

RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 12 March 2024



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

Purpose of report: The report provides an update on the progress made in response to the recommendations made by the Resources and Performance Select Committee in June 2023 relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Introduction:

1. The Resources and Performance Select Committee made the following recommendations following the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion update in June 2023:
 - 1.1 The ED&I Lead shares the quarterly reporting on the 2023-24 Action Plan with the Select Committee. These reports should include specific responsibilities and timescales.
 - 1.2 The People and Change Directorate and the ED&I Lead use findings from the disabled, minority ethnic and LGBTQ+ workforce reviews to inform plans to enhance recruitment and retention amongst these groups.
 - 1.3 The Chief Executive's Office should (a) work with organisations representing people with lived experience of disability to help them provide work-ready training to people who are disabled and enable them to fill roles at Surrey County Council. The Office should work to remove barriers that prevent people accessing work, and to create opportunities for people to develop skills for the workplace, where needed, and (b) report back to the Committee with timescales for achieving these objectives.

There were two recommendations focussed on the accessibility of the Surrey County Council estate:

- 1.4 The Cabinet Member for Property and Waste and Assistant Director for Facilities Management share with the Committee the schedule of reasonable adjustments work currently scheduled and (a) accompany representatives of Surrey Coalition of Disabled People and the Select Committee Chairman on a tour of Woodhatch, Dakota and Fairmount House by the end of September 2023 to identify what accessibility issues are

encountered, (b) add these to their schedule of works and make findings available to the Select Committee, (c) commit to ensuring these issues are resolved as soon as is reasonably practicable, (d) advise the Select Committee of progress or delay by its February 2024 meeting and, before then, (e) invite the Select Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to inspect work in progress.

1.5 The business case for any acquisition of a new council office must include consultation on its accessibility from people with lived experience of disabilities.

2. This paper provides a progress report to the Committee on the recommendations listed above, and an overview of the plans for equality diversity and inclusion for 2024-25.

Recommendation 1: To share quarterly updates of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan (2023-24)

3. The Action Plan has continued to be monitored and scrutinised on a quarterly basis by the EDI Programme Board with update reports shared with Members. This year, the workforce-related elements of the plan are aligned with the council's People Strategy which has ED&I as a central theme throughout to ensure the council is a fairer and more inclusive organisation.
4. Progress has been made across all areas of the action plan and the quarter 3 update report is attached at Appendix 1. Some notable highlights from this year include:
 - Working with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) partners to ensure uptake of support measures including the Household Support Fund by vulnerable and underserved groups. 43% of our residents who are disabled or have a long-term health condition say they are no longer able to meet the additional costs associated with their health requirements. In the period up to July 2023, the Surrey Coalition for Disabled People distributed Household Support fund vouchers to over 400 disabled households.
 - Our Inclusive Refuges programme has increased capacity from 3 properties to 8, comprising 6 single adult residences and 2 residences for single adults with children. Demand consistently exceeds supply, with 111 referrals received and 17 people supported so far. People from minoritised ethnic backgrounds have made up three quarters of people supported, nearly a fifth of clients are transgender and 3 are male. 100% of clients have reported improved physical and mental health after support.

- Significant improvements to the accessibility of our external website, with the development and roll-out of an 'accessibility bot' which automates the checking of documents.
 - Finding out about people's experiences of Surrey County Council and qualitative research into the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on our most vulnerable communities. This research is being used to inform work across the council including in Customer Transformation, Design, and Resident Insight.
 - Launching a programme with the VCSE Alliance and [Getting On Board](#) , which has engaged 19 local organisations to work on increasing diversity within their trustee boards. We are also supporting the sector to run learning sessions for local organisations across the year, including an upcoming conference tackling issues of racial inequity in the sector in February.
 - Carrying out 3 in-depth reviews of staff experience with disabled, LGBTQ+ and ethnically diverse colleagues. Recommendations from these reports will form the basis of our workforce focused activity for 2024/25.
 - Establishing the role of Accessibility Forum in providing scrutiny of and advice to our Agile Organisation Programme. The group has representation from Land and Property, the Disabled Employees Network in Surrey (DENIS), People and Change and Trade Unions. We have also employed an Accessibility Officer with significant knowledge, expertise and lived experience of access issues to support this work over the next 22 months.
 - Submitting our application and achieving Carer Confident Level 2 status, including agreeing a proposal for paid Carer's Leave of up to one week for staff whose caring responsibilities require it.
 - Improving our system for assessing staff needs for Workplace Adjustments and reducing time to implement recommendations.
 - Rolling out new training offers for staff on EDI and publishing an [Inclusive and Accessible Language Guide](#) to support staff.
5. There have also been challenges this year, including:
- Workplace Adjustment budgets continue to be under pressure, partly because we use several different systems at SCC which are incompatible with assistive technology. It is anticipated that increased time in the office for information-centric roles is likely to place further pressure on this budget due to some physical adjustments needing to be in place both at home and in the office for staff. The budget will continue to be held corporately within the

Resources Directorate and will also be increased to ensure that it reflects actual spend. It is important to note that SCC continues to meet employees' workplace adjustment needs despite the budget challenges, and that the 2023/24 overspend is being managed and absorbed within Resources. A 'Workplace Adjustments Sustainability Group' has been established to identify opportunities for more effective use of the budget and the equipment and software that is purchased.

- As with any major system change, the data migration for personal demographics to Unit4/MySurrey has been challenging. We have a dedicated team in place to urgently work through these post-implementation issues to ensure we are accurately recording personal demographics (such as ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation). There has also been a proportion of staff who have not, or do not want to, share this information with us. Once the data migration issue is fully resolved and staff can record their information, we will be able to understand the outcomes for staff with these characteristics, including the disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting. It is important to note, however, that the 2023 Gender Pay Gap report is being compiled, enabling us to fulfil our statutory duty as laid out by the Equality Act 2010. This report and analysis is based on data from March 2023, which precedes the implementation of Unit 4, and is unaffected by the data quality issues described above.
 - The 'Hard to Reach' steering group brings together representatives from People & Change, Communications and Engagement, IT&D and Finance. It is exploring ways to improve digital access to online information for staff who either do not have the appropriate SCC IT equipment, Microsoft 365 licences or SCC email addresses. A range of possible solutions is being discussed and a parallel piece of user testing and discovery among affected staff is currently being carried out by IT user researchers in advance of the next steering group meeting on 4 March.
 - Budget pressures and key roles being short-term funded, including the new Accessibility Officer and the Digital Accessibility Officer, who ensures accessibility of our website and other digital assets. These roles are funded until the end of November 2025 and the end of March 2025 respectively. We are exploring options to ensure the work continues to be delivered after this funding period.
6. In the summer we underwent an LGA Peer Review of our EDI work, which recognised the culture change that has happened at SCC and the breadth of work we are currently undertaking across the organisation. The report also included recommendations, and a response to this was set out as can be seen in Appendix 2. We will incorporate these recommendations into the equality,

diversity and Inclusion Action Plan for 2024/25 along with the findings of our staff reviews, which is currently being drafted.

7. A key recommendation from the LGA review was the need for a shared understanding of and commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the statutory and VCSE sectors in Surrey. The EDI team are working with colleagues internally and externally to produce a framework for EDI that all partners working in this space can coalesce around. This will be a key element of work over the next 3-6 months and will involve consultation with key stakeholders including colleagues from health, borough and district councils, the police, education and elected members.

Recommendation 2: Use of the findings of the workforce reviews

8. The three reviews focussing on the experiences of disabled, LGBTQ+ and ethnically diverse colleagues have been completed and Surrey County Council has received the reports for each one. The recommendations are being scrutinised and prioritised and will shape the EDI action plan for 2024-25.
9. Common themes that have emerged from all three reviews relate to workforce development and training needs, culture and leadership, and consistency of the implementation of policy by line managers. These themes align with the findings of the LGA Peer Review. We are addressing these recommendations through various projects including improving the EDI training for managers to ensure an inclusive and fair environment for staff, ensuring career development and progression opportunities are transparent and equitable and making amendments to identified policies. These common themes and recommendations will contribute to the 2024/25 EDI action plan, ensuring we have an evidence-based approach and that we are focussed on the priority issues which will have the biggest impact on our workforce.
10. Specific recommendations which relate solely to the communities of staff we engaged (for example, accessibility recommendations for disabled staff) will be taken forward in 'Action Groups' – collaborative groups chaired by the Employee Experience Team, with representation from the relevant Staff Networks and Trade Union representatives.

Recommendation 3: Employment of disabled people at Surrey County Council

11. This recommendation is focussing specifically on Surrey County Council as an employer and maximising the recruitment, retention, and career progression of disabled people.

12. Surrey County Council strives to be an inclusive and compassionate place where diversity is valued, and staff can be themselves at work. We are a large employer as well as commissioner, and provider of services. Initial analysis of the 2021 Census data has shown that approximately 11.2% the working age population in Surrey are disabled. We ask staff to declare if they are disabled, and of those who chose to respond to this voluntary question, 5.2% declared a disability as of December 2023. This number falls to 3.2% of staff in senior and leadership positions. Both numbers have, however, increased since the beginning of the current financial year from 4.2% for all staff and 2.4% for senior staff. This increase may be indicative of increased confidence in sharing, or due to recruitment and retainment.
13. Surrey County Council is committed to being an employer of choice and increasingly diversifying its workforce to ensure that it is representative of the population it serves and that no one is left behind. One of our priorities has been to develop our Workplace Adjustments Service so that any changes to the working environment or working arrangements needed by an employee are carried out, enabling them to do their job as well as possible. This includes a Workplace Adjustment Passport which acts as a living record of an employee's reasonable adjustments and can support conversations with managers. We have partnered with Microlink to provide this service. They work with employees to understand their needs and give comprehensive advice, as well as provide the council with any adjustments purchases employees might need.
14. A review of the experiences of disabled colleagues has been undertaken by the Business Disability Forum (BDF) along with an internal review of the 'employee lifecycle' to examine the things that are working well and areas for development to improve the recruitment, retention and progression of staff.
15. The BDF review identified that there is much positive work and activity taking place at Surrey County Council to promote disability inclusion within its workforce. However, it also noted that some disabled colleagues continue to experience barriers in the built environment, and that the quality of experience is variable across the organisation.
16. A Disability Action Group has been established to review the recommendations of the review and prioritise activity. The Group brings together representatives from the DENIS network (Disabled Employees Network in Surrey), trade unions, People and Change and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team. This work will inform the EDI Action Plan for 2024-25.
17. Another priority for Surrey County Council has been to develop its recruitment practices to enhance accessibility and inclusion. Guidance has been issued for hiring managers to empower them to design inclusive recruitment processes which can include anonymous applications; asking candidates to respond to

questions in their applications, rather than supplying personal statements; and sending candidates interview questions in advance of the interview. The guidance is currently listed on SharePoint and within an Inclusive Recruitment toolkit whilst an ongoing project continues to build an e-learning module for managers. More managers are using inclusive practices and managers and candidates have provided positive feedback about their experiences of interviews. In addition, feedback received from the workforce reviews has been positive about the approach Surrey County Council has developed to inclusive recruitment. Inclusive leadership training for all managers is also being rolled out during 2024/25.

18. Employment is a key component of both the [All-Age Autism Strategy 2021 to 2026](#)) and the [Adult Social Care Strategy for people with Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment \(PDSI\) 2022 to 2027](#). The Disability Partnership Group oversees the delivery of the Strategy for People with Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment and includes colleagues from statutory and voluntary sector organisations.
19. As part of the PDSI strategy, work is being undertaken by the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People and Surrey County Council to ensure that disabled adults and those who have long-term health conditions have equity of access to vocational programmes and work-ready opportunities.
20. In Partnership with Surrey Heartlands ICS and Frimley ICS, Surrey County Council funds a range of organisations to provide employment-related support for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions living in Surrey. This support includes:
 - specific support for young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
 - the Surrey Choices Employability Service which aims to support more neurodivergent, autistic and people with a learning disability to develop careers through providing paid roles, voluntary work, and work experience opportunities. 67 placements have been taken place so far; 4 paid, 49 voluntary and 12 work experience. Initial exploratory conversations have happened about identifying roles within SCC for people accessing the Employability Service.
 - the Individual Placement Support service with Richmond Fellowship.
 - training opportunities for under-represented groups in the 'green skills' sector.

- a 2-year programme for community-based organisations to provide employment support for people with health conditions and disabilities funded by the Department of Work and Pensions.

Recommendations 4 and 5: Building accessibility

21. Representatives from the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People were accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure, Surrey County Council officers from Land and Property, and a representative from the Technical Authority for Inclusive Design for Atkins on tours of Woodhatch Place, Fairmount House, and Dakota in autumn 2023. The purpose of these tours was to consider the accessibility of the buildings from the perspective of a member of the public, or from that of a potential disabled employee.
22. Several recommendations were made following the tours which have been added to the existing accessibility programme of works which, taken together, create a comprehensive suite of accessible building works across our main office sites (see tables in appendix 3). Works already delivered at Woodhatch Place include the provision of fully accessible visitor toilets in the reception area, new signage across the site that focussed on accessibility requirements as a design priority, improved lighting in the car park and at the entrance to the Council chambers. There are several accessible projects scheduled to be delivered in the next three months, including increased provision of blue badge and occupational health car parking, barriers being installed around the water features, provision of two additional accessible toilets and height adjustable tea points (see appendix 4). Quadrant Court has the highest number of recommendations that are unlikely to be taken forward due to the imminent change of use for the site. The Select Committee Chairman and Vice-Chairman and representatives from the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People are returning to inspect work in progress on 5 March 2024.
23. The business case for the Victoria Gate in Woking was submitted to, and approved by, Cabinet in December 2023. The preparation for the proposal included securing a report from the Centre for Accessible Environment (CAE) and consultation with disabled colleagues, elected members, trade union representatives and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion team. This included 2 site visits with disabled staff members. This will be the approach taken for the development of any future business cases for new buildings.
24. A working group, including representatives from the Equality, Diversity Inclusion Team, and disabled colleagues, as well as our newly appointed Accessibility Officer, has been established to develop the specification for the works required to create an accessible and inclusive workspace at Victoria Gate that is fit for purpose.

25. The Accessibility Forum has also been engaged in the project and will continue to receive updates and provide feedback as part of the governance process for the work in advance of recommendations being taken to the Capital Programme Panel. Beyond the Accessibility Forum, officers are fully engaged at various levels such as the Agile Office Board and Main Office Client Board.

Equality, diversity and inclusion 2024-25

26. The annual report which reviews the progress made against the current ED&I action plan will be produced and shared with the Resources and Select Committee in May 2024, along with the action plan for the coming year. This will have a refreshed approach to monitoring and evaluation which will allow us to measure impact.
27. In line with the recommendation from the LGA Peer Review, Surrey County Council will work with partners to develop a framework for equality, diversity, and inclusion, with a focus on improving equality of access, opportunity and outcome for residents. The Framework will include metrics that will enable partners to understand the impact of ED&I related activity.
28. Activity to improve equality, diversity and inclusion for the workforce will continue to be addressed through the People Strategy Delivery Plan.

Conclusions:

29. This paper has provided an update on the progress made in responding to the recommendations made by the Resources and Performance Select Committee in June 2023. It has also captured some of the key achievements from the delivery of the 2023-24 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. It has also described the ambitions for 2024-25.
30. Significant progress has been made across all areas of the work, although there is still more to do to ensure that all staff can thrive and progress at work, and to tackle the inequality experienced by residents.
31. There is lots of activity happening to improve Surrey County Council as an employer and to maximise the recruitment, retention, and career progression of disabled people. This work will continue.
32. The People Strategy Delivery Plan and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action plan (2024-25) will respond to the recommendations from the 3 workforce reviews and the Local Government Peer Review.
33. Progress has been made to improve the accessibility of Surrey County Council buildings for staff and residents. This continues to be a priority.

34. Finally, in line with the recommendation made by the Local Government Association, we will work with partner organisations, residents and our workforce establish a framework for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion that will enable us to work together to improve equality of access, opportunity, and outcome for residents.

Recommendations:

35. It is recommended that the Resources and Performance Select Committee review and note the ED&I update and offer feedback and thoughts as appropriate.

Next steps:

36. To continue delivery on the 2023-24 ED&I Action Plan and undertake a review of progress and outcomes at the end of the financial year. The review will be shared with the Committee in May 2024.
37. To analyse the recommendations of the 3 workforce reviews to inform the design of the 2024-25 Action Plan and People Strategy Delivery Plan.
38. To engage with partner organisations, workforce and residents to design a Framework for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to advance equality of access, opportunity and outcome for residents in Surrey.

Report contact

Michael Smith, Chief of Staff to Chief Executive

Contact details

Michael.Smith1@surreycc.gov.uk 07581 199356

Sources/background papers

[List of all documents used in compiling the report, for example previous reports/minutes, letters, legislation, etc.]

Appendices

Appendix 1: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2023-24 Progress Report (Quarter 3)



Q3 EDI Action Plan
combined report v1.2

Appendix 2: Local Government Peer Review Report



LGA Peer Challenge Surrey CC EDI Peer
Equality Diversity andChallenge 2023 LGA F

Appendix 3: Accessibility-related building works

Table 1: Depicts the number of accessibility-related works required and/or completed at the main Surrey County Council hubs (i.e. a combination of tables 2 and 3 below). The actions below are the have been compiled via both the Centre Accessible Environments audit reports and the visits by colleagues from Surrey Coalition of Disabled People.

Actions	Woodhatch Place	Dakota	Fairmount House	Quadrant Court	Total Responses	Comments
Complete	27	6	40	7	80	Required works already completed.
Active	60	14	8	3	85	Required works actively being carried out or included within scheduled projects.
Pending	28	10	5	18	61	Required works being evaluated/planned.
No Action Required	60	34	32	21	147	Either just an observation or the requirement is no longer valid due to redevelopment of space.
Recommend No Action	7	45	31	65	148	Required works recommended to be impractical to carry out at this stage due to expected imminent change in lease/usage status. Items to be kept under review in case expected changes do not occur, so they can be actioned in future if necessary.
Total Actions Identified	182	109	116	114		

Table 2: Depicts the number of accessibility-related works required and/or completed at the main Surrey County Council hubs as compiled by the Centre Accessible Environments audit reports.

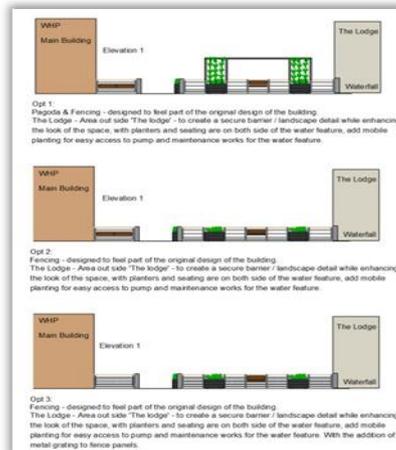
Actions	Woodhatch Place	Dakota	Fairmount House	Quadrant Court	Total Responses	Comments
Complete	24	5	40	7	76	Required works already completed.
Active	49	6	1	3	59	Required works actively being carried out or included within scheduled projects.
Pending	22	6	1	18	47	Required works being evaluated/planned.
No Action Required	59	32	32	21	144	Either just an observation or requirement is no longer valid due to redevelopment of space.
Recommend No Action	7	39	29	65	140	Required works recommended to be impractical to carry out at this stage due to expected imminent change in lease/usage status. Items to be kept under review in case expected changes do not occur, so they can be actioned in future if necessary.
Total Actions Identified	161	88	103	114		

Table 3: Depicts the number of accessibility-related works required and/or completed at the main Surrey County Council hubs which been compiled via the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People.

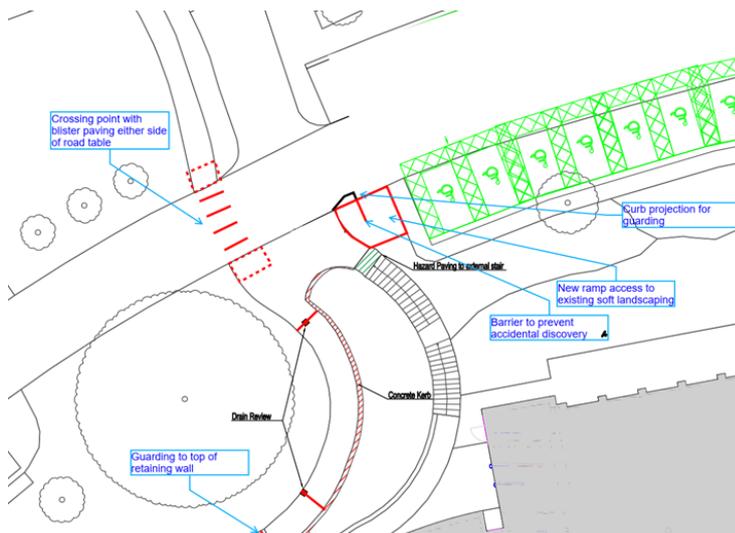
Actions	Woodhatch Place	Dakota	Fairmount House	Quadrant Court	Total Responses	Comments
Complete	3	1	0	0	4	Required works already completed.
Active	11	8	7	0	26	Required works actively being carried out or included within scheduled projects.
Pending	6	4	4	0	14	Required works being evaluated/planned.
No Action Required	1	2	0	0	3	Either just an observation or requirement is no longer valid due to redevelopment of space.
Recommended No Action	0	6	2	0	8	Required works recommended to be impractical to carry out at this stage due to expected imminent change in lease/usage status. Items to be kept under review in case expected changes do not occur, so they can be actioned in future if necessary.
Total Actions Identified	21	21	13	0		

Appendix 4: Accessibility Projects Scheduled to be Delivered:

Water feature safety barriers:



New Blue Badge Parking:



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