

Kent County Council

DRAFT – Annual Equality and Diversity Report for April 2020 to March 2021

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Useful information

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Local Authorities have a legal obligation to publish an annual report as part of fulfilling the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This report provides detail of how Kent County Council (KCC) has complied with equality legislation between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, including progress and activities contributing to KCC's equality objectives as set out in the council's Equality and Diversity Policy. Local Authorities were not required to publish a report for 2019-20 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 The report sets out progress against our objectives using the Equality and Human Rights Commission's six domains, or 'areas of life' that are important to people and their quality of life:
 - [Work](#)
 - [Education](#)
 - [Living Standards](#)
 - [Health](#)
 - [Justice and personal security](#)
 - [Participation](#)

2. Equality policy and local context

2.1 Policy

- 2.2 In 2016, the Kent County Council (KCC) published the Equality and Human Rights Policy and Objectives 2016-2020. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact across the county, this policy and its objectives were extended until 2021. A summary of the policy is provided below.
- 2.3 The council recognises the diverse needs of our community and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity in employment, commissioning and service delivery.
- 2.4 We value diversity and believe it is essential to provide services which work well for all residents and staff. The services KCC designs and delivers, on its own or with partners, should focus on maximising independence for people, families and communities. We will treat people with dignity and respect and help people to be safe and socially included. We will support and enable people to make informed choices, so that they will have control over their lives. We are committed to working with all statutory partners, businesses and the voluntary sector to ensure the best possible outcomes for those who live in, work in and visit Kent.
- 2.5 We will challenge discrimination and encourage respect, understanding and dignity for everyone living, working and visiting Kent. This will be achieved through our influence in the community, strategic planning, and commissioning and policy development in employment and through service delivery.

2.6 As a public sector organisation, we follow the Public-Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010, to protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of their protected characteristics. The characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

2.7 **Kent's profile as a County**

With a resident population of just under 1.6 million, Kent (excluding Medway) has the largest population of all the English counties. The following information is taken from the 2011 Census (the 2021 Census information will be published in 2022) and the mid-year population survey.

- 93.7% of all Kent residents are of White ethnic origin – this includes those who are White British as well as other identities such as Irish, Eastern European origin etc. Kent also has Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller populations greater than the national average.
- The 2011 Census recorded that 6.3% of Kent residents are classified as Black or Minority Ethnic (BME). This proportion is lower than the national average for England, which is 14.6%.
- People living in urban areas make up 73% of the Kent population but only occupy 21% of the total land area in Kent.
- The mid-year population survey notes that 51% of the total population of Kent identify as female and 49% as male.
- Significantly in terms of future challenges, Kent has an aging population with the number of +65-year-olds forecast to increase by 45% between 2019 and 2039.
- Kent has a greater population of children and young people aged 5-19 years old and people aged 45+ years old than the England average.
- There is no single quantifiable measure of the number of disabled people in Kent (or the UK) because identifying as disabled relies on individuals' self-perception, but it is estimated that 17.6% of Kent (excluding Medway) residents have a disability.
- 1,534 civil partnerships were formed between 2006 and 2019 in Kent. This dataset only relates to civil partnerships that are formed within Kent. It does not necessarily provide a true reflection of the sexual identity of people living in Kent.

Further information on social, demographic and economic aspects of Kent can be found on our website, by clicking on the [Kent Facts and Figures page](#).

2.8 Kent County Council's Workforce Profile

KCC recognises that the diversity of its workforce is one of its greatest strengths. It is committed to promoting equality and inclusivity and combating unfair treatment by providing a safe and accessible working environment with fair access to learning and development opportunities. The Council encourages and supports all staff in fulfilling their potential.

2.9 The section below contains details on how the council's workforce is made up, focusing on headline statistics, as of March 2021.

	As at March 2021
Current total number of FTE (non-schools)	7,373.50
Current total FTE on grades KR6 or below (non-schools staff earning salaries up to £22,072)	2344.97
% Staff who are female	79.6% (51%)*
% Of staff who are Black and Minority Ethnic	7.8% (6.6%)*
% Of staff who have declared a disability	3.95% (17.6%)*
% Of staff who are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual	2.4% (2.2%)+
% Of staff who are Trans-sexual	0.5%
% Of KCC's leadership group who are women	58.2%
Average age of staff	45
% Of staff aged under 25 or below	6.3%
% Of staff aged over 50	41.6%
% Of staff aged over 65	4.4%

*The figures in brackets are the percentage of Kent's population from those groups, as identified in the 2011 Census. There are likely to be significant changes in some metrics – we are awaiting the 2021 Census results, expected in 2022.

+The figure in brackets is the percentage of people in the South East identifying themselves as LGB, as identified in the National Office of Statistics data set published on **6 March 2020**.

2.10 It is acknowledged that the gap between the percentage of individuals declaring a disability (3.95%) and the census figure (17.6%) does appear wide. This gap is influenced by the fact that the census data covers the total of Kent's population, some of whom are not economically active or in employment and includes a larger proportion of older people than the Council employs who are more susceptible to developing a health condition that would be classified as a disability. This figure is broadly similar to other comparable employers. Overall, a greater percentage of disabled people in Kent find work compared to the national figure and KCC continues to support this as an employer.

2.11 There was a slight decrease in the percentage of staff who have declared a disability (by 1%), the percentage of staff who are female across the workforce (0.3%), women in the leadership group (3.1%), and staff who are Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (0.1%) and transsexual (0.2%). However, the percentage of staff who are Black and Minority Ethnic increased slightly by 0.2%.

- 2.12 The average age of staff increased slightly (by 0.1%) and this has been reflected in the percentage decrease of staff who are under the age of 25 (by 0.8%) and those over the age of 50 (by 0.7%) and 65 (by 0.5%). Lower turnover of staff during the COVID-19 pandemic was a contributory factor within these figures.

3. Equality Objectives 2016-2020(21)

- 3.1 Each directorate within KCC was asked to provide equality information to demonstrate how they contributed to KCC's equality objectives, as set out in the council's Equality and Diversity policy, between 1 April 2020 and March 2021. Their progress towards the objectives and other relevant activities are provided under the Equality and Human Rights Commission's six domains of Work, Education, Living Standards, Health, Justice & Personal Security, and Participation.

WORK

4. KCC's Workforce Equality Objectives

- 4.1 2020-21 was an unprecedented year due to the COVID-19 pandemic with a significant impact on KCC's workforce in terms of staff wellbeing. While our workforce profile saw some indicators that were less positive, a considerable amount of work was done over the last year to focus on supporting staff and creating inclusive workplaces. There is still more work to be done, in particular around increasing the diversity of the workforce.
- 4.2 Recruit, retain and develop a workforce that reflects the communities we serve and ensure our people feel valued and respected**
- 4.3 KCC aims to increase diversity through an inclusive approach to recruitment and development and to ensure a working environment which is based on mutual respect, consistency, and equity at all levels of the organisation. The following initiatives have contributed to this aim:
- Recruitment**
- 4.4 In response to the pandemic, support for managers was enhanced to include remote recruitment and induction guidance, which includes considerations around accessibility. Work is underway to refresh the KCC recruitment website to ensure we are attracting, engaging and ultimately recruiting from a more diverse candidate pool, at all levels.
- 4.5 KCC continues to sustain Level 2 of the Government's Disability Confident standard, which recognises businesses that are actively inclusive in their recruitment and retention practices.
- 4.6 Our recruitment profile improved in terms of those who declared themselves to have a disability. In 2020-21, of those applicants to posts, there were 5.4%

who were considered disabled. 7.1% of those people shortlisted were disabled, and 5.5% of those recruited were disabled. The turnover rate of staff who are considered disabled in the last 12 months was down to 8.6% from 14.4% in 2019-20; this was consistent with the overall organisation turnover rate which decreased during this period (9.6% in 2020-21 and 12.7% in 2019-20).

- 4.7 Similarly, the recruitment profile for those who are Black and Minority Ethnic improved to 13.8% in 2020-21, with an increase in the proportion of applicants who are Black and Minority Ethnic, and those people shortlisted. The turnover rate for 2020-21 for Black and Minority Ethnic staff reduced to 12.2% in 2020-21 from 19.3% in 19-20.
- 4.8 However, both the percentage of women and hires aged under 25 reduced over the last year. The percentage of non-heterosexual candidates increased, whereas the number of transgender hires reduced from 4 to 1 in 2020-21 although a higher proportion chose not to declare.

Apprenticeship levy

- 4.9 The apprenticeship levy was introduced in April 2017 and since that time KCC has been able to spend these funds (over £2m per year) on Apprenticeship training for both new and existing staff of all ages in KCC. Since the introduction of the levy, 881 KCC employees have accessed apprenticeship training with 412 employees currently on programmes supporting professional development, talent management programmes and enabling young people to begin their careers with KCC. 30% of those currently on apprenticeship programmes are aged 25 or under, and 30% of those employees who have accessed apprenticeship training since the introduction of the levy were aged 25 or under. 29% of the total number of training starts are male and 71% female.
- 4.10 KCC is currently enabling access to over 40 apprenticeship training programmes across a wide variety of disciplines and professional areas. In 2020-21 there were 162 apprenticeship training starts (32 of them were new apprentices to KCC). Their profile was as follows:
- Age: 4% were aged 16-18, 23% aged 19-24, and 73% aged 25+
 - Gender distribution: 21% male, 79% female,
 - Ethnicity: 8% were Black or Minority Ethnic, 86% white, and 6% undeclared
 - Disability: 5% had a disability, 87% had none, 8% were undeclared
 - Sexual orientation: 4% identified as bisexual, 0 gay, 0 lesbian, 84% heterosexual and 12% undeclared.

Kent Graduate Programme

- 4.11 The organisation has a long tradition of employing graduates through the Programme. A review of the programme was undertaken in 2019 and a new redesigned programme was launched. The main changes were the introduction of permanent contracts at the end of the training period and a profession-based approach where the graduates are based in a business unit and access professional development through apprenticeship training funded

by the apprenticeship levy. Since the launch of the new programme, seven graduates were recruited in professional areas such as Project Management, Business Improvement, Finance, Regulatory Compliance and Procurement during 2020-21.

Work Experience

- 4.12 The Education People's (TEP) Skills and Employability Service manages KCC's work experience which, in the last year with the pandemic and working from home, was a difficult agenda to deliver and placements were minimal. However, to overcome this issue Workforce Development in HR are working with TEP to design a virtual work experience platform which will integrate with a face-to-face offer when possible, with placements within a variety of roles.

Care leavers

- 4.13 KCC has corporate parenting responsibility for children and young people in Kent until the age of 18 when they become 'care leavers', and until they reach age 25. As part of the support to our Care Leavers, we continue with positive action to support them with joining our organisation. This includes an option for the candidate to select they are a 'KCC Care Leaver' as part of the application process to ensure they are shortlisted for interview, providing they meet the minimum criteria for the role, and providing individual support with starting their careers with KCC.

Training

- 4.14 Equality, diversity and inclusion continue to be embedded in the development, delivery and monitoring of corporate training programmes to ensure learning resources are suitable for and accessible to all. In 2020-21, analysis of the diversity profile of those undertaking learning and development showed that both the offer and access to training is inclusive to all staff groups within KCC.
- 4.15 From 1 April 2020, 830 Equality and Diversity e-learning courses have been completed (which covered Equality and Diversity in Recruitment and Selection, Introduction to Equality and Diversity, Care Certificate – Standard 4: Equality and Diversity and Introduction to Equality Impact Assessment). This training supports the embedding of diversity and inclusion into management practice and raising awareness on the responsibilities of both managers and staff in the workplace.
- 4.16 As part of the Kent Academy development offer within Social Care, dedicated equality and diversity activity didn't take place due to COVID-19 restrictions. However, a Practice Educator forum was held where there was a focus on cultural awareness when supporting Black and Ethnic Minority students, and an event was held during Black History month 2021. Work is underway on a more practice-related equality and diversity offer for the coming year.

Workforce planning

- 4.17 A new workforce planning tool has been developed to understand current and predicted future workforce requirements. One of the many benefits of this approach will be a more diverse talent pipeline at all levels of the organisation.

A pilot took place in parts of the Authority and is now being rolled out more widely.

Gender Pay Gap

- 4.18 KCC has now posted the fourth Gender Pay Gap report which covers the period up to March 2020. The gender pay gap for KCC is significantly below the national average. This is positive for KCC, the figures being 12.7% and 15.5% respectively. KCC's gender pay gap is explained by the higher proportion of men in the upper middle and upper pay quartiles, although there is a higher proportion of women in all quartiles. The proportion of women to men across KCC is currently 79% and 21% respectively. Within the lower half of the organisation the balance is further in favour of women, however the proportion changes by around 10% within the upper quartile. There is therefore still a significantly greater proportion of women in each of the pay quartiles.
- 4.19 The Gender Pay Gap Report states that KCC is very clear that gender should not limit or define choices in or outside of the workplace. Aspects which are in our control involve the whole employment cycle such as recruitment, career progression, maternity/return to work, leadership development, apprenticeships, and the use of flexible working arrangements. We seek to identify and address barriers as a way of making practical and positive changes in the context of a supportive management culture. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the way we work enormously; by enabling people to better manage their work and domestic responsibilities, there is potential for this to be beneficial for women and assist with personal or career development opportunities.

Workforce Race Equality Standards

- 4.20 In December 2020, the Adult, Social Care & Health (ASCH) directorate was announced as being successful in its bid to take part in the Workforce Race Equality Standards (WRES) in Social Care Programme along with 17 other LAs. The WRES will help provide a clearer picture and enable purposeful action to tackle race inequalities in the workplace. From April 2021 for one year ASCH will be required to collect and submit data on key areas and develop an action plan outlining how it will address some of the issues faced in the directorate. These could be in recruitment and retention, progression, learning and development opportunities or other areas.

4.21 We will continue to be an inclusive employer

- 4.22 An inclusive approach to employment practices helps ensure that service users, staff and employees of partner agencies are treated with the level of dignity and respect that is expected. The pandemic has brought the inclusion agenda to the fore due to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on different groups of staff. A set of new organisation design principles have been developed, which include taking an individual approach to understanding and supporting needs, underpinned by a new set of values and cultural attributes to create a culture of inclusion where staff can be

themselves at work. This response along with a number of specific initiatives have helped drive the inclusion agenda forward:

Policy framework

- 4.23 Our employment policies and practices, and terms and conditions were reviewed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure they are fit for purpose and promote diversity and inclusion. We regularly equality impact assess our employment policies to ensure they do not discriminate against the Council's employees and promote inclusion.

Reasonable Adjustments

- 4.24 The Council continues to collect and analyse data on the adjustments made to ways of work and equipment employees use on an annual basis. This seeks to understand how many people are being supported, the type of support required and whether this is in the most cost-effective manner, and to identify any trends. This data also helps support focused work with teams in looking at improving and maintaining attendance. During 2020, the number of reasonable adjustments in place decreased by 8.6% but we saw an increase in adjustments due to non-visible disabilities. We also saw an increase in the number of adjustments for office equipment which may have been a reflection of the increase in home working as a result of the pandemic, where this was possible.

Building Accessibility and Flexible Working

- 4.25 KCC continues to work with AccessAble, a specialist accessibility service, to assist with ensuring KCC buildings are accessible and inclusive in their design for staff and service users with a disability. 337 sites have been assessed to date, and action plans are in place based on best practice guidance. Access guides are available on internal and external websites, which provide further details about the accessibility in each building. In spite of COVID-19 severely impacting the number of building audits that took place, the 2018-2021 accessibility audit plan was successfully concluded, with building access guides being produced for an additional 19 sites.
- 4.26 The Hybrid Working team, who have been reconfiguring our estate to the flexible working model have engaged with the Level Playing Field staff group for staff with disabilities, to ensure that equality and inclusion is built into the changes. One change that came out of this collaboration was to create additional space for circulation around office areas. This, plus height adjustable desks and idea walls provided near both high and low level seating have been built into the standard provision.

Digital Accessibility for Staff

- 4.27 Having fully accessible ICT systems is essential for staff being able to fulfil their roles and undertake learning. KCC has an ongoing commitment to ensure compliance with statutory standards as part of its award winning internal digital accessibility agenda. This includes accessibility audits of websites to proactively identify and fix accessibility issues, promoting the topic and good working practices, and providing training and support to staff.

Total Contribution Pay

- 4.28 This year, due to the upheaval caused by the response to COVID-19 and the wide professional and personal challenges people faced, steps were taken to ensure that the Total Contribution Pay process remained inclusive by recognising everyone's contributions during the pandemic. The same percentage increase for all staff was given as part of a general pay award.
- 4.29 Although appraisal ratings did not impact people's pay, they were still recorded and analysed on a protected characteristic basis, and discussed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT). A revised approach for 2021-22 has been agreed, where more equality data will be available to the Corporate Management Team as part of the moderation process and therefore before formal sign off. This is a positive change in the continued effort to promote the equality agenda for part-time workers and treating people equally, independent of protected characteristics.

4.30 Leadership and Management in KCC

Our three planks of Leadership Traits, Managing in KCC (formerly Kent Manager) and the Future Manager Programme continue to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion sit at the heart of our leadership and management values and practices. Virtual roundtable events have been held for KCC's senior leadership group during the pandemic, with external speakers to provoke thought and insight, and insights from a series of action learning sets has been used to develop our Building Inclusive Leadership Practice programme. 'Managing in KCC' (formerly Kent Manager until 2021) has a diverse range of participating managers engaging in a programme that seeks to embeds diversity, inclusion and wellbeing through its content and activities.

Communications and engagement

- 4.31 Work was carried out during 2020-21 to improve the accessibility of all internal communication platforms and staff engagement activities. Key pages on KNet were redesigned, bringing to life the stories of our staff groups and the inclusion priorities; this activity has provided a permanent anchor point for diversity and inclusion communications across the workforce. A CMT briefing to all staff included Signers to ensure accessibility for British Sign Language users. Working alongside CMT, staff communications and engagement supported the drive towards inclusive leadership, co-producing Leadership Blogs on each of our revised values which reflected the sentiment analysis of the 2019 staff survey, holding inclusion at the core.
- 4.32 The internal Communications and Engagement team created campaign materials to support significant celebrations, awareness days and opportunities for advocacy. These were driven by the equality objectives and messages have also been integrated into our routine communication plans to ensure inclusion is part of our every day, rather than it being separate or different. We actively supported messaging and storytelling as part of Black History Month, Pride and Windrush Day. For Mental Health and wider wellbeing, a month-long campaign ran to normalise conversations and support mechanisms relating to being well at work. Each of these campaign

activities was supported by Senior Leadership messaging to embed a model of inclusion into business as usual.

Wellbeing

- 4.33 Health and wellbeing was a priority over 2020-21 to ensure the physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing of staff. The wellbeing offer was enhanced in response to particular health trends exacerbated by COVID-19, such as musculoskeletal guidance for managers, bereavement and trauma-based coaching support, and a series of wellbeing webinars focused on mental wellbeing and resilience. In addition, a wellbeing month was held during October 2020 to coincide with World Mental Health day, which saw awareness raising events, the promotion of tools and resources such as the 'I am in the 1 in 4' video about lived experiences of mental health and the KCC Choir. This holistic wellbeing support has been positively received by staff and managers and contributes to a more inclusive organisation.

Race Equality Matters

- 4.34 KCC made an organisational commitment to become anti-racist by signing up to Race Equality Matters. This aims to raise awareness of race equality in the workplace and achieve lasting culture change through a number of initiatives which are currently being planned.

Measuring Inclusion

- 4.35 An inclusivity model and indicator has been developed to increase understanding of what we mean by inclusion and how staff experience the organisation. It also provides a robust evidence base with which to drive further improvements.

4.36 We will continue to listen and engage with employees

Staff Groups

- 4.37 KCC is proud to support five staff groups, all of which play a leading role in providing support and development opportunities for their members as well as advising on policy and practice to support our commitment to promoting inclusion and equality, valuing diversity and combating unfair treatment. Our groups include: Level Playing Field (disabled staff and carers), Black and Minority Ethnic Forum, Rainbow (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender staff), Aspire (staff aged 30 and under) and Mental Health Support Network.
- 4.38 Over the past year, staff groups played a pivotal role in supporting members during the pandemic and informing the strategic response in terms of employee engagement and inclusiveness. The Black and Minority Ethnic Forum held a successful event during Black History Month, and Rainbow marked Pride month with a virtual flag raising event. Aspire held social events to support the wellbeing of members and quarterly events for members to support their professional development, and the Mental Health Support Network held regular events to raise awareness of particular topics relating to mental health which were open to a wider KCC audience.

- 4.39 Work also began to explore how the staff groups can best interact and collaborate with the organisation, and developing action plans to support the equality objectives.

Staff Survey

- 4.40 The staff survey in its traditional form was suspended in 2020 in favour of pulse checks related to work and wellbeing. The issues of inclusion could not be separated completely from the impact of COVID-19; in the early days of the pandemic, worry about COVID-19 was a consistent picture across all staff groups; younger staff and those who identified as LGBTQI+ reported feelings of isolation, and for some black and minority ethnic staff, conversations were not taking place around risk assessments which had an impact on their wellbeing. In contrast, the experience of some disabled staff, although not necessarily those with mental illness, improved while working at home as they were more able to better manage their disability.
- 4.41 In response to this, additional tools and guidance to support sensitive conversations, an enhanced package of wellbeing support and further resources to support physical and mental wellbeing were introduced. Action planning focused on supporting staff to connect and look after their wellbeing, with trauma support and engagement sessions designed to take account of individual and collective needs. Tailored support and workshops are also being developed for the Black and Minority Ethnic Forum following feedback from the staff group.
- 4.42 The Equality Duty will inform all services' efforts to maximise businesses' potential**
- 4.43 The Business Investment team have been improving their data collection for funding application processes and have identified a low take up from female led businesses and business owners who are BME. They are therefore using this data to inform their marketing strategies for new schemes and information events, to help the applicants to be more representative of Kent's demographic.
- 4.44 The team also completed Equality Impact Assessments for the new Growth Hub, KMBF, Peer 2 Peer Networks and South East Business Boost contracts, which included reviewing the data sets of the previous iterations of these schemes and using the lessons from these older schemes and their equality impact to incorporate them into the design of the new schemes and processes. This included targeting of lower represented groups and improving accessibility of scheme marketing and information material.
- 4.45 In adapting to operating their business schemes during the pandemic, the Business Investment team ensured that members of the Investment Advisory Board and scheme applicants were fully supported in adjusting to virtual meetings and online forms, providing one-to-one assistance by a Digital Champion to help them with their confidence and skills, which particularly benefited members and applicants from older age groups.

Creative and cultural economy

- 4.46 South East Creatives (SECCADS) business support programme aimed to maximise business potential by providing funding and support for SMEs and freelancers, with delivery at a hyper local level. The programme structure provided for local hubs and coordinators with existing networks and included activity aimed at girls and women (e.g Daughters of Industry events) , LGBTQI+ communities (via commissioning Margate Pride) and business leaders from BME backgrounds. For example, funding supported People Dem Collective set up a network for businesses led by people from BME backgrounds. This programme was designed in response to data analysed from applicants which indicated those groups with protected characteristics underrepresented in this sector.
- 4.47 Valuable lessons were also learned by the Cultural Economy team in their attempt to tender a programme for people who do not usually access mainstream business support. They found that organisations who work with people poorly represented on the South East Creatives client base, such as people who are BME or who identify as LGBTQI+ were less likely to have experience of Local Authority procurement in the field of business support. Therefore, the team are adapting their processes to build in more time for pre-contract dialogue and to demystify the process to ensure future procurements attract more success.

EDUCATION

5. Narrowing the achievement gaps with regards to disability, race, or sex

- 5.1 The Primary School Improvement team within KCC's company 'The Education People' (TEP) have provided access to a wide range of training linked to narrowing achievement gaps. Intervention funded specialist adviser visits have supported school leaders in evaluating the impact of provision on narrowing achievement gaps and supported schools in identifying teaching and learning strategies especially in maths and English. Adviser visits in the Autumn term also looked at the school's impact on narrowing the achievement gaps with regards to all pupil groups. Advisers raised issues around equality and diversity, having this as a review point for learning walks and school discussion.
- 5.2 **Increase learning and employment opportunities for those aged 16-25 with regard to Disability, Race or Sex**
- 5.3 In 2020-21, TEP's Secondary School Improvement and Skills & Employability team provided a number of initiatives on behalf of KCC. This included working with KCC's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) team to improve the support arrangements for young people aged 16-18 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and have a learning difficulty and/or disability. The Education People now supports those young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who

wish to go into training and employment. Since May when the new system started there have been over 132 cases supported by this process.

- 5.4 The Service has begun running bi-monthly district NEET network meetings for KCC and other services supporting young people to share good practice and information. Virtual School Kent (VSK), the SEND team and Youth Justice attended these meetings to improve their service delivery.
- 5.5 The Specialist Employment Team worked with schools and colleges to deliver employment options for young people with SEND when leaving education, helping them to explore career pathways and choices for qualification whilst in education. They offered Supported Internships to students with SEND - working with schools to raise aspirations for young people with SEND, and ensuring that those on supported internships understood the apprenticeship pathway.
- 5.6 Increasing access to early years services for 2-year-old offer of free provision regardless of disability, race or sex**
- 5.7 A bid was agreed for 2-year-old children eligible for a free place to be able to access the Disability Access Funding (DAF). This provides settings with an additional £615 per eligible child to support them in making reasonable adjustments to their provision to meet individual needs and enhance opportunities for progress. It also allows for each setting to receive a free membership and a resource pack for 2-year-olds within the TEP's 'Emporium' scheme providing play and learning resources.
- 5.8 Driving down permanent exclusions to zero for primary age children with regard to sex and race**
- Ongoing use of data from Management Information is used to track children and analyse any trends. The level of Permanent Exclusions is very small, and therefore no local trends have been identified. Individual officers challenge any equality issues identified on individual Permanent Exclusions.
- 5.9 Improved life chances and outcomes for children and young people through service developments and transformation**
- 5.10 During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools opened in the holidays for children of key workers and disadvantaged children. Free School Meals support was provided for vulnerable families during the holiday periods. Additional transport was also provided to take children with SEND to school to ensure safety and to overcome parental/pupil anxiety. Kent Test arrangements were modified to ensure disadvantaged pupils were not negatively impacted by reduced learning opportunities resulting from the pandemic, and ICT devices were distributed to children with a social worker and to disadvantaged Year 10 pupils.
- 5.11 During the pandemic, additional support and guidance was provided to schools to help leadership teams to deal with the rapidly changing environment and guidance. This ensured that schools remained open to all.

The Community Learning service moved all qualification courses on-line, provided access to digital devices, and kept in touch with vulnerable learners.

- 5.12 In addition, The Education People's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Team prepared and signposted resources and e-learning modules to schools and colleagues working in education that promoted equality of opportunity. This included English as an Additional Language (EAL) pedagogy and strategies that enabled schools to effectively differentiate teaching and learning for EAL learners and others with low literacy skills; ideas for celebrating, promoting and developing understanding of diversity and Inclusion e.g., festivals and identity work, a resource pack to help schools respond to issues raised under the Black Lives Matter agenda; and COVID advice in different languages for minority ethnic groups including refugees and information directly focused on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community.
- 5.13 The EDI Team arranged virtual consultations with Head Teachers and staff in schools, offering e-learning modules, delivering virtual training sessions, catch up sessions for disadvantaged/vulnerable learners, mentoring sessions for pupils, one-to-one and group support.
- 5.14 The EDI Team have held three cross-county, virtual hubs about GRT and EAL for Head Teachers and members of the Senior Management Team in response to referrals from schools, parents, the Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) directorate and organisations who support vulnerable learners. The meetings enabled schools to share good practice and explore current research across the Local Authority. The groups developed strategies to improve attendance, promote engagement in learning and accelerate progress. The service also offered advice on meeting the needs of vulnerable learners such as those with SEND and from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 5.15 The EDI Team have carried out interventions ranging from assessments and target setting for newly arrived children and young people with EAL (both Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and those who arrived by different routes, for example with a relocating family who have little or no English), and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. They have also supported literacy of Years 10 – 12 advanced bilingual learners, who had fallen behind during the COVID-19 lockdown and needed catch up tutor sessions.
- 5.16 During the COVID-19 pandemic the EDI Team saw an increase in the number of schools requesting support about recognising, reporting and responding to preventing racist incidents. The support provided included guidance to ensure compliance with duties under the Equality Act through a more inclusive and diverse curriculum. This increase in reported racist incidents in schools reflected a national trend and was not unexpected with children and young people having been isolated at home, unable to mix with others from different backgrounds and sometimes exposed to prejudicial views from home or through the media. The incidents took the form of verbal, rather than physical

abuse, and was mainly in primary schools, with no particular geographical focus.

- 5.17 The EDI Team have promoted social integration by taking part in Schools Linking. This is facilitated by The Linking Network Team and sponsored by the Department for Education (DfE), Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the Peers Foundation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this project was modified from a project that runs throughout the year, to be delivered virtually over 6 weeks in the Summer Term. The team worked alongside a lecturer from Kent University to evidence the impact of this project on pupils based on contact theory.
- 5.18 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Equality and Inclusion Advisers, working in the Early Years and Childcare Service's Equality and Inclusion Team, have produced an 'Early Years Anxiety' webinar in recognition of the need to prioritise and support mental health and well-being. They also delivered 'A Practical Guide to Inclusion and Diversity'. This course has been recognised and the training is now CPD Accredited.

Schools Accessibility Initiative

- 5.19 Eight projects were completed during 2020-21 to enhance the accessibility at primary school sites. These included adaptations such as ramps, accessible toilets and showers, care suites, fire exits, and a satellite classroom.

5.20 The quality and range of services are improved through increasing engagement with service users and carers

- 5.21 The EDI Team have responded to concerns about the wellbeing and safeguarding of gender variant children and trans young people in Kent, particularly when they were unable to access external support such as 'HUBs' (LGBTQ user groups) during the pandemic lockdowns, by signposting people to updated resources from Brighton and Hove City Council and Stonewall while Kent's Transgender Guidance is being reviewed. The TEP's EDI Service has met with Transgender and Non-binary people and organisations that support Trans/Non-binary inclusion including Porchlight and Medway Gender & Sexual Diversity Centre. This was to ensure that the life experiences of people with the protected characteristic of Gender Reassignment are heard and will be reflected within the guidance.

LIVING STANDARDS

6. Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm with regard to sex, disability, race and age

- 6.1 The Education Safeguarding Team trained over 3,700 school and early years staff and provided e-learning for a further 1,500. They carried out 34 detailed reviews of safeguarding processes in schools and delivered 18 National Minimum Standards visits to Kent's three residential special

schools. The team also picked up over 4,400 education safeguarding calls/enquiries from schools and early years providers.

- 6.2 The Adult Social Care (ASC) stakeholder engagement team and other KCC colleagues including public health and data analytics teams have a good understanding of the makeup of the community in detail including ethnic minorities such as asylum seekers, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, the Nepalese community and the different Asian communities in Gravesend and North Kent. The team understands where the pockets of disadvantage are as well as the trends around other needs such as mental health, autism and learning disability and rural isolation.
- 6.3 ASC has a wealth of data and access to partners' data, which it is using to understand its communities and deliver better services. Partnership working and data sharing has improved during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kent Observatory and integrated data set work is being used proactively, for example, to link ASC, Children's and NHS data to look at issues such as fuel poverty and health inequalities.
- 6.4 **Ensure that when we use ICT it is fully accessible for learning, working and getting into services**
- 6.5 Investment has been increased in digital support in response to the COVID - 19 pandemic. The online Solihull Approach parenting programme has been commissioned across Kent, providing a cost-effective solution to offering evidence based parenting support to all families in Kent. There are seven courses that are free to access including understanding your child with additional needs and understanding your child's mental health and wellbeing. Between 1 September 2020 and 31 October 2021, 1,653 families accessed a course.
- 6.6 Other examples include the Kent Born to Move app, encouraging play and interaction to support brain development, the Beside You website, providing interactive breastfeeding support and online counselling services such as Kooth.
- 6.7 KCC have supported and promoted digital investments made by the Clinical Commissioning Group such as Dad Pad, which launched in November 2021 to better support fathers and Silvercloud to improve peri natal mental wellbeing. This year, Birth, Bump and Beyond, a Kent and Medway website was also launched ,providing all information and advice to families in one place.
- 6.8 Kent County Council is piloting a digital loan scheme for service users who do not have access to devices or the internet. Service users are provided with a device (a Samsung Tablet) which is pre-loaded with relevant health and wellbeing apps and bookmarked websites or are provided with data to use on their own device. Loans are for six months and the scheme is free of charge.

Kara video care phones

- 6.9 KCC worked with health and care colleagues, Alcove and Rethink Partners to roll out the delivery of 2,000 Kara video care phones to enable the most vulnerable residents in our communities to stay connected to care and support services and loved ones during the pandemic, particularly during the periods of lockdown and shielding. The device also enabled people working with sensory teams to use sign language. Further information on this project can be found at this link: [Kara phone weblink](#).
- 6.10 Many of the Wellbeing and Day Care services transferred to online provision. For those unable to access digital services some providers delivered activity packs to homes. Examples of innovation include: Virtual Day Centres using Skype (quizzes, chats, cooking sessions, karaoke, story time, discos, art), Day Centre Facebook Groups, Befriending (phone calls once or twice per week), Whatsapp Groups, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy by phone or Skype, keyworker appointments by telephone. Donations of smartphones were distributed to those who wanted to engage but did not have the means.
- 6.11 Enablement Services, such as Kent Enablement & Recovery Service and Shared Lives continued to operate throughout lockdown. Where face-to-face visits were no longer possible, the services turned to digital technologies such as the KARA device and also Zoom to deliver group sessions such as cooking demonstrations.

Enhancing service provision to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and increase choice for families

- 6.12 During the periods of lockdown, disabled children and young people were unable to receive support they would usually access through schools or via short break provision. This put additional pressure on both the individuals concerned and on their families in trying to cope with what was a difficult time for all. The 'Toy Scheme' was devised and rolled out across the County which aimed to help families and individuals through the provision of a new toy or piece of equipment that would provide some diversion from the lockdown and help alleviate some of the impacts caused by removal of other activity. The scheme was well received by families across Kent and seen as an excellent way to help families through the lockdown period.
- 6.13 In November 2020, KCC commissioned research to identify the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of carers in Kent with regard to awareness of and access to support services and networks. This was with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities for informal carers seeking support and whether that support is of the right level and sought at the optimum moment. This research included reflections on how the pandemic affected carers and the people they care for. The key themes and behavioural insights have since informed the development of future plans in adult social care including the KCC Adult Social Care Strategy and separate Carers Strategy.

HEALTH

7. The number of Black and Minority Ethnic people and women in the mental health system is reduced

7.1 KCC and Kent & Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) jointly commission a Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, known as Live Well Kent and Medway. The service acknowledges that trauma may often be related to an inequality experienced on the grounds of a protected characteristic (or many) and promotes positive impacts for all protected groups. It also provides support interventions in ways that respect and value diversity, addressing the causes and consequences of stigma, discrimination, social inequality, and exclusion of people requiring support in and through the Service.

7.2 The service tailors support based on the demographic make-up of locations and develops support services for specific groups. For example, in Dartford, Gravesham Swanley and Swale, where there is a higher proportion of people from the Asian community, LWK offers a culturally sensitive listening and information service, for those affected by mental health issues. Staff speak Asian languages (Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindu, and Urdu) and English. Between 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2021, 57% of individuals who disclosed stated that they were Female and 8% stated they were from an ethnic group other than White British.

7.3 Ensure equity of access to Sexual Health services to improve health outcomes with regard to age, sexual orientation, gender identity and race

7.4 KCC commissions the specialist integrated sexual health service to deliver open access sexual health services based on a population approach. During the COVID-19 pandemic the service continued to accommodate needs for vulnerable individuals. It primarily promoted the use of digital and/or remote delivery to try and reduce the need to come into clinic, but where this method of delivery would prevent access, the service continued to accommodate individuals' needs either through home delivery or continued in-person clinics.

7.5 Ensuring that the Children's Public Health service reduces health inequalities in early years and maternal health

7.6 The Healthy Child Programme is a universal preventative service which provides families with a programme of screening, immunisation, health and development reviews, as well as a targeted and specialist offer to families and young people to support those most in need. In March 2021 the programme was extended from 0-19 years to include from preconception to 24 years of age for those most vulnerable and for children with a statutory requirement (care needs, additional health needs, disability.)

- 7.7 The Health Visiting service offers five universal, mandated contacts to all parents to support identification of needs and early intervention. This includes a vulnerable families service which works with women identified antenatally and until the baby is one year old. Additional resource has been agreed to increase the provision of this service within areas of high deprivation.
- 7.8 Health Visiting and Early Years Providers have implemented an 'Integrated Review at 2' pathway. Information sharing has improved, and children and families identified (or self-identifying) with any unmet need are now offered a joint review. The tongue tie (ankyloglossia) pathway and faltering growth pathway have also been updated to ensure that all families are receiving the support they require in a timely manner.
- 7.9 Several outreach clinics have been introduced across the County to encourage school age children, who are absent or not registered with a school, to participate in the health screening programme and to provide advice and support as required.
- 7.10 Capacity has been increased within the Children and Young People's Counselling Service to provide timely support to 2,400 Children and Young People with mild to moderate wellbeing needs each year across Kent.

7.11 The rate of male suicide declines

- 7.12 The potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on suicide rates was a concern during 2020-21. As soon as the pandemic hit the Suicide Prevention Programme took a number of actions. The service established a Real Time Suicide Surveillance (RTSS) system with Kent Police to monitor levels of suicide both generally and within key high-risk groups (such as men). The RTSS allows the service to understand more about what was going on in their lives.
- 7.13 The service introduced a 24-hour support service via text message. Anyone of any age can access support for free by texting the word 'Kent' to 85258. The service believes this may be more attractive to younger people and men who may prefer texting to speaking on a phone. The service also introduced a new programme with Citizens Advice to provide rapid access to an enhanced service for people with both financial and mental health difficulties. This is open to both sexes and is supporting many people whose employment and income was affected by COVID-19.
- 7.14 The service also provided funding to a wide range of charities and organisations such as Dads Unlimited who provide support to men who are going through family breakdown.

7.15 Ensuring equality of access to NHS Health Checks (age/sex/disability/race)

- 7.16 The NHS Health Check programme is targeted at 40-74-year-olds of both sexes, without a pre-defined existing health condition. This is delivered by the

Kent Community NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) in partnership with KCC. This programme was paused during the pandemic (March 2020 to September 2020), following guidance from Public Health England (PHE). Staff gradually restarted activity with some outreach events taking place in Quarter 4 of 2020-21.

- 7.17 In November/December 2020, KCC commissioning started to develop a targeted pilot to NHS Health Checks to target invitations based on cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk. This pilot will be rolled out in 2021-22 to ensure equality in uptake across genders.
- 7.18 The outreach workstream are looking to increase uptake in ethnic and minority groups. This workstream targets and reaches individuals directly in their communities. Examples include faith groups, clubs, businesses, and charities.
- 7.19 Invitations for an NHS Health Check are issued to all individuals. Reasonable adjustments are routinely made for disabled individuals, such as providing information in other formats and ensuring the space in which the NHS Health Check takes place can accommodate all persons.

7.20 Improved life chances and outcomes for vulnerable adults through service developments and transformation

- 7.21 Public Health Commissioners worked with services during 2020-21 to make their services available online, to deliver on their outcomes during the pandemic. Commissioners also supported redeploying of staff from services that unable to continue (i.e. Stop Smoking Services) to provide wellbeing calls for vulnerable clients who were accessing Drug and Alcohol Services. Public Health commissioning also procured some training around co-occurring conditions, so that front line workers who directly support these clients can understand the issues and support clients better.
- 7.22 Adult Social Care (ASC) hosts and co-chairs the Learning Disability Partnership, which enables people with a learning disability to have their say and influence service delivery and development.

7.23 The quality and range of services are improved through increasing engagement with service users and carers

- 7.24 Whilst transforming services to a remote offer, services engaged with their users on how they would like to receive their intervention (for example, what platform to use).
- 7.25 The Sexual Health Service's patients and local communities fed back on service development using patient, community and voluntary groups. These groups include a Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust-led (KCHFT) transgender advisory group, a Patient advisory group and HIV Talking Together peer support group, as well as KCC's Young People's Forum. All

patients who access the service are offered the opportunity to feed back on their experience.

- 7.26 During the pandemic, the Drug and Alcohol Service delivered medication to people's homes who were unable to access their medication from the pharmacy. They also increased their home detox programme for vulnerable clients and provided service users with phone devices so that they were able to contact clients.
- 7.27 A further measure implemented during the pandemic was a support service for people who are experiencing complex grief through bereavement (for under the age of 25). KCC worked with Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group and Medway Local Authority to commission a service that would help these individuals meet their need and improve their mental health.

JUSTICE AND PERSONAL SECURITY

8. Where appropriate, fewer young people become young offenders with regard to disability, sex and race

- 8.1 Kent's Youth Justice partnership offers prevention and diversion from the youth justice system. Our diversion programme in 2020-21 was 'KYDIS' (delivered by our health partner, 'We are With You') for children who have committed a low-level drugs offence. Our prevention offer is delivered by Adolescent Early Help which provides a holistic response to all children receiving an out-of-court disposal, and their families.
- 8.2 The Prevent team deal with hate crime referrals and work to prevent radicalisation. Innovative work is being done in prisons and on mental health (for example, with Punjab United) to reach young men so they can discuss hate crime and other issues.

Domestic Abuse

- 8.3 The Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS) is partnership funded through Public Health, Adults Social Care and Health, Districts, the Police and Crime Commissioners Office and Kent Fire and Rescue. The contract commenced in April 2017 and has been extended until March 2024. The contract is allotted to three providers who manage both community support (those who stay in their home) and safe accommodation services. Services are designed to be accessible across protected characteristics and funding was gained to employ five specialist Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers to support those who may have barriers of access to services.
- 8.4 In March 2020 the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy was approved by the Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group. This is a partnership group which includes the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioners Office, the NHS, Kent County Council, Medway Council, Kent Fire and Rescue, the National Probation Service and Districts.

This strategy makes a number of commitments to ensure that services are available to all people, an Easy Read version published, and funding from the then MHCLG was used to create a staff structure to support the partnership and actions.

- 8.5 Actions to support the strategy have included creating an inclusive and diverse social media campaign to increase awareness of domestic abuse which is now live, virtual workshops in November 2020 through KIDAS for a wide audience around best practice and focusing on those with protected characteristics (which received more than 10,000 event registrations) and the completion of a strategic needs assessment with clear gap analysis so we have better data to support understanding around why it might be harder for some demographics to access services. Work has also taken place around ensuring that the survivors' voice supports the development of strategy and commissioning, including the delivery of qualitative work with male victims of domestic abuse.
- 8.6 **The Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)** which are coordinated and managed by Kent Community Safety Team have been continuing to have a focus on equality issues relevant to the cases which inform learning and practice. For a number of cases reviewed and actioned during 2020-21 equalities issues were highlighted, for example: the need to ensure hard to reach communities such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities were considered by agencies to reduce barriers, a need to ensure male victims of domestic abuse received equal support from services, age-related factors regarding both children and the elderly as victims, mental health factors, and physical disability heightening vulnerability from domestic abuse. These findings resulted in the relevant agencies having to review and update their policies and procedures and change how they respond in future. Further information about these reviews can be found at this link: [Domestic Homicide Reviews - Kent County Council](#).

Community Wardens

- 8.7 As part of the Kent Together response during the pandemic, the KCC Community Wardens refocused their activity in order to identify and provide support to the most vulnerable in our communities which included those who were vulnerable due to their circumstances (for example, age and disability), those having to self-isolate or who were isolated with no support available to them. Out of a total 19,803 activities and tasks recorded by the Community Wardens as undertaken during 2020-21, 82% of these tasks were related to people aged over 55, 27% related to people with a disability, 21% with poor mental health and 11% with dementia. Such activities included supporting events and groups and one-to-one support such as making sure vulnerable residents had essential food provisions and medical prescriptions, and also linking them into the services they needed.

Trading Standards

- 8.8 Trading Standard's work to protect vulnerable people, especially the elderly, from scammers and doorstep crime continued during the pandemic. Activity adjusted to contacting the scam victims (or potential victims) by telephone

instead of visits, and the Victim Safeguarding Officer was able to undertake 144 engagements and saved losses of £290,219. This included preventing an elderly lady with onset dementia from losing £13,000 to fraudulent roofing work and also facilitating her welfare referral to social care, and preventing an elderly and vulnerable man from losing £24,000 to a fraudulent solar panel trader, while also assisting him with accessing amenities and health care.

PARTICIPATION

9. POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

9.1 We will listen to and engage with communities and partners to inform the way we plan, design, commission and deliver services. Communities can have their say through consultations and engagement activity

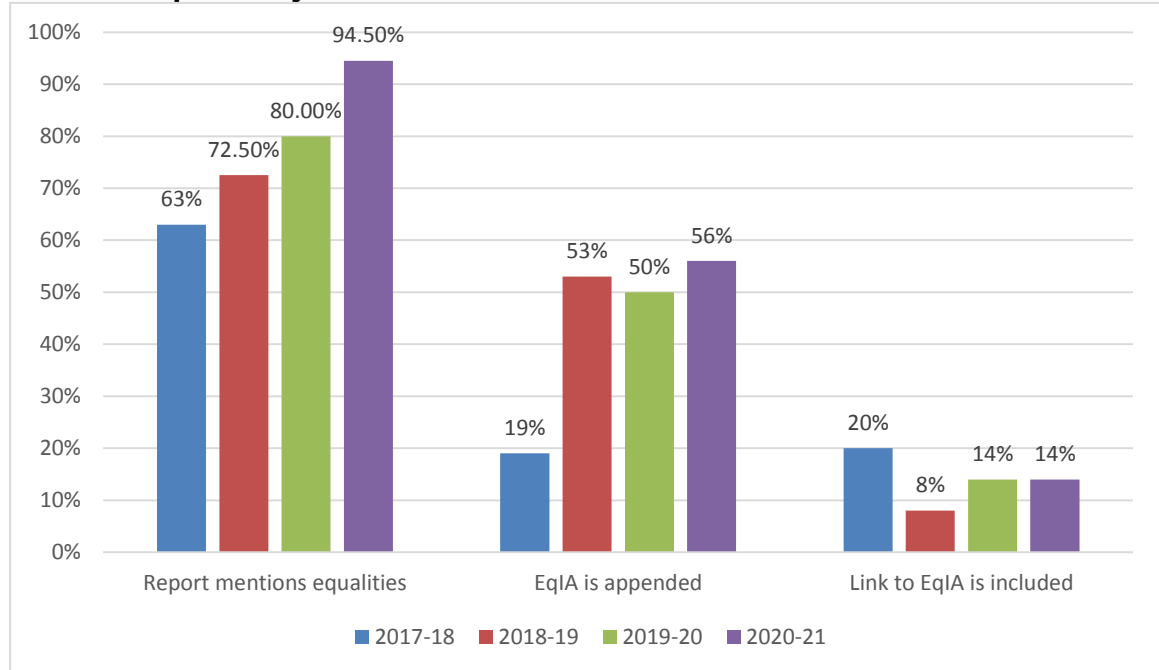
Engagement and Consultation

- 9.2 The targeting of engagement and consultation activity has been further developed in 2020-21. Guidance on stakeholder mapping and consultation planning has been updated which is available for all staff to view on KNet, helping teams to identify and consider their stakeholders and how best to reach and engage those with protected characteristics. This planning continues to be supported with advice and guidance from the Engagement and Consultation team. The team has introduced the targeting of social media posts through paid adverts to extend the reach so that, for example, those within a particular age bracket can be reached to encourage their participation.
- 9.3 In response to COVID-19 lockdowns, new ways to engage the public were explored including the use of online exhibition software and Teams interactive workshops to replicate the physical experience in an online environment. This enabled more people to have access to these events, including those who would have struggled participating in face-to-face events pre-lockdown, for example, those with caring responsibilities or certain disabilities.
- 9.4 The promotion of how to request consultation materials in alternative formats remained a consistent feature during the pandemic. Some consultations have alternative formats available at the outset, such as British Sign Language videos, audio, or easy read versions, as determined by stakeholder mapping and equality impact assessments.
- ##### **Complaints**
- 9.5 Of 5,273 complaints received in the financial year 2020-21 year, 264 were categorised Equality and Regulatory of which 18 were about equalities issues, for example, discrimination based. Of these, four were upheld with lessons learned recorded with the following actions taken: three were given a formal apology, and one resulted in performance management action. The service also delivered training to SEN and CYPE staff – over 200 attended the sessions which focused on responding to customers and looked at tailored responses to customers based on their individual needs.

Peer Review

- 9.6 In November 2020, ASCH asked the Local Government Association (LGA) to undertake a peer review against the LGA's Equality Framework for Local Government. The basis for the review was a benchmark against four areas of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) performance: 'Knowing and working with your communities', 'Leadership and organisational commitment', 'Responsive services and customer care', and 'Diverse and engaged workforce'. The report included a number of recommendations and has been used to support EDI activity taking place in 2021-22.
- 9.7 The peer review also helped to provide a focus for ASCH's 'Making A Difference Every Day' (MADE) approach, which was developed during 2020 partly in response to the need to respond, recover and reset as a result of the pandemic. Recognising major events such as the pandemic highlighting existing racial inequalities, the renewed focus on addressing inclusion issues, and that social care has a role to play in tackling society's injustices, MADE was developed with a strong focus on a person-centred approach to fully support the diverse range of people supported by Adult Social Care in Kent. ASCH embarked on wide-ranging staff engagement exercises to inform MADE's development and ran an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) workshop to bring together what the service understood about the people of Kent and its service users. The resulting Equalities Action Plan forms a key strand of MADE to ensure that any proposed changes will seek to make services more inclusive and responsive, particularly for any groups with protected characteristics.
- 9.8 All Members and Officers will be responsible for ensuring that the PSED is met in their day-to-day work and when making decisions, and publish Equality Analysis with all key and significant decisions**
- 9.9 2020-21 shows improvement in the extent to which equalities is acknowledged and considered in KCC's decision-making and business as usual processes. As shown in Table 1, in 2020-21, 94.5% of committee reports (including those with Key Decisions) mentioned equalities, compared to 80% in 2019-20 and 72% in 2019-18, the previous year reported. 56% of reports had appended an EqIA compared to 50% in 2019-20, and 14% included a link to the EqIA, level to the previous year.

Table 1: EqlA Analysis



9.10 Not all items that are taken to KCC’s committees require an EqlA or equalities considerations, for example, service updates, passporting of funding or signing of grant agreements. However, Key Decisions do require equalities consideration through an EqlA, and the percentage of Key Decisions with either an EqlA attached or a link provided stands at 63% for 2020-21, while the percentage of Key Decisions with EqlAs, a link, or a reference to equalities stands at 96%. It should be noted that a significant number of urgent decisions were processed, and indeed, a much higher number of Key Decisions overall processed in 2020-21 at 141 compared to 81 Key Decisions in 2019-20. This highlights the responsive nature of KCC’s actions during the pandemic, but there is work to be done to ensure that all Key Decisions are supported by an EqlA as we transition through the pandemic into less reactive approaches to business as usual.

The EqlA App

9.11 Overall, 94.5% of reports taken to committee referenced equalities, and 63% either attached or provided a link to an EqlA. This is a positive trajectory for demonstrating that KCC is considering equalities as part of its PSED duty, but there is room for improvement. To aid this, the Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance (SPRCA) division reviewed the EqlA process and policy and during 2020-21 worked with Infrastructure to develop a new online process for completing an EqlA. The EqlA App was created using Microsoft’s software and was designed to not only make the process simpler for staff, but also to provide a single EqlA library on KNet for all staff to access. It is also supported by a new analytical dashboard which will provide CMT and KCC’s Corporate Equality Group with analysis of trends and data from completed EqlAs across the organisation, to support their equalities oversight role. Development of the App was supported by user testing across services during 2020, and was approved by CMT in December 2020 along with an updated

EqlA Policy. It was formally launched to staff in the first quarter of 2021-22, and so its progress and take-up will be followed up in next year's Annual Equalities Report.

9.12 Ensure that when we use ICT it is fully accessible for learning, working and getting into services

9.13 All Technology products supplied via Infrastructure commissioning comply with the ICT Technology Strategy, which is itself aligned to the 'Digital Inclusion Standards' as laid out by The Cabinet Office. The Technology Refresh Programme (TRP) is in planning stages at present and we have ensured that representatives from the Level Playing Field staff group and Digital Accessibility team are included in the working group to ensure inclusivity.

9.14 Digital Accessibility Compliance is a mandatory legislative requirement of all systems and software that is delivered under commissions constructed by the Technology Strategy & Commissioning Team (TC&S), and all future procurement activities, in line with and contributing to the EqlA process. To support this, the Digital Accessibility Team have progressed KCC's digital accessibility agenda through workstreams such as:

- Manual accessibility audits on KCC websites which significantly helped mitigate the risk of non-compliance, especially for websites subject to formal monitoring processes as part of the Accessibility Regulations.
- Staff training and awareness, for example workshops about creating inclusive and accessible web content, promoting digital accessibility through staff messaging via KNet and KMail, and running an 'empathy lab' during Digital Skills Week, and using Directorate Accessibility Champions and Digital champions to promote new digital accessibility features.
- The Digital Accessibility team have engaged with staff groups, the Sensory Services team and external disability bodies to help share knowledge and maintain continuous improvement of KCC's work practices.

9.15 ACCESS TO SERVICES AND THE LOCAL AREA

9.16 Protected characteristics will be considered within all highways and transport schemes identified within Local Transport Plan 4, as well as the schemes' potential to advance equality of opportunity

9.17 During the pandemic, the Public Transport team changed the eligibility for users of the Kent Karrier bus service in order to enable members to choose family members to travel on their behalf. They identified that it was the only means of transportation for some people who were vulnerable, such as being of older age and/or having a disability, but could not travel, for example, due to shielding. Users were allowed to elect someone else to travel on their behalf by making phone calls to the bus operators.

9.18 The Kent English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is normally set at the default time of Monday to Friday 9.30am to 11pm, all day Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays. At the beginning of the pandemic, and

at no additional cost to KCC, the Public Transport team removed the 9.30am restriction to enable holders of an ENCTS pass – the elderly, disabled and vulnerable – to access those shopping hours where such groups could shop safely earlier in the morning. The take-up of this was relatively low, but for those who did it was a lifeline, allowing them to shop without the need for long queues and at no extra cost.

9.19 The protected characteristics of all members of a community will be considered when investing in roads, facilities and utilities that are identified through the GIF, and delivered to meet the needs of Kent’s population changes

9.20 There is particular opportunity, given the high quantum of housing growth, to deliver specific services focused on members of the community with protected characteristics through garden settlements. An example of this is Otterpool Park in Folkestone & Hythe District where there are plans for up to 10,000 homes. The development is committed to delivering a school facility specifically for those with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

9.21 Kent County Council’s Infrastructure Funding Statement illustrates three case studies which were funded, in part, by developer contributions. Each case study illustrates how these contributions consider the protected characteristics of all members of a community. For example, one case study focussed on The Amelia Tunbridge Wells which will provide a range of community services. This will include adult education classes for example numeracy and literacy skills training for the community including those whose first language may not be English. Another case study features Ebbsfleet Green Primary School which has a specialist resource base provision for up to 15 pupils with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

9.22 Irrespective of age, disability, race or religion and belief, Kent residents should be able to access our county’s high-quality landscapes and environment

9.23 The County Council has a policy of least restrictive access for the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network. Since 2007, 5,867 stiles have been removed from the network (46%), the result is a network that is 70% stile free and more accessible to the disabled and elderly. In 2020 and 2021 a further 372 stiles were removed. All changes to the Public Rights of Way network are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. Proposed diversions must be at least as accessible as the original route with an expectation that improvements to accessibility will be secured / provided.

9.24 During 2020-21 the Old Chalk New Downs (OCND) project held several events and engagement activities specifically to counter access problems often experienced by those with mobility issues trying to get to the OCND project locations. These events were held at locations with easy access trails, plus guided walks starting and finishing from train stations. In collaboration with partners, the project also delivered events for families including country

park open days. In response to the pandemic, the project team invested in a portable action video camera and KCC staff volunteered their time to film walks accessible in the OCND project area. These were used to create 'StoryMaps', which give descriptions of walking trails as well as a video, interactive map and images. These walks were shared via social media and mailing list to enable those with little access to green spaces the opportunity to still feel connected to the outdoors and nature.

- 9.25 KCC's Country Parks were maintained throughout the pandemic, providing valuable open space during lockdowns for our local communities and visitors and were often open when other parks were closed. The Country Parks service kept equalities considerations at the forefront of their planning during this period particularly to ensure accessibility – for example, maintaining the 'trampers' (mobility scooters), providing hand sanitisers at wheelchair height, keeping toilet facilities open when the centres were closed, and ensuring restricted access to the cafes was accessible. Other improvements were made during 2020, for example, Grove Ferry Picnic Site used LEADER rural economy funding to make accessibility improvements, including a 100 metre rolled stone path, refurbishing a fishing platform for use by people with disabilities, and a new changing room.

9.26 The LRA service in Kent will continue to understand its local communities' needs, and tailor its services accordingly

Libraries, Registration & Archives

- 9.27 During the periods of lockdown Libraries, Registration & Archives (LRA) adapted many of their services to remain accessible to customers, particularly those with Protected Characteristics. Digital resources became the main way to access the LRA services and usage increased extraordinarily with online joining being instigated early on. These resources include e-books, e-magazines and e-newspapers all of which have accessibility features enabling those with disabilities to engage. Social Media content developed exponentially which developed staff's digital skills and confidence to create accessible content such as subtitled content and Makaton signed Baby Rhyme Time. LRA also produced and presented dual language Story Times for example in Romanian ([Storytime link](#)), and also produced a multi-sensory Story Time for people with learning disabilities ([Multi-sensory Storytime link](#)).
- 9.28 The 'Books Beyond Words' reading groups for people with learning disabilities met virtually throughout lockdowns, and actually met much more regularly as most other community activities had halted because of COVID-19. A film was produced to help users join ([Beyond Words link](#)), and Library staff attended regularly for support and maintaining library contacts. Planning also began on delivering virtual Dementia Awareness sessions for staff and volunteers – offering a chance for people to become a Dementia Friend, explaining how the library service can support people and carers of people with dementia.
- 9.29 While the Home Library Service (HLS) was suspended during lockdown, LRA created the befriending service, whereby staff telephoned their typically physically excluded HLS customers to offer a friendly ear during

lockdown. 255 of 588 HLS customers took up this service and over 1,000 phone calls were made during the first lockdown. Over 2,500 mobile library customers and postal loan users were also telephoned. A survey of HLS customers demonstrated that the befriending service had a positive impact and helped LRA's vulnerable customers to feel less lonely during the pandemic. As a result, LRA are trialling a Reading Agency initiative 'Reading Friends' in the Maidstone borough to counter social isolation through reading.

- 9.30 Other adaptations of the library services during the height of the pandemic included creating the 'Select & Collect' service from selected libraries, which helped support people from different communities who could not access LRA's services digitally which helped to support mental wellbeing, and the mobile libraries provided an outreach service into communities by offering Select & Collect so people with limited mobility could still access a wide range of physical books. And LRA was also able to provide the 'CoderDojo' sessions (computer coding for children) online along with the Summer Reading Challenge so that younger customers could still take part in library activities.

Sport & Physical Activity Service

- 9.31 During the periods of lockdown, the Service adapted and provided a range of activities and information including:
- 9.32 Secured and distributed funding, including £220,000 from Sport England, to help reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 and reduce the widening inequalities gap of physical activity and sport among underrepresented groups, including: people with disabilities, people with long term health conditions, people from lower socio-economic groups and people from ethnically diverse communities. See this [case studies link](#) and short [film clip link](#) for further details of these projects.
- 9.33 For children and young people, the service created Virtual Kent School Games competitions, 'My Active Rainbow'/'My Active Life' challenges enabling young people to work through a series of challenges to win medals, and Virtual Satellite Clubs for young people interested in box fit, hockey, basketball and handball. Online information was provided for families through the [Everyday Active website](#) suggesting indoor and outdoor physical activity ideas. The website was tested by target audiences, for example, Kent Association for the Blind to ensure that the website, campaign and resources were inclusive and fit for purpose in encouraging a diverse range of people to move more.
- 9.34 For older people, Virtual Sporting Memories Groups were created including for those living with dementia and their carers, leaflets were produced providing advice to older people on exercises at home, distributed by the Community Hubs to vulnerable older people in their communities, and the service also worked with local charities to provide sports equipment packs to be distributed to vulnerable families.

- 9.35 The service adapted its communication, guidance and materials to operate safely within the pandemic, including developing safeguarding guidance about safe delivery of online activities ([Delivering Super Online Sessions link](#))

10. Looking ahead

- 10.1 The year for 2020-21 was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but as this report demonstrates, KCC's services kept equality and diversity fully central to their responses to ensure that staff, services users and residents were safe and supported. Many of the innovations and adaptations will continue as services resume a new 'business as usual' in the light of the pandemic, notably many of those digital services that were developed and helped to increase inclusion in services and activities. As we look ahead to reviewing progress made for 2021-22, it will be important for KCC services to focus on embedding and mainstreaming equalities considerations into the new operating environment created by the long-term nature of the pandemic.
- 10.2 Responding to, adapting, and recovering from the pandemic means that consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion remains vital to KCC's strategic direction. To this end, the 2016-2020(21) Equality and Diversity objectives will be refreshed in conjunction with the development of KCC's new Strategic Statement/Five Year Plan, which will be developed, consulted on and published in 2022. The new equality objectives will be developed with services across KCC, and it is our intention to embed them within KCC's new Strategic Statement to ensure that equality priorities are delivered as an integral part of the council's overarching strategic plan.