

APPENDIX 1

This Appendix contains the full comments from the online Let's Talk Equalities engagement exercise, both from the survey (4 questions) and the Ideas Board.

These comments are confidential and should not be published publicly.

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Question 1: Do you agree with our proposed equality objectives? (Please tell us why not.)

Everybody should be treated the same, treating some groups differently for whatever reason is unfair

I agree with the objectives generally, however I am disappointed that unpaid carers, including our working staff who are unpaid carers, are not mentioned or referenced in any of the objectives. Although not technically covered under equalities legislation per se, other than by association, unpaid caring is strongly linked to other characteristics, including age and sex. These issues are paramount to ensuring a viable workforce in the future. As such it should at least be referenced or alluded to within the strategy.

No account taken for years of service

Too much emphasis is given on the rights of those with 'protected qualities' than on those who disagree with them on moral grounds. It's like because we don't concur with their view, our views are not respected, and at worst condemned. That in itself is a form of discrimination.

Hire the best person for the job not the one that fits the quota.

I feel that by striving to be more inclusive to minority groups, myself as a white male has less of a chance to get a position based on my qualification and experience rather than my age, gender or ethnicity.

Employees should be right in person not right colour

The council needs to focus on providing basic services cost efficiently not playing identity politics which serve to divide the public.

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

Question 2: Do you think that our proposed equality objectives will promote and embed equality and diversity into the services the Council provides? (Please tell us why not.)

The RCT has failed in recent times for certain demographics of people who were linked within the council. In 2023 alone, they resulted in RCT Pride disbanding due to the Pontypridd Pride event being cancelled without any explanation as to this on any fronts, or ways to correct this for all people, especially LGBTQ+ people within the Rhondda Cynon Taff to celebrating their diversity and inclusion in a healthy way.

Just give the job to the best person for the job

- There is little capacity to prioritise this in addition to other requirements placed on managers already
- understanding of population demographics to gauge our performance in reflecting the population is not available
- There is little reflection in the document of the tension for teams to perform and fulfill statutory duties with less resource whilst positively supporting and making adjustments for people with disabilities for example. All managers are keen to support their staff in when they are having difficulties but its becoming more difficult as numbers are cut. Not saying we shouldn't just saying this document needs to reflect on that otherwise it fails to reflect reality

1) I think you have missed in the introduction the support we already provide to unpaid carers within our workforce and 2) how this could be supported under the equality umbrella to further develop inclusive workplaces.

Due to financial constraints

The more a community highlight differences the more we detract from being a community - multiculturalism is a failed experiment.

As 74% of the workforce is female, I believe that as a white male, I have been overlooked for jobs because of my gender. Over the last 6 years, I have applied for 14 grade 6 jobs and got to interview but then did not get the job. All the jobs were taken by women. One of the positions was re-advertised within 2 years because the female that took it moved on.

It needs to be something everyone believes in and part of. Not all staff will get to see or feel part of this until someone take the time to devolve the information to all staff.

Your having a laugh I applied for 40 jobs this Year not only am I not good enough for the job I now I'm not gay or black enough

I don't trust this Council to do the work needed.

As above

Question 3: Do you think that it is important for our proposed equality objectives to focus on developing our workforce? (Please tell us why not.)

Because people should be recruited because they are the best person for the job. Not because you need to employ a certain number of people based on protected qualities to make you look good. Too many people from protected quality backgrounds is counterintuitive because it doesn't give a balanced view.

As above

Just give the job to the best person for the job

It should not just be there to develop the workforce it should be used to empower it also as these staff are the council not just the workforce. They are the community and they represent more than just the council.

working in public sector i think it should be focused on everyone customers/public and workforce this is the only way to make changes not just focused on workforce.

This work is costing money and during a period in our lives when the council is cutting services to save money, this is zero priority.

The workforce would develop naturally if more work was done in communities (given most of the workforce lives IN THOSE COMMUNITIES)

There is no room for advancement through experience/time spent in the job. I have taken on several extra rolls within admin but there is no room for promotion in my current roll. If you focus on getting a diverse employment force, you will overlook qualified people and get a lower productive force within RCT.

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

Question 4: Do you have any other comments about the proposed Strategic Equality Plan?

Nothing to add, I feel that the STP is well written and sets out clear achievable objectives.

I think it should be more explicit on the current workforce as it all's about new people and talking to rct residents but I think it would benefit from more from a staff angle. Felt like we have been left out thanks
I liked the easy read

I feel in order to create inclusive and supportive workplaces this plan needs to cover elements of equality and diversity that aren't strictly speaking covered by legislation, such as unpaid caring responsibilities.

It doesn't say what you are going to do

NOTHING TO ADD

It would be great to also have some additional manager guidance on recruiting from a diversity perspective, for example in terms of recruitment adverting

A lot of it does make sense and is a good hopefully future. However with how some RCT courses have been run while I am seeking employment through services such as Communities For Work Plus, and seeing inward refusal of service to the likes of RCT Pride in 2023, it does have ben concerned for my safety as an LGBTQ+ person currently living within the Rhondda Cynon Taff.

No

I think that people who live alone are more likely to be overlooked or that lone living/working could detrimentally underline a persons access to inclusion or having appropriate consideration? Loneliness impacts on a persons confidence and sense of worth, those with protected characteristics (LGBT; Disabled) could be more prone to isolation. Perhaps future staff survey's could include employees living in solo occupancy, and then give appropriate consideration to such isolation when considering 'Homeworking' or Occupational Health considerations (someone with work related stress could perhaps work from home, but if living in isolation might not be the right reccomendation.

Satisfying the public and workforce needs, Really important and a great plan. Information on council progression being shared to forums

it sounds a bit vague and I'm not sure I can support it fully without real targets and promises. Saing you want to develop the workforce is all very well but what does that mean in numbers. You dont know how maany people from discrimated groups are put off from applying already or who dont feel safe being themselves in work and Id want to see actual concrete plans and promises here to believe it will change for the better.

Option to work from home when needed for those who are disabled or suffer from chronic conditions.

If this plan extends to Council Tax payers then I wish to raise the on-going reluctance by RCTCBC to deal directly with me over my concern over the whereabouts of my Donations to the failed ...Powerhouse Trust .

Please make sure you are abiding by the law and the Equality Act 2010. Some lobby groups give advice on what they would like the law to be rather than what it actually states. Since 75% of the staff are female then single sex spaces should be widely available rather than converting to mixed gender/sex spaces.

In your easy to read guide you say that you will speak with shops - might I suggest this is extended to include businesses as many businesses are not shops i.e. professional services.

Seems a little to involved and timely both to set up so far and looking at the requiremnts going forward, when we could focus on our work

Just a few points from the draft proposal;

Point 4 - Mentions that RCT will 'call out' behaviour that harms.... Perhaps that could be rephrased....'We will not tolerate' - also, put in place a confidential and supportive process when such behaviour is identified.

Point 5 - Third paragraph....external agencies such Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board AND South Wales Police - as opposed to 'or'

Point 6 - EDI. Look to incorporate EDI training into the workplace to encourage staff to firstly; talk about topics, and to secondly - see how person/s of an BAME feel that living in a predominantly white environment affects the way they are perceived.

Objective 3 - Inclusion - consideration of a disability support network within the council as in SWP.

PS 1441 Phillips - Pontypridd Police Station - 09/01/2024.

Any plan like this is only going to be successful if driven by a senior leadership team that reflects its objectives in their own opinions and attitudes. If there are significant decision makers with longstanding roles in the same position, who hold outdated opinions or have low-risk decision making style; then the same past Diversity and Inclusion "errors" could continue to happen.

An externally-led full SLT review may be a good starting point to see if RCT does have the kind of required leadership before putting this ambitious plan into action. It needs to mean something and lead to better outcomes for affected staff and not just be a nice idea that remains good on paper.

I believe it is very likely that some staff have lost out on pay and progression because of previously undiagnosed conditions that might have been mistaken for "laziness," "obstinance" or "poor interview technique," but were in fact were very likely a result of a specific condition now diagnosed. Could there be some sort of "no blame" one-off past RCT career review as part of ongoing performance reviews, where the Council reflects that perhaps a compensatory pay honorarium might be appropriate in some cases?

not at this time.

Not at this time

This is something that should already be in place. However the acknowledgement to get it right is commendable.

RCT desperately need to give anti racism training to employees, it must be the only local authority that doesn't. The latest closest training has been cultural competency which is basic and dated. I have asked multiple times for the training and have been told there is not a demand for it. RCT has a responsibility to ensure its employees are anti racist and equipped with the tools to do so.

RCT does not have a baby/pregnancy loss policy, this currently falls under sick leave. Most private and public sectors do and allow for leave under these circumstances.

Just stop. It's good to be different but don't make that the main driving force in everything. The issue with equality directives like this is that it typically involves equity which is essentially unfair. People are people, nothing more nothing less. I don't care if someone is ginger, of Sudanese decent or drinks the blood of goats, it doesn't matter, so don't create a policy where this stuff is used to make division.

No

To engage with those who fall under the umbrella for their input

Money can be better spent elsewhere in the service. There is too much reporting on meeting targets or complying with needless legislation. I don't need or want to know how many people with protected qualities' you've employed.

One of the statements is regarding 74% of the workforce is female adding to the gender pay gap. An amount of female workers are probably home makers and only work part time as are traditional rolls within RCT. The structure of pay bands in RCT means that Men and Women in the same band are paid the same ie. Band 5 payrates are the same for which ever gender is working that roll. Men tend to work longer hours and take on higher band rolls as most would feel a need to be the breadwinner.

The plan sounds very positive however there is a long way to go if the distance between what the plan says RCT wants to be like and how RCT currently treat their staff.

The following phrases from the foreword and section 2 were very problematic:

“We recognise and value the benefits of a diverse workforce”

“duty to tackle discrimination and disadvantage so people feel safe from harassment”

“inclusive working environment” and

“remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic”

As a person with a disability working for RCT I have never felt valued and have experienced disadvantage and discrimination from my employers. If RCT want to remove the disadvantages they need to stop punishing their disabled staff who have disability related sick leave, signed off by their doctors yet being subjected to disciplinary hearing for “misconduct” when they have done nothing wrong apart from being born with a disability.

To then have occupational health reports used as evidence against them in disciplinary hearings, when their employers have disregarded the recommendations from Occ health doctors for years is especially cruel , as is sending letters that arrive on the weekend informing people that they are subject to a disciplinary hearing and are being classed as “misconduct” and “absenteeism” when they are in fact disabled and giving every ounce of energy they have to being in work and it’s the job and punitive systems and total lack of support or understanding that is making them too ill to be in work in the first place.

In section 4 you say that RCT has a commitment to “lead change and be brave” and that you have the backs of your staff but you won’t even consider a reduced working week when someone is requesting this just so that they can avoid getting so unwell that they need time off work. Even when your own Occupational Health department are agreeing that this will drastically improve performance, productivity and attendance for that member of staff.

You also say you “communicate the rationale for decisions” when in reality a formal request for a reduction in hours, including a clear rationale for how this would benefit the service and the member of staff, went unanswered for weeks , then was dismissed out of hand and when the member of staff asked for the rationale for their request being decline without any discussion, was told “those are private emails between managers so you can’t have access to them”. Then when the member staff became too unwell to work again they too were punished when they returned to work by the unfair and discriminatory “absence management policy”.

If RCT honestly wanted to improve attendance at work they would listen when their employees are telling them what will help or at least have the common courtesy to have a discussion about it. *(continues overleaf)*

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People with disabilities use their annual leave just to try to remain well enough to stay in work, meaning they have less chance of a proper break to rest and recuperate. This in turn has a negative affect on their health making it even more likely that they will be too unwell to remain in work. If people were not terrified by the disciplinary process they are subjected to and told “we must see improvement”, then they wouldn’t have to use annual leave to try to manage their health condition.

Also if requests for reduction to hours ,which comes with a pay cut, which again is discriminatory because if they were not disabled they could work full time without becoming so unwell their doctor signs them off, were taken seriously then disabled people would have the chance to have a work life balance like non disabled people do. Instead, people are belittled and degraded by a HR process that completely disadvantages people with disabilities. Even when Occ health recommend that triggers for the policy are individualised for the person with a disability, this is completely ignored.

If RCT are serious about the claim that one of the things they will do to address Objective 3 is to review HR policies then they really must look at the punitive, degrading and discriminatory absence management policy as a matter of urgency because it is making people ill and I wouldn’t be surprised if it doesn’t lead to people taking their lives.

Also in objective 3 you mention reasonable adjustments and how the onus is on the disabled person. This is correct and it sets people up to fail because if what you suggest doesn’t work then there’s no where else to turn. Attitudes need to be addressed that lead to comments like “we can’t support you forever” and “you can’t have that, it’s unfair to the rest of the team who don’t get special treatment” and “no one else has a problem with the system” etc etc that have been said to people within formal reasonable adjustments meetings. Again, this totally blames the disabled person and makes them feel useless and a burden.

On a more positive note the staff forums are a brilliant source of support and do make people with protected characteristics feel seen and heard by RCT . I hope that these continue and that they can be a way for RCT to see that we do have a lot to offer and are good employees, just because we are different does not make us substandard.

It would be great if this plan is implemented well and that in the future people will be able to genuinely say “the council values me as an employee and I feel safe and supported in work”.

I think the importance of simplifying recruitment processes in some areas is a key component of attracting a wider range and diversity of staff. For example, competency based applications for practical roles does not suit the applicant or support the employer in understanding how well the person can undertake the role.

It doesn't matter what species you have working for RCT just as long as it's the right species and doing a good job.

I would like to think that this plan is already in place.

The Strategic Equality Plan needs to be shared across the whole of the council and not just the office based workforce. The staff not based in offices feel they have no voice in some aspects of what the council do or are providing.

No

It is very wishy-washy

we need to listen to what is being asked for and not just thinking that we know the answers. small changes make a massive difference to diverse groups. we need to change our public facilities as in toilets/ changing rooms making these non-gendered and accessible.

Overall, the plan feels thought out, evidence-based and seems to have strong rationale. There are some areas that would benefit from further detail.

Objective 1 (What We Will Do) -

1. How? What does this look like?

4 - What would this look like? 'EDI regularly features' could be rephrased to 'EDI is regularly monitored and discussed at...'

Objective 2 (What We Will Do) -

- 'Improve the uptake of completion of workforce equality monitoring data' - How?

'Improve the number of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority candidates applying for jobs.' - How?

- 'Review our existing Recruitment and Selection policy and practices with the intention of removing any bias.' - What will this look like? Diverse interview panels? Unconscious bias training for interview panels? What personal information will be redacted in job applications?

- 'Offer initiatives such as mentoring programmes that benefit under-represented groups of staff.' - What will this look like? How will it be structured? Will mentors have shared lived experience with their mentees? Will this be an additional workload or will steps be taken to mitigate this? Will you work with anyone else?

Objective 3 (What We Will Do) -

2. Can you be specific on what EDI topics will be included? E.g. anti-racism

5. How?

Overall, there does not seem to be a focus on collaborative working e.g. with community representatives or outside organisations/individuals with expertise in specific areas - consider whether this should be included.

No, There is a clear plan for this going forward.

As a charity who support the D/deaf community in RCT, we are concerned that the plan itself is not Deaf Aware nor is it accessible for BSL users. Therefore, although we do feel this is a step in the right direction, there still seems to be a lot of work to be done to improve Deaf Awareness within RCTCBC. The BSL Act was passed in 2022 and it is disheartening that this council led document is inaccessible for this recognised language. Even though there is an easy read document, it may come across to the Deaf community as condescending and a version in BSL will be more appropriate.

Idea	Reply/ies
<p>Support for unpaid carers</p> <p>Continue the Carers Caffi peer support group, allow Carers Leave to be taken in hours rather than as a half day minimum, improve line managers understanding of the challenges working carers face, increase awareness across the Council of support for staff who have caring responsibilities. Working Carers are adversely affected in the workplace - as a result of the significant challenges of juggling work and caring. Research from Carers UK tells us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each year, over 2 million people give up work to care and 3 million reduce their working hours. • 600 people a day give up work to care and many others reduce their working hours. • Men and women who care for 20 or more hours a week are much less likely to be in higher level jobs. 	
<p>Organise community events that focus on different aspects of communities e.g. International day to celebrate ethnic makeup of RCT.</p>	
<p>Go beyond the usual media channels when advertising vacancies</p> <p>Take the adverts to the places where particular communities congregate, especially if wanting to win trust and so encourage qualified individuals to believe they stand as good a chance as any others. It would require more effort but that would be equity to get all applicants viewing the advert at the same level.</p>	
<p>Dropped Curbs</p> <p>These are important and the council could speed up response times to these</p>	<p>And remove the restrictions that they can only be installed by certain contractors charging over inflated prices. They should be installed by any competent constructor at a competitive price.</p>
<p>Progression</p> <p>The council could more efficiently share our progression on products with members of the public.</p>	