



Subject:	Update on Race Equality Action Plan
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Tully Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Catherine Christy - HR Manager Development Sarah Williams - Governance and Compliance Manager Leish Dolan - Good Relations Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update the Committee on the development of the Race Equality Action Plan.
1.2	Following the decision, in April 2022, to appoint a CMT representative as Executive Sponsor for Race to champion and take forward the development of a Race Equality Action Plan in the Council, work has been ongoing across departments to identify appropriate activity. This report sets out progress to date.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main Report
	Background and context
3.1	In 2022, the Council, in partnership with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, commissioned research into the inequalities experienced by Black, Asian, minority ethnic and Traveller people residing in Belfast at that time. The research was undertaken by Lucy Michael Research with the African and Caribbean Support Organisation of Northern Ireland (ACSONI) and Polish Language, Culture, And Affairs (POLCA).
3.2	The research identified that while minority ethnic residents have made significant and lasting contributions to the city many face challenges of racism, isolation and poverty. These have impacted on how they can participate in political, social, and economic life. There are a wide range of challenges identified for both minority ethnic and migrant individuals in gaining employment, accessing suitable housing, healthcare, education, leisure, political participation, access to justice, safety, economic inclusion, receiving language support and cultural integration.
3.3	Members will recall the decision to appoint a CMT representative as Executive Sponsor for Race, to take forward the development of a Race Equality Action Plan to help the Council lead the way in the city to help address these challenges.
3.4	CMT agreed that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy would be best placed to lead on this work and engage with relevant officers across all Council departments. A cross departmental working group and three subgroups were set up to consider three distinct strands of work:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Workforce: attracting more ethnic minority applicants and supporting our existing ethnic minority staff in the workplace; ○ Accessibility to services: promoting access to council services to ethnic minority customers and citizens and; ○ Civic leadership: championing ethnic minority inclusion in decision making, in communities and in public life.
3.5	<p>A variety of staff including officers from Corporate HR, the Equality and Diversity Unit, Good Relations, Employability and Skills, departmental policy officers, community safety, the Customer Hub, Marketing and Communications etc. have worked together to ensure necessary linkages with existing relevant service delivery, activity and work plans.</p>
	<p>Provision of Support and Assistance</p>
3.6	<p>Members will be aware that the Good Relations Unit has a significant level of engagement with people from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds and have regular contact with support organisations through the Council led Migrant Forum. In March 2023, the Council received Home Office Dispersal funding through TEO to support proposals to develop support and services for people seeking asylum.</p>
3.7	<p>Through this funding Council is supporting a number of initiatives to support those seeking asylum in the city. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Asylum Support and Triage Project, providing a bilingual helpline and casework support for people seeking asylum, delivered by the Red Cross • A Family Help Project, Supporting parents and children coping with displacement through conflict, with a focus on school readiness, child development and parenting, delivered by Barnardos • A Community Integration Programme and trauma therapy intervention, delivered by LORAG • A Language, mentoring, training befriending and integration programme, delivered by Conway Education Centre • An integration and well-being outreach project, delivered by Belfast City of Sanctuary.
3.8	<p>In addition to the Council's integral role in organising and hosting the Ukrainian Assistance Centre, the Council had also provided funding to the Red Cross to develop a bilingual helpline for Ukrainian Nationals to support them with accessing services.</p>

3.9	<p>Following a proposal at the SP and R Committee in August 2023 to explore funding opportunities for a migrant hub or hubs, officers have commenced work to commission a scoping of the current services offered as well as an assessment of need, demand and gaps in provision. As part of this project extensive engagement will be undertaken with key stakeholders, with those who have a lived experience of coming to Belfast and navigating services, existing service providers and statutory agencies. Following the completion of this first phase and presentation back to Members, the next steps will include a site options appraisal to identify the right location for a resource that would serve communities new to Belfast, identification of the specific services and agencies to be involved and identification of potential funding sources.</p>
3.10	<p>Belfast Agenda Refresh</p> <p>To ensure that the voices of everyone living in Belfast are heard, conversations have continued with a wide range of stakeholders, including the new communities in our city. The need for Belfast to be a Compassionate City - a welcoming, caring, fair and inclusive city where no one is left behind, has again emerged as an important theme to ensure the Council's inclusive growth and anti-poverty ambitions. This engagement across the city has helped shape the specific actions in the draft Belfast Agenda that is now in the final stages of preparation.</p>
3.11	<p>Belfast Business Promise and Race at Work Campaign</p> <p>Aligned to our inclusive growth ambitions, the Belfast Business Promise includes a number of pledges aimed at encouraging employers to commit to and implement inclusive recruitment and workplace practices for all communities facing additional barriers to employment. Having participated in the pilot exercise, it has been identified that the Council already fully meets the Recruit Inclusively pledge criteria.</p>
3.12	<p>Signing up to Business in the Community Race at Work campaign also demonstrates the Council's best practice and commitment to attracting employees from minority ethnic groups and supporting them in the workplace. Among other things it requires the Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying • Make it clear that supporting equality in the workforce is the responsibility of all leaders and managers • Take action that supports ethnic minority career progression • Support race inclusion allies in the workplace
3.13	<p>Further appropriate actions and outreach are being considered for the action plan.</p>

Building Capacity and Understanding

3.14 In October, Livingstone Thompson of Living Cultural Solutions, a contributor to the inequalities research project referenced at paragraph 3.1, delivered Anti-Racism training to a number of directors and other members of the working groups. In addition, the Executive Sponsor for Race and working group members have been engaging with people with lived experience, both groups and individuals, to learn more about what changes are needed. Feedback from this “lived experience mentoring” has identified opportunities to further build capacity and understanding.

3.15 A draft Race Equality Action Plan, incorporating all three strands of work, has now been produced and shared with Dr Lucy Michael and Livingston Thompson in their role as “critical friends” for this work, and detailed feedback on the draft plan has been received following this engagement.

3.16 A key recommendation from this engagement is that the Council should continue to build capacity in this area ahead of the final publication of the plan. This approach will ensure that senior council officers and elected members are fully equipped with the relevant knowledge and understanding to maximise the positive impact of the Race Equality Action Plan and further support senior decision makers in identifying appropriate actions to underpin the Belfast Agenda ambitions.

3.17 TEO approved the use of £20,000 Home Office Dispersal funding to support the procurement of a cultural competence training programme for the Council. This will be used to commission both awareness raising training for elected members, directors, senior managers and other relevant staff, and further consultancy support to assist the working group to finalise the development of a Race Equality Action Plan that will make a difference to the lives of people from minority ethnic communities living and working in our city.

Resource Implications

3.18 There are no direct resource implications in terms of costs or human resources associated with this report at present. Further resource implications will be identified through the development of a Race Equality Action plan and costed for future approval.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.19 Work on screening of the Race Equality Action Plan is ongoing as the plan is being developed. Actions, which promote the inclusion of black and other ethnic minority

	communities in employment and civic life, would have a positive impact on equality and good relations within the city.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None