

Kent County Council

Annual Equality and Diversity Report for April 2022 to March 2023

Contents

- 1. Executive Summary 3
- 2. Introduction 8
- 3. Strengthen our equality data collection and analysis across our services to better understand people’s needs and the cumulative impact of the council’s actions on people with protected characteristics. 10
 - Strengthening our equality data collection 10
 - Strengthening our equality data analysis 11
 - Better understanding people’s needs..... 20
 - Conclusions & Next Steps..... 23
- 4. Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies. 24
 - Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Key Contracts 24
 - Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Commissioning & Procurement Processes 25
 - Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion via KCC’s Trading Companies 28
 - Conclusion & Next Steps 29
- 5. Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded. 30
 - Council information is accessible for everyone 30
 - Council services are accessible for everyone 34
 - Digital Exclusion..... 40
 - Conclusion & Next Steps 42
- 6. Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities. 44
 - Work with Strategic Partnerships 44
 - Partnership Working 46
 - Conclusion & Next Steps 47
- 7. Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour. 48

An inclusive employer	48
Fair, open, and equitable access to career progression	54
A trusted working environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour	55
Conclusion & Next Steps	57
8. Attract and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation which reflects the communities that KCC serves.	58
KCC's Workforce Profile	58
Retaining a diverse workforce.....	59
Attracting a diverse workforce.....	61
Conclusion & Next Steps	63
9. Conclusion.....	64

Useful information

This document is available in a range of formats and can be explained in other languages. To ask for an alternative version, please

Email: alternativeformats@kent.gov.uk

Phone with Text relay: 18001 03000 414141

Or write to: Kent County Council, Room 2.70, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the detail of how the council has complied with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. In addition to discharging the council’s duties under the Equality Act 2010, this report is intended to support the identification of priority areas for improvement, highlight where specific action is required, inform where additional measurement mechanisms are needed and demonstrate areas of success. The findings of this report are a vital tool for KCC in ensuring the continuous improvement of our equalities performance.

- 1.2 In line with KCC’s 2022-2026 Equality Objectives, as published in Framing Kent’s Future, this report considers the council’s performance with equalities across equality data collection and analysis; procurement and commissioning; accessibility of information and services; strategic partnership working and the inclusivity and diversity of the workforce. In the assessment of our performance across the Equality Objectives, both the trends emerging from quantitative data obtained from specific services, and anecdotal information on equalities activities from directorates have been considered.

- 1.3 A summary of the headline issues emerging across the six Equality Objectives is detailed below.

Strengthen our equality data collection and analysis across our services to better understand people’s needs and the cumulative impact of the council’s actions on people with protected characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whilst 83% of the EqlAs published during 2022-23 utilised data on the protected groups impacted, only 59% utilised national data/evidence, suggesting that this may be an underutilised data source within equality analysis. This data could be particularly useful to support understanding of the impact of changes on protected characteristic groups for which service user data may not be available. As such, this trend will be a priority for further consideration with Corporate Equality Group in the coming year.• Across 2022-23 EqlAs, the greatest number of potential negative impacts (and mitigating actions) were identified for disability, age and carers responsibilities, whilst the fewest were identified for marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation and gender/transgender. This suggests that negative impacts are more frequently identified for protected characteristic groups which typically experience more ‘physical’ or ‘tangible’ negative impacts, rather than groups who might be more likely to experience ‘intangible’ or
--	---

	<p>'hidden' negative impacts. This has been identified as an area for a focused piece of work with CEG in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across the Key Decisions for 2022-23, 66% included an EqlA as a link or attachment. Whilst this is a marked improvement on the previous year with 25% Key Decisions having an EqlA attached and 39% having an EqlA linked, and demonstrates improved compliance with KCC's EqlA Policy, this needs to be sustained alongside a wider review of how successfully other policy provisions have been implemented in 2023-24. This will include monitoring of completion of the associated online learning module. • The report demonstrates multiple examples of best practice in equality analysis conducted during the period; opportunities to harness these to help improve other services' future analysis needs to be explored. • Whilst analysis for 2022-23 suggests that across many of KCC's services, service user equality data is routinely collected, there is the potential to develop a fuller understanding of the extent and status of service user equality data collection across the council. • There is also the opportunity to strengthen our equality data collection via the publication and socialisation of the updated 'About You' questions, which is expected in 2023-24.
<p>Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCC's services provided a range of examples of their consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion across commissioning and procurement activity during 2022-23. This included examples of co-production, detailed equalities analysis, social value and provisions made within tender documentation, specifications, and KPIs. • However, detailed analysis for this objective was limited by the extent of measurement mechanisms currently in place. As such, the priority for improvement within this objective will be the development of additional mechanisms to measure our equality performance. This will be supported by both the wider development of KCC's commercial function, and our Trading Companies' ambitions to develop their policies and workforce equality profile measures. • KCC achieved a score of 'Realise' for diversity and inclusion in procurement in the Employer's Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE) benchmarking tool. Future improvement within this objective will also be informed by the recommendations of this evaluation.

Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded.

- For 2022-23, this objective constitutes KCC's greatest area of success, with more examples of how council information and services were made accessible than it was possible to include within the report. This included examples of where a broader understanding of 'accessibility' has been adopted, to consider the needs of people across the protected characteristic groups, including the experience of 'intangible' or 'hidden' barriers. In particular, there were several examples of best practice emerging from 2022-23 consultations. As such, our priority will be highlighting the areas of best practice and identifying how these can be used to inform subsequent service developments over 2023-24.
- Of the complaints received in the period, there was one example related to accessibility where a solution was then actioned. In addition, 12 compliments were received that related to the council providing support to meet individuals' needs arising from disability.
- The baseline has been established for KCC's performance with regard to digital accessibility, with a clear range of actions already underway to drive improvement over 2023-24.
- The baseline has also been established for the level and type of requests completed by the Alternative Formats team, which will continue to be monitored over the lifetime of the 2022-2026 objectives.
- Digital exclusion has already been well embedded within equality analysis for 2022-23 and supported via a range of digital inclusion projects. We will look to sustain and strengthen this into the future.

Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities

- A key priority for 2023-24 will be the development of a mechanism to understand the full extent of KCC's Strategic Partnerships, and the equalities achievements and/or opportunities that they bring, to enable more detailed analysis for this objective within the following year's report.
- Looking at available data for 2022-23, the majority of examples of partnership working toward positive equality outcomes have supported better understanding of the diverse needs of communities, over specific action to support them. It is hoped that as this improved understanding becomes embedded and dispersed, this will begin to have an impact on how the diverse needs of our communities are physically supported.

Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour.

- Whilst 82.0% staff responded positively to questions around 'Inclusion and Fair Treatment' in the 2022 Staff Survey, more detailed review of responses suggests the need to continue to promote disability inclusion, ensure staff feel that their individual needs will be met, and that staff they feel comfortable to discuss them.
- Analysis of the 2022-23 TCP ratings demonstrated that whilst there was improvement in some areas, there are still some areas of disparity, which have increased in the period for LGBTQ+ employees, younger and older employees (aged under 25 and over 65), and disabled employees.
- As of December 2022, approximately 11.4% of the workforce had an adjustment in place; considering the council's workforce profile, it seems that there are opportunities to promote and increase this proportion further. This will be a continued focus, alongside promotion of Inclusion Passports.
- Changes in the equality profile of new apprenticeship starts in 2022-23 were largely in line with the overarching themes of movement and change in the council's total workforce profile, suggesting that these development opportunities were accessible and inclusive to most groups of KCC staff. Whilst apprenticeships were particularly utilised by younger staff, trends associated with disabled staff, staff with a faith/religion, and older staff need to continue to be monitored.
- Whilst Staff Survey 2022 responses regarding bullying/harassment were relatively even across the protected characteristics, these identified that further work is required regarding staff experiences with non-employees, and for LGBTQ+ staff and disabled staff in particular. To support future improvement, the impact of 2022-23 activity will need to be reviewed alongside new data arising from the updated Health & Safety Incident and Accident reporting form.

Attract and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation which reflects the communities that KCC serves.

- Despite some areas of disparity, KCC's workforce profile for 2022-23 is broadly reflective of the Kent county profile, with some protected characteristic groups reaching their highest levels within the workforce in the past few years. The diversity of KCC's leadership group has improved in 2022-23, however there is more work to be done to continue to improve the representation of female staff and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff.


- 
- KCC job applicant demographics for 2022-23 were largely proportionate to the greater Kent profile, with the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants and female applicants surpassing the county profile and Disabled applicants applying in a smaller proportion compared to the county profile.
 - Data suggests that our workforce diversity has been maintained largely via new recruits, with the staff turnover rate for staff aged 25 and under, staff aged 65 and over, transgender staff and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff surpassing the organisational average.

Figure 1: 2022-23 Annual Equality & Diversity Report Executive Summary

- 1.4 Evidently, the 2022-23 report has supported the identification of key priorities for the future, both in terms of specific areas for improvement, and where additional measurement mechanisms need to be established to enable more detailed performance analysis. Furthermore, whilst this is the first year that KCC is reporting against the new Equality Objectives, their key principles have already been embedded across council services, with numerous examples of best practice available in the main body of this report.
- 1.5 Looking ahead, work will be undertaken both within directorates and with specific services to drive improvements in identified areas and utilise the learning opportunities of our areas of success. This will also be supported by a focused session with the Corporate Equality Group (CEG), to identify the group's specific priorities and the actions it will take to support their delivery/achievement.

2. Introduction

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

2.1 As a public authority, Kent County Council (KCC) must comply with the **Public Sector Equality Duty** (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010. The PSED includes both general duties, and specific duties. In the exercise of its functions, the **general duty** requires KCC to have paid due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited in the Act,
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic¹, and those who do not,
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

2.2 The **specific duties** under the PSED require that the council publishes annual Gender Pay Gap information, annual **'equality information'** to demonstrate their compliance with the general duty and one or more **'equality objectives'** in support of the achievement of the general duty, at least every four years.

2.3 This **Annual Equality & Diversity Report** acts as the **'equality information'** to demonstrate the detail of how the council has complied with this equality legislation between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, including progress and activities that contributed to **KCC's 2022-2026 Equality Objectives**.

KCC's Equality Objectives (2022-2026)

2.4 With the publication of **Framing Kent's Future**, KCC included its Equality Objectives within its Strategic Statement for the first time. This decision was made in order to demonstrate the council's commitment to delivering on these objectives and to highlight the centrality of equalities to the council's wider goals and ambitions for 2022-26.

2.5 For 2022-2026, KCC has six **Equality Objectives**, four of which are outward-looking and concern our residents and service users, and two of which are inward-looking, concerning our workforce:

¹ The protected characteristics are Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage/civil partnership, Pregnancy/maternity, Race, Religion/belief, Sex, and Sexual orientation. KCC have also made a commitment to consider the impact on people with Carers responsibilities as part of their equality analysis, although this is not a characteristic which is protected under the Equality Act 2010.

- Strengthen our equality data collection and analysis across our services to better understand people’s needs and the cumulative impact of the council’s actions on people with protected characteristics.
- Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies.
- Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded.
- Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities.
- Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour.
- Attract and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation which reflects the communities that KCC serves.

2.6 These objectives are broad, strategic and embrace a range of activity across the council’s directorates and services, marking a shift in approach on the previous set of **Equality Objectives** which were largely service specific. This will enable a unified, council-wide approach to achieving our objectives, as each objective largely translates to service delivery across directorates. However, this does also mean that both the structure of the report, and the methodology for collecting data to inform the report, have changed compared with the **Annual Equality & Diversity Report 2021-22**.

2.7 For 2022-23 the report will take you through each of the **Equality Objectives** methodically, starting with the outward facing objectives, and finishing with the workforce objectives. This year, our Directorates (Adult Social Care & Health (ASCH), Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) and Growth, Environment & Transport (GET)) were asked to respond to each of the Equality Objectives, where possible for their services, instead of being required to respond to Equality Objectives specific to their individual services. As such, we have been able to develop a cross-directorate picture of performance for each of the Equality Objectives. In addition, some specific Corporate services (within the Chief Executive’s Department (CED) and Deputy Chief Executive’s Department (DCED)) were asked to provide information to further support this cross-directorate picture of our performance.

2.8 As the first year that KCC is reporting against the new Equality Objectives, it is expected that this report will work to establish a baseline with which to measure our future progress; support the identification of priority areas and/or specific action that needs to be taken to enable progress and help establish where additional measurement mechanisms need to be developed to improve our understanding of our performance.

3. Strengthen our equality data collection and analysis across our services to better understand people’s needs and the cumulative impact of the council’s actions on people with protected characteristics.

3.1 In our approach to this Equality Objective, we have considered information available on the current status of equality data collection across services; key EqIA App Dashboard data from 2022-23; policy changes that have been introduced to support continuous improvement; the types of data that have been used by services to inform service delivery and equality analysis, and the additional learning opportunities that have been made available to support staff understanding of the needs of people with protected characteristics. This has also been supplemented with three detailed case studies looking at the equality profile of Let’s Talk Kent registrations and 2022 Annual Budget Consultation participants; the findings of Active Kent & Medway’s Tackling Inequalities through Sport and Physical Activity report, and the activity undertaken by the Safeguarding, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance service. The latter two offer best practice examples of how the council has undertaken equality analysis to better understand people’s needs across a range of themes.

Strengthening our equality data collection

KCC Equality Data Collection

3.2 Where possible, KCC’s services collect protected characteristic information about their service users, in order to better understand who their current customers are, which groups might be missing, and to support activity to understand and meet the needs of service users with particular protected characteristics.² For example, equality information is collected by the **No Use Empty** service at the point of application, within **Active Travel** cycle training packages, and in regular customer satisfaction surveys conducted by **Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs)** and **Libraries**. The Children, Young People & Education (CYPE) **Strengthening Independence Service** collects feedback from all families within the service three times a year and has worked closely with **Kent Analytics** to analyse the responses and understand where existing procedures need to be improved or amended.³ Equality data is also collected from participants across **Kent Youth Voice** services; as of the end of March 2023, this data indicated that the service had engaged a diverse range of young people in service delivery, with 24% participants Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, 19%

² Whilst services may ask service users to provide their equality information, this is always voluntary, with individuals able to chose not to declare.

³ Most recently, analysis has identified the need for improved communication.

participants having Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and 10% participants identifying as Trans or Non-binary. Whilst this provides a perspective on the nature of equality data collection at KCC, it is hoped that over the coming years, our understanding of the full extent and quality of equality data collection across our services will improve.

About You

- 3.3 KCC uses 'About You' questions when collecting protected characteristic information about service users. In the past year, it was identified that some of the questions and answers included outdated terminology that might not offer responders the opportunity to accurately reflect aspects of their identity as they understand it. As such, a project was begun between KCC's Consultation Team and Analytics Team to reconcile the council's About You questions with up-to-date standards, as set in the Census. These have been through a thorough engagement exercise with the Corporate Equality Group (CEG), which includes representatives from the council's **staff groups**, to ensure their appropriateness. It is expected that these will be approved and available for use in the following reporting period, with future review to be undertaken where required.

Strengthening our equality data analysis

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) & the EqIA App Dashboard

- 3.4 Following the findings of the 2021-22 Annual Equality & Diversity Report which demonstrated that compliance with the requirement for all Key Decisions to be supported by an EqIA had decreased in recent years, changes were made to strengthen the EqIA Policy (see **3.9**), and communications were issued via various channels⁴ to make staff aware and drive improvement over 2022-23. As a result, we have seen significant progress in compliance with this policy position.
- 3.5 Across all Key Decisions for 2022-23, 66% included an EqIA as a link or attachment. This is a marked improvement on the figure of 25-39% for the previous year.⁵ A closer analysis shows that there was a significant shift to 91% compliance in Quarter 3 of 2022-23, following 45% compliance in Quarter 2; this may be associated with the dissemination of the 2021-22 findings in this period. Whilst this demonstrates a positive step in strengthening our equality analysis for Key Decisions, priorities for the future will include maintaining this improved

⁴ Including via Corporate Directors, CEG, GET Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Group and communications for staff and managers.

⁵ In 2021-22, 25% Key Decisions had attached an EqIA and 39% had linked an EqIA. Since 2022-23, monitoring has collated this into one category to no longer differentiate between where EqIAs are provided as a link or as an attachment.

compliance, ensuring officers are following the full EqlA App process, and beginning to build on the quality of the analysis that is being completed. In particular, work is required to ensure that officers are always using the EqlA App to conduct their analysis, (this was not done for 18% of Key Decisions) and ensuring that these are approved in-App by the Head of Service prior to the Key Decision date (this was not completed for a further 13% of Key Decisions).

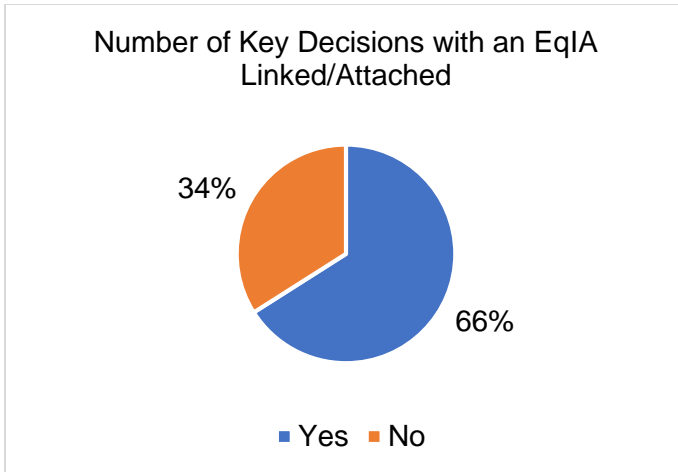


Figure 2: Number of Key Decisions with an EqlA Linked/Attached

3.6 Data inputted into EqlAs in the EqlA App automatically flows into the EqlA App Dashboard in Power BI⁶, which offers a rich source of data on how equalities analysis is being undertaken across the council. The Dashboard shows that during 2022-23, 139 EqlAs were published via the EqlA App; the directorate breakdown of these is summarised in the chart below.

⁶ Power BI is a data visualisation platform available within the Microsoft suite that enables the creation of data dashboards to report and visualise data in a range of styles and formats, including graphs and charts.

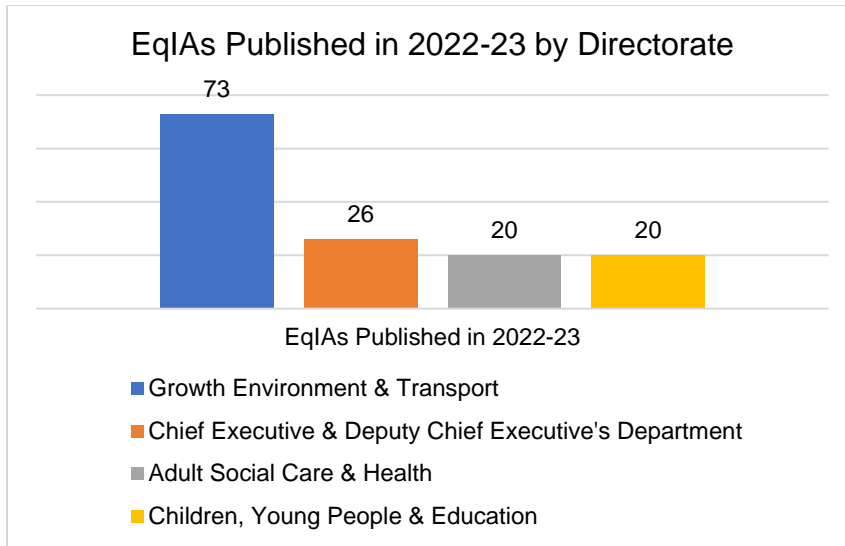


Figure 3: EqIAs Published in 2022-23 by Directorate

- 3.7 This is a significant increase on the 83 EqIAs published in the last Annual Equality & Diversity report period (between App launch in June 2021, and March 2022). Closer analysis shows that there was a gradual increase in the number of EqIAs published in each quarter of 2022-23. This was accompanied with a gradual increase in the number of new users each quarter. Overall, this demonstrates that staff engagement with the EqIA process and the EqIA App has continued to grow over the course of 2022-23, which in turn provides us with a more accurate picture of equality analysis across the council. Similarly to the previous year, the vast majority of EqIAs published in 2022-23 concerned projects or programmes, with a significant proportion concerning strategies or policies, and commissioning or procurement.
- 3.8 Quarterly analysis of the EqIA App Dashboard has been presented at CEG meetings since December 2022 with the introduction of the Policy Officer for Equality role. The form of this analysis has continued to be refined in order to best support the identification of priorities for progress, and how CEG can work to support these. Some of the key findings that have been presented and discussed at the group during 2022-23 include:
- When completing an EqIA, Responsible Officers are asked about the supporting evidence for their analysis; in order to proceed, they must answer positively to one of the three options available⁷. **Across the 139 EqIAs published in 2022-23, 83% had data related to the protected groups**

⁷ This means that officers must answer yes to at least one of the following questions: 'Do you have data related to the protected groups of people impacted by this activity?', 'Is it possible to get the data in a timely and cost effective way?', 'Is there national evidence/data that you can use?'

- impacted, for 83% it was possible to get this data in a timely and cost-effective way, and for 59% there was national evidence or data that could be used.** This suggests that national evidence/data is potentially underutilised in the council's equality analysis; this is interesting because this type of data could be particularly useful to support understanding of how different groups could be impacted by changes, particularly for protected characteristics where service user data is not available. Further exploration of this will be a future area of focus for CEG.
- **The greatest number of potential negative impacts (and mitigating actions) were identified for disability, age and carers responsibilities, whilst the fewest were identified for marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation and gender/transgender.** This is somewhat surprising given that being a carer is not a characteristic protected under the Equality Act 2010, but a characteristic that KCC has made a commitment to consider within its equality analysis. In addition, it would appear that negative impacts are more frequently identified for protected characteristic groups which typically experience more 'physical' or 'tangible' negative impacts, rather than groups who might be more likely to experience 'intangible' or 'hidden' negative impacts. This has been identified as an area for a focused piece of work with CEG in the future, which can be complemented with review of how services have attempted to mitigate intangible or hidden negative impacts in 2022-23, which is detailed in sections **5.17-5.22** of this report.
 - Of the 139 Published EqlAs, 74 identified no negative impacts. This enabled interesting discussion around EqlAs where this might have been unexpected and could be an area for further exploration in the future.

Equality Policy

- 3.9 In the period, work has been undertaken to develop the council's equality policy provision in order to support and improve KCC's equality analysis. Published in April 2023, but developed over the course of 2022-23, the updated **EqlA Policy** introduced a number of key changes, and reinforced the existing requirement for all Key Decisions to be supported with an EqlA. The key changes included additional guidance about the roles and responsibilities of officers across the organisation within the EqlA process, the requirement for all officers creating or approving EqlAs to first complete the Introduction to EqlAs Delta module, and for action plans to be developed, approved by Heads of Service and sent to a central mailbox for EqlAs that identified significant mitigating actions. The impact of these policy changes on how staff are making equality considerations will be reviewed in the 2023-24 Annual Equality & Diversity report, to assess if any further changes or measures are required in support of continuous improvement.
- 3.10 Whilst it was not KCC policy during 2022-23 that all officers creating and approving EqlAs must first complete the **Introduction to EqlAs Delta module**, it

is useful to review the module completions during this period to establish a baseline for future comparison. Of the 111 Responsible Officers who completed an EqlA during 2022-23, only 31% had first completed the module. Of the 59 Heads of Service who approved an EqlA in the same period, only 15% had first completed the module. This demonstrates significant room for improvement, which will be supported via future communications highlighting that the module must be completed before completing or approving EqlAs, in line with the EqlA Policy. There is an aspiration to complete a review and refresh of the e-learning module during 2023-24, which will also provide an opportunity to promote its availability and encourage more staff completions.

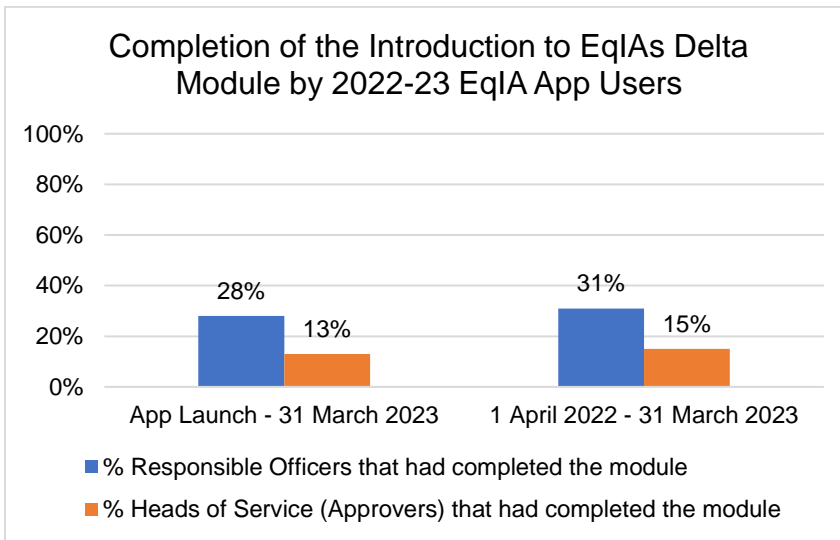


Figure 4: Completion of the Introduction to EqlAs Delta Module by 2022-23 EqlA App Users

3.11 Finally, work also began in the period to produce an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy in response to the equalities risks associated with the use of AI that became evident in our work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in late 2022.

Census Data

3.12 Following the release of the Census 2021 data, Kent Analytics highlighted the new equality information for Kent on [Kent.gov](https://www.kent.gov.uk) so that it could be easily accessed by staff, service users and residents. This information is summarised by protected characteristic, where possible in the county profile table below. Compared with the previous Census, there were some key differences in Kent's equality profile; these included:

- A decrease in the proportion of residents who are neither disabled under the Equality Act nor have a long-term physical or mental health condition.
- An increase in the proportion of residents who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic.

- An increase in the proportion of residents with no religion, and an increase in the proportion of residents who practice a religion other than Christianity.
- A small decrease in the proportion of households with a couple in a marriage/civil partnership.
- Data on gender identity and sexual orientation was available in the Census for the first time.

Protected Characteristic	Census 2021	Census 2011
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74.8% not disabled under the Equality Act, with no long term physical or mental health condition • 17.9% disabled under the Equality Act • 7.4% not disabled under the Equality Act but have a long term physical or mental health condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 82.4% day-to-day activities not limited by a long-term health problem or disability • 17.6% are limited a lot or a little by a long-term health problem or disability
Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89.4% White⁸ • 10.6% Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 93.7% White ethnic • 6.3% Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic
Religion/belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40.9% have no religion • 48.5% Christian • 4.9% Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh or other religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26.8% have no religion • 62.5% Christian • 3.4% Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh or other religion
Marriage/civil partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31.8% households with a couple in a marriage/civil partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34.9% households with a couple in a marriage/civil partnership
Sexual orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90.6% straight or heterosexual • 2.7% LGBTQ+ 	N/A

⁸ Including White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, Irish, Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Roma, or other White ethnicity)

Gender reassignment (Gender/Transgender)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 94.4% gender identity the same as sex registered at birth • 0.4% other gender identities 	N/A
---	---	-----

Figure 5: Kent County Profile Comparison between Census 2021 and Census 2011

- 3.13 In addition, the 2021 mid-year population estimates show that Kent is the most populous county council area in the South East with a population of 1,578,500 people. 51.3% Kent residents are female, and 48.7% male. The mean age of the population in Kent is 41.6 years, which is a year older than the national mean age.
- 3.14 Census equality information is an important data source for KCC as it is often the starting point for officers when completing EqlAs, as a means of identifying groups that may be impacted by proposals, or groups that are underrepresented and need to be targeted with service provision or changes. This data is particularly useful for services which are unable to collect equality information on their service users. In 2022-23, the **Youth Justice service** made use of Census data as part of their county planning activity, considering the county demographic changes with respect to age and ethnicity in particular. This informed their demand planning and their understanding of workforce diversity and development needs around having sensitive conversations with children and families about their experiences and needs. The **Kent Fostering Service** also used Census 2021 information to inform their recruitment campaigns during 2022-23. Within **Integrated Children’s Services**, analysis of Census data identified shifts in the size of populations within districts, and the need to tailor service delivery within different districts which have different ethnic minority profiles as a result. Census 2021 data was also vital for the planning of **library** locations for the ‘British Library Living Knowledge Network – Chinese and British touring’ exhibition. The data was used to identify areas in Kent with the largest Chinese communities, and areas with smaller Chinese communities in order to promote inclusion and diversity in those areas.⁹

Service User Equality Data

- 3.15 Where available, services have also utilised service user equality data to understand how well they have adapted to need and to inform future strategy and approaches to service delivery. In 2022-23, this included discussion at West Kent Management Meeting about the demographic breakdown of Kent Children In Care, using the **Corporate Parenting** Scorecard to determine how the service

⁹ The touring exhibition was held in Canterbury, which has the largest Chinese community in Kent, and in Sevenoaks, Cheriton, Gravesend and Ashford.

adapts to meet the needs of the profile. In particular, this discussion looked at how Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are supported, as well as the increasing number of children with disabilities in the service who do not meet the threshold for support from the Supporting Independence Service. Child level data collected by the council was used by **Adoption Partnership South East** to inform the adopter recruitment strategy (for more information **see 5.10**). **The Corporate Parenting** Service also contributed data to the Children's Commissioner survey on the care experience relative to the protected characteristics, and to research conducted by the University of Kent into young LGBTQ+ migrants.

Use of a range of data, from a variety of sources

- 3.16 It is good practice for equality analysis to be supported with evidence/data from a variety of sources where possible, relevant and proportionate, with national evidence being particularly useful where there might be gaps in Census or service user equality data for some protected characteristic groups. In a number of cases, equality analysis in the period has involved the use of national evidence or data from a variety of sources; this has included the following.
- 3.17 During 2022-23, a comprehensive EqIA was completed and updated for the Fastrack Electrification project¹⁰. This was informed by an extensive range of evidence and information including the 2021 Network Survey, KCC's 'Disability in Kent' statistical bulletin (2020) and KCC's 2018 Air Quality Report¹¹. To support this data, engagement was undertaken with the Kent Association for the Blind and Compaid Kent¹², in order to further understand the potential impacts of the electrification of Fastrack buses, and the associated introduction of physical charging infrastructure on streets. This engagement also supported the identification of how negative impacts on service users who are blind, partially sighted, hard of hearing, or with sensory needs could be mitigated, which informed the tender documents for the project. For more information on how this equality analysis impacted the procurement process, **see 4.8**.

¹⁰ To include the physical bus electrification infrastructure, electric bus fleet and the new operator contract.

¹¹ The Air Quality report was used to understand the air quality in each area, which should be improved by the electrification of the bus fleet as part of this project. It is intended that this will benefit those with respiratory disabilities or illness who are disproportionately impacted by poor air quality.

¹² This is a charitable organisation which helps disabled, older and vulnerable people to live life to the full.

3.18 Similarly, a wide range of data was used in equality analysis for the Country Park Strategy EqIAs and for the Countryside Partnerships EqIA. This included national and local data, stakeholder feedback and specific research into barriers to access to ‘green therapy’ activities for different protected characteristic groups.

Case Study: Consultation / Let’s Talk Kent

3.19 To support work towards this Equality Objective, an analysis of the equality data for Let’s Talk Kent¹³ registrations in 2022-23, and participants in the 2022 Annual Budget Consultation has been completed.¹⁴ This analysis may help to determine which groups are currently participating in KCC consultation opportunities, identify any areas of under or over representation, and highlight potential barriers to participation. With 2022-23 as the baseline year, this will continue to be monitored in future Annual Equality & Diversity reports. Services are responsible for conducting an equality analysis of the demographics that respond to their consultations and considering, for the specific service or topic, the extent to which this is representative and reflects their expectations, or if any particular groups need to be targeted. It is hoped that this analysis could be considered in future reports.

2022-23 Let’s Talk Kent Registrations

3.20 Looking at the equality profile of registrations with Let’s Talk Kent during 2022-23, whilst the numbers of both men and women registering continued to increase, men remained slightly underrepresented when compared with the county profile. Under 34s continued to be underrepresented compared with the county profile, whilst the age group most overrepresented were those aged 35-44.¹⁵ Despite this, there was a slight increase in the proportion of registrations aged 25-34, compared with 2021-22. Whilst trends in the equality profile remain relatively consistent year on year, it would seem that to a certain extent, demographic changes in registrations are impacted by the scale and scope of consultations occurring in the period. In 2022-23, examples included the Community Services and Home to School Transport consultations which both

¹³ [Let’s Talk Kent](#) is KCC’s online public consultation portal which allows members of the public to have their say on KCC projects and proposals.

¹⁴ Due to the nature of consultation, depending on the specific project concerned, it is to be expected that some protected characteristic groups will be overrepresented on some consultations. The Annual Budget Consultation has been selected for analysis as it represents a regular and unspecific consultation where we would hope to see participant demographics which are broadly reflective of our county profile.

¹⁵ Those registering must be aged 14 or over, so to a certain extent it is expected that those aged under 34 would be underrepresented amongst registrations when compared to the county profile.

seemed to generate an increase in registrations, particularly from female individuals.¹⁶

2022 Annual Budget Consultation

- 3.21 When comparing the demographics of those who responded to the **2022 Annual Budget Consultation** with the Kent county profile¹⁷, whilst there were some areas of disproportionality, participation was broadly representative for many of the protected characteristics, including sex, gender identity and disability. Those aged under 34 were underrepresented, with the most overrepresented aged groups being 65-74, 50-59 and 60-64. However, it is likely that this underrepresentation of younger people is a result of the Annual Budget Consultation being largely aimed at Kent householders who pay council tax. Whilst the proportion of participants with Christian faith was broadly in line with the county profile, no responses were received from individuals with Sikh faith¹⁸, and people of Muslim and Hindu faith were also underrepresented. People from ethnic minority groups were also underrepresented amongst participants, with particularly low responses from those identifying as Asian or Asian British Other, and those identifying as Black or Black British African.¹⁹ Both in 2021 and 2022 there was a higher proportion of carers responding than indicated in the Census, and this has continued to increase.

Better understanding people's needs

Equality Learning & Development Opportunities

- 3.22 In addition to utilising various equality data sources, engagement opportunities and conducting equality analysis to better understand the needs of people in Kent, a number of services have provided training and learning opportunities for their teams in order to better support and develop this understanding.
- 3.23 **CYPE Safeguarding** provided Communities of Practice online training events, which covered topics such as diversity and difference for Gypsy, Roma and

¹⁶ The Community Services consultation saw 746 female registrations and 166 male registrations, whilst the Home To School Transport consultation saw 195 female registrations and 44 male registrations.

¹⁷ As per the Census 2021. It should be noted that for some of the protected characteristics, questions to collect data vary from those asked in the Census 2021, so do not necessarily offer a direct comparison.

¹⁸ Who represent 1.5% of the County profile.

¹⁹ Asian or Asian British Other (0% in 2022 Annual Budget Consultation compared to 1.6% in the Census) and Black or Black British African (0.3% in 2022 Annual Budget Consultation compared to 1.9% in the Census).

Traveller communities, and offered masterclasses to staff during Black History month, which included a discussion with Hari Sewell about intersectionality. A Kent UASC Networking Event was held in March 2023, bringing together 50 people from organisations working with UASC in Kent. A Microsoft Team has since been created for the group, with a conference planned for the future, which will involve UASC children in its organisation and delivery. In September 2022, an in-service mandatory training day was held for all **Corporate Parenting Service** staff, which incorporated learning opportunities around topics such as Cultural Competence, Language, Unconscious Bias, LGBTQ+ issues, Professional Curiosity, Exercises in blind spots, and Minority Stress Theory. At the event, both staff and service users were able to share examples of their own experiences, ask questions and make use of learning and reflection time. Within **Adult Social Care & Health (ASCH)**, training was delivered during 2022-23 on assessing people under the Mental Health Act who are from the LGBTQ+ community; training has since been commissioned for the following year, to increase awareness on assessing people who are not White British under the Mental Health Act.

- 3.24 Case Study: [Tackling Inequalities through Sport and Physical Activity Report](#)
- Following the delivery of a range of sport and physical activity projects utilising Sport England's 2020-22 Tackling Inequalities Fund, **Active Kent and Medway** produced a detailed report into its impact and key learnings. The report is available online and considers the impact of the projects on three key underrepresented groups (people from lower socio-economic groups, people from culturally diverse communities, and people with a disability or long-term health condition), along with recommendations for delivering similar projects in the future. The findings have been shared with partners through webinars to support their understanding of working with targeted groups. Some of the key findings for future projects include the need to: utilise the local community to engage with target audiences, recruit staff that are relatable, build in social elements, involve participants in the development of projects and maintain regular contact. The report also found that across the 74 projects delivered, 63% participants were female, 37% participants were from culturally diverse backgrounds and 54% participants had a disability.

- 3.25 Case Study: [CYPE Safeguarding, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance](#)
- Within **CYPE Safeguarding, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance (SPSQA)**, extensive work was undertaken to better understand the needs of people from a range of protected characteristic groups. This included:
- Following the Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection in May 2022, a task and finish group was created to explore diversity within practice across Integrated Children's Services (ICS), with a

number of actions agreed and implemented. This included provision of additional or updated training across themes of identity, individuality, unconscious bias and cultural competence.²⁰ The service also took part in the 2023 multi-agency UASC training programme.²¹ Guidance was updated to include writing from a child's perspective and providing oversight and reflective supervision in the completion of forms and supervisions. Finally, the Practice Development Service developed an Identity Hub containing tools and research.

- In September 2022, an audit was conducted by the **SPSQA** and **Youth Justice** services, looking at ten Kent Black or Minority Ethnic children who had been convicted of the most serious offences and were consequently subject to either custodial or highly intensive court orders.²² Key themes arising from the audit included staff skills and confidence in discussing and analysing culture and ethnicity, the impact of staff's own values, bias and culture, the potential for cultural competency training, support for parents, earlier interventions, information sharing with Local Authorities and support for other agencies. As a result, the findings were presented to the County Youth Justice Board (CYJB) and a new **Youth Justice** KPI was introduced, requiring partners to report data on racial disparities to the CYJB. Further action to address racial disproportionalities identified have been embedded within the 23/24 Youth Justice plan.
- Following the publication of the practice review 'The Myth of Invisible Men' and a deep dive study completed by Kent Safeguarding Multi-Agency Partnership (KCSMP)²³, it was identified within Kent Children's Services that fathers were not routinely engaged and were notably absent from assessments and visits. As a result, a Parent Inclusion Coordinator was recruited in May 2022 to develop and implement Father Inclusive Practice across the county. Key activity included training and guidance on father inclusive practice; implementation of father inclusivity in policy and quality assurance processes; support provided to other services developing this practice, including in the commissioning tender for Men's Antenatal/Postnatal

²⁰ In February 2023, training was delivered on 'Unconscious Bias and Cultural Competence in Safeguarding Children' as well as a Communities of Practice session on "Capturing the needs and experiences of children; exploring identity and individuality".

²¹ This involved KCC, Refugee Council, Barnardos (Independent Child Trafficking Guardians), and Porchlight and was a programme for professionals (including foster carers) including training on age assessments, radicalisation and Prevent, LGBTQ+, trauma, the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), trafficking, and the asylum process.

²² The audits were measured against the relevant recommendations in the Her Majesties Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) October 2021 report on "The experiences of Black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system" and the subsequent effective practice guide published in December 2021.

²³ This was completed in 2021 to better understand non-accidental injury involving babies under one year.

support, and consultation with fathers in partnership with Dads Unlimited in order to understand their wants and needs from professionals.

Conclusions & Next Steps

- 3.26 Overall, analysis for this Equality Objective has determined that across many of KCC's services, service user equality data is routinely collected; that increasingly Key Decisions are being supported by EqlAs and that there is an abundance of examples of where services have used Census data, service user equality data and learning and development opportunities to support equality analysis, and, ultimately, their understanding of people's needs. Despite this, there are some key areas for future improvement and/or further exploration.
- 3.27 Both the number of service examples, and the findings of the EqlA App Dashboard seem to suggest that national evidence may be underutilised within equality analysis. This, along with some of the other key trends arising from the Dashboard will be priority areas for further consideration with CEG in the coming year. Whilst compliance with the EqlA Policy in terms of Key Decisions and EqlAs has improved, this needs to be sustained alongside a wider review of how successfully other policy provisions have been implemented in 2023-24. There is also the opportunity to use the case studies demonstrating best practice of understanding people's needs to support future equality analysis within other services. All of this would be supported by a fuller understanding of the extent and status of service user equality data collection across the council. Improving our understanding of this will be a key focus for the future, along with finalising the review and socialisation of the 'About You' questions in support of new data collection opportunities.
- 3.28 Finally, it is noted that this Equality Objective also includes an aspiration to understand the cumulative impact of the council's actions on people with protected characteristics. This will continue to be an aspiration for the future of the objectives, with our initial focus being to develop the areas mentioned above, in order to ensure a robust basis for cumulative impact analysis to be built upon.

4. Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies.

4.1 The introduction of this Equality Objective has provided the council with new opportunities to understand how existing commissioning and procurement processes have worked to promote equality, diversity and inclusion across services, and determine how this can be further improved and supported. Such activity will be underpinned by the continued development of KCC's new Commercial & Procurement function. For 2022-23, existing data on key contracts has been utilised to begin to develop a picture of our performance and has been supported by examples of practice across services, and at different stages of commissioning, procurement and delivery.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Key Contracts

4.2 During 2022-23, there were 28 Key Decisions that related to commissioning and procurement. An EqlA was attached to 75% of these, which is higher than the overall figure of 66% across all Key Decisions. For three of these, an additional Selection Questionnaire (SQ) stage was completed, which would have included specific questions on equalities considerations. Furthermore, all projects resulting in a contract would have seen the awarded supplier/s being bound by KCC's standard terms and conditions, which require adherence to equalities legislation. Looking at the eight reviews of KCC's key contracts conducted by the Contract Management Review Group (CMRG) in 2022-23, there were substantive references to social value in two of the presentations, minimal references in three of the presentations, and no reference to social value or equalities considerations in the remaining three presentations. Where social value was mentioned, this largely looked at the provision of apprenticeships, community development and sustainability initiatives, with one referencing the supplier's commitment to ensure all employees are treated equally.

4.3 During 2022-23, KCC participated in the Employer's Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE), which identified that in terms of diversity and inclusion in procurement, KCC was operating within the 'Realise' category.²⁴ Key areas for improvement included improving equality,

²⁴ This is a benchmarking tool which evaluates an organisation's performance with regard to diversity and inclusion, to identify the steps and actions required to support an inclusive culture. Assessment is made across a number of areas including, the workforce; strategy and plans; leadership and accountability; recruitment and attraction; training and development; employment practices; communication and engagement; and procurement. Each area is given a score identifying where performance sits on the enei's Diversity and Inclusion Road Map. The Road Map levels are: Prepare, Mobilise, Realise, Embed, and Sustain, with Sustain being the highest level.

diversity and inclusion monitoring of suppliers and contracts, and action to promote the benefits of engaging with diverse suppliers.

- 4.4 As mentioned, our future aspirations for development and monitoring of this Equality Objective will coincide with the wider changes to KCC's commercial function, which will include development of our approach in the areas of equality, diversity and inclusion. This will likely include the introduction of measures to better understand the diversity of our suppliers, and how equalities considerations are embedded within our commissioning and procurement processes. As part of the Annual Equality & Diversity report data collection process, services were asked to provide information on contracts that were active in the period along with commissioning or procurement exercises undertaken. These examples are detailed in the following sections and determine both areas of success and interesting points for future exploration or consideration.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Commissioning & Procurement Processes

Co-design & Co-production

- 4.5 During the co-design work to produce the new model for the **Integrated Community Equipment Services (ICES)**, the project team noted a lack of representation from ethnic minority groups and people with non-English cultural backgrounds at engagement events. As a result, the team engaged Healthwatch Kent²⁵, and through their People's Voice Service, made connections with a number of groups, including Nepalese, Caribbean, Nigerian and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities living in Kent. This involved awareness raising of Healthwatch during the Windrush event held by the Caribbean group in North Kent, engagement with Carers' Support East Kent and planning with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Network to arrange ongoing visits to discuss health inequalities. Through this engagement, a service accessibility gap was identified, as individuals were not aware of the services available to them or how to access them. This informed the design of the new service specification, which included an expectation for the new provider to improve awareness of the service and how to access it.
- 4.6 In 2022-23, **Healthwatch Kent and KCC** were shortlisted by Healthwatch England for an Impact Award, in recognition of their co-production work to improve digital skills, increase mental wellbeing and address health inequalities for the Nepalese community in Folkestone. The Kent Coast Volunteering project

²⁵ Healthwatch Kent is a local health and social care champion that uses its network to share the experiences of individuals, ensure their voice is heard and help them to find information and advice.

delivered digital skills training to 21 people from the Nepalese community, which enabled them to access health and social care services and book Covid vaccines online and improve their overall knowledge and confidence.

- 4.7 The development of the service specification for **Community Support Services** for Children, Young People and Adults with Sensory Needs included focus groups with young people and adults with sensory impairments. Workshops focused on the qualities of support workers, outcomes that people wanted from support services, and providing feedback. These groups were facilitated by the use of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

Equality Analysis

- 4.8 As mentioned in **3.17**, an EqIA was completed in 2022-23 to support the development of the tender documents for both the Kent Thameside Electric Fastrack Operations Contract (including Electric Fleet) and for Charging Infrastructure Provision²⁶, in order to ensure that the procurement process promoted equality, diversity and inclusion. To mitigate the potential negative impacts on protected characteristic groups identified within the EqIA, the tender specifications were amended to include the following:

- To address difficulty in electric vehicle detection for people who are blind, partially sighted or hard of hearing, induction loops must be provided for the electric vehicles. The operator must also undertake an education campaign with Kent Association for the Blind ahead of the launch of the fleet.
- To provide familiar journey sounds and mitigate sensory challenges arising from the quietness of the electric vehicles, audio recordings of bus vehicle sounds must be provided via the Fastrack App.
- To promote accessibility for customers with a range of additional needs, electric vehicles must meet the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR). These regulations require a second priority wheelchair space, an audible and visual route, next stop announcements on board and induction loops.
- To mitigate the disproportionate risk of collision with on-street charging infrastructure for those with a visual impairment, the tender specified a 1.8m footway width to be maintained next to chargers.
- For both contracts, Tenderers were required to submit an answer to be assessed based on the Social Value requirements that were set out, including a focus on how they would provide more opportunities for employment for those with protected characteristics, as required within the specification.

²⁶ Whilst the Invitation To Tender (ITT) was published in April 2023, the tender documents and associated equality analysis were completed during 2022-23.

4.9 Analysis of data collected via the **Short Breaks Service** dashboard was used to inform the approach to future contracts for the service and promote equality for young people with different protected characteristics. This analysis demonstrated that of the young people that attended between April 2022 and March 2023, 62% were male and 38% female, and that there were far more opportunities for young people aged 8-18 than those aged 0-8. As a result, work was undertaken to understand why females were less likely to attend sessions; this included engagement with Short Break providers with higher female attendance levels to explore what made their sessions more engaging for this group. The findings will inform the grant funding rounds for April 2024-2026. To increase access opportunities for younger children, the service held an Innovation Grant opportunity to ask the market to bid for money to deliver activities for children aged 5-8. In addition, when implementing the Short Break one year grant extension, a provider expressed that their service had gained the skills and experience to offer more places exclusively to children and young people with more complex needs, in response to local demand. As a result, a variation was made to the agreement to facilitate this change.

4.10 Analysis was also conducted as part of the scoping work for the future **Direct Payment Support Service**. This involved review of the protected characteristic data²⁷ for the current cohort to identify any trends and comparison with Kent's Census information to determine if there were any protected characteristic groups with unmet needs. This analysis evidenced that diverse groups had engaged with the service and identified no signs of indirect discrimination in current service delivery.

Equality considerations in Tender Documents

4.11 In 2022, the **Environment & Circular Economy** division completed a procurement exercise for a new provider to undertake a programme of mystery shopping and research across its network of Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs). Tenderers were asked to provide examples of how social value will be embedded into the contract. The successful tenderer gave examples of how they had supported researchers with protected characteristics. The service hopes to develop this through their contract and explore how well site staff understand HWRC procedures related to equalities.

Contract Monitoring

4.12 There are equality monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within a number of Adult Social Care and Health contracts; this includes the number of

²⁷ Including age, sex and disability.

people accessing services who are from deprived areas or target groups, for example, individuals with a learning disability, or individuals from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background. The Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES) Contract also includes quarterly monitoring of the diversity of service users. This information is then shared at the ICES Partnership Board in order to ensure equality, diversity and inclusivity are identified at the point of prescribing equipment solutions.

Social value and fostering diversity

- 4.13 Arriva, the **Fastrack** Kent Thameside operator, implemented a number of initiatives in support of social value in the period. This included a Fastrack driver recruitment campaign to improve the number of drivers who are female and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds and a driver dress down day to raise money for guide dog training. To support this, KCC gave Arriva permission to host a recruitment day at Gravesend Bus Station and to produce on-bus advertising. **Environment & Circular Economy's** contract providers have also supported social value in the period, supplying wood to Kent Menshed²⁸ and arranging a site visit to Canterbury's HWRC for a group of junior international school students studying Sustainable Development Goals.
- 4.14 In January 2023, a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), was set up for the contracting of Independent Chairs for **Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)**. Whilst in previous years, the Chairs that applied tended to be from a very similar demographic and working background, applicants to the new DPS have been more varied, providing greater diversity in the Chairs we work with for DHRs.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion via KCC's Trading Companies

- 4.15 **Commercial Services Group (CSG)** is the umbrella for all of the trading companies owned by the local authority, spanning education services, legal services, IT solutions and recruitment and HR services. With the formation of CSG in 2022 to bring all of these together, equality, diversity and inclusion has been adopted as one of the key strategic themes to inform work into the future. Much of the work to develop this strategic theme, including the development of a People Strategy and a Diversity, Equality and Belonging policy was begun during 2022-23 and continues into 2023-24. Whilst progress on the full extent of this activity can be further reported on in the following year's report, work thus far has focused around inclusivity and wellbeing; ensuring communications are relevant and accessible to all; and the development of a Race Equality Action Plan.

²⁸ Menshed is an organisation that provides community spaces for men to connect, converse and create, with the objective of reducing loneliness and isolation and allow men to enjoy time together.

- 4.16 To establish the baseline and identify areas for improvement into the future, CSG has developed a dashboard to monitor workforce equality data. This is summarised below and identifies some key areas of focus for diversifying the workforce into the future, particularly around disability. It is intended that this will also be supported by work to collect workforce equality data on wider protected characteristics in the future.

Category	Workforce Profile as of March 2023	Kent County Profile as per Census 2021	Variance
Total number of staff	1,698	N/A	N/A
% who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic	7.2%	10.6%	-3.4%
% who have declared a disability	3.0%	17.9%	-14.9%
% who are LGBTQ+ (16+)	1.6%	2.7%	-1.1%

Figure 6: 2022-23 Commercial Services Group Workforce Profile Comparison

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 4.17 Looking at commissioning and procurement activity requiring a Key Decision, and key contracts from the period, data indicates that largely, equality analysis was completed, but that more needs to be done to focus social value toward equality outcomes for protected characteristic groups. Examples gathered from services indicate that there are areas where opportunities for co-production are being utilised, and detailed equalities analysis undertaken with the result of engaging underrepresented groups, targeting inequalities and better understanding individuals' needs. In addition, some services implemented equalities considerations within tender documentation, specifications, KPIs and social value. These examples of best practice can be used to inform how wider practice could be improved and what further measures might be needed in order to support this. Looking ahead, it will be important that further mechanisms for measuring equality, diversity and inclusion in commissioning and procurement, and within KCC's Trading Companies are established to develop a more detailed understanding of the council's performance against this Equality Objective.
- 4.18 It should also be noted that across KCC's services, many of which are commissioned or procured, action was taken in 2022-23 to promote equality, diversity and inclusion for service users. This included targeting specific groups to address identified inequalities, promoting diversity amongst staff and service users, and ensuring services were accessible and inclusive to people from protected characteristic groups. This activity is discussed in more detail in the following section.

5. Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded.

- 5.1 As part of our approach to this Equality Objective, we have considered a number of more familiar aspects of accessibility – physical accessibility, digital accessibility and language translation – in addition to our aspirations to implement more wide-ranging understandings of accessibility that consider the full extent of often intangible barriers to access experienced by many protected characteristic groups. In addition, we have utilised EqIA App Dashboard data to develop an understanding of how well digital exclusion has been considered within proposals for new services or changes to existing services.

Council information is accessible for everyone

Language & Alternative Formats

- 5.2 The **Alternative Formats team** facilitates a wide range of translation and alternative format requests from the council's services. In 2022-23, 43 language translation requests were made, 39 of which were completed. Whilst requests that can be completed in-house are free of charge, language translations and braille requests have a cost implication which cannot always be met by the service, potentially explaining the four requests that went uncompleted in the period. The top three languages for which the most translations were completed were Ukrainian (13), Russian (7) and Romanian (3).²⁹ It is likely that the number of Ukrainian translation requests was associated with the implementation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. During the period, the team fulfilled 13 Large Print requests, 7 braille requests, 4 Easy Read requests, 3 audio requests, 3 plain text conversion requests, and 1 British Sign Language (BSL) request. In addition, across KCC, individual services have made attempts to improve the accessibility of their information to people with additional needs:
- 5.3 In order to improve accessibility for the many older users of the **KCC Fastrack service**, all public communications are designed with larger fonts, with service changes communicated both online and via paper leaflets and notices. To make information on service changes accessible to blind service users, the new Fastrack website³⁰ has been designed to work with screen reading software. During 2022-23, **Trading Standards** worked with interpreters to create videos on doorstep crime that are accessible to the deaf; developed built-in language translations on social media channels to allow residents to read content in their

²⁹ Other language translations included Polish, Pashto, Czech, Spanish, Kurdish, Sorani, Lithuanian, Tamil, Slovakian, Punjabi, Turkish, Kurdish, Albanian, Arabic, and Dari.

³⁰ The new Fastrack website is due to launch in early 2024 and has been designed to meet digital accessibility standards.

preferred language; created infographics for social media so that information could be more easily understood and placed posters with information from the doorstep crime digital campaign in local areas of interest. The team also continued to conduct regular checks of their website pages and social media captions to ensure plain English was used. In the summer of 2022 **Kent Community Warden Service (KCWS)** developed and printed new leaflets to promote their service, including an easy read version and a version in Ukrainian. In addition, one warden began British Sign Language (BSL) training to assist in their support to residents with additional needs.

- 5.4 To support equal access to KCC **Corporate Parenting's** adoption and foster care programmes, translators and signers were provided for applicants who did not have English as a first language or had a significant hearing impairment. The **Strengthening Independence Service** has a range of measures in place to ensure information is accessible, including use of Easy Read, BSL, Language Line³¹, Dragon Dictate, communication passports³² and Makaton³³. The **i-THRIVE and Participation** team ensured that all Kent Youth County Council (KYCC) election materials were produced using 'Widgit Communicate: In Print'³⁴, to enable more clear and effective communication with young people with additional needs due to age, disability or language. To ensure accessibility and clear communication, **Integrated Children's Services** utilise interpreters and translation services across areas of delivery where parents do not have English as a first language, to ensure that families can understand information written about them and the issues and concerns that are raised. In particular, BSL interpreters and a deaf relay were used by the service to support a family who are deaf and also have additional learning needs.
- 5.5 KCC's **Reception and Safe Care Service** (RSCS) provides accommodation and support to newly arrived Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in Kent. During 2022-23, the outcomes of the service's March 2022 Child Outcome Analysis were implemented, which included the provision of more pictorial and translated information on the walls at reception centres. Interpreters are used with children throughout their experience with the service, explaining information provided and attending each Looked After Child's review and weekly residents' meetings. A video to explain the National Transfer Scheme to children was

³¹ Language Line is a telephone interpreting service that connects individuals who do not share a common language via telephone.

³² Communication Passports present key information about people with communication difficulties who cannot easily speak for themselves.

³³ Makaton is a communication tool with speech, signs, and symbols to support communication for people with disabilities or learning disabilities.

³⁴ This is an accessible software which enables text to be directly linked with symbols in a wordbank.

produced in six languages, with two additional videos produced since, explaining the role of professionals that children may encounter on their care journey, and the educational options available in the UK. In March 2022, a specialist UASC Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was introduced to the service, which is the first example of its kind nationally. The specialist UASC IRO has since worked to produce the 'Best Practice in Working with Interpreters' guide which was disseminated to RSCS staff and district social workers.

Digital Accessibility

- 5.6 KCC's **Digital Accessibility Team** completes regular Digital Accessibility Audits³⁵ across the council's websites and digital systems. As of the end of 2022-23, this audit process identified that 42% of the council's websites had a fully compliant digital accessibility statement in place,³⁶ and each website met on average 21 of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) success criteria. Across the online services audited in the period, 46% were identified to be low risk, 53% were identified to be medium risk, and 1% were identified to be high risk.³⁷ In 2022-23, 35% of low risk websites were re-audited within the SLA period, 6% of medium risk websites were re-audited within the SLA period and 100% of high risk websites were re-audited within the SLA period.³⁸ In 2022-23, the team have worked to develop a robust road plan to target areas for improvement, with initial changes to be made in 2023-24.
- 5.7 The planned changes include revision of the audit template to make outcomes clearer and increase content owner buy-in, and the adoption of a new approach to audits, whereby the detail level will be adjusted to enable a greater number of audits to be completed by the team. These proposals were informed by engagement with services and a review of government guidance and other

³⁵ These look at whether accessibility statements are in place, how many of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) success criteria have been met and evaluate the overall risk profile of the digital content or website. Accessibility statements are required in order to meet accessibility regulations and document the level of accessibility across the website or app concerned, informing users of alternative routes to access where there are barriers, and providing contact details for the website owner if users identify issues.

³⁶ Where it was identified that a Digital Accessibility Statement had not been published, content owners within services were informed

³⁷ Risk ratings are used as part of the audit process in order to indicate the likelihood that any accessibility issues identified could become problematic to the website owner. To determine the risk level, the team considers how extensive any accessibility issues are, whether a compliant accessibility statement is in place and the level of visitors to the website or system.

³⁸ To manage risk and support continuous improvement of the council's digital accessibility, the team have established Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for the period of time in which websites will be re-audited, relative to their risk rating.

organisations' practices and will be underpinned by the Digital Accessibility Strategy, which began to be developed by the new Digital Accessibility Lead in the period.

- 5.8 The **Digital Accessibility Team** also provides a range of training which is regularly updated, spanning 'Accessible Social Media', 'Creating Accessible Documents' and 'Accessibility in Microsoft 365'. All three courses were well attended in 2022-23, with additional staff registering on the waitlist for future training³⁹. In addition, the team arranged a series of training courses with Kent Connects, called the 'Summer of Accessibility' for KCC colleagues and other organisations including the NHS, Kent Police and other councils. These courses received high turn-out and supported staff to improve their skills, knowledge and experience with making online services and documents more accessible. The team also held four Digital Accessibility Group meetings during 2022-23, attended by approximately twenty organisations such as the NHS, Kent Police and Kent Connects, to discuss planned training and to share good practice.
- 5.9 Whilst data suggests that the results of Digital Accessibility audits are not always actioned by content owners (and therefore an area of future focus), in many cases, KCC's services have embraced the feedback and guidance provided by the Digital Accessibility Team. Following the 2022 audit of KCC's consultation portal, **Let's Talk Kent**⁴⁰, an Accessibility Statement was developed and made available, and action taken to address 'not met' items. Work was also undertaken to improve the digital accessibility of the **Kent Academy**⁴¹ and improve the website's search function. Services also implemented and cascaded skills and information from training courses within their wider teams, with the **Library, Registrations & Archives (LRA) service** developing specific guidance for their library staff and volunteers around creating accessible social media content, adding alternative text to images, how to write accessible copy and best practice on how to film and add captions to videos.

Representing the communities we serve

- 5.10 Part of the council's duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) include the need to consider how it can promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between protected characteristic groups; in part, this can be delivered

³⁹ This included 90 attendees and 26 on the waitlist for Accessible Social Media, 82 attendees and 42 on the waitlist for Creating Accessible Documents and 39 attendees and 4 on the waitlist for Accessibility in Microsoft 365.

⁴⁰ Which identified the platform as medium risk, with 31 passes and 9 'not met' items.

⁴¹ The Kent Academy is a dedicated platform for the Children's and Adults' workforce to access support and resources to develop their knowledge, skills and practice

through inclusive council campaigns and communications that promote a positive narrative around equality. In 2022-23, this has included:

- **Kent Fostering's** recruitment campaigns and e-bulletins are inclusive and open to all members of the Kent community who are ready to provide a safe and loving home for our looked after children. Specific content from 2022-23 focused on supporting events such as International Women's Day, Black History Month and Pride, challenging myths about who can be a foster carer and highlighting that applicants from all communities are welcomed. The service also holds fostering information events throughout Kent which prospective foster carers can attend to meet with current foster carers and professionals; these have been well attended by individuals across the protected characteristic groups. The service also worked alongside the Fostering Ambassadors, which are made up of foster carers from different ethnic groups, who attended meetings with the Head of Service to support the review and development of policy, guidance and new services for foster carers and children.
- Similarly, **Adoption Partnership South East** worked closely with the National Adoption Strategy team, utilising their 'You can Adopt' recruitment campaigns to highlight that becoming an adopter is accessible and inclusive to all, and encourage applications from diverse protected characteristic groups and ethnicities.
- **Active Kent & Medway** produced a series of 'tackling inequalities' films to promote a positive narrative around supporting specific groups to become more active; this included Kent Wildlife Trust's [Walking for Mental Health](#), Whitstable Lawn Tennis Club's [Inclusive Tennis](#), Yo Street Zone's [Street Football](#), and Age UK Faversham & Sittingbourne's [Walking Netball](#). In its publications and campaigns, the service aims to utilise images that are reflective of our local communities and include representation for often underrepresented communities.
- In the period, **Public Health** has commissioned a branding and content team for Drug and Alcohol services to improve the information contained on the service's website and highlight the voices of underrepresented groups. This will involve insight work with women, minority ethnic groups and people with learning disabilities to understand the barriers to access for these groups.
- The new **Start for Life** web pages on Kent.gov were developed in the period. To ensure that the content produced was accessible and inclusive, the service worked with **Rainbow, Level Playing Field and the Single Parent staff group**.

Council services are accessible for everyone

Complaints & Customer Satisfaction

- 5.11 Whilst not reflective of every possible instance where KCC services or information may have been found to be inaccessible, data on equality related

complaints received in 2022-23 offers a useful temperature check for understanding how accessible the council's services and information are. Of the 5,580 complaints received in 2022-23, 180 were categorised as Equality and Regulatory, of which 64 were about equalities issues, with only 3 of these upheld and a formal apology issued. One of these complaints related to accessibility on a Public Right Of Way; as a result, additional site visits were offered to understand the impact and to seek a solution.

- 5.12 The Customer Satisfaction team also collects data on compliments received. In 2022-23, 12 compliments were received that related to the council providing support to meet needs arising from disability. These spanned across the directorates, and included how individuals' needs were understood, support in understanding forms, bus services and support provided at a Household Waste Recycling Centre.

Physical Accessibility Projects & Improvements

- 5.13 KCC's **Property team** have continued to engage AccessAble to undertake accessibility audits at over 300 corporate landlord freehold sites and over 300 KCC maintained school sites in 2022-23. As part of the audit process, AccessAble produce detailed Access Guides which provide details of what accessibility is like across KCC sites, these guides are available via the following [link](#). The team has also continued to deliver the School Accessibility Initiative (SAI) which delivers projects to make adaptations for children with accessibility needs or requirements. During 2022-23, 15 projects were due to be completed⁴².
- 5.14 In addition to ensuring that all **Active Kent and Medway (AKM)** events during 2022-23 were held at accessible venues and that attendees were asked about any additional support requirements ahead of the events, the service introduced a number of physical accessibility improvements. This included the introduction of a pool hoist at Folkestone Sports Centre and a funding award for provision of an accessible changing area and toilet at Gravesend Sailing Club in February 2023. The **Active Travel Service** purchased adapted trikes in order to make their adult cycle training provision more inclusive and accessible. In 2022-23, the **Environment & Circular Economy service** conducted a trial of a new feature as part of the **Household Waste and Recycling Centre** booking system, which enabled customers to request on-site assistance where they had additional needs arising from age, disability, pregnancy, or other protected characteristics.

⁴² These projects were delivered at the following school sites: Aylesham Primary School, Chatham & Clarendon Grammar School, Ditton Infant School, Eythorne Elvington Community PS, The Marsh Academy, New Ash Green Primary School, Palmarsh Primary School, Riverview Infant School, Senacre Wood Primary School, St Gregorys Catholic School, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School, Staplehurst School, The Churchill School, The Archbishop's School and Oakley School.

This trial was introduced as a result of consultation responses which identified that certain groups experienced challenges when lifting waste into containers. Following the successful trial period, this process has been retained, with approximately 8% of customers requesting additional assistance at the time of booking during the period.

- 5.15 During 2022-23, the **Country Parks (CP)** service continued to introduce further physical accessibility improvements across its sites. The new improvements that have been made are set out in the table below. Full accessibility information is available for each of the parks on kent.gov.

Physical Accessibility Improvement:	Lullingstone	Brockhill	Manor	Shorne Woods
Installation of Changing Places accessible toilets	✓	✓		
Installation of accessible rain shelters	✓		✓	
Installation of inclusive play areas (including ability swing and wheelchair roundabout)				✓
Resurfacing paths for wheelchair access	✓	✓		
Replacement of old kissing gates and chicane barriers with accessible versions to enable tramper ⁴³ and pushchair access.	✓			
Purchase of a tramper	✓			
Production of a printed access leaflet.				✓

Figure 7: New Physical Accessibility Improvements introduced to Country Parks in 2022-23

- 5.16 During 2022-23, **Public Health** undertook accessibility audits of all of KCC's Drug and Alcohol Hubs, providing additional budget to implement relevant accessibility improvements/actions identified in the audit process. A review of the Substance Misuse building was carried out in support of recommendations with regard to accessibility for disabled individuals. The service has also worked with district, borough and city councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector, health

⁴³ Trampers are mobility scooters designed for safe and comfortable use on all-terrains.

colleagues and other partners to share and extend knowledge locally; this has included work with One You⁴⁴, to extend the service's reach into the high street, by sharing buildings that are directly accessible to the public.

Inclusive Services & Addressing Invisible Barriers

- 5.17 Part of our aspirations under this Equality Objective involve looking at what we mean by accessibility more broadly, to understand the full extent of barriers to access experienced by people with all manner of protected characteristics, many of which could be invisible, hidden or intangible. Activity undertaken related to this will be explored under this category of Inclusive Services & Addressing Invisible Barriers.
- 5.18 Hypertension Heroes was developed in collaboration with system partners⁴⁵ as a community health project to address Blood Pressure management and target specific ethnic minority groups. To achieve this, the project focused on community engagement, personalisation and addressing health inequalities, which involved running specific sessions regarding health inequalities associated with ethnicity with 'Health Champions' who target groups and communities with the poorest health outcomes.
- 5.19 The Gypsy, Roma Traveller Needs Assessment was undertaken by **Public Health** to quantify the scale of health needs for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Kent. The Needs Assessment identified the following recommendations: development of a consistent approach to ethnicity data collection for the community; addressing barriers to primary care; investment in developing trust and culturally competent services and consideration of developing or commissioning accessible and appropriate resources for the community to raise awareness of disease, symptoms, prevention and the available health services. In October 2022, the **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller service**⁴⁶ made professional referrals to the Household Energy Fund which provided residents with vouchers towards their energy usage, as they were not eligible for the discount that all house dwellers received. This activity was then repeated when there was another round of funding available in March 2023.
- 5.20 Our **Integrated Children's Services** Early Help Workers have provided specific support for LGBTQ+ young people, linking to local LGBTQ+ groups, providing emotional well-being support to Trans young people, and developing case

⁴⁴ The One You service promotes and provides advice on small lifestyle changes that can be made in support of improved health and wellbeing.

⁴⁵ Including Kent and Medway Public Health, the Voluntary and Community Sector and the Integrated Care Board.

⁴⁶ This service is dedicated to providing landlord support and advice to the approximately 135 families from Gypsy, Roma or Traveller communities living on KCC owned sites.

recording to represent preferred pronouns and names. All staff have also attended additional training for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), enabling them to develop the knowledge to facilitate meaningful conversations with multi-agency partners regarding inclusion. The **Adolescents & Open Access** service has also delivered groups to meet the needs of specific user groups, including LGBTQ+, Roma, Afghan, neurodiverse and SEND young people who may struggle to attend other youth groups.

- 5.21 Due to the vulnerability of newly arrived Albanian young people, a series of scoping meetings were organised by the **Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS)** with social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), and Barnardos Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs). ICTGs delivered face-to-face training for social workers, reception centre staff and foster carers, and worked jointly with social workers, including attending home visits.
- 5.22 Libraries, Registrations & Archives (LRA) have introduced a range of activities to ensure their services are as inclusive and accessible to as many people as possible; during 2022-23, this included:
- Following an enquiry from a deaf individual in September 2022, the service developed a reading group for British Sign Language (BSL) signers, which began at Canterbury Library in December 2022 and meets monthly. This has been supported by promotion with partners, via accessible posters designed with a deaf volunteer, and on social media, including use of a video recorded with volunteers and members, which is available on YouTube.
 - The service has supported and promoted inclusive calendar events at libraries and online, including Black History Month, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, LGBT+ History Month, Refugee Week, Disability Pride Month, Dementia Action Week and religious festivals.
 - To support promotion of the Summer Reading Challenge, targeted marketing was introduced with groups such as Autism South East⁴⁷ via social media.
 - As part of the LRA Cost of Living campaign, multi-sensory Bag Books were provided for people with severe, profound or multiple learning disabilities and Pictures to Share titles were provided to help support those living with dementia.

Consultation

- 5.23 When considering the accessibility of KCC consultations, two key aspects have been considered – 1) how accessible participation was, and 2) how communications and advertising about the consultation were used to maximise

⁴⁷ Which offers support to parents with autism

engagement from those who might be affected, including underrepresented groups. Of the 17 consultations held during 2022-23, 12 were advertised both digitally and physically. Whilst the remaining 5 were advertised solely via digital methods, these were primarily aimed at stakeholder organisations. To promote both the accessibility of participation and the inclusivity of engagement and advertising for consultations, there are a range of standard measures in place.⁴⁸ The following examples demonstrate how specific consultations from the period attempted to improve accessibility and engagement.

Gypsy and Traveller Site Pitch Allocations Policy

- 5.24 Prior to consultation, the service engaged with Friends, Families and Travellers⁴⁹, for their views on the draft policy and the consultation process. To make participation more accessible to those who have low literacy levels or do not wish to read consultation documents, videos summarising the consultation process and the changes to the policy were provided in addition to an audio version of the consultation document and face-to-face drop-in sessions held at libraries close to the KCC sites. Site Managers also visited KCC sites to explain the proposals, provide hard copies of consultation materials where required, and to help residents participate. To promote and encourage engagement, the service sent text messages to residents at the launch of the consultation, and as a reminder to participate toward the end of the consultation period. Site Managers identified potential site residents with adult children who may be future applicants and therefore impacted by the proposals and made sure that they were aware of the consultation and how they could be impacted by any proposed changes.

Community Services Consultation

- 5.25 To make participation as accessible as possible, feedback was welcomed in a range of formats such as videos, notes from group discussions and hard copies of the consultation questionnaire, with phone calls made to those impacted by proposals for 'Community Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities' in order to gather feedback verbally or through an Easy Read summary and questionnaire. Leaflets promoting the consultation were also translated into

⁴⁸ To support the accessibility of participation, word versions, hard copies, translations and alternative formats of documents and questionnaires can be made available. In order to promote inclusion and engagement in consultations, consulting services will usually email their stakeholder list to invite their participation and promotion of the consultation within their networks. This typically includes relevant Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations that represent or work with specific protected characteristic groups that the service wishes to engage.

⁴⁹ Friends Families and Travellers is a national charity that works on behalf of all Gypsies, Travellers and Roma.

Slovak, Polish, and Punjabi and included explanation of the consultation and how to access more information in their language. To increase engagement, 24 in-person drop-in events were held across the county in children's centres and libraries, and youth workers took engagement packs to the young people they supported for feedback. During the consultation it was identified that there was a low response from male parents/carers; as a result, social media advertising was used to target these groups with imagery of male parents/carers.

Home to School Transport Policy and Post-16 Transport Policy Statement

- 5.26 During pre-consultation, the Fair Access Service reviewed the consultation materials and policy with Kent Parent and Carers Together (PACT)⁵⁰ and developed a parental engagement strategy. An article was featured in KCC's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) e-newsletter to reach parents and guardians of SEND young people in addition to posters displayed in Libraries and Gateways across Kent and on buses to reach pupils travelling to school. During the consultation period, the Head of Fair Access presented on Home to School transport at Kent Youth County Council (KYCC). A number of young people then took part in a focus group with the Head of Fair Access to discuss their thoughts in more detail, including suggestions for further changes, the limitations of legislation, and methodologies to encourage more young people to participate in the consultation.

Digital Exclusion

Consideration and mitigation of Digital Exclusion

- 5.27 At present, the primary mechanism to monitor the consideration of digital exclusion in the delivery of information and services is through review of the equality analysis for digital projects or services via the EqlA App. Whilst there is a potential knowledge gap for services that are not new and have existed for some time, this offers a useful starting point. Of the 139 EqlAs that were published in 2022-23, 17 concerned services that would be delivered, at least in part, digitally. For fourteen of these, physical options were available, or potential methodologies to mitigate digital exclusion were identified. Whilst this was not the case for three, considering the activities concerned, it is unlikely that significant negative impacts would arise for people who are digitally excluded as a result.
- 5.28 Data collected from services on their 2022-23 activity that contributed to this Equality Objective has further evidenced that consideration of digital exclusion and how it could be mitigated is already embedded within service delivery across the council, with most services who reported information having at least one

⁵⁰ A forum for parents and carers of children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within the Kent local authority.

example of how such considerations have been made. This has included provision of physical options for accessing information and services; physical marketing and advertising methods and the introduction of digital inclusion initiatives to allow individuals to access equipment or improve their digital skills. Some examples include:

- **Active Kent and Medway** worked with partners to produce Active at Home booklets and provide digital skills workshops.
- **Trading Standards** offered an email alternative for the weekly roundup of scam alerts available on social media as standard. Many of Kent's parish councils are signed up to this and print copies for their notice boards.
- As an alternative to the **Household Waste and Recycling Centre** booking system, customers can telephone to make a booking and request additional assistance if required.
- The **Corporate Parenting service** ran monthly consultation sessions for families interested in becoming adopters and regular support groups for Kent Foster carers. These groups enable discussion and information sharing for individuals who struggle to access online information.
- The **i-THRIVE and Participation** service offered in-person events every month and during school holidays, as well as facilitating face-to-face sessions for young people who find it more difficult to engage digitally.

5.29 To mitigate the potential impacts of digital exclusion, the **LRA service** introduced Wifi printing to allow customers to print documents using their own devices, provided a plain text option for member newsletters and uploaded digital information on available services to Library Self Service machines. In addition, a Ministry of Defence project was introduced in July 2022, providing laptops for prisoners to use in-cell to develop their digital skills and make connections with the library and request items or other services. As a result, the library delivered requested stock to men who are disabled or physically unable to get to the library, or self-secluding, including one individual who uses a wheelchair and was provided with books on chair-based exercises.

Digital Inclusion Initiatives

5.30 **Digital Kent** have delivered projects and schemes to support residents to become more digitally included, working in partnership with NHS Kent and Medway and NHS Health Education England to tackle health inequalities. This included:

- Digital Champions Network – one of the largest networks of digital champions in the country with over 700 champions recruited. The Network has a diverse background of people, and can speak over 40 different languages.

- Digital Support & Skills – providing Digital Hubs and support sessions in community settings to individuals who are digitally excluded, helping them to apply for or find information for public services online.
- Hardware Access – providing 2-in-1 laptops to residents that are digitally excluded.
- Connectivity Access – providing connectivity solutions for a time-limited period (usually 12 months) to those that cannot afford to stay online through their cellular data or broadband.

5.31 In addition, **North West Kent Countryside Partnership** delivered a digital inclusion project in partnership with Age UK, delivering workshops to older people with mobility issues, which allowed them to access nature through wildlife cameras, webcams, online maps, wildlife apps and more. **Virtual School Kent** provided and set-up laptops for KCC’s Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who are living in the community and being supported by the **Reception and Safe Care Service** (RSCS), with Wifi provided by Ready Homes and district teams providing basic mobile phones for young people who do not have one.

Conclusion & Next Steps

5.32 Overall, review of performance against this Equality Objective paints a positive picture, which we would hope to maintain and build upon over the lifetime of these objectives. Looking at accessible information, provision of translations and alternative formats are already being utilised across many of our services as standard; we have established a benchmark for performance against digital accessibility which will be supported by a robust road map for improvement and a number of services have made a real effort to promote a positive narrative of equality, diversity and inclusion in their communications and materials about services. With regard to services, complaints and compliments demonstrate that a number of people with disabilities felt considered and supported, and that where something was found to be inaccessible, action was taken by the service. This was supported by physical accessibility improvements across buildings, country parks and within service provision; efforts to make specific consultations as accessible to impacted groups as possible and the introduction of specialised provision for certain groups that may experience intangible or hidden barriers to access. Looking ahead, a priority will be highlighting areas of best practice and identifying how these can be used to inform and improve future service developments over the next year. Despite this being the first year in which digital exclusion was specifically considered, it is evident that it is largely embedded within services’ equality analysis and supported by a number of projects and initiatives to promote digital inclusion. This will continue to be monitored to ensure that this is maintained into the future.

6. Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities.

- 6.1 This Equality Objective was developed as a legacy of KCC's effective and collaborative partnership working during the pandemic, in order to maintain and improve upon the opportunities that our strategic partnerships provide for achieving equality outcomes. As part of our approach to this objective, we intend to develop a mechanism to understand the full scale of the council's strategic partnerships and the positive equality outcomes they could support or have achieved. This work will be a key priority for 2023-24, to enable more detailed reporting within subsequent Annual Equality & Diversity reports. It is intended that this will enable us to gain a greater understanding of the extent to which KCC's Strategic Partnerships have an equalities focus or priority; the proportion that have developed or contributed to an EqIA, and where they have enabled data sharing, engagement opportunities, equalities achievements, or supported diversity and inclusion. This year's report will therefore provide an insight into the 2022-23 activities of a number of our Strategic Partnerships⁵¹, as well as the equalities impacts of some of the council's more informal partnership working during the period.

Work with Strategic Partnerships

Kent Community Safety Partnership (KCSP)

- 6.2 In September 2022 the **Kent Community Safety Partnership (KCSP)** jointly delivered a webinar with the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board for multi-agency frontline professionals regarding carers. This included a focus on age and disability, as the individuals in the Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) presented were elderly and suffering with dementia. Dr Hannah Bows was a guest speaker at the event and highlighted the assumptions frequently made around domestic abuse and older people, which is often misunderstood or dismissed. A further webinar was held in November 2022 regarding cultural competency. This focused on two published DHRs, [Tamana](#) and [Simran](#), and shared lessons around the intersection of race, religion, age, sex and culture, and how this influenced agency and individual responses in these cases, with a view to inform and improve how support is delivered across partners' services in the future.

⁵¹ For the purposes of this report, Strategic Partnerships have been defined as an organised and managed board or group of partners, including KCC and other organisations from public, private and/or VCSE sectors, which has a Terms of Reference and meets at least once a year.

- 6.3 In March 2023, KCSP delivered a Conference on the topic of Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) attended by over 250 people from a variety of partner agencies as well as Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector organisations. The aim of the conference was to raise awareness and share good practice covering a range of topics including the Trauma Effect of VAWG, Misogyny and Incels⁵², and the Active Bystander programme⁵³. Following the event, a resource pack was disseminated to delegates including information about available commissioned services in Kent, bite size videos about VAWG, along with reports and partner information. The feedback from the conference was very positive with 90% of respondents rating it as excellent or very good, and 98% of respondents rating it as excellent, very good or good. Respondents to the post-conference survey stated they would share details with colleagues, do additional research and undertake further training.
- 6.4 The KCSP also used some of the Crime Reduction Grant Funding provided by the Police and Crime Commissioner in support of the Hate Crime Forum to produce Kent Hate Crime posters in multiple languages as well as 2 banners for use at events.

Integrated Care System (ICS) Partnership

- 6.5 During 2022-23, the interim Integrated Care System (ICS) strategy was developed by partners in Kent and Medway. This was intended to be a system-led strategy for all, to support work to improve health, care and wellbeing by ICS partners and was supported by an EqIA completed by the NHS in collaboration with partners. Over the course of 2023-24, a process of engagement on the strategy has been undertaken to inform a final version for publication in December 2023.
- 6.6 Addressing health inequalities is a key priority/driver for the ICS, and as such, much of the partnership's work has focused around identifying and addressing uneven health outcomes, such as the increased chance of serious injury or death arising from pregnancy/maternity for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women.

⁵² Incel stands for 'involuntary celibate', meaning people who are unable to get a romantic or sexual partner despite wanting one. People who subscribe to this ideology are usually part of online subcultures that are characterised by misogyny, misanthropy and hostility to women (and men) who are sexually active.

⁵³ The Active Bystander Programme supports colleagues to become active bystanders who feel confident to take an early intervention approach to prevent negative behaviours from escalating.

Work across the system has been divided into three groups: inequalities, prevention and population health. Over the following year, each group will work to develop action plans. As the ICS becomes further established, KCC's role within the partnership will develop and enable further progress under this Equality Objective.

Partnership Working

- 6.7 Within the **PRU⁵⁴, Inclusion and Attendance Service (PIAS)**, multi-agency work was undertaken with schools, PRUs and other strategic partners to use shared data on interventions for attendance, permanent exclusions, suspensions, managed moves, and directions off site to highlight inequalities occurring with respect to sex and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), to then review practice and impact in these areas.
- 6.8 **Adoption Partnership South East** worked closely with organisations such as New Family Social, CoramBAAF, Adoption UK and Parents And Children Together (PACT)⁵⁵ to ensure that the service was informed on current research on the diverse needs of different protected characteristic groups, including Black Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, and the LGBTQ+ community.
- 6.9 In addition to working with people and partners across the county in the development of the Move Together Strategy, **Active Kent and Medway** have implemented a number of actions with partners to achieve positive equality outcomes. This included asking all funded partners to provide participant demographics⁵⁶; sharing equality data with Sport England, including participant data regarding disability and race, and working with School Games Organisers based in each district, to inform targeting of schools both by data, and by local knowledge of schools that do not regularly engage in district level opportunities and programmes.
- 6.10 The **Adolescents & Open Access** team worked with Public Health, Health visiting and midwifery in the development of the Kent Communities and Family Hub consultation EqlAs, which were informed by data shared by partners. The team has continued to work with midwifery through the Health Inequalities Board to develop partnership work to address disparity in outcomes for specific community groups and localised areas. The team also worked closely with Canterbury City Council to deliver direct support services to Afghan nationals

⁵⁴ Pupil Referral Units

⁵⁵ New Family Social is a UK charity led by LGBTQ+ adopters and foster carers, CoramBAAF is a membership organisation for professionals working across adoption, fostering and kinship care, Adoption UK is a charity that supports adoption.

⁵⁶ Previously, some partners did not collect this data.

living in local hotels.

- 6.11 **Public Health** is in a legal partnership with Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) who deliver a number of public health services. In early 2023, KCHFT developed a new programme of Health Equity Audits to support improved understanding and targeting of Public Health services. This will be used by KCC to support a programme of service transformation. The first audit was an in-depth equity profile of School Health Services, with an action plan developed in response to potential issues identified. In addition, as members of the Kent and Medway Turning the Tide Oversight Board⁵⁷, a dashboard was developed to identify gaps in need and as a result, the priority actions related to Population Health inequality. Analysis of the dashboard data identified several priorities for further work, including the identification of disproportionality of hypertension in the ethnic minority community, which led to the project detailed in **5.18**.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 6.12 There is evidence that work has taken place, both within Strategic Partnerships and with more informal partnerships to support the delivery of this Equality Objective. However, review of what has taken place over 2022-23 indicates that this has leant toward using partnership working to understand the diverse needs of our communities. It is hoped that as this improved understanding becomes embedded and dispersed, this will begin to have an actual impact on how the diverse needs of our communities are physically met. Finally, a key focus for the next year will be working to establish the full extent of the council's Strategic Partnerships in order to better understand our activity and progress with this Equality Objective and identify any potential opportunities to be explored.

⁵⁷ The Turning the Tide Transformation Oversight Board was established by the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System (ICS) to drive the implementation of a strategy intended to address the impact Covid-19 is having on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations and workforce.

7. Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour.

7.1 This is the first of the two equality objectives that focus on activity and progress across equality, diversity and inclusion for the council's workforce. As part of our approach to this Equality Objective, we have begun with an analysis of metrics and activity that contribute to a picture of the council's inclusivity as a whole, many of which underpin the ambitions of our **2022-27 People Strategy** and the conclusions of the **KCC Inclusivity Indicator**. This is then supported by findings related to our learning and development offer as an indication of the inclusivity of career progression opportunities. Finally, we have explored data around incidents, discriminatory behaviour and sickness absence to determine our progress in maintaining a trusted working environment for our staff.

An inclusive employer

People Strategy 2022-27

7.2 The People Strategy 2022-2027 sets out KCC's strategic statement of intent and aspiration for KCC as an employer, and fundamentally underpins all KCC activity to ensure we continue to be an inclusive and diverse employer. The strategy includes four overarching themes for achieving these ambitions, and is monitored by an annual progress report, drawing on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and detailed management information. Key areas of success noted for 2022-23 included employee support for cost-of-living concerns; awareness raising about menopause; investment in developing leadership and management; inclusive culture development; development of career pathways into KCC for people aged 16-25 and development of KCC's recruitment website.

Inclusivity Indicator

7.3 The **Inclusivity Indicator**⁵⁸ was introduced in 2019 to support organisational understanding of what we mean by inclusion, determine how staff experience the organisation, and to provide a robust evidence base with which to drive continuous improvement. **Inclusivity Indicator** analysis for 2022-23 concluded that the council had continued to improve as a diverse and inclusive employer, with monitoring mechanisms in place to track and identify opportunities for improvement. Compared to the previous year, KCC remained largely consistent,

⁵⁸ The Inclusivity Indicator acts as a methodology to synthesise KCC workforce data from a variety of sources in order to establish how inclusive KCC is an employer and drive continuous improvement.

with a high proportion of staff continuing to respond positively in terms of overall feelings of inclusion and fair treatment, despite some difference in experience for some minority groups of staff. These findings are supported by the following detailed analysis of the individual measures that sit within the Inclusivity Indicator and key activity undertaken in the period in support of workforce inclusivity.

Total Contribution Pay (TCP)

- 7.4 TCP ratings are important as they can have a direct impact on how valued staff feel, and also on their feelings about staying at, or leaving the organisation. Comparison of the awards between those who share a particular protected characteristic and those who do not can also potentially identify areas for improvement in terms of inclusivity, whether this be in supporting certain groups to perform at their best, working to develop a more inclusive workplace culture, in the application of ratings by managers taking into account individuals' ability to perform, or addressing inequality. Overall, an analysis of the 2022-23 TCP ratings demonstrates that whilst there was improvement in some areas, there are still some areas of disparity, which have increased in the period for LGBTQ+ employees, younger and older employees (aged under 25 and over 65), and disabled employees.

Gender Pay Gap

- 7.5 Both KCC's mean and median Gender Pay Gap for 2022 have fallen compared to 2021 and continue to be less than the national average.⁵⁹ Whilst it is positive that the pay gap is continuing to narrow, the remaining gap can be 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. Looking at the Gender Pay Gap information with regard to bonuses, whilst the proportion of both male and female employees who receive a bonus is falling, the gender pay gap between male and female staff that receive a bonus has increased.⁶⁰ The full report is available here: [KCC 2022-23 Gender Pay Gap Report](#).
- 7.6 In acknowledgement that other protected characteristic groups experience inequality in the workplace, the council has an aspiration to widen its pay gap analysis to other protected characteristics. Initial investigations have begun to explore the possibility of completing this analysis for disability and ethnicity,

⁵⁹ The gender pay gap (2022) for KCC is below the national average, 11.4% v 14.9% respectively for the mean. It is also lower than the figure for last year which stood at 12.2%. The median figure has also reduced to 12.6% from 18.0% previously.

⁶⁰ KCC's mean gender bonus pay gap for 2022-23 was 21.4% and the median was 28.6%. KCC's mean gender bonus pay gap for 2021-22 was 5.8% and the median was 16.7%. In 2022-23, the proportion of male employees in KCC receiving a bonus was 7.6% and the proportion of female employees receiving a bonus was 4.0%.

however the usefulness of this is dependent on first improving declaration rates of equality data. This will continue to be a focus for the future.

2022 Staff Survey

- 7.7 Overall response to the question of **'Inclusion and Fair Treatment'** in the 2022 Staff Survey remained positive, with 82.0% staff responding positively. However, disabled staff answered less positively to the topic than non-disabled staff. There was a small decline in the level of positive response to questions about whether employees believed positive action would be taken in response to their individual needs and personal circumstances, and how able employees felt to discuss their individual needs and personal circumstances. Whilst still minimal, where questions related to individual needs, this decline was slightly greater than questions related to personal circumstances. Response to questions regarding 'my manager' remained positive at 72.9%, which is a slight increase on the previous year. This suggests that whilst the general picture for all staff was positive, due to the lower level of positive response from disabled staff, the council needs to continue to promote disability inclusion. In addition, 2022 Staff Survey data shows that more work needs to be done to ensure staff feel that their individual needs will be met, and that they feel comfortable to discuss them.

Workplace Adjustments

- 7.8 In 2022-23, a new methodology for the collection of information on workplace adjustments was rolled out to make it easier for employees to be supported with adjustments and to improve the accuracy of the council's data. As a result of this change, there was an 11% increase in the proportion of staff providing their data⁶¹; an 8% increase in the number of staff reporting that they had adjustments in place, and a 19.6% increase in the total number of adjustments reported, compared with 2021-22. This is a positive indicator for the council's inclusivity. The increase in workplace adjustments can be seen largely in the uptake of flexible working patterns and absence/leave, which may be explained by the change in working arrangements across the organisation and/or due to the changing needs of employees. Looking at the data on adjustment types recorded, there has also been a shift toward physical equipment adjustments.⁶²
- 7.9 Data on the disability categories reported across the adjustments recorded for 2022-23 saw an increase across all categories except for Non-Visible disability, which fell by 136 compared to 2021-22. Physical Disability continued to be the

⁶¹ Including nil return for adjustments in place.

⁶² In December 2022, the top two adjustment types made remained the same as the previous year, with 523 adjustments made for Flexible Working Patterns and 278 adjustments made for Chairs (including specialist chairs). The number of adjustments for Computer Equipment (Hardware) has overtaken Absence/Leave in 2022, becoming the third largest adjustment type in the period.

most frequently reported disability category for adjustments. This information is used to understand the changing needs of our workforce and inform how these can be better supported, for example through the neurodiversity awareness raising work which began in 2022-23.

- 7.10 As of December 2022, approximately 11.4% of the workforce had an adjustment in place. Whilst it is not possible to accurately determine how many more staff might need or benefit from a workplace adjustment, considering the council's workforce profile, it seems that there are opportunities to promote and increase this proportion further. As such, there are plans to continually promote their availability via HR/OD communications. In acknowledgement that not all workplace adjustments arise from a disability and in order to support a broader range of staff needs, in 2022-23, KCC's Disability Passports were replaced by **Inclusion Passports**. The development of Inclusion Passports was supported by engagement with **staff groups**, to obtain feedback on the types of questions asked, the language, style, format and content of the documents. Thus far, this has resulted in only a small increase in the number of Inclusion Passports in place, however these will continue to be promoted, alongside opportunities to better understand how they are being used by staff. Despite this, there is evidence to suggest that staff are utilising adjustments for a broader range of needs than disability alone, as for 210 of the adjustments reported in 2022, no disability was recorded.

Policy Framework

- 7.11 KCC continually looks to improve the policies, practices and guidance documents that are in place to support staff, meet their individual needs and achieve their best at work. Two policies were refreshed in 2022-23 - the Whistleblowing Policy, and the Resolution Policy; these were reviewed as part of our review cycle to ensure that they continued to meet the changing needs of the organisation and its employees, values and culture. An additional nine guidance documents were also updated, spanning Reasonable Adjustments, Inclusion Passports, Shared Parental Leave, Drugs & Alcohol Policy, Positive Attendance Management and Case Management. During 2022-23, work was also started to review and increase awareness of disability resources and support, particularly around neurodiversity. In addition, work began to develop policy changes in order to reflect the council's position on IVF.

Building Inclusive Cultures

- 7.12 A 9-month pilot of a new reverse mentoring programme for Building Inclusive Cultures was delivered, with participants from KCC **staff groups** as mentors and senior managers at KR15 and above as mentees. This aimed to share different perspectives based on diverse backgrounds and explore how we can better support our work and our people, particularly for KCC's disabled colleagues due

to the evident difference of experience demonstrated through the 2022 Staff Survey results. Further development to support middle managers with learning on equality and inclusion has taken place, with the roll out of more than 28 cohorts of Developing Inclusive Management practice workshops to 696 attendees since January 2021. Following the reverse mentoring programme there are plans to set up of a community of practice to continue the discussion and work within directorates on inclusion.

Communications and Engagement

- 7.13 The engagement plan continued to mark celebration events in support of our strategic priorities for diversity and inclusion such as Black History Month and Race Equality week, Pride Month, World Mental Health Day and Mental Health Awareness Week, International Day of People with Disabilities and Menopause awareness, which included signposting to webinars and events. External speakers were brought in to lead events in support of Pride and Black History Month. KCC also became a White Ribbon accredited employer and promoted resources as part of 16 days of action on Domestic Abuse.
- 7.14 The development of the new KNet in the period involved the migration of 644 pages and 3,726 documents and an update of thousands of links to ensure a well-structured and compliant system is in place for staff to share and access information. To support deaf inclusion, some of the important KNet pages have been translated into British Sign Language to help our staff access the information they need to work or to support their wellbeing. This work was undertaken with sensory services in order to ensure the right information was prioritised in the right way. Managers were made aware of the BSL landing page to signpost colleagues as required.

Staff Groups

- 7.15 As of March 2023, KCC has six staff groups, these are: Level Playing Field (disabled staff and carers), Staff Ethnic Diversity Forum, Rainbow (LGBTQ+ staff), Aspire (staff aged 30 and under), Mental Health Support Network and Single Parent Staff Group (SPSG), which was established in March 2023⁶³. SPSG has already been able to comment/feedback on a number of both internal and external facing projects across the council, including Guidance for managers – Neurodiversity in the Workplace, and support for services in the development of the Domestic Abuse strategy and Father Inclusive Guidance. Our staff groups contribute to all three aspects of this Equality Objective, in providing a safe space for their members to discuss any issues; in providing support and development

⁶³ Whilst not formally established for much of 2022-23, SPF had already begun meeting in the period; themes of conversation from these meetings have informed the development of their action plan.

opportunities to their members, and in facilitating engagement across the council's services, providing feedback on equality issues and ensuring the employee voice is heard.

- 7.16 In support of the important role that staff groups play, the strategy for staff groups was reviewed by CMT during 2022-23. As a result, allocated time to conduct staff group role activities was introduced for specific roles within staff groups, and a Staff Group Guide was developed, which has since been applied in the formation of Single Parent Staff Group. Open door sessions with CMT were introduced to supplement existing escalation routes for issues identified by staff groups and are due to continue to take place at regular intervals going forward. HR/OD are supporting the delivery of the commitments made by CMT at the first open door, held with Aspire. A Safe Space workshop between CMT and Level Playing Field has also been planned, in order to understand the lived experiences of disabled staff in the organisation and identify improvement opportunities. This will inform part of an OD diagnostic piece of work aiming to take a different approach to challenging inclusive mindsets and behaviours of staff and managers, with an initial focus on disability and digital accessibility.

Workforce Action Plans

- 7.17 The **Disability Action Plan** captures areas of activity that are likely to have the greatest impact on workplace disability inclusion, which has been informed by data, best practice, feedback from **Level Playing Field staff group** and Staff Survey responses. The activity aims to increase declaration and representation rates of disabled staff to better reflect the communities we serve, to develop a culture where disabled staff feel confident and reach their full potential, and to involve and engage with disabled staff in decision making. Key activity in the period included the introduction of the Inclusion Passport, development of neurodiversity resources, delivery of engagement activity and awareness days, and the new approach to collating workplace adjustments.
- 7.18 Key 2022-2023 activity delivered against KCC's **Race Action Plan** included engagement for the roll-out of race equality objectives as part of the TCP process, effective from April 2023, equalities analysis of TCP ratings and exploration of the potential to develop a race pay gap analysis. Future areas of focus will include strengthening of the staff induction, and continuing small and large scale conversations about race via Challenger and T200. In support of CMT's Race Action plan, Adult Social Care (ASC) have continued to take part in a **Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (SCWRES)**. In early 2022, this involved the development of the [SCWRES action plan](#) which was published on Kent.gov in May 2022. This spans areas such as recruitment, career progression, training and bullying, harassment and abuse and is supported by

corporate-level and directorate-level activities. Delivery of the associated actions has been supported by the WRES working group.

Fair, open, and equitable access to career progression

KCC's Learning & Development Opportunities

- 7.19 KCC's principal accredited staff training opportunities are available through use of the apprenticeship levy, which saw 224 new starts during 2022-23. The changes in the equality profile of new apprenticeship starts in 2022-23 were largely in line with the overarching themes of movement and change in the council's total workforce profile, which, overall, paints a positive picture of the inclusivity and accessibility of apprenticeships to staff from different protected characteristic groups. However, there were some areas of disparity with our workforce profile – staff aged under 25 are overrepresented amongst apprenticeship starts; whilst staff with a faith or religion and transgender staff are underrepresented.
- 7.20 Looking at the level of positive response to questions relating to '**Learning and Development**' in the **2022 Staff Survey**, this decreased slightly when compared to 2021, with 55.0% positive responses to "*KCC is committed to developing people*", and 48.8% positive responses to "*There are opportunities for me to develop my career within KCC*". Despite this, there was an increased positive response from staff aged 16-25 compared to the previous year, which is in line with the equality profile of apprenticeship starts. However, a smaller proportion of disabled staff responded positively to these questions than non-disabled staff. In 2022, two new questions were added to the '**Learning and Development**' section of the Staff Survey, related to digital skills. Both of these received a high positive response.
- 7.21 During 2022-23, **Aspire staff group** have also worked to promote career development and job opportunities to its members in support of KCC's intentions in this area. This included engagement with Kent University students to enable them to understand what working for KCC could be like for them and gain feedback on their experience. Furthermore, the staff group in collaboration with HR/OD, has continued to support participation in the Young Local Authority of the Year Award.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The two-day competition is held annually, with the aim of enhancing the professional development of people from across the UK who are in the early stages of their careers in local government.

- 7.22 As mentioned in **4.3**, During 2022-23, KCC participated in the Employer’s Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei) Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation (TIDE).⁶⁵ Subsequently, the council received a silver TIDE award from the enei for our approach and progress on diversity and inclusion compared to other organisations. The enei’s recommendations on areas for improvement will be taken forward to support our future progress.
- 7.23 In addition to attempts to make its broader training offer as inclusive as possible, KCC also offers a range of **eLearning modules relating to equality and diversity** on its online training platform, Delta. These aim to provide all staff with the tools and knowledge to work in accordance with the council’s values and adapt their practice to principles of inclusivity, both when interacting with colleagues and members of the public. During 2022-23, these modules saw 1,149 completions, which is an increase on the previous year. Of these, there were 394 completions of ‘Introduction to Equality and Diversity’, 211 completions of ‘Care Certificate – Standard 4: Equality and Diversity’, and 159 completions of ‘Trans Awareness’. Recently, access to these modules was enhanced with the addition of the ‘Equality and Inclusion Zone’ on Delta, which allows staff to see all of the relevant modules available.

[A trusted working environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour](#)

Discriminatory behaviour & Incidents

- 7.24 Whilst there was an overall decrease in the number of cases recorded on the **ER Case Management system** in 2022-23, the proportion of cases which were categorised as Resolution & Harassment increased by 3.7% compared to 2021-22. Looking at **2022 Staff Survey** responses on the likelihood that staff would report unfair treatment, whilst generally minority groups of staff reported less positively, the difference in experience was mostly minimal. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff answered that they were less likely to report compared with White staff, and disabled staff answered that they were less likely to report compared with non-disabled staff.
- 7.25 When comparing **2022 Staff Survey** responses from staff who have a certain protected characteristic with those do not, experience is relatively even across most of the protected characteristics with regard to bullying or harassment

⁶⁵ This is a benchmarking tool which evaluates an organisation’s performance with regard to diversity and inclusion, to identify the steps and actions required to support an inclusive culture. Assessment is made across a number of areas including, the workforce; strategy and plans; leadership and accountability; recruitment and attraction; training and development; employment practices; communication and engagement; and procurement. Each area is given a score identifying where performance sits on the enei’s Diversity and Inclusion Road Map. The Road Map levels are: Prepare, Mobilise, Realise, Embed, and Sustain, with Sustain being the highest level.

experienced in the twelve months prior. However, responses indicated that bullying or harassment had been experienced by greater proportions of disabled staff and LGBTQ+ staff. Whilst most groups of staff reported that the main source of harassment was received from non-employees, staff who are pregnant or have taken parental leave do not meet this trend, reporting colleagues as the main source.

- 7.26 In response to these findings, Corporate Management Team (CMT) communications in 2022-23 reinforced KCC's zero-tolerance stance toward any form of unacceptable behaviour or discrimination in the workplace, with the introduction of CMT open door sessions with **staff groups** to supplement existing escalation routes where issues do occur. This was supported by the introduction of refreshed Dignity at Work guidance and an internal campaign to promote the Expect Respect policy, to highlight the role we all play in challenging inappropriate behaviour. The Health and Safety Incident and Accident reporting form was also updated to support monitoring of bullying and harassment or abusive incidents and inform interventions where required. Work is continuing with directorates to reinforce the council's expectations around zero tolerance toward inappropriate behaviour from both staff and service users, and to inform what a refresh of the Expect Respect campaign for an external audience might look like.

Trusted working environment

- 7.27 The Staff Survey also includes questions which can contribute to our understanding of the KCC working environment more generally. In 2022, there was a high level of positive response to the statements "*I feel able to be myself at work*" (84.6% positive), "*I am treated with respect by the people that I work with*" (84.5% positive) and "*I think that KCC staff respect individual differences*" (81.2% positive), with minimal change in these areas compared to 2021. However, staff were less positive than the previous year with regard to feeling valued for the work they do and to feeling involved in decisions that affect their work. Whilst there is room for improvement, this suggests that most staff feel that KCC does offer a safe and trusted working environment that respects individual difference.
- 7.28 Trends related to staff **absence due to sickness** can also be a useful indicator of the inclusivity of the council's working environment, across a number of factors. Looking at data for 2022-23, trends for staff absence due to sickness have remained largely consistent with 2021-22. Sickness levels continue to be significantly higher for disabled staff than non-disabled staff, and female staff continue to take more sickness days than male staff proportionately. Sickness levels for White staff are only slightly higher than Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff and staff who choose not to declare their ethnicity. Whilst it is difficult to draw a conclusion from this data, this will continue to be monitored as KCC

continues to support its staff and improve its understanding of the barriers and experiences of different groups of staff that may contribute to these trends.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 7.29 Taken together, data related to the inclusivity of the council as a whole suggests an overall positive picture, with some difference in experience for disabled staff, LGBTQ+ staff and both younger and older groups of staff. There has been focused activity undertaken in the period to address this, particularly targeted toward disability inclusion via the Disability Action Plan. Whilst general inclusion work such as the Building Inclusive Cultures mentoring programme is intended to improve on this, the impact of this will need to continue to be monitored to determine if further specific action is required to improve the experience of the organisation for these groups. It is hoped that the continuing programme of CMT and staff group open doors will contribute to this, alongside wider HR/OD activity.
- 7.30 Data suggests that in the most part, our learning and development opportunities were accessible and inclusive to most groups of KCC staff and that these were particularly important to younger staff members this year. Looking ahead, it will be important to consider whether there are any barriers contributing to the difference of experience for disabled staff, staff with a faith/religion and older staff, and to continue to monitor trends for these groups.
- 7.31 Whilst the overall picture on the KCC working environment was positive, there is further work to be done to prevent cases of bullying or harassment, and to support staff where this is occurring, particularly in their interactions with the public. The impact of activity introduced to address this in 2022-23 will need to be monitored alongside the new data arising from the updated H&S Incident and Accident reporting form. Additional consideration may also need to be given to the unique experience of disabled staff.

8. Attract and retain a diverse workforce at all levels of the organisation which reflects the communities that KCC serves.

8.1 Whilst our previous set of equality objectives included a commitment around recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce that reflects the communities we serve, this Equality Objective for 2022-2026 includes an aspiration to actively promote diversity within the workforce. Therefore, in addition to comparing our 2022-23 workforce equality profile with the 2021 Census information and reviewing the staff turnover rate for each of the protected characteristics, we have also specifically considered the diversity of applicants and new hires, and action taken to improve the diversity and inclusivity of our recruitment processes.

KCC's Workforce Profile

8.2 Since publication of the 2021-22 Annual Equality & Diversity Report, the Census 2021 data has become available, enabling us to update our understanding of the county's demographic make-up. For example, the Census tells us that there has been an increased proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, and people with a disability living in Kent. The Census has also included information on the number of LGBTQ+ people living in Kent for the first time. This has meant that, whilst the proportion of staff who are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic increased in 2022-23, this group is now underrepresented when compared with Kent's county profile. Whilst variance with the county profile is small in some areas, there are also some larger disparities with the largest of these being in the categories of sex, disability, religion/faith and age (people aged between 16-25 or over 65). Largely, these are long-standing trends in terms of our workforce profile, and to a certain extent arise from the lower proportions of disabled people and people aged 16-25 in Kent who are economically active.

Category	Workforce Profile as of March 2023	Kent County Profile as per Census 2021	Variance
Current total number of FTE (non schools)	7,660.50	N/A	N/A
Current total FTE on grades KR6 or below ⁶⁶	3,165	N/A	N/A
% who are female	79.2%	51.3%	+27.9%

⁶⁶ Non-schools staff earning up to £23,262.

% who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic	8.9%	10.6%	-1.7%
% who have declared a disability	4.9%	17.9%	-13.0%
% who are LGBTQ+ (16+)	3.3%	2.7%	+0.6%
% who are transgender (16+)	0.5%	0.4%	+0.1%
% who have declared a religion/faith	45.2%	53.4%	-8.2%
% aged 16-25	8.2%	16%	-7.8%
% aged over 65	5.6%	20.4%	-14.8%

Figure 8: 2022-23 KCC Workforce Profile Comparison

8.3 Amongst KCC's leadership group⁶⁷, the proportion of female employees, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees, and disabled employees increased in 2022-23. However, there is still work to be done to continue to improve the representation of female staff and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff within this group.

Retaining a diverse workforce

8.4 The 2022-23 workforce equalities data demonstrates there was an increase in the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees, disabled employees and LGBTQ+ employees, which all reached their highest point over the last four years. The proportion of employees with a faith/religion decreased very slightly, as did the proportion of employees who are transgender. This suggests that whilst our overall workforce and leadership group was not fully representative of our county profile, on the whole, the council continued to retain the diversity of its workforce over the past year.

Staff Turnover

8.5 As of March 2023, KCC's 12-month rolling turnover was at 16.0%. When comparing the turnover rate for staff across the protected characteristics, it would appear that groups which are in the minority of KCC's workforce tended to have a higher turnover rate, as did groups of staff who chose not to declare their equality information. Excluding staff who chose not to declare, the groups of staff

⁶⁷ Employees on a pay scale of KR13 or above.

with the highest turnover were staff aged 25 and under (34.5%), staff aged 65 and over (28.6%), transgender staff (28.3%), and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff (21.5%). Whilst there are a range of factors contributing to the full picture of staff desire to leave the organisation, it is interesting to note that employees aged 25 and under and 65 and over also received a lower percentage of higher TCP ratings, suggesting this could be a possible contributing factor among many for the higher turnover rate for these groups.

- 8.6 Taken with our workforce profile data, this suggests that there are a number of groups that are leaving the organisation at a higher rate than the average of 16.0%, and that therefore, our workforce diversity for 2022-23 was largely maintained by new recruits joining the organisation. To improve, key areas of focus would include:
- increasing the number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, disabled staff, and young staff (aged 16-25);
 - improving the overall diversity of our leadership group, and
 - introducing measures to retain staff who are disabled, aged 25 and under, aged 65 and over, transgender, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

Much of the activity discussed in the previous Equality Objective on inclusivity is intended to support these ambitions/outcomes.

2022 Staff Survey

- 8.7 Whilst analysis of 2022 Staff Survey responses did not identify any conclusive trends for specific protected characteristic groups around the themes of 'Plans for the future' and 'Employee Engagement' (both of which could be indicative of staff's appetite to leave the organisation), the overall findings for the organisation indicate that responses to both themes were less positive compared with 2021. The 2022 Staff Survey also captured staff comments on reasons to work for the council, and what could be done better.⁶⁸ Whilst only a small proportion of staff responded to these questions, the overall feedback suggested that there is an uneven picture about whether staff feel valued for the work they do, and that for a small proportion of staff, respect/fairness and harassment/discrimination were an issue. Any/all of these could be contributing factors to KCC's staff retention. Establishing a better understanding of why certain groups are leaving the council at a greater rate will be a priority area for the coming year; it is intended that this

⁶⁸ Looking at reasons to work for the council, the areas that received the most positive response were general support (4%) and feeling valued, appreciated and/or understood (2%). The most frequent comments about what could be done better focused around employees not feeling valued, appreciated and/or understood (5%), and a lack of respect, fairness and/or equality for all (3%), whilst 1% of respondents provided comments expressing a concern around bullying, harassment and or discrimination within the workplace.

will be supported by feedback gained from the CMT Open Doors and reverse mentoring pilot introduced in the period.

Attracting a diverse workforce

Diversity of Applicants

- 8.8 Looking at the equality information of applicants for 2022-23, there was a small increase in the proportion of applicants from most groups currently in the minority of KCC's workforce, as well as an increase in the proportion of applicants choosing not to declare their equality information. This was not the case for the level of disabled applicants, which fell by a small amount, and applicants aged 16-25, which fell more significantly. Applicant demographics were largely proportionate compared to the greater Kent profile, with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants and female applicants surpassing the county profile. Disabled applicants applied in a smaller proportion compared to the county profile. This suggests that whilst KCC is successfully attracting a diverse pool of applicants to the organisation overall, there remains a need to attract more applicants that are disabled and/or aged 16-25, particularly as both of these groups were also underrepresented within KCC's 2022-23 workforce profile. It is recognised that this should be supported by work to encourage candidates to disclose where they have a disability, as some still prefer not to say. Work to achieve this had already begun in the period, as detailed in the following sections; this activity will continue to be developed over the coming year.

Attracting diverse candidates, including Disability Inclusion

- 8.9 In 2022-23, positive action was explored as a methodology to remove potential barriers in recruitment for disabled candidates and increase the number of disabled applicants. This involved engagement with a central and local government recruitment service and KCC **staff groups** on the effectiveness of specific disability recruitment websites, the use of recruitment apps and blind recruitment, and to ultimately inform the changes made. Feedback was also received from **Staff Ethnic Diversity Forum** members to support understanding of how job advertisement methods could be used to further attract diverse candidates. Following this engagement, improved guidance was developed for managers, and recruitment website content produced, to promote the reasonable adjustments that could be made in KCC's recruitment processes. In support of continuous improvement, a candidate feedback questionnaire was developed, feedback from which will further inform our understanding of the potential barriers that exist in the recruitment process, particularly for disabled applicants, including those who are neurodiverse.
- 8.10 During 2022-23 KCC's new recruitment website was launched. This was designed to be consistent with KCC's inclusive branding, incorporating the personal experiences of real KCC employees to promote KCC as an inclusive

and diverse employer. This will continue to be developed in the future, with the promotion of the council's flexible working arrangements, diversity of roles and career pathways, and further real-life stories on what it is like to work for KCC. In support of KCC's inclusive employer branding, posts on diversity and inclusion were shared during national events such as National Inclusion Week and Black History Month. Work also began to explore how outreach activity through the council's existing channels with diverse communities could be utilised to improve the diversity of applicants for KCC job opportunities; this will continue to be a priority for 2023-24.

Attracting young people

- 8.11 To further support the representation of young people amongst our workforce and attract those aged 16-25 to the organisation, a range of workforce development approaches have been introduced, tested and developed during 2022-23 to promote new entry points into KCC for this group. This includes the Kickstart and Graduate programmes which have both won awards, the availability of Social Work Degree apprenticeships and the Traineeship pilot with Kent Scientific Services. Ongoing student experience assessments will look to assess the effectiveness of different entry points for social work students, support mechanisms in place, and the overall impact of Practice education on outcomes for students.

Diversity in applicant shortlisting

- 8.12 When considering the equality profile of applicants who were shortlisted and hired in the period compared with those who applied, there were some inconsistencies across the protected characteristics. The proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic hires, male hires and hires with a faith/religion fell most significantly when compared to the proportion that applied. This trend is consistent with 2021-22, and there may be many factors at play to explain this.

Improved recruitment processes

- 8.13 To improve the inclusivity of KCC's recruitment processes and positively impact our organisational culture through the values and attributes of those who are recruited to work for the council, a selection of new interview questions were introduced in the period. This included a mandatory inclusion question, a bank of values-based questions and additional specific questions for management or leadership roles. New Recruitment & Selection training was also made available on Delta⁶⁹, and was supplemented with improved guidance and information on KNet intended to support inclusivity and accessibility in recruitment. This included the induction to probation guidance, for which review remains ongoing, and the

⁶⁹ Evaluation of its impact and success will be considered in the following year's report.

recruiting manager toolkit, which highlights the need to consider standard advert wording and provide alternative contact details on job adverts to improve accessibility for disabled applicants.

- 8.14 To improve inclusivity for applicants with diverse gender identities, feedback was sought from the **Rainbow staff group** on proposed alternative wording for the pronoun question on KCC's recruitment management system. Pilots were also begun for the workforce planning tool, which, alongside other aspects, encourages managers to think about their diversity profile as part of their workforce planning. This will be fully rolled-out in 2023-24, with data obtained via the tool to support future Strategic Workforce Planning.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 8.15 Data for 2022-23 has demonstrated that, whilst there are some disparities, KCC's workforce has remained diverse and broadly reflective of its county profile, with some protected characteristic groups reaching their highest levels within the workforce in the past few years. Despite this, it would appear that this diversity has been maintained largely as a result of new recruits to the organisation. This will require further work to understand the reasons for this, and implement action to improve retention, much of which has already begun in the period and is detailed under the previous Equality Objective on inclusivity. Monitoring this and identifying specific areas and action for improvement will be a priority for 2023-24. This is equally the case for work that was undertaken in order to attract more young people and disabled people to the organisation.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Information for 2022-23 has shown that despite this being the first year in which KCC has adopted and reported against the new Equality Objectives, many of the key principles across the new objectives have already begun to be embedded within service delivery. There is a breadth of examples of where services have harnessed equality data collection and analysis opportunities, including areas of best practice where detailed analysis was undertaken in order to inform future service delivery, and where relevant, the specific commissioning or procurement processes. In addition, this report has evidenced that significant efforts have been made across services to ensure that information and services are accessible to everyone; this has included activity to support the inclusivity of services to diverse groups who may experience 'hidden' or 'intangible barriers' to access, such as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, LGBTQ+ people and people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities. As noted in the 2021-22 report, consideration of digital exclusion and the potential for digital inclusion initiatives has also continued into 2022-23. Within HR/OD activity, inclusion and diversity have both continued to be promoted, with the implementation of a range of measures to improve our recruitment processes, improved support for our staff groups and targeted activity to improve disability inclusion and attract young people to the organisation.
- 9.2 However, compilation of this report has indicated that performance varies across the objectives. Our strongest area of performance is within the Equality Objective relating to the accessibility of our information and services, with a wealth of service examples provided across directorates, to the extent that not every example of good practice could be mentioned within this report. Consideration of how we could standardise the best practice approaches taken by specific teams in this area and spread learning opportunities will be a key focus looking ahead. The Equality Objective relating to equality data collection and analysis is also an area of strength and evident improvement compared to 2021-22. To support continuous improvement in this area, future work will involve maintaining and continuing to monitor compliance with the EqIA Policy; implementing learning from examples of best practice; further developing our understanding of the status of data collection and analysis and working with the Corporate Equality Group to utilise EqIA App Dashboard data to drive improvement in the quality of our equality analysis. Whilst there were excellent examples of the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion within strategic partnership working and commissioning and procurement in 2022-23, such as the outputs of the Kent Community Safety Partnership, these two Equality Objectives represent our central areas for improvement and development over the coming years as our understanding of performance has been limited by the extent of measurement mechanisms currently in place in these areas. This improvement will be

supported by the development of a Strategic Partnership register and through the development of measures within the reshaping of KCC's Commercial function, both of which will help close the knowledge gaps of our performance in these areas and support the identification of priority areas of focus to improve into the future.

- 9.3 Compilation of sections 7-8 regarding our workforce objectives have demonstrated that there is a robust evidence base in place in support of our understanding of performance in these areas. Looking ahead, our focus will be reviewing the impact of activity undertaken in the period to improve inclusivity and diversity and utilising information arising from additional measures that have been introduced in the period, such as the CMT open doors. This will support identification of any further activity required in order to address the 2022-23 workforce trends, including the prevalence of harassment from non-employees and the difference of experience of disabled staff across a number of areas.
- 9.4 Finally, it is intended that this improvement will be supported by continued work within directorates and with specific services to achieve the targeted improvements identified and to continue to embed the principles of the organisation-wide objectives across directorates and services. This will be supported by a focused session with the Corporate Equality Group (CEG), to identify the group's priorities and the actions it will take to support their delivery and achievement.