

REPORT UNDER RULE 2(VI) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Report by Councillor Naomi Tweddle, Chair of Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel

Introduction

This is my third report to Council as Chair of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel. The report covers the period from February 2019 to January 2021 and provides an update on the work completed with the Panel in that time.

The Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel is an informal advisory working group rather than a formal committee, but it does play a vital role in ensuring the Council embraces equality and diversity. The Panel is a combination of officers and Councillors and provides an opportunity to discuss and share views on equality and diversity issues. It also allows Councillors and officers to look at Council policies, services and practices and consider whether there is a need for further adjustments.

The members who currently sit on the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel are:

- Cllr Naomi Tweddle (Chair)
- Cllr Rosanne Kirk (Vice-Chair)
- Cllr Alan Briggs
- Cllr Chris Burke
- Cllr Thomas Dyer
- Cllr Jane Loffhagen
- Cllr Helena Mair
- Cllr Adrianna McNulty
- Cllr Ric Metcalfe

Summary of Main Work

The Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires public sector organisations to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act,
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality and Diversity Group is primarily interested in the first two parts of the duty, with the third part coming under Councillor Rosanne Kirk's portfolio, Reducing Inequality.

The group has met five times since the last report to Council in February 2019. These meetings, and items discussed, were as follows:

- March 2019
 - City Hall Access/Egress
 - Gender Pay Gap
 - Applications for City of Lincoln Council Job Vacancies
 - Equality Action Plans 2018/19 and 2019/20
- September 2019
 - Gender Pay Gap Project
 - Equality Journal 2018/19
 - Equality Action Plan - Update
- December 2019
 - Setting New Equality Objectives for 2020-24
- February 2020
 - Proposed Equality Objectives for 2020-24
 - Gender Pay Gap
 - Recruitment Data
 - Equality Action Plan
- October 2020
 - Equality Journal 2019/20
 - Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy Review
 - Terms of Reference for Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel
 - Gender Pay Gap – comparison with other authorities
 - Equality Action Plan
 - Digital Accessibility Regulations

We continue to focus the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel agenda on working towards the Council's five equality objectives. These were reviewed in 2019/20 with the following five objectives adopted for the period April 2020 to March 2024:

- Objective 1: Our services are accessible and do not discriminate on any unjustifiable grounds
- Objective 2: Local communities, partners and stakeholders are empowered to influence the way our services are provided to them
- Objective 3: Equality is at the heart of decision making at all levels within the council
- Objective 4: Our workforce at all levels reflects the makeup of the local community
- Objective 5: Equalities, social inclusion and community cohesion have all improved with our communities

The Annual Equality Journal provides a summary of the actions taken under each objective, and the report for 2019/20 (covering April 2019 to March 2020) can be found on the council's website - www.lincoln.gov.uk/your-council/equality-and-diversity.

The report for 2020/21 will be published in the autumn and therefore I will provide a short summary of some of the equality actions undertaken during the period from March 2020. There have been three formal periods of lockdown due to Covid 19, and restrictions at some level have now been in place for almost a year. The pandemic has caused life to be more difficult for many people, but it has been particularly difficult for some of our most vulnerable residents.

We have been able to support these groups through some specific initiatives aimed at protecting the most vulnerable. These included the Befriending and Community Help services to help those in need. We have also helped children in families struggling to manage as a result of reduced incomes during the pandemic, through the half-term help initiative during October 2020, and during Christmas 2021 through the FiSH scheme provided by Bridge Church. These schemes have provided much needed support to vulnerable residents at a very difficult time, and is a scheme that the Council can be very proud of.

The Panel continues to monitor the gender pay gap and recruitment data at meetings and has supported improvements made to the equality and diversity training given to all staff. The Panel is also currently looking at is the implementation of gender balanced job evaluation panels. There was an initial discussion at the October 2020 meeting and work continues on this. There will be further discussion on this at the next meeting, which will be held 3 March 2021.

Concluding Comments

Looking ahead, it is important that we continue to strive to ensure that the work of the Council reflects the importance of equality and diversity, this is particularly pertinent when we are changing services or working on projects.

The action plan sets out what the Council is doing to support those with protected characteristics, and it is currently being refreshed for 2021/2022. It will draw together equality actions identified by senior officers, aligning with projects set out in our strategic plan, Vision 2025. This will help further instil equality and diversity into all aspects of the Council's work, which I believe is imperative. The Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel has also worked with officers to embed the action plan into Council work and try to ensure that the objectives set are effective, measurable and achievable.

I would like to finish by thanking both Councillor's and officers who have been, or are currently, a member of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel. We have worked on a wide variety of policy and practice areas during the past two years, and I look forward to continuing this work in the coming months.