



Policy Panel

Item

8


November 2023

Report of

Head of People

Author

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 508804

Title

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

Wards
affected

Not applicable

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 As a Local Authority, we are required to adhere to the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011. While meeting our statutory requirements is mandatory, we recognise the importance of going beyond the minimum statutory requirements. At Colchester City Council (CCC) we are taking proactive steps by initiating the development and implementation of an all-encompassing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy. This policy will serve as a guiding framework for our process redesigns, business decisions, and future policies. By adopting this policy, we aim to actively support our colleagues, customers, and residents, fostering an environment where individuals can be themselves without encountering barriers, prejudice, or unfair treatment whether in the workplace or at home.
- 1.2 The Panel gave approval to examine the Equality and Diversity (EDI) Policy at the meeting on 28 June 2023 the outcome of this would be to review the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and implement a programme of work to support the Policy.
- 1.3 The EDI policy provides the framework for future developments and this report outlines the progress made over the last 12 months.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010. It came in to force in April 2011 to ensure public bodies, including Local Government and the Civil Service takes account of equality in their day-to day work. The duty is to consider the impact of policies on people who share protected characteristics. (s.149 of the Equality Act 2010)
- 2.2 The organisations vision to be an “Inclusive, Modern and Sustainable City” is aligned to the strategic priority to tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable residents.
- 2.3 The People Strategy provides a detailed plan of how CCC will embed EDI in the management of its people, including how it recruits and selects its employees to ensure a modern and diverse workforce.
- 2.4 In February 2022, Colchester City Council (CCC) commissioned an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion audit to understand our strengths and identify areas for improvement. The audit was conducted by an independent consultant who made a number of recommendations including the adoption of a renewed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy which would reflect the Strategic Plan, People Strategy and address our legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

2.5 The audit identified the following strengths and areas for improvement:

Strengths

- Commitment to equalities from senior leadership
- The People Strategy which provides a detailed plan of how the council embed EDI in the management of its people.
- The council has enabled opportunities for women in senior leadership positions.
- Existing good practice in embedding EDI in services e.g., Colchester and Ipswich Museums and Communities.

Areas for Improvement

- Further development of a policy framework
- More analysis of EDI data to inform future initiatives and policies.
- Further work to establish a diverse workforce with good representation across the protected characteristics.
- Focus on structures and systems to promote EDI to further embed more deeply into the council's work.
- Delivery of a comprehensive learning and development programme for staff to extend the breadth and depth of their understanding of equalities.
- A more consistent approach to the management of staff through a management development programme.
- The review of CCC's Equality and Diversity Policy which would establish a clearer policy framework including equality objectives taken from evidence and analysis of work already done on equalities.

3. Methodology/approach taken

3.1 Qualitative and quantitative data was obtained from a variety of sources to include:

- Analysis of key documents – People Strategy, EqIA's [Equality Impact Assessments], recruitment, learning and development policies
- Examination of our website – Equality objectives, policies, and job advertisements
- Scrutiny of key external reports – Employment Tribunal Judgement, Colchester & Ipswich Museum D&I (Diversity & Inclusion) Strategy.
- Meetings with senior and middle managers – Including all members of the Senior Leadership Team and the Chief Executive
- Attending our Speak Up Now Meeting
- A staff survey using an electronic questionnaire
- Examination of training materials

3.2 Staff from a number of internal working groups were consulted to develop the EDI Policy including two focus groups, our staff Speak Up Now (SUN) group and other relevant colleagues with background or interest in EDI. Feedback helped shape the policy which is to be considered for review in the report.

4. Developments and Improvements

4.1 Training

4.1.1 A new Learning Management System has been launched with an EDI Awareness module covering the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Duty has been created and new e-learning EDI modules will be created to cover all the protected characteristics.

- 4.1.2 Senior Leadership Team training has been commissioned from a theatrical training company Afta Thought for February 2024. This will be extended to managers and staff.
- 4.1.3 A programme of 'Lunch and Learn' events have been organised for staff. Autism Awareness and Deaf Awareness sessions have taken place and were well attended. The next Lunch and Learn topic will be black history. The purpose of the sessions is to raise awareness of each protected characteristic.
- 4.1.4 A calendar of events to mark EDI awareness events has been developed.

4.2 Working Groups and EDI Champions

- 4.2.1 The EDI working group has been relaunched and reestablished and made up from more than 20 volunteer staff who represent all nine Protected Characteristics, representing all areas of CCC. The group meets bi-monthly and discusses many EDI topics, with a suggestion option from the wider organisation.
- 4.2.2 From the group, a well-represented Champion network has been created representing a point of contact for staff for each protected characteristic.
- 4.2.3 Staff can access information about the council's equality duty, policy, work programme and the role of EDI Champions on a newly created EDI intranet page.

4.3 Local Government Association (LGA) Framework

- 4.3.1 The Framework helps local councils to meet their obligations under the EA2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duties. It has four improvement modules:
- 4.3.2 A significant piece of work is currently being undertaken to assess our organisation against the Local Government Association's Equality Framework. This framework has four improvement modules; Understanding and Working with your Communities, Leadership and Organisational Commitment, Responsive Services and Customer Care, and Diverse and Engaged Workforce.
- 4.3.3 A self-assessment against the four modules is being conducted against 3 levels of achievement: Developing, Achieving, or Excellent. The self- assessment indicates at this time that CCC is 'developing' in most areas and an improvement plan is being developed to achieve the excellent level which will be the subject of further reports.

4.4 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA)

- 4.4.1 EqIA is a method or tool for assessing the impacts of a council policy or function on removing barriers to equality. Research shows that the way organisations do things can have unintentional negative effects on public groups known as institutional discrimination.
- 4.4.2 The current EqIA process is being developed from completing a form with details of the policy/process form to a PowerApp making the process more accessible.
- 4.4.3 Refreshed EqIA training will be provided to ensure staff effectively consider and mitigate the impact of policies, projects and services on different groups within the community and workforce.

4.5 Accessibility Audit of Town Hall

4.5.1 In February 2023, an external audit was commissioned to review how accessible the Town Hall was to staff, councillors and members of the public. The purpose of the audit was to make recommendations on improving the Town Hall's accessibility for councillors, staff and visitors. The audit provided a plan of priority and non-priority works, which is currently being considered as part of the asset management project.

4.5.2 The long-term plan is to conduct accessibility audits across all of CCC's assets.

4.6 Equalities Data Reporting

4.6.1 The council is required to publish its Gender Pay Gap annually. EDI data is reported on the council's website and is used to inform EDI workforce initiatives and monitor the impact on our workforce.

4.7 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

4.7.1 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy has been developed following the audit recommendations. The policy outlines CCC's commitment to eliminating discrimination, promote diversity and ensuring equal opportunities for employees and communities. A copy of the draft policy can be found at Appendix A.

4.8 EDI Development for Services

4.8.1 The Community and Partnership Team within the Wellbeing, Protection and Partnerships service area ensures EDI is considered in all areas of its work to comply with the council's equality duty responsibilities.

4.8.2 Some key examples include the resettlement work, which involves working alongside various agencies, communities and processes on complex schemes e.g. Homes 4 Ukraine Scheme, Afghan Resettlement Scheme and Asylum Seeker Resettlement. As well as this area of work, the team is heavily involved in work around health inequalities and ensuring that we are working collaboratively to reduce these inequalities in the various forms they exist.

4.8.3 Community & Partnership Officers represent CCC across a variety of collaborative networks and forums including Multi Schools Councils, Essex Migration Forum, Multi Faith Groups, Local Neighbourhood MDTs, to understand the needs of different community groups and guide the work of the team.

4.8.4 Other examples include drawing on a network of contacts to support the Electoral Service team to review the accessibility of polling stations, and Leisure World colleagues advise on enquiries about male/female only swimming sessions.

4.8.5 Colleagues in Colchester and Ipswich Museums (CIMS) preserve, interpret, and make accessible the material culture and cultural heritage of both Colchester and Ipswich residents and visitors to both towns. It is a museum service with regional and national reach contributing to the cultural regeneration and wellbeing of both towns and the wider region.

5. Conclusion

5.1 The focus of the workforce EDI programme in the last 12 months has been to review the policy, establish the EDI group and EDI champions and train staff.

5.2 The focus in the next 12 months will be to review our progress against the LGA Equality Framework and setting objectives and measures to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce to better understand the needs of our communities and inform service provision.