
Subject:	EQUALITY POLICY UPDATE
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 2 October 2023
Report of:	Rebecca Brough, Head of Corporate Services and Democracy
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Sue Beer, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance, Climate Change and Environment
Decision Type:	Non-Key Executive
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report:	To amend the Equality Policy pronoun guidance.
Recommendation:	To agree the amended guidance on pronouns that forms part of the Council's Equality Policy.

1. Summary

1.1 This report seeks to make an amendment to the Equality Policy in respect of its guidance on the use of pronouns.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Cabinet agreed the current Equality Policy and the equality objectives for the period 2022-2026 at its meeting held on 7 November 2022. As part of this, a guidance note was included in respect of gender pronouns and those staff wishing to include their gender pronouns in their email signature were encouraged to do so.

2.2 This is increasingly used not only in public sector bodies but also in the private sector (for example Lloyds and Goldman Sachs) and on social media and is an important demonstration of inclusivity and a simple measure for preventing misgendering. The accidental misgendering (getting someone's gender wrong) of a person can be embarrassing for the person who does it and cause hurt to the person on the receiving end.

2.3 The adoption of this guidance is and remains voluntary and no members of staff have been pressured to follow it. A communication was sent to staff following the adoption of the Equality Policy to bring the matter to their attention. Accordingly, following this soft roll out, the take up of the use of pronouns on email signatures has remained relatively low within the organisation. This was not unexpected although it is hoped that this situation will change organically over time as the benefits of it are seen.

2.4 The Solicitor to the Council has brought to our attention an article in the Compliance and Risk Journal that sets out the opinion that it would be more appropriate to provide staff with the space to include their pronouns should they want to rather than 'encouraging' them to do so with the risk of them feeling pressurised to do so. In such circumstances the Council could theoretically be challenged on the matter. While the risk of challenge is potentially low given the way the guidance has been rolled out to staff it has been decided, following consultation with the Solicitor to the Council and the Head of Human Resources, Payroll and Communications, that it would be sensible to address this issue as a precautionary measure to avoid any future potential for challenge.

2.5 The entirety of the changes required to the Equality Policy relate to a single line in the guidance note on pronouns. The current guidance states: "As part of the Council's

ongoing efforts to be inclusive of all gender identities anyone wishing to add pronouns to their email signature under their name and job title are encouraged to do so.”

- 2.6 It is proposed to delete “are encouraged to do so” and replace it with “may do so if they wish to”.
- 2.7 The proposed amendment would therefore read: “As part of the Council’s ongoing efforts to be inclusive of all gender identities anyone wishing to add pronouns to their email signature under their name and job title may do so if they wish to.”
- 2.8 This change does not change either the intent or the application of the policy but does reduce the potential for challenge to the policy through clarifying the language in respect of its intent.

3. **Identification of Options**

- 3.1 Option 1 – To agree the proposed change.
- 3.2 Option 2 – To not make any changes to the Equality Policy.
- 3.3 Option 3 – To make a different change to the Equality Policy.

4. **Evaluation of Options**

- 4.1 Option 1 is the recommended option as it reduces the potential risk of challenge to the Equality Policy while also maintaining the intent that was introduced in 2022 to support staff in expressing their pronouns should they wish to.
- 4.2 Option 2 is not recommended as it does not address the potential weakness in the policy as drafted. While the risk of challenge is low on the current policy due to the way it has been rolled out, it is not considered prudent to leave the matter unaddressed now that it has been identified.
- 4.3 Option 3 is not recommended. However, if this is the preferred option it is requested it be raised in advance of the meeting to allow for a Legal and Human Resources opinion to be obtained.

5. **Resource Implications**

- 5.1 There are no resource implications beyond officer time in amending the electronic Equality Policy document to reflect the change.

6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

- 6.1 There are no climate change or environmental implications arising from this report.

7. **Corporate Implications**

- 7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy have been consulted and have no further comments. (SK)
- 7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.
- 7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: The Equality Officer has been involved in the development of this report and has no further comment to make other than to remind members that in discharging their responsibilities they are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Revised Equality Policy

9. **Background Papers**

Equality Policy 2022

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