

An Update on Race Equality Progress

Report of the Interim Chief Executive

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: that the Cabinet be asked to

- a) note the progress on race equality made throughout 2022.
- b) support the planned next steps to further advance race equality and commit to a 'zero tolerance' approach to racism.
- c) promote attendance at the elected Member Masterclass on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 'Legal and Moral Duties' on 23rd November 2022.

1. Introduction and Summary

Devon County Council's (DCC) Strategic Plan 2021-2025 sets out the Council's commitment to becoming an organisation that is intolerant to prejudice and discrimination and helping Devon to be a place that is inclusive, compassionate, and caring, where everyone can feel safe. The social, environmental, and economic benefits of equality, diversity, and inclusion in all its forms are well known and we cannot reach our full potential as individuals, organisations or a place if people in our workforce, or community are being held back by the colour of their skin, nationality or heritage. An inclusive and diverse culture increases motivation, trust and confidence, improves recruitment and retention, and helps all our staff feel valued and respected, increasing innovation and creativity.

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on the progress made throughout 2022 since the publication of the Strategic Plan in December 2021 and the Race Equality Audit in January 2022.

2. Progress Update

There is a lot of work to be done to respond to the learning and findings of the Race Equality Audit and deliver against the commitments in the Council's Strategic Plan. This section of the report sets out the initial steps taken earlier this year and the more detailed work that has been done since then.

2.1. Initial Steps

- Included a key action in the Strategic Plan 2021/2025 *to consider the findings of the Race Equality Audit and implement its recommendations.*

- Moved the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion function to the Organisational Change Team to provide access to a wider team of support and embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion into the Council's organisational change work.
- Allocated additional budget to support Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work.
- Raised awareness of the unacceptable behaviour help line.
- Relunched the *It's ok to say it's not ok* campaign.
- Included Race Equality as a standing item on Strategic Leadership Team agenda.

2.2. Governance, accountability, and oversight

- Established a cross organisational Race Equality Delivery Group to develop an Anti-Racism Framework to describe how the Council will address racism in the workplace and community.
- Established a Race Equality Staff Group chaired by Fakir Osman (Head of Trading Standards, Business Support and Innovation) and deputy chair Maria Chakraborty (Interim Head of HR) which meets regularly and provides direction, leadership and prioritisation for the Council's race equality work.
- Regular connections with Cabinet Portfolio Holder Councillor Croad and Councillor Hall, who has cited inclusivity, diversity and equality as one of his priorities as Chair of the Council.
- Developed a Race Equality Action Plan.
- Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee (CIRS) agreed to monitor the progress against the Race Equality Action Plan.
- Set up an Elected Member Masterclass on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 'Legal and Moral Duties' on 23rd November 2022.

2.3. Raising awareness and understanding

- Developed explicit references to protected characteristics and anti-racism in the Council's Core Principles and Behaviours Framework and added 'prompts' to supervision/appraisal guidance.
- Developed an equality statement and positive action statement for use in recruitment.
- Increased the iTrent ethnicity staff profile completion rates to 62% (as of August 2022) to help monitor diversity and employment outcomes.
- Improved and increased the frequency of communications to staff about anti-racism and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, including providing information on how to get involved in staff networks, policy development and change initiatives.

2.4. Strengthening training and development

- Reinforced the mandatory EDI Essentials training through Strategic Leadership Team communications and commitment.
- Completed the Let's Explore Race Mentoring pilot programme, with 20 members of staff expressing an interest in the second phase of the Let's Explore Race Mentoring programme.
- Developed a resource for managers to help facilitate honest and productive team conversations about race equality.

3. Planned next steps

Work will continue to deliver against the Race Equality Framework and Action Plan and the additional areas of focus identified by the Race Equality Staff Group, including

reviewing and improving the Council's prayer and contemplation facilities. A particular area of focus will be providing protection for staff at risk of identity-based harm:

- Taking a 'zero tolerance approach' to racism (that racism is unacceptable). This is due to continued reports of racism directed at staff from the families they are trying to support.
- Improved protection for staff at risk will include:
 - provision of personal safety equipment.
 - improvements to and reminders about the Customer Notice and Unacceptable Customer Behaviour guidance.
 - improvements to risk assessment and incident logging.
 - review of the Staff Grievance Policy and procedures with a view to incorporate 'restorative practice' approaches as well as 'safe channels' for raising concerns.

4. Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

None.

5. Strategic Plan

The progress to date and the action planned for the coming months will help the Council be an organisation that is intolerant to prejudice and discrimination and help Devon to be a place that is inclusive, compassionate, and caring, where everyone can feel safe, as set out in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

6. Financial Considerations

None.

7. Legal Considerations

The Race Equality Framework and Race Equality Action Plan contribute positively to our public sector equality duties to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations for the protected characteristic of race (Equality Act 2010).

8. Environmental Impact Considerations

It is not anticipated that the activities within the plan will have a negative environmental impact.

9. Equality Considerations

The activities will have a positive equality impact for the protected characteristic of race. Other needs and impacts such as disability access and intersectionality will be considered as part of each activity and, where necessary or beneficial, an impact assessment will be carried out for individual projects.

10. Risk Management Considerations

Maintaining momentum and prioritisation against other competing priorities and external factors such as increasing costs and service demand is a key risk to progress. Six monthly reporting to CIRS will alert any issues to Members. The Race Equality Framework is included as a 'risk control' on the Risk Management system for the following risk *Failure to prevent discriminatory practice/adhere to the Equality Act 2010* (Ref: SPOC15).

11. Public Health Impact

This work is focussed on reducing inequalities and would not expect to impact negatively on associated Public Health outcomes around reducing health inequalities.

12. Summary

The Council is committed to becoming an organisation that is intolerant to prejudice and discrimination and helping Devon to be a place that is inclusive, compassionate, and caring, where everyone can feel safe.

Progress has been made in response to the findings of the Race Equality Audit report, with actions taken to support colleagues and develop a more inclusive culture.

Work will continue to address racism in the workplace and our communities and to improve the protection of staff.

Jan Spicer
Interim Chief Executive

Electoral Divisions – All.
Cabinet Member for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – Councillor Roger Croad.
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