



Scrutiny Committee
5 April 2016

Report from the HR Director

For Information

Wards Affected:
ALL

Progress report on the HR and Equalities review

1.0 Summary

A review of HR Policies & Equalities was carried out in October 2014 by Councillor Michael Pavey. The methodology used included review of documents and policies, discussions with managers and focus groups with staff. The review also engaged support from the Local Government Association (LGA) and other external experts in order to ensure objectivity and fairness. The findings and recommendations from the review were incorporated into an action plan that was approved by the Scrutiny Committee in April 2015. The HR and Equalities review action plan is owned by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and overseen by the Equalities Committee. The detailed progress update on the action plan is attached as Appendix 1.

A peer assessment team reviewed equalities in Brent for the 'Excellent' level in the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The LGA peer team visit took place between 30 June and 2 July 2015. The peer report identified a number of excellent activities and initiatives across the council, and provided positive feedback on its HR policies and equality initiatives across all service areas. The conclusion of the team was that the council is extremely close to achieving the 'Excellent' level in EFLG, and they requested to return at a time of the council's choosing to re-assess progress following a number of recommendations.

The LGA peer team made five recommendations, namely:

1. Corporate Management Team to report on progress on the Equality Strategy action plan after the first six months
2. Effectively address the building accessibility issues of the new Civic Centre
3. Implement the recommendations in the latest Annual Workforce Equalities report
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the new Equality Committee
5. Progress on the recommendations in the HR Review action plan.

This report presents a progress update on the HR and Equalities review action plan and the council's assessment for 'Excellence' in EFLG with particular focus on the five recommendations made by the LGA peer team.

2.0 Recommendations

Members of the Scrutiny Committee to note the progress on the HR and Equalities review action plan and on the council's assessment for 'Excellence' in EFLG.

3.0 Progress on the assessment for 'Excellence' in EFLG

At the time of writing this report, the Equality team are compiling the evidence pack to demonstrate progress against the five recommendations made by the LGA peer team during their visit. This will be sent to the LGA peer team and the council should be notified of the final outcome of its assessment for 'Excellence' in EFLG by the end of April 2016.

Please see below an outline of the progress achieved to date against each of the five recommendations.

3.1 **Recommendation 1:** Corporate Management Team to report on progress on the Equality Strategy action plan after the first six months

Brent's new Equality Strategy and Action Plan were launched in April 2015. Progress against the Equality Strategy action plan is reported to CMT on a quarterly basis. To date, the significant majority of actions have been implemented or are on target for completion. The detailed progress update on the Equality Strategy action plan is available in **Appendix 2**.

3.2 **Recommendation 2:** Effectively address the building accessibility issues of the new Civic Centre

One of the main reasons for the peer team's decision not to award Excellent after their first visit to the council was related to the new Civic Centre and *'the significant outstanding remedial action from by the Access Audit completed in 2014'*. The peer team felt the Council needed to expedite and complete the majority of the recommendations in the Access audit report and to identify a mechanism to ensure that disability access is maintained at the highest level in all council buildings.

Significant progress has been achieved since the LGA peer team visit and the Facilities Management Team have reported progress to the Equalities Committee (in October 2015 and January 2016, respectively). The reports are available on the [Committee's webpage](#).

Since the peer review in November 2015, the Council won the 2015 BDF Disability-smart premises award in recognition of the accessible and inclusive Civic Centre building, which was also recognised for becoming a best practice example in the government's Accessible Britain Challenge.

In December 2015, Brent was also awarded with the DWP Disability Confident Employer status, which demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that its facilities, services, working environment and employment practices are accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities.

In their January meeting the Committee praised the efforts of the Facilities Management Team and recognised the progress achieved within a short space of time. The team is committed to continue to carry out annual building user surveys that will help inform further improvements to the building in future.

In addition to the annual survey, the facilities team also consults with relevant disability groups such as the Dementia Awareness Group, the Disability Forum and other relevant groups (e.g. Staff Disability Network) for their views on improvements to council buildings. The Team delivered a presentation at the International Day of People with Disabilities and sought feedback from attendees on their experience of the Civic Centre and its facilities, some of which have been incorporated in future improvement plans.

3.3 Recommendation 3: Implement the recommendations in the 2014-15 Annual Workforce Equalities report

Following approval by the Diversity Reference Group and CMT, the 2014-15 Annual Workforce Equalities report was published on the web in September 2015, as required by the Equality Act 2010.

The report contained a number of recommendations to further enhance the diversity profile and experiences of the Council's workforce, and promote workplace inclusion. The significant majority of the recommendations contained in the report have already been implemented or are on target. These include:

- 3.3.1 Investors in People (IiP) Accreditation - in September 2015 the Council successfully retained its IiP Silver Level status
- 3.3.2 Development and roll out of mandatory training on unconscious bias for recruiting managers – all hiring managers are required to complete the e-module prior to selection and interviews
- 3.3.3 Review of the equalities monitoring questions on the Council's recruitment system – a new recruitment system (Taleo) was implemented in October 2015. The new system now ensures that equality reporting requirements are met
- 3.3.4 Establishment of staff equality networks - four staff equality networks (Cultural Diversity, Disability, Gender and LGBT+) now meet quarterly. The networks are led by each of the Strategic Directors. The chairs of the networks are invited to Diversity Reference Group meetings
- 3.3.5 Development of guidance for managers on making workplace adjustments for staff with a disabilities or long-term health conditions - Guidance was developed and communicated to staff in June 2015
- 3.3.6 Diversity profile of Brent's workforce - in early October 2015 Brent Council was the only Local Authority shortlisted for the Race for Opportunity Awards 2015 and a finalist in the Transparency, Monitoring & Action Award category. This is a very high recognition for the council's best practice in workforce diversity monitoring and ensuring that its workforce is representative of the communities it serves
- 3.3.7 CMT to consider voluntary workforce equalities targets – a report on voluntary workforce targets was taken to CMT in October 2015 and the decision was to retain current monitoring arrangements as they were considered to be significantly robust. In addition, a Collaborative Mentoring programme aimed at fostering regular dialogue between staff and senior managers was developed in December 2015 and launched in January 2016
- 3.3.8 Development and launch of the Aspire Leadership & Development programme that aims to 'grow our own talent', particularly from under-represented groups BAME – the programme was launched in December 2015, with the first cohort of staff starting the programme in March 2016. A total of 38 employees will participate in the course which commenced in March 2016.

3.4 Recommendation 4: Evaluate the effectiveness of the new Equality Committee

The Equalities Committee was established on 13 July 2015 with the following Terms of Reference (ToRs):

ToR 1: To ensure the Council's plans and practice reflect current and future equalities legislation and guidance.

ToR2: To oversee the Council's achievement and maintenance of the Excellent Standard in the Equalities Framework for Local Government.

ToR 3: To monitor the progress of the Equalities & HR Policies Review Action Plan.

At the time of writing this report, the Committee has met on three occasions. The agenda and papers of the Committee meetings are available on the [Council's website](#).

Since inception, the Equalities Committee has effectively completed its objectives set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), as follows:

ToR 1: To ensure the Council's plans and practice reflect current and future equalities legislation and guidance.

Since its establishment the Equalities Committee has played an important role in ensuring that the Council is compliant with its equalities duties. The Committee's strong focus on compliance with legislation and best practice is evidenced by the Committee's reports on council's Equality Impact Assessment process (October 2015) and council's approach to corporate complaints related to equality and diversity (January 2016). These reports demonstrated that the organisation has robust systems in place to ensure that equality and diversity related issues and implications are effectively considered.

In addition the Committee's contributions to the Members' Development programme, Brent Council has become the first London Borough to achieve the 'gold standard' Charter Plus Award for Elected Member Development. The assessment noted that Members have a strong understanding of their roles and duties, and articulated the value of collecting information from their casework and work within their community, to inform the council's policies and priorities.

ToR 2: To oversee the Council's achievement and maintenance of the Excellent Standard in EFLG.

The Committee has focussed on ensuring that the Council is working to address the recommendations identified by the LGA peer team. Their scrutiny of accessibility issues in Brent Civic Centre (Recommendation 2 of the peer team report) is a very good illustration of the Committee's positive impact. The Committee reviewed two reports on the Accessibility of the Civic Centre in October 2015 and in January 2016.

At the time the final report was produced by the peer team only one third of the actions listed in the 2014 Brent Civic Centre Access Audit were completed. As of 3rd March 2016, as a result of the proactive scrutiny of the Committee, 95% of the actions identified in the Access Audit have been completed. The detailed progress update is available in Appendix 3.

ToR 3: To monitor the progress of the Equalities & HR review action plan.

Cllr Pavey's action plan is a permanent item on the Equalities Committee agenda and forward plan. Please refer to Recommendation 5 below for detailed information on the current progress against the action plan.

Examples of the positive impact and outcomes achieved from the work of the Equalities Committee:

Council's Leadership and Development programme

As a result of the Committee's contributions to the content of the programme, all participating staff will be supported by mentors and coaches throughout the

programme. Also, those staff who haven't been successful will receive feedback and will have access to a training and development support package to help them enhance their skills and enable them to apply for future cohorts of the programme.

Council's Collaborative Mentoring programme

Initially planned as a reverse mentoring activity, this initiative evolved into an enhanced programme of opportunities aimed at fostering a regular dialogue and interaction between senior managers and staff. As a result of the discussions between officers and Committee members, the Collaborative Mentoring programme now incorporates initiatives such as shadowing and back to the floor days, reverse mentoring circles, live web chats with senior managers and 360 Degree Feedback for senior managers (including the Chief Executive).

Regular engagement with staff

The Leader of the Council, the Chair of the Equalities Committee, who is also the Lead Member for Equality and Diversity and the Chief Executive are proactively engaging with staff on a regular basis. Examples include (non-exhaustive list):

- Question time sessions for staff (16th Dec 2015)
- Participation in 'Break Barriers, Open Doors' events (e.g. Black History Month, Staff Awards, International Day of People with Disabilities, LGBT History Month, International Women's Day, White Ribbon campaign, etc)
- Messages from the Chief Executive encouraging staff to shadow her (December 2015).

Overall feedback from staff is that they appreciate these opportunities to interact with Members and the Chief Executive.

3.5 Recommendation 5: Progress on the recommendations in the HR review action plan.

Councillor Pavey's HR and Equalities review action plan sets out four key priority areas, each of which is owned by a Strategic or Operational Director:

- 3.5.1 Achieving consistency in staff progression and diversity at management levels. Lead owner: **Lorraine Langham**
- 3.5.2 Achieving excellence in employment practices. Lead owner: **Mildred Phillips**
- 3.5.3 Achieving excellence in employment and management practice. Lead owner: **Phil Porter**
- 3.5.4 Supporting excellence by better communication and by involvement of elected members. Lead owner: **Lorraine Langham**

At their January meeting, Committee members noted the significant progress made on Councillor Pavey's action plan.

At the time of writing this report, the significant majority (86% or 55 out of the 64) of actions in Councillor Pavey's action plan have been completed or are ongoing. 11% (seven) actions are on target for completion by the end of the financial year. The remaining 5% (three) actions where a slippage in the timescales was acknowledged in the October 2015 Committee meeting are now back on track: the development and launch of a Leadership and Development programme (two actions) and the development of the Collaborative mentoring programme. The detailed progress update on the HR and Equalities review action plan is available in Appendix 1.

4.0 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5.0 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 Diversity Implications

The HR and Equalities review action plan aimed to systematically embed best practice across the council with regard to equality and diversity to ensure that all staff are treated with fairly, and that staff and residents from under-represented groups are provided with equal access to employment and development opportunities.

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

The council is committed to being an equal opportunities employer and growing own talent from under-represented staff groups and from local communities.

Background papers

Appendix 1 – HR and Equalities review action plan

Appendix 2 – 2015 -16 Equality Strategy action plan

Appendix 3 – Access Audit Accessibility Tracker

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