

To: City Executive Board
Date: 14 November 2018
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Workforce Equalities Annual Report

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning Workforce Equalities.
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Board Member for Customer Focussed Services
Corporate Priority:	An Efficient and Effective Council
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Draft City Executive Board response to the recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 6 November 2018, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Annual Workforce Equalities Report, prior to consideration by the City Executive Board (CEB) on 14 November. The issue of workforce equalities has remained high on the Committee's agenda in recent years, following a significant piece of work undertaken by the Equality and Diversity Review Group, chaired by Councillor Tom Hayes, in 2016, and subsequent monitoring of the Review Group's recommendations.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Chapman, Board Member for Customer Focussed Services, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Helen Bishop (Head of Business Improvement), Paul Adams (HR and Payroll Manager) and Chris Harvey (Organisational Development Manager) for supporting the meeting.

3. Councillors noted the improved level of trend data made available since it previously considered the issue in March 2018, as requested by the Scrutiny Committee earlier this year, and the Board Member himself as a member of the Committee at that time. The data provided the Committee with a more robust assessment of the profile and diversity of the Council's workforce, and enabled the Committee to identify where improvements needed to be made.

Summary and recommendations

4. As an administrative point, the Committee noted that the Council currently separates Christians and Catholics as part of its monitoring of the diversity of the workforce. The Committee were of the view that Catholics should not be categorised under a separate heading in Oxford.

Recommendation 1 - That the Council does not differentiate between Catholics and Christians in its workforce equalities data.

5. The Committee noted that the 2011 Census data showed that 18.7% of Oxford's economically active population come from an ethnic minority background, excluding full-time students. However, the Workforce Equalities Report notes that only 9% of Council and Oxford Direct Services (ODS) employees are from a BAME group, and this has remained relatively consistent since 2015/16. The lack of BAME representation is particularly acute within ODS, at just 5.8%, whereas the Council achieves a 12% level of representation.
6. In addition to this underrepresentation, the Committee expressed concern that BAME members of staff were overrepresented within lower paid roles, when compared to higher paid roles. The report explained that around 90% of staff from a BAME group are on grade 3 – 7 pay scales, which compares with 66% of staff from a white group.
7. The Committee reemphasised the need for job descriptions and appointment criteria to take account of a person's ability to speak a second language. This was previously a recommendation of the Equality and Diversity Review Group in 2016. The Committee believe that the ability to speak a second language should give a candidate a competitive advantage given the diversity of languages spoken by City residents.
8. The Committee and Board Member agreed that more proactive work is needed to address the need for greater diversity within the workforce. It is noted that the Equalities Action Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21 provides a clearer steer towards this aim, but members were still unsure of how much impact this work would have. A suggestion the Committee had for improving the diversity of applicants' concerned recruitment activities that better engage with a diverse range of prospective candidates.

Recommendation 2 - That the Council explores opportunities to improve its engagement with the BAME population within Oxford through existing tools such as job fairs, for example.

9. The Committee believes, as the report acknowledges, that there may be unconscious bias influencing the amount of BAME applicants that are recruited,

and that unconscious bias training would be welcome to address this. Unconscious bias may be having an influence on recruitment given that 19% of white applicants are appointed, but only 7% of BAME applicants are appointed.

10. The Committee also noted that there was an underrepresentation of women in senior roles within the Council’s workforce (excluding ODS), evidenced by there being a higher proportion of men in all positions graded 10 and above. The Committee advocated a greater focus on ensuring women were fairly represented within the senior officer recruitment process and ensuring that recruiters are appropriately briefed on this. The Committee welcomed assurances that in future, Councillors who sit on the Appointments Committee for senior appointments would be given appropriate training in relation to workforce representation.
11. In order to have a better understanding of unconscious bias within the organisation, it would be useful to gather feedback from people currently working for the organisation, and those planning to leave, on how they feel they have been treated. Do people feel that their protected characteristics (in particular race and gender) have in anyway disadvantaged them in their career with the Council?
12. The Committee note that for current employees, they may personally have doubts over whether providing such feedback may disadvantage them in their career, particularly in circumstances where they may be critical of their line manager for example. It is therefore suggested that mechanisms are put in place for people to provide this type of feedback in an anonymised way. The information gathered can then be used to help identify and overcome any barriers to recruitment and career progression for underrepresented groups.

Recommendation 3 - That the Council ensures it has robust processes in place to gather feedback from employees who are leaving the organisation, and whether their treatment in relation to any protected characteristics was a factor in their decision to leave. Consideration should also be given to facilitating a ‘safe space’ where current employees can feedback about sensitive employment matters, such as barriers experienced by under-represented groups.

Further consideration

13. The Committee will continue to monitor workforce equalities data annually.

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