West Berkshire Council

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Framework

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Context

West Berkshire Council (**the Council**) has commissioned The Equal Group (**TEG**) to develop an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (**EDI**) framework, informed by the lived experiences of residents. This framework will express a Vision, Strategic Principles, and Objectives, with an accompanying Action Plan to support the delivery of the Council's Strategy.

To ensure this Framework is driven by the perspectives and experiences of those living and/or working in West Berkshire, The Equal Group undertook an engagement process which consisted of an EDI survey (including a separate easy read version) and a series of five focus groups conducted in November and December of 2022. Please see the Engagement Report for further details.

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to demonstrate due regard for equalities considerations, as set out under the Public Sector Equality Duty (**PSED**). This requires the Council to consider the ways in which it is able to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The development of this Framework intends to support the Council in meeting its duty, which has a specific focus on the nine defined protected characteristics: sex, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, disability, gender reassignment, race, marriage and civil partnership, and sexual orientation. While this forms the basis of the Framework and its accompanying action plan, the Council also wishes to understand where it can *go beyond its legal duty* to eliminate sources of disadvantage that are not included within the scope of the Equality Act.

In order to gather the relevant data needed for this Framework, TEG and the Council sought to engage with those whose voices are seldom heard. In doing so, we identified a priority need to address barriers faced by:

- People living with disabilities;
- Those living rurally;
- Those from low socioeconomic backgrounds;
- Young and elderly people;
- Gypsy Roma and Traveller (**GRT**) communities;
- Displaced communities.

In any case, it is imperative that the Council considers the ways in which personal characteristics may intersect to produce particular and more acute needs.

Equality Impact Assessments (**EqIA**) should be carried out by the Council any time a new policy or process is being considered. EqIA's ensure that any potential equalities risks associated with the proposed introduction of a new policy or process are considered and actively mitigated against. We recommend that the Council goes beyond the protected characteristics and embeds a focus on all key excluded groups set out in this Framework when refreshing its approach to EqIA's[1]. In addition to this, we recommend that the Council takes stock of all existing evidence that indicates inequality, and aligns itself with key recent legislative updates, such as the Armed Forces Act (2021).

Building Understanding

When making recommendations, TEG believes it is vital to acknowledge where action has been taken, with a view to build on the positive work that the Council has already started. We recognise the Council's commitment to improving its understanding of EDI, primarily through its commissioning of the EDI Needs Assessment (not conducted by TEG) and the development of this Framework. We firmly support the Council's belief that any EDI progress should be driven by data, and encourage the Council to see this Framework as a foundation to build on.

Through the engagement phase of this project, the Council and TEG were able to hear from over 500 people (across the surveys and focus groups) to gather perspectives on EDI. In conjunction with the EDI Needs Assessment, this has provided a detailed understanding of some of the key issues. However, this is only a small proportion of the local population, and should be built upon in the coming years. We understand that the Council is on a journey of continuous learning and recognises that it needs to take a more intentional approach to building a more inclusive and equitable district.

When seeking to build understanding, the Council should endeavour to engage with, learn about and foster strong relationships with all local communities – this includes the racing community, the Armed Forces and any other groups present within West Berkshire. Further to this, the Council should seek to tailor its approach to engagement

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[1] N.B. There are some legally defined exceptions to the PSED, whereby the Government has identified specific situations in which implementation of the PSED may interfere with other legislation. 'Immigration' is one of the exceptions set out under Section 18 of the Act. The Council should carefully consider what this means in practice for displaced individuals in West Berkshire, and how it can balance the exercise of its duties with a need to foster inclusion in the local community. See pages 13–14 of this briefing paper for further information.

with each group in line with their shared experiences/circumstances. We have provided additional context on this within the Action Plan.

Vision and Strategic Principles

In February 2023, TEG held a collaborative workshop with Sam Shepherd and Pamela Voss. The purpose of this workshop was to bring together the key findings from our engagement process, reflect on how we would like to be able to describe EDI in West Berkshire one year from now, and to identify enablers and barriers to progress. Taking all of this into account, we arrived at the following Vision and Strategic Principles. We have utilised the word 'Thrive' to tie in with the sense of 'equity of opportunity'.

Vision

> West Berkshire: where **everyone** can thrive

Strategic Principles

1. Everyone is seen and heard

- We promote visibility and inclusion for everyone
- We seek to 'level the playing field' for all
- We support and enable communities so they can thrive
- We look to empower local communities to lead change

2. Everyone is celebrated

- We embrace all forms of diversity that exist within West Berkshire
- We acknowledge and celebrate events that promote diversity and inclusion
- We work collaboratively with our partners to build mutual understanding of our diverse communities
- We aim to become community leaders for equity and inclusion

3. Everyone has a responsibility

- We are all committed to inclusion
- We respect and empower; we do 'with' each other, not 'to'
- We welcome and recognise everyone's strengths
- We encourage everyone to speak up when change is needed and support this with appropriate policies and processes

4. Everyone is understood

- We learn from the lived experiences of others
- We value diversity in all forms
- We acknowledge that we can't remove barriers that we aren't aware of

> • We are committed to recognising and addressing exclusion
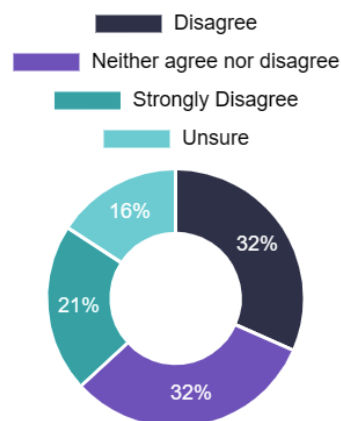
Objectives

This section of the report aims to define a clear set of objectives that the Council is seeking to achieve within the next year. These Objectives are also based on the output of our collaborative workshop. We have split the objectives to cover the community and the workplace, ensuring that the Council is able to direct change both internally and externally.

While this makes it easier to identify progress markers, it is important not to look at the objectives in isolation, and to instead consider the relationship between the two. Internal efforts to increase understanding of EDI can be a significant enabler of external progress, helping the Council and its partners to better cater to the needs of the local population. Similarly, an external focus on EDI should also help to reinforce EDI in the Council – especially where gaps in representation or knowledge have been identified.

West Berkshire is, at large, an affluent area in which people can thrive, but this overarching truth can mask pockets of disadvantage that exist within local communities. 'Equity' is about recognising the fact that not everyone starts from the same place. We have included below a high-level summary of key data, focusing on three significant disparities in the survey responses we collected. A fuller breakdown of the data is provided in the Engagement Report.

**I feel West Berkshire Council's approach to community issues is inclusive, fair and**

Legend:
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Unsure

Chart values: 32%, 32%, 21%, 16%

considerate of a diverse range of backgrounds:

For respondents indicating their ethnicity is White, 11% said that they 'disagree' with the above statement and a further 6% 'strongly disagree'. This compares with 32% of respondents from an Ethnic Minority background who said that they 'disagree', and a further 21% who 'strongly disagree', as per Figure 1.

I feel that West Berkshire Council as an organisation is inclusive, fair and considerate
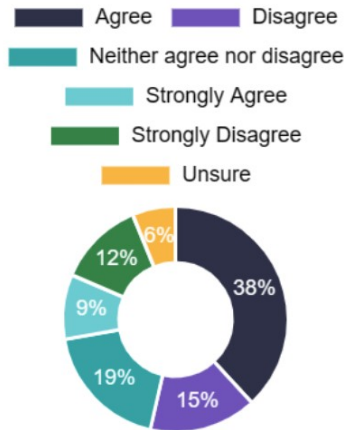

of a diverse range of backgrounds:

For respondents without a (hidden or visible) disability, 10% 'disagree' with the above statement, and a further 3% 'strongly disagree'. This compares with 15% of respondents with a disability who said that they 'disagree', and a further 12% who 'strongly disagree', as per Figure 2.

I feel the local area is one which provides a range of services to meet the needs of
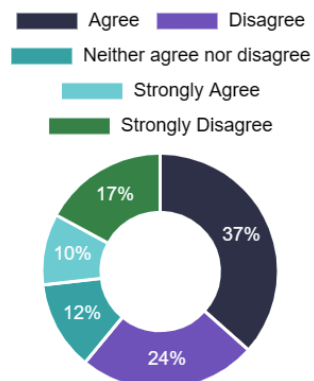
people from all backgrounds and experiences:

For respondents identifying as heterosexual, 17% 'disagree' with the above statement, and a further 4% 'strongly disagree'. This compares with 24% of respondents identifying as LGBTQ+ who said that they 'disagree', and a further 17% who 'strongly disagree', as per Figure 3.

Figure 3: A pie chart showing survey responses from respondents identifying as LGBTQ+.

In addition to this, we know from the EDI Needs Assessment that:

- West Berkshire has six Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), scoring in the 1st to 5th deciles. This means that they are amongst the 50% most deprived in the country, according to the English Indices of Deprivation 2019.
- Those living in rural households in West Berkshire are at higher risk of experiencing digital exclusion, fuel poverty and food deserts than those living in more urban areas.
- Compared with the South East (19.3%) and England overall (18%), West Berkshire has a higher proportion of children with Autism (33.5%).

The data shows us why this EDI Framework is needed – the following Objectives set out what the Council aims to achieve through this Framework.

Community Objectives	Associated Strategic Principles
1. There is a sense of mutual understanding around EDI in West Berkshire, including why it is important and the actions the Council is taking to advance it	1, 2, 3, 4
2. The Council has a comprehensive understanding of accessibility challenges, and how to overcome barriers for different groups	1, 4
3. Improved engagement with a wider range of community networks and groups	1, 2, 4
4. The Council is known for celebrating diversity in West Berkshire and residents from all backgrounds feel included	1, 2, 4

Workplace Objectives	Associated Strategic Principles
5. The Council has refreshed its approach to equalities and is able to demonstrate compliance with the PSED	1, 3, 4
6. Existing policies and procedures to advance equality are reviewed and updated. Where gaps are identified these are addressed in existing policies and procedures, or by creating new ones	1, 2, 3, 4
7. The Council has established a sense of collective responsibility for EDI progress, whereby all key stakeholders understand the purpose and benefits	3
8. An increased sense of belonging and psychological safety among all Council employees	1, 3

Monitoring Progress

The PSED requires the Council to set and publish equity/equality objectives every four years. Every four years, the Council should arrive at a point in which it has a clear understanding of progress that has been made against its previous objectives, where further work is still needed and, where relevant, if there are emerging needs for different groups not previously considered. This requires the Council to be intentional and committed to fairness and equity on a consistent basis, embedding it at the heart of its duties.

As a way of bridging this gap, we recommend that the Council reviews the agreed Action Plan after a 12 month period to measure progress. The outcome of the review should form the basis of the following year's Action Plan. To maintain a high standard of accountability, it is important that, if actions are rolled over, the Council carefully considers and makes note of why particular actions were not met and what needs to be done differently the following year to achieve progress. In order to build trust among the workforce and local population, we highly recommend that the Council shares the findings of its review and outlines its next steps.

There are several other ways to monitor progress - below we have included a high level overview of three methods we have found to be particularly effective when conducting similar work. We have presented these not as prescriptive recommendations of what the Council *should* do, but to highlight a number of options it has available to it when seeking to monitor progress.

Objectives and Key Results (OKR)

The Council may find it helpful to view the Action Plan through an OKR lens. The Objectives (in this case, the Action Plan's Recommendations) are simply what the Council wants to achieve, and the Key Results are how the Council will get there. If adopting this approach, the Council may wish to develop an OKR table to sit alongside the Action Plan. We suggest that a maximum of 3 Key Results are devised for each Objective to ensure it is realistic and achievable within one year.

We have previously helped the Greater London Authority to develop OKR's following a review; we focused on breaking down recommendations into small tasks, defining what success looks like for each Objective, establishing prerequisites or resources needed to achieve them, as well as identifying risks and solutions. We would be happy to discuss this with West Berkshire Council once the Action Plan has been agreed by all relevant stakeholders.

Maturity Model

A Maturity Model is a tool used by organisations to assess what 'stage' of their EDI journey they are at. It typically comprises of 3-5 phases, and for Council's this will usually range from a position characterised by significant regulatory risks to being viewed as an innovative leader for inclusion. TEG has previously developed Maturity Models for other Councils, which look at a range of key indicators such as workforce representation, organisational culture, decision making and service delivery. This can be particularly useful for Council's that are at significant risk of non-compliance with equalities legislation, providing a detailed understanding of how to meet requirements and then move beyond this to create a more impactful approach to EDI.

LGA: Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) 2021

The Local Government Association (**LGA**) produced the [EFLG](#) to help Council's deliver inclusive services, be representative of their local population, ensure equity of opportunity for their staff and meet/exceed PSED requirements. The EFLG takes into account the fact that different Council's are at different stages and looks at four 'modules' - all of which are pertinent to West Berkshire Council's aims and desired

outcomes.

The modules outlined within the Framework are:

- Understanding and working with your communities;
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
- Responsive services and customer care; and,
- Diverse and engaged workforce.

Within each of these, the Council can fall into one of three categories: Developing, Achieving, or Excellent. The LGA have provided clear indicators for each of these to help Council's assess their current position and what actions they need to take to move to the next category. This approach is similar to that of the Maturity Model mentioned above, but is not specific to West Berkshire's local context. The Council may wish to consider the LGA's EFLG in conjunction with its own EDI Framework to get a more holistic view of what further steps it may wish to take, while recognising that there is no substitute for the localised assessment of EDI priorities. As such, the Council should always consider external guidance through the lens of the local lived experiences.

Glossary

Key Term	Definition
EDI	Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EFLG	Equality Framework for Local Government
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
ERG	Employee Resource Group
LGA	Local Government Association
OKR	Objectives and Key Results
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty

Appendix A: Associated policies/strategies

Policy/Strategy	Context
Gender Pay Gap Data	The Council is legally required to report on Gender Pay Gap data each year.
Maternity Procedure [HRMAT] V.2.3 Nov 2019	This procedure sets out the entitlements and responsibilities that apply to employees who are pregnant and give birth.
Menopause Policy [HRMP] V.1 Sept 2020	The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness, encourage open conversation and support workers to continue to be effective in their jobs while experiencing menopause.
Sickness Absence – Reporting and Management Policy, Procedure and Guidance [HRMSA1] V.1.9 Aug 2022	The purpose of this policy is to support the effective reporting, recording and management of sickness absence to reduce its impact on service delivery and provide appropriate support to employees.
Shared Parental Leave Policy [HRSPLP] V.1 March 2015	The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Council will handle the discretionary aspects of Shared Parental Leave and Pay.
Transgender Policy [TRPV1] V.1 Sept 2018	The purpose of this policy is to set out the Council's commitment to ensuring that transgender people are treated with dignity and are not unlawfully discriminated against or disadvantaged in the workplace.
Draft Council Strategy 2023–2027 Forward Together [For Consultation Jan 2023]	A Council Strategy is a business planning document that sets out future priorities and planned outcomes. A new Strategy is produced every four years.
Capability Procedure [WBCPCR] V.4 Dec 2022	This procedure is to be used to manage performance that falls below the required standard due to 'lack of aptitude, skill or ability'.
Disciplinary Procedure [HR Disc] V.4 Dec 2022	The Disciplinary Procedure is designed to help and encourage employees to achieve and maintain standards of conduct.
Equality in Employment Policy [No ref given] V.3 March 2016	The purpose of this policy is to set out West Berkshire Council's approach to diversity and equality in employment.

Equality Policy [No ref given] V.1 Jan 2018	The purpose of this Policy is to set out West Berkshire Council's vision and commitment to equality of opportunity and respect for diversity.
Reasonable Adjustments for Staff with Disabilities Flow Chart [No ref given] V.3 May 2016	A Corporate Process for Accessing Funding in the application of reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities.