

Kent County Council

Annual Equality and Diversity Report for April 2023 to March 2024

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Useful information

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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 2023 and 31 March 2024. In addition to discharging the council's duties under the Equality Act 2010, this report is intended to highlight areas of success and support the identification of priority areas for improvement, including where specific action or additional measurement mechanisms are required. 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.

- Whilst 91% of the EqlAs published during 2023-24 utilised data on the protected groups impacted, 72% utilised national data/evidence. For both data types, this is a substantial increase on the previous year. Closer analysis has shown that the comparatively lower use of national data/evidence largely reflects the activity type being assessed. This will continue to be monitored, with action taken to promote the value of national/evidence in EqlAs as required.
- Across 2023-24 EqlAs, the greatest number of potential negative impacts (and mitigating actions) were identified for disability, age, race and carers responsibilities, whilst the fewest were identified for marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation and religion. This is largely consistent with the previous year (with the addition of race and religion). As such, awareness-raising of potential impacts to protected characteristic groups less frequently identified within EqlAs will be a potential focus for the coming year.
- There has been a significant improvement in the proportion of Key Decisions that have included an EqlA as an attachment in 2023-24, to 93%, from 66% in the previous year. This success will need to be sustained into the future. Despite this, many of the EqlAs attached to 2023-24 Key Decisions had not been taken through the full EqlA App process and were therefore not compliant with KCC's policy (51%). Work will be undertaken in

	<p>the coming year to disseminate these results and remind officers of the processes that they are expected to follow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider review of compliance with the EqIA Policy has identified that staff awareness of the policy requirements will need to be improved in 2024-25. The majority of Responsible Officers and Heads of Service involved in EqIAs in the period had not completed the required e-learning module and the action plan process had not been followed for any of the EqIAs published in 2023-24. • The report demonstrates that engagement with data collection and analysis opportunities across the council's services remains high, with particular emphasis on assessing data to identify areas of underrepresentation amongst service users. Compared to the previous year, the breadth of equality data analysis examples was more limited; improving how we evidence progress under this objective will therefore be a focus for the future.
<p>Promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, including our trading companies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantitative analysis of our performance under this objective during 2023-24 was limited by the extent of measurement mechanisms currently in place, however we have been able to identify that 100% commissioning and procurement Key Decisions in the period were supported by an EqIA, which is greater than the average across Key Decisions, and an improvement on the previous year. • Whilst the report has highlighted a range of examples of where the council promoted equality, diversity and inclusion via its supply chains in 2023-24, these were less varied than in the previous year's report. • In the coming year, progress with this objective will need to be supported by activity to develop how equality is considered within commissioning and procurement processes, and to extend our measurement mechanisms to bolster our understanding of performance in this area. • There has been significant improvement in the Commercial Services Group (CSG)'s equality profile when compared to the previous year, in addition to an extensive range of activity delivered by CSG in support of equality, diversity and inclusion.
<p>Ensure council information and services are accessible for everyone including those who are digitally excluded.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council continues to see its greatest area of success within this objective, with extensive and detailed examples available of how council information and services were made accessible during 2023-24. Highlights from the period include the consideration of physical accessibility in service planning; a range of activity to mitigate invisible barriers across Resettlement Schemes and award-winning work within the Kent Downs team. Looking ahead, our priority will be to work

	<p>with services to share best practice and understand how we could build on this success and become more aspirational within this objective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the complaints received in the period, there were eleven categorised as Equality and Regulatory which were upheld, with lessons learned recorded and action taken. It was not possible to identify any compliments received that related to the council providing support to meet individuals' needs during 2023-24, however this will continue to be monitored looking ahead. • This year has seen a focus on supporting the digital accessibility needs of our staff. • In comparison to the previous year, the number of requests fulfilled by the Alternative Formats team has fallen. The broad range of examples of where information has been made more accessible in the period suggest that this may be a result of officers utilising more informal channels to facilitate service users' communication needs. 2023-24 also saw some shifts in the top language translation requests fulfilled by the team. • Digital exclusion continues to be well embedded within equality analysis for 2023-24, with an extensive range of examples of how this has been mitigated and physical options retained in the period.
<p>Work with our strategic partnerships to understand and support the diverse needs of our communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This objective has seen the greatest level of improvement on the previous year, with an extensive range of case studies highlighting the work undertaken within KCC's Strategic Partnerships and more informal partnership working that has supported our ambitions under our other equality objectives. • In addition, 2023-24 has seen the introduction of a Strategic Partnership Register survey, which has enabled the collection of key equality data related to KCC's Strategic Partnerships. The responses received to the survey suggest that 73% of our Strategic Partnerships have an equalities focus or have made some kind of equality considerations, and that 47% have conducted a partnership EqIA. In addition to indicating the potential equality impacts our Strategic Partnerships are having, looking ahead, this will also enable us to identify untapped opportunities and promote best practice.
<p>Continue to be an inclusive employer which provides fair, open and equitable access to career progression and a trusted environment in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive responses to questions around 'Inclusion and Fair Treatment' remained high at 82.1% in the 2023 Staff Survey. However, disabled staff continued to answer less positively, and there was also a small decline in the positive responses about whether employees felt that positive action would be taken in response to individual needs and personal circumstances.

which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour.

- Analysis of the 2023-24 TCP ratings demonstrated minimal change from the previous year. Areas of disparity still exist for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, disabled staff, and older and younger staff (aged over 65, and 25 and under). With the introduction of the new pay structure in April 2025, the equity of application will be monitored and findings reported in next year's report.
- The number of workplace adjustments and Inclusion Passports in place has risen significantly. This is demonstrative of their successful promotion in previous years, which will continue in order to ensure our staff are accessing the support they need at work.
- The equality profile of new starts to the apprenticeship levy scheme in 2023-24 paints a positive picture, with only small levels of underrepresentation amongst disabled staff, transgender staff, LGBTQ+ staff and male staff when compared to our overall workforce profile. The Staff Survey saw slight increases in the proportion of employees who felt they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities to support their role. Despite this, disabled staff have continued to respond less positively to questions relating to Learning and Development, whilst staff aged 35 and under continued to respond more positively.
- Staff Survey 2023 responses regarding bullying/harassment showed consistent trends on the previous year. Whilst staff reported that they were highly likely to report an incident, there was some disparity for some of the protected groups. Disabled staff and LGBTQ+ staff also continued to report in the Staff Survey that they experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work at higher levels.

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

- In 2023-24, KCC retained its workforce diversity, which remains broadly reflective of the Kent county profile, with modest increases in the proportion of disabled, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and LGBTQ+ staff within the workforce. Work will continue to support staff attraction and retention in order to further narrow remaining areas of disparity. There have also been slight improvements to the diversity of KC's leadership group in the period.
- KCC's 12-month rolling turnover has fallen to 11.9%, with decreases also seen across the protected characteristic groups. This has fallen most significantly for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, from 22.1% in 2022-23, to 16.7% in 2023-24.
- KCC job applicant demographics for 2023-24 remained largely consistent with the previous year, however there was an increase in the proportion of applicants who were Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic and applicants with a faith/religion. Furthermore, across a number of protected characteristic

groups, KCC has attracted a more diverse pool of candidates compared to our workforce profile. In support of continuous improvement, activity to attract disabled individuals and people aged 16-25 to apply to work for KCC will continue.

- Extensive activity has been undertaken in support of staff attraction and retention, and the resulting culture change can take time to be realised and reflected in our workforce data. As such, the impact of these measures will continue to be reviewed over the coming years.

Figure 1: 2023-24 Annual Equality & Diversity Report Executive Summary

- 1.4 In addition to celebrating areas of best practice, the 2023-24 report has provided a temperature check of our progress two years into our current set of Equality Objectives. This has supported the identification of priority objectives for improvement and where there is scope to be more aspirational in our ambitions for delivery. Additionally, the findings of this year's report can be used to inform the development of our approach to data collection and analysis in support of our progress monitoring and identification of key areas for improvement.
- 1.5 As such, looking ahead, work will be undertaken at various levels across the organisation to share learning, further develop our aspirations and action the recommendations for continuous improvement as detailed within this report. This will involve engagement with our services, Corporate Equality Group (CEG) and Corporate Management Team (CMT) to shape activity over the remainder of 2024-25.

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 2023 and 31 March 2024, 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:
- 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.

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.

- 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** for 2016-20, which were largely service specific. This new approach enables a unified, council-wide approach to achieving our objectives, as each objective largely translates to service delivery across directorates.

2.7 For 2023-24 the report will take you through each of the **Equality Objectives** methodically, starting with the outward facing objectives, and finishing with the workforce objectives. To inform this year's report, 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. This has enabled the development of 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 reported against the new Equality Objectives, the 2022-23 report established a baseline against which future activity could be measured; to support our understanding of the council's progress, comparative quantitative data has been provided within this report wherever possible for each objective. This report will thereby also support our understanding of where additional measurement mechanisms are required and help to identify what our areas of focus should be for the 2024-25 year and into the future of these objectives. To enable the council to more proactively act on the findings of this report, the reporting process has been brought forward this year.

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 EqlA App Dashboard data from 2023-24; compliance with the EqlA policy; 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 been supplemented with a review of the equality profile of Let's Talk Kent registrations and participants in the 2023 Annual Budget Consultation to understand how far these were representative of our county profile.

Strengthening our equality data collection

KCC Equality Data Collection

- 3.2 Wherever possible, our services collect equality information about our service users as a standard practice, to support our understanding of which groups are using our services and inform improvements². Examples from 2023-24 include:

- Our **library service** collects this data from all service users, including those engaging with Home Library and Mobile Library services, as well as collating learning from any complaints related to equality or diversity.
- The **18+ Leavers Service** holds an annual survey to collect feedback on care leavers' experience of the service; in 2023-24, this saw a record number of participants with 677 responses.
- The **Household Waste Recycling Centres'** Winter 2023-24 customer satisfaction survey saw just over 5,000 responses, with 33 comments received relating to equality; 21 were regarding age (elderly) and 12 regarding disability. Whilst the majority of these were positive and related to helpful site staff, negative comments were reviewed and fed back to operational teams to inform service delivery.
- As standard, the **Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS)** uses equality data gained from initial assessments with newly arrived Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) to support operational decisions, such as matching placements.
- In the period, the **Positive Wellbeing service** has updated its collection of equality data to include sexual orientation and disability. This information has been used by the team to identify underrepresented groups more

² Whilst services may ask service users to provide their equality information, this is always voluntary as individuals can choose not to declare.

effectively and direct support and communications to areas with a higher level of need or underrepresentation.

About You

- 3.3 Following the review to KCC's 'About You' questions in the previous reporting period, the updated questions have since been approved and published for use during 2023-24. This has enabled services across our directorates to ensure that when they are collecting protected characteristic information from our service users, this is being done consistently across the organisation, in line with current standards, and reflects the terminology used within the latest Census. Looking ahead, the 'About You' questions will continue to be updated in accordance with need or further changes to national standards for equality data collection.

Strengthening our equality data analysis

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) & the EqIA App Dashboard

- 3.4 At KCC, Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are the method by which the council's officers complete equality analysis of the potential impacts of an activity on people with protected characteristics. The council has a centralised process of doing this, via the EqIA App; data inputted into EqIAs in the EqIA App then automatically flows into the EqIA App Dashboard in Power BI³, which offers a rich source of data on how equalities analysis is being undertaken across the council. The Dashboard shows that during 2023-24, 194 EqIAs were published via the EqIA App; the directorate breakdown of these is summarised in the chart below.

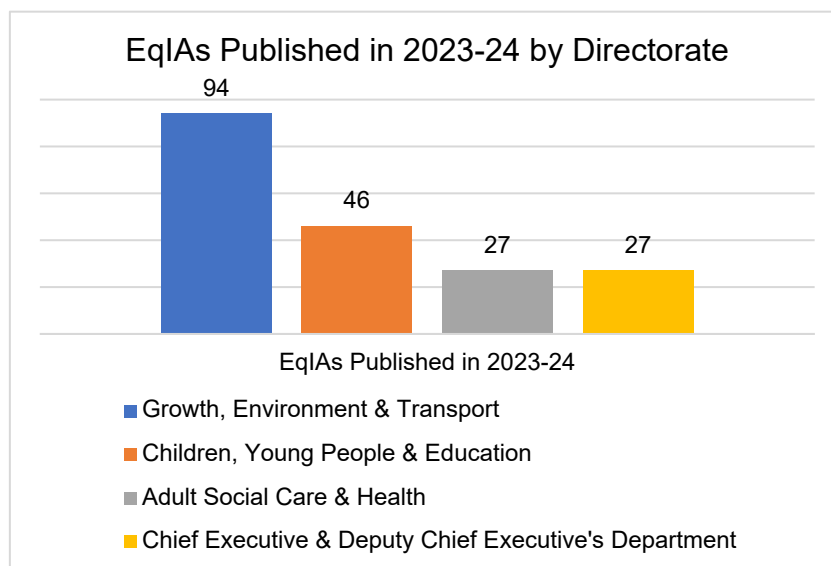


Figure 2: EqIAs Published in 2023-24 by Directorate

³ 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.

3.5 This is a significant increase on the 139 EqlAs published in the previous reporting period, with the number of EqlAs published steadily rising over each quarter of the 2023-24 year. Evidently, officer engagement with the EqlA App process has remained high amongst new and existing staff, with the App seeing a significant number of new users each quarter. The most common activity types for which EqlAs have been completed have remained consistent with the previous two years, with projects or programmes, strategies or policies, and commissioning or procurement dominating.

3.6 Quarterly analysis of the EqlA App Dashboard has continued to be prepared for the Corporate Equality Group (CEG) to enable discussion and identify areas requiring further investigation or action. A number of key trends were presented in last year's report and have continued to be monitored during 2023-24 to understand if further action is required. Our findings are as follows:

- Trends associated with the type of data evidenced in support of EqlAs has remained relatively consistent. **Across the 194 EqlAs published in 2023-24, 91% had data related to the protected groups impacted, for 85% it was possible to get this data in a timely and cost-effective way, and for 72% there was national evidence or data that could be used.** This shows a substantial increase in the use of data related to the protected groups impacted and the use of national evidence or data, compared to the previous year.⁴ Whilst national evidence and data is still comparatively underutilised, a closer review has suggested that this may in large part be a reflection of the number of EqlAs relating to internal process changes, staff restructuring, and school expansion projects, which have instead been informed by a substantial amount of service specific data. This will continue to be monitored, with actions taken where needed to promote the value of using national evidence and research as a resource to inform how wider groups can be impacted by change.
- **The greatest number of potential negative impacts (and mitigating actions) were identified for disability, age, race and carers responsibilities, whilst the fewest were identified for marriage/civil partnership, sexual orientation and religion.** This is largely consistent with the previous year, with the addition of race and religion. This does also seem to be reflected in activity undertaken in the period to ensure that council information and services are accessible to everyone (see section 5 of this report), with an emphasis around addressing barriers to access for the protected characteristics of age, disability and race.

Equality Policy

3.7 Following the introduction of the updated **EqlA Policy** in April 2023, a review has been undertaken to assess the impact that this has had, and the extent to which officers are complying with the council's expectations as set out within the policy. This review focused on compliance with the policy's following key provisions:

⁴ Across the 139 EqlAs published in 2022-23, 83% had data related to the protected groups 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.

- That all Key Decisions must be supported by an EqlA.
- That all officers responsible for creating or approving EqlAs must first complete the Introduction to EqlAs e-learning module on Delta.
- Where an EqlA has identified significant mitigating actions, that an action plan is developed, approved by the Head of Service and sent to the central mailbox.

The table below sets out the level of compliance for the following during 2023-24:

Policy Requirement:	Policy Review Results:
% of 2023-24 Key Decisions that were supported by an EqlA.	93%
% of 2023-24 EqlAs that were developed by a Responsible Officer who had completed the Introduction to EqlAs e-learning module on Delta.	43%
% of 2023-24 EqlAs that were approved by a Head of Service who had completed the Introduction to EqlAs e-learning module on Delta.	17%

Figure 3: EqlA Policy Review Results

- 3.8 This demonstrates a varied picture of compliance across the key requirements of the policy. Whilst the proportion of Key Decisions supported by an EqlA has reached its highest level since records began, and significantly increased to 93% from 66% in the previous reporting period, a deeper dive into this demonstrates that the EqlAs attached have not always been taken through the entire EqlA App process and formally approved prior to publication. Despite this, compared to the previous year, the overall proportion of Key Decisions with a ‘fully compliant’ EqlA has increased from 35% to 45%. To work to improve this in the coming year, these results will be disseminated via the Corporate Equality Group and directorate channels, with specialised messaging produced to remind staff of the correct processes, and the importance of following this.
- 3.9 Review of the proportion of 2023-24 EqlAs that have been created and approved by a Responsible Officer and Head of Service who have completed the Introduction to EqlAs e-learning module on Delta suggests that there is significant room for improvement. Despite this, comparison with the previous year shows a somewhat improving picture. The proportion of EqlAs developed by a Responsible Officer who had completed the module has increased from 31% to 43% for Responsible Officers and remained at 15% for Heads of Service.⁵ Interestingly, data shows that relatively high numbers of staff (presumably new starters) are completing this module each month, but that they are not necessarily those staff undertaking EqlAs. Overall, this demonstrates a requirement to increase staff awareness of this policy requirement with focused communications, which could potentially coincide

⁵ This equates to 78 (out of 130) Responsible Officers and 58 (out of 68) Heads of Service involved in an EqlA published during 2023-24 who had not completed the e-learning module.

with a refresh of the existing e-learning module. Additionally, improving engagement and guidance for Heads of Service will be a particular focus for the future.

- 3.10 Since publication of the updated policy in April 2023, one action plan has been sent to the central mailbox. We would not expect an action plan to be completed for 100% of EqlAs in a given year, as not all EqlAs will have significant mitigating actions, with some identifying no mitigating actions. However, we would have expected more than one action plan to have been completed and sent to the central mailbox. This therefore potentially indicates a communication issue on this area of the policy; we will look to address this in the coming year, with a more detailed review of how many instances an action plan should have been completed accordingly.
- 3.11 Looking ahead, the detail of these results, including a directorate level breakdown will be taken to CMT to agree the appropriate course of action. As there is significant variance in performance across the key themes when comparing our directorates, targeted engagement would be developed to ensure actions have the greatest impact.
- 3.12 2023-24 also saw the publication of KCC's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy. In addition to addressing the wider risks of use of and interaction with AI, this policy makes a number of provisions to ensure the potential equality impacts are understood and addressed where officers are utilising this technology. This policy has been essential in the risk management of the council's CoPilot for M365 trial which began in February 2024; the findings and relevant measures will be reported in the following year's report.

Census Data

- 3.13 Census equality information is an important data source for KCC as it is often the starting point for officers when completing EqlAs, and particularly useful for services that are unable to collect equality information on their service users. In the period, **Positive Wellbeing** have used 2021 Census data to facilitate a mapping task of service 'need' across the county, considering protected characteristics that have been associated with a greater risk of social isolation and loneliness in the [2023 loneliness report](#). The outcomes of this mapping exercise will play a crucial role in shaping their delivery plan and guide the strategic placement of future hubs and support services to ensure equitable access to services and address the unique needs of various communities. Census data is also utilised by the **Safer Speeds & Enforcement** service to understand demographic groups and shape campaigns. This has included a focus on younger drivers, consideration of how to make campaign information accessible to individuals with refugee status adjusting to travelling around Kent and/or with English as an Additional Language, and to older drivers who are less likely to access digital information, via the Mature Drivers programme.

Service User Equality Data

- 3.14 Where available, services have also collected and utilised service user equality data to understand how well they have adapted to need and to inform future strategy and approaches to service delivery. An analysis of the demographics of **Kent & Medway Business Advisory Board** membership was undertaken to support understanding of its equality profile and will be used to support the future round of board recruitment to promote balanced representation amongst members. The **Create South East** programme regularly reports data on its performance against the scheme's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) KPIs and equality profile analysis of those accessing funding through the scheme to their EDI working group. On a six-monthly basis, **Live Well Kent and Medway** reviews demographic data to understand if any protected characteristic groups are underrepresented and review whether targeted groups (such as those aged 18-25) are accessing services.
- 3.15 In addition to embracing new data collection opportunities, our services also strive to improve how data is presented, using available technologies to support strengthened analysis. The **ASCH Operations team** uses the Demographics and Protected Characteristics Power BI report to present equality information about the people supported by ASCH alongside Census data, to enable direct comparisons to be made and evaluate levels of underrepresentation. This is also a useful tool to support the service's Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs). In the period, **CYPE's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) task and finish group** also began work to develop a Power BI inclusion app, which will assist in the consideration of demographics and workforce data within services/districts and support identification of lines of enquiry for Child Outcome Analysis (COA) audit reviews⁶ and inform the development of the COA Next Steps Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.
- 3.16 Our services are also increasingly considering data regarding the diversity of their workforce in recognition of how this contributes to the inclusivity of service delivery, with attempts made to attract diverse applicants to positions. Integrated Children's Services in particular have begun to consider how reflective their workforce is of the protected characteristics of the young people they support.

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

- 3.17 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. 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.

⁶ Child Outcome Analysis (COA) audit reviews consider how teams are considering the identity and culture of children, families and the demographics of their district.

- 3.18 In support of transformation and development of **Sexual Health** services, a range of activity has been undertaken by the service, which has involved collecting and utilising an array of data sources. This has included use of Census data, service mapping in conjunction with the Public Health Observatory to ensure locations address local need and are accessible, and the development of a Sexual Health Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment involved a particular focus on those living in areas of high deprivation, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, young people, sex workers, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, migrant populations, and men who have sex with men. The service also commissioned research surveys with protected characteristic groups, including LGBTQ+ and minority ethnic communities to understand their awareness of and access to sexual health services. This information has been used to ensure that our services are meeting the needs of all residents in Kent, and that protected characteristic groups with additional vulnerabilities are targeted as necessary. Integrated sexual health services in East Kent have also worked with 'Walking Together' HIV patient groups to inform potential service improvements, with a view to reducing the HIV Did Not Attend rates for individuals who are less likely to access services and support.
- 3.19 All **Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs)**⁷ require specific consideration of the impact of individuals' protected characteristics and the use of a wide range of relevant data, including research or specialist input, subject to the case specifics. For DHRs undertaken in the period, this has included gathering additional information relating to sex, religion and race, with two cases requiring special consideration of the Eastern European background of the victims. Analysis undertaken as part of DHRs supports the development of recommendations for service delivery, for example for materials on domestic abuse to be made available in different languages, and for commissioning frameworks to require that service providers ensure their services are accessible to minority groups, including individuals from Eastern Europe.
- 3.20 Across our directorates, services have engaged with stakeholders to better understand service users' needs and the potential impacts on diverse groups. The **I-Thrive and Participation** team ran focus groups with young people with protected characteristics as part of the 'Have Your Say' opportunities for the Integrated Care Board's new mental health system. The Participation Team have worked alongside the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service and Kent Analytics to develop the SNAP survey approach for consulting with children. This has been developed to enable translation to a range of languages, with feedback received from UASC children being used to inform the development of the new Reception and Safe Care centres. The Stakeholder Engagement Team within the **Public Health** Business Delivery Unit engaged with community events for Black History month in order to gain better understanding of the needs of diverse communities, celebrate diversity, and improve awareness of available services. A fare survey was conducted by **Public Transport** in May 2023, with responses used to inform the decision

⁷ Kent DHRs are undertaken by the Kent Community Safety Partnership, which is managed and coordinated by KCC Community Safety staff.

around introducing a cashless Fastrack bus service. The findings suggested that this proposal would disproportionately impact on certain protected characteristic groups who predominantly use cash to purchase bus tickets.

Case Study: Consultation / Let's Talk Kent

- 3.21 To support work towards this Equality Objective, an annual analysis of the equality data for Let's Talk Kent⁸ registrations and participants in the Annual Budget Consultation has been introduced.⁹ This analysis may help to determine which groups are currently participating in KCC consultation opportunities, identify any areas of under or over representation, highlight potential barriers to participation and identify if there are any persistent trends to be addressed. Services are responsible for conducting an equality analysis of the demographics that respond to their consultations and considering the extent to which this is representative and reflects their expectations, or if any particular groups need to be targeted.

2023-24 Let's Talk Kent Registrations

- 3.22 Looking at the equality profile of registrations with Let's Talk Kent during 2023-24, 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, however, the age group that is most overrepresented is now those aged 55-64.¹⁰ Overall, this has shown a very consistent picture compared to the previous year, with a significantly larger increase in the number of registrations from female users than male users. Once again, this may be the result of the scale and subject of consultations in the period, for example with the Shaping the Family Hubs and Start for Life Offer consultation in 2023-24, which saw considerably more responses from females (598) than males (97).

2023 Annual Budget Consultation

- 3.23 When comparing the demographics of those who responded to the **2023 Annual Budget Consultation** with the previous year, there is a consistent picture, with the greatest level of change in the proportion of responses from males, and from carers.¹¹ This means that existing areas of disproportionality have continued, with those aged under 34 underrepresented, and those aged 50-74 the most overrepresented age group, although this may be arising from the fact that this consultation is largely aimed at Kent householders who pay council tax. People from ethnic minority groups also continue to be

⁸ [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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ The proportion of responses from males fell from 49% in 2022 to 44% in 2023, whilst the proportion of responses from carers increased from 18% in 2022 to 22% in 2023.

underrepresented compared to our county profile, despite targeted communications taking place in attempts to improve this number; this will be a continued focus looking ahead. Finally, individuals with a religion or belief have also continued to be underrepresented amongst responses to the Annual Budget Consultation, with a number of specific faiths also underrepresented.¹²

Better understanding people's needs

Equality Learning & Development Opportunities

- 3.24 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.
- 3.25 The **Kent Academy** continues to provide a range of resources and training for the ASCH and CYPE workforce across topics that can support officers' understanding of the communities and individuals they serve, and how to best meet their needs. This includes resources around cultural competence, supporting LGBTQ+ individuals, neurodiversity and sensory needs. A dedicated training resource has also been made available for practitioners supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), covering 'Age Assessments for UASC' and 'LGBTQ awareness for RSCS'. Following the success of the UASC Networking Event held in March 2023, which was mentioned in the previous year's report, a Kent UASC Networking Forum has been established on Microsoft Teams to enable further learning opportunities between involved organisations, with a UASC Conference successfully delivered in 2024, and attended by 50 people from organisations working with UASC in Kent.
- 3.26 Practice Development and Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supervisors have undertaken extensive activity during 2023-24 to support staff understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion, and positively impact how our services are delivered to meet the needs of diverse groups. Practice Postcard sessions held in the period covered a range of topics, including Carers and Young Carers (these were co-produced and co-delivered with Carers); Neurodiversity; taking a Trauma Informed Approach and Mental Health Awareness. Bespoke sessions were run with Adult Social Care Teams to raise awareness around Learning Disability and workshops on Neurodiversity awareness and Anti-Racist Practice were delivered to Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) cohorts.
- 3.27 During 2023-24, **CYPE's Safeguarding, Professional Standards & Quality Assurance (SPSQA)** has continued to support staff understanding of the needs of specific protected characteristic groups. As a legacy of work reported in the previous period on promoting Father Inclusive Practice, this has remained a key focus, to raise the visibility of fathers and improve their

¹² This includes people who are Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh.

engagement in Universal, Early Help and Children's Social Work services. Alongside Kent Safeguarding Multi-Agency Partnership (KCSMP), a Father Inclusive Practice Guide was launched via a Communities of Practice in November, with tools and resources also shared to Kent Academy.

- 3.28 KCC has been a **White Ribbon** accredited organisation since 2021 and over this period has developed and implemented a three-year action plan to raise awareness and hold conversations in support of ending male Violence Against Women and Girls. Key activity in the period has included attendance at community events; proactive internal and external communications; linking in with related projects including Victim Blaming Language training and Public Health's SPACE Matters; and sharing resources within the organisation and at KCC buildings. As part of the programme, work has also been undertaken to build stronger links with providers to encourage learning directed towards boys, which has included linking in and sharing resources with Kent Police Schools Officers.

Conclusions & Next Steps

- 3.29 Overall, analysis for this Equality Objective suggests that generally, there continues to be a good level of engagement with equality data collection and analysis - services have been proactively collecting this data wherever possible, and increasingly using this to understand areas of underrepresentation. A number of services have been able to evidence how equality data from a range of sources has been used to shape service delivery and demonstrate how they have used learning opportunities to improve staff understanding of service users' diverse needs. EqlA App data has also continued to grow, with an increasing number of EqlAs being developed by both new and existing staff. Whilst the council's efforts in the past two years to improve the proportion of our Key Decisions that have an EqlA attached have been very successful, a closer review has uncovered some further areas for improvement in terms of adherence to the full EqlA App process, and other requirements set out within our EqlA Policy. Additionally, there are still opportunities to improve use of national research, and to promote understanding of the specific needs and barriers experienced by some of the protected characteristic groups.
- 3.30 Looking ahead, these areas for improvement will be supported by a range of measures in the coming years to further raise the profile of the Equality Policy function, to include a refresh to the e-learning module and guidance for Heads of Service, and more robust communications and KNet presence. It is hoped that this activity will provide the basis for the council to begin to build on its understanding of the potential cumulative impact of its actions on people with protected characteristics. However, our immediate focus will be to improve compliance with the EqlA App process, in order to establish a more accurate and complete picture of council-wide equality impacts, which will be a necessary precursor to consideration/assessment of our cumulative impact.

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. To assess our performance for 2023-24, high-level data relating to KCC's commissioning and procurement Key Decisions has been reviewed. This has been supported with examples of how our contracts, commissioned providers and processes have supported equality outcomes in the period. Looking ahead, it is anticipated that work undertaken by the Commercial Standards and Improvement team will support the development of a more detailed understanding of our performance in this area.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Key Contracts

- 4.2 During 2023-24, there were 31 Key Decisions that related to commissioning and procurement. An EqlA was attached to 100% of these, which is higher than the overall figure of 93% across all Key Decisions, and a substantial improvement on the previous year.¹³ However, only 35% of these Key Decisions were supported by a fully compliant EqlA that had been progressed through the entire EqlA App process. This is lower than the overall level of compliance across all Key Decisions and identifies a potential requirement for engagement with officers responsible for commissioning and procurement projects regarding the council's policy and expectations for EqlAs.
- 4.3 For 11 of the 31 Key Decisions related to commissioning and procurement in the period, an additional Selection Questionnaire (SQ) stage was completed; this 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 seven reviews of KCC's key contracts conducted by the Contract Management Review Group (CMRG) in 2023-24, 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 two presentations. This is consistent with data from the previous year.
- 4.4 In September 2023, new roles were established within the Commercial Standards and Improvement Team. Looking ahead, activity undertaken by the team will be important in supporting continuous improvement with this Equality Objective, with the development of KCC's first Social Value Policy a key priority for the coming year. There is also an intention to work collaboratively to support the introduction of additional measures to monitor our equality performance within commissioning and procurement where

¹³ Only 75% of the 2022-23 Key Decisions relating to commissioning and procurement had an EqlA attached, although this was still higher than the overall figure for all Key Decisions.

possible. The team will also be important in supporting the development of our officers' skills and knowledge of how equality outcomes and social value can be built into and delivered via commissioning and procurement activity/contracts, through a review of existing templates, policy and guidance. Whilst this will provide the foundations for improved knowledge and practice, it will be directorates' responsibility to ensure that policies and guidance are followed.

Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Through Our Supply Chains

- 4.5 In support of the above snapshot of equality considerations in key contracts during 2023-24, the following sections provide examples of how our services have been able to support equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes via our supply chains.
- 4.6 Across a range of KCC's commissioned services, attempts have been made to reach or target individuals from protected characteristic groups. To promote engagement from underrepresented ethnic minority groups with the **NHS Health Check programme**¹⁴, the outreach team attended local events for Hong Kong communities within Kent and held the first health check event at a Nepalese community centre. To address barriers to access for individuals who are still of working age, multiple workplace events were held, with a particular focus on industries where shift work is common, including police stations and hospitals. Outreach work was also undertaken at Margate football club, the Farmer's expo and Ashford cattle market to encourage men, who have higher risk factors and are less likely to engage, to take advantage of the service. In March 2024 the NHS Health Check team were awarded a Health Watch award for the second year running in the category "Excellence in inclusivity and equal access to services".
- 4.7 During 2023-24, Kent condom programme KPIs relating to supporting vulnerable groups have been strengthened. Additionally, across **Sexual health services** there has been targeted activity to support those who are at the greatest risk of adverse health outcomes, including individuals who are LGBTQ+ and/or from ethnic minority groups. This has involved outreach work to support asylum seekers in Kent, and a pilot within the Online STI Testing service to test women who are at a higher risk of Trichomonas Vaginalis (TV), which has since been rolled-out as a business-as-usual activity. A pilot was also conducted to engage with sex workers to communicate information on sexual health services and promote access. Review of clinic data has shown that this has not yielded the anticipated results; as such methodologies to promote access for this group will be a continued focus.
- 4.8 In the period, the **Heritage** team commissioned AOC Archaeology to carry out community archaeology work at Chilmington, Ashford. This project was designed to promote accessibility to young people via an education stream,

¹⁴ The NHS Health Check programme is provided by Kent Community NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) in partnership with KCC and works to target 40-74 year-olds without a pre-defined existing health condition.

and to include events for older people to improve their opportunities to participate.

- 4.9 Within the **Adult Social Care Operations** team, materials, events and training have been shared and promoted with the local care market to support improved equality and diversity outcomes, particularly in recruitment. This has included workshops at the annual conference focused on improving the inclusivity of care services for LGBTQ+ people and developing a population-centric workforce for neurodivergent people. An NHS 'de-bias recruitment and selection toolkit' was also adapted for the care sector and circulated.
- 4.10 Opportunities to promote and achieve social value have been considered in several contracts that were live during 2023-24. FCC Environment's¹⁵ Education and Communication Officer has delivered school tours throughout the period, educating children and young people about the importance of reuse and recycling. As part of the award of the Kent Thameside Electric Fastrack Operations Contract in 2023, Go-Ahead has committed to provide community skill development activities to upskill local residents along the bus route. Looking ahead, the provider will work with local job centres to identify local barriers to employment in order to develop engagement strategies for disadvantaged members of the community. The success of these activities will be monitored via quantitative and qualitative KPI trackers for Social Value, and annual social value reports will assess the value of the initiatives.

Case Study: Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Services (KIDAS)

- 4.11 Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Services' commissioning decisions in the period have been informed by detailed equality analysis undertaken as part of the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment. This provided evidence to suggest that younger survivors (aged 16-19); older survivors (aged over 55); Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British survivors (within community-based support), and male survivors (excluding male-specific services) may be underrepresented amongst existing service users. As a result, a male-specific domestic abuse refuge was commissioned, and commenced delivery in December 2023. Furthermore, survivors fed into the procurement process for the 'Sanctuary Access For Eligible Residents Scheme', devising a question to assess bidders' suitability. Across all domestic abuse commissioned services, demographic data from providers is reviewed every three months to identify if there are protected characteristic groups or geographical areas that are underrepresented and inform action to be taken to improve reach accordingly.

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

- 4.12 **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, recruitment and HR services and energy and carbon services. During 2023-24, CSG has worked to develop equality, diversity and inclusion as a key strategic theme. This has been supported by the

¹⁵ This organisation runs fourteen of KCC's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).

introduction of the new role of Group Chief People, Culture and Communications Officer on the CSG Executive Board, to prioritise the development of a people-focused organisation. The first CSG People Strategy was launched following staff engagement and sets out the organisation's line of sight. This sets out the aspirations, key actions, evaluation and outcomes involved in delivery over the next three years, with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) underpinning all areas. Delivery of these ambitions will be supported by two new recruits to the People, Culture and Communications team. In the period, CSG have also produced a Race Equality Action Plan, which has received Executive sign-off, and developed a draft DEIB Policy. Looking ahead, CSG intends to support this with a strategy and approach for delivery.

- 4.13 In the previous year's report, CSG's 2022-23 workforce equality data was provided in order to establish the baseline and identify areas for improvement into the future. This identified an aspiration to extend equality data reporting to include wider protected characteristics, and to improve declaration rates. Data for 2023-24 has evidenced that this has been achieved, with declaration rates increasing significantly across all business areas, and the addition of workforce data related to sex, religion/faith and neurodiversity. The table below provides a summary of how CSG's workforce equality profile has changed from the previous year. Whilst the representation of LGBTQ+ staff and disabled staff has increased, it has fallen for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff compared to the previous year.

Category	Workforce Profile as of March 2023	Workforce Profile as of March 2024	Variance
Total number of staff	1,698	1,680	N/A
% who are female	Data not yet collected	59.6%	N/A
% who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic	7.2%	5.6%	-1.6%
% who have declared a disability	3.0%	3.5%	+0.5%
% who are LGBTQ+ (16+)	1.6%	12.2%	+10.6%
% who have declared a religion/faith	Data not yet collected	29.3%	N/A
% who are neurodiverse	Data not yet collected	3.0%	N/A

Figure 44: 2023-24 Commercial Services Group Workforce Profile Comparison

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 4.14 Data related to commissioning and procurement Key Decisions in the period demonstrates that equality analysis has been undertaken by officers, with 100% Key Decisions having an EqlA attached. However, this has also shown that there is further work to ensure that these EqlAs are always taken through the full EqlA App process. CSG's progress with their People Strategy, Race

Equality Action Plan and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy is a positive indicator of how EDI is promoted through the council's trading companies and establishes a positive trajectory for the future.

- 4.15 Whilst there are a range of examples of how the council has been able to promote equality, diversity and inclusion through our supply chains, it is evident that these are less varied than in the previous year's report. Indeed, there are fewer examples of where equality has been built into tender documentation, specifications or contract KPIs, indicating that a more proactive effort needs to be made to drive improvement in this area in the coming years. This will be supported by planned activity in collaboration with the Commercial Standards and Improvement team to improve existing guidance and documents and bolster measurement mechanisms to obtain a more detailed/quantitative understanding of our performance in this area.

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 KCC's **Alternative Formats team** facilitates a wide range of translation and alternative format requests from the council's services. In 2023-24, 34 language translation requests were made, 26 (76%) of which were completed. Where requests are not fulfilled, this could be attributed to the cost implication of language translations, which cannot always be met by services. It is interesting to note that both the overall number of requests, and the proportion of requests that were fulfilled has fallen when compared with 2022-23¹⁶; it is possible that this could be associated with the increasing availability of online language translation tools in the period. The top five languages for which the most translations were completed were Punjabi, Polish, Czech, Russian and Nepali; whilst this demonstrates a shift from the previous year, this is broadly reflected of languages commonly spoken within Kent districts as per the Census 2021.¹⁷ During the period, the team fulfilled 10 Large Print requests, 5 braille requests, 4 Easy Read requests, 2 plain text conversion requests, 1 audio request, and 1 British Sign Language (BSL) request. Compared to the previous year, this is a reduction in the total number of accessibility requests fulfilled by 26%, although the most frequent formats have remained consistent. In addition to processing these requests, services across the council have also worked to improve the accessibility of their information to people with additional needs:
- 5.3 As KCC's main online platform for information, advice and guidance on accessing care and support, the accessibility of the [Kent Connect to Support website](#) is an important part of ensuring equal access to these services. In support of this, the website has been updated with new webpages that have been designed to make content easy to read and improve accessibility, which can also be automatically translated into a wide range of languages. The **Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS)** have

¹⁶ In 2022-23, 39 (91%) of the 43 language requests received by the team were fulfilled.

¹⁷ Other language translations included Bengali, Bulgarian, Dari, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Romanian, Slovakian, Spanish, Ukrainian and Urdu.

ensured that all communications and campaign materials are available in physical and digital formats, and in translations catering for the top 10 languages spoken across the county, as identified within the Census 2021. KIDAS providers also operate a D/deaf and hard of hearing working group which has enabled marketing materials and referral pathways to be made available in BSL. To support customers to understand and access the services that are most relevant to them and that will best meet their individual needs, **Kent Libraries** have developed and continued to update library information sheets. These have been improved following feedback from a Hearing Impaired reading group, with the inclusion of symbols to support text and the use of plainer English, to make it easier for people with disabilities or varying English literacy levels to understand the information. In 2023-24, the **Kent Community Warden Service** began work with the Gurdwara in North Kent to translate the service leaflet and other community safety publications into other languages, as a number of residents in the area who do not have English as a first language have been the target of scams. It is hoped these leaflets will be available later in 2024 for distribution.

- 5.4 At KCC's Family Hubs, leaflets and posters displayed in buildings are available in a variety of languages. Following the closure of Children's Centres, a large print resource has been developed setting out the range of **Start for Life** services available, and has been translated into four languages to enable the Family Hubs workforce to help diverse groups access these. Additionally, a series of perinatal mental health awareness films have been presented with BSL and foreign language translations. **Adolescent services** ensure that foreign language interpreters or Language Line telephone interpreters are available where required for families who do not have English as a first language, to facilitate home visits and meetings and translate documents such as assessments and Court reports. This has been complemented by the production of 'read easy' versions of all Youth Justice template letters and materials, which have been developed in collaboration with a speech and language therapist.
- 5.5 The **Reception and Safe Care Service (RSCS)** has continued to support the communication and other needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in its care in 2023-24, ensuring that materials, guidance and support provided is accessible to those with varying levels of English and that whilst in Kent's care, children are supported to celebrate the religious and cultural events that are important to them. The service provides interpreters in person and over the phone and has produced translated booklets and video guides to help children to understand what it means to be a child in care in Kent.

Digital Accessibility

- 5.6 As highlighted in last year's report, during 2023-24, the **Digital Accessibility Team** have introduced a number of changes as part of their Digital Accessibility Strategy to improve staff engagement and understanding to support improved digital accessibility across the council's digital content and websites. The audit template has been simplified, and the audit process amended to enable meetings to be conducted to discuss documentation and

results. In addition to offering training courses, the team has also attended team meetings and hosted presentations across the council's services, engaging with over 800 officers through these sessions.¹⁸

- 5.7 Over the course of 2023-24, there has been a focus on supporting staff's digital accessibility requirements. As part of this, digital accessibility has been integrated into the Display Screen Equipment (DSE) workstation assessment process, to ensure that our staff receive the appropriate software and hardware to support their needs. The Digital Accessibility team have also actively collaborated in the roll-out of new laptops to ensure colleagues' needs are best met within this process. To complement this, information about digital accessibility software and hardware has been updated on KNet to ensure this is easy to find.
- 5.8 Digital Accessibility considerations have also been embraced across our services in the period. In Spring 2023, the new **Fastrack** website was launched. To improve accessibility, the website had been designed in line with the latest (WCAG) success criteria, can be used with screen reading software and enables users to change both font sizes and contrasts. To ensure the digital accessibility of our [Active Kent & Medway website](#) and [Everyday Active website](#) all images include Alt Text descriptions and captions are included in all films, with transcripts available on request.

[Representing the communities we serve](#)

- 5.9 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 through inclusive council campaigns and communications that promote a positive narrative around equality. In 2023-24, this has included:
- **Active Kent & Medway** have continued their 'tackling inequalities' series to promote a positive narrative around supporting specific groups to become more active. Films produced in the period included TKO [Folkestone Boxing Club](#) supporting people living with Parkinson's to become more active; inclusive sessions held by the [Woodland Warriors Wheelchair Rugby League project](#); the delivery of accessible dance sessions by [Moving Memory Dance](#); [Shishu Kishor Club's project](#) to deliver community swimming sessions for Muslim families, which included training participants to become lifeguards to help sustain sessions longer term, and [inclusive para badminton sessions](#) for all ages and abilities, held by Kings Canterbury.¹⁹ The service has also produced School Games

¹⁸ The team has held training courses covering 'Accessible Social Media', 'Creating Accessible Documents' and 'Accessibility in Microsoft 365'.

¹⁹ In addition to project films, films were also produced with participants to share their experience. These are available here: [Barry & Chris's story](#) (TKO Folkestone Boxing Club) [Rabia's Story](#) (Shishu Kishor Club swimming lessons) [Tora and Arlene's Story](#) (Kings Canterbury para badminton).

films to demonstrate how the programme has evolved to engage those most affected by inequalities.²⁰

- The **Kent Downs** website and **Create South East** landing page and case studies have seen an update to ensure that these are inclusive and represent the communities we serve and showcase how the council has met the needs of diverse groups.
- Looking ahead, work is in progress between the **Kent Educational Psychology Service (KEPS)** and **Education** to review the narrative around young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) to ensure the inclusivity of the service to this group.

Council services are accessible for everyone

Complaints & Customer Satisfaction

- 5.10 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 2023-24 offers a useful temperature check for understanding how accessible the council's services and information are. Of the 5,537 complaints received in the period, 199 were categorised as Equality and Regulatory, of which 48 were about equalities issues. Only 11 of these were upheld, with lessons learned recorded and action taken. This included the provision of further training/guidance for staff, the distribution of formal apologies and implementation of changes to prevent a future reoccurrence. As a result of one of these complaints, Library staff were reminded to check areas for any obstacles such as chairs that could limit access to individuals with mobility issues. A review of data on compliments received during 2023-24 has not uncovered any specific references to how the council has supported individuals' needs arising from disability.

Physical Accessibility Projects & Improvements

- 5.11 During 2023-24, KCC's **Property team** have continued to engage AccessAble to undertake accessibility audits at our corporate landlord freehold sites and KCC maintained schools, with the development of detailed [Access Guides](#) describing the accessibility of KCC sites. This work has also supported the identification and delivery of accessibility improvements, such as installation of ramping, accessible toilets and door adaptations. The **Country Parks** service, in partnership with Kent Downs National Landscape have engaged with AccessAble to produce similar accessibility reports providing an overview of facilities across our core country parks, with a specific accessibility leaflet produced for Shorne Woods Country Park which highlights tramper-friendly routes. Additionally, 24 School Accessibility Initiative projects²¹ were

²⁰ These films are available here: [Personal Development through Leadership and Volunteering](#); [Transitioning to Secondary School PE and Sport](#); [Positive Experiences for Children and Young People](#); [Active 60](#).

²¹ The School Accessibility Initiative (SAI) delivers projects to make adaptations for children with accessibility needs or requirements. During 2023-24, SAI projects were delivered at the following sites: Bridge and Patribourne Church of England Primary School, Chartham Primary School, Cheriton Primary School, Ditton Infants School, Eythorne Elvington Primary School, Ifield Primary

completed across the education estate, and work began to develop a new Accessibility Policy for schools, in collaboration with Education. In this period, additional funding was secured within the Capital Maintenance budgets, of which £500k has been ringfenced to support accessibility improvements across KCC's building portfolio; looking ahead to the coming year, a programme for delivery will be prepared.

- 5.12 Physical accessibility is an important part of inclusive service delivery, and is a key consideration when events are planned, or changes made to our services or physical infrastructure. To ensure the physical accessibility of **Kent School Games**, within the registration process, detailed information on participant disabilities is collected and used in the selection and preparation of venues, for example, in ensuring hoists are available where required, or in the provision of a calm and quiet environment. Similarly, all **Active Kent and Medway** events run during 2023-24 were held at accessible venues, with participants asked about any additional support requirements prior to the event taking place. The **i-THRIVE and Participation** service has worked to ensure that events and workshops are accessible to all, with a Hearing Loop and PA system available at all times, and the provision of fidget toys, coloured paper and safe spaces to create an inclusive environment for young people attending. The service also commissioned accessible mobile toilets for the Big Mental Health Conversation, to enable young people with disabilities to participate. Following the closure of Folkestone **Library**, the Books Beyond Words book group (a reading group for people with learning disabilities) was relocated to the single storey Wood Avenue Library after it was found that the original alternative venue was not suitable for the group members' needs.
- 5.13 An extensive refurbishment of the **Coroners Service** area of Oakwood House in the period included the provision of an accessibility lift between the ground and mezzanine floor, with controls at wheelchair user height. The Coroners Service has also worked to ensure reasonable adjustments are available for Jurors, family and Next of Kin attending their sites, capturing individuals' needs via communications and the updated Juror's form. During 2023-24, the service supported a family with mobility and digital skills needs to remotely attend an inquest with the Coroners Service in Essex. The Integrated **Sexual Health** provisions for Thanet have been concentrated in the newly established Flete clinic on the QEQM Hospital grounds; this site was selected with accessibility considerations in mind and fitted with a lift to enable wheelchair access to the upper floor; examination couches were also purchased to accommodate the needs of diverse patients. Looking ahead, there is an ongoing project to review the physical premises in Swale and assess its suitability.

School, Marsh Academy, New Ash Green Primary School, Oakley School, Oakley School, Petham Primary School, Riverview Infants School, Riverview Infants School, Senacre Wood Primary School, Slade Primary School, St Gregory's Catholic School, St Margarets at Cliffe Primary School, St Pauls Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Staplehurst Primary School, The Churchill School, Tymberwood Academy, Ufton Lane/Meadowfield 6th Form School.

Inclusive Services & Addressing Invisible Barriers

- 5.14 Within the **East Kent and West Kent Adult Drug and Alcohol Service**, work was undertaken to develop a specific women's pathway in recognition of the different needs and experiences of this group. Additionally, a Nepalese speaking group has been established within the **East Kent Drug and Alcohol Service**, allowing service provision to recognise Nepalese social and cultural contexts and enabling service users to recover in their own language.
- 5.15 **North West Kent Countryside Partnership (NWKCP)** has delivered [Forest School](#) to Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools and wellbeing groups, tailoring these to the needs of participants. To support access to wellbeing groups, introductory videos have been produced so that people can feel informed and reassured about attending a new group in unfamiliar surroundings.
- 5.16 During 2023-24, The Education People (**TEP**)'s **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team** (EDIT) were contacted by the Violence Reduction Unit to hold a conference with young people from schools in Kent. As a result, recommendations were made for more training for teachers on anti-racism, including lesson plans for primary school children on the topic. The EDIT team subsequently produced a training pack called 'Educating Racism', covering topics such as unconscious bias, stereotyping and anti-racism. This was trialled at schools, with 40 schools attending the launch and 100% of evaluation responses rating the package good or above. Schools have since contacted the team for further information and support on the topic. The **i-Thrive and Participation team** worked with the Parent Carer Voice Group in the period to develop and publish a [resource](#) to support autistic young people with their periods.
- 5.17 Reasonable adjustments were made available to all clients attending KCC's **diversionary schemes**²² in order to remove or reduce potential barriers to access. This includes the facilitation of requests related to closed captions or BSL interpreters, mobility, neurodivergence, breastfeeding and premises for prayer. Clients were also able to bring their own interpreter, attend with their carer or access an online course with a BSL trainer. The re-commissioning of the booking system also included an accessibility review to consider the needs of individuals who require additional support in order to attend and complete their course.

Case Study: Live Well Kent and Medway

- 5.18 Within Live Well Kent and Medway²³, the Rethink Sahayk telephone helpline has provided culturally sensitive support for individuals from the Asian community who are affected by mental health issues or domestic abuse, enabling callers to interact and receive support in Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindu, and Urdu, as well as English. Work has been undertaken by the service and

²² Diversionary schemes are police-led programmes that divert people caught committing minor offences away from the criminal justice system to other measures.

²³ Live Well Kent & Medway is a network of voluntary organisations and charities that help people aged 17+ with mental health issues, which is delivered on the behalf of Kent County Council and the NHS, by Porchlight and Shaw Trust.

the provider, South Kent Mind to engage with local Nepalese communities, to promote awareness of available services and influence the narrative around mental health, which has historically been subject to cultural stigma and impacted on uptake of support within this group.²⁴ Live Well Kent and Medway have also continued to work with Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT), to engage with harder to reach groups of young people through its outreach work, with the aim of becoming more responsive to the needs of the community and reduce criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

Case Study: Resettlement Schemes

5.19 Across the Afghan Resettlement Schemes (ARAP and ACRS), United Kingdom Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) and the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (VPRS), KCC works to ensure that the equality needs of individuals are met as far as possible. During 2023-24, this has included:

- The recruitment of a dedicated ESOL Coordinator to improve support to individuals experiencing barriers (due to childcare, disabilities or mental health) to accessing English language lessons. Healthcare information relating to chicken pox, measles and hepatitis has also been provided in alternative languages, with translated literature on maternity care provided to pregnant clients.
- The establishment of a pathway to mental health support which tackles cultural stigmas around mental health and engages experts with migration experience and cultural and religious understanding.
- Women's groups have been held in Afghan hotel accommodation for conversation classes, mental health support in other languages and cooking, walking and sewing groups.
- Information sessions have been held on adjusting to life in the UK, highlighting the rights of women and the differences in UK law around gender equality as well as tackling issues relating to domestic violence sensitively with expert professionals.
- Individuals involved in legal processes or complaints procedures within the NHS have been supported to ensure they are not adversely affected by their unfamiliarity with UK systems and processes. Support and advocacy has also been provided with regard to engaging with statutory services, accessing adult social care or gaining support for disability or additional needs.
- Tutors have been engaged where children have been impacted by significant time out of school or cannot access education, to ensure that they are able to develop English language proficiency and other basic skills such as maths and science so that they are not marginalised from their peers.
- Liaising with Kent Fire and Rescue and local Community Policing teams to deliver safety advice which takes into consideration the fears and specific needs of the cohort, including language barriers, fear of authority, and experience of traumatic events.

²⁴ Live Well Kent and Medway Link Workers attended a Gurkha families health day at the community centre based at Shorncliffe barracks, and South Kent Mind has been present at the Royal Gurkha Rifles Unit Health Fair 2024.

Homes for Ukraine

- 5.20 Within the Homes for Ukraine scheme, across service delivery, translated materials have been provided to ensure information on available services and support is easily accessible; this is also supported by two Ukrainian staff members in the service. This has included signposting to access to education and further education, with support workers able to assist with applications. Additionally, where social care support is required, relevant referrals are made, with support from the team to provide translators and a familiar face. The service has also been supported by Adult Education, to ensure courses can be accessed by all, with the provision of additional online ESOL and English language courses for those unable to attend during working hours. The service has worked to support guests' access to employment, working with Kent Teach for individuals who hold teaching qualifications and with a number of guests finding employment with district council teams. Families are supported to engage with a range of support services and integrate into local communities, with specific support hubs held within local areas to enable guests to socialise and share advice.

Case Study: Community Transport Grant Scheme

- 5.21 In the context of a reduced local supported bus budget and service, our Public Transport service has worked to mitigate the potential impacts on people with protected characteristics via the promotion of the Community Transport Grant scheme. To maximise the potential benefit to local communities, funding was awarded for specific user groups and activities, as well as for scheduled bus services. This included provision for medical appointments for older and disabled persons in North West Kent; social activities and shopping trips for disabled and older people; days out for carers, and transport to warm places, food banks and dementia awareness groups. Awards were also made for transport that catered to clients who are neurodiverse or have sensory impairments to attend various sports and theatre activities and forest school, and to enable access to community events such as fetes, concerts and food festivals for older people who are unable to access transport without assistance.

Case Study: Kent Downs

- 5.22 Kent Downs' Putting Down Routes project seeks to encourage new audiences from under-represented communities to visit the North Downs Way National Trail and enhance parts of the trail so that they are more accessible to a wider range of people. In support of this project, the service has worked with Black Girls Hike²⁵ and Wild with Wheels²⁶ to promote and deliver walks. For those unable to physically access the Kent Downs, the team financed a digital film of the Darent Valley River and trialled a virtual reality experience following the River Darent from source to sea, enabling access to the feeling of being outdoors in Kent's natural environment. They have also worked to ensure the

²⁵ Black Girls Hike is a charity which works to provide a safe space for Black women to explore the outdoors, and reconnect with nature, hosting group hikes, outdoor activity days, and training events.

²⁶ Wild with Wheels is a charity which offers free, safe and accessible routes for guided, interactive nature walks and experiences for people with disabilities and impairments.

GeoDiversity project²⁷ is accessible to a wide range of groups, developing supporting educational toolkits with partners, organising nature engagement activities with the Beacon School for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and working with Touchbase Care²⁸ to promote understanding of the project with a creative session working with clay. In recognition of its achievements with the 'Up the Kent Downs' Muslim Hikers Coastal Trek campaign in the previous period, the service was awarded 2023 the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Campaign award at the 2023 Travel Marketing Awards.²⁹

5.23 Libraries, Registrations & Archives (LRA) have continued to proactively work to ensure that their services are as inclusive and accessible to as many people as possible; during 2023-24, this included:

- [Virtual library tours](#) were mapped out online for a third of Kent's libraries. This resource will support individuals with a range of needs to understand how they can access our sites, including those with physical disabilities, people who are neurodivergent and parents with newborns or pushchairs.
- Work to provide 'Dementia Friendly' and 'Autism Friendly' library sites, by building staff awareness, delivering adjustments within buildings, providing social stories and virtual tours on the library website and making pledges to improve services for these groups.³⁰
- Continued to celebrate inclusive calendar events throughout the year. This included working with a customer to create a bookmark to raise the profile of black women in football for Black History Month, and the Books Beyond Words (BBW) Book Group at Deal read 'A Refugee's Story' and recorded the session, which was posted on social media as part of Refugee Week. This helped to promote a positive narrative and challenge underrepresentation and negative stereotypes that are often experienced by these two community groups.
- Specific groups and sessions have continued to be held across library sites to support and bring together individuals with diverse needs; for example, Ashford Library held their first in-person visually impaired reading group session since Covid, and Thanet Libraries hosted groups of Adults with Learning Disabilities.
- Canterbury Library launched their Ukrainian book collection and have also run a regular 'Tea and Talk' Chinese/English talk time, allowing people to practice their English.

²⁷ The GeoDiversity project was launched in July 2023, and will help more people to discover their local incredible geodiversity and explore personal stories and connections with the landscape; this will include events, activities and learning opportunities, and explore how the Kent Downs have influenced stories of immigration and settlement that in the area.

²⁸ Touchbase Care is a community group located in Folkestone's Creative Quarter, which takes an innovative and holistic approach to supporting adults and young people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, neurodiversity and sensory impairment.

²⁹ The Travel Marketing Awards, organised by the Chartered Institute of Marketing's Travel Group (CIM TG), is the most prestigious event in the travel and tourism marketing calendar and one of the industry's most sought-after accolades.

³⁰ Libraries in the following districts have been accredited as Working to Become Dementia Friendly – Ashford, Canterbury, Dartford, Folkestone & Hythe, Gravesham, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Swale, Tonbridge, Thanet & Dover and Tunbridge Wells.

- BSL services were used to fulfil a marriage ceremony for a housebound couple, and to support a Notice of Marriage appointment for a couple in the Tunbridge Wells Register office.

Consultation

- 5.24 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 engagement from those who might be affected, including underrepresented groups. Of the 35 consultations held during 2023-24, 28 were advertised both digitally and physically. Whilst the remaining 7 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.³¹
- 5.25 A range of action was taken to support the accessibility of engagement with 2023-24 consultations. Community Wardens provided support to older service users to enable them to take part in the ‘Kent Community Warden Service (KCWS) Review’ consultation, with a proforma developed to capture feedback from dementia cafes, youth groups and warm hubs. Four online parental meetings took place during the ‘Locality Model for Special Educational Needs Inclusion’ consultation, to explain proposals, answer questions and encourage parents to participate. To strengthen the accessibility of the annual budget consultation, a BSL translation was provided for the Cabinet Members’ introduction video, along with Easy Read and Large Print versions of all documentation and the introduction of a Budget Quiz to provide a new way for people to engage with and understand the proposals. As part of the ‘Adult Social Care Charging Policy – Higher Level Disability Benefits’ consultation, accessibility was enhanced through activities such as providing the option for individuals to telephone for support and staff completing an online form on their behalf.
- 5.26 Across consultations held during 2023-24, various attempts have been made to target impacted individuals and reach minority groups within Kent communities. For both the ‘Adult Social Care Charging Policy’ and ‘Future of Blackburn Lodge Care Home’ consultations, letters were posted to individuals that would be directly impacted by proposals, with Easy Read versions provided as required. As part of the ‘Family Hubs’ consultation, promotional postcards were translated into Punjabi, Polish and Slovak, to ensure that individuals that do not have English as a first language were aware of the opportunity to engage. Trusted agents have also been used to reach people

³¹ 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 are required to identify their key stakeholders and consider their potential needs to engage. Services will also typically 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.

who might not normally engage with KCC, with health visitors and community-based midwifery services promoting the 'Best Start for Life Strategies' consultation to mothers and fathers directly, and communications sent via Kent Parents And Carers Together (PACT) regarding the 'Early Years Provision Review for Specialist Nurseries'. Community Wardens were provided with postcards and briefings in order to promote the 2024-25 Budget Consultation to the people they support, who are often vulnerable and have a number of protected characteristics.

- 5.27 Reactive communications were also issued for consultations where underrepresentation was identified in responses. Paid-for Facebook advertising was introduced to engage more fathers and male carers in the 'Family Hubs' consultation and to increase the response to the annual budget consultation from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals. Similarly, Facebook advertising was used to extend the reach of the 'Best Start for Life Strategies' consultation in areas with larger Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic populations, with representation of these groups in the promotional material issued. In an attempt to engage with younger people who are traditionally less likely to respond to consultations, 'Kent's Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan' consultation included the option to respond with comments via a map with drop pins.

Digital Exclusion

Consideration and mitigation of Digital Exclusion

- 5.28 Review of the equality analysis for digital projects or services via the EqIA App remains our primary mechanism to monitor the consideration of digital exclusion in the delivery of KCC information and services.³² Of the 193 EqIAs that were published in 2023-24, 25 concerned digital projects, or services that would be delivered, at least in part, digitally. For 13 of these, physical options were available, or potential methodologies to mitigate digital exclusion were identified. For 11 of these, digital exclusion would not have been an applicable concern, and there was only one project where digital exclusion could have been considered but was not.
- 5.29 Information on activity undertaken by services during 2023-24 in support of this Equality Objective has continued to demonstrate that consideration and mitigation of the impact of digital exclusion has been integrated into day-to-day service delivery, with a wealth of supporting examples received from our services. This has included the maintenance of physical options for accessing services and provision of a physical presence and communication methods in our local communities, as well as support to service users to help them to understand how technology can help them, and initiatives to promote digital inclusion. Some examples include:
- To support participation from individuals who may be digitally excluded, the **Heritage team** undertakes a number of outreach activities, such as

³² Whilst there is a potential knowledge gap for services that are not new and have existed for some time, this review offers a useful starting point.

providing print-outs of database information to those without online access, and regular visits to local metal-detecting clubs to help pair less digitally able people with individuals who can support them.

- Whilst similar services in other areas of the country have moved to online-only models of delivery, KCC's condom programme has maintained physical collection sites to ensure that all people that need access to free condoms (aged 24 and under) can continue to do so if they do not have access to a smart device. Following a review, the psychosexual service has also continued to offer face-to-face appointments where patients expressed a need or preference for this method of consultation.
- **Kent Integrated Domestic Abuse Service (KIDAS)** providers have worked with charities to provide laptops, mobile phones and data bundles to individuals who have fled domestic abuse, to enable them to seek employment, attend therapeutic programmes and support their children to access education or other services.
- The **Kent Community Warden Service (KCWS)** has continued to act as a physical presence within Kent communities, to support digitally excluded individuals to access KCC services and information they would otherwise be unaware of, including key messages from other council services, such as live consultations, flood and extreme weather information and public health alerts.
- During 2023-24, **Public Health's Stakeholder Engagement team** held a Digital Roadshow to bring information and guidance on new digital developments in social care to individuals that prefer to access this in person. Over 20 locations and local community groups were visited to demonstrate the functionality and range of online tools and resources available, with signposting to digital inclusion support available from Digital Kent.

5.30 **ASCH's Operations** team has worked to engage and inform individuals who may not have the digital knowledge to understand how digital tools and technology could support them. Technology Facilitators within the Technology Enhanced Lives Service (TELS) work closely with individuals to develop their understanding of how technology can help them, with one-to-one support provided where required. Similarly, a trial of technology hospital facilitators was supported with NHS England funding; this put in place a dedicated resource to help people to be discharged from hospital with technology and support for those who were digitally excluded or with limited digital skills. The Digital Roadmap was also co-developed with individuals who receive care and support: this sets out the service's key digital priorities for 2024-25 and includes ambitions around digital inclusion.

Digital Inclusion Initiatives

5.31 **Digital Kent** have continued to deliver projects and schemes to support residents to become more digitally included, working in partnership with NHS Kent and Medway, NHS Health Education England, UK Power Networks and SGN to tackle inequalities and digital exclusion. During 2023-24, the service has continued to develop the following key activities:

- Digital Champions Network – over 700 champions, speaking more than 40 different languages have been recruited into the network, which provides training opportunities and digital upskilling within Kent communities.
- 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.

5.32 **Growth & Communities’ Innovation and Business Intelligence (IBI) Communications Team** has developed the [Teacher in your Pocket](#) resource³³ with content related to the dangers of counterfeit and unsafe goods, to be shared with digitally excluded individuals by their family, friends, carers, community or other voluntary organisations. This was supported by a promotional campaign, with the videos being viewed over 50,000 times. Following this success, the platform will be expanded to capture further topics, including tackling loneliness and social isolation in the coming year. **North West Kent Countryside Partnership** have continued to deliver their digital inclusion partnership project, providing tablets to enable Age UK service users to access footage of wildlife from the cameras set up in the Age UK garden.

Conclusion & Next Steps

5.33 Overall, data presented within this section demonstrates that the council has continued to excel with regards to the accessibility of its information and services. Provision of accessible information is becoming the status quo, in terms of the production of ‘easy read’ documents, simplified information and readily available translations in high demand languages. In addition to utilising the services offered by our Alternative Formats team, officers across services are using their own skills and more informal channels to ensure that the information they produce can be accessed by wide groups, and where there is an emerging need, further action has been taken to address this. During 2023-24, we have also seen increasing engagement with the digital accessibility agenda, including access to accessibility software and hardware for our staff. Physical accessibility has also continued to be prioritised, with action taken to improve our sites and address issues or complaints where these occur, and a potentially exciting upcoming programme of works within the Property team. Equally, the extent of examples of mitigation and consideration of digital exclusion and maintenance of physical options can offer a high level of confidence that this need is well considered as a business as usual concern.

³³ This includes three accessible and easy to understand explainer videos to address the dangers of counterfeit and unsafe goods and how to report them, in the context of the cost of living which makes all individuals more vulnerable to making economic choices that might put them at greater risk, such as unsafe electrical products.

5.34 Evidently, there are particular services that have really excelled in their contribution to this objective during the period; as such there is potentially an exercise to promote this across other services in the coming year, to share learning, practices and approaches to support improvement. Additionally, as our greatest area of success, there is an opportunity to work with services to understand how we could attempt to be more aspirational in this area. This could include consideration of how well the full range of protected characteristics are considered within work to improve the accessibility of our information and services, as needs associated with disability, age and English as an Additional Language have dominated in the period.

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 have developed a mechanism to capture the full picture of the council's strategic partnerships, and thereby develop an understanding of how these have supported positive equality outcomes. Being the first year that this in place, this data has been used to establish a benchmark for future reporting and has been supported by more detailed information on how a number of our strategic partnerships and more informal partnership working arrangements have had a positive equalities impact in the period.

Work with Strategic Partnerships

KCC's Strategic Partnerships

- 6.2 During 2023-24, work was begun to develop a mechanism to capture key strategic partnership information, with the view to develop a Strategic Partnership Register which would be updated on an annual basis. This information was collected via an MS Form, which also included two equality-related questions to inform the council's progress with this Equality Objective. Data collected for 2023-24 showed that KCC is currently a member of at least 55 strategic partnerships. Of these, 73% (40) either had an equalities focus, or had made some kind of equality considerations. Only 47% (26) of these had conducted a partnership EqIA. As the first year in which this data has been collected, this is a positive indicator of the extent to which our strategic partnerships are supporting our equality ambitions, as well as offering the opportunity to extend this further. Indeed, there is a potential piece of work to drill down into this further, to consider the specific equality impact our strategic partnerships are already having, and to engage with relevant KCC officers to review partnership EqIAs, promote good practice or unlock other opportunities. This will be a focus for the 2024-25 year. Looking ahead, there is also the intention to widen the questions asked in relation to equalities to further enrich our understanding of the equalities impact KCC has in collaboration with its strategic partnerships, and to continue to promote this activity via staff communications, to increase the number of strategic partnerships captured in this exercise. The following sections provide further details of the equalities work undertaken by just a few of the council's strategic partnerships in the period.

Integrated Care System (ICS) Partnership

- 6.3 Following approval of the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Strategy, partners have worked to develop a Shared Delivery Plan, mapping individual strategies and projects that will contribute to the delivery of the strategy's

shared objectives. This is supported by a set of indicators to enable oversight of progress and deep dives into any areas of concern.

- 6.4 The Integrated Care System (ICS), working with the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, has committed to integrate and improve support for people and employers so that more people with health conditions and disabilities can start, stay and succeed in work. To support this, work began to develop an Integrated Work and Health Strategy, setting out the actions all partners will take to ensure that people can receive holistic support to overcome barriers to work. These could include work and health coaching, access to physical and mental health services, skills development and community support for issues like social isolation. This will also include support for employers to recruit, retain and support people with health conditions and disabilities at work. Looking ahead, the strategy will be shaped by engagement activity, to include people who are not working or may have to stop working due to a health condition or disability.
- 6.5 The Kent and Medway Children and Young People Programme Board³⁴ have refreshed their Children and Young People Framework, which forms the blueprint for aligning the efforts of different sectors and agencies to meet the needs of Children and Young People across the region. It embraces efforts to close gaps in educational outcomes, provide robust health and social care, improve safety and wellbeing, and prepare young people for a successful transition into adulthood and employment. This has been developed with engagement with children, young people and their parents or carers, with the strategy team attending the Kent Youth Council in January 2024 and running two sessions with a group of children aged 11-17. As part of these sessions, children and young people were asked to design their own Vision Statement and a tagline, which would form the basis of the Strategic Framework.
- 6.6 The Inequalities, Prevention and Population Health subcommittees of the ICS drive the system's work to understand, address and prevent health inequalities and target health, care and support to those at particular risk of developing health conditions. In the period, they worked to identify their priorities for delivery, with the Inequalities subcommittee committing to develop a programme for groups of people who are at greater risk of being socially excluded and having very poor health outcomes, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The Prevention subcommittee has approved an action plan for mental health; to support this, an analysis of the equality profile of people with serious mental illness is currently underway. This includes consideration of age and ethnicity and will help to improve understanding and support people to access their physical health check.
- Kent Community Safety Partnership (KCSP)**
- 6.7 During 2023-24, the Kent Community Safety Partnership utilised Crime Reduction Grant (CRG) funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver training sessions for multi-agency partners on the topic of victim

³⁴ The Board brings together Children's Leads from Kent County Council, Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway ICB

blaming language. This training aimed to reduce deliberate and unconscious use of language that can have a negative impact on victims engaging with support services and the criminal justice system, particularly toward victims of domestic abuse and other forms of Violence Against Women and Girls. Further CRG funding was used by the partnership to support the development of new policies and training around the identification of, and response to, staff and service users presenting with abusive behaviours in order to support the prevention and reduction of incidences of domestic abuse.

Kent and Medway Executive Group

- 6.8 Since 2012 partners have come together to work in collaboration to tackle domestic abuse through the **Kent and Medway Executive Group**.³⁵ Partners from across the group contributed their data to inform the development of the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment, which has been used alongside feedback from in-depth interviews with survivors to inform the multi-agency Kent and Medway Domestic Abuse Strategy, which has subsequently been through formal public consultation and launched during 2023-24.

Youth Justice Partnership

- 6.9 KCC's Youth Justice service contribute a quarterly report on the equality data of individuals within the system, and the service's workforce, to the Youth Justice Partnership Board.³⁶ This data collection and sharing across the partnership has subsequently led to proposals to tackle disproportionality within the system, with the prioritisation of avoidance of entry into the youth justice system for over-represented groups. During 2023-24, this has involved the development of a specific policy for managing children in care who are at risk of entering the youth justice system; looking ahead, the service will be exploring with partners how this could be replicated for other over-represented groups, including Black boys and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

Kent Housing Group

- 6.10 During 2023-24, discussions on digital inclusion were held within Kent Housing Group's (KHG) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion sub-group, which led to the development of the Digital Inclusion Project. This focuses on the current and future needs of Kent's most digitally disengaged residents, designing innovative solutions based on people's varying needs to close the digital gap.

Partnership Working

- 6.11 During 2023-24, **Active Kent and Medway** has worked with the Port of London Authority to award £150,000 through their Active Thames programme to 23 Kent projects which aim to encourage physical activity on the tidal Thames and inland waterways. This included [Age UK Kent Rivers](#), which received funding to set-up two walking groups along the Thames Path; one group will specifically support adults with learning disabilities and their support

³⁵ This includes KCC, Medway Council, ICB, Probation, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue and Kent's Districts and Borough councils.

³⁶ This is a multi-agency, county-wide board with membership from key partners including KCC, Kent Police, Health, Education and the National Probation Service.

workers, with the other group open to all, and supported by staff so that older and vulnerable people feel safe and confident to attend.

- 6.12 KCC's **Heritage team** has worked with Highways England and the Museum of London Archaeology to support the 'Underserved Communities' project, with the aim of developing a report to assess findings and make recommendations on the engagement of individuals who are often underserved by archaeology projects. To support this, the service worked with Link19³⁷ to understand how engagement with people with Special Educational Needs could be improved.
- 6.13 **Environment and Circular Economy** has worked in partnership with charitable organisations across a number of recycling and reuse projects to promote social value and support vulnerable people in Kent's communities whilst diverting items otherwise destined for disposal. This has included a furniture reuse project at Maidstone (Tovil) Household Waste Recycling Centre, run in partnership with Making A Difference to Maidstone (MADM) charity³⁸ and bicycle reuse projects with FCC Environment and Cycle Circle³⁹, and in collaboration with Swale Borough Council⁴⁰. In partnership with KCC's ASCH directorate, NRS Healthcare and the NHS, the service has enabled the reuse of old and unwanted medical equipment from four HWRCs across Kent.⁴¹ Since launch in June 2023, over 1,000 items were collected, cleaned and reused by NRS Healthcare in the local community. Looking ahead, there is the intention to extend the scheme to other HWRC sites, and widen the scope to include electrical community care aids.
- 6.14 In **Libraries, Registration and Archives**, The Books Beyond Words Book Group at Ashford Library invited police officers to discuss their role and how they can help support people with learning disabilities. Group members shared their experiences of disability hate crime, which were subsequently followed up by the police, who have helped support a member to resolve an issue. Thanet Libraries held workshops and coffee mornings in partnership with local Mencap groups, and Sensory Storytime was held at Cheriton

³⁷ Link19 is a Care and Education organisation in Gravesham for special educational needs (SEN) students which aims to deliver a range of educational, employability and life skills development for learners aged 19-25 years old

³⁸ MADM is a charitable organisation that supports individuals and families who find themselves in crisis through homelessness, domestic abuse, addiction, financial need, unemployment, relationship breakdown and more. This project saw furniture items delivered to the HWRC's dedicated 'reuse container' sold on in MADM's shops to raise money in support of outreach work or gifted to local residents in crisis. A pilot of this project was also run at Allington HWRC, with preparations underway to open a 'Reuse Shop' at the site in 2024-25.

³⁹ Bicycle reuse events were hosted at Ashford HWRC to encourage customers to bring in unwanted or broken bikes for repair or reuse for parts. Donations were collected by Cycle Circle, repaired and sold for affordable prices, with the proceeds used to fund their repair shop and the roll-out of the 'Cycle Community' programme, which delivers maintenance and repair workshops and bicycle training for all ages.

⁴⁰ As part of the 'Swale Cycle-re-Cycle programme', a bike collection container was provided at Sheerness HWRC. These bikes were then refurbished by inmates at HM Prison Swaleside and made available to charities and the local community at low cost.

⁴¹ Items such as walking aids, grab rails, handles, furniture raisers, bath lifts and wheelchairs can be taken to Allington, Dover, Swanley and Tunbridge Wells HWRCs for reuse.

Library as part of a visit from the Bridge Resource Centre for adults with learning disabilities.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 6.15 The baseline data from 2023-24 for the extent to which strategic partnerships across the council support equality outcomes and analysis offers a positive starting point for future improvement. In addition to promoting this information collection exercise and gaining more extensive and detailed information in coming years, there is also the potential to identify new opportunities for joint equality work, and to share partnership learning more widely across KCC's services. To support continuous improvement in this area, this will be a key activity for exploration in 2024-25. Furthermore, anecdotal examples and case studies of where our formal and informal partnership working has supported equality outcomes has evidenced that these are having a real impact and supporting the delivery of KCC's wider Equality Objectives. There are multiple examples where work in partnership has supported our ambitions in terms of collecting and analysing equality data; developing a better understanding of the needs of diverse groups; removing barriers to access for protected characteristic groups services, and mitigating the impacts of digital exclusion.

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. 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. Progress is actively monitored across the four overarching themes via the 13 KPIs set out within the strategy, with the detail available within the **annual People Strategy 2022-27 progress report**. The 2023-24 report highlighted the following achievements for the past financial year: development of the new grading structure; refreshed employee Health & Wellbeing Strategy; targeted leadership team intervention; investment in developing leadership and management; work to promote an inclusive workplace culture; development of KCC career pathways for people aged 16-25, and improvements to recruitment branding.

7.3 KCC takes a multifaceted approach to assessing how inclusive it is. As such, one indicator must not be looked at in isolation but rather read as part of the greater whole to understand the Council's journey against its inclusivity indicator. The following sections look at component elements that contribute to the narrative of how inclusive the Council is.

Total Contribution Pay (TCP)

7.4 Analysis of TCP ratings received by staff and their distribution across the protected characteristic groups can provide useful insights that contribute to the overall picture of how inclusive KCC is as an employer. An analysis of TCP⁴² ratings for 2023-24 demonstrates that there has been minimal change to existing areas of disparity for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, disabled staff and older and younger staff (aged over 65, and 25 and under). This was also somewhat reflected in the Staff Survey 2023 results, with White

⁴² Total Contribution Pay (TCP) is the Council's current performance management and pay scheme

British staff answering questions regarding pay and benefits more positively than Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff.

- 7.5 Throughout 2023-24 and into 2024-25, work has been undertaken to develop the new pay structure and approach to performance management, for delivery from April 2025. It is intended that this will address a number of challenges that are causing pressures on the current pay and grading structure, aid recruitment and retention, and continue to give us a robust equal pay position. The new performance management approach will place greater emphasis on recognition on excellent performance through cash and non-cash awards. The equity of application will be monitored, and findings included in the 2024-25 report.

Gender Pay Gap

- 7.6 The median pay gap for KCC has increased from the figure last year which stood at 12.6%. This can be explained by the very small movement of 1% of males from the lower middle quartile to the upper middle quartile. KCC's mean pay gap has reduced to 10.9% from 11.4% previously. This is because there was a lower % of males in the upper pay quartile, and an increase of females in the upper middle quartile. KCC compares favourably to the overall pay gap figure for employers based in Kent and the Southeast.⁴³ KCC does not operate a traditional bonus scheme, however managers can recognise individual performance using cash awards. During 2023-24, this constituted 7.1% of male employees and 3.3% of female employees. Compared to the previous year, the median figure has increased significantly with females receiving cash awards twice as big as males (as explained in our data above). The mean bonus (cash award) pay gap figure has decreased from 21.4% to 10.7%. The full report is available [here](#).
- 7.7 During 2023-24, KCC has also continued to work to develop mechanisms to enable pay gap analysis to be undertaken across the other protected characteristic groups.

2023 Staff Survey

- 7.8 KCC's staff, via its staff survey in 2023, indicated that some highly positive responses to questions associated with inclusion. Positive responses to questions under the theme of '**Inclusion and Fair Treatment**' remained high at 82.1%, as did responses to 'my manager', at 73.4%. In comparison to the previous year, these haven't moved much. Despite this, disabled staff continued to answer less positively across survey themes when compared with non-disabled staff. In addition, there was a slight decline in positive responses around whether employees felt that positive action would be taken in response to individual needs and personal circumstances. Whilst staff were less positive regarding whether KCC respects individual difference, responses were more positive around staff feeling valued for the work they do. Overall,

⁴³ For employers in the Southeast, the median pay gap is 18.3% and the mean pay gap is 15.7%. For employers based in Kent, the median pay gap is 16.6% and the mean pay gap is 15.8% (ONS provisional data, 2023).

this suggests that the council's priorities in this area must continue, which includes a focus on disability inclusion and ensuring staff feel that their individual needs will be met.

Workplace Adjustments

- 7.9 In 2023-24, the number of **workplace adjustments** reported has continued to rise, reaching 3,714 adjustments, across 1,430 members of staff, equating to approximately 11.4% of the workforce⁴⁴. This is a significant increase of 1,000 adjustments on the previous year, and demonstrative of the success in promoting both the availability of workplace adjustments, and the importance of recording these, and is a positive indicator for our workplace inclusivity as a whole as we create an environment where staff feel comfortable discussing support needed to deliver their best at work. The number of **Inclusion Passports** in place has also significantly increased by 67 (84.8%) compared to the previous year, with a further 61 Inclusion Passports pending at the close of 2023-24. Whilst this suggests that their use is becoming well embedded within the organisation, of the 1,430 employees with adjustments, only 14% have an Inclusion Passport in place; as such, work will continue to promote their use in the coming year.
- 7.10 Work has also been undertaken to ensure that new recruits are receiving the support they need when joining the organisation, with a review of signposting for workplace adjustments and timelines for implementing these. To support this, guidance for recruiting managers has been updated to emphasise workplace adjustments, including system prompts during onboarding and to signpost successful candidates to Access to Work.

Building Inclusive Cultures

- 7.11 Following last year's pilot of the Building Inclusive Cultures reverse mentoring programme, an evaluation was undertaken with the resulting recommendations taken forward. This included workshops held with middle managers and directorates to explore issues, challenges and opportunities within services. Targeted work has been delivered focusing on specific priority projects including Cultural Growth within Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH). Looking ahead, work will be undertaken to consider how this programme can be integrated into leadership development opportunities.

Communications and Engagement

- 7.12 During 2023-24, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion-focused communications and engagement activity continued, marking celebratory moments and events throughout the year, including Inclusion week, Windrush day, 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. External speakers were also brought in to lead staff events on Trans Awareness and Visible Difference. In June 2023, Staff Ethnic Diversity Forum worked with North Kent Caribbean Network and

⁴⁴ As of December 2023.

Cohesion Plus community groups to deliver an event marking the 75th anniversary of Windrush at Sessions House, which involved an art exhibition and discussion with elders from the Windrush generation. This was attended by the Chairman of KCC, KCC directors, Kent Police and representatives from the staff group and KCC's services. The Kent Windrush 75 flag was raised at the event, which had been designed to specifically mark Kent Windrush communities.

Staff Groups

- 7.13 As of March 2024, KCC has six staff groups, these are: Level Playing Field (disabled staff and carers of disabled people), Staff Ethnic Diversity Forum, Rainbow (LGBTQ+ staff), Aspire (staff aged 30 and under), Mental Health Support Network and Single Parent Staff Group (SPSG). During the period, coaching was offered to staff groups to support professional growth and development; looking ahead, this approach will continue to be trialled. 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 opportunities to their members, providing feedback on equality issues and ensuring that the employee voice is heard.
- 7.14 Open door sessions with CMT were introduced in 2022 to supplement existing escalation routes for issues identified by staff groups and have continued during 2023-24, with sessions held with Level Playing Field, Rainbow and SPSSG. These resulted in follow up actions being taken forward, which include raising awareness of how the employment offer can be used by managers to support minority groups.

Workforce Action Plans

- 7.15 The Disability Action Plan has been refreshed this year as a result of a number of Safe Space workshops held between November and April between Level Playing Field and KCC's Corporate Management Team (CMT) to better understand the experience of staff and inform what changes were needed. It captures areas of activity that are likely to have the greatest impact on workplace disability inclusion. 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.
- 7.16 Key 2023-2024 activity delivered against KCC's **Race Action Plan** included deep dives into recruitment and turnover data relative to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants and staff; activity to ensure inclusive recruitment practice, the 'My Name Is' initiative, and the delivery of a race-focused equality objective as part of staff's performance management action plans. 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)**. To support the delivery of the [SCWRES action plan](#), workforce equality data was reviewed within an equalities focused Directorate Management Team (DMT) session in September 2023; managers were asked

to co-develop equality plans within their teams and work was undertaken with staff groups to inform the future development of the SCWRES.

Fair, open, and equitable access to career progression

KCC's Learning & Development Opportunities

- 7.17 KCC's principal accredited staff training opportunities are available through use of the apprenticeship levy, which saw 174 new starts during 2023-24. Looking at the equality profile of new apprenticeship starts during the period, the proportion of disabled staff, female staff and staff with a faith/religion increased, whilst the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff reduced. When reviewed against our workforce profile, disabled staff, transgender staff⁴⁵, LGBTQ+ staff and male staff are underrepresented. Despite this, the level of underrepresentation remains small, overall painting a positive picture of the inclusivity and accessibility of apprenticeships to staff from different protected characteristic groups.
- 7.18 Responses to the 2023 Staff Survey showed a slight increase in the proportion of employees who felt they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities to support their role, with just under half responding positively about opportunities to develop their career in KCC.⁴⁶ However, when looking at the responses to questions relating to '**Learning and Development**' more broadly, there continues to be a difference in experience for disabled staff, who answered questions under this theme less positively, and for staff aged 35 and under, who answered more positively than staff aged over 35.⁴⁷ This is in line with the apprenticeship levy new start demographics, and suggests that further action may be required in order to ensure an equitable experience for disabled staff and older staff in terms of the learning and development opportunities available.
- 7.19 During 2023-24, a review and evaluation of Skills for Growth⁴⁸ was undertaken, to ensure that staff development opportunities are updated in response to staff feedback, and that opportunities remain accessible for all staff. As a result, work has been undertaken with trainers and facilitators to ensure that the community aspect to the learning feels inclusive and supportive to all, with additional materials currently being tested by learners to ensure that these meet the needs of neurodiverse colleagues. In the period, staff also continued to make use of the Development Request process to access professional development that directly supports their role, with 304 staff benefitting from this. In addition, **e-Learning modules relating to**

⁴⁵ For the second year in a row, 0% of apprenticeship starts were transgender, however this can be explained by their relatively small make-up within the overall workforce.

⁴⁶ 75.4% staff answered that they felt they were able to access the right learning and development opportunities to support their role in the 2023 Staff Survey.

⁴⁷ 67% staff aged 35 and under answered positively, compared to 61% of staff aged over 35. 55% staff with a disability or health condition answered positively, compared to 64% staff without a disability or health condition.

⁴⁸ Our Skills for Growth Programme is aimed at all colleagues who are KR3 to KR8 and has been designed to help define clear personal development plans to enable more productive career development conversations with line managers.

equality and diversity continued to be made available on KCC's 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.

A trusted working environment in which staff feel confident to call out discriminatory behaviour

Discriminatory behaviour & Incidents

- 7.20 **Staff Survey 2023** results showed that, should an incident occur at work, staff are highly likely to report this. The results also showed that disabled staff were slightly less likely to report an incident than non-disabled staff, and that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff were less likely to report than white British staff. Whilst the difference is minimal, this is consistent with the previous year's results. Disabled staff, staff who have carer responsibilities and LGBTQ+ staff reported that they had experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work in the 12 months prior at higher levels than other groups of staff.⁴⁹ This is a continuing trend for disabled staff and LGBTQ+ staff. Across all protected characteristic groups, the main source of harassment received was reported to be from a client, a client's relative, or member of the public; as such, there will be a continued focus on addressing bullying and harassment at work, particularly from people external to the organisation.
- 7.21 In 2023-24, there was an overall increase in the number of cases recorded on the **ER Case Management system**. Analysis shows a slight increase in the number of resolution cases which represents 10% of all case activity. Resolution cases concerning bullying and harassment are at a similar level to the last two years and represent less than 3% of the total of all cases. Case levels indicate Managers are taking a proactive approach in managing these cases formally where the informal stages have been exhausted.⁵⁰
- 7.22 KCC's CMT has continued to reinforce the council's zero-tolerance policy toward any form of unacceptable behaviour, bullying or discrimination in the workplace. In addition, three all-manager briefings were held, organisation-wide, to explore issues and required actions relating to Bullying, Harassment and Abuse. To support this, management guidance was shared, including links to key KCC documents policies, and the Health and Safety Incident and Accident reporting form.

Trusted working environment

- 7.23 The Staff Survey also includes questions which can contribute to our understanding of the KCC working environment more generally. In 2023,

⁴⁹ Whilst 15% staff who responded to the 2023 Staff Survey reported having experienced harassment, bullying or abuse at work within the 12 months prior, this represented 27% responses from disabled staff, 22% responses from staff with carer responsibilities and 21% LGBTQ+ staff.

⁵⁰ Overall, 94% staff answered that they would report it if they saw other members of staff subjected to any kind of discrimination, bullying or harassment at work.

there was a high level of positive response to the statements “*I feel able to be myself at work*” (83.4% positive), “*I am treated with respect by the people that I work with*” (83.7% positive) and “*I think that KCC staff respect individual differences*” (80.7% positive), overall showing only a marginal decrease compared to the previous year. There was a slight increase in the level of positive responses to questions regarding feeling valued for the work they do and to feeling involved in decisions that affect their work. Whilst the overall consistency of these responses with the previous year suggests that KCC is maintaining its position in offering a working environment which most staff experience as safe and trusted and that respects individual difference, there is still more to be done in order to drive more significant improvement.

- 7.24 A range of activity has been progressed during 2023-24 to support inclusivity and foster a trusted working environment, with the launch of neurodiversity guidance and e-learning and the roll-out of inclusion of a race equality objective within performance management action plans. Targeted organisational development interventions have also been introduced, with small coaching-led workshop activities held in high-risk teams⁵¹, and whole-service sessions, which included sessions on culture growth and development in Social Care and Infrastructure and on the behavioural framework and standards in SEND. This work will continue into 2024/25, with the continued scoping of Member development relating to inclusion.
- 7.25 In acknowledgement of the council’s current operating context and the rate of change, the development and delivery of the KCC Change Hub⁵² has been a substantial piece of work undertaken during 2023-24. KCC understands that change can be more challenging for neurodiverse staff; as such, the Change Hub will see further development in the coming year, in order to enhance support for neurodiversity and wellbeing.

Staff sickness absence and health

- 7.26 Trends related to staff **absence due to sickness** can also be a useful indicator of the inclusivity of the council’s working environment, for example, where staff are supported at work and their individual needs are met through good conversations with their manager, with preventative measures in place, and good role design, this can help people to stay at work and reduce staff absence levels. In 2023-24, on average 8.24 days were lost to staff sickness, which is a slight increase on the previous year and in line with other similarly sized public sector employers. The top five reasons for sickness absence have remained the same, although fewer days have been lost to COVID, with an increase in the days lost to musculoskeletal illness and mental health. Compared to the previous year, numbers have remained largely consistent across the protected characteristics, with no standout trends for specific groups.

⁵¹ These are teams where there are resource gaps and the service manager or assistant director has identified risk areas in terms of performance or low levels of wellbeing.

⁵² The KCC Change Hub on our e-learning platform, Delta, provides a range of tools to support staff and managers through change.

7.27 In addition to attempts to proactively and positively influence staff wellbeing, extensive work was undertaken in the period to provide support to enable staff who are ill to return to work and promote awareness of the support available for managing various conditions at work. Additionally, a targeted approach has been taken to working with teams with the highest absence levels, particularly for sickness relating to musculoskeletal illness and mental health. This involved delivering pilot Q&A sessions to managers and the provision of 1:1 support from a member of the HR team regarding absence management. A similar approach has been taken with wellbeing work, in addition to the roll-out of the Wellbeing Diagnostic Tool in November 2023, which has been designed to improve managers' approach to wellbeing within their teams and reduce sickness absence as a result. Our partnership with Maximus⁵³ has also been strengthened, to promote them to our staff and managers to support positive mental health.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 7.28 Across the three key areas of this Equality Objective, data for 2023-24 has painted a largely consistent picture when compared to the previous year. The council recognises that building an inclusive environment to create a culture where people feel supported to work, perform, innovate and challenge takes time and that there will be fluctuations in data as the expectations of staff and the work landscape changes.
- 7.29 Data has shown the need for a continued focus on disability inclusion in all areas, to improve the experience of disabled staff at work. Additionally, the 2023 Staff Survey suggested that there may be a need to consider barriers to accessing the right learning and development opportunities for disabled staff and older staff (aged over 35). The Staff Survey also indicated that disabled staff and LGBQ+ staff have continued to experience bullying and harassment at higher levels, and that there is a need to continue to manage incidences of abuse or harassment from members of the public. Looking ahead, with the introduction of the new pay structure in April 2025, recognition mechanisms will be monitored to ensure equity of application, with any issues addressed accordingly to ensure any impact on minority groups is negated.
- 7.30 Despite this, there were some positive indicators of change. Utilisation of Inclusion Passports continued to rise, with a significant increase in the level of reasonable adjustments in place. Staff Survey responses continued to show that staff are highly likely to report this should an incident occur. This report has also shown that a robust range of work has been delivered to improve inclusion in the period, with a particular focus around improving workplace culture and ensuring staff have access to the adjustments they need to be their best at work.

⁵³ Maximus, formerly known as Remploy provide free, confidential, one to one mental health support sessions to help KCC colleagues to stay in or return to work.

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

8.1 During 2023-24, KCC has continued to actively promote diversity within the workforce. In the following sections, this activity has been reviewed alongside a comparison of our workforce profile with the Kent county profile and protected characteristic data relating to staff turnover and the diversity of applicants and new hires to the organisation in the period.

KCC's Workforce Profile

8.2 The diversity of our workforce profile has remained largely consistent when compared with 2022-23, with modest increases in the proportion of disabled, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and LGBTQ+ staff. Whilst the proportion of LGBTQ+ staff and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff remains largely in line with the county profile, there are larger disparities in the categories of sex, disability, religion/faith and age (people aged between 16-25 or over 65). It is worth noting that whilst the council has continued work to attract and retain staff from these protected characteristic groups, some disparities remain in part due to societal dynamics and structural inequalities at a local and/or national level; for example, lower proportions of disabled people, people aged 16-25 and people aged over 65 in Kent are economically active.

8.3 Further analysis has shown that these trends are reflected in directorate-level data; for example, when looking at the proportion of disabled staff and LGBTQ+ staff, there is a fairly consistent picture across the directorates. However, the variance is more significant for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff in GET, female staff in GET and DCED, and staff with a faith or religion in CED.⁵⁴ As part of strategic workforce planning, directorates are considering how to address these trends.

Category	Workforce Profile as of March 2024	Kent County Profile as per Census 2021	Variance
Current total number of FTE (non-schools)	7,874	N/A	N/A
Current total FTE on grades KR6 or below ⁵⁵	3,154	N/A	N/A

⁵⁴ GET directorate had the lowest proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff (-4.4% compared to the overall workforce profile). GET and DCED directorates had the lowest proportions of female staff (-16.0% and -12.2% compared to the overall workforce profile). CED directorate had the lowest proportion of staff with a religion or faith (-10.3% compared with the overall workforce profile).

⁵⁵ Non-schools staff earning up to £23,262

% who are female	79.7%	51.2%	28.5%
% who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic	9.4%	10.6%	-1.2%
% who have declared a disability	5.8%	17.8%	-12.0% ⁵⁶
% who are LGBTQ+ (16+)	3.4%	2.7%	0.7%
% who are transgender (16+)	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%
% who have declared a religion/faith	45.7%	53.4%	-7.7%
% aged 16-25	5.8%	16.0%	-10.2% ⁵⁷
% aged 65 and over	4.8%	20.4%	-15.6%

Figure 5: KCC's 2024 Workforce Profile compared with the Kent County Profile as per the Census 2021

- 8.4 The diversity of KCC's leadership group⁵⁸ is positive and has remained stable, with slight improvements to the proportion of female, Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, and LGBTQ+ employees.

Retaining a diverse workforce

- 8.5 Our workforce profile data for 2023-24 has remained relatively constant, demonstrating that the council has continued to retain its workforce diversity. With small increases seen for some of the protected characteristic groups, our workforce profile is indicating that work to attract and retain staff who are disabled, have a faith/religion, are older or younger, or are male or female, particularly within our leadership group, is starting to show an impact but the work needs to continue to drive improvements. The following sections will explore whether retention or attraction issues are playing a part for those groups who are currently underrepresented within our workforce profile for 2023-24.

⁵⁶ Whilst the Census 2021 showed that 17.8% of Kent residents have a declared disability, a smaller proportion of these individuals will be economically active and therefore the variance compared with this group will be lower.

⁵⁷ Whilst the Census 2021 showed that 16.0% of Kent residents are aged 16-25, many of these individuals will still be in education or training and therefore not economically active and therefore the variance compared with this group will be lower.

⁵⁸ Employees on a pay scale of KR13 or above.

Staff Turnover

- 8.6 As of March 2024, KCC's 12-month rolling turnover has fallen to 11.9%; whilst this has been mirrored across the protected characteristic groups, some groups continue to experience a turnover rate above the organisational average. This is greatest for employees aged 65 and over (25.7%), employees aged 25 and under (23.8%) and LGBTQ+ employees (17.7%). Whilst turnover for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employees is 16.7%, this has fallen significantly from 22.1% in 2022-23. Whilst the staff turnover results have shown an improvement, it is worth noting that responses to the Staff Survey 2023 relating to 'My Plans for the Future' showed that disabled staff and LGBTQ+ staff responded less positively than non-disabled and non-LGBTQ+ staff.
- 8.7 Accordingly, a range of activity has been conducted in 2023-24 to address this, aimed at improving retention for all staff in addition to specifically targeting groups where the turnover rate is highest. This included support provided to staff groups to raise awareness of KCC's employment offer, coaching and other career development opportunities and reiteration of the council's approach to hybrid working to clarify how staff can engage with this. A deep dive analysis was conducted in order to better understand the factors contributing to the above average turnover rate during 2022-23 for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, and indicated a potential retention issue for staff from this group who work as social workers and/or live outside of Kent. There has also been a specific piece of work to understand the experience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (AYSE) programme, to review their onboarding experience and identify any barriers to passing the assessment and continuing employment with KCC. This resulted in making the induction process more robust, including a change to the initial communication with ASYE students to make them aware that equality and diversity needs will be explored as part of the programme induction. Additionally, a further focus group was held to explore discrimination issues from service users in the workplace, which found that KCC's Dignity and Respect at Work policy provides robust guidance to managers on how this should be addressed.
- 8.8 In acknowledgement of the important role that managers play in the retention of staff, the Managing Well Campaign was delivered in 2023-24. This included a spotlight on diversity and inclusion, capturing the new neurodiversity guidance and e-learning and promoting the use of Inclusion Passports, the Good Conversations tool and Workplace Adjustments guidance. Whilst there has been a slight increase in the level of positive Staff Survey responses to questions regarding managers in 2023, insight from engagement forums held in the past year has revealed that some managers feel more comfortable addressing issues for some protected characteristic groups than others, and that a more empathetic and nuanced approach to management may need to be promoted. As such, a cross-council managers' session was held on Inclusion to explore scenarios around race and neurodiversity and followed with distribution of a 'managing inclusively' resource pack. Developing managers will remain as a focus for 2024/25, with an extensive plan of work to support improvement.

Attracting a diverse workforce

Diversity of Applicants

- 8.9 Looking at applicants for 2023-24, the equality profile remained largely consistent when compared with the previous year. However, there was an increase in the proportion of applicants who were Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic and applicants with a faith/religion, which increased by 9.7% and 5.4% respectively. As such, when applicant demographics are compared with our county profile, individuals with a disability have continued to be underrepresented whilst a greater proportion of women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals have applied for roles compared to our county profile. Indeed, across a number of the protected characteristic groups, KCC has attracted a more diverse pool of candidates compared to our current workforce profile. In support of continuous improvement, activity to attract disabled individuals and people aged 16-25 to apply to work with KCC will continue.⁵⁹ In the previous report there was also an ambition to improve equality information declaration rates amongst candidates, particularly around disability; this will be a continued ambition in the coming year.⁶⁰

Attracting diverse candidates

- 8.10 During 2023-24, there has been an emphasis on utilising a variety of channels to advertise vacancies and promote KCC's profile as an employer, in order to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Activity has included renewal of our contract with LinkedIn; celebrating and welcoming new joiners and staff moving roles on LinkedIn; a refresh of KCC's home pages on Glassdoor and Indeed; advising managers to share job opportunities in their wider networks for increased visibility, and posting new photos and content to our recruitment website and social media to reflect our diverse workforce. Standard advert wording has also been updated to include references to caring responsibilities and 'let's talk flexibility'.

Attracting young people

- 8.11 The average age of recruits to KCC is mid-30s, as such one of our goals within the People Strategy is to open-up job and training opportunities for younger people. This ambition has been supported a range of activity in the period, to enhance access routes into KCC, and will be a long-term programme of work to support workforce planning and develop KCC as the "first employer of choice". This has included work to enhance support for Social Work Recruitment and grow entry points for the profession. In March 2024, KCC successfully bid to recruit twelve new Social Work Degree Apprentices to Adult Social Care, and the Think Ahead opportunities were launched.⁶¹ The Supported Internship pilot programme for 16-25 SEND

⁵⁹ The proportion of disabled applicants has increased by only 0.3% in 2023-24, whilst the proportion aged 25 and under has fallen by 2.2%.

⁶⁰ In 2023-24, the proportion of applicants who chose not to declare for disability increased by 2.1%.

⁶¹ Think Ahead is a charity working in partnership with NHS and Local Authority community mental health services to provide a route into adult mental health social work for graduates and career changes. This project broadens the opportunities for new and existing staff to secure social work qualifications.

students was also launched in the period as an additional pathway into employment for this group. At the end of 2023, The Workforce Development Team began scoping the re-introduction of in-house Work Experience Programmes, which will be tested alongside the development of T Level Qualifications and Internships across the organisation into 2024/25.

Diversity in applicant shortlisting

- 8.12 When considering the equality profile of applicants who were hired in the period compared with those who applied, there were some inconsistencies across the protected characteristics. There has been a consistent trend across the last three years, with a higher proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants than hires. A deep dive analysis commenced in 2023-24 to understand the reasons behind this trend. Looking at the equality profile of staff hired, disabled staff, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff, LGBQ+ staff and staff aged 16-25 were hired in greater proportions than their makeup in our current workforce profile, demonstrating an encouraging direction of travel.

Improved recruitment processes

- 8.13 Building on improvements made to the inclusivity of KCC's recruitment processes in the previous period, during 2023-24 there has been a particular focus on analysis of candidate recruitment experience surveys, which have been introduced to inform any changes required to enhance the candidate experience. Analysis has identified the need for further information in some areas, and the survey questions are being updated in order to capture this. Improvements have been informed by horizon scanning and benchmarking to ensure our approach reflects current best practice, for example, outreach work and the reasonable adjustments provided within recruitment processes. Improvements were also made on the Tribepad recruitment system, with prompts included on the system and within the supporting guidance to ensure that managers use digitally accessible job descriptions. Additionally, the induction guidance has been strengthened to include details on requesting reasonable adjustments, Access To Work and an Inclusion Passport so that conversations are happening at an early stage of someone's employee journey at KCC. Following the introduction of the Recruitment and Selection training in the previous period, an evaluation has been conducted with very positive feedback and high attendance levels from delegates.

Conclusion & Next Steps

- 8.14 Overall, data for 2023-24 has shown a consistent picture compared with the previous year. We have begun to see small shifts in our workforce profile in relation to disability and ethnicity, which may be a result of broader activity to attract and retain a more diverse workforce. Looking ahead, work will continue in order to ensure sustained improvements over the longer-term.

- 8.15 Data on both the retention and attraction of staff demonstrates that experience varies across the protected characteristic groups.⁶² Staff turnover rates are falling, but there are still a number of groups where this is higher than the average rate. Overall, this suggests that the council should maintain the approach it has taken to improving attraction and retention in the period, and harness opportunities to gain intelligence on the potential factors contributing to this across the protected characteristics, for example via CMT Open Doors with Staff Groups. There is also the potential to consider how intersectionality may contribute to staff's experiences.
- 8.16 Looking at activity undertaken in the period in support of this Equality Objective, it is evident that extensive work has been introduced to respond to staff retention issues, with a particular focus on the impact our managers can have. The council recognises that culture change takes time, and thus it will be important to continue to review the impact of these measures over the course of these equality objectives.

⁶² Data suggests that the underrepresentation of male staff and disabled staff is contributed to by the low proportion of these staff applying for job opportunities, and lower disability declaration rates amongst applicants. Equally, turnover data suggests that once these groups join the organisation, they tend to stay, despite disabled staff reporting a less positive experience across a number of themes. Conversely, it appears that the underrepresentation of younger staff, staff with a religion/faith and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff results from a retention issue.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Overall, this report has evidenced a positive picture and future trajectory for KCC's progress with its Equality Objectives. 2023-24 has seen substantial improvements to the proportion of Key Decisions which have been supported by an EqIA, with services also increasingly engaging with data collection opportunities and using this data to understand levels of underrepresentation amongst service users. Both the physical and digital accessibility of our information and services has been considered and promoted across services, with specific action taken to address barriers that exist for certain protected characteristic groups, whether this be to access public health services, visit and engage with Kent's natural landscape, or participate in public consultation opportunities. Consideration and mitigation of digital exclusion has also continued to be a priority within service delivery, including within commissioned services. Additionally, we have a breadth of examples of how our Strategic Partnership working has supported equality outcomes more broadly, and specifically contributed to the ambitions of our Equality Objectives. Under our commissioning and procurement Equality Objective, there is great potential with the progress seen within the Commercial Services Group workforce, and the opportunities to extend our own performance measurement mechanisms for commissioning and procurement activity. KCC has sustained its performance regarding its workforce objectives, with a number of positive indicators relating to workplace adjustments, inclusion passports and the diversity of candidates attracted and recruited to the organisation during the period.
- 9.2 Building on the baseline established in the previous year's report, our approach to collecting and analysing data relevant to our Equality Objectives has enabled us to track progress effectively in this year's report. This has shown that our greatest area of success has remained constant, in our Equality Objective relating to the accessibility of our information and services. 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. Performance regarding our strategic partnership Equality Objective has also been a highlight of 2023-24, with an extensive range of supporting case studies which have equally supported our ambitions across our other objectives. This period also saw the development of our Strategic Partnership Register survey which has provided a rich source of data to enable the exploration of untapped opportunities and promotion of best practice in the coming year.
- 9.3 Whilst information received for our Equality Objectives relating to data collection/analysis and commissioning and procurement also evidenced some best practice activity across the organisation, examples for these were not as easily obtainable. Developing how we better evidence progress for these objectives will therefore constitute one of our priorities for the coming years and will involve engagement with our divisions across the organisation. Within the commissioning and procurement Equality Objective in particular, there is substantial opportunity to improve both our monitoring mechanisms and the

guidance, processes and templates used to improve practice. There is also opportunity to build on our success in driving up the proportion of Key Decisions which are supported by an EqIA to improve officer compliance with the other requirements of our EqIA Policy.

- 9.4 Data relating to our workforce objectives has evidenced a largely consistent picture compared to the previous year, indicating that the council has been able to maintain the inclusivity and diversity of its workforce during 2023-24. Whilst small improvements have begun to be seen, the council recognises that more substantial changes will take time to materialise as our organisational culture evolves and responds to inclusion activity. Our priorities for these objectives will therefore remain constant, with a focus on monitoring the impact of activity introduced in the period; promotion of disability inclusion; reinforcing our zero-tolerance policy and managing incidents of harassment, bullying or abuse; inclusive recruitment processes; and the attraction of diverse groups to the workforce, including young people.