



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

Thursday, 14 March 2024

Report of the Managing Director

Diverse Council Declaration
(Cabinet Member for Health and Communities)

1. Divisions Affected

1.1 County-wide

2. Key Decision

2.1 This is not a Key Decision

Purpose

2.2 To consider and approve the recommendations from the cross-party working group in respect of Diverse Council Declaration Motion presented at Full Council on 12 July 2023

3. Information and Analysis

3.1 On 12 July 2023, Full Council heard a Motion in respect of the Diverse Council Declaration, where it was agreed that the Motion be referred to Cabinet to consider establishing a cross party working group to discuss and debate the wide-ranging matters covered in the motion.

3.2 At its meeting of 21 September 2023 Cabinet agreed to establish a cross-party working group as set out above and to receive a further report to outline recommendations from the cross-party working group.

3.3 Following the Cabinet meeting a working group has been established comprising Elected Members with appropriate officers in attendance in

an advisory capacity. The group has met on three occasions and has considered the currently activity being undertaken, identified where more could be done and has agreed a set of recommendations in respect of the matters contained in the Diverse Council declaration.

3.4 The Diverse Councils Declaration did seek to ensure that Elected Members reflect the diversity of their community by committing to a number of pledges as follows:

1. Provide a clear public commitment to improving diversity in democracy and benchmark our current position in line with established good practice
2. Demonstrate an open and welcoming culture to all, promoting the highest standards of behaviour and conduct.
3. Set out a local Diverse Council Action Plan ahead of the next local elections. Including:
 - Appoint Diversity Ambassadors for each political group on the council to work with each other and local party associations to encourage recruitment of candidates from under-represented groups.
 - Encourage and enable people from under-represented groups to stand for office through the provision of activities such as mentoring and shadowing programmes and information and learning events for people interested in standing as official candidates.
 - Proactive engagement and involvement with local community groups and partner organisations supporting and representing under-represented groups
 - Ensure that all members and candidates complete a candidates' and Elected Members survey distributed at election time.
 - Set ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the next local elections.
4. Work towards the standards for member support and development as set out in the LGA Councillor Development Charter and/or Charter Plus.
5. Demonstrate a commitment to a duty of care for Councillors by:
 - providing access to counselling services for all Councillors having regard for the safety and wellbeing of Councillors whenever they are performing their role as Councillors.
 - taking a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment of members including through social networks.
6. Provide flexibility in council business by:
 - regularly reviewing and staggering meeting times
 - encouraging and supporting remote attendance at meetings
 - agreeing recess periods to support Councillors with caring or work commitments.

7. Ensure that all members take up the allowances and salaries to which they are entitled, particularly any reimbursement for costs of care, so that all members receive fair remuneration for their work and that the role of member is not limited to those who can afford it.

8. Ensure that the council adopts a parental leave policy setting out members' entitlement to maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave and relevant allowances.

9. Ensure that Councillors from under-represented groups are represented whenever possible in high profile, high influence roles.

3.5 Many of the actions in the Declaration are for Political Groups and not for the Council to take forward, such as committing to appointing Diversity Ambassadors, setting ambitious targets for candidates from under-represented groups at the next local elections and promoting the talent and diversity of colleagues through mentoring and shadowing.

3.6 Some elements of the Declaration can be promoted and supported by the Council. The Council has a duty to promote local democracy which allows it to carry out a range of activities to support this. For example, making residents more aware of the democratic process, making information available on how to be involved and how to stand for a formal governance role such as being a councillor. Many elements of the Diverse Council Declaration and activity to support the promotion of local democracy are already carried out by the Council. For example:

- All Elected Members receive core mandatory induction training including the Code of Conduct which is the LGA model code adopted locally and EDI training. In addition, Health and Safety training for members is provided within the induction programme.
- Organisational EDI Events take place throughout the year to raise awareness, provide a forum of peer support and allyship, demonstrate our commitment to being an inclusive employer and recognise the contribution of our diverse communities. Many of the events are applicable to Elected Members as well as the organisation's workforce and in some cases partner organisations.
- The organisation provides non-partisan information on the role of an Elected Member in the run up to an election and this information is shared as widely as possible.
- As part of the organisation's approach to wellbeing, the Employee Assistance Programme is available to all Elected Members, including a 24/7 confidential helpline, counselling, legal info and a wellbeing portal and App.
- Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) is a peer support approach that aims to help people who have experienced trauma and is also available to Elected Members.

- Joined Up Care Derbyshire, our health partner, offer a timetable of wellbeing activities including fitness classes, mental health support and singing, all of which is available for Elected Members.
- In terms of council business:
 - Elected Members are able to schedule political group meetings to suit their commitments, including in the evenings.
 - Non-formal meetings are offered as hybrid meetings where practical.
 - Formal meetings have to be in person due to provisions in the Local Government Act 1972.
 - There are no meetings planned in August to avoid the main holiday season.
 - Elected Members can send substitutes to meetings where allowed
- Allowances are paid by default unless Elected Members opt to not take all or part of their allowance.

3.7 Recommendations from the Diverse Council Working Group

Whilst the above activity, addresses many of the matters contained in the Declaration, the Working Group identified opportunities to complement and enhance the existing work being undertaken and the support available. As a result, several recommendations have been agreed by the Working Group for both Elected Members and the Council as follows:

Recommendations for Elected Members

- Political parties to consider Councillor diversity benchmarking and actions which can be taken within political parties in response to this to increase diversity in democracy.
- Political parties to consider actions which can be taken with known community groups to increase diversity in democracy.
- Political parties to consider where councillor representation has been made across EDI events in the last 12 months and whether any gaps in support exist.
- Political parties to engage in member training and for Elected Members to utilise allowances as appropriate and aligned to individual circumstances.
- Political parties to consider their scheduling of meetings and consult with officers where any issues arise.

The above recommendations will be for the political groups to take forward, A separate set of recommendations has been developed by the Working Group that can be undertaken by the Council. These are as follows:

Recommendations for the Council

- Undertake an equality survey of current Elected Members.
- Share the known community engagement groups with political parties.
- Communicate the EDI forward plan to Elected Members to enable engagement and participation and in planned organisational events, alongside a general reminder to Elected Members of where they can access information which is contained in Our Derbyshire.
- Continue to develop the approach to Elected Member induction including the signposting of allowances available and the role of an Elected Member.
- Consider holding events specifically for Elected Members or to encourage attendance at events organised for Elected Members (e.g. LGA events)
- Continue to consider the availability of hybrid meeting spaces as part of the organisation's wider asset management strategy.
- Consider how within the organisation's review of the strategic approach to EDI the organisation can continue development of an inclusive culture.
- Scope the possibility of a leave policy for Elected Members, considering best in practice examples (i.e. LGA) with focus on maternity, paternity, shared parental and adoption leave.

3.8 Should the recommendations from the cross-party working group for the Council be approved by Cabinet, they will be incorporated within the refreshed strategic approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which is currently being reviewed. Recognising that different experiences, perspectives and voices lead to better decisions and that a truly skilled and diverse council (both Elected members and workforce) is one that is far more likely to understand the needs of its residents and be able to fulfil them

4. Consultation

4.1 Community engagement has not been undertaken on the basis that it is a set of internal commitments for the Council and its Elected Members to take forward. It is anticipated that, should the report be agreed, Elected Members and their Political Groups may wish to engage with residents and community groups on the implementation of the Declaration.

5. Alternative Options Considered

5.1 The alternatives would include not taking any action in respect of the Motion. However, it is appropriate to ensure and support diversity and equality of opportunity amongst Elected Members. Ensuring the

involvement of and supporting Elected Members across the Council to be representative of their communities is an important aspect of the expectations of the Public Sector Equality Duty and helps build confidence within communities across Derbyshire.

6. Implications

- 6.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None identified.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Implications

9. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

1. Agree the recommendations from the Diverse Council Working Group as set out at paragraph 3.7 above.

10. Reasons for Recommendation(s)

- 10.1 The Working Group recommendations support the Council's work on equality, diversity and inclusion and recognises that an organisation that better reflects its communities is more respected and trusted by the public as residents are more likely to see themselves reflected across the Council.

11. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

- 11.1 No

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Implications

Financial

1.1 None

Legal

2.1 The proposed actions are supportive of the Public Sector Equality Duty created by the Equality Act 2010. The Public Sector Equality Duty was developed in order to harmonise the equality duties and to extend it across the protected characteristics. It consists of a general equality duty, supported by specific duties which are imposed by secondary legislation. In summary, those subject to the equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need 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.

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- The actions detailed in the report support the aims detailed above.

Human Resources

3.1 None

Information Technology

4.1 None

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 The recommendations will have a positive equality, diversity and inclusion impact, supporting Elected Members and developing further their role as champions for equalities within their communities, within Council business, and within decision-making.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 Strong links are already made between the EDI Strategy and the Council Plan and Department based Service Plans. The refresh of the strategic approach to EDI offers a real opportunity of translating organisational improvement and addressing inequalities within these key corporate plans.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

- 7.1 None