

To: Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date: 28th January 2013 **Item No:**

Report of: Simon Howick
Head of Human Resources and Facilities

Title of Report: Equalities & Diversity: Update report

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

To summarise the progress being made by the Council in increasing the diversity of its workforce

Report approved by: Councillor Bob Price

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to:

- 1. Note the steps already undertaken and those planned to increase the diversity of the Council's workforce**
- 2. Note the encouraging trends made in the numbers of BME applicants for Council vacancies since 2011**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The equalities report in March 2012 focused on the Council's accreditation as an "Achieving" authority under the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and the Council's Corporate Equalities Scheme (updated in 2012) set out an action plan to build on the good work already undertaken. This update report covers the work implemented from April 2012 with specific regard to the commitment to increasing the diversity of our workforce contained within the Corporate Equality Scheme Action Plan.
- 1.2 The Council publishes an Annual Workforce Equalities Report (AWER) shortly after the end of each financial year which will give more detail to the summary below.

2. What we look like in 2012: key data

2.1 The Council has maintained a stable workforce (averaging 1200) during a period of significant economic austerity and financial constraints placed on local authorities. The diversity of the workforce has remained largely consistent during this period, with the gender split remaining roughly 65.5 % Male/ 34.5% Female (principally due to a large direct services business area), and a small increase in BME staff at 6.1%. Disabled staff account for 9/1% of the workforce. The 2012 AWER is available on the Council's website.

2.2 The highlight data from the 2011/ 2012 AWER describes an organisation making progress in attracting more applications from BME communities, but we still need to see higher appointment rates once applicants have been short listed in order to increase our workforce diversity at a greater rate. BME applications almost doubled from 404 in 2010/ 2011 to 794 - 17% of all applications. There were 21 new starters from BME groups representing over 10 % of all new starters which is an improvement. The introduction of on line recruitment in October 2012 through the iTrent system has seen this trend continue, with over a quarter of all applicants from BME groups since October (29%) and 10% appointed overall. Although the overall proportion of BME staff is increasing this is still some way short of reflecting the likely census picture of around 25% of city residents from BME groups. However, the Council has implemented some positive action initiatives in 2012 which are making an impact including:

- Targeted recruitment at underrepresented communities - the recent administrative and trades apprenticeship cohort were recruited under the criteria of living within city postcodes (effectively OX1-OX5) and falling within the 16-19 age range. As part of this successful campaign 50% of the appointed administrative apprentices came from BME communities. In addition, as part of the trades apprentice recruitment, a positive action approach to the interview process was implemented where all BME candidates were guaranteed an interview followed by feedback on their performance.
- Other targeted recruitment such as the Trainee Solicitor role where applications were encouraged from under-represented groups within the city.
- Meeting members of the BME community to build an understanding of what barriers there might be in applying to work, or working for the Council
- Commissioning a 'You Tube' video to myth-bust some of the negative perceptions there may be about working at the Council
- Continuing our regular monthly Work Club which provides opportunities for candidates to get advice on applying for jobs, interview skills, etc. Many of the attendees are from diverse communities.

2.3 Other initiatives planned across the next 3 months include:

- Canvas our BME staff about what it's like to work here and how we can overcome any barriers

- To increase the number of posts where speaking a second language is an “occupational requirement” or desirable criteria as this is likely to open up more posts for BME applicants.
 - To review the Work Club and establish practical links with the new community work clubs in Barton, Littlemore and BBL. From March 2013 the HR team will join these community-based Work Clubs to assist in delivering employability and soft/ communication skills workshops.
 - To find a model to provide “job ready” workshops for city partnership schools; we have already instigated contacts with careers staff at an East Oxford school to progress ideas around delivering employability workshops and group mentoring involving current apprentices, as well as producing a guide to careers at the Council
 - To consider targeted professional development for BME staff through exploring the benefits of affiliating to groups such as the Network for Black Professionals (www.nbp.org.uk) and/or commissioning an in-house Personal Effectiveness Positive Action training workshop from an external provider (www.copeforequality.co.uk).
 - To consider targeted professional for women, facilitating competition for senior management roles.
 - Develop the potential of iTrent reports to run headline equalities assessments by each recruitment campaign; this has been in place since October 2012 but further refinements are being made to enable the production of a single trend report summarising all protected characteristics (available for Heads of Service to monitor on a quarterly basis as an aid to service planning).
 - To make available literacy/ numeracy and ESOL courses providing additional support for existing staff to facilitate greater confidence and career development.
- 2.4 An analysis of the current recruitment data shows positive movements in key areas. With successful annual re-accreditation against the Two Ticks criteria (positive about disabled people - originally gained in 2010) the Council has put in place a central budget to fund any reasonable adjustments for disabled staff, and has seen the numbers of disabled staff growing from 7.4% to 9.1%. This is as a result of both an improved attendance management policy (with training delivered to all managers) and improved occupational health support, both of which have made more staff confident to declare themselves as having a disability under the Equality Act.
- 2.5 Oxford reflects a typical age profile for local government, with 55.4% of staff falling within the 40-49 age groups. The encouraging trend is that 50% of all new starters in 2011/ 2012 were under 35 and that staff under 39 now comprise 37% of the workforce. The continued commitment to apprenticeships will assist this trend.

3. Broader Equality Actions 2012/ 2013

- 3.1 The Oxford Living Wage commitment of £8.01 has been seen as groundbreaking, with Oxford one of 11 accredited local authorities nationally. The current pay negotiations (subject to a ballot of all trade union members) have built in the aspiration to increase the Oxford Living Wage to £8.64 in October 2013 (after an initial 1.5% increase in April 2013). The current pay proposals would provide an incremental

increase for all staff on the bottom point of each grade; positively impacting 489 staff. This is a significant step as the largest numbers of BME staff are represented across bands 4-7 and will benefit directly from this uplift.

- 3.2 Tackling educational inequalities and other new medium term budget commitments such as securing funding for an apprentice cohort to be recruited every two years from 2014, will ensure longer term support for and an opportunity to help underrepresented communities.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no additional financial implications

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Council needs to ensure it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty and this continues to be reflected in the Corporate Equality Scheme

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Council will continue to recruit and retain a workforce at an appropriate accelerated rate that better reflects the local community. By continually reviewing and refining our approach – and taking action – we will build better understanding as to why applications from specific groups might fail or indeed why they are not applying in the first place. Using targeted recruitment and working directly with schools, community based work clubs and other partners will help move use towards our aspiration

Name and contact details of author: Jarlath Brine

List of background papers: None

Version number: 1