



# Equality Objectives Annual Report 2022/23

July 2023

## Introduction

The Council is a public body which, under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the [Equality Act 2010](#), has a specific duty to publish one or more equality objectives to demonstrate how the Council is meeting the aims of the general equality duty.

[Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010](#) places a general equality duty on the Council to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

The characteristics protected under the Act are:

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

Under the [Equality Act 2010 \(Specific Duties\) Regulations 2011](#), the Council is required to publish one or more objectives we think we should achieve to do any of the things mentioned in the 3 general duties.

In December 2019, the Executive published a new suite of Equality Objectives for the Council, for the period 2020 to 2024. These are available at on the [Equality pages](#) of the Council's website.

## Scope and structure of this report

This third annual report provides an update on activity in relation to the agreed Objectives.

For each Objective an update is provided against the broad activities that it was agreed in December 2019 the Council would focus on.

## Equality Objective 1: Using data and local intelligence better

The focus of this objective is to continue to improve our equality data and use local intelligence and data insight to inform future service planning and formal decision making.

### Areas of activity

#### **A) Building our data and insight capability within the organisation**

The Council created a dedicated Data and Insight Team in 2020. Formed to help the organisation better understand and manage our data, it faced an immediate test in responding to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, where the team provided invaluable information on the local situation as we responded to protect residents. Since then, the team has been working to develop the organisation's data capacity and effectiveness.

Within the last year, several workstreams have been progressing well. Reflective of the developing national and local context, the team developed a Fuel Poverty and Cost of Living predictive model which allowed the council to assess which households would be impacted most by economic challenges. This helped improve our understanding and has enabled us to better target our proactive welfare support to vulnerable members of our communities.

The Data and Insight team has also been expanding on the Council's research and consultation tools. A new Research Officer role was created in September 2022, and is now supporting the organisation's research efforts, particularly through engaging with local stakeholders. As part of these efforts, a new consultation toolkit was launched in early 2023; this self-service toolkit allows staff to build better quality surveys to increase our understanding of residents, and ultimately build that evidence into our services and decisions. Working together with services across the Council, including our Communications and Community Development teams, the toolkit and our ongoing consultation efforts help ensure that the needs of all those within the borough, including those with protected characteristics, are reflected in our work.

Our efforts to better use data aren't limited to just one team – we have been working to improve skills and understanding across the organisation. Building on the findings of the previous year's data maturity review, the Council now has an established Data Community, including officers from a wide range of teams and services. The community meets regularly to consider new data topics, including natural language processing, best practice for graphs, and data action stories. The community also helps to coordinate training opportunities open to all staff. Building data skills and knowledge throughout the Council gives us the capability we need to reflect equality, diversity and inclusion into service design, delivery and monitoring across all our activities.

## **B) Improving the availability of equality data, and raising awareness of service users' needs to inform service design across the Council**

### **Workforce equality data**

In 2020, as part of a wider review of the accuracy of employee data held by the Council, staff were encouraged to update their personal details on the Council's HR system. Although remaining optional for staff to complete, this information helps us comply with our Public Sector Equality Duty in relation to workforce reporting. Updated [workforce equality information](#) is now published on the Council's website and is available to all those officers involved in service design across the Council. The data was most recently updated in December 2022.

### **Borough equality data**

An overview of the [Borough Equality Characteristics](#) is published on the website, providing useful borough and ward level information about those in the borough with protected characteristics. This now includes data from the 2021 Census, providing a much more up to date overview than was previously available. Whilst Census information doesn't necessarily cover all aspects of equality information, it provides some of the best quantitative and top level information to help us understand the borough, and the latest census provides a wider range of data relating to protected characteristics.

To help make best of this data, we have promoted its availability within the organisation and encouraged teams to make use of it to inform their service planning. An example of this was utilising the early release of census data on eastern European residents to help us devise proportionate plans for Ukrainian refugee resettlement

In addition to Census data, the Data and Insight team have supported fresh primary research into specific local community needs through various projects, ranging from Community Centre use, Harlequin customers, residents' opinions on environmental sustainability and our management of greenspaces. All of these have helped build better and more representative information about local needs. Without primary research the baseline information that the council uses would be narrower in scope, and would potentially not represent the diversity of our borough's residents and other service users.

### **Data and insight about our most vulnerable residents and those needing extra support**

The Council's frontline support services all need to understand the needs of our residents and communities to enable us to provide appropriate support, particularly for the most vulnerable.

As identified above, tools such as predictive modelling and consultation can help with this and let us plan ahead of emerging need. More qualitative information is also essential, however, and officers across the organisation work personally with residents to build this human understanding. Our routes for engaging include our Community Development workers, Family Support and Money Support teams, our Community Centres and our Customer Contact team. Work this year has encompassed engagement with new local community groups, broadening the offers at our community centres, and continuing to build on our refugee support programme.

The Council isn't alone in trying to help people, and we also work with a range of partners, including housing associations, the NHS, and local charitable and voluntary sector bodies. With these partners, we can coordinate in response to levels of local need and help direct resources in response to developing demand. This year, we've been particularly looking at how we can understand the health needs of local residents and make sure it's easy for everyone, and particularly the most vulnerable, to find and access the right support. By having a cohesive understanding of health factors, we can help do our part in preventing health issues developing, rather than simply responding once they've happened.

Where the Council holds personal information, it is handled securely and sensitively, in accordance with our published [privacy notice](#), which notes that information around a range of protected characteristics is treated with particular care.

## Future Focus

Looking to the year ahead, the effective use of data will continue to be an essential part of the Council's work. Recent economic pressures are expected to continue, which will require us to be as effective and efficient as we can in providing support and directing resources where they'll do the most good. We'll therefore need to maintain and continue to develop our understanding of local priorities, and update our models to inform ongoing service planning.

We'll also be undertaking consultations on a range of emerging areas, including local leisure needs, public spaces, and starting the process of reviewing our Corporate Plan. These efforts will make use of the Consultation Toolkit and be supported by the Data and Insight team and relevant services across the organisation.

The effective use of data will also help inform topics covered elsewhere in this report, including developing a new Customer Contact Strategy, building and maintaining our community relations, and steering our organisation development.

## Equality Objective 2: Supporting good community relations

The focus of this objective is to develop a greater focus on promoting social inclusivity across all the Council's services and fostering good community relations

### Areas of activity

#### **A) Supporting communities through the work of our frontline teams and in partnership with other relevant organisations**

##### Community Development

The Council's Community Development work covers five key localities across the borough, incorporating Horley, Merstham, Preston, Redhill, Woodhatch and Whitebushes, along with broader support for local areas.

Community Development Workers seek to understand the needs of communities and residents and build on their strengths to help them address challenges and benefit the places around them. Doing this effectively requires consideration of equality, diversity and inclusivity and reflecting the needs and strengths of those with protected characteristics.

Reflecting our expanding collaboration with the health sector, there has been a focus this year on health and place based working. This approach seeks to improve the wider determinants of health in borough neighbourhoods through cohesive efforts with partners. By helping to prevent factors which can cause both health and social problems, we can do more to keep communities healthy and make sure that everyone's needs are met.

Work of particular relevance to this report in the past year has included:

- Work with the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service to create a Reigate and Banstead focussed 'Safe and Well' form, meaning that residents who receive a 'Safe and Well' visit from the service are signposted to local resources and support. This support can be particularly helpful for those with other vulnerabilities.
- Helping local residents to set up groups at our Community Centres, including a support group for the parents of children with special educational needs in Woodhatch, and an African Community Group in Horley.
- Securing funding to help make sure young people in Preston can afford to access the local leisure centre and support their physical wellbeing.
- Supporting the operation of five food clubs, providing low cost food for local people. There are currently 310 people registered across the clubs, enabling them to access healthy food more affordably.

A core achievement this year has been setting up and administering a Creating Healthy Communities grant fund, supported by East Surrey Place, which provided resources for a range of projects supporting communities. Working together with local partners, this has included:

- Mental health support through befriending schemes and support groups for older people, those with health conditions, refugees and survivors of abuse.
- Community, drama and music groups for all ages, including those with special educational needs or physical disabilities.
- Sports and physical activity opportunities, to support physical wellbeing and staying active across different ages and communities.
- Counselling, support and advice for children, young people and families, and for those on low income.
- Other projects, such as resources to make life easier for carers, community transport, and IT support.

The combination of these efforts and more, the Council's frontline teams and our partners have continued to provide invaluable support for communities, with particular benefits for the vulnerable, community cohesion, and equality of opportunity.

### **Money Support**

The last couple of years have been particularly financially challenging for many, with the costs of food and energy rising sharply. This can often have a disproportionate effect on those with other vulnerabilities including protected characteristics, or can lead to knock-on effects for those who may find it more difficult to access support.

The Council has a number of services working to address such needs, including Family Support and Housing, but the Money Support Team is particularly well placed to address these concerns. The team is able to provide advice and signposting to residents to help them manage their finances, access available resources, and overcome the challenges they face. Referrals to the team have increased in the past year, indicating the additional demand for support, whilst feedback from those supported has consistently reported improvements to their situation and wellbeing.

### **B) Incorporating consideration of social inclusivity in service-level strategies, service design and delivery**

To meet the Council's equality obligations, the work of the organisation must incorporate consideration of equality matters and social inclusivity throughout its work. This forms part of the day-to-day work of the Council, as well as being included in development of strategies and longer terms plans.

As identified above, one route through which this is accomplished is consultations, which help to make sure the needs of all residents and communities are understood and reflected. In the past year, this has included questions around the Council's budget, parking costs, community centre modernisation, and open spaces at Earlswood and Redhill Commons. Whilst it's not always possible to deliver everything we'd like to, consultations and other engagement helps make sure that service planning takes as much account as possible of the wide range of needs and priorities across the borough, including those with protected characteristics.

Social inclusivity is also a baseline feature of service design, strategies and delivery. This is present both across frontline services and other parts of the organisation, and Equality Impact Assessments are a core component of service planning. Examples include our Housing work, where the service ensure temporary and emergency accommodation is suitable for those accessing it, support for refugees and asylum seekers and their varied needs, Council Tax Support measures to help those facing financial pressures, and the commitment to accessibility in the new Leisure and Culture strategy.

## **Community Centres**

The Council's Community centres have now successfully implemented a transformation programme, which has broadened and reach and appeal of the centres. As well as leading to increased visitor numbers, the programme has expanded the range of those within the community we can engage with, and who can benefit from the opportunities available.

The centres offer resources and activities for all ages. This ranges from a place to get a hot meal, to exercise classes, to children's play sessions (including with parents and grandparents), to dementia support, to IT classes, to diverse community groups, and through to clubs for games, arts, crafts and music. The centres also provide venues for personal care and health provision, including chiropody, hairdressing, and audiology. These offers help to provide opportunities for all members of the community, and keep important services accessible locally.

This work has been supported by improved and expanded engagement and messaging to raise awareness of what's on offer. This has included new signage, branding, and marketing to help information on the options and support available reach everyone who might benefit.

## **Refugee Support**

Council services have been continuing to provide support for families displaced from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan, as part of national programmes. This has included providing assistance for over 300 Ukrainian individuals, as well as those who have become sponsors



under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Weekly support sessions have been available for those displaced and their sponsors, helping them to manage their transition to the UK.

Support for Syrian and Afghan families has also been ongoing, including guidance towards opportunities for employment, English language skills, and working together to ensure their independence. The Syrian feast has now become an annual event, with the recipe book and the feast itself remaining popular.

## **Future Focus**

There will be a continued need to support communities and provide inclusive services in the coming year. This will need to encompass both maintaining our current approaches and offers, and looking for how we can make best use of resources as circumstances develop. It will be important to address the impacts of financial challenges on residents and communities, and consider how these can affect those with protected characteristics or other vulnerabilities.

With the new Leisure and Culture Strategy agreed, this will begin to be implemented, and will include steps to improve both the physical and mental health of residents in the borough, with benefits provided through active sports and leisure, as well as cultural offers. It will also include reviewing delivery models to ensure that they are accessible to residents through understanding needs, removing barriers to entry, and creating a leisure and culture landscape that promotes and celebrates equality.

This is consistent with and complementary to the wider health and place based approach being implemented through our community work, and we look to continue to build on our collaboration with the health sector and other partners to further develop these benefits for all residents. Efforts at Community Centres will also progress, including background infrastructure improvements to help make best use of resources, and increasing the breadth of available low cost activities for residents.

## **Equality Objective 3: Accessible information and services**

The focus of this objective is to ensure that Council services, information, consultation and engagement opportunities remain accessible to all residents, particularly those with protected characteristics.

## Areas of Activity

### **A) Better understanding of the nature of our customer contact**

An exercise has been underway to map customer contact activity and identify trends in user activity and needs. This exercise will help us to understand both what sort of support is sought from customer contact, and potentially show us where gaps indicate others may not be getting in touch.

The findings of the mapping exercise will inform the development of our customer contact strategy. Development of this strategy began in Spring 2023, and is expected to conclude by the end of 2023/24. The development process includes a specific workstream around understanding residents and their accessibility needs, and these requirements will be considered throughout the customer contact approach developed.

This current work builds upon existing approaches to provide and maintain customer contact that is accessible to all. Whilst almost all Council information is available on our website, we recognise that not everyone is comfortable with or readily able to use online tools. We therefore also maintain an in-house customer contact team who can be contacted via the phone, and also monitor correspondence received through the post. We also have a staffed reception at the Town Hall in Reigate, which can help with guidance and signposting for those attending in person.

### **B) Making sure services and information are accessible for those with protected characteristics**

#### Communications

The council uses a wide variety of communication methods to make information and news available to as many as possible within the borough. Our regular communication channels include both digital media, such as email, social media and the Council website (see website accessibility below), along with more traditional forms, such as printed borough news magazine, flyers, posters and banners, and placement in local media. The Autumn 2022 borough magazine included information on Community Centres and new activities as well as help available for those facing cost of living pressures, helping to make this information available to nondigitally enabled residents.

Customer contact is also supported through phone lines operated locally by Council staff, and print media is available in a range of languages and accessible formats [upon request](#). Following the release of information from the 2021 Census, we have updated the range of translations provided on the website to reflect the languages most commonly spoken within the borough.

The lessons of the pandemic emphasised the need to ensure information is available to those who do not use digital channels, although these are increasing in popularity. This is supported by the maintenance of a network of local knowledge and connections, and working with local organisations, community development workers and champions to disseminate information and awareness. Physical sites, such as community centres, also help provide news and information for visitors.

### **Consultation and engagement**

Equality and diversity considerations are explicitly incorporated into the design of Council consultation and engagement projects. This includes considering the needs of participants and utilising the most appropriate methods to enable them to both access and respond to the process. This approach has carried through to the new Consultation Toolkit, and we're continuing to look at how we do more to make sure consultations reach all parts of the borough and are accessible to everyone.

As with other areas, where we use online and electronic tools for conducting consultations, these are supported by options for accessing information and responding through other channels, including paper copies, over the phone assistance, and specific language and accessibility support where required.

In line with data privacy regulation, and with participants' consent, data such as gender, age, ethnicity, and long term health and disability is collected to monitor how well we have reached different demographics within our consultations and other engagement. This enables us to boost participation in under-represented groups where possible and, where appropriate, we can analyse responses according to these groups to provide insight into the different perceptions and experiences of sections of our community. With the availability of more recent Census data, we can compare the data we collect with that for the borough to help us better identify where those gaps in representation may be.

### **Website accessibility**

All online material published by the Council must be compliant with national accessibility regulations. This means that all users should be able to access online services, and all new content created should be fully accessible. How our website complies with the regulations is set out in our website accessibility statement, which is published at: [www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/accessibility-statement](http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/accessibility-statement).

Work is ongoing to review historical documents published on our website (PDF, Word and Excel) for accessibility, and to ensure new content is fully compliant with all regulations. We've expanded training for the organisations online content editors on creating accessible

content that complies with current and future regulations, and makes material easy to access and understand.

## Future Focus

Our work to make sure that our services are accessible to all, and the information we provide matches the needs of local people. As we build our understanding of resident needs and preferences in accessing information, this will let us better match our offer to those needing information and support. Whilst digital media is increasing in popularity, we will ensure that news and information remains accessible to those without digital access.

The Council's website and online services will continue to be updated to reflect accessibility objectives, and understanding of these needs will be expanded across the organisation. We are preparing for an expected update to the website accessibility regulations and will be rolling out new automated accessibility checking software to improve the website experience for everyone.

These considerations will also continued to be reflected and maintained in the wider work of the organisation, including both specific consultations and engagement and the day to day work of services. We will seek to continue to build on the lessons of recent years, and use our strengthened connections to local communities and organisations to enhance this approach.

## Equality Objective 4: Working for the Council

The focus of this objective is to continue to seek opportunities to build inclusivity into the Council's internal policies and procedures.

### Areas of activity

#### **A) Reviewing – and as necessary updating – relevant internal policies and procedures**

##### **Corporate Equality Policy**

Following a review in 2020, the Council's Corporate Equality Policy was updated to ensure it remained fit for purpose and properly reflected the Council's duties and obligations. This process was supported by consultation with Unions and the Staff Association as well as the Council's Corporate Governance Group. This [Corporate Equality Policy](#) has remained current in 2022/23, and is available on the Council's intranet and external-facing website.

## Equality Impact Assessment template

Similarly to the Corporate Equality Policy, the Council's Equality Impact Assessment template was updated in 2020. The template supports the completion of Equality Impact Assessments, which ensure Council services and decisions take account of equality considerations. As identified in the 2020 report, the updates included making the template more user friendly, including better signposting to equality information and data sources, including more emphasis on opportunities to taking a proactive approach to ensuring equality of opportunity, and enabling consideration of impact on all vulnerable residents (not just those with protected characteristics). The template has remained current in 2021 and is used to support the Council's formal decision making process and project management approach.

As well as signposting to external sources, we also provide an annual summary of both borough and workforce equality characteristics to help provide an overview for informing impact assessments. These are available via the Council's Equality web page, at: [Equality | Reigate and Banstead \(reigate-banstead.gov.uk\)](https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/equality)

## **B) Reviewing – and as necessary updating – resources and training for staff, and member learning and development resources, in relation to equalities issues**

### Resources and training for staff

The Council's intranet was updated with additional and clearer information on equality, diversity and inclusion in 2020. Additional updates on related material have been provided throughout the year, including Census findings, consultations, and topics and events of interest. Resources available to staff include the Corporate Equality Policy, the Council's Equality Objectives, and borough and workforce equality information. The intranet pages were also updated to include better signposting to an expanded range of training and learning opportunities, and external resources providing more information and guidance. This information has remained current, and these pages have been maintained in 2022/23.

A briefing for staff on the findings of the 2021 Census was conducted in March 2023, and included both material on the general uses of the information, as well as specific elements on how it can be used to inform and support work with regard to equality and accessibility. A recording of the briefing is also available for staff to access on the Council's intranet pages.

### Member learning and development

Training on equality, diversity and inclusion is available and encouraged for elected Members each year, supported and facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA). Additional information is also readily available through the Council and the LGA. The most recent

workshop was held in January 2022, and included information on a range of topics, including common challenges faced by Councils, public sector equality duties, and addressing any systematic issues to create an inclusive Council. Following the recent elections, the next training session is due to be held in September 2023.

Training and information is also made available to all new Members as part of the induction process, with additional training on employment law available, and required for those serving on the Council's Employment Committee.

### **Support for Council staff**

The Council recognises that its staff may also sometimes face equality or accessibility issues or be in need of support. In addition to the organisation's Corporate Equality Policy and Human Resources support, the Council is expanding its health and wellbeing offer for staff, to help maintain and promote the wellbeing of its employees. Whilst covering a broader range of content than equality, diversity and inclusion, these can form important parts of an individual's wellbeing situation and what the strategy works to address. The Council also operates an employee assistance programme where staff can access free, confidential advice and support. This programme can help assist staff facing challenges, whether those might be related to finances, mental health, or other personal circumstances.

### **Future focus**

The Council's internal policies and procedures remain up to date, and will continue to be implemented across the organisation throughout 2023. Where new information or guidance emerges, they will be reviewed and updated as appropriate. Signposting to supporting information and data will be updated as new material becomes available.

Training for Council officers and elected Members will continue to be maintained and refreshed throughout the year. Additional resources will be made available in specific areas, such as the continued expansion of website accessibility training. As with the Council's policies and procedures, training and resources will be updated as appropriate in response to new regulations, guidance or information, and feedback from ongoing training and engagement will help to inform and shape future activities.