

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

Introduction

I have been chair of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel since September 2017. This latest report brings council members up to date with the most recent work of the panel over the past year in line with Council reporting timescales.

I would like to thank each member of the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel and officers for their ongoing support.

The Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel is an informal advisory working group rather than a formal committee. The membership of the panel comprises of elected members and officers and is an important part of council functions. The panel gives elected members an opportunity to discuss equality and diversity with the relevant officers and to give members the chance to share their views. It also allows the council to look at its policies, services and practices and consider whether there needs to be further equality adjustments made.

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

- Cllr Naomi Tweddle (Chair)
- Cllr Sue Burke (Vice-Chair)
- Cllr Matthew Fido
- Cllr Gary Hewson
- Cllr Jane Loffhagen
- Cllr Ric Metcalfe
- Cllr Clare Smalley
- Cllr Rachel Storer
- Cllr Joshua Wells

In addition, a range of council officers also sit on this panel, each having a connection to the topic of equality and diversity through their areas of work.

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 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 panel has met on two occasions in the past year. These meetings were as follows:

Tuesday 2nd March 2022

Agenda items -

1. Equality & Diversity Member Training
2. Equality & Diversity Member Survey
3. City of Lincoln Council Gender Pay Gap
4. Update on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan

Wednesday 12th October 2022

Agenda items -

1. Equality Journal 2021/22
2. Update on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan
3. Census 2021 update
4. Recruitment Report

We continue to focus the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel agenda on working towards the council's five equality objectives for the period 2020 – 2024. As a reminder these objectives are:

- Objective 1: Our services are more accessible and do not discriminate on any unjustifiable grounds
- Objective 2: Local communities 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

Every year we produce an Equality Journal, which provides statistical information on the makeup of the city and compares that to the makeup of our workforce. It also provides information on all of the work we have done over the year to promote equality and diversity at City of Lincoln Council. The Equality Journal for 2021/22 was presented to the Corporate Management Team in September 2022 and the Equality & Diversity Advisory Panel in October 2022. The Equality Journal 2021/22 will also be presented to Council on 29th November 2022.

Key equality achievements

I have included below a brief insight into some of the council's key equality achievements as highlighted within the latest Equality Journal 2021/22. Included below are also a couple of additional equality related achievements since the Equality Journal 2021/22 was completed.

Gender Pay Gap

The latest mean gender pay gap for the whole economy (according to the October 2021 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures) is 11.9%, whilst in the construction sector this is 5.1%. At 3.5%, the council's latest mean gender pay gap is lower than both.

The latest median gender pay gap for the whole economy (according to the October 2021 ONS ASHE figures) is 7.9%, while in the construction sector this is 9.6%. At 1.6%, our latest median gender pay gap is significantly lower than both.

Council policies

The Corporate Policy Team working with the Legal Services Manager continues to monitor all council policies on a quarterly basis to ensure they are reviewed at the required frequency by service areas and continue to meet the needs of the council and national legislation. Of these policies, 36 are owned and maintained by the Human Resources Team, with the majority having direct or indirect links to the topic of equality and diversity.

Fostering Friendly Employer

The council has recently been officially approved as a Fostering Friendly Employer. The initiative helps employers to support and recognise the roles of their employees who foster. As required by this accreditation the council has included within its Maternity Policy details of the council's commitment to those staff who have fostering responsibilities. This commitment includes offering foster carers flexible working, together with paid time off for training and settling a new child into their home.

Retained accreditation to the Carers Charter Quality Award

In December 2021 City of Lincoln Council was successfully re-assessed by Employers for Carers for the Carers Charter Quality Award. The focus of the award is in ensuring that as an employer we are well placed to support and manage employees with unpaid caring responsibilities.

Retained accreditation as a Mindful Employer and Disability Confident Employer

Under this accreditation the council has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to employing disabled people, and that it has met the required criteria regarding employment, retention, training, and career development of disabled employees. The council continues to be proud to display the Mindful and Disability Confident symbol.

Kept under review the impact of the ongoing pandemic on vulnerable residents and initiated support as required

Throughout 2021/22, the Revenues and Benefits service has closely monitored the ongoing impact of the pandemic on our vulnerable residents. To help mitigate these impacts, during this period the team focused on the following activities to support vulnerable residents:

- Prompt processing of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims

- Assessment and payment of Test and Trace Support Payment applications
- Assessment and payment of a Winter Grant Scheme to specific cohorts
- Holistic welfare reform support through the Welfare Reform Support Team
- Benefits, money, and debt advice through the Welfare Team
- Proactive utilisation of Discretionary Housing Payments
- Proactive utilisation of Council Tax Hardship Fund
- Deferrals of Council Tax instalments due for appropriate cases where undue hardship to taxpayers may occur
- Support to businesses through administration of reliefs and support for business grants schemes

De Wint Court Redevelopment

Jointly funded between City of Lincoln Council, Homes England and Lincolnshire County Council, the De Wint Court facility plays a vital part in the council's commitment to providing quality homes at affordable rents to meet the diverse housing need within the city.

De Wint Court aims to enhance quality of life and give people the provision to stay within their local communities and access services close to home.

A total of 70 apartments (50 one bed and 20 two bed) have been provided at the extra care facility, which opened on 22nd March 2022.

Forward look

Equality Action Plan 2022/23

The Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2022/23 contains a range of equality and diversity related actions being delivered across the council between April 2022 and March 2023. The actions set out in the action plan serve to demonstrate how the council is meeting its Equality Objectives and complying with the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The actions included within the Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2022/23 consist of:

- Equality related actions drawn from Assistant Director Service Plans for 2022/23
- A range recurring equality related actions, which are delivered annually
- Actions suggested for inclusion by the Equality & Diversity Advisory Panel
- Actions which have been identified by service areas

At the time of writing this report there are **25** actions within the Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2022/23. Of these actions:

- **13** actions are on target
- **0** actions are overdue
- **2** actions have been completed
- **10** actions are yet to be started

The actions delivered within this plan will form the basis of the Equality Journal 2022/23.

Concluding Comments

I would like to thank council members and officers for their commitment towards the topic of equality and diversity over the past twelve months.

Looking ahead it is important that we continue to strive to ensure that equality and diversity is at the heart of everything we do. This is particularly pertinent when we are changing services or working on projects.

The next Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel meeting is scheduled to take place in February 2023.