



Equalities Committee

7 April 2016

Report from Mildred Phillips HR Director

Report Title: Progress update on impact of Cllr Pavey's review on HR and Equalities

1.0 Summary

This report provides a progress update of the impact from Cllr Pavey's review of HR and Equalities based on the available qualitative and quantitative information.

2.0 Recommendations

The Equalities Committee is asked to note the contents of this progress update and the supporting appendices.

3.0 Detail

At the time of writing this report, the significant majority of actions in Cllr Pavey's action plan (60 out of the 64 or 94 per cent) are completed or ongoing. The remaining four actions (six per cent) are on target for completion as per the indicated timescales. The detailed progress update on the action plan is attached as **Appendix 1**.

3.1 Some of the notable achievements and positive outcomes identified to date against the objectives set in Cllr Pavey's action plan are listed below:

3.1.1 To achieve excellence in employment and management practice and learning from practice is used to improve performance

- A more consistent approach to monitoring and reporting on the diversity profile of job applicants, current staff and leavers
- CMT, the Diversity Reference Group, HRIG and staff equality networks receive quarterly HR and Equalities updates
- DMTs have a clear role in respect of compliance with HR and equalities policies and procedures
- The HR team reviewing and learning from discipline, grievance (including bullying and harassment) and capability procedures
- The HR team systematically reviews learning from employment tribunal cases and reports quarterly to HRIG and annually to CMT
- Monthly case management review meetings held between HR, Legal and relevant Strategic and Operational directors
- Annual reporting on findings from exit interviews and equal pay audits to help inform workforce planning and retention strategies.

3.1.2 To ensure best practice in implementing recruitment policies

- Taleo was introduced to ensure that equality details of job applicants are captured and monitored
- Equality data is collected at long list, short list and interview stage
- Recruitment information is reported to Directors on a weekly basis and to CMT quarterly
- A mandatory e-learning module on Recruitment and Selection incorporating Unconscious Bias for hiring managers / panels
- Hiring managers are also required to set up a diverse recruitment panel to ensure the selection process is fair and unbiased
- HR advice note and pro-forma is emailed to recruitment panel prior to every shortlisting
- Staff equality networks will be encouraged to complete the Selection and Recruitment and other relevant training, and to take part in recruitment panels
- Unconscious Bias is now embedded in Members' training programme
- A workforce planning and talent management strategy is currently being developed and incorporates recommendations from IIP.

3.1.3 To ensure Brent's HR policies and procedures reflect best practice and establish a more coherent competency framework

- The Code of Conduct has been revised and HR policies reviewed by the LGA and found to be sound
- The Competency Framework revised and supported by training on appraisals and mid / end of year guidelines for managers
- Compliance with HR is monitored by DMTs and reported to CMT on a quarterly basis via the HR Dashboard reports
- This year for the first time Strategic and Operational Directors, including the Chief Executive will be subject to a 360° appraisal
- The HR Intranet pages revamped and a Communications forward plan developed to ensure regular and consistent communication.

3.1.4 To engage staff in developing workforce strength and diversity and to ensure their views are used to shape decision-making

- A number of focus groups carried out and the recommendation incorporated in the 2014/15 Master Equality & Diversity action plan
- Four staff equality networks (Cultural Diversity, Gender, Disability and LGBT+) established and meet quarterly
- A staff survey launched on 21 March 2016 and the outcomes of the survey will inform the Council's 2020 vision
- Staff self-disclosure rate is currently at 89% (where staff have disclosed equality information on four or more characteristics)
- The Oracle system was adapted to make entry easier and a new staff self-disclosure campaign will be re-launched from April 2016
- Regular dialogue between Senior Managers and staff via the Collaborative Mentoring programme (on the agenda).

3.1.5 To ensure excellence in our approach to disabled staff

- As of 24 March 2016, 95 per cent of the actions identified in the 2014 Brent Civic Centre Access audit have been completed
- In December 2015 Brent was awarded with the DWP Disability Confident Employer status
- In November 2015 the Council won the 2015 Business Disability Forum Disability-smart premises award
- Brent was also recognised as a best practice example in the government's Accessible Britain Challenge
- Guidance on reasonable / workplace adjustments launched in June 2015 and supported training carried out
- A detailed report on the Council's policies and initiatives supporting employees with disabilities on the agenda.

3.1.6 To ensure there is a creative approach to the development of talent & leadership and under-represented groups

- Council's Aspire Leadership and Development programme launched in March 2016
 - All participating staff supported by mentors and coaches throughout the programme
 - Unsuccessful applicants received constructive feedback and have access to a training and development support package
 - The cohort is reflective of the Council's and Borough's diversity profile, with under-represented groups being over-represented
 - A detailed progress update is available as a separate item on the agenda.
- Council's Let's Talk Collaborative Mentoring programme launched in January 2016
 - An enhanced programme of opportunities fostering a regular dialogue and interaction between senior managers and staff
 - Programmes includes shadowing and back to floor days, reverse mentoring circles, 360° appraisal for Strategic and Operational Directors, including the Chief Executive
 - To date over 50 staff members have taken part in one or more of the above initiatives
 - A detailed progress update is available as a separate item on the agenda.
- Staff equality networks
 - Four staff equality networks (Cultural Diversity, Disability, Gender and LGBT+) established and meet quarterly
 - The networks are sponsored by each of the Strategic Directors
 - The Chairs of the networks are members of the corporate Diversity Reference Group chaired by the Chief Executive
 - Some of the priority areas identified by staff networks include: raising the profile of the networks among staff from under-represented groups, promoting the importance of staff diversity self-disclosure, workplace adjustments, flexible working.

3.1.7 To review and refresh the apprenticeship and graduate schemes so they are high quality programmes leading to employment

- National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP)
 - The internal management arrangements reviewed and improvements implemented in June 2015
 - Improved programme in place for cohort 17 that started in October 2015
 - All graduates have been allocated Strategic Directors, Operational Directors or Heads of Service as mentors
 - A local graduate recruitment exercise was held in December 2015.

- Council's apprenticeship programme
 - An independent review undertaken by Grant Thornton in June 2015, with all recommendations already implemented
 - Regular sessions and catch ups held to capture apprentices' feedback and experience from the scheme
 - HR are working with the Looked After Children team to proactively market the apprenticeship and graduate positions
 - A careers fair targeted at local people was carried out on 20 January 2016 and will be held on a regular basis.

3.1.8 To ensure staff and elected members are aware of the outcomes of the HR and equalities policy review

- The HR and Equalities review action plan owned by CMT and overseen by the Equalities Committee quarterly
- Quarterly updates are also considered by DRG, DMTs and staff equality networks
- Staff updates on HR and Equalities are provided via the internal communication channels and events
- CMT report on the progress on HR and Equalities to the Scrutiny Committee annually (annual report presented on 5 April 2016).

3.2 Feedback from employees

Employees' views on Equality and Diversity at Brent were sought via staff events, Departmental meetings, equality networks and other staff forums. Over 100 staff members were provided with the opportunity to share their views and suggestions, including staff who took part in Cllr Pavey's focus groups. The feedback has informed this paper and the draft 2016/17 E&D action plan.

The consultation feedback is summarised below. Overall, the majority of employees were positive about equality and diversity at Brent and identified a number of improvements over the past year. However, a minority of respondents still hold negative perceptions and the view that things haven't improved much.

Areas for improvement identified by respondents

As probably expected, **restructuring** was the main theme of concern for staff, with the majority of comments summarised in the following two quotes: “Less cuts, more staff” and “Stop restructuring every few months”.

The other most discussed theme was the **lack of diversity at senior levels**. Some staff members also referred to the **lack of ‘open door’ policy**. One respondent to our survey wrote “*Brent needs to adopt more of an “open door” policy and help negate the fear of rebuttal for individuals to come forward if they are not happy with a present situation or feeling workload pressure etc.*”

There were a couple of negative comments related to the **Aspire programme**. One respondent felt it was a “waste up”, while the other one who is also a delegate in the first cohort wasn’t satisfied with the induction session.

Notable improvements from employees’ perspective

When asked ‘What has improved in the organisation over the past year?’ the majority of staff mentioned. **Senior management visibility and top down communication**, as well as more awareness of various equality and diversity and health and wellbeing topics. One respondent to our survey wrote: “*The visibility and communications around various equality and diversity topics, including health and wellbeing, has been really good.*”

Staff members specifically praised the **shadowing and mentoring opportunities** offered by Senior Managers, as well as the staff equality groups and events. One respondent wrote: “*There are different {staff} communities and group events within the council such as mentoring group etc*”

The second most mentioned improvement was the **Aspire programme** and respondents demonstrated a detailed level of understanding of the rationale and objectives of this programme. One of the respondents to our survey wrote: “*The introduction of the Aspire programme has been a good move by Brent going forward and the aim was to support and assist aspiring individuals within BAME groups.*”

Other key improvements mentioned and valued by staff were the **graduate and apprenticeship programmes**. One respondent wrote: “*Graduate and apprentice schemes are quite good ways of bringing young people into organisation.*”

The **diversity programme, equalities monitoring and impact assessment** for all changes affecting staff were also mentioned as areas with notable improvement.

Employees’ suggestions for further improvements

When asked: ‘What more can we do to make Brent Council an even better place to work?’, **communication and improved feedback** were identified as key areas for improvement.

Increasing the **diversity profile of the senior management** was another frequently mentioned theme. When asked what else the Council should be doing to improve this, respondents' views gravitated around the suggestion: *"Instil confidence in staff to solve problems or at least come with solutions to managers"*. The following comments from a respondent to our survey summarises the nature of the feedback on this theme: *"The council can continue to find creative ways for more diverse representation in senior management."*

A couple of respondents to our online survey referred to the **equality and diversity programme and policies** with the following suggestions: *"More diversity programme"* and *"Keep reviewing equality policies."*

There were a couple of employees staff members who **felt very positive about equality and diversity** at Brent. One of them wrote: *"I have never been under an impression that Brent Council is a place where equality and diversity is not taken seriously."* Another respondent to our survey wrote: *"Keep going along the road we are travelling along but keep an eye out for the signposts along the way so that nothing is forgotten & everything remembered."*

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