diversity and human rights in Leicester over four years (2018 – 2022).
- 3.2 A supporting action plan for 2018/19 was also agreed, which underpinned 4 priority areas for work. A copy with progress updates against each action is attached as Appendix E1.
- 3.3 The 2018/19 action plan was based on key contextual factors such as the financial position of the Council, data and evidence such as local demographics and workforce analysis, national research findings and guidance, best practice examples, the knowledge and experience of the equalities team in their day to day work across the organisation and, importantly, employee engagement findings, as their understanding and actions shape the extent to which we are able to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty. The findings from the employee engagement have also been used to develop the updated action plan for 2019/20, as many of the issues raised required a longer-term approach which must be built upon year by year.
- 3.4 Overall, progress against the actions set out in the plan for 2018/19 has been good. However, there are key areas where a different approach has been required due to changes or a lack of evidence or, alternatively, where the work undertaken has been positive but now a more targeted approach is needed. These key areas have helped to form the basis for the draft action plan for

2019/20 (full copy attached as Appendix E2) and are summarised in the body of this report.

Priority 1: Design, commission and deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of people and communities in Leicester

- 3.5** The first area where further work has been identified for next year under this priority is digital inclusion. The aim for last year was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current provision across the city, including the city council's own provision and voluntary and community sector (VCS) provision. This was identified as a priority for the 2018/19 action plan due to the organisational commitment to making it easier for people to interact with the council digitally, in the context of digital transformation. In addition, the potential equalities implications of digital transformation were raised as the key concern by staff who participated in the engagement sessions when asked to prioritise which areas of their feedback required the most attention.
- 3.6** In terms of the update on the 2018/19 actions, due to limited progress in mapping the VCS provision (as a result of a low response rate) other areas of work have not progressed as quickly as anticipated. Although there have been difficulties with mapping VCS provision, work to map the Council's own provision has been effective. There is access to informal support and formal qualifications in IT and digital skills across the city. In the past year, Adult Skills and Learning have also introduced more targeted support for those who may face additional barriers or may be adversely impacted if they do not have basic digital skills - for example, targeted support for Universal Credit claimants has been introduced. There are opportunities to more effectively utilise/ expand upon our current offer (particularly the informal support provided in libraries) and communicate it more effectively with target groups. There are also opportunities to explore how the private sector may support this work. As a result, this area of work has been carried over to next year's action plan, in order to maintain the priority of digital inclusion in the equalities agenda.
- 3.7** The second area for further work under this priority is to build upon the work that we have done over 2018/19 to build capacity within the organisation to robustly assess the equalities impacts of service or policy change. This was included in the 2018/19 action plan based on feedback from staff about areas that they felt they needed to develop, in addition to a review of other evidence (such as the findings of the annual report on EIAs and mitigating actions) in addition to observations from the equalities team as to the overall quality of EIAs, services' and EIA authors' understanding of equalities and any process related issues. In the past year the equalities team have also undertaken a survey, which was sent to all staff who had undertaken an EIA during the prior 12 months, to find out what further support they required to feel confident in undertaking an effective equality impact assessment. The findings from this have further informed our staff development offer and the toolkit on our intranet pages.
- 3.8** Significant positive progress has been made in increasing staff confidence to undertake a good quality EIA - a rolling programme of equality impact assessment workshops commenced in April 2019 and there has been high

demand for these ½ day sessions. By the end of August 2019, 92 staff who have responsibility for undertaking equality impact assessments have participated. However, we recognise that there are areas of the organisation that have been underrepresented at these sessions and, therefore, more targeted work is required. This has been identified as an action for 2019/20. There is also the potential to deliver tailored workshops to decision makers within the organisation, including senior officers and elected members as a refresher on the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and specifically the role of decision makers in relation to our statutory duties.

- 3.9** We have also identified that, although equality monitoring guidance and templates were introduced as part of actions for 2018/19, it is still an area where we receive a large number of queries and requests for support and therefore we have committed over the next year to continuing to raise awareness of the guidance and templates. In addition to the wider support offer, the team have provided individual 1-1 support on approximately 40 EIAs between October 2018 – May 2019 and have provided comments on the equalities implications on over 150 reports during this time, in addition to providing support and advice in relation to general enquiries, complaints and ad hoc briefings with staff teams. This day to day work contributes to supporting the organisation to achieve positive equalities outcomes and builds capacity within the organisation, as the team takes a coaching and supportive approach to working in partnership with other services on equality impact assessments and other projects.
- 3.10** In addition to the positive progress against the actions listed under this priority area in the previous action plan, we have also had a number of successes as a team which are not documented in the action plan.
- 3.11** For example, we have set up a BSL charter and deaf awareness working group who have had a number of successes. As a group we have delivered deaf awareness training to front of house and colleagues in front line services across the organisation, we have made significant progress towards procuring real time BSL interpretation using web chat for use in customer support and we have undertaken an audit of customer support at Granby Street where service users with varying degrees of hearing loss and different methods of communication made recommendations to make the environment and approach of staff more accessible to D/deaf people.
- 3.12** The team have also supported the council's work with Leicestershire Cares to promote staff volunteering as part of our corporate social responsibility, in addition to supporting employment opportunities such as placements and work experience for young people who are not in education, employment and training, care experienced young people and ex offender. The City Council won an award for 'outstanding contribution to employability' and was a finalist in the category for 'company of the year' at the Leicestershire Cares Awards 2019. The Equalities Team also co-ordinated 'Collect for Christmas' which was a drive for donations of 'starter packs' for people moving into accommodation after a period of having been homeless or vulnerably housed.

3.13 A new area of work for 19/20 under this priority is the 'City Listening' project. This project aims to bring together women in neighbourhoods and communities across the city with the aim of reflecting on progress made and barriers to achievement for women living in contemporary Leicester. Data will be collected, analysed and presented to the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and can be used to inform the action plan for 2020/21.

Priority 2: Raise awareness of equalities issues and tackle prejudices, both internally and externally

3.14 Positive progress has been made in raising awareness within the organisation in relation to hidden disabilities. We have promoted a number of case studies from staff with hidden disabilities, detailing some of the common misconceptions and raising awareness of some of the Council's support mechanisms as part of this and through the events that we have coordinated. We want to build on this work next year to pilot a 'lived experience' event and continue to raise awareness of disabilities, both visible and hidden with a refreshed communications plan.

3.15 The team have provided significant support in organising employee group events with a range of speakers and workshops for staff to benefit from. These events have included a Disability Awareness event, Carers Awareness event and Time to Change event amongst others. For every event they undertake an evaluation in order to identify improvements for future events and to identify other areas of focus in terms of raising awareness of equalities issues within the workforce. In addition to internal events, we organised a community volunteering day for Interfaith week, where Christian and Muslim colleagues joined forces to undertake some work to improve the environment at Abbey Park and we have participated in the Pride parade 2018, carrying a banner to express 'Pride in our city's diversity' with members of the LGBT+ employee network and other colleagues.

3.16 Another achievement in 2018/19 was the successful pilot 'Don't judge a book by its cover' (human library) event which encouraged staff with different backgrounds, identities and characteristics to share their stories with attendees at the event in order to tackle stigma and prejudices. The feedback from this event was excellent, although there were small numbers involved. We plan to expand on this concept and grow our pool of volunteers to reach a wider audience in 2019/20.

Priority 3: Attract, recruit, retain and progress a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates diversity and inclusion.

3.17 We continue to identify further work to address the under representation of colleagues from a black or minority ethnic background (BME) at the most senior levels of the organisation. Last year, the plan included actions to better understand the issues. For 2019/20 a number of actions have been identified arising from this analysis.

3.18 In addition to the corporate work related to workforce representation, we have started to undertake some partnership work with other health and social care organisations across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to address shared

equality and inclusion issues across the health and social care workforce. As part of this, the city council are piloting a reverse mentoring programme which may be scaled up, dependent upon the findings of the evaluation from the first cohort at the end of 2019. This partnership work also includes rolling out joint masterclasses on Unconscious Bias and Professional Behaviour, which also fits with our internal organisational priorities.

- 3.19** Internally, there is significant work currently being undertaken to design and eventually implement talent management tools. It is recognised that without adequate consideration, decisions relating to individuals' development can be influenced by unconscious biases and assumptions. In order to minimise the impact of bias, the equalities team have committed to work with Organisational Development to find ways in which we can both minimise the risk of bias through design of the tools and by increasing managers' awareness and understanding of the ways in which bias can influence their decisions and how they can address this.
- 3.20** Last year, guidance for supporting trans staff was implemented. Queries and requests for support in understanding gender identity remain relatively frequent. Therefore, we want to continue to raise awareness of the guidance and deliver a masterclass for managers on understanding gender identity and practical advice on how to use the transitioning support plan template to best support their staff in the next year.

Priority 4: Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect

- 3.21** Under this priority we need to continue to progress the actions from 2018/19. A review of the evidence of the effectiveness of the dignity at work policy is underway and we will identify any themes for further investigation if required and actions to address any issues arising. We will also continue to support managers in understanding their responsibilities and how they can best support staff, but we will do this in a more targeted way (where opportunities for improved practise are identified) over the coming year. We have also committed to making improvements to the Access to Work and reasonable adjustment process for managers and employees to self-serve more easily including the implementation of a portal offer, based on feedback received over the past year.
- 3.22** We have also undertaken a substantial amount of work to support the employee groups such as delivering workshop sessions, providing support with chairing meetings and supporting to deliver events either on behalf of the employee groups or in partnership with them.

4. Financial implications

The next steps outlined in the report do not have any apparent significant financial implications. However, the costs and funding of any specific actions that may arise should be carefully considered at the time.

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, tel. 0116 454 4081

5. Legal implications

No legal implications arising from the report.

Julia Slipper, Principle Lawyer (Employment and Education) Legal Services tel. 0116 454 2284

There are no legal implications that arise from this report.

Mandeep Virdee, Solicitor, (Commercial Property and Planning Team)
Legal Services, tel, 0116 454 1422

6. Climate change and carbon reduction implications

There are no significant climate change implications associated with this report.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, tel. 0116 454 2284

7. Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

In addition, the council has responsibilities as an employer under the Equality Act 2010.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The equality strategy and the supporting action plan support our work to not only ensure that we meet our statutory duties but also that we work to implement best practise where potential for improvements have been identified across a wide range of areas. The strategy and action plan are not exhaustive and does not aim to include all of the work that takes place across the council and city of Leicester, merely key areas of focus for the coming year. It is important that we continue improve our usual day to day activities, as well as making progress against actions identified in the plan in order to achieve positive equalities outcomes.

Hannah Watkins, Equalities Manager ext. 37 5811

8. Background information and other papers:

Appendix E1 Equality Action Plan 2018/19

Appendix E2 Draft Equality Action plan 2019/20