

Employees' Consultative Forum

Minutes

10 November 2021

Present:

Chair: Councillor Natasha Proctor

Councillors: Camilla Bath Mina Parmar
Philip Benjamin Varsha Parmar
Angella Murphy-Strachan Sachin Shah

**Teacher
Representatives:** Ms L Crimmins - NEU

**Unison
Representatives:** Mr J Royle Mr D Searles

**GMB
Representative:** Ms P Belgrave
Ms A Jones

Absent: Anne Lyons

63. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note that there were no Reserve Members in attendance.

64. Appointment of Vice-Chair

RESOLVED: That Davis Searles, Harrow Unison, be appointed from the Employees' side as Vice-Chair of the Employees' Consultative Forum for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

65. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members at the meeting except that Councillor Angela Murphy-Strachan had submitted a non-pecuniary interest in respect of all the agenda items in that she was a member of the NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters' Union of Women Teachers), as published on the Council's website prior to the meeting.

66. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

67. Petitions, Deputations and Public Questions

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions, petitions or deputations were received at this meeting.

Resolved Items

68. Race Equality in Harrow Council

The Forum received a report of the Chief Executive which set out the Council's Strategic Vision for Race Equality. An Action Plan for Change had been developed for implementation, as set out at Appendix A to the report. The report also launched a series of new corporate objectives designed to ensure that the Council's policies and practices were fair and equitable for all staff in the workplace, beginning with a focus on race and ethnicity.

An officer introduced the report and made a presentation, which is attached as an appendix to these minutes for reference purposes. The officer set out the key components of the Race Equality Plan and described the journey that had culminated into an Action Plan for Change for Harrow's employees at all levels.

As part of the presentation, Members were informed of the Council's approach which had included both qualitative and quantitative research. The Council had praised the involvement and openness of staff in the research undertaken. Members were advised of the key themes that had emerged from the Independent Race Review, such as psychological safety, racism in the workplace. Governance and accountability processes would also be reviewed.

Members were informed that the Council's Race Equality Action Plan centred around the following three themes:

- creating safe spaces.
- changing the organisations culture and behaviour.
- recruitment and retention, which included an ambitious target of 5% of the Council's staff to be representative of the overall resident

population by 2025. An aspect of this theme would include a move towards advertising vacant posts internally to give existing staff the opportunity to apply for the post first, thereby scoping out existing staff and providing a seamless approach.

Members were also informed that there would be a new offer for staff culminating into a zero-tolerance approach in all aspects of the Council's work, employment and service delivery which would also help ensure that staff were supported and trained.

Members were advised of how the Council's ambitions would be achieved which would involve staff at all levels through ongoing discussions. Finally, Members were informed of the next steps that had been put in place until January 2022. The officer was keen to receive feedback from the Forum and to identify any improvements that might be required prior to the initiatives being bedded in.

The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development and an officer responded to questions from Members and Employee Representatives, as follows:

- the new Dignity at Work Policy would be non-contractual, but managers and staff would be required to comply and adhere to it. A Unison representative was of the view that the previous Policy had not been 'fit for purpose' because it did not form part of the contract of employment. He questioned why a Council that was aspiring to change the ethos of the organisation would not make the Policy contractual. A Member expressed similar concerns and stated that, whilst the Action Plan appeared to be aspirational, the Dignity at Work Policy was lacking in that it would be non-contractual. A GMB representative was also concerned that staff would not be required to adhere to the Dignity at Work Policy as part of their employment contract.
- In response, the Director stated that the intention was to change the culture of the organisation but that she would discuss the concerns expressed by Forum members with the Corporate Strategy Board. The intention was to change behaviours and to make staff feel protected. Psychological safety could not always be created by a contract and perhaps the Policy would require testing first and any adjustments made later. Training and transparency would be key, and staff would be allowed to raise issues anonymously. Dignity at Work cases would be reported through meetings with Employee Representatives where they could explore ways in which the Policy could be strengthened. She was of the view that it would be difficult to mandate behaviours and attitudes.
- The Race Equality Action Plan would be mainstream and embedded in different forms so that it would not lose focus towards the strides that the Council was making to become an anti-racist Council. It was a 5-year Plan and would be reported on a quarterly basis. It would also be reviewed and refreshed within a circular feedback model.

- There had been deficiencies in the organisation's training and development and, in moving forward, the team would be better resourced. Previously, access to training had been inconsistent - with some staff saying that they had never been on a training course - and it was intended to remove such blockages.
- Positive discrimination was not an option as it was unlawful except in certain limited circumstances. The Council's focus would be on positive action which would be applied in areas which had been identified to have underrepresentation and where a targeted approach would be applied. The focus would be on training, encouragement, and targeted advertising, including ensuring that our recruitment agencies worked within the confines of the law. Positive steps would be undertaken but these were not intended to disadvantage or alienate groups that were not underrepresented. Diversity programme would include open schemes, apprenticeships, and management opportunities for the benefit of all staff. A Member welcomed the move towards positive action and suggested that the Action Plan ought to clarify the approach being taken.
- The Race Survey had highlighted issues and specific cases of bullying and harassment and these had been shared with management. Some cases had been referred on for further investigation. A culture of psychological safety could not be achieved immediately, and it was hoped that the drop-in sessions would help and make the Plan more visible.

Another GMB representative expressed concern that managers would be made responsible for the various Action Plans, the same managers that the staff survey had possibly highlighted issues with. She asked if any monitoring had been put in place and who would decide which staff were mentored, trained, etc.

In response, the officer stated that all staff would contribute, inform, and take ownership of the Divisional Action Plans. Monitoring would take place through the normal HROD reporting process, which would also help ensure that the correct approach was being used. Training programmes would be open to all staff and would not require managerial approval; however, in some cases such as apprenticeships that required off the job training, managers would need to ensure business needs could be met. The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development added that there would be staff autonomy allowing them to access training courses, but a process would be required. The business needs of the Council would need to be balanced against releasing staff for training courses. However, the Corporate Strategy Board and the Leadership Team would hold managers to account for refusing to release staff. Training courses would also be open to all frontline staff and those who wanted to change careers.

The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development stressed that it was not intended to give the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff an unfair advantage in terms of recruitment and retention but to address inequalities faced by the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community, particularly staff in junior posts and those in the frontline. It was to ensure that

all staff had access to training courses and devices and the Council needed to improve its performance in this regard, which the People Strategy would provide. The Strategy was intended to address identified race inequalities and discrimination. She acknowledged that this message needed to be made clear as it was intended to open opportunities for all staff.

There was cross-party support in that white privilege existed and that the Action Plan sought to address this issue. A Member was of the view that the Action Plan was not ambitious enough.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Council's strategic approach on race equality in Harrow and the Race Equality Action Plan at Appendix A to the report be noted and that annual updates on the progress be received following the formal launch of the Action Plan;
- (2) the Zero Tolerance Statement attached at Appendix B to the report be noted.

69. Annual Health and Safety Report

The Forum received a report of the Divisional Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development, which set out the Council's Health and Safety performance for the year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, providing an update of activities and giving information on outcome measures such as the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, training required, audits carried out and the number of accidents reported. The report also included the Council's Health and Safety Strategy and the Corporate Health and Safety Plan Policy. For completeness, the report also included information about Occupational Health and Safety.

An officer introduced the report and identified the six key areas, details of which were set out in the report. He stated that the Health and Safety Strategy, Performance Plan and Health and Safety Policy formed the foundations to a positive health and safety culture.

Members were briefed on the work streams, such as the need to carry out risk assessments which were dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic, details of which were set out on page 78 and onwards of the agenda. A governance and risk assessment process had been established and initially reviewed by the Health and Safety Compliance Manager to ensure that the right controls were in place. These were then shared and further reviewed by the relevant Corporate Strategy Board sub-group. There was confidence that robust processes had been put in place and this had been confirmed by the random spot checks carried out by the Health and Safety Executive who had applauded and provided a positive feedback on the processes that the Council had put in place.

Various measures were also put in place as part of the Council's Wellbeing and Agile Working agenda, including support for those with mental health issues and wellbeing activities. There had been a marked drop in the number of accidents reported which had been due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the

initial closure of schools. Several (17) RIDDOR reports were submitted to the Health and Safety Executive. Most accidents were in schools and had been attributed to physical assaults. The Council was fortunate in that it had been possible to carry out much of the training on Health and Safety face- to-face.

The officer apologised for the typographical error and confirmed that the Strategy, which was for 3 years, would be reviewed in March 2022. He acknowledged that the Strategy had been signed off the former Corporate Director of Community and would be refreshed but that the Strategy was being monitored by the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development. He responded to questions as follows:

- there had been a low uptake in staff volunteering for Covid-19 vaccination, but the service had been made available. A Unison representative questioned this further and wondered if misinformation had been in circulation.
- the Housing stock had been reviewed during the year. In terms of the risk assessment methodology and the comparison with the Grenfell Tower fire disaster, the Council was satisfied that the one high rise building in its stock met the necessary safety requirements. A Member questioned if there had been delays in completing certain works to buildings because of asbestos and she cited an example. The officer agreed to communicate with the Member in this regard and requested further information to be sent to him before he was able to respond.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the accidents and incidents report be noted;
- (2) the Strategies and Policies enclosed in the appendices to the report be noted.

70. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED: To note that the Forum was schedule to next meet on Wednesday 12 January 2022.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 6.34 pm, closed at 8.08 pm).

(Signed) Councillor Natasha Proctor
Chair

Race Equality in Harrow Council

An Action Plan for Change

Our approach

We started our work on race equality in September 2020 and have been led by the strategic principles that guide our corporate work on equality, diversity, and inclusion, this involved:

- Evidence and insight
- Consultation and Partnership working
- Developing a strategic approach
- Communicating our strategic approach
- Development of an Action Plan
- Implementation

We took the following approach:

Qualitative research

- Conducted an Independent Race Review by Prof. Patrick Vernon
- Feedback from 573 staff members via Race Survey conducted by FW Business
- Focus Groups with over 230 staff members

Quantitative research

- Analysis of Workforce Profile
- Ethnicity Pay Report (published as part of Cabinet papers)
- Findings from Race Survey

The Action Plan has considered key themes that emerged from the Independent Race Review, including:

- Psychological safety
- Racism in the workplace
- Challenges with management behaviour
- Lack of career opportunities for Black, Asian and Multi-Ethnic staff
- Impact of racism on health and well-being
- Race and sexism
- Institutional and structural racism

The council's high-level approach for the Race Equality Action Plan centres around:

1. **Creating safe spaces**
2. **Changing the organisation's culture and behaviour through leadership, training, and development**
3. **Recruitment and Retention**

Response to the Independent Race Review

Acknowledging and recognising the journey of ‘righting the wrongs’

- A clear commitment to addressing deep-rooted inequalities and doing all that we can to become an inclusive anti-racist organisation and the recognition that we need to invest in the capacity to lead this and our broader EDI work.
- Personal pledge by CSB around their commitment to the EDI agenda

Recruitment and retention

- Reviewing our recruitment practices, including looking at more creative ways to ensure we are sourcing talent from a more diverse pool of candidates, and launching equality training for all recruiting managers.

Changing the organisation’s culture and behaviour through leadership, training and development

- Making a clear commitment to developing our staff across all levels of the organisation by making EDI integral to the people strategy, ‘Great People, Great Culture’ and launching a series of new Diverse Talent Management training programmes and reviewing our use of the apprenticeship levy.

Creating safe spaces

- All staff will be expected to undergo mandatory EDI training and we are exploring ways to create a new reporting mechanism, which will allow staff to raise incidents of bullying, harassment, and racism anonymously both online and onsite.
- New Dignity at Work Policy and Zero Tolerance Statement

Governance and accountability processes

- New governance and accountability structures in place through CSB and the newly established Cross-Party Member’s Working Group on BLM and EDI. The council’s strategic objectives on race equality will be reported against quarterly as part of our usual HROD reporting mechanisms.

The Council's Race Equality Action Plan

Creating safe spaces

1. To develop an inclusive culture of dignity at work for all and zero tolerance of racism and discriminatory practices.
2. To create a culture of openness and inclusivity by continuing to listen to our Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic staff on an ongoing basis and learning from their experiences in the workplace.
3. Senior leaders to cultivate an environment of psychological safety for all staff within the organisation, directorates, divisions, teams and on a one-to-one basis through personal interactions.

Changing the organisation's culture and behaviour through leadership, training and development

1. Senior leader sponsorship of our Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic staff with the aim of increasing representation at senior levels of the organisation through a number of avenues, such as shadowing, mentoring, access to opportunities, career coaching.
2. Each directorate to create their own clearly defined pathways for Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic staff by exploring opportunities for them to gain exposure to broad areas of work that contribute towards their career development.
3. Targeted training and development programme for staff from Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic backgrounds to progress from junior to middle management grades.

Recruitment and retention

1. The top 5% of our staff to be representative of our overall resident population by 2025.
2. Each Directorate to review the number of Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic staff within their services areas and take steps to adequately represent the community that we serve at all levels.
3. Transparency in the recruitment process across the organisation by providing sufficient training for staff before they undertake a recruitment exercise in order to tackle bias throughout the process and to ensure fairness.

A new offer for staff

Consideration for managers: Terminology and providing psychological safety

- Clear guidance for managers and all staff around creating safe spaces to build up psychological safety
- Key principles around what to do and what not to do when discussing race in the workplace
- Using the right inclusive language to help all staff along this journey

New approach to dignity at work and zero tolerance towards all forms of discrimination

- New Dignity at Work Policy which sets out the council's intention to create an environment built on dignity and respect
- New Zero Tolerance Statement aimed at staff, residents, suppliers, members, and all stakeholders that have an association with the organisation

Training and development

- A suite of new Diversity Talent programmes aimed at staff up to G8 and MG+ grades, including a women's development programme, Be You, Black on Board, First Steps to Management, Management Apprenticeships
- A more formalised approach towards mentoring, coaching and sponsorship

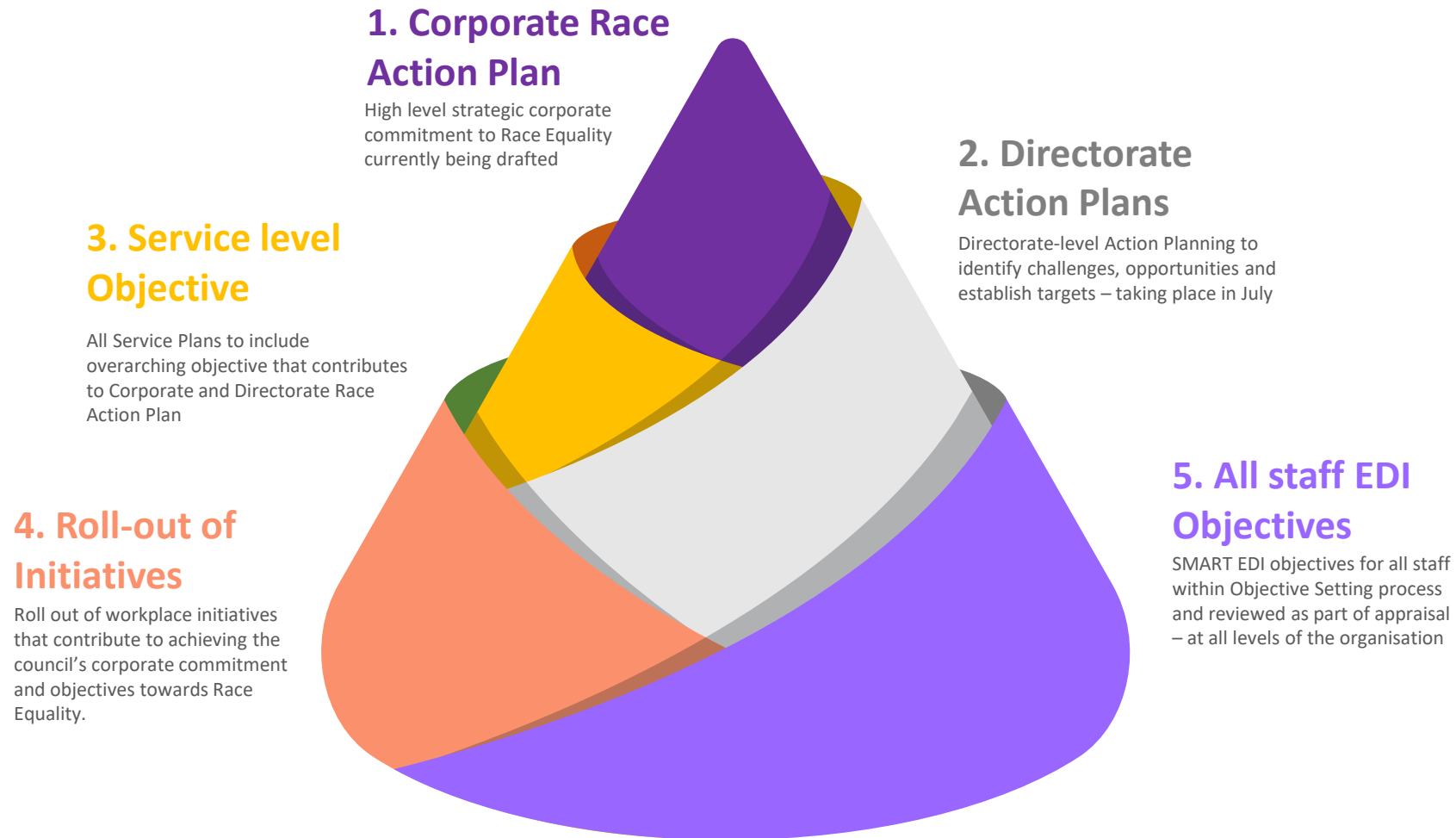
Supporting staff

- EDI mandatory training and anti-racism training
- New training to undertake Equality Impact Assessments
- Better access to evidence and insight via the EDI hub

In the process of launching:

- A new confidential reporting mechanism for all staff
- A new EDI toolkit to help managers guide the conversation around race equality in teams
- Anti-racism webinars to support staff around emerging language and building equity
- Equality training for the recruitment process for all recruiting managers
- EDI training during procurement to ensure diversity within our supply chains

Achieving our ambitions



Next steps

Last week

- The Race Equality in Harrow Council Report and Action Plan was published last week
- A new space has been created for Race Equality on the hub which contains details of all new initiatives
- A Staff Guidance has also been published to help staff navigate the Action Plan

This month

- The EDI team will be hosting a series of hybrid drop-in sessions to discuss the Action Plan and answer any questions (on-site and online)
- A paper copy of the report will be sent to colleagues who cannot access it remotely

November - December

- Continue to work with Directorates and Divisions over the coming months to support staff in setting their local objectives

January 2022

- A series of further drop-in sessions hosted by the EDI team for staff for post-implementation discussions and to take feedback on where improvements can be made on all initiatives that have been launched as part of the Action Plan