

Cabinet Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Equalities Task Group

Introduction

At the Cabinet meeting on 7th July 2021, consideration was given to the report of the Equalities Task Group. The Leader welcomed Councillor P. McDonald, who joined the meeting remotely as Chairman of the Task Group, to the meeting and thanked him for being present to provide clarification on any matters raised by Cabinet Members. Councillor McDonald outlined the work which had been undertaken by the Task Group and thanked Members and officers for their contributions.

The Cabinet then discussed and considered each of the recommendations of the Task Group in detail.

Response to recommendations

Please find below responses to the recommendations contained within the scrutiny report:

Recommendation 1

That an annual Equalities Report be prepared for 2021 and annually thereafter.

Cabinet Response

An annual equalities report would support the Council to demonstrate compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The PSED comprises a general Equality duty supported by further duties; to publish equality information at least once a year, to show how the Council has complied with the equality duty, and to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every 4 years. In this context, Cabinet supported this recommendation.

This recommendation was approved.

Recommendation 2

That a question in respect of IOS certification (or equivalent) is included in the Contractors' Questionnaire in respect of Equalities.

Cabinet Response

IOS certification is available for a range of areas, however, the Council has been unable to identify a specific IOS relating to Equalities. As an alternative, it has been suggested that contractors should be required to hold an IOS relevant to their industry, however the Council's Legal Department has concluded that the Council is not qualified to assess for each contract the relevant IOS that should apply. In addition, the IOS certification process can be both lengthy and financially costly and not something that companies in all sectors would undergo as a matter of course. There is a risk that a requirement for IOS certification could exclude some smaller operators from some Council contracts through the Council's procurement process.

However, the issues identified with IOS certification do not preclude the potential to amend the Contractors' Questionnaire. It has been suggested that Contractors' Questionnaire be updated to be as robust as possible in respect of equalities issues without needing to make reference to IOS certification. In this context Cabinet agreed the following:

The Contractors' Questionnaire should be updated to be as robust as possible in respect of equalities issues.

Recommendation 3

That when the new ERP system is in use, the data collated by it in respect of HR issues be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Cabinet Response

Responsibility for staffing and HR issues is an operational matter which lies with Senior Officers and the HR Department. Data from the ERP system will be made available to managers to enable them to manage their services and this data will also be made available to the Corporate Management Team on a regular basis. Therefore, whilst data could potentially be provided to the Board in the long-term it would need to be considered by Senior Officers first. For this reason, the recommendation was rejected.

This recommendation was rejected.

Recommendation 4

- a) That clear guidelines are put in place in respect of the secondment process (which would include some sort of appeals process) and made accessible to all staff; and
- b) That a formal progression policy be put in place and made accessible to all staff.

Cabinet Response

Clear written guidance on the secondment process would be useful. However, it is a manager's responsibility to determine whether officers can be released to take up a secondment position. Whilst managers always try to support their employees' personal development sometimes it is not possible to support a request of a secondment, particularly if this were to impact on service continuity. In addition, staff can already raise concerns through the Council's grievance process. Unfortunately, the Council cannot guarantee career progression to staff and a Progression Policy could raise expectations that could not necessarily be met.

As an alternative, given the potential benefits of having clear, written guidance on the secondment process, Cabinet agreed the following resolution:

Clear guidelines are put in place in respect of the secondment process and made available to all staff.

Guidance on the benefits of staff development and progression be put in place and accessible to all staff.

Recommendation 5

- a) That a specific section on Equalities be included within the annual Community Survey; and
- b) That the Overview and Scrutiny Board (or Members of the Equalities Task Group) are involved in the preparation of the questions to be included.

Cabinet Response

There is already a specific section in the Community Survey that is dedicated to equalities issues. Responsibility for the Community Survey and the questions in respect of equalities matters rests with officers, particularly those officers who have been specifically employed to address equalities issues and have experiences in this field. For these reasons the recommendation was rejected.

This recommendation was rejected.

Councillor G. Denaro – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling (including Governance/ Policy and Performance/HR).