


LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	Cabinet 2 November 2023	
Report Title	Inclusion Action Plan	
Cabinet Portfolio	<p>Councillor Vicky Ashworth, Portfolio Lead Member for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities</p> <p>Councillor Paul Douglas, Portfolio Lead Member for Finance and Resources</p>	 
Report Author/ Contact details	<p>Shazia Hussain, Deputy Chief Executive</p> <p>Deputy Chief Executive</p> <p>shazia.hussain@walthamforest.gov.uk</p>	
Wards affected	None specifically	
Public Access	Open	
Appendices	<p>Appendix 1: Inclusion Action Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2: Equalities Screener</p>	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's approval of the Inclusion Action Plan for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion for our workforce, attached to this report at Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to note and agree the Council's Inclusion Action Plan at Appendix 1.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 The People Strategy 2021 – 2025 agreed by Cabinet on 23rd June 2021 set out how the council would invest in our workforce and create a workplace where regardless of our staffs' background, they would have opportunities to achieve their goals. The overall ambition of the strategy was to become an employer of choice and insights from staff surveys,

‘The Big Conversation’ sessions and focus groups, helped to co-design the strategy’s four overarching priorities:

- Connected Workforce
- Diverse and Inclusive
- Inspirational Managers
- Realising Potential

3.1.1 We are proud of the positive progress made on the Diverse and Inclusive priority, including the rise in secondments, and acting up roles, with half being filled by ethnically diverse staff and nearly three-quarters filled by women.

3.1.2 In addition to the People Strategy, one of the Council’s four published Equalities Objectives 2022 – 2026, is to build an inclusive workplace where our workforce, from the frontline to senior management, reflects the communities we serve, and all colleagues feel confident to be their authentic selves at work.

3.1.3 However, we know we have a way to go before this is a reality because our latest staff survey responses tell us that our people with protected characteristics feel considerably less positive about their experience here and our workforce data tells us clearly that our people in positions of leadership do not adequately reflect our community.

3.1.4 Strategies to address our Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gaps were published in 2019 and 2021 respectively. While some effort was taken to deliver the associated action plans, our pay gaps remain largely unimpacted and we currently have a gender pay gap of 11.96% (13.5% in 2019) and an ethnicity pay gap of 16.69% (15.86% in 2021).

3.2 The Inclusion Action Plan seeks both to address the issues highlighted by our people and our data, and, to actively work towards achieving our Equalities Objective for our workforce. However, it also proposes a very marked shift from delivering a collection of EDI initiatives to delivering a strategic and focused plan of action towards becoming a radically more equitable, inclusive, and diverse organisation.

3.2.1 Our Inclusion Action Plan aims to positively disrupt our practises and our culture to ensure we can become more inclusive and more equitable now and for the long term.

3.2.2 There is still lots to be done. Our workforce data shows:

- Despite making up 53.4% of the wider workforce, ethnically diverse staff only make up 22.6% of our top 5% earners
- We still have large ethnicity and gender pay gaps (16.7% & 11.9%)

3.2.3 And our latest staff survey shows:

- Less than half agree that all staff are treated equally, and there is no discrimination

- 168 individuals say they've been bullied or harassed in the past two years
- 211 people say they don't feel able to be their authentic selves at work

3.2.4 The Inclusion Action Plan will be guided by four firm principles:

- **Engage** – Co-designing with our workforce and being led by their insights, experiences and feedback
- **Empower** - Elevating different voices ensuring you're able to participate in the development of inclusivity within the organisation.
- **Equity** - Developing a culture that supports representation at all levels and across all areas of the organisation
- **Educate** - Training and resources for all that encourage inclusive leadership, cultural intelligence and allyship

3.2.5 It sets out a three-year approach, ensuring flexibility to pivot direction if required:

- **Year One:** Disrupting our policies and practises in order to drive more inclusivity, equity and diversity. Challenging our behaviours and mindsets and setting ourselves up for long term change.
- **Year Two:** Building on progress, and maximising the capabilities of our digital HR systems to support and enhance the EDI experience of our employees, and ensuring consistent employee journeys across the organisation
- **Year Three:** Future-proofing the work that has been undertaken so far by ensuring robust checks are in place and consistently applying them to drive accountability. Seeking validation of our work through internal groups and external bodies.

3.2.6 The Inclusion Action Plan has been co-designed with staff and is based on a clear evidence base of need taken from our workforce data and the Full Staff Survey carried out in September 2022. This evidence base is detailed in Appendix Two. The resulting workstreams, where we know action is most needed, are:

Inclusive Leadership and Recruitment: Fair, equitable and consistent leadership and line-management for everyone, everywhere. Recruiting without bias at all pay levels.

Culture and Behaviours: Everyone being accountable for embedding inclusivity across the organisation and ensuring people feel psychologically safe to bring their authentic selves to work

Talent Development: Everyone being able to access good quality and suitable opportunities for learning, development and progression

Pay, Benefits & Pay Policies: Attracting and retaining highly diverse and talented people at all levels. Narrowing our ethnicity and gender pay gaps.

3.2.7 Under Inclusive Leadership and Recruitment, we will introduce:

- A peer-to-peer support network for our managers
- Mandatory training for managers on bullying and harassment and emotional intelligence
- A performance objective for all managers on EDI practise, with accountability for meeting it through 360 reviews
- EQIA the end-to-end recruitment process, develop clear guidance and training to support equitable recruitment practices.
- Inclusive recruitment mindset and behaviour training for all recruiters but starting with our Extended Leadership Team

3.2.8 Under Culture and Behaviours, we will introduce:

- A newly curated programme of diversity awareness seminars and training, using a range of credible thought-leaders representing protected characteristics and intersectionality.
- A directorate-by-directorate roll out of Speak Up Champions
- A new and improved process for work-related adjustments
- A Disability Employment Charter and associated action plan
- An enhanced EDI induction to new starters at the organisation

3.2.9 Under Talent and Development, we will introduce:

- A programme of personal development and motivational masterclasses hosted by inspirational and diverse people, both internal and external
- Career coaching and job application support and guidance for all

3.2.10 Under Pay, Benefits and Policies, we will introduce:

- A reformed set of specific policies and practises that have been scrutinised by external bodies advocating for those with protected-characteristics
- Clear guidance on flexible working, with a range of traditional and non-traditional arrangements that can be applied depending on roles
- A comprehensive women's health policy
- Directorate-level action plans to tackle our gender and ethnicity pay gaps and work with our LGBTQIA+ and Disabled colleagues to increase declarations.

3.2.11 While these deliverables will be Council-wide, we recognise the differences at play within each directorate and that a blanket approach will not be effective or impactful. We will work closely with directorates

to ensure actions are delivered in a targeted and considered way, and clearly informed by directorate-level insight.

- 3.2.12 We will measure the impact of actions delivered under each theme on a quarterly and annual basis. These measures are set out in Appendix Two and are both quantitative and qualitative, drawing from our workforce data, our staff survey results and focus groups.
- 3.2.13 We will report Council-wide progress against these measures through the People Programme governance structure and PLMs, and report Directorate-level progress every six months to Directorate Management Teams (DMTs).
- 3.2.14 The measures we take will help to inform how our delivery plan evolves and how our action plans for Years Two and Three are developed.
- 3.2.15 We will be transparent with our workforce about our progress against these measures with quarterly updates provided in a variety of formats through our communications plan.
- 3.2.16 We know that our communications plan needs flex and thoughtfulness in order for the intention behind this work and the opportunities it brings to be heard and engaged with. For that reason, while we will deliver communications via existing corporate platforms, we will also tailor our communication for different directorates and services to ensure our narrative really resonates with different groups and drives maximum engagement.

4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The alternative is not to publish an Inclusion Acton Plan nor resource the delivery of this three-year strategy to driving impactful of sustainable change.

5. COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

- 5.1 The Inclusion Action Plan for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion aligns closely with other corporate strategies such as 15-Minute Neighbourhoods and wider, resident-facing programmes of work on equality, diversity and inclusion.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Engagement is a guiding principle for the Inclusion Acton Plan and so in developing its contents, there has been considerable engagement with staff members from within our Employee Networks, with lead Cabinet Members and with the Equalities Board.
- 6.2 Going forward, in developing directorate-level action plans for both the Inclusion Action Plan and for narrowing our pay gaps, engagement with people working within those sections of the organisation will be key,

including with DMTs, Directorate Business Managers and Heads of Service.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.1.1 Resource requirements for the delivery of the Inclusion Action Plan are being scoped within existing budgets from the People and Organisational Development department.

7.2 Legal

- 7.3 The recommendation to agree the Inclusion Action Plan supports how the Council complies with its' equality duties and public sector equality duties under the Equality Act 2010. Development of positive action policies and plans is action that may be taken under Section 158 of the Equality Act 2010. As employer the Council may also use Section 159 of the Act to take positive action when deciding whom to recruit and promote where those sharing a protected characteristic are at a disadvantage or under-represented.

7.4 Equalities and Diversity

- 7.4.1 An initial screening exercise of the equality impact of this decision was undertaken (see Appendix Two). It determined that there were no negative impacts on the Council's equality duty and is expected to have a positive impact arising from the principles and priorities set within the Action plan and focuses on tackling inequality and creating a more equitable, equal and diverse workforce where all staff can thrive and develop.
- 7.4.2 There are no deliverables set out in this report that implicate Looked After Children or Care Leavers, however, as part of the Inclusive Recruitment workstream we would like to explore the introduction of a Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Care Leavers.

7.5 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

- 7.5.1 The Inclusion Action plan focuses on improving equality, equity, diversity and inclusion for our workforce and will have a positive impact on making Waltham Forest an inclusive employer of choice where staff feel they can bring their whole selves to work.
- 7.5.2 There are no climate or crime implications as a result of the Inclusion Action Plan.

7.6 Council Infrastructure

- 7.6.1 The Council's Human Resources Service is a critical partner in the successful delivery of the Inclusion Action Plan as they will be responsible for the implementation of changes to key HR policies, practices and processes.

7.6.2 Delivery will also require strong collaboration with ICT, Digital and Communications.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None