



Annual Equalities Report

Corporate Priority:	Excellent Services positively impacting on our communities. Connected with and led by our community (outward)
Relevant Ward Member(s):	All
Date of consultation with Ward Member(s):	N/A
Exempt Information:	No

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide an update to Council on the progress against our Equality objectives and the work undertaken to meet our public sector equality duty as required by equality legislation, including compliance with the Equality Act 2010, and specifically the subsequent Public Sector Equality Duty, and the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 1.2 This is demonstrated through progress measured against the Council's Equalities Action Plan.

2 Recommendation(s)

That Council:

- 2.1 **Notes the progress made in meeting the Council's equalities duties and commitments as outlined in this report.**

3 Reason for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council publishes a Single Equality Scheme (SES) which covers all our legal duties as required by The Equality Act 2010.
- 3.2 The SES sets out the Council's objectives and approach to advancing equality and diversity, fostering good relations and in tackling discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

- 3.3 The current scheme was approved by Council in December 2019 and covers the period 2020-2024.
- 3.4 The Council has an obligation under law to publish its equality obligations every four years and as part of this duty, the Council publishes their objectives through their Action plan.
- 3.5 As the Single Equality Scheme is included within the Council's Constitution, updates against progress and changes to the scheme is required to be presented to full Council for approval.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Council is required by legislation to set one or more specific equality objectives every four years through the Single Equality Scheme (SES). The current approved SES covers the period 2020-2024 which are set out below:
 - a) Objective 1: Engage and communicate in appropriate and accessible ways.
 - b) Objective 2: Develop and support a diverse workforce (being recognised as an employer of choice)
 - c) Objective 3: Ensure services are in place or commissioned which are inclusive and responsive.
 - d) Objective 4: Foster good relations with and within the community (understanding difference and celebrating diversity)
- 4.2 The Single Equality Scheme's main delivery mechanism is through the Action Plan which is based on a number of actions designed to deliver the four objectives noted above.
- 4.3 The report considers the progress to date against the 4 objectives. Progress against each objective is also included within the Action Plan (Appendix 1 ED Action Plan)

5 Main Considerations

5.1 Public Sector Equality Duty

- 5.1.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty needs to be embedded throughout the Council - this is achieved by compliance to our policies and procedures. The Duty provides three key areas of focus. These are:
 - a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
 - b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
 - c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 5.1.2 Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) help to demonstrate how the Council is meeting their statutory duties. As part of the process for completing an EIA form, a Check and Challenge group is tasked with checking and challenging any part of the EIA form that requires further consideration in relation to Equality matters. This helps to ensure the Equality Duty is met and allows the Council to produce evidence, if required, that 'Due Regard' has been paid to the introduction of a new service, or changes to existing ones. The Check and challenge group is made of officers from across directorates, and they provide invaluable feedback and challenge, so that a rigorous process is being followed as to any new/amended proposal, service provision, function or policy.

5.2 Corporate Equalities Group

5.2.1 The Council's Corporate Equalities Group is responsible for overseeing and monitoring the delivery of the Action Plan.

5.2.2 As a Council, we want to continuously challenge ourselves on this agenda to go above and beyond just meeting our statutory responsibilities. The Corporate Equalities Group is very proactive in ensuring that, as a Council, we are an exemplar of promoting equality and diversity. This included tasking ourselves additionally with championing four specific strands throughout this SES period:

- a) Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community
- b) Anti Racism
- c) Neuro-Diversity
- d) Sexual Orientation

5.2.3 Gypsy Roma and Traveller was incorporated with anti-racism when we delivered anti-racism workshops in May 2022. These were delivered as "Conversations Across Difference" and encouraged discussions regarding race in a safe space. The workshops were well attended by staff from across all Council services and were overwhelmingly positive.

- a) "Your questions allowed exploration in a safe way of feelings, myths, knowledge and conditioned thoughts". (Workshop participant)

5.2.4 The neurodiversity project is currently underway in its primary stages. The Equality lead and cross-departmental colleagues are working on establishing the main areas of priority for this. Neurodiversity workshops are also planned for later this year. These workshops will help develop our knowledge and understanding of Neurodiversity and understand how recruitment and workplace adaptations can assist neurodiverse colleagues in achieving their maximum potential.

5.2.5 We continue to have a shared Equality Lead with North West Leicestershire District Council. This is a resource of half a day per week allocated to Melton and supports us with delivery of our Equality Objectives.

5.2.6 In 2023, our Equality Lead will focus on a review of our four-year Single Equality Scheme.

5.3 Progress against objectives

5.3.1 Objective 1 – Engage and communicate in appropriate and accessible ways.

- a) From the Resident Survey 2022, (60.3%) respondents said that their preferred method of finding out information about where they live was through the Council Website, thus this mechanism being a key area of focus.
- b) In August 2021, the Council's website was scoring 79% for accessibility using a recognised online checker called Silktide. Since then, we have developed our new website and implemented a number of standards and requirements for all pages to improve accessibility for users. These include but are not limited to ensuring pdfs are to an agreed accessible standard before they go on the website, working with our web champions to ensure language is to a suitable level and that pages are designed with colour contrasts and font sizes that are appropriate. Following these changes to our website, we now score 100% accessibility on Silktide and this is measured against

WCAG level AA ratings which is the industry legal standard for local authority websites. We are currently in the top 4 of all councils nationally for accessibility.

5.3.2 Objective 2 – Develop and support a diverse workforce (being recognised as an employer of choice)

- a) The Council has been working towards gauging data as to job applicants who may have a protected characteristic. This will be an ongoing piece of work as such data and disclosure will take time to receive and action.
- b) The Council has embedded mandatory equalities training for all employees on their new learning management system. Furthermore, this training has been extended to members to ensure that inclusivity is embedded throughout the Council's work and values.
- c) Hybrid working arrangements – This has helped to create a good balance between business needs and the workforce preference of how and where to work. There will be a further review of this implementation, to try and advance it to cover more groups of the workforce. To further support and bridge the gap between those individuals who share a protected characteristic and those that do not, managers are encouraged to speak with employees during regular check in meetings, so as to gauge a preference for how/where that individual may choose to work. The hope is that employees will feel that they can disclose such information, so that the Council can better provide targeted support for those in need of it.
- d) The Council have also been revalidated as a Disability Confident Leader which is the highest level of the Disability Confident employer scheme. The Council demonstrated that they met the criteria in 2019, being one of the first councils in the East Midlands to achieve this status. A self-assessment was undertaken in December 2022 and, following a review of actions implemented over the two year period, the council has successfully retained the accreditation.
- e) Earlier in this reporting year, the Council received a Gold Award for the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. The Gold Award is the highest badge of honour for employers who support those who serve in the Armed Forces, veterans, and their families.
- f) In November 2022, the Domestic Abuse policy was reviewed and formally approved. We will be providing domestic champions in the workplace and access to counselling. Employees are also entitled to take up to 10 days safe leave each year to help with anyone suffering with these issues.

5.3.3 Objective 3 – Ensure services are in place or commissioned which are inclusive and responsive

- a) The Council has looked at the results of the Resident Survey 2022 which shows that engagement and trust have improved markedly since 2019.
- b) Furthermore, the survey has highlighted that there has been a slight increase from 80.5% to 82.7% which shows that residents are satisfied within their local areas.
- c) However, it should be noted that those who did not consider themselves to have a health condition or disability were more positive about the area that they live in. It is hoped that with the changes that are implemented through the course of the action plan, this should increase the satisfaction levels amongst groups who may have a protected characteristic such as a disability.

- d) The Census 2021 results (which are being published in phases) will also be shared with relevant parties and will help inform the way that the Council can further engage with the different groups across their communities. As the Census 2021 results are being released in stages through topic summaries (and separated in some cases based on protected characteristics), the analysis of this data will be an ongoing project.

5.3.4 Objective 4 – Foster good relations with and within the community (understanding difference and celebrating diversity)

- a) Work around this objective is extended to include an internal look as well as being outward facing.
- b) We have delivered Anti-Racism Workshops, which have received good attendance and have empowered those attendees to have open conversations and learn from one another.
- c) All Members were invited to equalities training which took place in October 2022.
- d) The EIA form has been reviewed to make it more user-friendly whilst remaining thorough to ensure that it can capture all the relevant data as to impacts on those with protected characteristics.
- e) EIA workshops have been delivered across the check and challenge group and for other staff members who wanted to increase their awareness and knowledge in this area of work that would also support them to complete EIAs as part of service and policy development.

6 Options Considered

- 6.1 The work detailed in this report forms the response to the Council's statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty and the Human Rights Act 1998. Failure to undertake the items contained in this report may leave the Council open to legal challenge.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 A full consultation on the 4-year Single Equality Scheme took place prior to its implementation and the results of this were included in the Council report of December 2019.

8 Next Steps – Implementation and Communication

- 8.1 The current Single Equality Scheme (SES) runs from 2020-2024. Our key focus for 2023 will be to review this in order to agree the new four-year scheme to run from 2024.
- 8.2 The new SES will be presented to Council for consideration during 2023.

9 Financial Implications

- 9.1 There is an annual budget provided of circa £5k to support equality work which currently funds the shared Equality Lead with North West Leicestershire District Council. This is a resource of half a day per week allocated to Melton and supports us with delivery of our Equality Objectives.

Financial Implications reviewed by: Assistant Director for Resources

10 Legal and Governance Implications

- 10.1 Legal and governance implications are addressed within the report.

Legal Implications reviewed by: Deputy Monitoring Officer

11 Equality and Safeguarding Implications

11.1 The Equality Scheme and Equality Objectives are specifically designed to address inequalities faced by employees and the community of Melton.

12 Community Safety Implications

12.1 The Council specifically has a duty to ‘foster good relations with and within the community’ and has a number of actions to help address any community safety issues. The Council in its role as a local leader will set a positive example in relation to promoting diversity and equality issues publicly and proactively.

13 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

13.1 None

14 Risk & Mitigation

Risk No	Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk
1	The Council may still fail to meet its equality obligations by failing to follow the identified actions within the plan or failing to give ‘due regard’ to equality considerations during operational or policy developments.	Very Low	Critical	6

		Impact / Consequences			
		Negligible	Marginal	Critical	Catastrophic
Likelihood	Score/ definition	1	2	3	4
	6 Very High				
	5 High				
	4 Significant				
	3 Low			1	
	2 Very Low				
	1 Almost impossible				

Risk No	Mitigation
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1	<p>The Corporate Equalities Group is set up to mitigate against this risk and to ensure there is a first point of escalation for concerns relating to our equality obligations.</p> <p>The Equality Impact Assessment and Check & Challenge Process is also robust and is firmly embedded into policy/service development and reviews.</p>
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15 Background Papers

15.1 None

16 Appendices

16.1 Appendix A – Equalities Action Plan, February 2023

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