

The role of Scrutiny Members in implementing the recommendations of the January 2022 Race Equality Audit report

Report of the Chief Executive

Recommendation: Scrutiny Members discuss and consider the role of Scrutiny in holding the whole Council to account in implementing the recommendations in the Race Equality Audit report.

1. Implementing the recommendations in the January 2022 Race Equality Audit report

Members will recall that making Devon a fairer and more equal county is one of the six priorities in the Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 that the Council adopted at the end of last year.

The Race Equality Audit that the Chief Executive and his Leadership Group commissioned in Spring last year was a way of helping the Council understand the nature and impact of structural racism within the organisation so that it can be addressed. The audit's objectives were to provide an honest assessment of how it feels for Black and Asian colleagues to work for Devon County Council, to challenge assumptions and advise on actions to ensure DCC becomes a place where Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse staff feel safe, included and welcomed. The audit was carried out by three anti-racism consultants: Kalkidan Legesse MBA, Maia Thomas and Sandhya Dave.

The full 30 page Race Equality Audit report, which was published on 26 January 2022, is available, together with an accompanying summary infographic, at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/performance-and-monitoring/raceaudit21>

The report's recommendations are set out under six themes:

- Denial of Racism.
- 'Small Numbers' Rhetoric.
- "No Data" Excuse.
- White Fragility in Leadership.
- Lack of Sufficient and Consistent Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion.
- Unwelcoming culture for Black and Asian People.

The overall findings make for some hard and uncomfortable reading. They are a wake-up call for all of us that racism still exists to an unacceptable extent in our country, in our county, and regrettably, within our Council. It highlights that we all need to do more to ensure Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse staff feel included and are able to express their needs and experiences safely. We all share a responsibility to challenge racist behaviour and call out racism within the Council and our local communities.

The Cabinet and Leadership Group support the report and have accepted its findings. The Council is moving forward with implementing the report's

recommendations. To the end, the 2022/23 budget includes provision for an ongoing £500,000 investment in equality, diversity and inclusion. That £500,000 will be used to strengthen the Council's ability to challenge inequality and celebrate diversity.

Four areas are highlighted in the report's recommendations as urgent priorities:

- Provide clear guidance on the process of investigating incidents of racial discrimination to all stakeholders.
- Employ a diverse and skilled Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team, to work alongside the Lead EDI officer in implementing the recommendations of this report and wider equality priorities.
- Implement appropriate racial grievance channels, enabling staff to raise concerns independent of line manager.
- Let's Explore Race mentoring programme to be made available to all management within DCC.

Beyond those priorities and over the medium and longer term further investment will include a focus on:

- Staffing to support improvements in training, guidance, engagement, data and HR activities.
- Learning and development.
- Support for voluntary and community organisations.
- Improving access to services.

The Cabinet will consider a proposed anti-racism framework at its meeting on 13 April 2022.

2 The roles of Scrutiny Members in race equality and anti-racism

All Members of the Council will be invited to participate in further discussions about the Race Equality Audit. Those sessions (dates to be confirmed) will be an important opportunity for Members to explore and fully understand the audit's findings and all Members are urged to participate.

This Committee will have an important part to play in oversight of progress with implementing the recommendations to ensure that the Council is the best possible employer and service provider to everyone. The Deputy Chief Executive at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny has described this challenge as: "better understanding and giving voice to those disenfranchised, disadvantaged and silenced because of their race."

It is proposed to make an annual report to the CRIS Scrutiny Committee on progress with implementing the Race Equality Audit recommendations. Scrutiny Members are invited to suggest questions which could form the basis of Scrutiny Committee's examination and challenge on racial equality. In considering possible questions, members may find these resources on the Council's website useful:

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/policy-and-legislation/equality-legislation>

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/impact/toolkit/>