

TITLE OF REPORT: **Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy**

REPORT OF: **Mike Barker – Strategic Director, Corporate Services and Governance**

Purpose of the Report

1. Cabinet is asked to endorse and recommend the Council to approve a new Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Policy (**Appendix 2**) and Strategy (**Appendix 3**).

Background

2. The Council has had a corporate equal opportunities policy in place since 2000, which has been continually reviewed since then. It addresses how the Council will approach ED&I as an organisation, considering both our customers and our workforce in that approach.
3. An ED&I workforce policy and strategy is needed that sets out our vision and commitments to the employees in regard to being an equal opportunity, diverse and inclusive employer.
4. Our approach to achieving equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion in our borough will have many similar themes, but the strategies we adopt and programmes of work we undertake for our workforce will differ due to our legal obligations as an employer.
5. To date, the Council has not had a Workforce ED&I Policy or Strategy which is focussed solely on achieving a workforce and working environment where equity is prevalent, equality is demonstrated, our demographic is diverse and representative of the community we serve and where all employees feel included.

Proposal

6. This policy and strategy set out the Council's commitment to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between different groups.
7. Councillors, as decision makers, are accountable to the people of Gateshead for delivering improved outcomes for equality, diversity and inclusion and for discharging the Council's public sector equality duty.

8. This policy has been designed to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the Council to all areas of equalities work, with a commitment to making EDI a shared responsibility and priority, with a policy review every three years.

Recommendation

9. Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council the Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy as set out in appendices 2 and 3.

For the following reason:

To demonstrate the Council's commitment to ensuring equality at the Council, delivery of the Workforce Strategy, Thrive, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Corporate Plan whilst ensuring compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010.

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Policy Context

1. The Council's Workforce Strategy, Corporate Plan, Thrive and the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy seek for the Council to be an employer that promotes and encourages equality, diversity and inclusion and provides a workplace where employees thrive. In order for our workforce to help our community thrive there is need to help them thrive also.
2. The workforce Strategy seeks for Gateshead to be an employer of choice and being an equality of opportunity, diverse and inclusive employer supports and underpins this ambition.
3. The Policy and Strategy will support delivery of making the Council a place where its workforce thrives and where people want to come and work and stay.

Background

4. This Workforce EDI Policy and Strategy have been developed to ensure the Council is meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and deliver on our Public Sector Equality Duty.
5. We currently use the Local Government Association's Equality Framework (2021) to structure how we develop and report progress against our corporate Equality and Diversity work programme which includes a specific workstream for workforce.
6. The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, along with other public sector organisations, to comply with the Equality Duty, which came into force in April 2011.
7. The main elements of the strategy are:
 - Outline the Council's vision for ED& I and what that means.
 - Define what we mean by ED & I.
 - Set out our equality statement.
 - To outline whereas an ED & I employer where we are aiming to be i.e., 5 steps to success.
 - To set out our strategic approach; to Engage, Enable, Educate, Empower, Encourage, Embed, Evaluate and Evolve.
 - What our plan and priorities are.
8. The main elements of the policy are:
 - Make clear who the policy covers.
 - What the commitments of the policy.
 - Make clear the responsibilities of the Council as the employer and the workforce as employees of the Council.
 - Make clear what action an employee can take if they believe that they have been treated differently due to a protected characteristic.

Proposal

9. The strategy and policy demonstrate our commitment to improving equality, diversity and inclusion at Gateshead Council, as a leading local employer and service provider.
10. ED&I will be a shared responsibility and priority, so that everyone at the council, across all levels and services, works to tackle any issues or concerns that arise due to ED&I that impact negatively on an individual or groups of individuals that are employed by Gateshead Council and/or affect our aim to be an employer of choice.
11. Following the approval of the Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy which agreed to adopt the voluntary Socio-Economic Duty of the Equality Act 2010, the strategy and policy will look to ensure that there are commitments to implement plans to ensure we meet our obligations within it.
12. We will engage key stakeholders in the development of action plans to deliver the strategy.

Consultation

13. Consultation has taken place with various stakeholder groups including SMG, Ways of Working Group, the Workforce ED&I Network and Trade Unions.
14. Consultation has also taken place with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, as well as the Support Cabinet Member for Diversity and Equalities.

Alternative Options

15. There are no alternative options with regard to the report as the recommendation supports the Council's specific duty to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010.

Implications of Recommended Option

16. Resources

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms there are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
- b) **Human Resource Implications** – The vision and commitments relating to the workforce will support the Council's ability to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- c) **Property Implications** – There are no property implications arising directly from this report.

17. **Risk Management Implications** – There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report.

18. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – The policy has been developed with the aim of improving the employee experience and demonstrate that Gateshead Council is

an employer of choice who takes steps to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion for those with protected characteristics. An integrated impact assessment has been developed for this policy and is attached as **Appendix 3**.

19. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising directly as a result of this report.

20. **Health Implications** – There are no direct health implications arising directly as a result of this report.

21. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no direct climate emergency and sustainability implications arising directly as a result of this report.

22. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no direct human rights implications arising directly as a result of this report.

23. **Ward implications** – There are no direct area and ward implications arising directly as a result of this report.

Background Information

24. The following background papers have been used to inform this report:

- Gateshead Council Equal Opportunities policy 2019
- Making Gateshead a Place where everyone Thrives 2019
- Gateshead Council Corporate Plan 2023-28
- Workforce Strategy 2022-25
- Corporate Plan