

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 November 2019
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services
Corporate Priority:	Efficient Effective Council
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 05 November 2019, the Scrutiny Committee considered the report concerning the Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Helen Bishop, Head of Business

Improvement, for compiling the report and supporting the meeting, and Paul Adams, HR and Payroll Manager, for supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. The Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, Councillor Nigel Chapman, introduced the report.
4. It was reported that good progress is being made in increasing the proportion of the Council's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees. The number of BAME candidates is increasing and twice as many new starters are declaring that they are from the BAME community as in the recent past (18.03% in 2018/19 compared to 8.75% in 2016/17). Much more needs to be done however, both to increase the proportion of BAME employees (so as provide a closer match to City's overall demographics) and, more urgently, to increase the proportion of BAME employees holding senior positions. Similar efforts are needed to increase the proportion of women holding senior positions.
5. Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, said a "step change" is needed in relation to the employment of those from the BAME community and women as described by Councillor Chapman. To do this there would be a focus on the existing BAME and female workforce, combined with some targeted recruitment of apprentices and graduates.
6. In response to the report presented the Committee's particular areas of scrutiny focused on a number of key areas:
 - Steps to reduce structural bias in recruitment and promotion
 - Means of engaging BAME communities
 - The Council's equality duty as a company shareholder, particularly with regards to Oxford Direct Services
 - The level of non-disclosure by staff regarding sexual orientation
 - Data reliability and the impact on future targets
7. The Committee makes eight recommendations.

Structural bias in recruitment and promotion

8. Though recognising the near-complete absence of BAME and relative absence of women in higher positions at the Council, the Committee welcomed the conclusion of the Head of Business Improvement that from interrogation of the data there was no single, clear cause or area of discrimination which was causing the imbalances. A corollary of this was, however, that responses to the issue would have to be holistic rather than focused, and consider less visible or easily identified forms of discrimination – structural and unconscious.
9. One particular challenge identified was that of how organisational culture could be changed to develop internal female and BAME senior managers or appoint them from outside whilst the majority of those making decisions about training, development and recruitment were white males. One suggestion presented concerned developing a

mentoring scheme for female and BAME staff drawing on internal expertise but also drawing on the relevant experience available externally.

10. Committee members queried BAME representation on recruitment panels, particularly for high-level but officer-appointed roles, such as heads of service. Such roles were recognised as being influential in shaping organisational culture, but in light of the unrepresentative demographics at the top of the Council, unconscious bias could potentially make the appointment of BAME candidates less likely.
11. Though it is noted that the Council does seek to include a diversity of representation through the makeup of its stakeholder interviews, the Committee questions whether this may be sufficient to overcome the disadvantage of unconscious bias BAME candidates face. Increased BAME representation on interview panels, brought in from externally if necessary, may be proportionate to counterbalance this disadvantage. Oxford University has been identified as a local organisation which has successfully increased the number of BAME candidates in senior positions. It is also the view of the Committee that whilst less acute an issue in the Council than BAME representation at senior levels, this reasoning could equally apply to addressing the number of women in senior roles.

Recommendation 1: That consideration is given to the suitability of the Council's current policy in regards to BAME and female representation on officer-led recruitment panels, particularly with reference to the recruitment of heads of service.

12. In discussion about appointments to senior roles such as Director and Head of Service, which are partially organised through recruitment agencies, the feedback that there was an expectation that shortlists should include BAME and female candidates was welcomed. It may be the case that this, and the challenging of agencies which do not offer diverse shortlists, is an example of good practice rather than a proactive decision of the Council to ensure such practice is embedded. The Committee supports a formalisation of the Council's commitment to avoiding all-male or all-white shortlists for senior positions.

Recommendation 2: That when making appointments to Director and Head of Service level that the Council expressly shares its expectation to relevant recruitment agencies that shortlists will include women and BAME candidates.

13. The Committee recognises the progress made in delivering training to all staff - and managers particularly - on diversity issues. It is felt, however, that further benefit would be delivered in increasing awareness of structural discrimination and ways to identify and address it. What is meant by this is the ways in which shared cultural experiences and expectations of those in a decision-making majority can coalesce into an organisational culture which unwittingly creates additional barriers to those who do not share those cultural experiences.

Recommendation 3: That all managers, particularly senior managers, be given structural discrimination training

14. The importance of having independent, HR-led exit interviews is also recognised as being an important opportunity to capture candid feedback on the reasons people, including women and BAME candidates, leave the organisation, and to identify areas of structural discrimination. It is felt that this is a particularly pertinent source of

information because of the likelihood that those facing structural discrimination, for example not getting promotions, are likely to leave the organisation to fulfil their ambitions.

Means of engaging BAME communities

15. The Committee welcomed the efforts made to reach out to BAME communities through roadshows and CV-writing support and positive results seen in the increase in the proportion of new starters and the workforce as a whole from BAME communities. However, the Committee did also identify some suggestions for further improvement.
16. It was noted that in their roles as Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and Sheriff the Council's civic office holders are regularly invited to meet varied communities, including BAME groups, often with significant numbers of people attending. Civic office holders are therefore well placed to share information around job opportunities at the Council with demographic target communities.
17. It is the view of the Committee that civic office holders should be enabled to contribute towards this agenda by being provided with up to date information on the opportunities available and that the provision of such information would act as an encouragement and reminder to do so.

Recommendation 4: That briefings on current outreach and employment opportunities be provided to civic office holders, with details to include i) the support available to BAME groups to make applications to work at the Council, ii) upcoming job fairs and other events, and iii) upcoming apprenticeship and graduate placements

18. Whilst valuable, it was felt that outreach support by the Council such as CV-writing workshops did tend to focus on particular BAME communities, and did not impact across the diversity within those BAME communities. Whilst publicising such events through umbrella organisations such as the Oxfordshire Council for Racial Equality was suggested as a partial solution, it was recognised that events providing such support do tend to attract people from a narrow range of potential beneficiaries and often from only one community group. As such, it is the recommendation of the Committee that more events, specifically BAME careers fairs, be run.

Recommendation 5: That the Council extends the number of targeted BAME-focused careers fairs to reach different BAME communities

The Council's equality duties as a shareholder

19. In discussing the impact of the founding of Oxford Direct Services on tracking trends in the reported year on year figures, the Committee also considered what should be the appropriate response to the Council's duties and goals in its capacity as a shareholder.
20. Though recognised to be demographically different to the Council, it was discussed whether the Council should require Oxford Direct Services to adhere to the Workforce Equalities Action Plan. From discussion it was concluded that though it was the Council's role to ensure that the workforce of Oxford Direct Services did reflect the

community it serves, it should not abide by the Council's own action plan but be allowed to chart its own way to the same destination.

21. It is the recommendation of the Committee that ODS should contribute towards the Council's aims for a workforce reflective of its community, and that progress towards this should form a regular part of assessing ODS performance.

Recommendation 6: That Oxford Direct Services is held to the same equality standards as the Council, and that it should make regular reports on actions taken towards and progress against equality goals to the shareholder

Non-disclosure by staff regarding sexual orientation

22. The Committee considered the level of non-disclosure of sexual orientation referenced in section 5(d) of the report. Though appendix 1, data table 9 did show year on year increases in the number of staff declaring as gay or bisexual and (in data table 8) that these are represented at levels significantly above the general population, nevertheless, the combined total of the 'not specified' and 'prefer not to say' categories remains high, at over a quarter (almost 27%).
23. The Committee does not draw any conclusions from this non-disclosure figure in relation to the degree to which the Council provides a LGBT-friendly workplace culture due to the multiple possible causes which may contribute towards it. It does, however, note that the figure represents a significant knowledge gap which the Council would benefit from addressing.

Recommendation 7: To investigate the reasons for the high rate of non-disclosure over sexual orientation, and consider whether as part of that work to engage with the Stonewall Workforce Equality Index.

Data Reliability

24. Whilst the Committee recognises that the 2011 census data remains the most reliable source of information regarding the proportion of economically active local residents, it is conscious that the information is now significantly out of date meaning that actual ethnic figures may be significantly above the current level of 18.7%. It is possible that a sharp increase in the number of BAME staff members may be required to mirror the demographics of the city. It is the recommendation of the Committee that preparation be made now to support more ambitious targets in the future.

Recommendation 8: Before new census data are released learning on which approaches are and are not successful in attracting BAME staff is captured to inform recruitment strategies.

Further Consideration

25. The Council's annual reporting on the equality and diversity of its workforce will ensure the Committee has the opportunity to include this topic in its work plan in future years. Due to the gradual nature of changes to the workforce composition, it is not expected that the topic will be revisited prior to the publication of the next Workforce Equality Report.

26. It is anticipated that the Companies Scrutiny Panel would be the appropriate forum for scrutiny of ODS equality reporting.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 05/11/2019 concerning Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan

Provided by the Cabinet member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, Councillor Nigel Chapman

15

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That consideration is given to the suitability of the Council's current policy in regards to BAME and female representation on officer-led recruitment panels, particularly with reference to the recruitment of heads of service.	Agree	
2) That when making appointments to Director and Head of Service level that the Council expressly shares its expectation to relevant recruitment agencies that shortlists will include women and BAME candidates.	Agree	
3) That all managers, particularly senior managers, be given structural discrimination training	Agree	
4) That briefings on current outreach and employment opportunities be provided to civic office holders, with details to include i) the support available to BAME groups to make applications to work at the Council, ii) upcoming job fairs and other events, and iii) upcoming apprenticeship and graduate placements	Agree	
5) That the Council extends the number of targeted BAME-focused careers fairs to reach different BAME communities	Agree	
6) That Oxford Direct Services is held to the same equality standards as the Council, and that it should make regular reports on actions taken towards and progress against equality goals to the shareholder	Agree	
7) To investigate the reasons for the high rate of non-disclosure over sexual orientation, and consider whether as part of that work to engage with the Stonewall Workforce Equality Index.	Agree	

Date of Cabinet Meeting: 13/11/19

8) Before new census data are released learning on which approaches are and are not successful in attracting BAME staff is captured to inform recruitment strategies.	Agree	
--	-------	--