


LONDON BOROUGH OF WALTHAM FOREST

Meeting / Date	Cabinet 7th July 2022	
Report Title	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Making a Living Strategy	
Cabinet Portfolio	Councillor Vicky Ashworth – Portfolio Lead for Jobs, Social Inclusion and Equalities	
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Wards affected	All	
Public Access	Open	
Appendices	A: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Making a Living Strategy B: EDI Making a Living Initial Action Plan C: EDI Making a Living Summit Report	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. The events of the last two years have been stark reminders of the extreme inequalities that exist in society. During the Covid-19 pandemic, residents across the borough came together as neighbours to support one another like never before. At the same time, the unequal impact of the pandemic, coupled with national protests about systemic injustices and the cost-of-living crisis laid bare the stark reality that many residents face systemic discrimination and barriers to living healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives. The Council is committed to stamping out racism and discrimination in the borough, working with the community through programmes like Connecting Communities and the world's first Citizen's Assembly on hate crime.
- 1.2. In June 2021, the Council published the State of the Borough Report. The report demonstrated how widespread the injustices faced by residents of Waltham Forest are and acted as a first step to tackling inequalities in the borough. Following the State of the Borough, the

Council developed an innovative multi-method engagement approach of community conversations. The engagement built on the quantitative data gathered in the State of the Borough report by creating spaces for the Council to listen to and better understand the lived experience of residents who face the greatest barriers to making a living, many of which are complex and often intersect. A report on the engagement was brought to Cabinet in March 2022.

- 1.3. To conclude the engagement, in March the EDI Making a Living Summit brought together 32 residents and voluntary and community sector representatives to review the existing evidence base of challenges. The participants collectively developed a set of 15 recommendations for action to support the creation of a fairer and more equal borough, where everyone can make a good living while in work and in later life.
- 1.4. Following the summit, the EDI Making a Living Strategy (Appendix A) has been developed. This strategy sets out how the Council, partners, stakeholders and the wider borough can implement the recommendations developed by residents in the EDI Making a Living Summit. This Strategy is supported by an action plan (Appendix B) that identifies the interventions that respond to the recommendation areas over the next six months, alongside longer-term commitments which will be produced later this year. The EDI Making a Living Strategy is the culmination of a year's work by the Council, residents and voluntary and community groups (VCS) working together in Waltham Forest.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Cabinet is recommended to:
 - 2.1.1. approve the EDI Making a Living Strategy and initial action plan as set out in this report and appendices and note that the full action plan will be brought to Cabinet later this year.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1. **State of the Borough Report**
 - 3.1.1. Tackling inequality is embedded throughout the Council's priorities, from the Connecting Communities programme to the Citizen's Assembly on hate crime and the 2020 Public Service Strategy. Building on this work, the State of the Borough report was as an essential step in developing a shared understanding of the systemic inequalities that people face in Waltham Forest, so that effective action can be taken.

- 3.1.2. It was quickly evident that people often experience a combination of structural inequalities that shape their lives. By analysing the quantitative data available, the State of the Borough was the first step towards developing the Council's longer-term commitment to tackling the scale of structural inequality in the borough. To ensure the response to these challenges was practical and could deliver meaningful change, initial focus was placed on the Making a Living theme. This theme was chosen due to the lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on economic wellbeing.

3.2. **Community Conversations**

- 3.2.1. For the EDI Making a Living Strategy to be compelling, it was essential that the voices of the most disadvantaged groups were represented and heard. To do this, an innovative multi-method approach was used to capture a diverse range of voices through a mixture of open engagement, targeted voluntary and community sector led (VCS) workshops and ethnographic research. Over 550 residents engaged through over 400 hours of meaningful engagement.

- 3.2.2. The engagement made it clear that many residents in Waltham Forest experience significant challenges at all stages of making a living both while at working age and in later life. Underpinning all of the challenges residents faced was varying, often intersecting, levels of discrimination. Following the engagement, the challenges and solutions suggested by residents were distilled into four broad themes which were used to structure the Summit and develop recommendations for the EDI Making a Living Strategy:

1. Inclusive workplaces – From finding and staying in a good job to progressing in work, many residents face significant challenges entering the labour market because of discriminatory working practices, toxic workplace cultures and a lack of flexible working options.

2. Developing good quality jobs for all – A lack of suitable, well-paid jobs, career opportunities and support for local businesses were all key barriers that disproportionately impact disadvantaged groups ability to make a living.

3. Learning, advice and skills for those who need it most – From difficulty accessing information and support to poor experiences in school, to financial difficulties, caring commitments and cultural factors, many factors prevent some people from having equal access to learning, advice and skills.

4. Creating a caring and fair system - From the cost of living, unaffordable housing, limited childcare support, and delays with accessing benefit support, participants made it clear that in their

lived experience has demonstrated the system to feel uncaring, unfair and unsupportive.

3.3. **EDI Making a Living Summit**

3.3.1. Taking place over three days, the EDI Making a Living Summit brought together people from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to co-design ideas for action and recommendations for change. 32 participants from a range of ages, ethnicities and employment statuses came together, with the majority having previously engaged with the community conversations. Participants were a mixture of residents and voluntary and community sector group representatives who worked with marginalised communities. Over one third of participants identified as disabled, and one in six were from the LGBTQIA+ community. Each day had a different focus:

- **Day one: Understand:** Participants were introduced to the State of the Borough and community conversation findings, with presentations from elected members, officers, and testimony from a resident.
- **Day two: Deliberate:** Participants reviewed analysis of the economic challenges and opportunities in Waltham Forest and evidence of best practice before identifying potential solutions relating to each of four themes. Their ideas were tested with expert practitioners to develop them further.
- **Day three: Decide:** Participants developed their ideas into recommendations, reviewing each other's work and presenting the final recommendations to the whole group for collective agreement through a democratic vote.

3.3.2. The Council partnered with Democratic Society, who previously facilitated the Hate Crime Citizens Assembly, to deliver the Summit. Demos also provided summit participants with an analysis of the economic challenges and opportunities in Waltham Forest. In addition, expert practitioners from within the Council's services and partners from anchor institutions such as Barts NHS Trust, and local businesses including Crate, supported residents in testing ideas and developing recommendations. This enabled the recommendations from the Summit to be grounded in best practice and informed by real-world examples, ensuring the recommendations for action are achievable and proven to work well elsewhere.

3.3.3. Alongside the Summit, the EDI Development fund provided 8 VCS groups with £1,250 of funding each to enable them to immediately work on solutions that came from the community conversations. In total, the projects supported 145 residents and 4 employers. These included an income-maximisation drop-in service for older residents, a mentoring scheme for young black men and women, LGBTQIA+

awareness workshops for employers and a digital-skills training programme for disabled people.

3.4. Strategy and next steps

3.4.1. Community is at the heart of this strategy. The EDI Making a Living Strategy (Appendix A) sets out the way the borough should tackle the systemic barriers that residents in Waltham Forest face. The Strategy demonstrates the scale of structural barriers many people face when making a living in Waltham Forest, bringing together the big-picture evidence from the State of the Borough and the analysis of the economic challenges and opportunities and substantiating this with the lived experience of residents gathered in the community conversations.

3.4.2. Underpinning the Strategy is the EDI Making a Living Initial Action Plan (Appendix B). The action plan sets out the work that the Council is already doing and the short-term actions against the four recommendations that can be delivered in the next few months. This has been developed through workshops with services across the Council who will be responsible for implementing the actions.

3.4.3. A full action plan will identify proposed costings for the programme's delivery. This will present the longer-term outcome of the Strategy, broadly within three areas:

- Actions for the Council to deliver
- Actions for the borough to deliver (with the Council in a convening role where possible)
- Actions for the wider London area/national stakeholders (with the Council lobbying/campaigning for change)

3.4.4. The commitment to tackling inequalities through innovative approaches to community participation and deliberative democracy has been evident throughout the EDI making a living programme. By empowering people who are most impacted by inequality to create the change the process ensures that residents are able to exert greater influence over services to make them more accessible and responsive to the needs of communities in Waltham Forest.

4. OPTIONS & ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council could have decided not to engage on this topic through the Community Conversations and Summit. This would have left the Council to rely on the quantitative data presented in the State of the Borough Report, without the richness of the lived experience of residents to inform the understanding of the data, and without the

opportunity to co-create recommendations with residents at the Summit. This would have undermined the credibility of the Strategy and the commitment to meaningfully respond to the challenges residents face around making a living.

5. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY PRIORITIES (AND OTHER NATIONAL OR LOCAL POLICIES OR STRATEGIES)

5.1. The Waltham Forest For You Strategy will support the delivery of all Council priorities. It sets out that Waltham Forest Council will work in partnership to create a culture where everyone reaches their potential, in an environment that is healthy, safe, green and more equal.

5.2. The EDI Making a Living programme is integral to the priorities as set out in the Waltham Forest For You Strategy. Two of the six priorities set out in the Waltham Forest For You Strategy are doing everything the Council can to help residents find good jobs, and tackling the inequality that holds some residents back. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Making a Living Strategy is essential to both of these priority areas of the Council.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1. The Community Conversations involved consultation with 550 residents over 400 hours of engagement through workshops, ethnographic research, spontaneous street-based conversations and digital outreach. Following the community engagement, the EDI Making a Living Summit brought together 32 residents from key target groups to understand the evidence, deliberate on potential solutions and decide on the recommendations. This ensured that the Strategy is formed from the ideas and experiences of residents, with the action plan directly responding to the recommendations of participants.

6.2. Throughout the community conversations, Democratic Society, an independent organisation specialising in deliberative democracy, were providing quality assurance to the engagement activities. Democratic Society then provided the facilitation for the Summit event, ensuring that every resident who took part felt listened to and involved at all times.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Finance, Value for Money and Risk

7.1.1. There are no financial implications arising from the publication of the EDI Making a Living Strategy, and Initial Action Plan as set out in this report and appendices.

7.1.2. All work conducted to date including: the State of the Borough Report, the Community Conversations, The Summit Event, and writing and designing of the EDI Making a Living Strategy were funded from an allocation of £150,000 secured from the MHCLG grant for Phase 2 of the Connecting Communities Programme.

7.1.3. Underpinning the Strategy will be the EDI Making a Living Action Plan (Full Action Plan). At this stage, the Full Action Plan is yet to be concluded. The Initial Action Plan provides a breakdown of the current, and proposed programme to be delivered. At this point the cost associated to the delivery of the programme within the full action plan cannot be fully quantified. The Full Action Plan will outline the proposed costings for the delivery of the full programme.

7.2. **Legal**

7.2.1. The Public Sector Equality Duty (s.149, Equality Act 2010) requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have “due regard” to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between those who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not share that protected characteristic and;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (this involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice, and (b) promote understanding).

7.2.2. Cabinet are being asked to approve the EDI Making a Living Strategy, alongside the recommendations from the Summit and action plan. Whilst covering a broader spectrum of characteristics than those protected under the Equality Act, the proposal to consider and adopt a Strategy is consistent with the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

7.3. **Equalities and Diversity**

7.3.1. The action plan (Appendix B) highlights the proposed short-term changes to Council services and practices as a result of the EDI Making a Living Strategy. These focus on a broader spectrum of characteristics than those protected under the Equality Act 2010 and are expected to have wide reaching and entirely positive outcomes for those most impacted by structural inequalities. The fully costed long-term action plan will be brought to Cabinet in autumn 2022.

7.4. **Sustainability (climate change, health, crime and disorder)**

7.4.1. None specifically as a result of this report.

7.5. **Council Infrastructure**

7.5.1. None specifically as a result of this report.

7.6. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION** (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

7.6.1. None.