

# **Guildford Borough Council**

**Report to:** Corporate Governance and Standards Committee

**Date:** 18 January 2024

**Ward(s) affected:** n/a

**Report of Director:** Transformation & Governance

**Author:** Ali Holman, Specialist HR (Business Partner)

**Tel:** 01483 444008

**Email:** ali.holman@guildford.gov.uk

**Lead Councillor responsible:** Carla Morson

**Tel:** 07843 489796

**Email:** carla.morson@guildford.gov.uk

**Report Status:** Open

## **Update on the revised, joint Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, and associated action plan.**

### **1. Executive Summary**

1.1 Under the Equality Act 2010 there are statutory obligations for organisations to have equality objectives and to adhere to the general and specific duties within the Act.

1.2 The key objectives of the updated policy and action plan are:

- To demonstrate how the Council will meet its legal obligations set out in the Equality Act 2010
- To provide a structured and easy to understand equality framework
- To ensure that our workforce encourages equality, diversity and inclusion to help prevent legal challenges arising from bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

- 1.2 The policy itself has been updated in June 2023 in collaboration with Waverley Borough Council and is now a shared policy (albeit with a separate action plan for each Council). It is reviewed annually and updated every three years. The action plan itself has been updated to be more accessible and easier to use. It is an organic document which is reviewed by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group every quarter and progress updated annually to this Committee.

## **2 Recommendation to Committee**

- 2.1 That the Committee approves the updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and its associated action plan as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

## **3 Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 To assist the Council in meeting its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and to provide a way to measure and evidence our work in this area.

## **4 Exemption from publication**

- 4.1 No

## **5 Purpose of Report**

- 5.1 To obtain approval of the updated, joint policy and Guildford's action plan.

## **6 Strategic Priorities**

- 6.1 To further collaboration with Waverley in having a joint ED&I policy
- 6.2 To contribute to the Council's fundamental theme of supporting older, more vulnerable, and less advantaged people in our community.

## 7 Background

7.1 A workplace encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion can help:

- Make it more successful
- Keep employees happy and motivated
- Prevent serious or legal issues arising, such as bullying, harassment, or discrimination
- To better serve a diverse range of customers
- To improve ideas and problem solving
- To attract and retain quality staff and become an employer of choice.

7.2 The detailed action plan is attached in Appendix 1. Some key actions taken and updates under each heading of the plan include:

**Provide high quality public services which are accessible to all and delivered fairly, and ensure under-represented groups throughout the Borough are able to access our services**

- Guidance on reasonable adjustments for service users published to all staff.
- Video training on how to complete Equality Impact Assessments is finished and waiting to be published.

**Work with partners and stakeholders to develop Communities where equality, diversity and inclusion are respected, and discrimination is eliminated**

- EDI training for Councillors took place in July 2023
- Review of Disability Confident Scheme and rating.

**Improve inclusion and value differences by supporting EDI initiatives, and communicating the embedding equality and diversity practices into the whole organisation.**

- The joint Waverley and Guildford policy has been approved by the Corporate Management Board (CMB) and is being submitted to this Committee for final review. Plan to

update the intranet with our EDI objectives to ensure a joint Council approach.

- A menopause survey is planned along with a period dignity project with a view to signposting and removing stigma.
- Support the organisation in addressing gender and ethnicity pay gaps, and diversity under-representation.

**Promote and environment where people feel safe to challenge discriminatory behaviour and language.**

- All staff email to promote the use of personal pronouns jointly to both Waverley and Guildford – awaiting publication
- Planned update on equality fields in Business World, then undertake EDI data refresh.

7.3 Endorsement of the updated policy and action plan will re-affirm the Council's commitment to equality and diversity as well as highlighting its stance on key issues such as sexual and racial discrimination.

7.4 The actions will develop and change over time and progress will be reviewed periodically by CMB.

## **8 Consultations**

8.1 No formal consultations conducted as this is a progress update on the revised policy and action plan.

## **9 Key Risks**

9.1 No risks have been identified

## **10 Financial Implications**

10.1 There are no financial implications. Existing employees form the ED&I group.

## **11 Legal Implications**

- 11.1 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the regulatory body responsible for enforcing the Equality Act. They have enforcement powers, which range from guidance to investigations and court action where organisations fail to meet their obligations.
- 11.2 It is not a legal requirement to have an equality action plan or policy; however, there are obligations to have equality objectives and to adhere to the general and specific duties of the Equality Act. The policy and action plan are an ideal minimum to evidence this.

## **12 Human Resource Implications**

- 12.1 Equality and diversity form a fundamental part of the HR team's remit. There are therefore no HR implications.

## **13 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 13.1 The Equality Impact Assessment for this policy was completed in May 2023 and found no negative E&D implications.

## **14 Climate Change/Sustainability Implications**

- 14.1 There are no Climate Change/Sustainability implications associated with this report.

## **15 Summary of Options**

- 15.1 Option 1:  
To approve and comment, if applicable, on the reviewed policy and action plan – this is the recommended option.
- 15.2 Option 2  
To not approve the policy. This option carries some risk as it may result in the Council not adhering to the duties of the Equality Act.

This could result in an increase in discrimination claims, potential reputational damage, and potential court action by the EHRC.

## **16 Conclusion**

- 16.1 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy has been reviewed in collaboration with Waverley Borough Council and is presented to this Committee.
- 16.2 The action plan has been updated and refreshed so that it is more user friendly and practical.
- 16.3 Having a diverse and inclusive workforce is fundamental to the success of any organisation and our senior management are committed to equality and diversity both throughout the organisation and for our service users.
- 16.4 Discrimination claims are uncapped in employment law and it makes sense to ensure the organisation protects itself from breaches of the Equality Act.

## **17 Background Papers**

None

## **18 Appendices**

Appendix 1: Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy  
Appendix 2: Equality action plan