

Report Title: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report

Date of meeting:	Thursday 25 July 2024
Report to:	Cabinet
Report of:	Executive Director – Regeneration, Economy and Assets
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Communities and Partnership Engagement
Wards affected:	(All Wards)
Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Is this a key decision:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No

Summary:

Sefton Council published its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy for 2023-2027 for approval at the Cabinet meeting of April 2023. That meeting requested an annual report on progress against the strategy and action plan therein.

This report provides a summary of progress over the first 12 months since approval of the strategy against its objectives and action areas. The report outlines the breadth of activity and level of progress being made across the Council in all areas, recognising the strategy's focus on the Council's role as an employer as a priority in the short term. However, it also recognises that there remains much to do in this important area of work as we continue (and will always continue) to aim to improve all aspects of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as an employer, a provider of services, a commissioner and as a place leader.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) note the content of this report and its appendices;
- (2) provide feedback on key issues and opportunities arising, and advise on areas of potential interest for further review and focus in future years; and
- (3) receive the next annual report on performance against the strategy and action plan

in 12 months' time.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1 Sefton Council has an exciting and ambitious Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy launched in April 2023.
- 1.2 The Council's aim has been to focus on borough-wide challenges and opportunities, for the whole of Sefton and all the communities within it. Equally, an important commitment to ensuring that Sefton meets its own high standards and expectations as an inclusive employer with a diverse workforce, that is supportive to all employees and ensures the attraction, development and retention of a diverse workforce.
- 1.3 Sefton Council's workforce and community is becoming even more diverse. The Council has recently been delighted to welcome the much-needed international workers. The Council recognises its crucial role in ensuring all employees feel valued, supported and understood but also, in promoting the positive appreciation for these newly recruited cohorts within Sefton's community.
- 1.4 The aim of this report is to provide the Cabinet with visibility of the EDI strategy evaluation a year on, the actions that have been prioritised and the expected outcomes in relation to the wider objectives. Also, to enable feedback and discussion on these areas of priority for the EDI Strategy and the projects embedding it.
- 1.5 This strategy focuses on each of the Council's roles:
 - As an employer
 - As a provider of services
 - As a commissioner of goods and services
 - As a place leader

There are seven key objective areas:

- Objective 1: Increased awareness and engagement across the whole organisation
- Objective 2: Increased engagement with our partners and communities
- Objective 3: Consistent and targeted training and development
- Objective 4: Strengthened support for staff
- Objective 5: Maximise effectiveness and inclusivity in HR processes and procedures
- Objective 6: Improved monitoring and measurement of progress
- Objective 7: Establish and strengthen monitoring and governance structures

2. Areas of progress and impact

- 2.1 There have been key areas of progress since the launch of the Strategy in 2023 which are summarised below. The appointment of a new Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer provides direct focus on the aims of the strategy, ensuring that agreed actions are completed and vision on future development is maintained.
- 2.2 The awareness of issues surrounding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion has increased. This can be seen through engagement with opportunities within Sefton such as the some of the Network Groups, calendared events and policy change. The recent staff survey was also evidence of this where most staff felt EDI principles were valued within Sefton Council.
- 2.3 The Caring Business Charter and Workplace Adjustment Passports have been launched which both provide key aspects of support and inclusion for staff and young people who are Cared for or Care Experienced. Community groups have led change in the delivery of accessible information on the Council website and wider forms of communication.
- 2.4 Phase 1 Race Equality training has been delivered to staff and managers across a range of Council sectors and overall feedback has been positive. It has provided a platform for further areas of development, due to the wider understanding and awareness of issues that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and community members can face in their lives.
- 2.5 Staff Network groups have been used to gather feedback and viewpoints from diverse perspectives and implement change in policy and practice. This has also provided a forum for staff to share their experiences and have creative ownership of chosen events.
- 2.6 Key HR processes have been adapted to provide more inclusive opportunities for diverse applicants through the short-listing processes and the make-up of interview panels.
- 2.7 Recent developments around how the Corporate Equalities Group monitors the success of the EDI Strategy have been established to provide regular updates, evaluation opportunities and accountability.

3 Summary of Key Priority Actions in 2024

- 3.1 The Strategy's initial list of 33 key performance indicators have been condensed and prioritised so that the actions that are near completion or will have wider immediate impact are being focussed on.
- 3.2 Feedback from staff network groups available for consultation provided a common theme around acknowledgement of positive steps of progress but a need for the wider understanding to be embedded within the working culture of Sefton. It was often commented that whilst many staff and managers appreciated the importance of EDI principles and key policies, it could be subjective to the sector or dependent on the training that had been completed or personal interests of certain staff or managers.
- 3.3 Increased awareness through training and events, with promotion of the Zero Tolerance Policy and its Additional Guidance for protected characteristics will be key in embedding understanding and awareness within Sefton Council.
- 3.4 Communication both internally and externally will require updating so that the website and microsite provide updated and clear information that promotes the positive EDI principles Sefton values.

Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Objectives – Areas for development

4. Objective 1: Increased awareness and engagement across the whole organisation

- 4.1 The current Equality & Diversity Awareness training is mandatory and provides a broad understanding of EDI issues, the law and how that works as an employer / employee. However, due to the delivery being online, independently using an interactive powerpoint, the engagement and impact is limited. It does not allow for more nuanced discussions around some complex issues.
- 4.2 The Phase 1 Race Equality Training (also mandatory) is delivered face to face by an external company procured by LCR. This is a half-day session where attendees can both listen, discuss and feedback on information around race equality. Overall feedback is very positive in terms of how informative the session was and inspirational in wanting to bring about change within the Council. 63% of places on the training sessions have been used. Potential barriers have been analysed through feedback from staff (those who have & have not attended). It is clear that busy work schedules is a key issue, but also lack of awareness around how the training could be of use to individuals or teams, beyond the information acquired in the online Equality & Diversity Awareness training.
- 4.3 Phase 2 Race Equality Training will be planned with Sefton's Combined Authority partners and the LCR Race Equality Hub. The planning will respond to feedback and lessons learnt from Phase 1 training.
- 4.4 The new Zero Tolerance Policy also presents an opportunity to address multiple objectives within the EDI Strategy, but specifically Ob.1 Increased awareness and engagement across the whole organisation & Ob. 3 Consistent and targeted training and development when it is launched.
- 4.5 The Zero Tolerance Policy's additional guidance will be created through input and ideas from the Staff Network Groups. This will provide stakeholders with lived experience the opportunity to raise awareness around key issues and provide guidance that improves the culture with Sefton both day to day and more broadly. Managers will be empowered to support their staff more effectively if they face disadvantages or discrimination due to their protected characteristics.
- 4.6 The additional guidance documents and the issues they raise could also be introduced through 'bite-size' training sessions completed within monthly team meetings. This would then provide an opportunity for staff to engage more meaningfully with the material and discuss its implications within the context of that service area.
- 4.7 The structure of 'Team Training' sessions could then provide future opportunities to embed further elements of the EDI strategy actions such as the development of psychological safety in the workplace and restorative supervision opportunities.
- 4.8 Staff Network groups will support further development of the calendared events so that each group has the minimum of a main annual event, with further dates acknowledged through communications both internally and externally. This should provide increased capacity to support the events and deepen engagement within the Council.

5. Objective 2: Increased engagement with our partners and communities

- 5.1 The Caring Business Charter is already engaging partners in both business and education settings. There is an opportunity to review what this support and opportunity feels like to the young people accessing it. Also, any lessons learnt by the businesses who have signed up for the charter can be captured. This will guide further planning and support through this important initiative.

- 5.2 The Sefton Race Equality Monitoring Group could form part of the increase in engagement amongst partners and communities. Its role and aims will need reviewing to maintain a sense of purpose and awareness of impact for the members.
- 5.3 Re-creating information shared on the microsite provides an opportunity to gain input from staff network groups but also community groups, who can share their views and suggestions for improvement and see the impact of their engagement.
- 5.4 Collaboration with key stakeholder community groups will be developed further. This will include discussions around improving accessibility, identifying wider areas for training to improve services and opportunities to create calendared events.
- 5.5 Further promotion of the Small Grants Fund to support community groups is required to increase engagement. The development of the communications externally will support this.

6. Objective 3: Consistent and targeted training and development

- 6.1 The plans described in 4.5 and 4.6 explain how training can be developed and embedded across the Council, creating the potential for wider areas of training within Teams.
- 6.2 The Sefton Active Workforce has begun collaboration with the EDI Officer in using the forum to celebrate diversity and raise awareness through literature and staff discussion groups.
- 6.3 Recent collaborations with Inclusive Companies can provide further opportunities to provide specific areas of training (such as support employees identifying as trans or neurodivergent) and to plan bespoke packages relevant to the Sefton context.
- 6.4 The Council will continue to roll-out “real-lived experience training”, including (but not limited to) immersive visually-impaired walking tours of town centres, known as SimSpec Walks, in partnership with Merseyside Sight Loss Council, and also including a “real-lived experience of the care system” training session delivered in person to staff from across the Council by a care experienced young person in Sefton.

7. Objective 4: Strengthened support for staff

- 7.1 As described earlier in the report, the Zero Tolerance Policy and its subsequent training opportunities will help to embed a supportive culture for staff members with a protected characteristic. Sensitive and empathic learning provides the forum to reflect on the implications of certain behaviours or attitudes that could be unintentionally harmful.
- 7.2 The inclusion of HR and OH input in the creation of the Zero Tolerance policy and its link policies, will ensure that where intervention is required, staff can feel reassured that the principles and guidance are being followed consistently and reliably.
- 7.3 The role of ‘Freedom To Speak Up Guardians’ has been seen as a positive form of peer support by Staff Network Groups. It is felt that this will provide a valuable alternative to formal complaints routes, where staff might feel less confident to disclose negative experiences. The role’s expectations will be finalised in conjunction with the Zero Tolerance Policy launch. This roles will provide confidential, emotional support and practical guidance

or signposting where needed. It will not replace the formal procedures that address discrimination or abuse.

- 7.4 Staff Network Group engagement requires further review. Whilst some network groups are well-attended, others have struggled to gain interest. Any barriers or issues can be further understood and addressed, but equally views of staff who might not feel the groups are beneficial to them. There are also opportunities that could be further explored around support for neurodivergence and care experienced.
- 7.5 The promotion of wider use of pronouns on emails requires further staff consultation to gather views and current levels of understanding around the benefits.
- 7.6 The current awareness, use and impact of the Reasonable Adjustment Passport needs to be reviewed. This will improve consistency of use, embedded understanding of the principles around this (e.g. visible & non-visible disabilities being planned and catered for, employees avoiding repeated conversations around agreed needs) and the benefits felt by staff availing themselves of this support. (The lessons learnt from this process can be used to review a potential carer's passport).

8. Objective 5: Maximise effectiveness and inclusivity in HR processes and procedures

- 8.1 The recruitment and subsequent HR processes will be reviewed in order to understand the journey for a potential candidate from the initial vacancy search to the potential first month of employment. This will be vital in identifying how inclusivity and diversity can be improved through areas such as the adverts, website information, application format, shortlisting process, interview panels/formats and the induction process.

9. Objective 6: Improved monitoring and measurement of progress

- 9.1 The Corporate Equalities Group will continue to review the impact and success of the EDI Strategy through the bi-monthly meetings. The Objectives and key actions form the agenda. This provides regular evaluation, feedback and collaborative planning. Equally, the ELT and Cabinet reviews of progress ensure robust reviews of the EDI strategy and its effectiveness.
- 9.2 Sefton Council continues to use the Navajo Assessment to monitor progress against the agreed targets. The next review is due in 2024.

10. Objective 7: Establish and strengthen monitoring and governance structures

- 10.1 The consistency of approach to EIAs requires further work. Templates have been shared with the CEG but need to be agreed upon once wider feedback has been captured. Care experience and (potentially) socioeconomic duty need incorporating.
- 10.2 The Race Equality Monitoring Group requires its role and purpose reviewing to develop the engagement and effectiveness in feeding back on the Strategy's relevant actions.

Financial Implications

There are no revenue implications of this report. The activity and associated resources discussed herein are funded from within core budgets. There are no capital implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising

Corporate Risk Implications

Any corporate risk implications arising are included in the body of the report.

Staffing HR Implications

Any Staffing HR implications arising are included in the body of the report.

Conclusion

The recommendations will support the effective and transparent governance of the Council's approach to inequality, diversity and inclusion, and its performance to date against the approved strategy and action plan.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option of not producing an annual report was not considered.

Equality Implications: Given the subject matter of the report, equality implications are considered throughout.	
Impact on Children and Young People: Yes The Council has recognised care experience as a protected characteristic, and as such focus on support and opportunity for care experienced young people should permeate through every part of the strategy and action plan. Some specific action areas are referenced within the report.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will:	
Have a positive impact	No
Have a neutral impact	Yes
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	No

There are no environmental implications.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD7697/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD5797/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Internal consultation also includes with key stakeholders from the Council's Corporate Equalities Group (comprising representation from all service areas of the Council), along with Staff Network groups (DEBs, Disability, LGBTQ+, Women's) and feedback from relevant Cabinet Members.

(B) External Consultations

Ongoing dialogue with partners including, but not limited to the LCR Race Equality Hub Board, Sefton CVS, Southport African Caribbean Heritage, Liverpool Advocates for Windrush, Merseyside Police Race Action Plan, Liverpool Commonwealth Symposium, Cared for Children, Navajo, Inclusive Companies, SAFE, People First, Ability Plus.

Implementation Date for the Decision:

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting.

Contact Officer:	Emma Stewart, Equality Diversity & Inclusion Officer
Telephone Number:	07890892455
Email Address:	Emma.stewart@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report.

Background Papers:

Link below to the strategy approved in April 2023.

[EDI Strategy 2023-2027 \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk/edi-strategy-2023-2027)