

## Report to Policy Overview and Scrutiny

# Oldham's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy – Delivery Update

### Portfolio Holder:

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### Reason for Decision

At Full Council in September 2021, Oldham Council adopted a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

This report summarises how we currently meet our duties in respect of equality in Oldham, as well as providing an update on the delivery of the EDI Strategy.

### 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 updating on the delivery of the EDI Strategy Action Plan.

### Recommendations

1. To note the update on the EDI Strategy.
2. To agree that the EDI Action Plan is updated to reflect new priorities, including the cost-of-living crisis.

## 1 Background

1.1 At Full Council in September 2021, Oldham Council adopted a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

1.2 This report summarises how we currently meet our duties in respect of equality in Oldham and provides an update on the implementation of Oldham's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

## 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 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 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. **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, please see section 5.0.

#### 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). Following consultation with services, portfolio holders and equality leads from across the partnership, Oldham Council adopted four Equality Objectives in September 2021.

1. **We will identify and mitigate the equality impacts of COVID-19, informing our response through research, best practice and lived experience, while supporting the delivery of our Covid-19 Recovery Strategy** – 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 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, ensuring our services are inclusive and drive equity** – Our policies and strategies aim to capture the lived experiences of our communities and our action Equality Strategy reflects their insights.
3. **We will champion inclusivity across the borough, working with our partners and communities to make Oldham a fairer place for everyone, while valuing and celebrating diversity and inclusion for all** – Ensuring equality is fully embedded

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within our organisational culture and across Team Oldham and is reflected in our principles and values in everything we do

4. **We will achieve a skilled and diverse workforce building 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 are 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. The new strategy was adopted in September 2021.

5.2 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.

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 outlined 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.

5.6 An update on the delivery of the Equality Strategy is included in **Appendix 1**.

## 6.0 **Next Steps**

6.1 Though Oldham’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was only adopted in September 2021, there have been significant societal changes. Covid-19 has become endemic and vaccines have enabled the gradual removal of restrictions on everyday life. However, many residents across our communities 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 is updated to reflect these new priorities.