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## Report to Overview and Scrutiny

# Oldham's Approach to Equality

### Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic and Social Reform

### Officer Contact:

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### Reason for Decision

At Full Council in June 2020 a commitment was made to develop a new Equality Strategy for Oldham Council, including the adoption of new Equality Objectives.

This report summarises how we currently meet our duties in respect of equality in Oldham, as well as proposing the adoption of new Equality Objectives and an Equality Strategy covering 2021 – 2025.

### Executive Summary

In summary, 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.

This report summarises how we currently achieve this in Oldham, as well as what we do to further champion equality and diversity in Oldham.

### Recommendations

1. To provide feedback on the new Equality Objectives for 2021 - 2025
2. To provide feedback on the proposed Equality Strategy for 2021 - 2025

## 1 Background

- 1.1 At Full Council in June 2020 a commitment was made to develop a new Equality Strategy for Oldham Council, including the adoption of new Equality Objectives.
- 1.2 This report summarises how we currently meet our duties in respect of equality in Oldham, as well proposing the adoption of new Equality Objectives and an Equality Strategy covering 2021 – 2025.

## 2 What are our duties in respect of equality?

- 2.1 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	sexual orientation

- 2.2 In December 2010, the Government announced that it would not be taking forward the socio-economic duty for public bodies. Despite this we have continued to consider people on low incomes as part of our equality impact assessment (EIA) process.
- 2.3 In summary, 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.
- 2.4 The Act also introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty. Under this duty, local authorities must:
- publish service and workforce data annually
  - set at least one equality objective for the organisation (maximum timeframe for achievement set at 4 years)

## 3.0 How are we meeting these duties in Oldham?

- 3.1 There are five main elements to our approach to equality in Oldham, they are:
1. **Considering the impact of our 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 involves:

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- 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 is 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.

2. **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 new Equality Strategy.
3. **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. We have refreshed our Equality Objectives for 2021 – 2025, please see section 4.0.
4. **Developing a new Equality Strategy for the Council** – To support the council’s ambition to champion Equality and Diversity, an Equality Strategy has been 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, please see section 5.0.
5. **Shaping our Covid-19 response through Oldham’s Equality Advisory Group** – We are committed to minimising the impact of COVID-19 across our communities. The steps we are taking to tackle the pandemic and the subsequent recovery planning, aim to support people, especially those groups with protected characteristics who are often most impacted. To support this approach, we have established an Equality Advisory Group which will provide insight and expertise, helping us capture the voice of lived community experience in our COVID-19 response and recovery planning and beyond.

#### 4.0 **Adopting New Equality Objectives**

4.1 Under the duties of the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty, a local authority must set at least one equality objective for the organisation (with a maximum timeframe for achievement set at 4 years). Oldham Council adopted two Equality Objectives in April 2015 which were set for four years. These objectives were as follows:

- 1) **To establish standardised categories and classifications for equality data being recorded:** This was to ensure that equality data is collected and reported consistently across the organisation, using uniform criteria which can be future proofed and adapted for any changes to equality categorisation.

Over the past four years the we have started to standardise equality datasets and analysed them to look at how we can achieve a more representative workforce. This piece of work was one of the deep-dives for 2016/17. Over time we intend to collect even more service information and to strengthen the collection of equality related data across

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the council. Crucially, we will work to identify how we use this data to inform service planning and development, seeking to continually improve our performance over time.

- 2) **To carry out in-depth research and analysis of service areas for which we collect equality data at a rate of one service area per year:** This was to enable the council to look at how the equality data we collect can be improved and how we can better use the data to inform service planning.

The first deep-dive (2015/16) we carried out was looking at the impact of welfare reform on those aged between 16-25 years old. Two other deep-dives have been undertaken: the work to look at how we can achieve a more representative workforce, and the work to develop a Street Charter for those with a sensory disability which includes mechanisms for better collection of data around these issues. A fourth deep dive into the equality impact of Covid-19 was recently completed, which has been used to help shape our ongoing Covid-19 response and recovery planning.

- 4.2 The objectives now need to be refreshed to outline Team Oldham's equality focus for the next four years from 2021 - 2025. Following consultation with services, portfolio holders and equality leads from across the partnership, we are proposing to adopt four new Equality Objectives that will set out our commitment for progressing equality, diversity and human rights across the borough:

1. **We will identify and mitigate the potential equality impacts caused by Covid-19, informing our response through research, best practice and lived experience** – As a council we are committed to minimizing the impact of Covid-19 on our residents. Though the Equality Impact Assessment process that has been completed, we have identified additional steps we will take to address inequalities as a result of the pandemic response through to mitigating against inequality as we recover.
2. **We will provide services that put the citizens' voice at the heart of decision-making, advancing equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity and inclusion for all** – Our policies and strategies aim to capture the lived experiences of our communities and our action Equality Strategy reflects their insights.
3. **We will lead the way in championing inclusivity across the borough, working with our partners and communities to make Oldham a fairer place for everyone** – Ensuring equality is fully embedded within our organisational culture and across Team Oldham and is reflected in our principles and values in everything we do
4. **We will encourage and enable a skilled and diverse workforce to build a culture of equality and inclusion in everything we do** – Implementing a programme of activity which supports workforce equality and diversity in a holistic way through The Workforce Strategy 2020-2023.

- 4.3 These objectives will be supported by Oldham's Equality Strategy, which shows how we will achieve these objectives.

## 5.0 **Oldham's Equality Strategy**

- 5.1 At Full Council 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.

- 5.2 The proposed strategy sets out the council's commitment to progressing equality, diversity and human rights across the borough. It outlines how we will eliminate unlawful

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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.

- 5.3 The purpose of the Strategy is not to capture everything that the council does to address inequality, as the work to address inequalities are reflected in the relevant individual strategies, plans and policies that are in place across Team Oldham. These specific strategies, plans, and policies will themselves have assessed and identified the equality implications and desired equality outcomes that they wish to achieve, as part of the council's Equality Impact Assessment process.
- 5.4 The aim of the Equality Strategy is to place equality and diversity at the heart of what we do, setting ourselves ambitious goals and measuring progress against these in order to drive organisational improvement. We are 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 us to monitor progress and impact.
- 5.5 The strategy builds on the four Equality Objectives proposed in section 4.0, ensuring 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. The proposed Equality Strategy can be seen in full in Appendix 1.