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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan

Report summary:

This report outlines East Devon District Council's (EDDC) progress in achieving equality objectives from 2021-2025 and introduces a forward-looking Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan for 2025-2028. It also proposes key recommendations to enhance EDI at member level by ensuring it is actively championed, integrated into decision-making processes, and supported through training to equip members with the knowledge and awareness needed to address key EDI issues effectively.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

1. Note progress made on previous equality objectives (2021-25)
2. Note the comprehensive EDI Action Plan for 2025-2028 (Appendix 1), which outlines five main objectives and corresponding actions. This plan includes specific timelines and activities for each objective, demonstrating a structured approach to advancing EDI within the council and the communities it serves.
3. Appointment of an EDI Member Champion, to work alongside the current Armed Forces Member Champion. It is recommended that the Council take steps to appoint an EDI Member Champion during the upcoming May Council meeting. The appointment of an EDI Member Champion aligns with best practices in local government and demonstrates the Council's commitment to fostering an inclusive environment. This role will play a vital part in ensuring that EDI remains a priority across all Council activities and decision-making processes.
4. Approval of EDI Awareness Training Sessions, initially for members. To foster a culture of inclusivity and understanding among members, it is proposed that the Council approves the EDI awareness training sessions. This initiative aims to equip members with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage effectively with EDI issues, thereby enhancing our collective ability to create a more inclusive environment.

Reason for recommendation:

To note progress on existing Equalities objectives, note the new EDI Action Plan (2025-28), ensure commitment to EDI at member level and enhance members' awareness of EDI.

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy and Assets
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact High Impact

The impact has been assessed as high relevance with positive impacts. The EDI action plan aims to reduce inequalities and promote inclusivity, benefiting both the organisation and the wider community. This approach addresses the weakness of inadequate mitigation of corporate risks related to equality duties.

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Report in full

1. Where we are now - Progress Report on Equality Objectives (2021-2025)

1.1. The Council's current policy and equality objectives are on the [internet](#). Below is a summary of the progress we have made to date, for the period 2021-2025. It is important as we move on to the next phase of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) maturity journey, looking forward to the next 3 years, that we reflect on what we have accomplished over the last 4 years. While specific measurable outcomes are limited in the available information, the report highlights key achievements, ongoing initiatives, and challenges encountered.

1.2. Equality Objective 1: Know our communities

- EDDC has implemented a comprehensive programme of external reviews, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement and gaining a deeper understanding of the

communities it serves, as highlighted in the 2024 Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge for EDDC.

- The council has developed better data and information about its towns, as evidenced by the ongoing development of Cranbrook, a new community in East Devon.
- The council's approach to EDI is described as a "work in progress" in our peer challenge report, indicating that there are areas that require further development, which will include knowing our communities better.
- We are committed to continuing our engagement with Town and Parish Councils to serve our communities better.

1.3. Equality Objective 2: Serve our communities

- EDDC has officially signed the Armed Forces Community Covenant, with a signing ceremony held on 6th June 2024 to show support for local servicemen and women, veterans, and their families. While there is still much work to be done, this is a positive step and the current Armed Forces Member Champion has been liaising with the Corporate Lead – Human Resources on next steps, which forms part of the EDI action plan.
- The council has developed and is actioning a new Poverty Strategy to support all communities. Between April 1 and September 27, 2024, EDDC distributed nearly £285,000 of UK Government Household Support Funding to over 1,400 low-income households in East Devon.
- Last year, we approved our Public Health (PH) Strategy for 2024-2027, which outlines our commitment to promoting equality and diversity in East Devon. We aim to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity for a long, healthy life, supporting individuals in healthy environments. Our first priority addresses the cost of living crisis. You can see details here: [Public Health Strategic Plan - East Devon](#).
- EDDC has shown good levels of engagement with local businesses and has supported regional growth sites within the Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone (EEDZ). The council has worked collaboratively with partners to enable growth ambitions and drive clean growth, creating jobs and a skilled workforce for the future.
- It is important to note that the council has undergone significant operational changes, including the retirement of a long-serving chief executive. Also, in the past 18 months, we have recruited four new Directors, including the creation of a new Director of Place.

1.4. Equality Objective 3: Include equalities in all decision-making.

- A part time EDI Advisor has been appointed to provide advice and support.
- EDDC has implemented an equality review requirement for all committee papers via a reporting template and will be including it in the policy review template.
- Efforts are being made to ensure that equality impact assessments (EQIAs) are completed using an updated EQIA template and Guidance Document, which was made available on the intranet in March 2024. This resource is intended for staff to utilise when making key decisions, implementing service changes, and developing policies. However, we recognise that training is needed for staff on the EQIA process. Additionally, we aim to establish a more robust EQIA process to guarantee effective implementation, as reflected in the new EDI Action Plan.
- Efforts are being made to improve monitoring of the workforce profile to identify trends and challenge inequalities. To help us achieve we are implementing a new iTrent system and PowerBI to support robust data collecting and reporting for Equalities.
- The council is producing equal pay data in accordance with legislation and gender pay gap reporting requirements.
- The peer challenge report recommended creating an action plan. This plan has been developed and supported by both the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

- We introduced a Transgender Equality Policy in July 2023, which includes guidance for line managers to support employees undergoing a transition effectively.
- 2. In conclusion, EDDC has made progress in addressing its equality objectives, but there is still work to be done to fully achieve its goals and effectively measure and communicate its progress. The new EDI Action Plan addresses these issues, providing a comprehensive strategy that will advance EDDC in its journey towards greater equality, diversity, and inclusion maturity.

3. Where we want to be – EDI Action Plan for 2025-28

- 3.1. The EDI action plan comprises several key areas that have been worked on further to produce five strategic objectives with related EDI actions and key activities. The development phase included ensuring alignment with the current EDI objectives (2021-2025), Council Plan priorities, and insights gained from a comprehensive SWOT analysis (see appendix 2).
- 3.2. The operational aspects of the action plan will require additional time for thorough development. We intend to develop a comprehensive programme of works for these EDI actions and key activities and to seek the support of the EDI steering group, once established, to ensure effective oversight and implementation of the action plan. Below are the five strategic Equality objectives and EDI Actions and related activities for 2025-28. Further information is available in the high-level action plan at Appendix 1.
- 4. Equalities Objective 1: Cultivate an inclusive workplace culture.
 - 4.1. EDI action: We will develop and implement a comprehensive EDI training programme, including psychological safety, deaf awareness and trauma-informed practice, to enhance awareness, skills, and cultural competence across all levels of the organisation. Training would be put in place to support staff and suitable training for members would be introduced.
 - 4.2. Key activities include:
 - Enhance officer onboarding EDI training.
 - Implement comprehensive officer EDI training programme.
 - Deliver tailored EDI training for council members.
 - Raise awareness of EDI issues for example through officer and member communications.
- 5. Equalities Objective 2: Embed and promote EDI principles into organisational policies and processes, fostering accountability.
 - 5.1. EDI action: We will embed EDI into the organisation by establishing accountability for EDI at senior and member levels, and integrate EDI principles into decision-making, policies, processes, and programme/services.
 - 5.2. Key activities include:
 - Develop greater robustness into the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) process – The process helps identify and evaluate how policies, practices, or decisions affect different groups, especially those protected by equality laws. It involves collecting evidence, engaging with stakeholders, analysing risks and benefits, and making adjustments to promote fairness and prevent discrimination. Undertaking robust EQIA ensures we are meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty and promotes inclusive outcomes. A new template, training and specific advice will support in ensuring a robust process moving forward.
 - Align council policies with EDI legislation.
 - Update EDI Policy.
 - Establish EDI Steering Group and Director Sponsor.
 - Appoint council member as EDI Champion
 - Integrate EDI principles into corporate vision.
 - Enhance EDI accountability in risk management.

- Collaborate on Cultural and Housing strategies
6. Equalities Objective 3: Promote diverse representation and inclusive practices.
- 6.1. EDI actions:
- 6.1.1. We will increase diverse representation in our workforce at all levels of the organisation to reflect the communities we serve and create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel valued and empowered.
 - 6.1.2. We will develop a targeted programme and support mechanisms to address the specific needs of vulnerable and underrepresented groups within the organisation and community.
- 6.2. Key activities include:
- Implement workforce diversity initiatives.
 - Establish EDI officer champions.
 - Maintain disability-confident employer status.
 - Develop initiatives for marginalised groups.
 - Work towards Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award
 - Develop policy for vulnerable residents.
 - Collect accessibility data during registration.
7. Equalities Objective 4: Strengthen external partnerships and engagement to better support the needs of the communities we serve.
- 7.1. EDI action: We will foster meaningful partnerships and engagement with diverse communities, stakeholders, and employee resource groups to inform and enhance EDI initiatives.
- 7.2. Key activities include:
- Implement access panels.
 - Build external EDI partnerships.
 - Enhance tenant satisfaction further through EDI principles.
 - Collaborate with voluntary sector.
 - Continue to develop Armed Forces network.
 - Support Devon County Council's Local Offer for care experienced young people.
 - Create inclusive communication guide.
8. Equalities Objective 5: Data-driven EDI measurement and improvements.
- 8.1. EDI action: We will implement a systematic approach to monitor EDI progress, evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives, and continuously refine strategies to drive ongoing improvement in equality, diversity, and inclusion outcomes.
- 8.2. Key activities include:
- Improve EDI data collection.
 - Implement EDI benchmarking.
 - Publish gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gap data and action plans.
 - Develop system to track EDI goals.
 - Update leadership and publish annual report.

Financial implications:

Implementing the EDI action plan will require investment in training programmes and other potential costs related to EDI initiatives. Also, once established, the EDI champions may wish to implement additional initiatives within the organisation which may have a cost implication. Currently, there is no specific budget allocated for EDI apart from the funds for the EDI Advisor position. A budget proposal has been drafted. It details Year 1 costs, with initial consideration given to the funding coming from Corporate Training budget. Some training, such as Equality Impact Assessment training, is urgently needed, so funding from the Corporate training budget will

be needed to progress at pace. For Year 2 and beyond, further funding will be sought through a budget bid, current budget proposals estimate cost to be £6,645 (excluding VAT). We would ask that consideration is given to this coming from the transformational fund.

Legal implications:

The EDI action plan ensures compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. This includes eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The plan also mitigates legal and compliance risks identified in the SWOT analysis.

Appendix 1

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action plan (2025-28)

EDI Actions	Key Activities	Who	When
EDI Objective 1: Cultivate an inclusive workplace culture.			
We will develop and implement a comprehensive EDI training programme, including psychological safety, deaf awareness and trauma-informed practice, to enhance awareness, skills, and cultural competence across all levels of the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance onboarding EDI training for new starters (Dec-24 - Mar-25) Implement a comprehensive EDI training programme that includes deaf awareness, basic sign language for frontline staff, and training on reasonable adjustments and psychological safety to ensure safe environments for all employees and trauma-informed practices. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) - Link in with cultural and transformation strategy Develop and deliver tailored EDI training for council members to improve awareness and understanding. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) Raise awareness of EDI issues using internal and external communication channels to regularly highlight key EDI topics, issues, and initiatives. (Dec-24 - Mar-25) 	HR	2025
EDI Objective 2: Embed and promote EDI principles into organisational policies and processes, fostering accountability.			
We will embed EDI into the organisation by establishing accountability for EDI at senior and member levels, and integrate EDI principles into decision-making, policies, processes, and programme/services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a robust EQIA process to assess the equality impacts of decisions, strategies, projects, organisational changes, and budgets affecting public services. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) Ensure council policies align with the latest EDI legislation and mandates, providing staff training as needed. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) Update the EDI Policy to incorporate the latest thinking and best practices. (Dec-24 - Mar-25) Establish a dedicated EDI Steering Group and a Director Sponsor with clear terms of reference to oversee and guide EDI initiatives. Part of the Cultural strategy workstreams (Dec-24 - Mar-25) Appoint a council member as EDI Sponsor to champion equality and inclusion at the decision-making level. (May-25 - Dec-25) 	HR/SLT/ELT	2025-28

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate EDI principles into the corporate vision to drive broader cultural change. Feeding into value and behaviours (Dec-24 - Mar-25) • Enhance EDI accountability in risk management by including the implementation of EQIAs on the corporate risk register and ensuring responsibility for their completion. (Dec-24 - Mar-25) • Collaborate with countryside & leisure teams on Cultural strategy and Housing strategy. 		
EDI Objective 3: Promote diverse representation and inclusive practices.			
<p>1. We will increase diverse representation in our workforce at all levels of the organisation to reflect the communities we serve, and create an inclusive environment where all individuals feel valued and empowered.</p> <p>2. We will develop targeted programme and support mechanisms to address the specific needs of vulnerable and underrepresented groups within the organisation and community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement initiatives to improve workforce diversity, ensuring representation at all levels. • Establish EDI champions throughout the organisation, providing relevant training for their roles. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Continue and expand efforts to maintain disability-confident employer status, working towards higher accreditation. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Work to address and develop target initiative to support the diverse needs of marginalised groups and communities, making necessary provisions to support them. (2026) • Work towards earning the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award, demonstrating a commitment to supporting military veterans. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Develop a policy for vulnerable residents that addresses the specific needs of at-risk individuals within our resident communities. • Collect accessibility data during registration to ensure that accessibility needs are identified for all relevant services, thereby improving overall accessibility. 	HR/SLT	2025-26
EDI Objective 4: Strengthen external partnerships and engagement to better support the needs of the communities we serve.			
We will foster meaningful partnerships and engagement with diverse communities, stakeholders, and employee resource groups to inform and enhance EDI initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development and implementation of access panels that improve stakeholder engagement with our communities, particularly targeting 'hard-to-reach' groups. This will ensure their perspectives are included in decision-making and that all voices are heard. (Jan - Dec-25) - dependent on communities team timeline 	HR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HOUSING COMMS	2025-26

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build strong external partnerships focused on EDI by strengthening relationships with organisations that support EDI initiatives and sharing best practices and resources. (Ongoing) • Enhance tenant satisfaction by addressing the diverse needs of residents. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Collaborate with voluntary and community sector organisations to further EDI efforts. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Support Devon CC's care leaver Local Offer. (Apr-25 – onwards) • Create a reference guide for inclusive communication to promote accessible interactions, ensuring that language and practices are easy to understand for everyone. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) 		
EDI Objective 5: Data-driven EDI measurement and improvements			
We will implement a systematic approach to monitor EDI progress, evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives, and continuously refine strategies to drive ongoing improvement in equality, diversity, and inclusion outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the collection of EDI data to better understand needs and outcomes. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Implement EDI benchmarking, measuring EDI indices and tracking progress on psychological safety across the organisation. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Publish data and action plans for gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps and take steps to resolve disparities. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Develop a systematic approach to track EDI goals and ensure any agreed targets are met. (Apr-25 - Dec-25) • Regularly update leadership on EDI progress and publish an annual report.(Q3 2025) 	HR	2025

SWOT Analysis for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

This SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of EDI, highlighting areas of strength, potential weaknesses, opportunities for growth, and potential threats to be mindful of when implementing and expanding EDI programs.

INTERNAL FACTORS

STRENGTHS +	WEAKNESSES –
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senior leadership buy-in and commitment. - Updated EIA form and guidance documents - Revenue and Benefits department/Teams comprehensively carries out EIAs. - Equality Policy and Objectives 2021-2025 - Decreased absenteeism over the years - We are a Disability Confident Employer - Ensure compliance with legal requirements and transparency in pay equity, aiming to reduce and close the mean (average) pay gap between women and men. - No recent discrimination/harassment employee relations cases – par recent alleged discrimination on our part from a member of the public that has mental ill-health and autism. - Joint Declaration for Equality - Devon Strategic Partnership - Recent armed forces convent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient and non-comprehensive EDI training programs - Lack of integration of EDI training into existing processes - Limited EDI awareness and understanding among staff. - Inadequate promotion of a psychologically safe work environment - Insufficient support for vulnerable and marginalised groups - Celebration of diversity and promotion of inclusivity - Lack of quality people data for data-driven decisions - Measurable insights into EDI progress and psychological safety - Consideration of diverse community voices in decision-making - Limited knowledge sharing and collaborative efforts on EDI initiatives. - Relationships with community organisations to help promote EDI in our communities. - Non-inclusive communication practices - Policies and practices that promote EDI across the organisation. - Alignment of organisational culture with EDI principles - EDI consideration in key projects and activities significantly impacting public and service users. - Inadequate mitigation of corporate risks related to equality duties.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource allocation considering protected groups. - Insufficient support and representation for diverse employee groups - Reactive rather than proactive addressing of accessibility requirements in service delivery - There are potential gaps in our approach to recruiting, retaining, and developing disabled employees despite Disability Confident employer status. - A trauma-informed approach to service users is insufficient. - Potential gaps in staff capabilities regarding current policies - Underrepresentation in the workforce - Monitoring improvement in EDI outcomes
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EXTERNAL FACTORS

OPPORTUNITIES +	THREATS –
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced innovation and problem-solving through diverse perspectives - Improved brand perception and competitive advantage - Better talent acquisition and retention - Increased employee engagement and productivity - Fulfilment of legislative duty and risk mitigation - Strengthened community engagement and representation. - Improved service delivery for vulnerable community members - Enhanced accountability and visibility of EDI initiatives at the highest levels - Comprehensive overview of EDI progress for stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistance to change and lack of buy-in from employees. - Risk of ineffective implementation leading to tokenism or reverse discrimination - Legal and compliance risks, if not properly managed - Potential backlash or negative perception if initiatives are seen as forced or insincere