

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 09 December 2020  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Workplace Equalities and Action Plan

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan report
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Joe McManners, vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

### **Introduction and overview**

1. At its meeting on 01 December 2020, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services for presenting the report, and Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, for authoring the report and answering questions.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, introduced the report. The report fulfilled a statutory requirement and the data within it were up until March 2020. The data only related to Council activity and did not include those for Oxford Direct Services (ODS). It was important as an employer that the Council should set a good example of practice in the matters covered by the report. It was important to note that the Council was now developing an improved Equality, Diversion & Inclusion Strategy, which extended well beyond just workplace equality matters. As a result of the pandemic, communication with the many and varied communities within the City had been improved and this was, in turn informing the development of that strategy. The three year workforce plan of 2018-21 had two main areas of focus, to increase the level of BAME representation in the workforce overall and to ensure that there were more women in positions of senior management.
4. Alongside the requirement to publish details about the gender pay gap, the Council had decided to publish details of the ethnicity pay gap, on a voluntary basis. In 2021 the Council would also publish details of the disability pay gap, also on a voluntary basis.
5. In relation to BAME representation, the growth of the previous year had been consolidated at about 13% at March 2020. A significant issue in relation to BAME employees was retention, with more or less equal numbers of arrivals and departures. Enquiries of the 15 most recent leavers indicated that two thirds of them had left for reasons of promotion or geography, where appropriate development or adjustments to contracts were offered. The number of BAME applicants was increasing year on year and it seemed likely that the Council's activity with communities during the pandemic would increase that number still further. About 7% (c. 60 -70 employees) of staff choose not to declare their ethnicity when asked and a good number of those may be from BAME communities.
6. In relation to women in senior positions within the organisation the position remained more or less static with no obvious likelihood of reaching the 50% level in the foreseeable future.
7. The gender pay gap data is necessarily driven by the predominance of women in lower grades. The gap is unlikely to be narrowed until there are more women in more senior positions. On a more positive note however, the pay gap is about 5% better than the national equivalent.
8. The ethnicity pay gap is, once again, driven by the distribution of employees across different roles in the Council and unlikely to be narrowed in the absence of an increase in the number of BAME employees in senior positions.
9. More work would be done on the intersectionality between the different data sets in the following year.
10. The Committee's discussion and suggestions in response to the report focused on the recording of mental illness, the granularity of ethnicity data, the benefits of exit interviews, co-production being a means of improving the Council's visibility amongst under-represented groups amongst the staff, possible reasons for non-

disclosure of race, religion or sexuality, and specific demographic groups the Council might wish to target more.

11. Though not making a recommendation regarding it, the Committee wishes it be known that it is entirely supportive of the Council's decision to publish its ethnicity pay gap and its proposals to include a disability pay gap and intersectional analysis in future iterations. The Committee considers this work to be of significant importance, and would encourage a similar exercise to be undertaken for Oxford Direct Services at a suitable point.
12. The Committee makes a total of five recommendations, making specific recommendations on ways to improve learning about the experience of minoritised groups, ways to understand the identities of the Council's workforce better, and promotion of the Council as a workplace for specific groups.

### **Improving the feedback from minoritised employees**

13. One particularly powerful tool in hearing the experience of all staff, but those from minority groups in particular, was endorsed by the Committee: exit interviews. These were deemed central to the understanding of why people leave the organisation but for them to be effective, employees must have confidence in them. The Committee welcomed the news that the proportion of leavers taking part in exit interviews was increasing, but would like to see it become standard. The HR function's assumption of the role of 'honest broker' had been key to the progress thus far, suggesting trust is a particularly important factor. The Committee therefore encourages the Council to continue progress in building an environment in which it is natural for staff to participate in exit interviews when they leave the organisation.

#### ***Recommendation 1: That the Council continues its work to foster an environment in which staff members feel confident to participate in exit interviews as a matter of course***

14. The Committee noted the efforts of the Council in recording the sexual and gender identity of staff. However, the approach taken by the Council at present did not fully reflect the diversity of options available. Implementing the practices recommended by Stonewall in its Do Ask, Do Tell report<sup>1</sup> would be to adopt best practice in the area and may, it is hoped, increase engagement by LGBTQ+ staff members in self-declaring.

#### ***Recommendation 2: That the Council adopts practices for recording sexual and gender insight in line with Stonewall's guidance***

15. The Committee was not unanimous in its attitude towards individuals self-declaring their racial, sexual or religious identities. Some interpreted the issue as primarily being one in which staff members felt their demographic profile was not relevant to their ability to do their job (and so a positive) whilst others felt that it suggested an uncertainty over the safety in making such a declaration. The Committee was unanimous, however, in wishing that the Council could reduce

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/do\\_ask\\_do\\_tell\\_guide\\_2016.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/do_ask_do_tell_guide_2016.pdf)

the number of people not self-declaring for negative reasons. It suggests that the first step in this work is to work out what the reasons are for non-disclosure, before being able to address those which are negative.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council investigates the barriers to individuals disclosing their ethnicity, sexuality and faith-based identities***

### **Specific Targets for Promotion of the Council as an Employer**

16. The Committee's wider discussion of the fact that two thirds of recent BAME leavers had done so on the basis of promotion or geography noted a number of issues. Firstly, that the City itself is more diverse than its surrounding area; if BAME recruitment is to be increased without going outside Oxfordshire then the best payback would be promotion of the Council as an employer within the City. Whilst recruiting from an area beyond Oxfordshire would increase the number of suitable candidates, doing so would likely run counter to the Council's carbon reduction aims. The Committee considers, therefore, that promotional efforts around recruitment should be focused primarily within the City.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council continues to increase the promotion of itself as an employer to those within the City***

17. Whilst the high turnover of BAME candidates for promotion reasons suggests that there are other areas of work to be undertaken to increase BAME worker numbers at the Council, it is important to ensure at least that BAME workers leaving are at least replaced by other BAME workers. It is the suggestion of the Committee that the Council's recruitment approaches towards BAME women in particular may benefit from additional focus.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council further develops communications and recruitment approaches to target women from minoritised backgrounds***

### **Further Consideration**

18. It is anticipated that the Committee will wish to see this item return next civic year, but no further consideration will be given in the current year.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 01/12/2020 concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan report**

**Response provided by Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, Nigel Chapman**

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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>1) That the Council continues its work to foster an environment in which staff members feel confident to participate in exit interviews as a matter of course</b>	Agreed	Progress to date has already increased the percentage of leavers taking up exit interviews from less than 30% to circa 55% by the end of March 2020. We wish to see this percentage increase. The more accurate information we can gather from departing employees as to their reasons the better we can tailor our policies and working practices to encourage talented individuals to stay with us.
<b>2) That the Council adopts practices for recording sexual and gender insight in line with Stonewall's guidance</b>	Agreed	Stonewall uses anonymous surveys and recommends taking a snapshot of employees at different parts of the employee life cycle. Hence this approach is not all about getting staff to declare, it is also about using other insight channels to understand issues.
<b>3) That the Council investigates the barriers to individuals disclosing their ethnicity, sexuality and faith-based identities</b>	Agreed	
<b>4) That the Council continues to increase the promotion of itself as an employer to those within the City</b>	Agreed	This will build on existing good practice that was in operation pre Covid where the Council was using a variety of approaches to promote job opportunities within the local community, including: holding recruitment roadshows in local community venues; attendance at local job fairs and careers events in local schools. The next cohort of apprentices will be introduced into the organisation in the coming year and will naturally provide an opportunity to

		promote the Council as a relevant and viable employer.
<b>5) That the Council further develops communications and recruitment approaches to target women from minoritised backgrounds</b>	Agreed	Each recruitment campaign is currently reviewed to ensure that the vacancy attracts as diverse a group of applicants as possible. Further improvements are planned to improve the skills of under-represented staff; to use local community pathways to advertise and promote opportunities and to ensure diversity at each stage in the recruitment process.