

POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
19/01/2023 at 6.00 pm



Present: Councillor McLaren (Chair)
Councillors Alyas, Dean, Harrison, Wilkinson and Williamson

Also in Attendance:

Jonathan Downs Corporate Policy Lead
Peter Thompson Constitutional Services

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barnes and C. Phythian.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions for this meeting of the Committee to consider.

5 **MINUTES**

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 13th December 2022, be approved as a correct record.

6 **OLDHAM'S EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY - DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Committee scrutinised a report of the Assistant Chief Executive, which updated Members on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (EDI). The Full Council at its meeting in September 2021, had adopted a new EDI Strategy. This report summarises how we currently meet our duties in respect of equality in Oldham, as well providing an update on the delivery of the EDI Strategy.

The Committee was advised that those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Committee's report summarised how Oldham Council was currently achieving its objectives, as well as updating on the delivery of the EDI Strategy Action Plan. The Equality Act 2010 brought several separate pieces of equality legislation together

into one Act. It also extended the public sector equality duties to cover eight protected characteristics, namely: age, pregnancy and maternity, disability, race, gender, religion and belief, gender reassignment and sexual orientation

Members were advised that the Act had also introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty. Under this duty, local authorities must: publish service and workforce data annually and to set at least one equality objective for the organisation (maximum timeframe for achievement set at four years).

The main elements of Oldham Council's approach to equality were:

- a. Considering the impact of decisions through the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process - In taking decisions the Council must demonstrate that it has given "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between different groups. Demonstrating that "due regard" has been given involved: assessing the potential equality impact of proposed decisions at an appropriate stage in the decision-making process - so that it informs the development of policy and is considered before a decision is taken; ensuring that decision makers are aware of the equality duties and any potential equality issues when making decisions. It was important to note that having due regard does not mean the Council cannot make decisions which have the potential to impact disproportionately, it means that we must be clear where this is the case and must be able to demonstrate that we have consulted, understood and mitigated the impact, where possible.
- b. Publishing service and workforce data – The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, on at least an annual basis. Over time we intend to collect even more service information and to strengthen the collection of equality related data across the council. This work is referenced in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- c. Setting Equality Objectives – The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to publish specific and measurable equality objectives. However, setting equality objectives is an important way for us to show our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- d. Implementing the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy – To support the council's ambition to champion Equality and Diversity, an Equality Strategy was developed, which shows the activity that will be undertaken to create a place that values and celebrates our differences while creating equal opportunities for all.

At the Council meeting that was held in June 2020, a commitment was made to develop a new Equality Strategy for Oldham Council, including the adoption of new Equality Objectives covering 2021 – 2025. The new strategy was adopted in September 2021. The strategy sets out the council's commitment to progressing equality, diversity and human rights across the borough. It outlines how we will eliminate unlawful

discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations between all people regardless of age, disability, race, sex, gender identity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, socio-economic and marital or civil partnership status. The purpose of the Strategy was not to capture everything that the council was doing to address inequality, as the work to address inequalities was reflected in the relevant individual strategies, plans and policies that are in place across Team Oldham.

The aim of the Equality Strategy was to place equality and diversity at the heart of what we do, setting ourselves ambitious goals and measuring progress against these to drive organisational improvement. The Council is currently identifying key leads for each action in the strategy, who will be responsible for ensuring delivery. This will include developing action plans that sit behind the strategy, enabling the Council to monitor progress and impact.

The strategy builds on the four Equality Objectives outlined at a – d above, ensuring that Oldham Council meets the general and specific requirements of the equality legislation in everything we do so that equality is fully embedded within our organisational culture and reflected in our values and principles.

Though Oldham's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy had only been adopted in September 2021, there had since been significant societal changes. Covid-19, for instance, became endemic and vaccines had enabled the gradual removal of restrictions on everyday life. However, many residents across the Borough are facing new challenges, including the rising cost-of-living, with mortgage rates, rent, energy bills and food prices, making it difficult for many families to pay the bills. To reflect this changing environment, it is proposed that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy's Action Plan be updated to reflect these new priorities.

As a way of expediting this matter the Chair suggested that the report's author (Corporate Policy Lead) be asked to meet informally with him to discuss how the Committee can effectively scrutinise the proposals contained within the Strategy.

Resolved:

1. That the Committee notes the report updating on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
2. That the Committee agrees that the To agree that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy's Action Plan be updated to reflect new priorities, including the cost-of-living crisis.
3. That the report's author (Corporate Policy Lead) be requested to meet informally with the Chair to discuss how the Committee can effectively scrutinise the proposals contained within the Strategy.



The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn and would be considered at the Committee's meeting that was scheduled to be held on 21st March 2023.

8 **OLDHAM COUNCIL RESOLUTION - SUPPORTING OUR ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY**

The Committee considered a Motion that had been presented to the full Council meeting on 14th December 2022: 'Supporting our Armed Forces Community'. At the Council meeting, it had been agreed that: 'Council resolved to refer consideration of the Motion to the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee', with a view to the Committee providing a response to Council in due course.

Resolved:

That the Chief Executive's office be requested to provide a report to the Committee's meeting on 21st March 2023 detailing the current provision of support to Armed Forces veterans in the Borough, including comparative information from neighbouring local authorities.

9 **POLICY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23**

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2022/23.

Resolved:

That the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2022/23 be noted.

10 **KEY DECISION DOCUMENT**

The Committee reviewed the Key Decision Notice which provided an opportunity for the identification of items or policy or service development, not otherwise listed on the Committee Work Programme.

Resolved:

That the report and the Key Decision Notice be noted.

The meeting started at 6.00pm and ended at 6.50pm