

Agenda Item	15.
Report No	CP/35/24

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 27 November 2024

**Report Title:** Neurodiversity Review Group

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – Place

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Neurodiversity is a term used to describe the different ways people's brains process information. People with conditions including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome are sometimes referred to as neuro-divergent or neuro-different however, everyone is neuro-diverse and it is recognised that everyone is unique in how they think, learn and act. Neurodiversity or neuro-difference should be seen as a positive way to describe differences.
- 1.3 When delivering services, it is important that the services themselves, and staff delivering them, are cognisant that people do interact in different ways and that some people may need support to access services. As an employer, it is also important to consider the needs of staff within the workplace.
- 1.4 As part of the development of the Council's new equality outcomes for 2025-2029, it is proposed to establish a short life Officer Review Group and that this would be supported by an informal Member Stakeholder Group to review the Council's approach to reflecting and taking account of neurodiversity in Council service delivery and as an employer. The aim will be to produce a new equality outcome and associated actions to be considered by this committee in May 2025 when agreeing the equality outcomes for 2025-2029.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - Consider and agree the proposed approach, as set out in section 5, to developing a new equality outcome to reflect and take account of neurodiversity in Council service delivery and as an employer.
  - Note that this will inform the review of equality outcomes with a new equality outcome and associated actions being considered as part of the Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report to Communities and Place in May 2025.

### **3. Implications**

- 3.1 Resource implications - There are no direct resource implications as a result of this report. The review outlined will be progressed within existing resources. Should possible actions identify additional resource requirements to be progressed, these will be considered by service management.
- 3.2 Legal implications – The public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities to think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the act. Public authorities must have due regard to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination.
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.
  - foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.
- 3.3 Gaelic implications - There are not considered to be any implications.
- 3.4 Risk implications - There are no risk implications identified in the report.
- 3.5 Health and Safety – There are no health and safety implications as a result of this report.

### **4. Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken. Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.2 This report sets out a proposal for establishing an advisory group to undertake a review and therefore an impact assessment or screening is not required at this stage but will be part of any review.

### **5. Background and Proposal**

- 5.1 Neurodiversity is used to describe the different ways people's brains process information. People with conditions including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and Tourette's syndrome are sometimes referred to as neuro-divergent or neuro-different however, everyone is neuro-diverse and it is recognised that everyone is unique in how they think, learn and act. Neurodiversity or neuro-difference should be seen as a positive way to describe differences.
- 5.2 Not everyone who may consider themselves neuro-different would necessarily have a formal diagnosis of any of the conditions noted above. The conditions often described as being indicative of neuro-difference are however considered as protected characteristics (disability) under the Equality Act 2010, although it is important to note that not all people who consider themselves to be neuro different would also consider this to be a disability.
- 5.3 When delivering services, it is important that the services themselves, and staff delivering them, are cognisant that people do interact in different ways and that some people may

need support to access services and others may wish to in different ways. As an employer, the needs of staff within the workplace also need to be considered. The aim is to consider what awareness raising, training and guidance is needed to support staff and managers; what awareness raising and training is needed to support Councillors; whether specific areas of Council policy need to be updated; and how to ensure neuro-difference considerations are progressed through existing approaches, for example, the Integrated Impact Assessment approach.

- 5.4 The Council's Equality Outcomes are due to be reviewed early in 2025, with a revised set of outcomes coming forward to the May meeting of Communities and Place Committee. This will include engaging with key stakeholders and representative groups in order to review existing outcomes and develop new ones. This process would provide a good opportunity to progress the review around neuro-difference and a framework under which to progress the work and actions in the future and hearing the voices of people with lived experience as part of this process.
- 5.5 It is proposed to establish an officer Review Group and that this would be supported by an informal Member Stakeholder Group focused on neuro-difference to support the review of equality outcomes. The aim would be to establish a new outcome and associated actions specifically focused on reflecting and taking account of neuro difference in Council service delivery and as an employer.
- 5.6 **Proposal**

Aim: To establish an Officer Review Group which will be supported by an informal Member Stakeholder Group to support the review of equality outcomes, with a view to establishing a new outcome and associated actions specifically focused on reflecting and taking account of neuro difference in Council service delivery and as an employer.

Timescales: The groups will meet between January and the end of March 2025.

Officer Review Group:

Purpose:

- To review relevant current approaches and practice across services
- To review related training and guidance for staff
- Consider current supports in place for Council staff
- Consider how neuro-difference considerations are progressed through existing approaches

Membership: *(to be confirmed)*

- Senior Community Development Manager (Chair)
- Principal Educational Psychologist
- Child Health Commissioner
- Senior Lead Manager, Additional Support for Learning
- Specialist Clinical Psychologist (NHS)
- Customer Services Manager
- HR Manager

External Advisers to be identified from public and third sector orgs and consideration given to how the voice of people with lived experience can be heard.

Informal Member Stakeholder Group:

Purpose:

- To share knowledge and experience to inform the officer group
- To consider and comment on the recommendations of the officer group

It is suggested that the informal Member Stakeholder Group is made up of 10 members and that volunteers will be identified in consultation with group leaders.

- 5.7 The conclusions of the work will inform recommendations which will come forward as part of the Equalities Outcomes and Mainstreaming report to the May meeting of Communities and Place Committee. Equality Outcomes are regularly reviewed to reflect new areas of practice or different approaches required. This will be an important when progressing any work related to neuro-difference.

Designation: Chief Officer – Housing and Communities

Date: 8 November 2024

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