

To: Cabinet
Date: 21 January 2025
Report of: Head of People Services
Title of Report: Workforce Equality Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	<p>To share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan</p> <p>To present and seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2024/2025, the Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report.</p>
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Corporate plan 2024 - 2028
Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
<p>Approve the contents of the Workforce Equality Report 2024/2025;</p> <p>Delegate authority to the Head of People to publish the Workforce Equality Report and to make any typographical changes and any changes as may be required before publication to reflect the Cabinet decision;</p> <p>Approve the contents of the Gender Pay Gap, Ethnicity Pay Gap and Disability Pay Gap reports for this year; and</p> <p>Delegate authority to the Head of People to publish the Gender Pay Gap table at paragraph 30 before 30 March 2026, the Ethnicity Pay Gap table at paragraph 40 and the Disability Pay Gap table at paragraph 47 on the Council website.</p>	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Workforce Equality Report (2025)
Appendix 2	Gender Pay Gap and Distribution of Council staff by Grade, Gender and Age.
Appendix 3	Ethnicity Pay Gap and Distribution of Council staff by Grade and Ethnicity
Appendix 4	Disability Pay Gap and Distribution of Council staff by Grade and Disability

Introduction

1. In 2022 the Council launched its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, developed using the Local Government Association Equalities Framework, which outlines four areas of focus for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
 - Understanding and Working with our Communities
 - Leadership and Organisational Commitment
 - Responsive Services and Customer Care
 - Diverse and Engaged Workforce
2. The Council's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion influences how it works with its residents, staff, and elected members. The Council wishes to have a workforce that reflects the community it serves, and to be seen as an employer of choice that values and draws strength from diversity.
3. This report is focused on the Council's workforce. However, it is important to recognise the wider context of the Council's equalities work and how workforce equalities fits within the strategic framework.
4. The People Strategy is a plan that considers the current challenges facing the Council, and sets objectives designed to build a high-performing organisation that meets the needs of the community it serves.
5. The People Strategy also aims to support the Council's planned work against its five priorities:
 - Good, affordable homes
 - Strong, fair economy
 - Thriving communities
 - Zero carbon Oxford
 - A well-run council

Workforce Equalities Report

6. The Council is an employer committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce and providing an inclusive environment with equality of opportunity and equity for all employees. The Council is also committed to making sure its workforce is representative of the diverse population it serves.
7. The Workforce Equalities Report (WER), presented at Appendix 1 is an annual report that the Council is obliged to publish every year under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act). The WER provides an update on equalities-related activities. It is a 'snapshot' of how diverse the workforce is, what recruitment has taken place and contains data trend analysis for a three-year period (1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025). The WER also provides comparative population data and a breakdown of the Council's staffing in relation to key equalities reporting areas.
8. The WER covers key aspects of the employment lifecycle and highlights what the Council has done to increase the diversity of its workforce, in addition to embedding the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010 best practice.
9. The main items to note are as follows:
 - Over the reporting period, the total number of new starters joining the Council was 98 in 2022/23 and 135 in 2023/24. In 2024/25 the number was 123. This slight decrease is reflective of a reduction in employee turnover.
 - The data shows that the proportion of female applicants has stayed the same as the previous year at around 51% however, the proportion of female applicants appointed has increased by 10% from 57% to 67%.
 - There was an increase of 2% in applicants from minority ethnic groups and 24% of new starters were from minority ethnic groups. This is a higher figure than the previous year of 18.5%.
 - Data indicates an increase from 14.8% to 16.5% in the representation of employees from minority ethnic groups in the workforce. The current target is 17%.
 - Since the last report the number of women in management roles has increased by 4% to 52%, however, this is not reflective of the total representation of women in the council which is 60%.
 - The proportion of the managers from minority ethnic groups has decreased by 4% and is now 6%. It must be noted that a significant proportion of employees (22%) have not declared their ethnicity, so an accurate picture is not available.
 - There has been an increase within people in management roles declaring they have a disability from 5% last year to 7%. The number who have not declared personal data is 26%, an increase from last year of 2%.
 - The proportion of managers who are part time has increased from 9% to 14% all of which are female. There is no data on all flexible working patterns open to staff.

Key achievements in the last 12 months include:

Equality Impact Assessment Training

10. The Equality Impact Assessment training aimed at equipping staff with the tools to consider equality implications in their work was successfully launched. This training was delivered to a select number of officers, as recommended by Service Directors. There will be more of this training in 2026.

Positive Action Policy

11. A Positive Action policy was created and launched to guide managers and officers in supporting inclusion and to allow the Council to become more representative of the diverse communities it serves. This has included changes to recruitment guidance.

Lunch and Learn Programme

12. The Council's "Lunch and Learn" sessions continue to thrive, with increased participation and positive feedback from staff. A recent survey highlighted the value of these sessions, particularly with praise for the Trans Awareness session, which sparked meaningful dialogue with the Trans community within the Council's workforce. Over 700 staff have attended the lunch and learn sessions since March 2024.

School Engagement and Student Placements

13. The Council hosted students from its target schools, Oxford Academy and Grey Friars, all of whom reported a positive and enriching experience. Additionally, some interview techniques workshops were delivered at these schools, supporting students' career readiness.

University of Oxford and Oxfordshire County Council Collaboration

14. In partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, two students from the University of Oxford were welcomed through the Local Policy Lab. They contributed to a valuable report around Pay Gap analyses and recommendations that supports the Council's ongoing work.

Aspiring Managers Programme

15. This positive action initiative is designed to improve representation of women and minority ethnic groups in management roles by providing a talent pipeline. An outcome will be a reduction in pay gaps. This leadership development programme was delivered to a second cohort. There has been tangible success from the first programme, with six participants progressing into higher-level roles. Each credited the programme as a key factor in their development and advancement.

EDI Audit

16. The Council's performance against the Equality Framework for Local Government was subject to an internal audit, with an overall positive report. Strengths recognised were the positive action policy, inclusive recruitment initiatives, Disability Confident employer status, engagement with staff networks, the health & wellbeing policy and interventions driven by data.

EDI staff survey

17. Working with the Reach network (Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage), a new survey to measure staff attitudes to diversity and inclusion and collect data on any experiences of discrimination, bullying and harassment was designed and delivered. 96% of respondents said the Council values diversity and 91% said the work environment is safe and inclusive. Some employees reported that they had experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination and work is underway with staff networks on actions to address this.

Annual staff survey results

18. The annual staff engagement survey shows that 94% of 684 survey respondents agreed with the statement "At the Council, I think differences are respected, irrespective of things such as ethnicity, gender, disability, age and sexual orientation". This stayed the same as last year. There was an increase of 4% in results for: "I feel like I belong here at the Council" with 88% agreeing with this statement, compared to 84% last year.

The WER sets out our priority aims and specific actions for 2025/26:

Future Commitments to Diversity and Inclusion

19. The Council remains dedicated to enhancing the diversity of its workforce and fostering an inclusive culture. Initiatives will focus on inclusive recruitment, leadership development, and building a deeper understanding of employee experiences.

Inclusive Recruitment Practices

20. To attract and retain a more diverse pool of candidates, achieve better representation of women and minority ethnic groups at senior levels of the organisation and address current pay gaps, the Council will:

- Monitor the impact of its newly implemented anonymised application forms, aimed to reduce unconscious bias in recruitment.
- Continue to strengthen inclusive hiring practices across service areas by analysing workforce profile data and continuing to train managers in inclusive recruitment practices.
- Monitor the impact of the Positive Action Policy.

Leadership Development, Practices and Culture

21. Building on existing EDI training, the Council is:

- Designing and delivering tailored Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training for senior leaders to embed inclusive decision making at the highest levels
- Developing a deeper understanding of employee experiences using the results of its new EDI survey and working with staff networks on actions coming out of the survey. Reporting on EDI workforce data by service area on a quarterly basis will build leadership ownership and accountability and help to identify areas for additional support.

To better understand and support our workforce, the Council will:

22. Enhance the collection of personal data through improved people processes, ensuring data is used ethically and transparently. Staff are encouraging to participate in recording their personal data and some targeted work and reporting by service area has been completed.
23. Continue to gather data on employee experience and opinion in partnership with staff networks to inform future actions.
24. Work closely with Union colleagues and the Council's equality and diversity lead.
25. Improve awareness and understanding of the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming people and the challenges they face.

Gender Pay Gap

26. The Council is required under the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 to publish an annual report that provides details of the Council's gender pay gap using a number of key measures: basic pay; bonus; the proportion of male and females receiving a bonus; and pay quartile data (basic pay) for male and female staff. Due to the Government's gender pay reporting cycle, the pay data that the Council must publish by 30 March 2026 relates to Council pay data at the 'snapshot date' of 31 March 2025.
27. Gender pay gap reporting is based on two calculation methods. The first uses the hourly rate of pay for male and female staff for the following reporting indices:
 - Mean* gender pay gap (basic pay)
 - Median** gender pay gap (basic pay)
 - Pay Quartiles by gender are also reported.
 - * The mean hourly rate is calculated by totalling the hourly rates of all employees and dividing by the number of employees.
 - ** The median hourly rate is the middle value when all hourly rates are placed in order from lowest to highest.
28. The second method relates to reporting on the bonus pay gap. However, the Council does not currently make any bonus payments so has no data to report for this element.
29. For the pay gap, the difference between average male and average female pay is expressed as a percentage. The percentage gap is that in favour of men. If the pay gap is in favour of women, this is expressly stated or shown as a negative figure.
30. The Council's gender pay gap details for the snapshot date of 31st March 2025 is shown below along with the percentage of men and women in each pay quartile.

Gender Pay Reports as of 31 March 2025

Gender Pay Gap comparisons between 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2025

31 March 2025

31 March 2024

Mean gender pay gap (basic pay)	10.1%
Median gender pay gap (basic pay)	3.1%
Mean gender bonus gap	0%
Median gender bonus gap	0%
Proportion males receiving a bonus	0%
Proportion females receiving a bonus	0%

Mean gender pay gap (basic pay)	6.5%
Median gender pay gap (basic pay)	0.0%
Mean gender bonus gap	0%
Median gender bonus gap	0%
Proportion males receiving a bonus	0%
Proportion females receiving a bonus	0%

Pay Quartiles by Gender

31 March 2025

Quartile	Males %	Females %
Top	54.59	45.41
Upper Middle	36.71	63.29
Lower Middle	33.82	66.18
Lower	32.04	67.96

31 March 2024

Quartile	Males %	Females %
Top	51.03	48.97
Upper Middle	45.88	54.12
Lower Middle	30.41	69.59
Lower	36.08	63.92

31. The mean gender pay gap has increased from 6.5% in 2024 to 10.1% in 2025, in favour of men. This measure is considered less reliable as it is more readily influenced by changes at either extreme in the data set.
32. The median gender pay gap has increased from 0.0% in 2024 to 3.1% in 2025. This is the more reliable measure. The Office for National Statistics reports annually on the national gender pay gap. The overall median gender pay gap is 12.8% in the UK as of April 2025.
33. A number of factors will have caused the increase in the gender pay gap. There is a greater proportion of women in the lower pay quartile. The Council is now recruiting more women, up by 10% overall. The proportion of women in the most senior roles has reduced but numbers have increased significantly in the upper middle quartile. It is disappointing that the gender pay gap has increased but it remains low compared to the UK pay gap and there is positive news around recruitment and progression to the upper middle quartile. One factor is that new starters will have been recruited at the grade minimum, which will impact the pay gap as there are more female new starters. Also, female new starters in the lowest pay quartile is up by 20%, so there are more women at the lowest pay levels. Our ongoing EDI work

supports improved representation of women and so will address the gender pay gap.

34. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Appendix 2 show the distribution of staff by grade, gender, employment type and age. The high number of part-time females contributes to the Council's gender pay gaps as a greater proportion of females work part time, and part-time work is more often seen at lower grades: 34% of females work part time compared to 12% of males.
35. The table below shows the Council's mean hourly rate of pay for part-time female staff is £20.41 (higher than male equivalent) and the median rate is £18.98 (same as male equivalent). There is no pay gap for part-time staff in favour of men. As more women work part time, women are more likely to advance their careers and increase their earnings whilst remaining part time.
36. The mean pay gap for full-time roles is in favour of men (8.6%). The median pay gap is 0% for the full-time group, indicating equal earnings at the midpoint. As there is an overall pay gap in favour of men for all staff, there is an uneven distribution of men and women across the range of pay levels. In addition to the impact of lower-paid part-time work which is occupied by more women.

Employment	Average	Pay Gap	Average Female Salary (per hour)	Average Male Salary (per hour)
Full Time	Mean	8.6%	£22.42	£24.35
Part Time	Mean	-2.8%	£20.41	£19.86
Full Time	Median	0%	£21.57	£21.57
Part Time	Median	0%	£18.98	£18.98

Ethnicity Pay Gap

37. Ethnicity pay gap reporting remains voluntary. The Council has published ethnicity pay gap data since 2020. The Government has published guidance for employers on reporting the ethnicity pay gap. The guidance uses the same methodology that is used for calculating the gender pay gap. This is the method that the Council has and will continue to use to calculate the Council's ethnicity pay gap. The provision of ethnicity data is voluntary and, for the Council's workforce, 13.4% of employees have not shared data about their ethnicity. For this report the categories have been grouped into three classifications:

- Minority ethnic groups

- Majority white ethnic groups
- Not known

38. It is important to note that, whilst the classifications have been grouped to provide a useful overview, this does not inhibit the Council from undertaking a deep dive to better understand the impact at a specific ethnicity level. However, it is worth noting that given the size of the smaller groups, it is important to be careful in how the information is interpreted and compared. The Government guidance recommends that when calculating data, it should be at the most specific level that is possible. It also recommends a minimum group size of 50 for published data. The current number of employees from all minority ethnic groups is relatively small, representing 16.5% of the workforce.

39. The Council's ethnicity pay gap details for the snapshot date of 31st March 2025.

Ethnicity Pay Gap comparisons between 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2025

31 March 2025			31 March 2024		
Mean ethnicity pay gap (basic pay)		14.3%	Mean ethnicity pay gap (basic pay)		14.0%
Median ethnicity pay gap (basic pay)		13.6%	Median ethnicity pay gap (basic pay)		12.0%
Mean ethnicity bonus gap		0%	Mean ethnicity bonus gap		0%
Median ethnicity bonus gap		0%	Median ethnicity bonus gap		0%
Proportion ethnicity receiving a bonus		0%	Proportions ethnicity receiving a bonus		0%
31 March 2025			31 March 2024		
Quartile	Minority ethnic groups %	Majority white groups %	Quartile	Minority ethnic groups %	Majority white groups %
Top	8.59	91.41	Top	8.44	91.56
Upper Middle	15.05	84.95	Upper Middle	13.56	86.44
Lower Middle	24.86	75.14	Lower Middle	21.71	78.29
Lower	25.00	75.00	Lower	22.84	77.16

40. Comparisons between the Ethnicity Pay Gap as of 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2025 shows that:

- The mean ethnicity pay gap has increased from 14% in March 2024 to 14.3% in March 2025.

- The median ethnicity pay gap has increased from 12% to 13.6%
41. The representation of minority ethnic groups has increased in all quartiles, with larger increases at lower levels in the organisation. This will be the reason why the pay gap has increased. It is positive that the Council has attracted more candidates from minority ethnic groups, but this is mostly in the lower two pay quartiles. Future career progression may help improve the pay gap moving forwards. Also, new starters will have been appointed at the grade minimum and incremental progression may mean the pay difference reduces next year.
42. The non-reporting of personal information impacts the reliability of this data. 13.4% of the whole workforce has not declared data on their ethnic background.
43. Not many local authorities in Oxfordshire or other cathedral cities publish ethnicity pay gaps. Oxfordshire County Council has reported ethnicity pay gaps of 2.11% for the mean and 2.51% for the median in 2025. Norwich City Council published a mean ethnicity pay gap of 10.17% in 2024 and median of 4.55%. Cambridge City Council published ethnicity pay gaps of -0.65% mean and 4.96% median in 2024. Looking at other authorities in the south-east, in 2024 Reading Borough Council reported a mean pay gap of 4.17% and a median of 0.68% and Milton Keynes City Council reported an ethnicity pay gap of 9% for the mean and a median pay gap of 3%.

Disability Pay Gap

44. This is the fifth year that the Council has reviewed its disability pay gap. The methodology used is the same as for gender and ethnicity pay gap reporting.
45. The provision of disability information is voluntary and for the Council's workforce 16.3% of employees have not shared their data. For this report the categories have been grouped into three classifications:
- Disabled
 - Non-disabled
 - Not known
46. The current proportion of the workforce at the Council declaring a disability is 11.5%. The Council's disability pay gap details for the snapshot date of 31st March 2025 are below:

Disability Pay Gap comparisons between 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2025

31 March 2025		31 March 2024	
Mean disability pay gap (basic pay)	5.9%	Mean disability pay gap (basic pay)	3.0%
Median disability pay gap (basic pay)	0.0%	Median disability pay gap (basic pay)	0.0%
Mean disability bonus gap	0%	Mean disability bonus gap	0%

Median disability bonus gap 0%			Median disability bonus gap 0%		
Proportion males receiving a bonus 0%			Proportion males receiving a bonus 0%		
31 March 2025			31 March 2024		
Quartile	Disabled %	Not Disabled %	Quartile	Disabled %	Not Disabled %
Top	9.37	90.63	Top	11.49	88.51
Upper Middle	14.13	85.87	Upper Middle	13.22	86.78
Lower Middle	14.71	85.29	Lower Middle	14.20	85.80
Lower	12.42	87.58	Lower	8.33	91.67

47. The data shows the mean disability pay gap has increased from 3% in 2024 to 5.9% in 2025. This is because the percentage of employees with a disability at the lowest pay quartile has increased by 4% and the representation of employees with a disability in the top pay quartile has decreased around 2%.
48. The Council has no median disability pay gap, the more reliable measure. This compares favourably with a national median pay gap of 8%.
49. Appendix 4 provides a table and graphic representation of disability by grade. There is a notably higher number of employees with a disability in grades 6 and 7. Employees with a disability are under-represented at senior pay grades.
50. The non-reporting of information impacts the reliability of this data. At 16.3% of the whole workforce, the number of people not reporting on disability is higher than the proportion of people reporting as having a disability at 11.5%.

Measuring Progress/Outcomes

51. WER and pay gap data provide a set of indicators for the performance of the organisation on equity and inclusion. Alongside this data, the Council's staff survey helps in measuring progress – the focus here being on outcomes such as trust and belonging, career progression and inclusive management.
52. The work around equality that has been delivered and is planned for in the next 12 months will continue to build and strengthen an inclusive organisation culture, will improve the diversity of the workforce and address the pay gaps. The Council's initiatives are making a difference, as seen in higher numbers of women and people from minority ethnic groups recruited and an increase in these two groups at the upper middle pay quartile, but there is more to do to achieve improved representation at all levels of the organisation and, from that, reduce the pay gaps.

Financial Implications

53. A base budget of £60,000 is in place to support the Council's on-going commitment to building a more diverse workforce and inclusive culture.

Legal Implications

54. The Equality Act 2010 (the Act), section 149 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty. It requires that in everything the Council does, it must have due regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

55. Relevant protected characteristic is defined in section 4 of the Act as: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnerships.

56. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 require the Council to publish information annually about how it complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The information must include information relating to persons who share a relevant protected characteristic who are:

- (a) Its employees; and
- (b) Other persons affected by its policies and practices.

57. This report does not address the requirement in the 2017 regulations to publish information relating to persons other than employees affected by the Council's policies and practices. That duty is to be discharged separately.

58. Regulations also impose obligations on the Council to publish information relating to the gender pay gap in the organisation on the snapshot date of 30th March in any year. In particular, the Council is required to publish the difference between the average hourly rate of pay paid to male and female employees; the difference between the average bonus paid to male and female employees; the proportions of male and of female employees who receive bonuses; and the relative proportions of male and female employees in each quartile pay band of the workforce. This information must be published within 12 months of the relevant snapshot date.

59. The Council is waiting for final guidance to be published following the qualification of the legal definition of a woman under the Equality Act.

60. The Workforce Equality Report and the Action Plan have been prepared in compliance with the requirements of the Act. (TM 10 Dec 2025 20301)

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Background Papers: None

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