

TITLE	Equality Plan Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 15 th March 2023
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Sally Watkins, Chief Operating Officer

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Equality Plan and accompanying annual action plan helps to ensure that the council continues to meet its equality obligations for the Borough and residents, progressing towards the “Achieving” level of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider progress on delivery of the annual equality action plan and note the proposed actions for 2023/24 aimed at continued progression against the EFLG.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

In March 2021, the Council approved the Equality Plan 2021-25 to deliver a programme of improvements against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The EFLG is a framework of continuous improvement designed help local authorities build equality into all aspects of service delivery and employment. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee received a report at its meeting on 23 February 2022 on the progress achieved in the first year of the programme, together with the action plan for 2022/23. Similarly, this report presents an update on progress made against this year’s annual action plan and sets out proposed actions for the 2023/24 plan.

An effective Cross-Party Working Group is in place to provide strategic oversight of the programme throughout the year.

A self-assessment against the EFLG conducted in December 2022 indicated that the Council was at the ‘Developing’ level of the framework. This means that the organisation had established the building blocks for progression, had made an organisational commitment to improving equality, and was putting in place processes to deliver on equality issues. Delivery of actions in 2021/22 and 2022/23 has consolidated this position and is supporting progress towards the ‘achieving’ standard.

The action plan for 2022/23 comprised 11 actions. Of these, all 11 actions have commenced, with 10 complete or due to be complete by the end of March 2023 and 1 which continues to be underway. Highlights of the action plan are set out within the report and more details provided in Appendix 1. The proposed action plan for 2023/24 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 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.

The equality action plan for 2022/23 comprised 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.

Detail

The 2022/23 equality action plan sought to build on the progress achieved in the first year of the equality programme, consolidating the 'Developing' position of the organisation by continuing to build the necessary supporting infrastructure, knowledge, and skills.

Appendix 1 sets out the progress made against each action thus far. Of the 11 actions within the plan, 10 have started and we are on track to deliver 10 actions by the end of the financial year, with 1 underway and due for completion in 2023/24.

It is important to note that as delivery against the Equality Plan continues, the organisation's equality and inclusion infrastructure is being developed, enabling continued focus through business as usual on some of the key areas targeted through our action plans.

Key achievements of this year thus far include:

- Meetings of the Equality Forum held bimonthly with consideration of key equality 'hot topics'.
- Provision of community grants via the Equality Forum to support grassroots activity to celebrate diversity and address issues of equality.
- Additional support for staff equality network groups, including through the provision of protected time for network leads.

- Embedding issues of equality within the council-wide Customer Excellence training programme.
- Provision of dedicated equality member learning and development sessions and addition of an introductory session within the member induction process.
- Provision of bitesize learning sessions to staff to support celebration of diversity days across the year and raise knowledge and awareness.
- Development of social value approach for housing and regeneration schemes feeding into a corporate policy in next year's plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures. 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)	£165,000		Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£95,425 (carried over from Year 1)		Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	TBC		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
This is a cross-Council programme requiring commitment and activity across all services.

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 2021-25.

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>
There is no direct impact on achieving a carbon neutral Borough, however the equality plan will help ensure that this aspiration is achieved in a just and equitable manner across the diverse communities in the Borough, taking regard of the protected characteristics.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

Contact Bryony Gibbs & Emily Higson	Service Insight, Strategy & Inclusion
Telephone No N/A	Email bryony.gibbs@wokingham.gov.uk