

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

## Annual Report 2024/25

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## 1. Legislative background

We are 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 during 2024-2025 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 us 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 ([Epsom & Ewell Vision](#)), we set out our 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 [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework 2021-2024](#) alongside our [equality and diversity ambitions](#).

## 3. Three thematic objectives of the DEI Framework

Our DEI Framework sets out the following three thematic objectives and progress that has been made through a range of activities as reported in this report.

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

This objective aims to develop a greater focus on promoting social inclusivity across all of our services and developing good community relations. Our 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 relates to ensuring 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 residents are able to access the information and services we provide. Not everyone is able to do this in the same way, so we need to make sure there are 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. We are committed to being an inclusive organisation providing opportunity for all.



## 4. Our progress in 2024-2025

A range of activities were undertaken in 2024-2025 to support our progress towards the three thematic objectives and priorities. An up4date is provided below.

### 4.1 Thematic Objective 1 - Developing inclusive communities and creating community cohesion

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

a) We have gathered the relevant data from a range of sources including the 2021 Census Data, LGA LG Inform, and Surrey-i. This has led to the production of the draft **Borough Profile** which includes an analysis of the protected characteristics. Once the design work has been completed, our Borough Profile will be published on the our website.

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

a) Working in tandem with the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Surrey Suicide Prevention Strategy, the council has identified the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents as one of its key priorities.

Our development of a Suicide Prevention Action Plan aims to raise awareness of mental health issues and highlight the support available to people both suffering from mental health challenges and those directly impacted by the loss of someone to suicide. We do so by working closely with our various partners and agencies.

One of the key actions was our hosting of the Walk & Talk event at Epsom Downs Racecourse on the 10 September 2024 to mark World Suicide Prevention Day. Over 65 residents and representatives from voluntary and statutory organisations joined together to raise awareness and share experiences to support mental health and end stigma. Councillor Clive Woodbridge also hosted discussion sessions.

We have allocated funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to our partner, We Power On, to help men access support in the borough. Suicide Awareness training has been provided to key staff to offer appropriate support and signposting individuals to the suitable services.

b) Using its powers under the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 (RRO), we have revised our Discretionary Private Sector Housing Grants Assistance Policy to support more disabled and vulnerable residents. This is enabled by the increased Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding from the Better Care Fund. Poor housing can contribute to immobility, social exclusion, ill health and depression among vulnerable, older and disabled people.

The revised Policy offers greater flexibility in providing assistance to residents so that they can live more independently in safe, well maintained, warm and suitable housing such as:

- Widened eligibility criteria, a versatile application approach, an increased grant level.
- Cases can be treated on a more individual basis with assistance available to those with a terminal illness and dementia.
- Accessible housing grants to meet a rising need for disabled persons who are either homeless or need to move to a more suitable property.
- Prevention grant to ensure health and safety in homes.

c) Funded in part by our Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network (EERN) that provides support to all refugees, including those from **Ukraine and Afghanistan**, in the borough with a range of services including language support, employment support, one to one support, and social activities. EERN supported 50 guests from Ukraine and 34 hosting households between January and March 2024. According to their survey, the feedback from the guests said that the English classes and practical assistance, such as support with documentation, access to material goods and being given information about life in the UK, were very helpful.

d) The Housing service has made significant progress since implementing the **Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy** in November 2022. This is against the pressures of increasing demand due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, poor housing supply, rental increases and a lack of resources for other agencies.

We have made 41 successful preventions from homelessness between April and September 2024, and continue to work diligently to move homeless households into temporary accommodation from nightly paid accommodation. The Service has held regular meetings with partners including Department for Work and Pensions, Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Food Bank to further improve early identification and prevention.

The Homelessness Prevention Fund has been utilised for a rent deposit scheme, rent top ups, and temporary payments to prevent homelessness.

Our housing team have also been working tirelessly with other agencies to support the health and wellbeing of homeless people. Councillor Hannah Dalton, who is the leader of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council and the District Councils Network Spokesperson for Housing and Homelessness, attended a parliamentary select committee on 5 November 2024 to give evidence on children in temporary accommodation.



e) We have continued delivering the **Affordable Housing Delivery Improvement Plan** through collaborative work with key stakeholders including housing providers to:

- Increase opportunities/options for new housing development.
- Respond to the Local Plan consultation.
- Consider the housing potential of EEBC and other public body assets, including a variety of projects such as micro homes, Ewell Court cottage and partnership opportunities.
- Expand the Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSLS), with a new property taken on in April 2024. A Landlords' Forum on 23 September 2024 was well attended to promote the PSLS scheme and the Rent Deposit Scheme, both of which play a key role in reducing and preventing homelessness.

In November 2024, we approved a planning application to develop three new homes to house local families who are at risk of homelessness.

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

a) Working closely with the Department of Work and Pensions, our Epsom and Ewell Hub is a free employment and skills service to local residents of all ages, including those who are refugees and people with additional needs, to assist them back into work or training. The Hub helps people find jobs and overcome challenges that can get in the way of finding work.

The Hub connects with colleges, local charities, and potential employers to create job opportunities and training as well as hosting job fairs to bring job seekers and employers together. It also offers personalised advice on CV building, job interview training and confidence-building resources. For the 12-month period between 1 November 2023 to 31 October 2024, the Hub had 544 registrations for employment support.

b) In April 2024, we led an innovative boxing programme with the **Epsom Boxing Academy** for 14 young people from local schools. Graduating students were awarded an England Boxing Bronze Award which was complemented with an AQA Empire Fighting Chance Award in nutrition and health. This programme not only helped young people develop new skills, confidence and resilience but it also supported their self-esteem and positive mental health. Boxing also provides invaluable opportunities for students by connecting them with positive mentors.



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

a) Following a public consultation, the 2024-2025 Community Safety Action Plan was agreed by Epsom and Ewell Community Safety Partnership, the council is a member of this partnership. The plan focuses on the most vulnerable or those at risk of harm, serious organised crime and PREVENT, identifying and tackling crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and improving community engagement.

The outcomes of the partnership work have led to, for example:

- Police interventions around modern day slavery in commercial and residential properties.
- Identification of a hot spot for ASB within the town centre with appropriate mitigations being in place.
- Identification of a county line drug operation in an area of the borough, which was traced back to a London based dealer using multi-agency information.

b) Councillors and the Chief Executive released a **public statement** that we stand with our community against anyone who threatens to disrupt our peace, safety and community cohesion following the tragic events in Southport in July 2024, and its aftermath across the country. The Community Safety team worked closely with the Surrey Police to step up patrols across the borough to reassure our residents, including Muslim and other ethnic communities. We widely publicised the routes to report any threats, hate crimes and discriminatory incidents in the borough.

c) Working with three local charities, we distributed around £132,000 from the government's **Household Support Fund 5 and 6** to support vulnerable residents including families, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people, as well as people experiencing financial hardship across the borough. The charities were:

- The Epsom and Ewell Foodbank and Epsom Pantry run by the Good Company.
- The Financial Wellbeing Support Service run by Citizen's Advice Epsom & Ewell.
- Drop-ins and activities for residents at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, run by The Meeting Room.

These charities have connections with vulnerable residents through their services and the allocations have been distributed across the borough both promptly and efficiently.

d) We are committed to ensuring the prevention of modern slavery and human trafficking in its corporate activities, and to ensuring its supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking. A Modern Slavery Act Statement has been published on our website which sets out our approach in tackling slavery and human trafficking in our organisation and supply chains.



e) We are also a member of the **East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission** which has brought commissioners together to identify some of the major issues affecting people in poverty and work together to find long-term solutions to these problems. An example is the delivery of more than 360 recycled laptops to six local schools for distribution to students from low-income families in tackling digital exclusion.

f) **Supporting vulnerable people in an emergency** – in the event of an emergency such as a fire, flood or blizzard, we work with partner organisations across Surrey (including the Surrey Local Resilience Forum, 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 and Emergency Plan for this purpose.

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

a) We have approved the introduction of the Playing Out (Play Street) scheme in the borough, originated by Play England, to support inclusive communities. It is a resident-led temporary road closures to allow children to play out in the street where they live and also helps to bring communities together. The scheme aligns with our health and wellbeing priorities in increasing children's physical activity and wellbeing as well as building strong, inclusive communities that overcome isolation.

b) We are committed to support the aims of the **Armed Forces Covenant**, both as an organisation and employer. The Covenant is a promise from the nation to the Armed Forces community that they are treated fairly. This means that:

- Any serving or ex members of the UK Armed Forces who apply for a job with us will be guaranteed an interview if they meet the selection criteria laid out in a job advert.
- We recognise military skills and qualifications when interviewing for new positions.
- Our housing policy does not disadvantage Armed Forces personnel.
- We highlight Armed Forces Day and fly the Armed Forces Day flag, and
- we accommodate reservists' training commitments (and mobilisation if they are required to deploy) plus we encourage our reservists to participate in Reservists Day.

We commenced our formal acts of Remembrance with the annual opening of the Garden of Remembrance at Bourne Hall in November, that was followed by a series of activities.

c) Following the launch of our **Arts, Heritage and Cultural Strategy** in 2023, the team has been working continuously with the local community to promote and celebrate the borough's diversity, inclusivity and heritage through arts.

By liaising with the artists from Positive Arts, several stunning mural projects have been completed:

- At a walkway between Miles Road and Stones Road in Epsom in partnership with the GLF Schools and the murals showcase the horse racing heritage of our borough.
- At the alleyway near East Street bridge through partnership with members of Girlguiding Epsom Division. It is a large-scale community mural celebrating inspirational, local women including Lady Sybil Grant, Isabella Beeton, Kathleen Riddick and Nora Willis.
- Near Clandon Close in Stoneleigh which celebrates the diversity of our borough through artistic references to our Hindu community. The murals were produced in partnership with We Power On (a local charity that supports men with their mental health).

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, these projects seek to nurture and champion local creative talents while increasing access to creativity for all to enjoy. They have also dramatically improved the aesthetics of the areas.

Supporting the youth community has been progressed by delivering **Creative Careers** workshops to community members who live or study within the borough. Led by a female street artist, these workshops offered young people the opportunity to engage with a professional creative and take part in creating a piece of art focused on personal wellbeing. The workshops have been organised for students at Glyn School, Rosebery School, and NESOCOT as well as a group of young people attending the club hosted by My Time for Young Carers and NEAT youth club.

In addition, we organised the **Kids in Museums** at Bourne Hall event, as part of the national Takeover Day with the theme of 'Careers'. Over 30 Year 5 pupils from Ewell Grove Nursery and Primary School learned about careers available in museums and the cultural sector.

## 4.2 Thematic Objective 2 - Ensuring engagement and accessible services

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

a) In early 2024, we supported 48 young members of vulnerable families in the borough, including refugee families, to complete a **swimming course** in the Rainbow Leisure Centre through funding awarded by Sports England. At the end of the course, the participants and their families were given the opportunity to continue with subsidised access to the Rainbow Leisure Centre for another three months.

b) In June 2024, we successfully delivered the **2024 Specsavers Surrey Youth Games** after approaching local schools for referrals. This event attracted children and young people including some from different ethnic groups, aged 7-16, to participate in free sport sessions for six to eight weeks including judo, swimming, tennis and touch rugby. The Games aimed to support inclusion in sports and offer those who may not otherwise have access to a sport club or sports lessons. It is hoped that through the confidence they gained during the sessions, they will be inspired to stay socially active for physical development and mental health.

c) We have continued to provide **financial support to five voluntary and community organisations** in 2024/25: Epsom & Ewell Citizens Advice, Epsom & Ewell Age Concern, Relate, Central Surrey Voluntary Action, and the Sunnybank Trust. These organisations offer support to some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough during the current cost-of-living crisis. They are also often the catalyst for mobilising community action and attracting, training, and deploying volunteers. The impact of their work is vital in helping to maintain and improve the life of our borough's vulnerable residents.

d) In October 2024, our colleagues organised a pop-up exhibition of the archival photographic collection of Surrey historian Stephen Bourne. He is a leading historian of **British Black History** and his work was showcased at Bourne Hall as part of the celebration of the Black History Month.

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

a) We use the **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** raised from developers on new developments to improve our local infrastructure and fund local community projects. In November 2024, we approved a total of £331,966 for five local CIL projects following bids by community groups and organisations, and a total of £1,755,000 for three strategic CIL funding projects. These projects, which relate to outdoor parks and spaces, a playground, sports pitch and public realm improvements, will not only create health and recreational benefits for the community now, but will also have a lasting impact on the quality of life for future generations.

b) In November 2024, our Community and Wellbeing Committee approved a renewed approach to **community engagement**. It consists of a variety of methods to engage with our residents to receive feedback on services and better understand residents' needs in view of our diverse communities and demographics of the borough. Some examples of recent consultations are included in the report. Our Communications Strategy also outlines how we aim to engage with our residents and partners on an ongoing basis. There are many existing channels for residents to feedback to us on including social media, e-newsletter, and direct contact.

c) The staff **Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Group** has invited the following two voluntary organisations to its meetings to hear about their experiences of working with our vulnerable residents. The Sunnybank Trust provides advocacy and consultancy work on accessibility for people with learning disabilities, hidden disabilities as well as neurodivergence. The Central Surrey Voluntary Action is a local infrastructure organisation, which supports and shapes best practice in volunteering and social action in Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley and Elmbridge. The Sunnybank Trust's "top tips" were shared within the organisation via internal communication.

d) We were pleased to be able to champion inspirational Epsom resident Ciara Lawrence, an influencer who aims to raise awareness of the issues relating to **learning disability**. Ciara is an author, a podcast host, and the first person with a learning disability to be on Mencap's leadership team. Ciara was also a trustee and volunteer at The Sunnybank Trust, a charity supported by Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.

e) Further to the previous public consultations of our draft Local Plan in 2013, our Planning Team has been developing an equality impact assessment of the proposed submission of Local Plan (Regulation 19 Consultation Stage). This 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

a) We use the **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)** template to assess any potential impact on residents and staff with protected characteristics due to a policy and service development/change. Some examples of the EIAs undertaken by us includes: the Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation; Arts, Culture, and Heritage Strategy; Taxi and Private Hire Emissions Policy.

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

a) Between October 2023 and October 2024:

- Our procurement of goods and services within **Threshold 3** have achieved 100% completion rate 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.
- All procuring officers are asked to confirm that they have read and understood the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework as part of their **Thresholds 2 and 3** procurement report submissions.

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

a) We continue to review our **website** to ensure it's accessible and address any issues. An 'accessibility fixer guide' is available for staff.

b) **'My council services'** continue to be developed on the website to enhance residents' access to digital services as part of our ICT strategy. This portal enables our residents to report issues affecting their local areas as well as accessing certain services.

c) There were **two equality related complaints** received by us from residents between October 2023 and October 2024. The first one was from a resident with disability about the lack of disability access to the new voting venue for his ward. We contacted the person requesting further information so that an investigation could be conducted. Due to the lack of response, this complaint was closed. The second complaint regarded the payment methods for hiring a tennis court from the council. This is still under investigation at the time of writing this report.

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

a) **Councillors** have been involved in several awareness raising activities related to diversity, equity and inclusion:

- Councillor Clive Woodbridge hosted discussion sessions at the World Suicide Prevention Day in September 2024, to raise awareness of mental health and the stigma attached to it
- Councillor Hannah Dalton attended a parliamentary select committee on 5 November 2024 to give evidence on children in temporary accommodation.
- Councillors and Chief Executive's public statement about our zero-tolerance approach to any form of discrimination following the tragic events in Southport in July 2024.

b) The **Chief Executive** communicated to all staff that we are committed to creating a work environment free of harassment, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We have a zero-tolerance approach to behaviour of this nature and it has mandatory training for all staff to support new legislation, the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which came into effect on 26 October 2024.

c) 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. The Learning Pool portal continues to be improved to further enhance the review and monitoring of training.

d) The last version of this **progress report** was submitted to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee in February 2024. This report is an annual progress report of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework for 2024/25 activities.

#### 4.3.2 Workforce diversity monitoring

a) As an employer, we collect data to produce a workforce profile, including a breakdown of workforce by protected characteristics. The last profile was published in February 2024. The February 2025 profile is currently in production.

b) 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. The next report will be released in January 2025.

#### 4.3.3 Ensuring inclusive workforce strategies and policies

a) Our HR Policies are being reviewed. The Dignity at Work Procedure has been updated to reflect the new duty to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace which came into force in October 2024. Policies and procedures within our **People Framework** are continually monitored to ensure their ongoing compliance with equality legislation and employment codes of practice.

b) The Diversity statement is published on our recruitment webpage. We welcome applications from all sections of our community particularly from underrepresented backgrounds, including different ethnic communities, LGBTQI+ and those with hidden or visible disabilities. We are committed to ensuring all our staff – regardless of gender, age, religion, sexuality, ethnicity or disability – can thrive and succeed whilst working with us.

c) We have launched a **staff recognition scheme** to celebrate staff in various ways and the scheme aims to highlight how we support each other.

d) We are a **Disability Confident Employer**, which means we are committed to:

- Working to challenge attitudes towards disability.
- Increasing understanding of disability.
- Removing barriers to disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.
- Ensuring that disabled people have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.



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

a) A staff survey is planned for 2025, which will also consult staff on equality, diversity and inclusion.

b) The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Group met four times between October 2023 and October 2024. The group is a key forum to champion and support equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation. In 2024, the group listened to the requests from staff to provide training in dealing with unacceptable customer behaviours, which was approved by the Strategic Leadership Team.

The group also provided quality assurance of several equality impact assessments to assess any potential impact on residents and staff with protected characteristics. A dedicated DEI page was set up on the new intranet to provide staff with the relevant knowledge, information and resources. An initial screening tool and a full EIA template with guidance notes were produced to guide managers and project managers in deciding when an EIA would be needed, and how to produce one. Best practice examples were also uploaded to the DEI intranet site. These activities aimed to enhance a shared understanding of DEI amongst staff.

