

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Purpose of report:

The report provides an update on the progress made in relation to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) at Surrey County Council for the workforce and residents.

Introduction:

1. The ED&I action plan is key to delivering the equality objectives in the [Organisation Strategy 2023 to 2028](#) and plays a pivotal role in supporting the council's wider aim to tackle inequality to ensure no one is left behind. Moving to a fairer, more compassionate, and inclusive culture will inform how we develop policy, take decisions, and serve all stakeholders so everyone who lives, works and studies in Surrey is supported to thrive.
2. To enable members of the Committee to carry out their scrutiny function of this area of work, this report reviews delivery against the [ED&I action plans](#) covering the financial years 2021-22 and 2022-23 (since the previous scrutiny and approval of the plan by the Select Committee and Cabinet respectively in 2021). The report describes the activity relating to our workforce, an overview of building accessibility before focussing on the work undertaken to improve the equality of access and outcome for residents and communities. It then outlines the work undertaken to support the development of ED&I in the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector.
3. Further to the above, the report provides an overview of the activity planned for 2023 which will lead to the development of a new ED&I Strategy which will be taken to Cabinet early in 2024.

Key delivery relating to the ED&I Action Plans 2021- 23

Workforce

4. Like many councils, our workforce is made up of more women than men and our workforce is on average older than the working age population of Surrey. Women are well represented at the most senior level of the organisation, and we have reduced our gender pay gap by 5.6% between 2019 and 2022.
5. We know, though, that representation of other key demographics (particularly disability and ethnicity) is not in line with our population as captured by the 2021

Census, particularly at senior management levels. In 2022, 6.49% of our senior managers were from minoritised ethnic groups, falling to 0% of those in leadership roles (15% of our working-age population is from minoritised ethnic groups i.e. non-White British/ White Other); and 0.07% of senior managers shared that they were disabled, again falling to 0% in leadership roles. Initial analysis of the 2021 Census data has shown that approximately 11.2% of our working age population are disabled. Further detail about the makeup of the workforce can be found here: [Equalities and Diversity Analysis 2019-2021 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://surreycc.gov.uk/equalities-and-diversity-analysis-2019-2021). The management levels in the report correspond with the following grades: front line staff PS1-7; team leaders PS8-9; middle managers PS10-12; senior managers PS13-15; and leadership roles are those on grades PS16+.

6. Inclusive recruitment is an important component in addressing this and new recruitment guidance for hiring managers has been put in place. Accompanying training is now in development. A centralised Reasonable Adjustments Service was also launched in April 2022 to provide consistent support, equipment, software, or training for all staff and members across the council that need it and to help better enable inclusive recruitment. An evaluation of the service has been undertaken after its first full year of operation, with several recommendations made. These include:

- 1.1 to extend the service to Surrey Fire and Rescue staff,
- 1.2 to develop a Workplace Adjustments Policy and a passport detailing the workplace adjustments required by a staff member (to avoid staff having to reiterate these when they change role or building),
- 1.3 to explore the feasibility of introducing an Accessibility Officer role within the council.

Work has started on the Workforce Adjustments Policy, and a plan for the implementation of the remaining agreed recommendations is being developed.

7. We also want to extend reporting to include ethnicity and disability pay gaps. This will help us to monitor progress to improve in these areas and to prioritise our effort more effectively. However there remains a lack of confidence by staff in sharing demographic information with the organisation. This leads to inaccurate recording and monitoring which presents a challenge. This is therefore a key area of focus. Through the communications plan for the launch and implementation of MySurrey (the council's replacement HR, finance, and data system) we will ask staff to review their data to ensure it is correct. This will include their demographic information, with examples of why this is important to the organisation along with the assurance of confidentiality.
8. Three workforce reviews have also been commissioned, aimed at finding out more about the experience of our disabled, minority ethnic and LGBTQ+ colleagues. These reviews will include tabletop reviews of workforce data and policies and facilitated focus groups with staff. Each review will be undertaken by an external, independent, organisation and conclude with a report and recommendations. The disability review is being conducted by the Business

Disability Forum and will be completed by the end of August 2023, whilst Business in the Community have recently been commissioned to undertake the minority ethnic review which will finish in November 2023. Procurement for the LGBTQ+ review is currently in progress with a view to the final report being ready by the end of 2023. The findings of these reviews will inform staff training plans, the 2024/25 ED&I action plan and support the ongoing work of the People Strategy delivery plan. The reviews have the full support of staff networks and trade unions.

9. Staff training is an important element of the ED&I work. We have launched a new programme of unconscious bias training that is available to all staff and are commissioning an inclusive leadership programme. We are already running a reverse mentoring programme with all our senior leaders. This involves more junior members of staff who are from underrepresented groups mentoring members of the Corporate Leadership Team to help them understand the barriers colleagues may face. The second cohort for this programme has been launched and we are currently recruiting for a third cohort. A more comprehensive ED&I training plan will be developed following the conclusion of the three workforce reviews and their recommendations.
10. New guidance for all staff who may face discrimination while carrying out their duties on behalf of the council has been developed. We have also established a new Bullying and Harassment Policy which makes our zero-tolerance approach clear.
11. We know however, that staff need a space to raise concerns outside of formal processes and we have facilitated informal drop-in sessions for them to do this. Actions have been implemented as a result, including providing additional Employee Assistance support to staff affected by racism ('you said, we did'). Surrey Fire and Rescue Service are currently piloting a confidential 'speaking up' service with Crimestoppers which will help to inform the design of a wider programme, should the evaluation demonstrate the effectiveness of the model.
12. An ED&I Working Group has also been set up to ensure staff from minority groups are not overrepresented in formal HR processes. This aims to share and implement evidence-based interventions which have been shown to address any disproportionate prevalence common in many organisations and sectors.
13. Our approach to Equality Impact Assessments has been strengthened so that the potential positive and negative impacts on staff and residents and mitigating actions are identified very early in any change process, and that ED&I considerations inform decision making from the outset.
14. An important component of our work is led through our Staff Networks. These continue to go from strength to strength and have a vital role in shaping policy and inclusivity within the organisation. There are nine networks: the Disabled Employees Network in Surrey (DENIS); LGBTQI+ Network; Minority Ethnic Group and Allies Network (MEGA); Women's Network; Early Careers Network; Parents Network; Carers Network; Deaf Employees Network and the newly developed Inter-Faith Network. Sub-groups are established in response to identified need/ interest, for example the Menopause Group.

15. The Networks have led many initiatives including activity to mark Black History Month, Disability History Month, LGBTQ+ History Month, Carers Week, Sign Language Awareness Week and International Women's Day. We are working with our Carers and Parents Staff Networks to support [Carer Confident](#) level 2 accreditation and [Working Families](#) assessment. The Networks receive a small annual budget to support their work.
16. Workforce ED&I plans for 2023/24 include:
 - a) Developing and implementing a 'Speaking Up' process, to provide staff with safe and confidential routes to raise concerns in the organisation.
 - b) Working with our Staff Networks to implement inclusive wellbeing programmes and campaigns, focusing on specific health conditions which disproportionately affect minority and under-represented groups, or are relevant for specific groups, for example men's health.

Accessibility of the Surrey County Council estate

17. The Facilities Management Accessibility Forum ('the Forum') has recently been established to provide a way to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to how the council's accessibility plans are developed and implemented across corporate buildings and a means to codesign solutions to improve the experience of all users. The Forum consists of over twenty members drawn from officers across the council (including staff network representatives, User Voice and participation representative, ED&I, HR, Agile Office, Design Authority, Facilities Management, Communications, Trade Unions and Leadership Office) many of whom bring to the Forum their own 'lived experiences' in terms of building accessibility related matters. Where recommendations from the Forum have been agreed, governance is now in place for submission to the relevant approval board. This could be Property Panel, Capital Programme Panel, and/ or Cabinet depending on the size and cost of the project, as agreed in terms of delegated financial authority. The Forum and governance structure provides greater coordination resulting in a swifter pace of decision making and implementation.
18. The Forum also receives updates and progress reports on the implementation of agreed accessibility related projects and activities. This helps iterate and test solutions whilst incorporating, where appropriate, recommendations from the Centre for Accessible Environment (CAE) audits and other building accessibility initiatives across the corporate offices.
19. CAE audits have been undertaken for Quadrant Court, Woodhatch Place, Dakota and Fairmont House and progress from the findings of these reports is being tracked (see appendix 1 for details). A SharePoint site has been established to assist the Forum in engaging, communicating, and tracking progress. Forum members are also consulted on Equalities Impact Assessments and otherwise engaged in accessibility related issues for future new builds, acquisitions, or significant refurbishments of the council's estate.

Community and resident facing activity

20. We have developed a better understanding of the inequalities that residents face. The launch of the [Surrey Index](#) has been key in helping us identify disparities and inequalities right down to neighbourhood level. The [Surrey Health and Well-being Strategy](#) identifies 22 key neighbourhoods and groups who experience the greatest health inequalities. Organisations across the Surrey system are working collaboratively in a strengths-based way within geographic communities and with priority groups on the issues that contribute to tackling inequality. These include delivering targeted and bespoke literacy and numeracy projects for those for who have not had the opportunities to develop those skills e.g., adults from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
21. The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on people from minoritised ethnic communities, exacerbated existing inequalities and has also made the needs and experiences of these communities more visible. To ensure that appropriate and accessible support is available, we have invested in the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF). SMEF is an umbrella organisation that brings together over 50 grassroots community groups. It represents the needs and aspirations of the ethnic minority populations in Surrey and empowers minoritized communities to work together to actively find solutions to the social and economic challenges they face. They also deliver a range of projects in communities to tackle social and economic inequality, to reduce isolation and stigma and to improve mental and physical health.
22. We also allocated nearly £1m of funding to support projects specifically designed to tackle inequality, particularly for those residents that were the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Projects included funding (from our Contain Outbreak Management Fund) to help set up a domestic abuse refuge for LGBTQI+ people, developing an online employment portal for disabled people and taking forward recommendations made by SMEF to provide training for faith leaders and marketing to minority ethnic residents to support their mental health.
23. We worked with colleagues in the voluntary, community and faith sector, including the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People, Age UK Surrey, Action for Carers, Surrey Community Action, and SMEF, as well domestic abuse organisations, and those that support children and young people to ensure that the [Household Support Funds](#) reached some of the most vulnerable people in Surrey's communities.
24. Collaboration with our partners has made it easier for people with protected characteristics to engage with the council and other public services. For example, working with the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, the High Sherriff and Surrey Faith Links to establish the Surrey Interfaith Forum, and with SMEF to set up a new Minoritised Ethnic Stakeholder Reference Group (MESRG). These partnerships are ensuring we are reaching deeper into communities, raising awareness of their needs, and ensuring we are working together to make the most of our resources and create fairer, inclusive communities. For example, the MESRG has been working with Surrey Fire & Rescue Services (SFRS) to

carry out health and safety checks with Asian small businesses owners, who they may not otherwise be able to engage with to raise awareness of some of the risks and support available.

25. In partnership with the charity, Binti International, we became the first county council in the UK to start eradicating period stigma by providing free period products to women, girls and residents who need them in council offices and some libraries.
26. We have made significant improvements to the accessibility of our website, meaning our accessibility statement has been judged compliant by government audit. We have developed and implemented an AI-driven checking system for documents that are uploaded to the website to make sure they meet best practice guidelines for digital accessibility.

Work undertaken to support the development of ED&I delivery in the Voluntary Community and Faith Sector (VCFS)

27. As described above, VCFS organisations are key partners for the council. However, national and local research, identified that charities had gaps in their organisational capability and capacity to drive ED&I practices at operational, governance and service delivery levels. Therefore, as part of our commitment to driving an inclusive and fairer Surrey, we have invested to support the development of the sector and its ED&I related practice.
28. Through engagement with the VCFS ED&I Steering Group, it was initially agreed funding would be used to recruit a fixed term ED&I lead for the sector. They would drive positive activity, change and improvements in VCFS organisations supporting delivery of Surrey's ED&I ambitions. The use of the funding allocated to the sector for an ED&I lead has since changed due to recruitment issues, leading to the development of a new model. The VCFS ED&I Steering Group and newly established VCFS ED&I Champions Group are now taking this work forward, and some important activity is taking place. For example, the last Champions Group received a presentation on the Census data and the poorer outcomes experienced by Muslim communities in Surrey in relation to key issues including employment and housing, with a view to sector colleagues considering how they can respond to these in their organisational plans.
29. By changing the approach in using this funding we are confident this will drive sustainable benefits. For example, expert support is being brought into the sector to help increase the diversity of trustees on the governance bodies of charities, including disabled people and those from minoritised groups. This type of investment is critical in driving sustainable and meaningful change and ensuring the voices of people with 'lived experience' are shaping organisations and services, and therefore ensuring they are relevant, accessible, inclusive, and engaging.
30. Working alongside our VCFS and statutory partners and providing system leadership is crucial in advancing our collective ambitions for residents. Our VCFS colleagues are appreciative of the work we do together. "*Surrey County*

Council have been key partners in enabling the Surrey VCSE sector to take significant strides forward in their EDI journey, over the last few years. The Surrey Charities EDI group has really benefited from high level creative strategic support from their active engagement and participation to help shape our strategy and priorities and they have also made a significant investment in the sector's development. This is contributing to a more inclusive Surrey through extending the VCSE offer and reach, and more equitable representation and governance.” (Surrey EDI Steering Group, 2023).

Areas of focus for 2023

31. We will deliver the [Equality, diversity and inclusion action plan 2023 to 2024](#) which continues to focus on our agreed areas: Employee experience; Leadership; Knowing and engaging our communities; Communication and engagement; Delivering inclusive services. The workforce-related activity contained in the plan is directly linked to the activity described in the People Strategy Delivery Plan with a focus on the culture outcomes.
32. In line with the recommendation made by the Resources and Performance Select Committee in January 2021, we have invited the Local Government Association to undertake a peer challenge under the Equality Framework. In preparation, a self-assessment has been completed and the LGA team will be undertaking the review in the week commencing 26th June 2023.
33. In addition to the peer challenge, we have commissioned workforce reviews focussing on the experiences of our disabled colleagues, our colleagues from minoritised ethnic backgrounds and LGBTQ+ staff.
34. The findings of the peer challenge and workforce reviews will inform a new ED&I Strategy for Surrey County Council (2024-2030), with a robust approach to monitoring progress and performance. The strategy and associated delivery plan will be taken to Cabinet in January 2024.

Conclusions:

35. Significant progress has been made in relation to ED&I. However, there is still more to do to ensure consistency across the organisation and that good practice is embedded in everything we do as colleagues, as an employer, as a partner organisation, system leader and with residents.
36. There remain real challenges within our workforce with staff highlighting experiences of discrimination and noticeable barriers to progression and retention, especially for disabled colleagues and those from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.
37. We have more work to do to ensure our estate is accessible to residents and staff so that everyone can work in an agile way.

38. It is important to recognise that tackling health inequality and inequality of outcomes in education, for example, requires long-term action and resourcing, as does building a culture of inclusion and belonging.
39. Finally, we need to continue to work collectively with partners and our workforce to ensure we are fulfilling our obligations specified by the Public Sector Equality Duty laid out in the Equality Act 2010, to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Ultimately this will ensure that our staff and residents are able to thrive, and that no one is left behind.

Recommendations:

40. It is recommended that the Resources and Performance Select Committee:
 - a) Review the ED&I update and offer feedback and thoughts as appropriate.
 - b) Express whether it is satisfied with the ED&I plans and ambitions for 2023.

Next steps:

- LGA Peer Challenge & workforce reviews
- ED&I strategy development
- Delivery of the 2023-24 Action Plan
- To return to the Resources and Performance Select Committee in 12 months to update Members on progress.

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Sources/background papers

Organisation Strategy 2023 to 2028

ED&I action plans covering the financial years 2021-22

Equalities and Diversity Analysis 2019-2021 (surreycc.gov.uk).

Carer Confident level 2 accreditation and Working Families assessment.

Surrey Index

Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy

Household Support Funds

Equality, diversity and inclusion action plan 2023 to 2024

Appendix 1: Centre for Accessible Environment (CAE) Audits

Table 1: Access Audit Recommendations: this provides an overview of the number of recommendations from the CAE Audits across each site and their completion figures. The recommendations from the Audits fall into categories of priority and feature. Feature means the part of the building the recommendation relates to such as Fixtures and Fittings. Additional classifications include those relating to construction and minor works; routine facilities management, maintenance or housekeeping; and those that administrative, or are relating to policy or procedure.

Site	Number of recommendations (minus no action)	Immediate Priority (Short and Medium, 1 and 2 importance- see Table 2)	In progress/ TBA	Complete	% complete	Additional Requests Building Users	AR completed	AR % Completed
Dakota	88	12	51	31	35	0	N/A	N/A
Fairmount	71	30	2	69	97	0	N/A	N/A
Quadrant Court	92	4	1	91	99	5	4	80
Woodhatch	127	48	38	60	47	1	0	0

Table 2: Priorities and Classification

Recommended Programme	Explanation
Short Term	1-3 months, urgent or essential items which should be actioned very quickly
Medium Term	Up to one year
Longer Term	Often 1 year+ and implemented during refurbishment
Importance	Explanation
1	Critical: Items which are fundamental to using the service, such as front entrance access
2	These items are still important but not as critical as level 1 priorities - eg., an inappropriately placed handrail or misleading information
3	Best Practice to BS8300 (2018): it would be reasonable to address these items when a refurbishment programme is implemented

Table 3: This table shows all recommendations from the CAE Audits broken down into feature including those that require no further action.

Features	Dakota	Fairmount	Quadrant Court	Woodhatch Place
Assistive Listening Devices	1	1	0	5
Blanks	0	1	0	0
Blue Badge Parking	3	3	3	3
Contrast	0	0	0	14
Dimensions	0	0	0	19
Door	9	16	17	11
Equipment	0	0	1	2
Fixtures and Fittings	36	12	27	34
General Description	30	60	40	52
Information	0	1	0	0
Light Levels	1	1	1	1
Management	0	0	0	4
Parking	0	0	0	1
Personal Support	0	0	0	0
Ramp	0	0	3	1
Signage	0	0	0	2
Sound Levels	1	1	0	0
Steps	8	8	21	14
Total number of recommendations	89	104	113	163

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