



**General Purposes Committee
29 January 2015**

**Report from the Deputy Leader of the
Council**

For Action Yes

Wards Affected:
None

**Review of Equalities & HR Policies and
Practice at Brent Council**

1.0 Background

- 1.1** Following the loss of an employment tribunal case in September, 2014, Councillor Pavey, Deputy Leader, who has Cabinet responsibility for Equalities and the Council's role as employer, agreed to take stock of the Council's policies and practice to see where improvements could be made. Councillor Pavey has now completed his review and will present the findings to the General Purposes Committee.

2.0 Recommendations

The General Purposes Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1** Note the findings of the review
- 2.2** Agree that officers prepare an action plan for improvement for March 2015.

3.0 Scope of the review

- 3.1** The scope of the internal review entailed:
- surveying a comprehensive suite of policies to identify those which need detailed consideration
 - reviewing those which need detailed consideration
 - reviewing staff knowledge, understanding and practice
 - reviewing progress towards the Gold standard in Investors in People
 - reviewing progress towards the Excellence Standard in the Equality Framework for Local Government
 - ensuring that diversity underpins all aspects of the review, including BAME involvement.

Methods were to include:

- analysis and scrutiny of written reports and documentation
- discussion with staff
- discussion with Members
- advice from external experts
- use of staff focus groups
- best practice comparison with other local authorities.

3.2 The review focused on the Council's HR policies and practice. There was a specific emphasis on making recommendations to ensure that the diversity of staff reflects the diversity of the borough, at all levels, and that working practices and organisational culture enable this outcome. Analysis of HR policies and processes formed a significant part of the review, as these are a key mechanism for enacting our organisational objectives and values with our staff.

3.3 It is important to note that the review was not a review of our HR department. It is about the role each person has to play in making Brent Council the best possible place to work. There are clear recommendations in relation to employment policies and practice, and these require the action of the entire organisation and crucially managers at all levels.

4. Methodology

The review considered a range of information sources and commissioned workstreams:

- LGA review of policies: The LGA reviewed the Council's relevant employment policies – the scope and recommendations are set out in appendix one at the end of this report.
- Focus groups with staff: these were facilitated by a new Operational Director. Participants were randomly selected from payroll records¹ to enable two general staff focus groups and one for middle managers. Participants were asked to comment on management engagement and to share their experience at the Council before contributing ideas for improvement.
- Roundtables with external stakeholders, examining:
 - Increasing the number of BAME staff in senior positions
 - Ensuring that the culture of the organisation is an open and positive one

Stakeholders included a range of skilled professionals with a wealth of experience across staff management and equalities practice within the public, private, advisory and not-for-profit sectors. They were:

- Dr Doyin Atewologun, Queen Mary University
- Peter Hall, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion
- Vernal Scott, Marshall ACM
- Diane Rutherford, BRAP equalities charity

¹ For general staff focus groups, each 66th employee on the payroll list was selected; for managers, each 28th. Information on ethnic background and pay grades for each focus group is available.

- Stephen Shashoua, Three Faiths Forum
- Matthew Critchlow, Thrive Training
- Drop-in sessions to provide the opportunity for any member of staff to provide views.
- Opportunities for staff to provide views anonymously.
- Discussions with Trade Unions and written submissions from UNISON the GMB, the NUT and Unite.
- The Council's IIP Adviser, accompanied by a BAME adviser new to the Borough, reviewed progress towards the Gold standard. This involved discussions with a number of focus groups with participants selected randomly from payroll records.
- Additional external oversight was provided by Charles Obazuaye, Director of Human Resources at the London Borough of Bromley. Mr Obazuaye provided expert advice at the start of the review and commented in detail on the draft report.
- A review of equalities data – encompassing recruitment, retention, progress across the equality characteristics. The Brent Diversity Profile is attached to this report as Appendix 2.
- Meetings were held with the HR Improvement Group, the HR Departmental Management Team and the Diversity Reference Group- in order to assess staff knowledge, understanding and practice of policies, and to suggest improvements.

5. Data

- 5.1 A review of equalities data was undertaken for the review. This encompassed recruitment, retention, progress across the equality characteristics. The Brent Diversity profile is attached to this report as Appendix 1.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no specific legal implications.

8. Diversity Implications

- 8.1 There are none arising directly from this report but any diversity implications identified from the action plan will be need to considered separately.

9. Staffing Implications

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report but any staffing implications identified from the action plan will need to be considered separately.

Contact:

Councillor M Pavey
Deputy Leader of the Council
Ext: 6674

