

**From:** Roger Gough, Leader of the Council  
Amanda Beer, Chief Executive

**To:** Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 10 September 2024

**Subject:** Annual Equality & Diversity Report 2023-24

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** Corporate Management Team

**Future Pathway of report:** N/A

**Summary:**

This report sets out progress against Kent County Council's six Equality Objectives, as set out within Framing Kent's Future, which is a statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010.

**Recommendation:**

The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to approve the Annual Equality & Diversity Report for 2023-24, attached as Appendix A.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which came into force in April 2011. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act;
  - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
  - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, sex and sexual orientation).
- 1.2 In addition, the Equality Act regulations require that public authorities publish:
- a. One or more 'equality objectives', at least every four years.
  - b. Annual 'equality information' to demonstrate their compliance with the general duty.
- 1.3 The 'Annual Equality & Diversity' report appended to this paper discharges the council's statutory duty to produce and publish annual 'equality information'.

## 2. Equality Objectives

2.1 The 2023-24 Annual Equality & Diversity report marks the second year of monitoring our progress against our current Corporate Equality Objectives (2022-26), as set out within Framing Kent's Future.

2.2 There are six Equality Objectives, four of which are primarily outward facing and two of which are inward looking, concerning our workforce. These are:

- 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.

2.3 Our equality objectives are broad and cross-cutting, enabling a unified approach to delivery and reporting across the council. The same approach has been taken in the compilation of the 2023-24 report as the previous year. Data has been obtained from key teams across the council in line with the measurement mechanisms set out within the objectives' framework<sup>1</sup>, and supplemented with information received via a call-out to directorates for service examples that have contributed to our objectives in the period. Directorates were asked to respond to each of the Equality Objectives where possible for their services, which has enabled the development of a cross-directorate picture of our performance.

## 3. Annual Review

3.1 As the second year reporting against our 2022-2026 Equality Objectives, this report has enabled us to build upon and measure against the baseline that was established in the 2022-23 report. We have therefore been able to develop a useful temperature check of our performance across objectives and highlight areas of success with a number of case studies from our services. This included examples of detailed equality analysis and routine collection of protected characteristic data; the delivery of equality outcomes via key

---

<sup>1</sup> The framework was developed by Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance (SPRCA) and informed by engagement with the Corporate Equality Group (CEG) and individuals and teams across the council in order to sense-check proposed measurement mechanisms. This is a live internal working document that will continue to be refreshed over the lifetime of the objectives.

contracts; extensive and detailed examples of how barriers to access experienced by diverse groups have been addressed; a continued focus on mitigating digital exclusion within service delivery, and utilisation of our strategic partnerships to support our wider equality objectives and ambitions. Within the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR/OD) service, a range of measures were implemented in support of our workforce objectives and in response to the findings of the annual People Strategy progress report. This included investment in developing inclusive leadership and management, work to ensure new recruits are receiving the support they need when joining KCC and continued activity to attract young people to the organisation. The key observations from this year's report are summarised below.

- 3.2 Information and analysis in support of the Equality Objective related to **equality data collection and analysis** (section 3) has demonstrated a continued high level of engagement with this activity, however has indicated that there is still room for improvement. Whilst information from directorates indicates that services have been proactively collecting equality data, there is more work to be done in this area in order to build fuller pictures of service users' or communities' needs to inform effective service delivery. Additionally, whilst increasing numbers of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are being completed, this report has highlighted that further work is required to improve officer compliance with the full EqIA App process. Previously, the annual reports have focused activity toward improving the proportion of Key Decisions which are supported by an EqIA; the success of this has been evident in 2023-24, with an improvement to 93% compliance with this, from 66% in 2022-23. It is hoped that this year's report will be an equally effective driver to improve other aspects of EqIA policy performance, supported by a range of activity to improve staff awareness of their accountabilities in the EqIA process in the coming year. This activity will be informed by engagement with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on the priority areas for improvement identified in the compliance review.
- 3.4 The council's strongest area of performance continued to be seen in section 5, which concerns the Equality Objective related to the **accessibility of council information and services and digital exclusion**. Once again, more positive examples of how services and information had been made accessible were supplied by our directorates than it was possible to include within the report. In support of continuous improvement, our priority will be highlighting and fostering this success between services, and working to identify how we could be more aspirational in the delivery of this Equality Objective.
- 3.5 Compared with the previous year, the Equality Objective relating to **strategic partnerships** (section 6) saw the greatest level of improvement in 2023-24. Directorates provided extensive examples of how partnership working has supported our ambitions across the other objectives. In addition, the introduction of an online questionnaire aimed at KCC officers participating in local strategic partnerships has provided an improved understanding of how our strategic partnerships are contributing to equality outcomes more broadly. There is the potential to drill-down further into the data obtained via this questionnaire to identify untapped opportunities to achieve equality outcomes or promote equality data sharing and learning. There are also significant

opportunities for improvement with regard to the **commissioning, procurement and trading companies** Equality Objective (section 4), with planned activity in the coming year in support of achieving equality outcomes within commissioning and procurement activity, and the positive upward trajectory set during the period by the Commercial Services Group (CSG).

- 3.6 The **workforce objectives** discussed in section 7 and 8 demonstrate an overall positive picture in terms of KCC's inclusivity and the diversity of its workforce, which has remained largely consistent compared with the previous year. Whilst incremental positive changes have begun to be seen, the council acknowledges that due to the nature of culture change, the impact of workforce activity is likely to be seen in the longer term and will need to continue to be monitored. Any further consideration of progress against the measurement mechanisms captured within these objectives will be taken forward by Personnel Committee.

#### **4. Looking Ahead**

- 4.1 Looking ahead, we will continue to work with the Corporate Equality Group (CEG) and our services to further develop our ambitions and deliver on our priorities for the future, as well as exploring new data sources in more detail and establishing further measurement mechanisms to enhance our understanding of our performance. This will encapsulate a range of activity over the course of 2024-25 and into the future, however, as touched on in the previous section, some of the key activities will include:

- Engagement with CMT regarding the findings of the EqIA Policy review to highlight priority areas for improvement and inform action to be taken forward.
- Presentation of the report findings to CEG in order to formulate and take forward any actions in conjunction with our service divisions as appropriate. This will include consideration of how we could be more aspirational in the delivery of the Equality Objective relating to the accessibility of our information and services and promote best practice.
- Delivery of planned activity within the commissioning and procurement Equality Objective to establish additional metrics and support the development of staff understanding of equality considerations within commissioning and procurement activity.
- Utilisation of the rich new data source represented by the information gathered from the new Strategic Partnership Register form, and consideration of any untapped opportunities for further equality outcomes.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications.

#### **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010), the Council is required to publish 'equality information', detailing how it has met its general duties, and performance against its 'equality objectives' on

an annual basis. This Annual Equality & Diversity report discharges these duties for 2023-24.

## 7. Equalities implications

- 7.1 The Annual Equality & Diversity report considers progress against KCC's Equality Objectives, which were designed to support our delivery of the PSED. As such, alongside the fulfilment of our statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010, this report will enable the identification of the council's priorities for improving its performance with the PSED over the coming years. As the report relates to performance monitoring of the previous year's work there is no requirement to undertake an EqIA.

## 8. Conclusions

- 8.1 As the second year that KCC has reported against the 2022-2026 Equality Objectives, the annual report has evidenced how the council has progressed against the baseline data established in the previous year. This has been enabled by the strategic and cross-cutting nature of the objectives, and the breadth of quantitative measurement mechanisms that have been utilised. Anecdotal information received from our services has also supported this, and in combination highlighted our strengths and priority areas for improvement across the six objectives. As the reporting process has been brought forward this year, it will enable us to more proactively begin to act on our priorities, working in collaboration with the Corporate Equality Group and our service divisions.

## 9. Recommendation:

- 9.1 The Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee is asked to approve the Annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2023-24, attached as Appendix A.

## 10. Contact details

### Report Authors:

Laura McPherson  
Policy Officer - Equality  
03000 415726  
[laura.mcpherson@kent.gov.uk](mailto:laura.mcpherson@kent.gov.uk)

Karla Phillips  
Corporate Lead - Business Planning &  
Corporate Policy  
03000 410315  
[karla.phillips@kent.gov.uk](mailto:karla.phillips@kent.gov.uk)

### Relevant Director:

David Whittle  
Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships  
& Corporate Assurance  
03000 416883  
[david.whittle@kent.gov.uk](mailto:david.whittle@kent.gov.uk)