



Equality Objectives Annual Report 2023/24

July 2024

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 fourth 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. The team helps the Council to better understand, manage and utilise our data. It also helps us to collect data effectively and in ways that are consistent with our equality duties and other responsibilities; this data collection activity is supported through the work of a dedicated Research Officer.

The Council operates a 'Consultation Toolkit', which provides officers with information on how to conduct consultation in a way that delivers the data we need and reflects equality, diversity, inclusion and wider ethical considerations. The toolkit covers elements such as stakeholder mapping, survey design, and reaching target audiences, as well as the value of feedback. Supporting our equality duties, it covers points around considering the potential needs of the audience, how accessible the content and presentation is, and where any extra steps might be needed. Related actions might include ensuring that paper copies are available, or if translation might be required.

Our team and Research Officer also promote general best practice around research methods and ethics. This means such actions as avoiding bias, and making sure that nobody's responses are excluded. One tool we've started working with to support these goals is machine learning, which can help us to analyse the sentiment from large numbers of responses and reveal themes within responses more independently of any individual. This technique was used to support our consultation this year on public space protection orders, where we received a high level of response.

We're also continuing to build our understanding of data across the organisation. An example of this is the Council's Data Community, which brings together officers from various services to look at topics of interest and areas for learning. A recent presentation to the group looked at inclusion and exclusion and considered aspects such as practical advice on pitfalls to avoid, information on unconscious bias, and considering the Council's values and behaviours.

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 annually 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 March 2024.

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 includes data from the 2021 Census, representing the latest information on various equality related characteristics. 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 than was the case for previous years. 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.

The Data and Insight team have also supported fresh primary research into specific local community needs through various projects, and provided information to support services deliver on others. Related projects in the last year included:

- Administering round four of the Household Support Fund. We have been able to analyse data and build a model to help us identify households at risk of hardship and reach those in greatest need.
- Shaping our customer contact approach. We compiled information from multiple sources to build better understanding of customer needs, which enables use to build these into service design.
- Our Safer Streets project in Redhill. Our data helped us to hear more voices from groups that are more often underrepresented or at risk of exclusion.

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 teams need to understand the needs of our residents and communities to enable us to provide appropriate services and assistance, particularly for those working directly with our residents and supporting the most vulnerable.

Information on these needs comes from a variety of sources. Our frontline teams are extremely useful in enabling us to build a picture of the concerns that residents have and how they change over time. This helps us to target our resources and support effectively to benefit those most in need.

We also rely upon our partners to maintain a full picture of the needs of the borough. These partners include charities, the NHS and health sector, community and faith groups and registered housing providers. We maintain strong relationships with our partners, but we've also recently been looking at how we can work together even more effectively. Work to enable better collaboration and shared understanding has included the Better Together conference with eighty local partners and a continued focus on strengthening our connections to the health sector. We also conducted a survey and listening event in summer 2023 with voluntary, community and faith sector partners, and sought views from the sector on our community workplan for 2024/25.

A reflection our use of insights and partnership working to support residents has been the establishment of the Council's Welfare and Discharge team. The team coordinates with health partners to assist those leaving hospitals and similar. This approach supports the NHS by increasing the availability of hospital beds and related resources, and benefits both vulnerable local residents and the Council by proactively enabling those supported to access suitable accommodation, advice and information and preventing potential issues arising. These efforts are only possible due to our work with partners and the information they provide.

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 now starting to ease somewhat, but their impacts will continue to be felt by many residents. Understanding the extent of such pressures will continue to be important in enabling us to direct our resources effectively, such as through delivery of the next round of Household Support Funding.

We're also currently working to develop our next corporate plan, for 2025-2030, alongside which we're reviewing our current Equality Objectives. As part of the process of developing the plan so far, we've sought to understand views of residents across the borough, including those who can be at risk of underrepresentation. We'll be conducting a formal consultation on the draft plan during the Autumn, and this will be supported by use of the consultation toolkit and efforts to ensure that the plan will be as informed as it reasonably can be of the views of all parts of the community and can make effective use of local equality data.

More widely, we're looking at how we can better gather information on broad resident views in future, whether through surveys or more participatory approaches. This will accompany other research and consultation around specific future projects as they emerge.

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 and Partnership

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.

The wider Community Partnerships service is also closely engaged with communities across the borough, and coordinates efforts with partners to strengthen community relations, facilitate support, and enable shared learning and understanding between organisations. Our community centres also act as local venues for community activities and groups, and have been continuing work to broaden their appeal.

During the last year, this work has encompassed a number of activities which have made positive contributions to the Council's equality responsibilities. These have included:

- Supporting five food clubs, offering low-cost food to residents facing cost of living pressures. These supported eight thousand visits in 2023.
- Facilitating groups to coordinate local efforts supporting particular elements of the community, such as and Older People Forum and working groups, and the re-launched 'Get Connected' network for organisations working with young people.
- Offering a venue at Horley Community Centre for the local African community, with a range of talks and events each attracting fifty to eighty people.
- Delivering round four of the Household Support Fund through our partners, providing £400,000 worth of essentials such as food and fuel vouchers, along with advice, for residents in need.
- Monitoring delivery of the Creating Healthy Communities grants, funded by East Surrey Place, providing support around matters such as mental health, drama and music opportunities for those with disabilities or special needs, and groups and assistance for carers, survivors of abuse and those with health conditions.

Work last year on a football project for young people in Preston, helping to support access to facilities and address challenges for children received special commendation, being highlighted as an example of good practice at NHS Surrey Downs' Pulling Together Conference.

Housing and Intervention

The Council's Housing and Intervention service has also been working to support communities. This has included through our Family and Money Support teams, which have assisted those facing particular difficulties, as well as the new Welfare and Discharge team referenced earlier in this report. Some of the recent factors facing residents can have especially pronounced effects on those with protected characteristics, and these teams are therefore well positioned to assist those in need and ensure they can access support.

Of note recently has been work to support refugees within the borough. We've worked with twelve families from Syria and Afghanistan, as well as over three hundred and fifty Ukrainians in the last few years to provide initial support and assistance. For those who have remained within the borough for a while, we've provided support with elements including language learning, community integration and finding employment. The last year saw notable progress in securing accommodation for families in need, in conjunction with Raven Housing Trust and Mount Green Housing Association, with fifteen properties either secured or underway, supported by grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The work of the team helps to assist refugees in need and facilitate building connections within local communities.

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

The Council 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.

An example from this year, which also ties in to wider work to support good community relations, is the [Safer Redhill](#) programme. Safer Redhill looks at issues around antisocial behaviour in the town centre and nearby areas, responding to local concerns. Supporting the scheme, there has been extensive work to engage with and listen to local residents and partners, including research on practical town centre improvements, stakeholder events, and youth outreach through the YMCA. There was also a consultation on the Redhill town centre public space protection order, which utilised the Council's consultation toolkit, and we've worked with faith groups in the area with additional training on addressing antisocial behaviour being provided for those active locally, such as street pastors.

We've also conducted consultations on a range of other topics this year, including regarding our annual budget, our borough news publication, and street design code work around the A23. These have again drawn on the guidance within the consultation toolkit around reaching underrepresented groups, providing accessible engagement options, and looking at the impact of plans on those with protected characteristics.

More generally, we continue to utilise Equality Impact Assessments as an important component of service planning. These assessments are used to consider where either new services or changes to existing offers are likely to have adverse impacts on any section of the population, particularly those with protected characteristics, and how those impacts might be avoided or mitigated. These factors are also reflected in our reporting to committees, where reports have a standing section on equality implications.

Community Centres

The Council's Community Centres have recently implemented a successful transformation programme, expanding the range of options on offer and the appeal of the centres to a wider range of local residents. This approach was informed by ambitions to have the centres work for all elements of local communities, and has so far proven successful with a 33% increase in activity participation and a 15% increase in room hire between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

As referenced last year, the centres now 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.

Future Focus

Future work will continue to build on our current approach and maintain efforts towards supporting our communities and relations between us, partners and residents. This will require remaining aware of the local circumstances and resident needs, and ensuring that Council plans continue to take account of their impacts on residents, particularly those with protected characteristics or who are otherwise vulnerable.

There is ambition to look towards how we can further development our engagement approaches and community work to expand opportunities for resident participation and help us listen effectively. This will accompany our ongoing work to collaborate closely with our partner organisations, especially around strengthening health sector cooperation, and develop further on recent work to be more open to partners in developing our plans.

We will also be working to ensure that equality considerations and accessibility are built into our future consultations, including around regular activities such as the annual budget, and longer term strategies, such as the development of our next Corporate Plan. These elements remain essential in ensuring that our services continue to reflect our equality responsibilities as well as they can.

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

We have mapped our customer contact activity and identified trends in user activity. This insight will be used to improve our customer contact approach, to meet the needs of both digital and non-digital citizens. Existing data and secondary research have also been analysed, partly to understand reasons behind digital exclusion and to inform a suitable future approach.

This work builds upon our existing approach to provide and maintain customer contact that is accessible to all. Much Council information is available on our website in an accessible format and contact can also be made via social media channels; for those not able or comfortable using online contact methods, we offer a phone and SMS contact option through our Customer Contact Centre. The same team also monitors postal correspondence and staff's our Town Hall Reception in Reigate, where guidance and signposting can be given to 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, along with more traditional forms, such as our printed resident magazine, Borough News, flyers, posters and banners, and stories in local print media. We also use TV and radio broadcast opportunities, putting senior council leaders forward for interview. Printed material is available in a range of languages and accessible formats [on request](#).

Using information from the 2021 Census, we updated the range of translations provided to reflect the languages most commonly spoken within the borough.

As part of ensuring information is available to those who do not use digital channels, the council uses its network of local connections, local organisations, community development workers and champions to disseminate information. Our 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 is supported in our 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, we offer options for accessing information and responding through other channels, including

papers 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 the 2021 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. We are constantly updating our website with the assistance of an online accessibility audit tool, and our website provider has updated the site to be WCAG 2.2 compliant. WCAG 2.2 is the latest version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. 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.

Work is ongoing to ensure new content is fully compliant with all regulations. For a second year running we've expanded the 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

We work to make sure that our services are accessible to all, and the information we provide matches the needs of local people. By continuing to build our understanding of resident needs and preferences in accessing information, we can continually improve 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. In this we are helped by newly introduced automated accessibility checking software to improve the website experience for everyone.

These considerations will also continue 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 2023/24, 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 2023/24 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://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 accessibility awareness, data protection, and making every contact count. 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 2023/24.

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 equality, diversity and inclusion training was held in September 2023, and accompanied other sessions throughout the year on topics such as communication skills, local cycling and walking infrastructure, and working with health.

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 has expanded its health and wellbeing offer for staff, to help maintain and promote the wellbeing of its employees, with a staff wellbeing group also in place to consider opportunities and approaches. Whilst covering a broader range of content than equality, diversity and inclusion, these equality related elements can also form important parts of an individual's wellbeing situation.

There were a number of related events and activities during 2023/24, including a charity football match in aid of mental health, lunchtime doodling club, Sing in the Sun with the Include Choir, a staff gardening area in the town hall courtyard, celebrating Black History Month, LGBT+ History Month and International Women's Day, awareness of Stoptober for

those quitting smoking, as well as a general wellbeing social calendar to help staff coordinate their own activities. Within 2023/24, the Council also established a LGBTQ + Allies Staff Network, and has now also established a Workability Network for those who identify as having a disability or neurodiversity.

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.

Within the last year, the Council also updated its guidance on protecting staff from abuse, with comprehensive notes now available on the intranet, external training provided on how to recognise and deal with abusive incidents, and additional support in place for staff following any such event.

Future focus

The Council's internal policies and procedures remain up to date, and will continue to be implemented across the organisation throughout 2024/25. 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. And updated as appropriate in response to new regulations, guidance or feedback.

The Council recently completed a detailed employee survey, which will help provide information on staff needs, concerns and interests. This information will therefore inform future work to support equality and inclusion at the Council. Supporting our equality responsibilities is also expected to be an area of focus within forthcoming human resources work, including supporting service and corporate planning and ensuring our duties continue to be reflected within policy and training.