REPORT TO CABINET

Open		Would any decisions proposed :			
Any especially affected Wards	Operational	Be entirely within Cabinet's powers to decide	NO		
		Need to be recommendations to Council	YES		
		Is it a Key Decision	NO		
Lead Member: Cllr A Beales E-mail: cllr.alister.beales@west-norfolk.gov.uk		Other Cabinet Members consulted: All Cabinet Members			
		Other Members consulted:			
Lead Officer: Becky Box, Assistant Director Central Services E-mail: becky.box@west-norfolk.gov.uk Direct Dial: 01553 616502		Other Officers consulted: Senior Leadership Team, Charlotte Marriott, Corporate Policy Officer, Corporate Equality Working Group Members			
Financial Implications YES/~~NO~~	Policy/ Personnel Implications YES/~~NO~~	Statutory Implications YES/~~NO~~	Equal Impact Assessment YES/~~NO~~ If YES: Pre-screening/~~ Full Assessment~~	Risk Management Implications ~~YES/~~NO	Environmental Considerations ~~YES~~/NO

Date of meeting: 15 April 2025

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

Summary

The Council's current Equality Policy was adopted in 2018 and outlines the arrangements the Council has put in place to ensure it complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The policy is now due for review and a revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy has been produced to update and strengthen the Council's commitment to and compliance with equalities legislation and best practice.

Recommendation

Cabinet Resolves:

i. To recommend to Full Council that the Council adopts the updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (as shown in Appendix 1).

Recommendations to Full Council:

That Council approves a recommendation to adopt the revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, as outlined in Appendix 1.

Reason for Decision

To ensure that the Council continues to meet it statutory duties in relation to equality matters and that the policy and associated procedures/practices continue to be in line with recommended best practice.

1 Background

1.1 The Council's current Equality Policy was adopted in 2018. The policy outlines the arrangements the Council has put in place to ensure it complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, which places a duty on public authorities to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- 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

1.2 There have been no changes to equalities legislation since 2018. However, across all sectors there has been a general move to a broader approach reflecting equality, diversity and inclusion issues.

1.3 This wider focus has been in line with social change, such as an increased profile for issues in connection with gender identity and trans rights, and high profile campaigns such as black lives matter and the need to address violence against women and girls. In addition the COVID19 pandemic raised the profile and understanding of health inequalities and contributed to the cost of living crisis – both issues which fall within the scope of wider approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

1.4 Since 2018 the Council has also progressed work to support other groups in our local communities which we have identified as potentially vulnerable – specifically Care Leavers and members of the Armed Forces Community – and these groups should be reflected in our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all.

1.5 In a motion to Council (NOM 4/21) it was requested that the Council be united in valuing the lives of all its residents equally, be committed to a culture of safety for women and girls, be committed to a level playing field of opportunity and respect for people of all abilities, genders and races and to stand up to discrimination in all its forms. This motion and has been considered in the development of the updated policy and the revised policy reflects a broader approach to responding to equality issues. In addition, the Council has considered separately it's commitment to responding to the issue of violence against women and girls, as evidenced by its decision to commit to achieving White Ribbon accreditation which was discussed following a separate Motion to Council and was supported by Cabinet earlier this year.

1.6 During 2023 a review of our equalities policy, practices and procedures was undertaken with support from an external consultant and included consideration

of current practice in other local authorities in our region. The review concluded that the Council has robust policy and procedures and that our current policy was comprehensive and detailed. The findings from the review have been used to shape and give focus to a programme of work undertaken by the Corporate Policy team, supported by the Corporate Equalities Working Group (which includes representatives from all Assistant Director areas) over the past 18 months. This has included a particular focus on developing and strengthening our equality impact assessment process and developing a range of other workstreams to strengthen and enhance our current practices.

1.7 The review also recommended that when the policy was next updated:

- The name should be updated and the scope broadened to reflect equality, diversity and inclusion
- The layout should be simplified and shortened
- Some of the more detailed content should be moved to a separate procedures document

1.8 The recommendations from the review have been taken on board during the development of the revised policy, including developing a new 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide' and 'Equality Impact Assessment Procedure' to provide detailed information separately to the policy document. This will mean that updates to advice and guidance can be implemented more easily and that colleagues can be signposted to practical advice and information effectively going forward.

1.9 The revised policy also includes a refreshed set of equality objectives – for both services and employment – that the Council will work towards (See Appendix 1). It is proposed that progress towards achievement of these objectives is monitored annually, with a corresponding report to Cabinet so that Members can review and assess progress on a regular basis.

2 Options Considered

2.1 No change – the Council could retain it's current, comprehensive Equality Policy which is compliant with current legislation.

2.2 Adopt a revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, as outlined in Appendix 1 – this revised policy is consistent with current best practice. The revised policy includes:

2.2.1 Clear definitions of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

2.2.2 Refreshed wording to ensure that it aligns closely with the Council's new Corporate Strategy, and clearly sets out the Council's commitment to ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion.

2.2.3 Updated references, for example to include reference to neurodiversity.

2.2.4 Updates to extend coverage to include reference to Care Leavers and the Armed Forces community.

2.2.5 The removal of procedural, guidance and technical information which has been separated from the core Policy and included in a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide and an Equality Impact Assessment Procedure. This has the benefit of retaining a clear and focussed policy for adoption by Elected Members, concentrating on the Council's commitment, providing overarching information and setting out the Council's equality objectives, and placing operational information in separate documents that can be updated by officers as required.

2.2.6 The revised policy also proposes the use of an annual operational action plan, agreed with Senior Leadership Team to focus progress, and the introduction of an annual monitoring report to Cabinet so that progress can be reviewed regularly.

2.2.7 In summary, the information contained in the policy, guide and procedure will be separated as follows:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy	**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guide**	**Equality Impact Assessment Procedure**
Our commitment and how the policy supports the Corporate Strategy Definitions (high level) Legal framework Roles and responsibilities (high level) Key activities to support the policy Equality objectives	Why EDI is important Definitions (detailed) Information on wider groups Reference to other related procedures Guidance on use of pronouns Autism awareness Unconscious bias Additional advice for managers Other operational information	Benefits of EIA's Steps/processes to follow, including when an EIA is required. Factors to consider Link to template forms

3 Policy Implications

3.1 The proposed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is an update to the Council's existing Equality Policy.

3.2 Responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion work sits in the Corporate Policy team, who will be responsible for the implementation of the updated policy, including communicating the update to staff and Elected Members and ensuring the updated policy is published on the Council's website. The Corporate Policy team will also manage an annual action plan, agreed with Corporate Leadership Team, to progress work in support of the policy and the Council's agreed equality objectives.

3.3 The Corporate Policy team also co-ordinate and chair the Corporate Equalities Working Group, which brings representatives from across the Council together to consider, progress and review equality, diversity and inclusion matters across all service areas, helping to ensure compliance with the policy and progress against equality objectives.

4 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications arising specifically from this policy. Any work undertaken to update existing/implement new work or procedures to support the achievement of the Policy or the equality objectives will be contained within existing resources/budgets.

5 Personnel Implications

5.1 The HR team have a key role to play in supporting the implementation of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy with employees and in ensuring that all the Council's employment policies and procedures reflect compliance with the Equality Act and recommended best practice. The HR is represented on the Corporate Equality Working Group and various sub-groups looking at improving the Council's procedures and practices which will bring benefits to employees.

6 Environmental Considerations

6.1 None

7 Statutory Considerations

7.1 The Council has legal responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 which applies to all organisations. This policy sets out the Council's commitment to meeting these responsibilities.

7.2 In addition, the Equality Act introduced a requirement for all Local Authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty are supported by Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations which came into force in September 2011. The policy also sets out how the Council will meet these additional duties, in particular through the use of Equality Impact Assessments, and via the establishment of equality objectives that the Council will work towards.

8 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 Pre-screening form attached.

9 Risk Management Implications

9.1 Local Authorities have an important role in ensuring and promoting equality of opportunity – as a provider of services, employer and in its role as a Community Leader. The lack of an up-to-date policy and procedures potentially leaves the Council at risk of legal action should any allegations of discrimination occur.

10 Declarations of Interest / Dispensations Granted

10.1 None

11 Background Papers

- Equality Act 2010
- Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Guidance from ACAS

Stage 1 - Pre-Screening Equality Impact Assessment

For equalities profile information please visit Norfolk Insight - Demographics and Statistics - Data Observatory

Name of policy/service/function	Updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy			
Is this a new or existing policy/ service/function? *(tick as appropriate)*	New		Existing	✓
Brief summary/description of the main aims of the policy/service/function being screened. Please state if this policy/service is rigidly constrained by statutory obligations, and identify relevant legislation.	Through our EDI policy the council seeks to ensure equality for all our residents, visitors and our employees. The council aims to do this through the delivery of accessible and fair services, by treating our employees and service users with fairness and respect and ensuring all contractors and other third-party organisations we work with share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Our EDI Policy is governed by the Equality Act 2010, and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).			
Who has been consulted as part of the development of the policy/service/function? – new only *(identify stakeholders consulted with)*	All members of our Corporate Equalities Working Group.			

Question	**Answer**				
1. Is there any reason to believe that the policy/service/function could have a specific impact on people from one or more of the following groups, for example, because they have particular needs, experiences, issues or priorities or in terms of ability to access the service? Please tick the relevant box for each group. NB. Equality neutral means no negative impact on any group. ***If potential adverse impacts are identified, then a full Equality Impact Assessment (Stage 2) will be required.***		Positive	Negative	Neutral	Unsure
	Age	✓			
	Disability	✓			
	Sex	✓			
	Gender Re-assignment	✓			
	Marriage/civil partnership	✓			
	Pregnancy & maternity	✓			
	Race	✓			
	Religion or belief	✓			
	Sexual orientation	✓			
	Armed forces community	✓			
	Care leavers	✓			
	Other (eg low income, caring responsibilities)	✓			

Please provide a brief explanation of the answers above:

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy exists to progress the duties identified within the Public Sector Equality Duty, ensuring that any existing or potential barriers are identified, minimised and (ideally) removed. Having a robust EDI policy documents in place ensures that EDI issues are considered in all that we do as a Local Authority, offering local services that benefit all of our residents, and as a large employer.

Question	**Answer**	**Comments**
2. Is the proposed policy/service likely to affect relations between certain equality communities or to damage relations between the equality communities and the Council, for example because it is seen as favouring a particular community or denying opportunities to another?	~~Yes~~ / No	
3. Could this policy/service be perceived as impacting on communities differently?	~~Yes~~ / No	
4. Are any impacts identified above minor and if so, can these be eliminated or reduced by minor actions? If yes, please agree actions with a member of the Corporate Equalities Working Group and list agreed actions in the comments section	~~Yes~~ / No	**Actions:** **Actions agreed by EWG member:** **…….**

If 'yes' to questions 2 - 4 a full impact assessment will be required unless comments are provided to explain why this is not felt necessary:

Although the pre-screening form does not identify the need to undertake a full equality impact assessment on the revised policy we plan to engage the support of an external EDI specialist to assist us in undertaking an impact assessment for the revised policy and our updated EIA procedures. This will further our knowledge and understanding of the related issues and any actions identified as part of the review will be built into the annual action plan moving forward.

Decision agreed by EWG member: ……..

5. Is the policy/service specifically designed to tackle evidence of disadvantage or potential discrimination?	Yes /~~No~~	**Please provide brief summary:** The policy and supporting documents are designed to ensure that any actual or potential disadvantage or discrimination is considered and mitigated, in all that we do.

Assessment completed by: **Name**	**Becky Box**		
Job title	**Assistant Director Central Services**		
Date completed	**03.03.25**		
Reviewed by EWG member	**Charlotte Marriott**	**Date**	**05.03.25**

✓ **Please tick to confirm completed EIA Pre-screening Form has been shared with Corporate Policy** (corporate.policy@west-norfolk.gov.uk)