

Cabinet		 TOWER HAMLETS
31 January 2024		
Report of: Robin Beattie, Acting Director of Strategy, Improvement & Transformation		Classification: Unrestricted
Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26		
Lead Member	Councillor Suluk Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion	
Originating Officer(s)	Afazul Hoque , Head of Corporate Strategy & Communities Daniel Kerr , Strategy & Policy Lead, Corporate Strategy & Communities	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Key Decision?	No	
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.	
Forward Plan Notice Published	17/03/2024	
Exempt information	None	
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	All priorities	

Executive Summary

The Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26 sets out the actions the council will deliver to achieve the equality objectives from the Strategic Plan 2022-26.

The Plan details actions to achieve the council’s ambitious vision to build a strong, inclusive and fair borough addressing inequalities through our work and ensuring that our workforce reflects the community. It also sets out the council’s commitment to promote and celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do as a council. In delivering this plan, the council commits to celebrate its diverse communities as a key asset, reduce inequality in all areas, and collaborate with partners to positively impact residents and support them to reach their potential.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26.

2. Note that a delivery plan will be developed setting out key milestones for actions within the plan. The Mayor, Cabinet Member and Mayor's Office will be engaged in the development of the delivery plan.
3. Note that an Annual Equalities Report will provide update on progress against the actions in the Corporate Equalities Plan.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26 is a new key strategic document that sets out the work plan for the whole organisation and reaffirms the council's commitment to tackling all areas of inequality.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The alternative option is not to agree the plan. This is not recommended as without a Corporate Equalities Plan the council may not deliver the equality objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2022-26 and therefore fail to comply with its statutory obligations under the Equalities Act 2010.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Our vision for equality is to build a strong, inclusive and fair borough, addressing inequalities through our work and ensuring that our workforce reflects the community. The Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26 supports this vision and details the council's commitments to achieve the key equality objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2022-26. It also brings together in one document the work underway to meet the council's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.2 The interventions set out in the Plan have been informed by the intelligence on areas of inequalities identified in the Borough Equality Assessment (BEA). The BEA captures data from the borough profile, and combines national, regional, community intelligence to offer a nuanced snapshot of inequality in Tower Hamlets. It identifies and prioritises inequality challenges based on Strategic Plan themes, equality objectives and protected characteristics.

Monitoring and reporting

- 3.3 Following Cabinet, it is proposed that a delivery plan be developed that sets out key milestones for each action and engagement with Mayor, Cabinet Member and Mayor's Office. This will provide clarity on delivery of the plan which will be complemented by an annual report on progress.
- 3.4 The Plan includes metrics to allow for an understanding of impact and provide valuable insight into how the council is delivering tangible improvements for residents and achieving equality objectives. The metrics are specifically in relation to each equality objective (as opposed to individual actions) as these are they are the key strategic driver behind the Plan. Corporate Directors and

Cabinet Leads will be responsible for ensuring successful delivery of each action.

- 3.5 Progress of actions and impact will be monitored through the Corporate Equality Board (CEB) which has identified key components of the Plan for inclusion in its work programme 2023-25. CEB will engage Corporate Directors and Cabinet Leads and assess success against performance data and data from other sources, such as the Annual Residents Survey, engagement with marginalised groups in the borough and residents lived experiences, and other national, regional, and local data sets. Moreover, the actions in the Plan are incorporated in the Strategic Delivery Plan which is monitored on a quarterly basis through performance reporting to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.
- 3.6 The Plan includes ownership from Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors to ensure oversight and accountability of their specified actions. It is important that Cabinet Members take responsibility of their actions and drive implementation, and Corporate Directors will be accountable for delivery. As many of the actions are taken from the Strategic Delivery Plan, they should have awareness of the remit of their portfolio. However, they should meet regularly to consider progress and plan future delivery in light of actions drafted into this Corporate Equalities Plan. The Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion will also meet with leads them to discuss progress of actions and how they are achieving equality objectives.
- 3.7 An Annual Equality Report will be published to demonstrate progress against the Corporate Equalities Plan and communicate improvements to residents and other key stakeholders.

Equality Objective 1: Work with communities across the borough to bring people together from different backgrounds and promote understanding.

- 3.8 Objective 1 addresses the council's PSED to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The recent Annual Resident Survey conveyed positive encouragement that actions taken to achieve this objective are working. Findings show 87% of respondents felt Tower Hamlets is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. This represents an increase of 9% from the previous survey and the Plan sets out actions to build on this.
- 3.9 To achieve this objective, we will organise events to celebrate diversity and raise awareness of different issues and equality challenges. These events will mark occasions such as International Women's Day, Black, History Month, and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. We will review and strengthen our community equality networks to ensure residents are at the forefront of designing and developing these events. This will also ensure our community equality networks are supported to facilitate greater involvement from residents in shaping council policy and decision making. It will help us to build trust with residents, strengthen collaboration in

delivery, and generate insight and learning to continually strengthen and improve our services.

- 3.10 It is essential that these objectives are incorporated across different council services, especially in projects which have the greatest impact on residents. To this end, we will ensure cohesion principles are embedded in regeneration projects and programmes, and our Adult Day Care services will consistently celebrate a wide range of occasions such as religious festivals. Through our Idea Stores, we will ensure that the visual and creative industries courses more closely meet the needs of male learners and learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 3.11 We will also strengthen our No Place for Hate strategy, moving away from an individual pledge-based approach and towards a strategy based on actions which actively tackle hate crime.

Equality Objective 2: Uphold and protect equality and diversity in all circumstances.

- 3.12 The council is unable to tackle the equality challenges the borough faces alone. Therefore, we will work with our partners through existing structures such as the Partnership Executive Group, and on new projects such as the Tower Hamlets Women's Commission, to ensure diversity and equality is at heart of our collective priorities.
- 3.13 For the council and our partners to prioritise their resources and interventions it is imperative that we improve collection, organisation and publication of our equalities data. To this end, we will refresh our Borough Equalities Assessment (BEA) and improve the collection of data about our communities. This will enable us to target our interventions and ensure we make the greatest possible impact in tackling areas of greatest inequality. We will have a special focus on collecting data about our transgender community. We know this is an area where there is currently little data available, and this will allow us to effectively develop policies and interventions that accurately address inequalities encountered by people who are non-binary and transgender.
- 3.14 This objective considers the challenges faced by all protected characteristics and puts forward actions to support a range of groups. For younger people, the council is committed to recognising Care as a protected characteristic and affirmed this at Cabinet in July 2023. We will build on this commitment to being a good corporate parent to care leavers and will work to increase job opportunities for young people in and leaving care. Delivery of the Tackling Poverty programme will address the borough's high level of child poverty and we will ensure young people who have traditionally been underrepresented in youth services, such as girls and young Somali residents, have fair access to this provision. We will also deliver projects that reduces loneliness amongst older people and disabled people, and aim to support more disabled people into employment. For the LGBT community, we will work closely with them to address their needs, specifically addressing a decrease in community LGBT spaces.

Equalities Objective 3: Address inequalities particularly those faced by Bangladeshi and Somali communities.

- 3.15 The council's recent Tackling Race Inequality Plan responded to global events and highlighted the stark challenges facing our Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic communities.
- 3.13. We will continue to be a leader in response to these challenges and support our Black, Asian and Multi Ethnic Communities. We will refresh and extend our partnership on race inequalities and ensure it is having a sustainable impact. We will also respond to regional best practice as advocated by London Councils to ensure we are at the forefront of tackling race inequality.
- 3.14. We will continue to support the Somali community, which we know composes the largest Black group in the borough but is underrepresented in employment and other local institutions. We will work with the Somali community to identify, understand, and address their needs. Significantly, we will support a dedicated resource centre for the Somali community which will be run by community members and open to the public.

Equalities Objective 4: Improve safety and opportunities for women.

- 3.15. Across a range of metrics, women in the borough are facing a wide variety of challenges. We will not truly realise the ambitions of our equality vision unless we take active action to ensure women have equality of opportunity in work, public, social and family life.
- 3.16. To this end, we will shortly launch a Women's Commission which will work across partnership structures to develop a comprehensive understanding of women's lived experiences and develop interventions to improve their outcomes in a range of areas including health, employment, community leadership and women's safety. The Women's Commission will aim to ensure women in Tower Hamlets have equality of opportunity in work, public, social, and family life, and are empowered to fulfil their full potential.
- 3.17. We will also develop dedicated programmes and spaces for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. In particular, we will support the establishment of a dedicated resource centre for women with a focus on Bangladeshi women. This will link in with wider ambitions to support and empower women, particularly ethnic minority women, with dedicated projects and programmes, and dedicated community facilities. We will also improve access to existing community spaces and provision. For example, we will improve access to sports, gyms and swimming which will include women only gym and swimming sessions.
- 3.18. The Annual Resident Survey showed that women are least likely to feel safe at night, and Tower Hamlets has the second highest rate of domestic abuse offenses in London from September 2022-23. The majority of those impacted are women, and most perpetrators are males. To address this, we will refresh

the current Violence Against Women and Girls strategy and include women's safety as a key theme. This will include work with directorates and departments such as parks and leisure, highways, licensing, planning to improve safety and security.

- 3.19. A key intersectional issue is the low rate of employment for women from Black, Asian and Multi-Ethnic backgrounds. Seven female ethnic groups had an employment rate below 50%, whilst no male group did. Bangladeshi women had the lowest employment rate (28.6%). We will actively aim to address this and deliver employment and training schemes to reduce the employment gap for women in our borough, in particular for Black, Asian and Multi- Ethnic women.

Equalities Objective 5: Ensure our workforce reflects the community.

- 3.20. Our workforce data shows an underrepresentation of female and Black, Asian, and Multi-Ethnic staff at senior management levels. There is also an underrepresentation of Bangladeshi, White, Staff aged 25-34, Disabled, and LGBTQ+ in the council's workforce. To address this, we will develop a Workforce to Reflect the Community strategy and action plan. This will address issues around the pay gap and improve diversity at the most senior levels within the organisation.
- 3.21. We will also deliver against our Stonewall improvement plan to improve our ranking in the workplace equality index. This will help to create a safer and more inclusive environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender council staff.
- 3.22. Finally, all staff across the council have a role to play in delivering equality objectives. We will ensure all staff are adequately trained to fulfil their roles and understand the equality implications placed on them. We will identify opportunities to provide specialised equality, diversity, and/or awareness training for council employees.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Corporate Equalities Plan provides a framework to meet our PSED and contains the actions which will deliver our equalities objectives set out in our Strategic Plan 2022-26. Equalities considerations are at the heart of the Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26 and specific implications and actions it will take to enhance outcomes for different protected characteristics are detailed above.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are

required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 This report is requesting approval for the Corporate Equalities Plan 2024-26. Approval of the Plan does not in itself give rise to any direct financial implications. Should implementation of any actions require additional resources this will need to be followed through the council's process, officers are obliged to ensure appropriate financial approval is in place before financial commitments are made.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 This report is seeking approval of the Corporate Equalities Plan which is the Council's corporate plan for promoting equality, embracing diversity, tackling inequality and promoting cohesion in the Borough.

7.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty (s.149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

7.3 (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.4 An equalities plan highlights the council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity for both service users and staff.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None.

Appendices

- None.

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A