

Review of the Equalities Panel (to be known as the Equity Panel)

Report by:

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Recommendations:

- 1 That the Panel considers and provides feedback on the draft Terms of Reference.
- 2 In relation to this the Council is particularly asking for the Panel's feedback on these four areas:
 - a. Feedback on the role profiles for the different types of members (to be emailed direct to members in the new year).
 - b. How best can we attract members of the public and voluntary and community sector groups and organisations/ faith leaders to become members of the Equity Panel?
 - c. Feedback on the ways of working document regarding how the Panel members will work together
 - d. How can we better present information to get members recommendations in the future? What has worked well and what could be improved upon, based on your experience as members of the Equalities Panel?

Purpose of this item:

To review the Panel to align with the council's ambitions around developing an Equity Strategy in 2026 and with the council's recent changes to its political governance model. (For this agenda item, there will be a presentation on the proposed Terms of Reference.)

Further background:

It is timely to review the Equalities Panel to align with the council's ambition to build upon its previous equalities strategies to develop an approach promoting equity (the council will be developing an Equity Strategy in 2026). Therefore, the name of the Panel would change from the Equalities Panel to the Equity Panel. Whilst equality is about providing people with equal rights and treatment, equity recognises that each person has different circumstances. Equity is about each person getting what they need to survive or succeed—access to opportunity, networks, resources, and support — based on where they are and where they want to go. In practice this may be about recognising intersectionality of identity but also being focused on outcomes for people. It can also include considering how different issues intersect in the way we work together as services to address issues – so looking at how to provide holistic support.

Additionally, the council has moved from a committee structure to a cabinet model in its political governance from May 2025. In the new structure, the Equity Panel will be an advisory group to the Cabinet, and changes to the terms of reference need to be made to reflect this.

The Equalities Panel was introduced approximately 25 years ago. Whilst the Terms of Reference have been reviewed and undergone minor changes, there has been no review of the working of the Equality Panel itself. It is important to review the terms of reference to take into account former and current Equalities Panel members' feedback.

Consultation undertaken to date:

The review of the Equalities Panel was an item at Panel meeting held on 3rd October 2023 and was discussed individually with Panel Members in the lead up to and since this meeting. Feedback can be summarized as:

- The meetings only being twice per year means it does not work alongside the Council's business plan

- There is no clear reporting structure to feed in recommendations to decision makers or to receive feedback from decision makers on the recommendations

Further consultation is planned in 2026 with the voluntary and community sector around future plans around Public Membership and Voluntary and Community Sector/ Faith Leader membership.

Anticipated outcomes, benefits or impact:

- Alignment with the political governance process, which was introduced in May 2025, so it is an advisory group to Cabinet. Advisory groups review evidence, conduct consultations, or undertake deep dive research. They help to ensure decisions made by Cabinet are backed by the right data.
- To change structure and operations to better support members of the Panel to engage with items and protect the Panel's Independence.
- Ensuring the Panel has a greater say in the Council's work as it relates to Equity (calling in EqIA's).
- Clarity around roles of membership and amplify the voice of Voluntary and Community Sector and Public Members' voice from lived experience.

Financial implications:

The draft Terms of Reference states that Public Members will be eligible for an allowance and will be reimbursed. Payment will be calculated based on number of hours attending and preparing for meetings and will be no less than the real Living Wage. This allowance would be claimed quarterly. Reimbursement of reasonable expenses, like travel, will also be agreed in advance for both public members and voluntary and community sector/faith leader members.

It is envisaged that the allowance, expenses, training, and room hire (and refreshments) costs will be delivered through existing budgets.

Appendices for this item:

Appendix A: Draft Terms of Reference for the Equity Panel

Appendix B: Ways of Working document for the Equity Panel

Appendix A: Draft Terms of Reference – Equity Panel

The Equity Panel (EP) is a body that supports the Council's decision-making and performance. The EP is separate and distinct from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees which are responsible for the council's scrutiny functions and lead members. As an advisory group, it can provide non-binding advice, recommendations, and critical feedback to support Cabinet Members and decision-makers, helping to inform policy development and improve decision-making while remaining distinct from formal scrutiny or executive functions.

The EP supports Cambridge City Council's Vision 'One Cambridge, Fair for All' by promoting fairness for communities experiencing marginalisation, discrimination and inequality in recommendations it makes. Moreover, fairness is promoted in how the EP itself is run with the voice of all members having equal importance.

Purpose

The role of the EP is to discuss the Council's progress on these areas, and support Council-led initiatives that play a leading role in promoting equity and inclusion, and that celebrate diversity. The Equity Panel will:

- Inform the development of initiatives that promote equity, inclusion and belonging for communities in Cambridge and Cambridge City Council's workforce.
- Monitor the Council's compliance with equity related legislation and the Equality Act 2010.
- Review and quality assure a selection of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) that are called in by Panel members about the Council's projects, policies and plans.
- Evaluate the work the Council is undertaking to help communities directly affected by discrimination and inequality become more fully engaged with the Council and share their expertise on what works based on their lived experience and/or professional knowledge.

Objectives

The Panel will centre lived experience and act as a critical friend recommending improvements to Council-led initiatives. It will:

- Play a leading role in the promotion of equity for people of diverse backgrounds.
- Ensure the Council as an employer and service provider celebrates diversity, values difference, challenges discrimination and promotes cohesion.
- Encourage the identification and sharing of good practice.
- Establish networks and joint/partnership working internally and externally.
- Develop and implement positive action to achieve cultural change.
- Promote positive relations and cohesion in the workplace and community.
- Help to raise issues and priorities of diverse communities to inform the Council's service delivery.
- Focus on people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 as well as:
 - People with care experience (an umbrella term used to describe individuals who are, or who have at any time been, in the care of a local authority)
 - People with experience of being on a low-income or in poverty
 - Travelling community members, including those without the protected characteristic of 'race' under the Equality Act 2010
 - Non-binary and gender fluid people

Membership

The EP membership will consist of:

- The Cabinet Lead Member for Communities (or a nominated substitute in their absence)

And 5 from each of the following

- Councillors will be appointed to the panel on a politically proportionate basis
- Cambridge City Council staff members attending to represent a staff group at the council and/or attending as individuals with interest and knowledge on equity.
- Public members from diverse communities.
- Members from the voluntary and community sector in the city working with diverse communities that experience discrimination, marginalisation and inequality, and/or from faith groups.

Staff members, public members and voluntary and community sector and/or faith leaders will be appointed for up to 2 years and can be appointed for a further 2 years. After these 2 terms this must be a break of at least 1 year before becoming eligible to apply to rejoin the EP. The only exception to this is where staff are elected by staff groups to be members of the EP where they may be elected annually or every 2 years – depending on what the staff group decides – with a 4-year maximum term.

Councillors (and their reserves) are proposed by their group as members of the EP on an annual basis.

Members agree to make available contact details with colleagues to facilitate work between meetings.

EP members will attend training sessions where appropriate and where possible and will read any material provided prior to attending the meeting.

EP members will be compliant with Cambridge City Council equality and GDPR policies.

All EP members agree to abide by the Council's code of conduct.

The EP will plan their annual work programme and may consider requests to or from

Cabinet, Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committees or individual Councillors to investigate specific issues.

Quorum

Note: a quorum refers to the minimum number of members required to be present at a meeting for it to be considered valid. This ensures that there is sufficient representation to conduct business effectively and that recommendations are not made by an unrepresentative minority.

A meeting will only go ahead if at least eight Panel members are present, as well as the Executive Councillor for Communities.

If there aren't enough people for a quorum, the meeting should be recorded as inquorate and any decisions made will need to be approved at the next meeting with a quorum.

Chairing

There will be a rotating chair, and the responsibility of chairing will be shared between staff members, public members and voluntary and community sector and/or faith group members who feel comfortable to do so.

Members will have training from the Council before they are able to go on the rota for Chairing. After training Members will be able to opt into the rota if they wish.

Frequency

The EP will normally meet quarterly with a minimum of four meetings per year. To meet the demands of projects and reviews, the frequency of meetings may be increased.

EP members are expected to endeavour to attend every meeting; however, they must attend a minimum of three meetings per annum unless there are extenuating circumstances. Councillors and voluntary and community

sector members can appoint reserve members to attend on the lead member's behalf where needed.

The Panel may hold a task and finish meeting to lead on specific activities, where there are council resources available to support such activities. Task and Finish Groups must report to the EP at an agreed frequency.

EP support

Administrative support for the EP will be provided by the Resettlement and Community Equity Team. Democratic services will publish agendas and papers.

Recommendations made by the EP shall be clearly noted and shared with relevant Cabinet Members and officers. The relevant Cabinet Members will ensure that recommendations made by the EP on items going to the relevant Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet are shared with Cabinet to inform decision-making.

All new members will be provided with a handbook of key documents.

Training requirements will be assessed, and a training programme will be developed, delivered, and regularly reviewed.

Public members will be eligible for an allowance and will be reimbursed. Payment will be calculated based on number of hours attending and preparing for meetings and will be no less than the real Living Wage. This allowance would be claimed quarterly. Reimbursement of reasonable expenses, like travel, will also be agreed in advance for both public members and voluntary and community sector/faith leader members.

Access to information

In each meeting the Cabinet Member for Communities will feed back on progress against recommendations made by the Panel from the previous meeting.

The EP will be provided with supporting documents a minimum of one week prior to each meeting.

Agendas will be published on the Council website a minimum of 10 working days before the meeting, ensuring that they are available in their accessible formats for members as needed at the same time.

Minutes will be published on the Council website normally 4 weeks after a meeting takes place.

The EP can request additional data, reports and information to carry out their activities.

Where appropriate information is not readily available, the EP may request information reports (appropriate in scale and content, subject to available resources) and / or invite officers or managers to meet with the EP to provide additional information or insight.

All requests for information and evidence must be made via the Resettlement and Community Equity Team.

The EP is a public meeting and will endeavour to ensure meetings are as accessible as possible and that there is opportunity for Public Questions. If you are interested in attending a meeting, please reach out to equalities@cambridge.gov.uk.

From time to time, the EP may consider items that are deemed confidential and therefore unsuitable for discussion in public. In such circumstances, the Chair shall seek the Panel's approval to move into an exempt session in accordance with Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. Upon approval, the Chair will request that any members of the public who have not been appointed to the panel as members leave the meeting for the duration of the exempt item.

Accountability

The EP meetings will be publicised on the Cambridge City Council website.

Minutes, agendas and meeting papers will be made available to the public on the Cambridge City Council website

Members of the public will be able to ask questions to the council's Equity Team via equalities@cambridge.gov.uk/.

Reviewing the Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference were approved by on [date] at Full Council.

The Terms of Reference be reviewed regularly by the EP to ensure they reflect the duties and responsibilities of the Panel.

Next date of review [insert date year on from Full Council meeting].

Appendix B: Ways of Working of the Equity Panel

This document is about how Panel Members can work together, so that everyone gets the best out of the meetings.

Cambridge City Council has developed our [Our values and behaviours - Cambridge City Council](#). These are:

- Accountable
- Collaborative
- Compassionate
- Courageous

The following points, from the Co-Production Collective, expand our values and behaviours.

Listen with respect and openness

We seek to value learning from different people and stay open to new ways of doing things.

Confidentiality

People may share something they wish to be kept confidential. We require everyone's agreement not to share anyone's information without their permission.

Disagree with the point – not the person

We seek to resolve conflicts and tensions.

Collaborate

We seek to make decisions by consensus. Everyone's input is **equally** valued.

Contribute

We seek to share ideas, ask questions, and contribute to discussions. We can also choose not to participate at any stage.

Use plain language

We seek first to understand, then be understood. If possible, avoid using jargon and explain acronyms* if they must be used.

* The meeting is made up of people from a wide range of organisations, backgrounds, and life experiences. Acronyms can mean very different things in different organisations and places of work.

Reference: [Welcome to the Co-Production Collective](#)