

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 December 2023
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Equalities Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lucy Pegg, Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 04 December 2023 to consider a report concerning an Equalities Update. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 13 December 2023, recommends that Cabinet approves the Workforce Equality Report 2023 and reports on the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap for 2023; along with granting delegated authority to the Head of Business Improvement to publish the relevant documents.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Chapman (Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies), Helen Bishop (Head of Business Improvement) and Gail Malkin (Head of People) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies introduced the report. The report was an annual update containing information that the Council was obliged to publish every year in accordance with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. The reporting formed part of the Council's overall People Strategy, which defined the Council's workforce ambition; and ongoing work was being done to improve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion lens that the Council was applying as part of the People Strategy.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to minority ethnic group representation within the workforce; number of applications versus appointments of individuals from minority ethnic groups; reflections on whether the workforce reflects the diversity of Oxford's local population; reporting on the sexual orientation pay gap; support for staff identifying as Trans and/or Non-Binary; staff engagement with 'Lunch and Learn' sessions; targets relating to workforce representation; key achievements in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the past year; staff recruitment and retention; career trajectories within the Council of individuals from minority ethnic groups; the availability of comparative benchmarking data from other local authorities; Oxford Direct Services' Gender Pay Gap; the definition of the 'Economically Active Population' of Oxford; and ensuring the Council is a welcoming and inclusive workplace.
5. In particular, the Committee discussed the reported increase in applications from individuals from minority ethnic groups but noted there had been no notable increase in ethnic minority group representation within the Council's workforce. The Committee was interested in understanding the point at which these applications were unsuccessful and agreed that the Council could do more to gather data on this, which would aid improvements over subsequent years.

Recommendation 1: That the Council surveys unsuccessful job applicants relating to equalities issues and surveys appointing managers as to why unsuccessful applicants were not recruited in order to improve the Council's data and insight into workforce equalities issues at the recruitment stage.

6. The Committee also noted that the Council had a target of 15% by 2024 for representation of minority ethnic groups in the workforce, but during discussion agreed that if a more ambitious target was set then the pace of improving representation of minority ethnic groups within the workforce would increase.

Recommendation 2: That the Council sets a higher, more ambitious target for the representation of minority ethnic groups within the workforce to increase the pace of improving representation.

7. During discussion on ethnic minority and religious representation within the workforce, the Committee agreed that it was imperative for the Council to identify, review and address any cultural and physical barriers to recruitment – for example availability of prayer rooms for staff who follow the Islamic faith. The Committee was of the view that particular attention should be paid to the reasons for under-

representation within the workforce of Muslim staff and how any barriers to recruitment and retention of Muslim staff could be identified and addressed.

Recommendation 3: That the Council explores the reasons for under-representation of Muslim staff within the workforce and works to identify and address barriers to the recruitment and retention of Muslim staff.

8. The Committee noted that, following a recommendation made in the previous year, the Council had introduced Trans and Non-Binary options for personal data collected via application forms and workforce monitoring. On reflection, the Committee agreed that it would be appropriate to expand the Trans option to include an option to select Trans Man or Trans Woman, rather than just Trans in a broad sense.

Recommendation 4: That the Council expands the gender identity options within its application forms and workforce monitoring to include options for Trans Man and Trans Woman.

9. When discussing current recruitment practices, the Committee noted responses to questions that, when applicants applied for a role at the Council through submitting a CV as opposed to the online application form, the Council did not collect Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data from those applicants. The Committee agreed that this data should be routinely collected, regardless of whether an applicant applied through submitting a CV or an online application form.
10. The Committee also noted that many workplaces anonymised applications during shortlisting processes, however this was not a practice currently employed by the Council. The Committee agreed that anonymising applications would be beneficial to the Council's recruitment processes in order to avoid biases.

Recommendation 5: That the Council routinely collects Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data from all job applicants, regardless of the application route they take (e.g. CV or online application form).

Recommendation 6: That the Council anonymises job application forms during the shortlisting process for all applications going forward.

11. The Committee was interested in the career trajectory over time of individuals within the workforce and, during discussion, agreed that it would be helpful for the Council to map (anonymised) career trajectory over time for individuals with a protected characteristic so that opportunities for progression and retention within the organisation in relation to equalities and representation could be understood in a broad sense. It was noted that this could be a difficult piece of work to get right, however the Committee was of the view that it was worth exploring how this could be done.

Recommendation 7: That the Council maps the career trajectory over time for individuals within the workforce with a protected characteristic; to include information such as length of service, pay grade, age and protected characteristic.

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