

Part A

Report to:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	30 th October 2023
Report author:	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead
Portfolio holder:	Cllr Aga Dychton and Cllr Mark Watkin
Report title:	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
Nature of Report:	For Approval

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Watford Borough Council is committed to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. This Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (EDI) demonstrates the council's commitment and responsibility to our residents, community, workforce and sustainability. The council is strengthening its equalities, diversity, and inclusion agenda to demonstrate compliance with its legal duty, implement best practice and to work towards recruiting a workforce with a closer demographic to the communities we serve.
- 1.2 The equality objectives established within the Policy set out how we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to embed equal, diverse, and inclusive practices in all that we do to build on our existing progress and achievements to ensure excellence. The accompanying EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will steer the council's work on equality, diversity, and inclusion from 2023-2027.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval of the policy, which demonstrates how the council will comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010, as well as going beyond our legal duty and implementing best practice, creating a culture where diversity is celebrated and ensuring that Watford is an inclusive borough.
- 1.4 The policy also demonstrates the council's commitment to EDI as influential community leader, service provider and employer, making clear that the responsibility extends to anyone who represents or is commissioned by Watford Borough Council.
- 1.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of this policy. Conclusions found that the policy will have positive impacts on a wide range of the community and employees beyond

those defined under the Equality Act 2010 as having protected characteristics.

2.0 Why this Policy is Needed

2.1 The EDI Policy will strengthen the council's ability to meet the Equality Act 2010 which includes the Public Sector Equality Duty.

2.2 The EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will help the council make decisions and provide services fairly and promote equality and inclusion across its functions.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet approves the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives (Appendix A) that are established in the policy.

3.2 That Cabinet approves the Delivery Plan (Appendix B) that underpins the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

4.0 Report pathway

4.1 Next review body: *Not applicable:*

4.1.1 Indicative date: Not applicable

4.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*

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Reviewed and signed off by: Lee Pound

5.0 Detailed proposal

5.1 Watford Borough Council is committed to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. This Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy demonstrates the council's commitment and responsibility to our residents, community, workforce, and sustainability. The equality objectives established within the Policy set out how we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to embed equal, diverse, and inclusive practices in all that we do to build on our existing achievements to ensure excellence.

5.2 The Equality Act 2010 and The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 require public authorities to set and publish equality objectives at least every four years to demonstrate how they aim to eliminate discrimination and advance equality. The council's approach to equality and diversity underpins all its key plans and policies. The Policy

outlines the Watford Borough Council's priorities, interventions and aims for the next four years.

- 5.3 The Equality Act 2010 identifies the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. In addition, the council recognises other groups may also be considered vulnerable or disadvantaged, such as neurodiverse people, people with caring responsibilities, and war veterans.
- 5.4 The new EDI Policy Action Plan is designed to integrate equalities into all the Council Plan themes. The delivery plan will be a live document, with lead officers updating their areas and adding actions over the year.
- 5.5 This policy will be reviewed every four years; however, reviews will be steered by any new guidance or legislation that may be produced before the next review date.

5.6 Strategic Context

- 5.6.1 We will continue to promote Watford as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued. The Council Plan and Delivery Plan commit to developing an Equality and Diversity policy for Watford, making sure it reflects our diverse town and our commitment to being a place where everyone can thrive.
- 5.6.2 The council's ambition is to be recognised as the leading local authority for achieving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for our residents and our organisation.
- 5.6.3 The vision of the EDI Policy therefore aims to have a significant impact on all future work on equalities underpinned by data and insight, also recognising that climate justice and sustainability are key aspects of this vision.
- 5.6.4 The policy is developed through strong relationships with colleagues, partners, and inclusive employer forums.

5.7 EDI Policy Vision and Objectives

- 5.7.1 Watford Borough Council's aims are established under three core themes:
1. Our role as community leader
 2. Delivering Services
 3. Our workforce

Each theme is underpinned by focused objectives that detail what the council will do to advance equality and how we aim to achieve them.

These equality objectives build on our current commitments and achievements, and take the council's aspirations even further to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the needs of those with protected characteristics
- Embed this understanding into every level of decision-making and practice
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership, and clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality, diversity and inclusion
- Reach out through community engagement and conversations to give everyone an opportunity to participate and influence decisions taken by the council
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to the diverse needs of Watford's communities, partnerships, businesses and workforce

5.7.2 The EDI Delivery Plan reinforces the council's commitment to actions to ensure continuous improvement through clear actions that are designed to meet the current needs of the borough and builds in resilience to recognise future issues that may arise.

5.7.3 This approach enables linkages between the EDI Policy and other council policies and strategies to be understood and embedded at all levels of the organisation. In line with the approach of new and emerging policies and strategies, explicit links are set out on the concluding page of the EDI Policy.

5.8 Consultation and Engagement:

5.8.1 Prior to formal consultation, the draft policy was subject to pre-engagement to ensure that it was developed in collaboration and consultation with other key stakeholders, including Watford Borough Council Corporate Management Team, Service Delivery Leads, Union Representatives, Staff Engagement Groups, and Watford Football Club as a key partner of the organisation. The findings and recommendations were used to adapt the draft policy and delivery plan further.

5.8.2 Consultation on the draft policy was undertaken over a period of 8 weeks with all council employees and Elected Members, and community partners and organisations including CAB and Veolia.

5.8.3 Overall, the feedback was very positive with high levels of agreement for the vision. The policy has been reviewed and updated taking into consideration the consultation responses to deliver this final version of the EDI Policy. Consultation responses informed the following changes.

5.9 Key findings from the consultation and resulting actions:

5.9.1 EDI Policy Vision – some of the consultation responses asked for clearer clarification on the responsibilities, actions, and deadlines in the delivery plan.

- The council's strategic partners have also been referenced more and the policy has been updated to make it clearer that this is a policy that will be delivered in partnership with other agencies who we expect to share our values.
- The vision has been updated to make clearer the actions to be achieved in service areas and the associated deadlines.
- Emphasis has been added in the Delivery Plan to partnership working in particular with further reference on the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors (VCFS).
- To help address some concerns around a lack of clarity on how we will achieve these aims, and how success of the approach will be measured, more detail has been included on the EDI Policy's approach and what we are doing to achieve the aims set out within the policy.

5.9.2 Delivery Plan – some respondents wanted to see more actions around anti-racism campaigns, LGBTQ+, reaching out to communities and making information accessible.

There were also a few comments within the different consultation strands that the vision should state how the council will deal with structural inequalities; however, after careful consideration it was felt there is sufficient emphasis on this.

The Delivery Plan is an organic document and will be updated over the life of the policy to ensure it includes more action covering these areas. The Delivery Plan has been updated to account for strong relationships with our existing workforce, third sector equality groups and forums to help us map all areas of inequalities faced by all our communities and to also gather quantitative data to tackle inequality.

6.0 Monitoring and Performance

6.1 Progress on the actions will be monitored by HR&OD, the Corporate Equalities Working Group and reported up to Corporate Management

Board, Cabinet, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee through the organisation's established Performance Improvement channels.

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial

7.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the proposals are within current budget. Any individual actions requiring additional funding will be brought forward as part of the normal budget process.

7.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

7.2.1 Adoption of the EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will strengthen the council's ability to meet its legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010.

7.3 Risks

The setting and publication of Equality Objectives will ensure that the council is not in breach of its statutory duty and that mitigation is not required.

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
That Cabinet decline to approve the EDI Policy and Delivery Plan	The council will be without an EDI policy and fail to meet its commitment in the Council/Delivery plan to develop an EDI Policy	The EDI Policy provides clarity on the vision and required actions to bring the Delivery Plan to fruition. Some complex work has been carried out considering an approach that fits with the culture and ambitions of the organisation; the finalised proposal demonstrates the council's commitment to deliver a wide-ranging programme of work establishes EDI as everyone's responsibility and throughout all that we do.	Treat	2

<p>The council fails to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Lack of consistent council-wide knowledge on the Public Sector Equality Duty and how to take equalities into consideration</p>	<p>HR&OD together with EDI Lead have already taken steps to meet the range of training needs. The Delivery Plan commits to compile a suite of resources as a toolkit that will support service areas to develop and implement robust service plans that embed EDI.</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>We may not achieve parity of focus and priority for all with protected characteristics due to limitations of data, knowledge, and resources</p>	<p>Engagement is compliance-driven rather than insight based on good analysis</p>	<p>Additionally, the role of Service Delivery Leads includes the responsibility to identify and address EDI within their respective areas: identifying resource, priorities, and action plans.</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Actions of the delivery plan are not fulfilled or kept in line with the EDI landscape</p>	<p>The council fails to deliver on its vision and commitments in the policy</p>	<p>Progress will be monitored against actions in the delivery plan. At the end of the life of the policy a self-assessment can be undertaken against the Local Government Equality Framework</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The policy sets out aspirations that are not achievable</p>	<p>Our aspirations are not achieved, and positive impacts are imperceptible</p>	<p>Commitment has been sought at Corporate Leadership Board, and from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to ensure ownership and leadership at the senior level. Included in the policy is the revival of the Corporate Equality Working Group to ensure</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>

		the Delivery Plan is driven forward.		
Residents and community fail to embrace the aims of the policy	Our aspirations are not achieved which could result in the opportunity for EDI progress and benefits is missed or delayed	Strategic links across service areas place stakeholders at the core of the ambitions of the EDI and other policies. Eg. Customer Experience, Comms and Conversations, and Community Engagement.	Treat	3
Employees view the policy as box-ticking	Poor decisions are likely to be made without a challenge to the status quo	Targeted training will include leadership training for colleagues with line management/supervisory roles so that employees can be supported to meet their EDI responsibilities.	Treat	2
Service areas may focus on what they consider their core business and consider EDI as less relevant.	Inconsistent ownership and accountability of the policy across service areas.	Each service area will be required to produce an equality work plan and held accountable for it.	Treat	2
	Competing demands within services	The Delivery Plan sets clear timescales for actions to be delivered or updates on progress through periodic reports	Treat	2
Employees consider the policy as unnecessary	Some employees do not grasp the importance and purpose of the policy	The Delivery Plan includes actions to identify where challenges lie within service areas to focus on those and ensure high standards are met across the organisation. A phased approach underpinned by training options will support employees with	Treat	3

		developing and delivering priorities.		
	Fail to play a role to reduce the likelihood of people developing prejudices now or in later life which in turn helps in creating a more welcoming and diverse society	Consultation feedback is overwhelming positive and reflects an appetite among employees to improve their learning to deliver better quality of services and to express and learn about lived experiences to aid their understanding on EDI matters.	Treat	3
Residents and the community experience no difference and perceive the policy as ineffective	Damage to the council's reputation and criticism of policy lacking impact for residents and the community	The Delivery Plan sets actions to develop and deliver EQIA training as well as embedding other equalities related training into Learning Development offers. Implementation of Delivery Plan will produce visible and tangible outcomes with positive impacts for residents and the community	Treat	2

7.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

7.4.1 Equalities

7.4.1.1 As this is a new policy an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix C to this report. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken which indicates that the Policy and Delivery Plan will have positive impacts for all protected groups.

7.4.1.2 The legal requirements of the 2010 Equality Act outlined above describe the requirement for public bodies to pay due regard to equalities.

7.4.2 Human Rights

7.4.2.1 The 2010 Equality Act created a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The characteristics protected by the 2010 Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act is therefore of pertinence to the Human Rights of freedom of thought, belief and religion; freedom of expression; the right to marry; and protection from discrimination.

7.4.3 Data Protection Impact Assessment

7.4.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

7.5 Sustainability

7.5.1 Equality, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability interact, and this policy can enable better understanding of the relationship between the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and factors that can produce inequalities, especially of health and wealth. In turn, these can have associations with differential environmental impacts and the carbon footprints of individuals.

7.5.2 Climate justice is a key part of equity and inclusion, as the most disadvantaged who are the most impacted or likely to be impacted by the ongoing climate emergency. Actions in the Delivery Plan should therefore aim to ensure that inequality and environmental issues are not considered in isolation, and that growth is fair, green, and sustainable.

7.6 People Implications

7.6.1 HR&OD has a direct link into EDI. Equal, diverse and inclusive workplaces benefits employees and organisations, with positive impacts on recruitment and retention. The EDI policy can help to create a workplace culture that values and respects all employees regardless of the characteristics or abilities.

7.6.2 The HR&OD agenda will be focused on educating our workforce, creating safe spaces for employees, and building EDI into the overall development of our people.

7.6.3 HR&OD will be responsible for overseeing the delivery plan, ensuring that the council creates an environment where employees feel safe and empowered to discuss EDI issues free from worry.

7.6.4 Resourcing to implement the actions in the delivery plan will be drawn from existing approved budgets.

7.7 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

7.7.1 The policy provides a framework for services, decisions, and work to enable the organisation to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Additionally, to fulfil its commitment that Watford is a place where people feel safe and everyone in our diverse borough feels that they are treated fairly and included.

7.8 Property

7.8.1 This policy has no direct property implications; however, Watford Borough Council must ensure that any property used for council, and third party purposes are appropriate for the expected users. As such, property may require adaptations and give due regard to the suitability of property, particularly for potential users and occupiers with protected characteristics.

8.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

8.1 Should Cabinet approve the recommendations in this report, the Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy will be formally published and adopted.

8.2 The Delivery Plan will become a live document, with Service Delivery Leads updating their service areas and adding actions over the year. Progress will be reported to the Corporate Equalities Working Group and updated shared for recording by the corporate management channels including Performance Improvement Management for reporting to Overview and Scrutiny.

9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy 2023-2027
Appendix B – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Delivery Plan 2023- 2027
Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

10.0 Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.