

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS & RESOURCES COMMITTEE 9 MARCH 2023

**EQUALITY & DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT - JOINT REPORT OF MEMBERS¹ OF THE
EQUALITY STEERING GROUP**

LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ROGER LEES, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's progress on equalities during 2022/23 and confirms our priorities for 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Note the progress of our 2022/23 work programme in Appendix A and our planned actions for 2023/24 as set out in para 4.5.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY/COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to Council Plan objectives?	
	Yes	Delivering good outcomes for communities and employees.
	Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) completed?	
	No	The report is not proposing a new policy, scheme, or project.
SCRUTINY POWERS	No	
KEY DECISION	Yes	Existing budgetary provision.
DECISION ROUTE	N/A	Standards and Resources Committee 9 March 2023
TARGET DATE	Yes	As above
FINANCIAL IMPACT	Yes	Within existing resources
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	Compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 is a statutory requirement. The actions will enhance the Council's position and make it easier to evidence consideration of the issues and therefore compliance
IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	The opportunity to strengthen our equality arrangements and improve outcomes for our communities and workforce.
IMPACT ON WARDS	NA	

¹ Corporate Director Communities and Wellbeing, Assistant Director Partnerships, Assistant Director Organisation & People Development and Assistant Director Welfare Services.

4. BACKGROUND

Review of Equality and Diversity

- 4.1 The Council commissioned a review of Equalities and Diversity during 2020/2021 to inform our equalities work programme for 2022/23 using the Local Government Association (LGA) Equality Framework.
- 4.2 The framework² covers the following.

Understanding and working with your communities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• collecting & sharing information• analysing-using data & information• effective community engagement• fostering good community relations• participation in public life	Leadership, partnership, and organisational commitment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• political & officer leadership• priorities & working in partnership• using equality impact assessment• performance monitoring & scrutiny
Responsive services and customer care <ul style="list-style-type: none">• commissioning & procuring services• integration of equality objectives into planned service outcomes• service design & delivery	Diverse and engaged workforce <ul style="list-style-type: none">• workforce diversity & inclusion• inclusive strategies & policies• collecting, analysing, publishing data• learning, development & progression• health & wellbeing

The framework has been slightly updated since the review referred to in para 4.1.

- 4.3 Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) established a new Equality Steering Group to have strategic oversight of equalities and approved 5 areas of focus for our 2022/23 Equality and Diversity work programme. This included leadership, engagement, policy, training, and communication. Adrian McLean an external equality specialist was also commissioned to provide advice and training to assist us in taking forward this work.
- 4.4 The Steering Group have reviewed progress against the above work programme and produced a summary of our progress during 2022/23. (Appendix A).

Next steps for 2023/24

- 4.5 Local authorities must publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty. This information must include information relating to people who share a protected characteristic who are its employees or affected by its policies

² Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) 2021 | Local Government Association

and practices. To ensure we continue to maintain good governance and compliance the following actions will be progressed.

- a) Review our corporate equality objectives. They should be reviewed at least 4 yearly. The last review was in 2020. CLT agreed the objectives will be refreshed to co-inside with the development of the new Council Plan in 2024.
- b) Update equality information on our website to reflect the latest census, locality, and workforce information. This has commenced and will be actioned throughout 2023 in line with the release of data.
- c) Strategic equality actions and/or metrics including community, customer and workforce themes will be identified for the IPM for 2023/24 by the Equality Steering Group.

4.6 The general equality duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations – when making decisions and setting policies. This requires an assessment and there should be adequate evidence to understand the potential effects of proposed decisions on different people covered by the duty.

4.7 Our Service Equality Group has therefore undertaken a review and updated our Equality Impact Assessment toolkit to support this duty. In addition, equality impact refresher training will be arranged during 2023.

Report of Equality Steering Group: Corporate Director Communities & Wellbeing, Assistant Director Partnerships, Assistant Director Organisation & People Development and Assistant Director Welfare Services

Review of Equality and Diversity during 2022/23

Leadership and performance management

- Commissioned expert equality consultancy to re-energise and shape our equality strategy, plans and training.
- New senior Equality Steering Group and Service Equality Groups established.
- Developed 'Community is the Best medicine' model to support community health.
- Equality is a feature of the new Member Development Strategy for 2023.
- Workforce Development Strategy 2022-2025 - key focus on inclusive leadership.
- Everyone Counts - summarises our top community and workforce equality issues.
- Developing and improving systems for collating and analysing the different data sets such as the recent inclusion of the Service Data Profiles to our Locality Profile data.
- Taking action to support socioeconomics and respond to the cost-of-living crisis. Our RPP plans also include consideration of minimising impacts or disadvantage for residents.

Engagement

- The Local Plan consultation has involved a variety of face to face, virtual events and an online portal to ensure a wide engagement with all groups in our communities as part of their consultation and engagement arrangements.
- The resident's survey is now online with the aim of reaching more people and underrepresented groups.
- Outreach work and public campaigning has been undertaken to increase levels of participation by protected groups, targeting elderly, young children, and disability most commonly.
- The 2022 'Be a Councillor Event' included targeted advertising and outreach work to encourage under-represented groups to attend the event and consider representing their communities as a councillor.
- Equality & Diversity profiling questions have been included in all surveys and public consultations where appropriate.
- Developed a range of projects in Locality 3 (which has the highest area of financial hardship) to make an impact on employment and skills.
- Developed a Community Asset list to support engagement in Locality 3.
- Extended ELT session on improving and using our Community and Workforce data to improve outcomes.
- A new inclusion calendar has been promoted to staff to improve knowledge of diverse cultures and support communication and engagement.
- Employee engagement surveys have taken place. Most recent one confirmed 93.5% of respondents would recommend the Council as an employer.
- Promoted the LGA's Debate not Hate campaign (Civility in Public Life).

Policy reviews

- The Local Plan preparation and consultation has adopted an evidenced based process for their underpinning emerging policies to reflect need including but not limited to housing, health, education, employment, and skills.
- The Council's Equality Impact Assessment guidance and arrangements have been reviewed and strengthened, the outcome of which is referenced in the report.
- A new Volunteer Policy.
- Recruitment policy reviewed to ensure it reflects inclusive recruitment practices.

Training

- Leadership coaching programme to support our inclusive culture.
- An equality refresher session for all managers and staff (summer 2022) - covered inclusive language and workforce and community data.
- A session on Data and Analytics to help us improve the link between data and outcomes.
- Community Engagement workshop has been commissioned for early 2023.
- Training on the updated EqIA toolkit is planned for 2023.

Communication including our website.

- The Council's website has its accessibility assessed monthly and is consistently rated against an industry recognised standard which means it is accessible for a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. An accessibility statement has also been added to the Council's website (<https://www.sstaffs.gov.uk/contact-us/accessibility-statement.cfm>), to continually review and improve accessibility and navigation.
- All services have undertaken a complete review of their Website Content as part of our Customer Experience Improvement Programme.
- Shortly introducing 'Recite Me'³ accessibility toolbar for our intranet and website.
- The equality information on the council's website has been refreshed as part of the above and will be reviewed throughout 2023 as relevant census, community and workforce data is released.

³ With Recite Me, a link is placed on a website, for example 'click for accessibility/read text.' Once this option has been selected Recite will automatically translate text to speech, enlarge words, and allow dictionary definitions. It also has functionality to translate over 100 different languages.