

Meeting	Board Meeting	Agenda Item No. Paper No.	12 113.9
Date of meeting	31 March 2021	Time required	10 Minutes

Title	Equality Priority Objectives
Sponsor	Petrina Hoggan, Head of Organisation Design and People Strategy
Status	OFFICIAL
To be communicated to:	Members and those in attendance

Executive summary

It is important to note that progressing the Equality Priority Objectives (EPOs) for 2020- 21 has been limited without a dedicated EDI Manager. It is acknowledged that a rigorous process is required detailing the steps to achieving fully consulted EPOs to ensure these are understood and communicated across the organisation. In doing so we look forward to working collaboratively with the OLC EDI Board sponsor in this process.

The attached paper outlines the challenges and proposes an approach to achieving new EPOs which are **embedded** within the organisation. The following themes are proposed for development in agreeing EPOs for 2021-22 and to be presented to Board and RemCo and published in Quarter 2.

Internal Themes: Cultivate and promote an inclusive culture that maximises talent, skills and diversity in the workplace. These include the following areas:

- Review and develop the Race Action plan
- Continue to raise awareness of issues for LGBT+ and people with Living with disability and Caring responsibilities
- Become a mentally healthier workplace reducing the stigma attached to mental health

External Themes: Develop our brand to attract both diversity in our recruitment and in accessibility to our service. These include the following areas:

- Reviewing our recruitment practices to ensure our workforce reflects a talented and diverse organisation
- Continuing to improve our service for customers with RA and vulnerable customers through phase two of the RA project
- Broadening access to our service to remove barriers to access

These themes are similar to the current EPOs however the appointment of an EDI manager in April this year will provide the organisation with renewed focus and capacity to develop:

- An EDI Strategy based on consultation with our Networks and colleagues
- SMART Equality Priority Objectives specifically linked to the Business Plan and underpinned by the People Plan which can be measured and progress tracked on a quarterly basis
- Engagement with our stakeholders, enhance EDI reporting internally and externally demonstrating VFM.
- Re-instate the Equality Forum to provide governance and accountability for EPOs.

The themes will require further development with the use of equality data to support the new objectives. The current EPOs will remain in place to continue to guide our work until the new EPOs have been signed off.

Recommendation/action required
Board are asked to endorse the proposed approach in the development and consultation of Equality Priority Objectives for 2021/22

Equality Priority Objectives

Background

The Equality Priority Objectives (EPOs) agreed for 2020-21 are detailed below

2020-21 Equality Priority Objectives (EPOs)

While progress has been made against the 2019/20 EPOs, there is further work we wish to do to ensure any vulnerable customer using our service is both identified and able to access the support they need from us. This work will include staff training; additional / updated guidance for staff; and updates to our IT systems to provide increased capture / visibility of information about vulnerability. Therefore the existing equality priority objectives will remain in place during 2020/21.

Equality Priority Objectives	Timescale
<i>Embed our inclusive service strategy, informed by our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data. Explore options for accessing Service Provider ED&I data</i>	Q1-Q4
<i>Raise staff awareness of issues for LGBT+ people and people with disabilities, to build a more inclusive service and organisation</i>	Q1-Q4
<i>Deliver our action plan to recognise and nurture Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) talent within the organisation</i>	Q1-Q4

The purpose of setting measurable Equality Priority Objectives (EPOs) is to improve our organisational performance by:

- Providing an inclusive workplace which harnesses diversity and inclusion making LeO a remarkable place to work.
- Providing an inclusive service for all people who require Legal Ombudsman Services

In doing so this also meets our statutory equality duty for public bodies.

Previously the Equality & Diversity Forum which last met in 2019 had clear objectives to provide strategic oversight of the design and implementation of EPOs, monitor and report to Management Team and OLC via RemCo on the delivery of EPOs. In addition, the Equality and Diversity Forum acted as EDI 'champions' for the organisation. Membership consisted of representatives across the business including a Board and Executive sponsor and open to Network Leads to attend when appropriate. The forum has not met due to limited resources and competing operational demands and therefore the EPOs have had no clear owner resulting in limited progress.

Current Situation

Without a dedicated EDI resource and oversight from the Equality Forum progress and accountability for the objectives has limited progress. The progress against current EPOs is summarised below.

Objective 1: There has been some progress about how we continue to build an inclusive organisation. For example the Reasonable Adjustment (RA) project led by the Quality Team aims to ensure staff are aware of our legal obligations to make reasonable adjustments and to improve the service to our customers by ensuring our scheme is accessible to them.

RA training was commissioned externally for vulnerable customer champions and Team leaders, the CRM system has been updated to enable easier recording of RA and vulnerable customers and the RA Policy has been reviewed and updated and is awaiting sign off from the Quality Committee.

Objective 2: The LGBT+ Network has been active in raising awareness of issues in the organisation by submitting blogs to News in Brief and celebrating LGBT+ History month, they have also started discussions with an external organisation Stonewall.

The Disability and Carers group have recently been liaising with the new Leadership team regarding Reasonable Adjustment Passports, however there is still work to do here.

Objective 3: Whilst we have developed a Race Action Plan both colleagues and LeO recognise there is much more work to do to progress the action plan and this was summarised in our response to MOJ in November 2021. However, in 2021 the organisation has signed up to the Race at Work Charter, supported race equality week and will publish a zero tolerance statement on bullying, harassment and discrimination in March.

With the new Leadership Team there has been a renewed focus on building the relationships with the Networks and commitment to EDI issues internally and externally.

In February RemCo considered a paper summarising 2021/22 proposed Equality Priority Objectives (EPOs). Feedback from Remco was given and the following key points were made:

- The EPOs felt more outward facing and consideration should be given to including one that was more internally focussed.
- The EPOs did not adequately reflect or do justice to what the LeO Scheme was aspiring to do, either for its staff or customers.
- The EPO's needed to be linked to the 2021/22 Business Plan.

Proposed Approach

The EPOs must support the business plan, building diversity and inclusivity internally and providing access to our service externally focusing on outcomes which can be measured.

To inform development of the objectives we need to have a clear understanding of the issues faced by colleagues, service users and stakeholders in relation to their Protected Characteristics.

This will require consultation with each of the Networks and colleagues across the organisation and analysis of our own equality data including results from the People Survey as well as other sources of information such as demographic information of legal service users, reports within the legal sector and Office of National statistics .

Also, essential to consider is the legal sector environment and information at a local and national level that highlight important equality issues for our customers and our colleagues.

In response to RemCo feedback in February 2021 the objectives have been reviewed and the following themes proposed for development by the new EDI Manager. This will include a detailed plan to build SMART objectives through consultation with the Networks and colleagues.

Internal Themes: Cultivate and promote an inclusive culture that maximises talent, skills and diversity in the workplace. These include the following areas:

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- Become a mentally healthier workplace reducing the stigma attached to mental health.

External Themes: Develop our brand to attract both diversity in our recruitment and in accessibility to our service. These include the following areas:

- Reviewing our recruitment practices to ensure our workforce reflects a talented and diverse organisation
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- Broadening access to our service to remove barriers to access.

These themes need to be supported by an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy which is directly linked to the business plan, and is underpinned by the People Plan to ensure that inclusive working behaviours are developed across the organisation. For example, a clear procedure for equality impact assessment enabling both operational and HR policies to be viewed through and EDI lense.

Equally important is how we recognise and respond to external issues and pressures all colleagues face as most recently demonstrated by the Leadership team in response to the Megan Markle interview, trial for the murder of George Floyd and the murder of Sarah Everard.

Next Steps

These themes are similar to the current Equality Priority Objectives and the appointment of an EDI Manager in April will give the organisation dedicated resource to develop the objectives, begin the engagement process, re-establish the Equality Forum with the intention of presenting agreed objectives to Board and RemCo and then publication in Quarter 2 of 2021-22. The current EPOs will remain in place to continue to guide our work until the new EPOs have been signed off.