

Corporate Select Committee

Emerging Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Objectives for 2023-2026

Date of meeting: 16 January 2023

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Margaret Dewsbury – Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships

Responsible Director: Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services

Introduction from Cabinet Member

Norfolk County Council aims for Norfolk to be one of the highest performing counties in the country - creating jobs and opportunities for the people of Norfolk and cherishing our environment, countryside and heritage.

Above all – we want to empower our residents to be in control of their lives and influence decision making in Norfolk, to enable equality of opportunity for all.

Our current EDI Plan is due to expire, and work is underway to develop a new set of EDI objectives for 2023 to 2026. We must think carefully about what will deliver the best results for all with our limited budget, so every three years we prioritise common-sense actions to improve equality and inclusion across our services, workforce and communities.

Over recent years, we have delivered many improvements on EDI, including:

- We are quadruple award-winning for our work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes nominations from the Municipal Journal; Blue Badge awards; British Council Office awards; Asian Fire Service Association Awards, Local Government Chronicle awards and the BBA Leonard Cheshire awards.
- Our progress to lay sound building blocks in Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service on EDI was commended by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as 'innovative practice'.
- Dr Margaret Flynn, the author of the Safeguarding Adults Review for Joanna, Jon and Ben, said that our approach to addressing Recommendation M in the report (tackling racism) was 'illuminating in terms of its reach, its evidence-based focus and piloting ways of thinking about dealing with racism'.

However, there is so much more to do – for example:

- Racism affects many of our ethnic minority residents and employees, and young Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in Norfolk experience the poorest lifelong outcomes (also seen in the rest of the UK).
- Many disabled people continue to experience substantial barriers to physical and digital environments – which require a high level of technical skill to resolve.
- Promoting inclusion for our LGBTQ+ communities is an important priority.

One of Norfolk's great strengths is our diversity – and the latest Census results for 2021 indicate that diversity is increasing. Our aim is that over the next three years, we will really make a difference in Norfolk – dismantling barriers to equality and using our considerable influence to continue to improve life in Norfolk for all.

Executive summary

This report summarises progress over the last three years to deliver against the County Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives for 2020 to 2023. Overall, progress has been good. All critical activities are due to be delivered.

The existing objectives are due to expire on 31 March 2023. Work has therefore taken place to prepare a new Plan.

This report sets out the arrangements to prepare the new Plan, the challenges to address and the evidence gathered to date (which includes consultation with 250+ residents from diverse backgrounds). It summarises the draft EDI objectives to emerge so far, set out in Section 5.

Following feedback from Select Committee and the completion of public consultation, the Cabinet will decide in March 2023 the final EDI objectives for 2023 to 2026.

Actions required

1. To note the progress made in delivering the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives 2020 to 2023, set out in Section 2.
2. To consider the challenges set out in Section 3; the actions that have taken place so far to prepare new objectives, and the emerging objectives set out in Section 5.
3. To advise the Cabinet of any additional actions that should take place, or any information that should be made available to Select Committee, to ensure that the final EDI objectives to be determined by the Cabinet in March 2023 are fit for purpose.

4. To recommend to the Cabinet the future timing of reports on EDI to Select Committee (for example, Select Committee may wish to receive an annual progress report).

1. The legal context

1.1. Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to pay 'due regard' to the following when exercising public functions:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good community relations

1.2. The Act requires authorities to publish equality objectives and report annually on progress each year.

2. Progress against the Council's equality objectives 2020 to 2023

2.1. Overall, progress over the last three years has been good.

2.2. All critical activities in the current Plan are due to be delivered by 31 March 2023.

2.3. Some key highlights include:

- The Council is quadruple award-nominated/winning for its work on equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes the British Council Office awards; Asian Fire Service Association Awards, Local Government Chronicle awards and the [BBAA Leonard Cheshire awards](#).
- Our progress to lay sound building blocks in Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service on EDI was commended by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as 'innovative practice'.
- Dr Margaret Flynn, the author of the independent Adult Safeguarding Review, said that our approach to addressing Recommendation M in the report (tackling racism) was 'illuminating in terms of its reach, its evidence-based focus and piloting ways of thinking about dealing with racism'.
- We have completed a whole-Council review of equality (500 data sets) to identify strengths and where there are inequalities. This means that the Council now has a clear picture of the most significant inequalities.

2.4. [For more details about progress please visit the Norfolk County Council's Equality, diversity and inclusion webpages.](#)

3. Operational challenges to address

3.1. Despite progress over the last three years there are significant challenges to address. For example:

- Our ethnic minority employees continue to report racism at work by service users and in their personal lives. Norfolk County Council agreed a Motion on 20 July 2020 to reaffirm the Council's commitment to race equality, to prioritise actions to eliminate racism and to use our influence to actively promote race equality.
- We have listened to feedback from ethnic minority residents and employees, and it is evident there is more we can do to tackle racism. This includes reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure they are clear and easy to apply; and that managers are equipped to support employees experiencing racism. It also means always challenging unacceptable behaviour and working and communicating in ways that actively promote race equality.
- Our social care workforce is increasingly ethnically diverse (it is more diverse than the population of Norfolk) and this will continue as we welcome more international workers to help fill vacancies in social care. This makes tackling racism even more important – it is not just about keeping people physically and psychologically safe, but also about recruitment and retention so that we can continue to provide social care services to the people of Norfolk.
- Our whole-Council review of equality highlighted embedded inequalities (also seen nationally) for young Black and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, for which there is yet no explanation. Children's Services have prioritised this and have agreed to conduct an analysis about why these inequalities are occurring (by examining how and why referrals to services are made, to identify if these operational decisions are following all relevant policies).
- On 23 November 2020, Full Council agreed a Motion for Disabled People. Accessibility for disabled people is complex and requires specialised skills. Everything that the Council now provides – whether customer services, computer software, websites, physical buildings, equipment, personal support or correspondence – must be accessible. Barriers experienced by people who are, for example, blind, Deaf, neurodiverse, wheelchair or cane users, who have learning disabilities or mental health issues are different. This means that at any one time, the Council is identifying and removing thousands of barriers. Often, barriers are substantial, and may impact on a disabled person's ability to live independently or access information or services. Looking ahead, working with disabled people to identify which barriers should be prioritised first will be important.
- There is a polarised national debate about the rights of trans and non-binary people. A priority is to ensure that our LGBTQ+ residents and employees feel safe, respected

and valued, and that our business systems can accurately record someone's sex and gender identity.

- We still have a significant EDI transformation strategy to deliver in Fire and Rescue.
- The Adult Social Care Peer Review highlighted a range of equality issues to be addressed in relation to the delivery of adult social care.

4. How we are developing potential EDI objectives for 2023 to 2026

4.1. We have undertaken a range of actions to properly research and shape the proposed emerging objectives set out in Section 5:

- A whole-Council review (500 data sets) of how the Council works and communicates. This means that we now have a clear picture of the most significant inequalities in lifelong outcomes for service users and employees.
- Initial consultation in 2022 with 250+ residents from seldom-heard communities (LGC award-nominated).
- Interviews in 2022 with 45 Black British, Black African and Black Caribbean women.
- Consultation with Norfolk residents on potential equality priorities for 2023 to 2026. We are actively promoting the consultation to our diverse ethnic minority, faith and LGBTQ+ communities. We are holding sessions for disabled people including people who are D/deaf, Blind and who have learning disabilities to ensure an inclusive approach. We are also engaging the Norfolk Resident's Panel.
- Listening to service users and employees with protected characteristics via our many different engagement mechanisms including staff advisory groups and employee conversations.
- Literature review of relevant past consultation exercises with Norfolk residents over the last decade – for example, consultation with the chairs of Norfolk's disability access groups, who identified top barriers to independence in Norfolk; consultation with 345 LGBTQ+ residents; consultation with 315 residents on religion and belief; workforce surveys.
- Independent advice from Black, Asian and race equality experts.
- A review of Children's and Adults Safeguarding Serious Case Reviews to identify themes around race and culture.
- Engagement with key stakeholders including independent safeguarding chairs.
- Review of relevant national Governmental publications on disability, race equality, gender identity, LGBTQ+.

5. Emerging EDI objectives for 2023 to 2026

5.1 On the basis of the evidence gathered so far, four potential objectives are emerging:

- a) Promote race equality and eliminate racism across our workforce, services and communities
- b) Provide services, information and environments that can be accessed, understood and used independently and with dignity to the greatest extent possible by all disabled people
- c) Promote inclusion for our LGBTQ+ service users and colleagues
- d) Deliver our EDI transformation actions in response to external inspections, peer and safeguarding reviews (this includes our EDI plan for Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service; our EDI actions in response to Adults Peer Review 2022; and our EDI actions in response to Recommendation M (tackling racism) Safeguarding Adults Review – Joanna, Jon and Ben.)

5.2 The final EDI objectives for 2023 to 2026 will be determined by the Cabinet in March 2023, following the end of consultation and feedback from Select Committee.

6. Governance

6.1 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships chairs the EDI Performance Board. The Board monitors progress against the EDI Objectives on a quarterly basis.

6.2 Select Committee is asked to recommend to the Cabinet the future timing of reports on EDI to Select Committee (see Recommendation 4).

7. Evidence and reasons for decision

7.1 The evidence for the proposals is set out in Section 3.

8. Financial and resource implications

8.1 The objectives detailed in this report can be met within existing budgets and resources.

9. Other implications

9.1 Human rights implications

No human rights issues identified.

9.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

The proposals in this report will enable the Council to comply with the Equality Act 2010 including the public sector equality duty. They will also ensure the Council continues to take full account of equality, diversity and inclusion when planning and commissioning services and, where necessary, put actions in place to promote equality and address barriers faced by people with protected characteristics.

9.3 Health and safety implications

None identified.

9.4 Sustainability implications

None identified.

10. Risk implications/assessment

10.1 The Council has monitored potential risks for failure to comply with statutory equality duties. This risk is regularly reviewed by departmental managers.

11. Background papers

11.1 None.

Officer contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

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