

TITLE	Equality Plan Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 23 February 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Equality Plan and accompanying year on year action plans help to ensure that the council continues to meet its equality obligations for the Borough and residents: progressing towards the “Achieving” level for re-assessment in 2023/24.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee are requested to consider progress on delivery of the year 1 action plan and note the year 2 action plan which will continue to deliver progress against the Local Government Association’s equality framework.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

During 2021 the Council approved the Equality Plan 2021-25 to deliver a programme of improvements against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). This report presents an update on what has so far been achieved during the first year of the plan.

A Cross-Party Working Group was established to work with officers in the development and delivery of the Equality Plan: they have been actively involved throughout.

The year 1 action plan set out 29 actions which would progress towards the “Developing” level of the award, meaning that “The organisation has established the building blocks for each priority. It has made an organisational commitment to improving equality. It is putting in place processes to deliver on equality issues and is meeting the statutory requirements.”

The EFLG is comprised of four themes around which the action plan has been structured and on which progress will be monitored. These themes are:

- Understanding and working with your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Responsive services and customer care
- Diverse and engaged workforce

The self-assessment completed earlier this year demonstrates that the council has achieved the “Developing” level across each of these themes. This is on track for delivery of the overall ambition of the Equality Plan.

Key aspects of the action plan are set out within the report and more details provided in Appendix 1. The approved action plan for year 2 is included as Appendix 2.

Background

In approving the Equality Plan 2021-25, the Council set out its commitment to tackling inequality for all our communities, presenting three priorities and eight objectives to be delivered across the lifetime of the Plan. These are detailed below:

Priority 1 – Listen to and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone

- We will improve the collection of data about our communities.
- We will engage and communicate with our residents to encourage participation.
- We will use feedback from residents to identify barriers to equality of opportunity.

Priority 2 – Act on our commitments to equality, diversity, and inclusion in the way we plan, deliver, and shape our services

- We will embed our commitments to equality into the way we plan, purchase, and deliver.
- We will model active community leadership through collaboration and coproduction.
- We will strengthen and improve our use of Equality Impact Assessments.

Priority 3 – Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected

- We will equip staff with the right tools to tackle inequality and meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community.
- We will honour the commitments agreed in our Equality Workforce Monitoring Report.

These priorities and objectives reflect the broad scope of the ambition required to make comprehensive progress against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

The goal of the EFLG is to mainstream the deliberate consideration of equality issues across the business of the organisation. Put simply, the EFLG aims to make sure we are thinking about the needs of different groups of people in everything that the council does: in our provision of services; in how we work with our partners; and in how we meet our responsibilities as an employer.

There are three levels of award against the EFLG, as follows:

- ***Developing*** - The organisation has made an organisational commitment to improving equality. It is putting in place processes to deliver on equality issues and is meeting the statutory requirements.
- ***Achieving*** - The organisation has policies, processes and procedures in place and is delivering some good equality outcomes. It is exceeding statutory requirements.
- ***Excellent*** – The organisation has mainstreamed equality throughout the organisation and can demonstrate that it is delivering significant outcomes across its services that are making a difference in its communities. The organisation is an exemplar council for equality and diversity.

In addition to the above levels of the award, there is also the baseline position of those not yet at the “Developing” level. This would be relevant for councils that are not yet able to evidence that they are meeting the statutory requirements.

Delivery of the Equality Plan is supported by an annual action plan. The year 1 action plan, which runs from April 2021 to March 2022, set out 29 actions and has been foundational, enabling the council to securely self-assess (and evidence achievements) at the ‘Developing’ level of the framework.

Set out below are some of the highlights of what has been achieved in the first year of the programme. A summary of the progress made against each of the 29 actions has been set out in Appendix 1.

Priority 1 – Listen to and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone

- A Resident’s Equality Forum has been established to provide a voice for the borough’s diverse groups and communities, with representation to be across the 9 protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- Equality data monitoring has been introduced into the council’s complaints process to help identify existing or emerging issues for equality groups.

Priority 2 – Act on our commitments to equality, diversity, and inclusion in the way we plan, deliver, and shape our services

- A programme of communications is underway celebrating the diversity of the borough and showcasing the work across the council to promote equality.
- Revised Equality Impact Assessment guidance and training has been made available to colleagues.

Priority 3 – Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected

- A review of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Learning and Development offer for members and colleagues across the organisation has been undertaken.
- An internal equality, diversity and inclusion intranet page was established to provide a central source of information and resources for colleagues across the Council.

Analysis of Issues

The year 2 action plan, attached as Appendix 2 to this report, comprises 11 actions targeted at supporting the council’s continued trajectory across the EFLG, towards the ‘Achieving’ level of the framework. .

The EFLG has four improvement modules and 17 priority themes as detailed below:

Understanding and working with your communities

1. collecting and sharing information
2. analysing and using data and information

3. effective community engagement
4. fostering good community relations
5. participation in public life.

Leadership, partnership, and organisational commitment

6. political and officer leadership
7. priorities and working in partnership
8. using equality impact assessment
9. performance monitoring and scrutiny.

Responsive services and customer care

10. commissioning and procuring services
11. integration of equality objectives into planned service outcomes
12. service design and delivery.

Diverse and engaged workforce

13. workforce diversity and inclusion
14. inclusive strategies and policies
15. collecting, analysing, and publishing workforce data
16. learning, development, and progression
17. health and wellbeing.

The 11 actions set out in the year 2 action plan have been informed by a detailed self-assessment against these priority themes and build on the progress achieved to date. They have been considered by the Cross-Party Working Group and signed off as the focus for delivery from April 2022.

In delivering year 2 of the equality programme, the Council will continue to build the supporting infrastructure, knowledge, and skills to further develop an (equality) data led cycle of improvement ensuring services are responsive to and reflective of the borough's communities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£1515,000	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	TBC		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	TBC		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
Set out in the report.

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been taken of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Framework for Local Government is an improvement tool which supports organisations to enhance performance in delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty. The actions set out in the attached appendices detail activity that directly delivers against the council's Public Sector Equality Duty. An equality impact assessment was undertaken for the Equality Plan 2021-22.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This decision will not have any negative impact on carbon neutrality, but through the consideration of equalities within detailed service planning (as part of the action plan), it should help ensure that all communities are considered in council decisions progressing toward achieving a carbon neutral borough.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
None

List of Background Papers
NA

Contact Bryony Gibbs & Mark Gwynne	Service Insight, Strategy & Inclusion
Telephone No 07710 465612	Email mark.gwynne@wokingham.gov.uk

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