EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Report of the Executive Director of Corporate and Support Services

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides an update on the council's ongoing commitment to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the organisation and in our communities. As part of our commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all employees and residents, significant strides have been made over the past year.

1.2 This update outlines our progress, highlights key initiatives, and identifies areas requiring further attention to ensure our EDI objectives are fully realised.

2. STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

2.1 One Stockport, One Future sets out our long term equality vision;

"A fair and inclusive Stockport, a borough for everyone where diversity and inclusion is celebrated and everyone has equity of opportunity."

The equality objectives, agreed in 2023 and which run until 2027 are informed and underpinned by our values; thinking Stockport, achieving as a team, working with ambition and showing everyone respect.

2.2 Our objectives are:

- Equality objective 1: Stockport is a fair and inclusive borough
- Equality objective 2: Support all staff in achieving their full potential and ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve
- Equality objective 3: Understand our diverse communities and their specific needs
- Equality objective 4: Address inequality in our services

2.3 At the heart of everything we do they describe the way we work in the council. Equality, diversity, and inclusion does not stand alone from other council strategies but seeks to provide a focus and overview of our commitment to equality and diversity and inclusion. Reducing inequality and delivering our equality objectives can only be done effectively if it is embedded across the organisation and within partnership working.

2.4 Leadership for equality, diversity and inclusion for the council is rooted within the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and is overseen by the Corporate Equality Steering Group (CESG). It includes senior leaders from across the council along with representatives from all employee engagement networks. This group is responsible for EDI oversight, ensuring that activities align with the council's strategic objectives and deliver impact.

AGENDA ITEM

2.5 Given the cross-cutting nature of equalities, many elements are delivered in partnership with through strategic forums such as the Fair and Inclusive working group and One Stockport Safer Partnership.

3. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

3.1 Following incidents of racism, Islamophobia, and discrimination during the summer months, we have taken the opportunity to reflect and further develop our work to ensure Stockport is a fair and inclusive borough and employer. We recognise that achieving a truly inclusive society requires continuous strategic efforts. To this end, we are enhancing our initiatives and focussing on our commitment to ensure that everyone feels safe, welcome, and included in Stockport.

3.2 It is recognised that to advance further and faster, a whole borough, whole partnership approach is needed. Our work on EDI covers different elements of the council's role:

- **Our place shaping and convening role** - working together as One Stockport we can create a vibrant environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and included. Partnership working involves collaboration with community leaders, strategic partnerships, and various stakeholders within our neighbourhoods.
- **Our role in delivering services** – ensuring that the needs of different protected characteristic are considered and service provision adapted accordingly. It also means using our data to ensure inclusive and equitable provision.
- **Our role as an employer** – ensuring we have an inclusive and diverse workforce that feels supported and represents the communities we serve.

3.3 In May 2024 we completed an EDI colleague survey. This showed that while there is a general sense of the council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, some areas for improvement were identified. These include better support for embodying EDI principles and more training and development on being more inclusive, fairer treatment for all, improved workplace accessibility and effective reporting of discrimination.

3.4 Many within our workforce, particularly colleagues of colour and faith were particularly affected by the events during the summer months. In response we provided a range of support including directorate check in sessions. Feedback from these sessions was collated to supplement the EDI survey and inform the refresh of our action plan.

3.5 Furthermore, there has been sessions with the corporate leadership team (CLT), the senior leadership group (SLG) and the corporate equalities steering group (CESG) to ensure that we have a cohesive and forward-looking approach to driving EDI initiatives. We have identified that there is a clear need for consistent language and for communications to be reviewed through an EDI lens, while also ensuring the messaging feels authentic and personal.

3.6 Elected members play a crucial role in this work through leading and advocating for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, engaging with our communities, shaping policies, and ensuring accountability through monitoring progress and holding the council to account for its equality objectives. There is strong oversight by the Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources. Progress is also be shared with the cross party working group on inequalities. This is achieved through oversight of our cross-party Fair and Inclusive working group and through our scrutiny process.

4. EDI ACTION PLAN

4.1 Our refreshed EDI Action Plan outlines the council's commitment to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion including community engagement, workforce development, and service delivery. We are looking to go further and faster and build on the foundations we already have in place. Our action plan has been structured into four pillars which align with our equality objectives. They are: -

4.2 Equality Objective 1 Stockport is a fair and inclusive borough
This objective aims to strengthen community unity by supporting local groups and events, offering cohesion-building resources, and enhancing council engagement with equity networks. It also focuses on ensuring equality in the Neighbourhoods and Prevention program, promoting inclusivity in the borough, and aligning with Greater Manchester equality initiatives.

4.3 Equality Objective 2 Support all staff in achieving their full potential and ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve
This objective outlines our ambition to ensure that our workforce reflects the communities we serve and that we foster an inclusive and supportive work environment. This involves launching targeted inclusive recruitment initiatives to boost diversity, ensuring fair recruitment practices, addressing the ethnicity pay gap, and offering leadership development opportunities for employees with protected characteristics. The goal also highlights the need for regular EDI training for all staff and councillors, conducting colleague surveys for feedback, and improving data and insights through consistent reporting.

4.4 Equality Objective 3 Understand our diverse communities and their specific needs
This objective seeks to gather insights from community engagement activities, including developing cohesion capacity-building, working with networks, and hosting events like peace breakfasts. The goal is to enhance relationships between community equity networks and decision-makers, promote positive council EDI community interactions, and integrate equalities into the Neighbourhoods and Prevention programme to improve outcomes for marginalized groups.

4.5 Equality Objective 4 Address inequality in our services
Focuses on ensuring that all services provided by the council are equitable and accessible to everyone. This includes reviewing and improving hate crime reporting mechanisms, collaborating with schools and young people to support community cohesion, and providing guidance on safe and welcoming community spaces. The objective also emphasizes the importance of participating in Greater Manchester equality initiatives and reflecting them locally, as well as creating visible cues of

inclusivity in the borough.

5. EDI ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS TO DATE

For a number of months we have been delivering against our action plan, with Senior Responsible officers in place for each of the objectives with clear areas of focus and next steps. This section of the report provides an update on the key areas of focus, progress to date and our next steps.

5.1 Equality Objective 1: Stockport is a fair and inclusive borough

The key areas of focus for this objective are: -
- Community engagement and investment in inclusion
- Education and prevention
- Review of our hate crime reporting and support offer
- Proactive communications
- Information, advice, and guidance to ensure community spaces feel safe and inclusive

Our progress to date includes community events and networks are now informing our strategies and action plan. We have a new organisation wide race equality group which has met three times and we are part of the Greater Manchester Race Equality Group. As part of our proactive communications work, we have launched an inclusive calendar which helps us to celebrate diversity, share knowledge and learning. We have also worked with the pallet of colour network to reflect on how we ensure that our communications are authentic and agile.

Our next steps are to establish a partnership community cohesion group which will be co chaired by a community leader. We will co design and launch the investment and celebration programme – learning from our work on town of culture. We are also keen to link in with emerging GM initiatives.

5.2 Equality Objective 2: Support all staff in achieving their full potential and ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve

The key areas of focus for this objective are: -
- Improving learning and development offer across the council but with a focus on inclusive leadership development, including targeted development for protected characterises
- Develop and deliver an inclusive recruitment plan
- Promoting the use of data and meaningful engagement when redesigning services or implementing programmes
- Internal communication and inclusive calendar communication
- Continue to strengthen Colleague Networks and explore development of EDI champions
- Zero Tolerance and dignity at work
- Report and support development and implementation

Our progress to date has focused on improving our workforce training and development offer. We have piloted a programme of reverse mentoring with our

senior leaders. CLT colleagues were mentored by colleagues with diverse backgrounds to understand their lived experiences. The pilot was successful and we have rolled out the first phase of this important learning approach across the council.

In addition, our Colleague Networks have a CLT sponsor aligned with them who not only provide support to the network but raise the profile of the protected characteristic the group represents and provides a learning opportunity to that CLT member.

We have delivered a number of inclusive leadership sessions and used our Leadership Forum to have focussed with our Corporate Leadership Team, Senior Leadership Group and through our Leadership Forum and these masterclasses are now being rolled out to any colleague who has a direct report responsibility. Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training was part of new member induction and further trained opportunities for elected members are being explored.

We have undertaken a number of EDI Self assessments within directorates using the LGA self assessment tool. The intelligence gathered from this is further supporting the development of the existing EDI action plan along with specific actions in directorates. We have also focused on inclusive recruitment, achieved through inclusive jobs fairs, our Jump Start programme for care experienced young people and supported internships for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Our next steps are to finalise our EDI self assessments and deliver on our inclusive leadership masterclasses so that every colleague with direct reports have attended these. We have also been developing our zero-tolerance policy and report and support offer to ensure that colleagues are confident on our standpoint and know where to go for support if they are experiencing discrimination.

5.3 Equality Objective 3; Understand our diverse communities and their specific needs

The key areas of focus for this objective are: -
- Continuing to develop neighbourhood profiles to strengthen information about protected characteristics in our population.
- Engaging with and understanding people's needs through our consultation and engagement processes, ensuring that these link to our strategic partnerships and Community Equity networks.
- Continuing to build and support our community networks.
- Promoting the use of data and meaningful engagement when redesigning services or implementing programmes (including Neighbourhoods and Prevention)
- Improve regular reporting on EDI through directorates and CLT.

Our progress to date includes the development and socialisation of our second iteration of our neighbourhood profiles. These were presented to area committees in September along with an update on our neighbourhood and prevention work.

Our next steps are to continue to develop our data and embed the use of it across our directorates. Within the neighbourhood and prevention programme the data will

be used to inform our population health plans and we are exploring opportunities to embed this in other key delivery programmes and commissioned activities. The work within this objective will inform the delivery of objectives one and two.

5.4 Equality Objective 4: Address inequality in our services.

The key areas of focus for this objective are: -
- Completion of LGA self-assessment tool across all directorates
- Deliver improved approach to integrated impact assessments (including equality, environmental & health impacts
- Identify opportunities to gather equalities information linked to service delivery, so that we can understand differences in service take-up
- Identify an approach to universal EDI training for elected members
- Identify options for increasing the resilience and sustainability of EDI expertise
- Explore accreditations for the organisation following Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award

Our progress to date includes delivery of our first all colleague EDI Survey which had a high participation rate and provided insightful intelligence to shape our plan. We have also used the LGA EDI self assessment across a number of directorates to help us understand where there are areas of good practice and where there is room for improvement. We have also achieved the Veterans Gold Aware, for armed forces community support.

Our next steps are to complete the LGA self assessments across our directorates and to continue to develop our EDI action plan, ensuring that we are clear on what we will deliver next, in what time frame and that we clearly communicate this to our kay stakeholders. We will also develop guidance on creating safe and welcoming community spaces.

6. MEASURING SUCCESS

6.1 It is important that we measure success against the actions that we have set in our action plan, each equality objective has a series of actions designed to meet its goals. Our senior responsible officers will monitor progress for their assigned equality objective and come together on a regular basis to provide high support and high challenge across the wider programme.

6.2 We will monitor progress both internally and externally. Internal progress will be monitored through regular staff surveys, colleague engagement and feedback from our colleague networks. We will know that we have succeeded when our workforce see, feel and hear a difference. Our workforce composition and recruitment conversation rates will also help us to measure success. We will also monitor the uptake of workforce training.

6.3 Externally, we will measure success through data, for example through the state of the borough report, census data, demographic trends and through the monitoring of 'inequality gap measures' aligned to our One Future programme.

7. GOVERNANCE

7.1 The Corporate Leadership Team manages the Fair and Inclusive programme, sets priorities, and works with the Corporate Equalities Steering Group.

7.2 The Corporate Equality Steering Group oversees the EDI plan for Stockport Council. This group includes senior leaders from every directorate across the council and representatives from all employee engagement networks. They will ensure that activities align with the council's strategic objectives and delivers impact.

7.3 Regular reporting in relation to EDI is takes place at our Senior Leadership Group and at Corporate Leadership Team.

7.4 There is oversight from elected members. This includes leadership from Cabinet Member for Communities, Culture & Sport and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources. Progress is shared with the Fair and Inclusive cross party working group and an annual report to scrutiny.

7.5 Our One Stockport Safer Partnership provides governance to our community cohesion work which includes a community cohesion wide coalition co-chaired with a community leader and an officer from the council.

7.6 All leaders within Stockport have a role to play, ensuring that we are a fair and inclusive borough and embedding our equality objectives and values in their teams and this is part of our expected leadership behaviours. They will also ensure that the services we offer are diverse and inclusive.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members of the scrutiny committee are asked to note the plans, progress and achievements made in the past 12 months with regards to Equality, Diversity and Inclusions and the ambition to be a more inclusive borough. Comments and feedback are most welcome.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 There are none.

Anyone wishing further information should contact (Emma Bowe) on telephone number (07800 618 683) or alternatively email (emma.bowe@stockport.gov.uk)