

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council  
**Diversity, Equity &  
Inclusion**  
Annual Report 2023/24

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## Legislative background

The Council is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion as an employer, as a service provider and as a leading agency in building resilient communities in the Borough.

This paper reports on the activities undertaken by the Council in 2023-2024 to progress our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework. It provides evidence for meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty 2011, which places a specific duty on us to publish equality objectives that demonstrate how we are meeting our responsibilities.

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a general equality duty on the Council to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

**The nine characteristics protected under the Act are:  
Age; Disability; Gender Reassignment; Pregnancy and Maternity; Race; Religion or Belief; Sex; and Sexual Orientation**



## 2. Our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Framework 2021-2024

Following a consultation with our residents ([link to the Epsom & Ewell Vision](#)), the council set out its long-term [Four Year Plan \(2020-2024\)](#). The plan strives to develop an even more successful future through harnessing the benefits of diversity and equality, by developing the council's [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework 2021-2024](#) alongside its [equality and diversity ambitions](#).

## 3. Three thematic objectives of the DEI Framework

Our DEI Framework sets out the following 3 thematic objectives and progress has been made through a range of activities as reported from pages 2 to 10 of this report.

### **Developing inclusive communities and creating community cohesion**

This objective aims to develop a greater focus on promoting social inclusivity across all the council's services and developing good community relations. The Council's long term vision is to create safe and healthy communities brimming with opportunity and prosperity. This means communities in which everyone regardless of their background, beliefs, personal situation, or identity, feels welcome and able to prosper.

### **Ensuring engagement and accessible services**

This objective is to ensure that Council services, information, consultation and engagement opportunities remain accessible to all residents, particularly those with protected characteristics. As a public body, we need to make sure all our residents are able to access our information and services. Not everyone is able to do this in the same way, so we need to make sure there is a range of options available

### **Building workforce inclusivity**

This objective is about continuing to seek opportunities to build inclusivity into the Council's internal policies and procedures. The council is committed to being an inclusive organisation providing opportunity for all.



## 4. Our progress in 2023-2024

A range of activities have been undertaken in 2023-2024 to support our progress towards the three thematic objectives and priorities. An update is provided below:

### 4.1.1 Greater understanding of our local communities and their protected characteristics

a) We have gathered the relevant data from the 2021 Census Data to produce our Borough profile which includes an analysis of the protected characteristics. This information is shared internally to help inform our service delivery.

### 4.1.2 Tackling health inequalities and socio-economic deprivation in the borough

a) A re-prioritised Community and Wellbeing Development Work Programme has been developed with the purpose of targeting communities most impacted by the wider determinants of health, including mental health.

The plan seeks to:

- Build and maintain purposeful relationships within the community
- Improve opportunities for vulnerable young people within the borough
- Support residents to become more connected and feel less isolated
- Address the emotional and mental health needs of residents

Information is being captured about health and the social determinants of health including socio- economic deprivation and other inequalities.

b) We have been providing operational management/support for the national refugee programme including the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, Homes for Ukraine, and Ukraine Family Sponsorship scheme. It is estimated that there are up to 9,500 asylum seekers, migrants and refugees in Surrey at any one time.

Due to the unique culture and heritage of their home country, we have been working diligently with local partners and other councils in Surrey to meet their different levels of needs and to help them settle.

To date, on the Home for Ukraine Scheme, the Council has helped circa. 163, and 84 host families. Our unique partnership with Epsom and Ewell Refugee Network has seen the Ukrainian Guests access English lessons, employment, and meet and socialise with others displaced by the conflict. It has also ensured the wrap-around support for Afghan and Syrian Refugees for the duration of the central government programmes, with each family allocated a dedicated support worker.

c) Following a consultation with the key stakeholders, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2022-2027) has been developed along with its Year 1 action plan. It intends to meet the needs of our residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including rough sleepers and single people.

The Strategy adopts an integrated approach with partners to support homeless applicants who have additional needs including mental health; physical ill health/disability; offending; drug and alcohol dependency; debt/budgeting; and domestic abuse. The ethnic origin of homeless households appears to largely reflect the demography of the borough. A mid-year update of the Year 1 action plan was considered by the Community and Wellbeing Committee in October 2023.

d) In light of the housing delivery challenge, the new Affordable Housing Delivery Improvement Plan and Year 1 Action Plan have been devised to maximise the number of affordable homes in the borough. Through collaborative working with the key stakeholders, the Plan strives to continue developing our homelessness prevention options; expanding our short-term accommodation alternatives such as the Private Sector Lease scheme; and the development of new affordable housing through a Local Plan. A detailed end of year report will be submitted to the Community and Wellbeing Committee in due course.

The above actions (c & d) have led to some tangible results: from limiting the impact of Homes for Ukraine and the cost of living crisis on homelessness through prevention work, to enabling people to remain in their home by way of facilitating adaptations and proactively working with partners to downsize households, and thereby secure a number of much needed larger homes. It is becoming increasingly difficult to link up with other statutory agencies, such as mental health and adult social care, as their resources have also become severely stretched, resulting in a significant increase in the complexity of people's needs who approach our service.

#### **4.1.3 Foster inclusive growth, skills & employment for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups**

a) Since its launch in December 2021, the council's Skills Hub has supported more than 600 young people aged 16 -24, who are in receipt of Universal Credit, with a range of free support from skills development to securing employment. The Hub has provided tailored support to meet their career aspirations. In collaboration with the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP), the Hub is intended to help this vulnerable group of young people to get into employment and also to grow the supply of skilled residents for the local economy.



b) Recent funding from the UK Prosperity Fund has enabled the council to expand the service to residents of all ages to find lasting work, including those who are refugees and people with additional needs. The council and SLLP continue to lead the renamed Employment Hub with partners including NESOCOT, Go Epsom and Coast to Capital. It provides a diverse range of support from job searching to interviewing skills. The Hub hold regular job fairs in various locations where local employers and job seekers are matched with apprenticeships, work placements and jobs. Two successful case studies can be found on our website.

c) The council also supported the first cohort of work experience placements, facilitated in partnership with the Employment Hub, in October and November 2023. The participants were able to work in the different services of the council and they were awarded certificates from the Mayor at the end of their placements.

#### 4.1.4 Support vulnerable members of the community including the groups with protected characteristics

a) Through a successful bid for funding of £271,000 from the Home Office, the council has initiated the **Safer Streets** project in addressing violence against women and girls as well as improving the safety of the night-time economy. The project has provided funding to support street pastors, installation of new town centre CCTV, training for licensed premises to be able to spot the signs of abusive behaviour and provision of anti-spiking equipment. A wide spread campaign has been launched to raise awareness including a [YouTube video](#) and the national campaign “[You’re right, that’s wrong](#)”, which has been adapted with Epsom specific content.

b) The council has launched a public consultation on its proposed Community Safety Action Plan in December 2023, highlighting the priorities for community safety in the borough.

Community safety covers a wide range of activities designed to reduce the likelihood of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour, protect victims and hold perpetrators to account. It also involves reducing incidents of domestic abuse where, due to its hidden nature, the victim may not have a voice and where vulnerable people are subject to coercion, exploitation and abuse.

Community engagement continues to be identified as one of the priorities.

c) The Council is a member of the East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission which has brought together local, Civic and Business Commissioners together to listen and discuss some of the lived experiences of poverty in East Surrey. The goals are to increase the understanding of the common causes of poverty in our community, build links between



different parts of the community, and help improve the lives of people who face the challenge of poverty every day.

d) Supporting vulnerable people in an emergency – in the event of an emergency such as a fire, flood or blizzard, the Council works with partner organisations across Surrey (including emergency services, Surrey County Council, mental health and social care providers) to identify the vulnerable people in our Borough. This is to ensure that help and support can reach them during these events. We continue to update our vulnerable people register for this purpose.

e) The Council is developing a Modern Slavery Act Statement which will set out our approach in tackling slavery and human trafficking in our organisation and supply chains.

#### **4.1.5 Promote and celebrate Diversity, Inclusivity and Heritage**

a) The council has held two extensive engagement activities before producing its first Arts, Heritage and Cultural Strategy, which was approved by the Community and Wellbeing Committee in October 2023. It aims to promote a cohesive identity for the borough as a cultural and creative hub, as well as a visitor destination through three workstreams: inclusivity and access for all, nurturing talent, and economic growth.

An action plan is being rolled out and the activities undertaken so far have included:

- The launch of a free app for a digital tour of the formal gardens at Nonsuch Park – this makes the Park accessible to people anytime, anywhere, and at a pace suited to the individual (e.g. residents with mobility issues and visitors with visual impairments).
- The Kids in Museums ‘Digital Takeover Day’ sought to empower primary pupils to explore Bourne Hall Museum, and find ways to engage with the collection that are meaningful and relevant to them as individuals, and as a cohort of children within our Borough.
- The Community Mural project engaged young people outside the school setting to learn new skills through creation of murals with professional artists. This project helped to improve individual self-esteem and self-worth as well as building a collective pride by working alongside peers.



## 4.2 Ensuring engagement and accessible services

### 4.2.1 Encouraging greater participation from different ethnic communities and LGBTQI+ 1 population as well as the VCFS2 in our community engagement mechanisms

- a) In June 2023, the council successfully delivered the 2023 Surrey Youth Games, after approaching 24 local schools and 116 referral partners. The event attracted 134 young people from different ethnic groups in the borough to participate in the free sport sessions. Around 25% of the participants come from areas of multiple deprivation. After the event, the council secured an additional £1,890 grant from the Together Fund from Sport England to facilitate additional sessions for these young people.
- b) An exhibition was held at Bourne Hall in September 2023 to pay tribute in 50 portraits to the activists, personalities, writers, and artists who have advanced the LGBTQI+ movement, and celebrated those who have endeavoured to create a more inclusive and tolerant world. The exhibition was free to enjoy and open 7 days a week, helping to raise awareness of the diversity, inclusivity, and equality within the borough.

### 4.2.2 Building meaningful relationships with our communities through better understanding of their needs

- The proposal of a renewed approach to community engagement was agreed by the Community and Wellbeing Committee in June 2023. It sets out the objectives and engagement options with residents to receive feedback on services and better understand residents' needs. One of the objectives is about the ability to deliver targeted community engagement with those seldom heard. In the meantime, the Council continues to engage with residents via existing mechanisms, for example, as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process (please also see 4.1.2c, 4.1.4b, 4.1.5, 4.2.2b, 4.2.3).
- b) In 2023, the Planning Policy team organised six public events to consult residents on a Regulation 18 of the Draft Local Plan. The consultation was promoted through a wide range of communications channels. In supporting neurodiversity, the plan and consultation material were designed to be as accessible as possible, using visuals and images to get across complex information. This included a large exhibition display at the Ashley Centre.
- Various techniques were employed to encourage a wide range of people to respond, including the employment of a social media advertising company to do targeted advertising to people that are traditionally under-represented in previous EEBC consultations (e.g. young people and people from ethnic backgrounds). Promotion material was also created, including the distribution of 3,500 flyers to 40 locations including libraries. Building on relationships formed with community groups in earlier

consultations, the Planning Policy team took opportunities to directly notify or speak to Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Epsom and Ewell Families, Epsom Islamic Society, Sustainable Epsom and Ewell, Central Surrey Volunteer Association, Sensory Services and Age Concern.

Within the 6-week consultation period, 1,736 individuals or organisations actively responded to the consultation on the future development of the Borough. Based on the data collected, there was an almost equal split between male and female respondents to the consultation, 62 people who responded had a disability, 84 people were from a non-white ethnic minority background. The above approach supports our Statement of Community Involvement in developing the new Local Plan which is informed by a suite of evidence, including the Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment.

#### **4.2.3 Using Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) as an integral part of service/system planning or change to inform decision making**

The council has developed the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) template to assess any potential impact on residents and staff with protected characteristics due to policy and service development / change. An example is the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which was informed by a review/needs assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment.

#### **4.2.4 Considering equality, diversity and inclusion in our procurement cycle**

- a) Our procurement of services within Threshold 3 requires mandatory use of the standard supplier questionnaire, which includes a section on the supplier's approach to the Modern Slavery Act 2015, regarding tackling modern slavery and human trafficking in the supply chain.
- b) For any goods, works and services to residents, our procurement reports for thresholds 2 and 3 also require suppliers to:
- consider the protected characteristics/groups under the Equality Act 2010, and Appendix 19
  - explain how they can support the thematic objectives of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework in their delivery models.

#### **4.2.5 Improving accessibility of residents to information, services and activities**

- a) The council continues to review its website to ensure its accessible. Our accessibility score in May 2022 was 96.6 out of 100. An 'accessibility fixer guide' is available for staff
- b) We continue to develop 'My Council Services' on our website to enhance residents' access to digital services. This portal enables our residents to report issues affecting their local areas as well as accessing certain services.

c) A new communication strategy has been developed which includes a planned review of all communications channels, to ensure that they are reaching and engaging with our residents and other key stakeholders. Various communications plans have been produced to support campaigns directly related to corporate priorities, such as climate change, elections, Local Plan, and Community Services support. We continue to use a range of communication channels to reach a wide range of audiences including social media, website, our electronic e-newsletter, eBorough Insight, PR, Borough Boards and partnership communications.

d) There was no equality related complaint received by the Council from residents between October 2022 and October 2023.

### **Thematic Objective 3 – Building workforce inclusivity**

#### **4.3.1 Strengthening the strategic leadership in driving diversity, equality and inclusion**

a) All new staff are required to complete the mandatory equality e-learning module during their induction. Existing staff are required to refresh this module once a year. Other free modules accessible to all staff include ‘An introduction to unconscious bias’ and ‘Equality Impact Assessment’.

b) The last progress report of our work in equality, diversity and inclusion was submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in November 2022. This is an annual progress report of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework 2021-2024.

#### **4.3.2 Workforce diversity monitoring**

a) As an employer, we collect data and produce a workforce profile including a breakdown of workforce by protected characteristics. The latest version was produced and published in September 2023.

b) We’re proud to be a Disability Confident employer. This means we are recognised for our support and retention of talented individuals with disabilities. We have also supported recruitment events hosted by the Epsom and Ewell Employment Hub and NESOT to attract diverse talent. A poster campaign promoting employment opportunities at the Council is currently in progress to increase workforce diversity.

c) The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 introduced a requirement for employers with 250 or more employees to publish details of their gender pay and bonus gap. Our latest Gender Pay Gap can be found on our website.

#### 4.3.3 Ensuring inclusive workforce strategies and policies

a) We continue to review the policies and procedures within our People Framework to ensure their ongoing compliance with equality legislation and employment codes of practice.

#### 4.3.4 Listening and supporting our employees in addressing equality, diversity and inclusion

a) The Council has refreshed and relaunched a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Group following the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a forum for staff to champion and support equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation. Membership includes the Chair/Vice-Chair of the Staff Consultative Group, the Union representative as well as colleagues from the various services. It is chaired by the Acting Director of Corporate Resources who is part of the Strategic Leadership Team. This forum provides various channels of communicating and disseminating information. A new intranet page has been created to update staff on the Group's activities.

