

## Equality Peer Challenge

March 2021

### 1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2020 the Council passed a Motion to record its solidarity in the fight against racism following the death of George Floyd in the USA and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests across the world. The Council agreed to undertake an all-party review of its processes, policies and organisational attitudes regarding racism.
- 1.2 The Policy and Projects Advisory Board (PPAB) held a Special Meeting on 25 August 2020 to consider the scope and next steps to be followed by the Council in light of the Motion. The Board agreed that to support this work, an LGA Peer Challenge on Equalities and Diversity should take place as soon as possible, with a view to any initial work being completed and recommendations prepared by the end of the 2020/21 Municipal Year.
- 1.3 The LGA Peer Challenge took place in January 2021 with LGA Peers undertaking two days of virtual meetings with Council staff, Members, community groups and partner organisations. The Peer Challenge undertaken was based upon the Equality Framework for Local Government and were asked to look specifically at Black and Minority Ethnic issues rather than other protected characteristics.
- 1.4 The Peer Team for the Challenge were as follows:
  - Councillor Kam Kaur – Portfolio Holder for Customer and Transformation, Warwickshire County Council
  - Minakshee Patel – Corporate Equality and Diversity Advisor, Rugby Borough Council
  - Sam Johnson – Policy and Performance Manager, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council
  - Kirsten Burnett – Head of Policy and Organisational Development, Hyndburn Borough Council
  - Gill Elliott – Review Manager, Local Government Association
  - Harry Parker – Review Manager, Local Government Association
  - Esther Barrott – LGA NGDP Graduate and Shadow Peer
- 1.5 The Peer Team were provided with a range of background documents in the weeks ahead of the review to supplement the two days of virtual meetings. The findings were presented to the Council on 28 January 2021 and all those who had participated in meetings with the Peer Team and all Members were invited to this session. This presentation and the written report (as attached at Annex A) have been structured in line with the four areas of the Equality Framework for Local Government, as follows:
  - Understanding and working with your communities
  - Leadership and organisational commitment
  - Responsive services and customer care
  - A diverse and engaged workforce

- 1.6 The report makes 35 recommendations to the Council for consideration and these reflect what the LGA witnessed during their review of documentation and through the two days of virtual conversations.
- 1.7 The report highlights a number of areas of good practice, along with an acknowledgement that the Council has made a good start, particularly with regard to how the Motion has been taken forward and the Council's "exemplary and long-standing work with the Nepali community". The recommendations provide some suggestions to the Council on how this can be further built upon to improve work on equalities and diversity.
- 1.8 In their report, the LGA acknowledge that Covid 19 has resulted in additional pressures for Council staff and that it will be important not to overwhelm staff with further additional work. The draft Action Plan (at Annex B) has been developed in this context with a view to this work being recognised as 'Business as Usual' in line with the LGA's recommendation.

## **2. Approach to developing the Action Plan**

- 2.1 Following publication of the LGA's report in February 2021, work has been underway to review each of the recommendations made by the LGA and to consider the Council's possible response to each of the actions. This work is summarised in Annex B which provides detail of each recommendation, the Council's proposed response and actions to be taken along with timescales and identification of the lead officer for each piece of work. In most instances, the Council's proposed response aligns with the recommendations of the LGA although in a small number of cases, the management response proposes a different approach.
- 2.2 This work has been reviewed by the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the actions and timescales are thought to be deliverable. The draft Action Plan includes a number of significant actions which will take place over the next 6 months and will include work to embed equalities and diversity into existing relevant strategies and further develop the governance framework that already exists. Work will also take place to refresh the training offer available for Council staff and work is already underway to improve the levels of workforce data that is currently held. Over the course of the summer, it is also proposed that further resident survey work is undertaken in line with the recommendations in the LGA report. The aim of this early work will be to ensure that the Council continues to ensure that it has up to date foundations for continued and enhanced work on Equalities and Diversity.
- 2.3 There are a number of actions that are identified for delivery between September 2021 and March 2022. These are typically activities where there is a need to align with work that is already planned (for example, the launch of a new website or the planned refresh of the Procurement Strategy) or where there is a need for earlier work to be embedded (such as staff training). The timing of the release of Census data will also be critical to enhancing the Council's understanding and work with communities.
- 2.4 The draft Action Plan also identifies a relatively small number of actions which are proposed for the delivery in the longer term. In light of the LGA's comments around phasing of implementation of actions, these are recommendations that may be best delivered in light of some of the proposed earlier work. The draft Action Plan proposes some indicative dates for these to be delivered.

- 2.5 Finally there is one action in relation to mentoring and coaching where officers consider that work is already underway as part of the Learning and Development Strategy and therefore no specific action is proposed. In this case, the recommendation is considered completed.

### **3. Next Steps**

- 3.1 Following discussion and consideration at this Board, it is proposed that the draft Action Plan is presented to Cabinet for adoption. It is proposed that the final Action Plan will be incorporated into the Service Plans for all relevant services and delivery will be monitored via the Equalities Working Group, CMT and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Rachel Barker

16 March 2021