

EXECUTIVE – 15 JULY 2021

## EQUALITIES ANNUAL REPORT - 2021

### Executive Summary

This annual report seeks to inform the Executive of progress on the equalities agenda. It covers the period April 2020 to March 2021. The Equality Act 2010 brought together, harmonised and in some cases extended previous equality law. The aim of the legislation is to make it more consistent, clearer and easier to follow in order to make society fairer. The Act also sets out the Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Duty ensures that all public bodies, including local authorities, play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all.

The Equality Duty covers the following protected characteristics; age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Duty requires the Council to have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Having 'due regard' means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision making. This means that consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions reached by the Council, e.g. how it acts as an employer, how it develops, evaluates and reviews policies, how it designs, delivers and evaluates services and how it commissions and procures from others.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the report be received.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To meet the requirement to report on annual progress on the equality agenda.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.
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**Background Papers:** [Corporate Equality Scheme](#)  
Sustainability Impact Assessment  
Equalities Impact Assessment

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Woking Borough Council believes that the diversity of its population and workforce is one of its greatest strengths. Equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination is a fundamental right and this Council has a duty to exercise leadership to promote this right. The Council intends to promote equality and prevent discrimination through its roles as service provider, employer and community leader.
- 1.2 The Council will follow best practice in all equality areas and work to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not; and
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 1.3 From April 2011 the Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation and gave full protection to eight protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Some aspect of the legislation also covers marriage and civil partnership.
- 1.4 Success in mainstreaming equalities in the organisation is measured by The Equality Framework for Local Government, which was adopted by the authority in March 2009. The Framework is based on three levels of achievement, developing, achieving and excellent. The Council has been successfully verified by external assessment at 'Achieving' level.
- 1.5 Over the 12 months covered by this report the Pandemic has obviously had unprecedented effects on the Council as a service provider, community leader and employer. The priority of service provision was to support the most vulnerable members of our community and ensure they were safe and well. As community leader, the Council played a key role in the emergency response to the pandemic and ensuring the safety of its residents. As an employer many people had to adjust to working from home for some or all of their working time. Employee support and wellbeing was paramount.

## 2.0 Progress

- 2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty (specific duties) requires all public bodies to:
- Annually publish information that shows how they have complied with the Equality Duty. This was published on the Council website in January.
  - Set equality objectives for the organisation. Overarching objectives have been developed which are relevant to each of the equality groups covered by the Equality Act. They relate back to the General Duty and are designed to ensure a holistic approach to tackling inequality and promoting equality through the organisation and Borough. (attached Appendix 1)
- 2.2 The Equality and Wellbeing Working Group met quarterly, monitoring progress on the equality and wellbeing agenda. Due to the pandemic the Group did not meet last year but will resume meetings this year.
- 2.3 A comprehensive programme of equality and wellbeing awareness has taken place over the year, covering issues such as wellbeing whilst working from home, mental health awareness, again focusing on the impact of the pandemic and lockdown. Our annual campaigns, e.g. around homophobia, gender equality, men's health and carers took place on-line, including

ewok+ and the Council's social media pages. A wellbeing section was created for the Covid response pages, ensuring up to date information was available to all. Weekly Health & Wellbeing emails were sent out, giving advice, tips and ensuring moral was maintained. On-line training was providing on topics such as working from home, coping with the stresses of the pandemic and building resilience. Employee surveys were carried out to gauge the impact of the pandemic on working life.

- 2.4 A pilot course was run on Building Resilience, ensuring individuals and teams have the skills and knowledge to look after their own health and wellbeing, cope with of their work and that of their teams and ensure a healthy work-life balance. Feedback from the pilot was positive, changes were made and follow-up sessions were run with one of the Family Support teams. This will be evaluated, with a view to rolling out to other teams in the organisation. This will be important over the coming months as we transition to the new hybrid way of working in the future.
- 2.5 In addition monthly health and wellbeing themes have also been highlighted on ewok+, offering helpful advice and tips on how to look after yourself and effectively manage life and work, especially in the current situation. Themes have included healthy heart, benefits of walking, diabetes awareness and men's health. Advice is also provided on how to achieve good mental health and wellbeing, including dealing with stress and obtaining a better work-life balance. The organisation has 8 trained Mental Health First Aiders and the Employee Assistance Programme is promoted regularly.
- 2.6 The equality agenda has been successfully mainstreamed throughout the organisation and the Council's priority is to ensure accessible services are available to the vulnerable sections of the local communities. A large proportion of the work over the last year has focused on supporting communities, local residents, businesses and employees through the pandemic. (See Appendix 2)
- 2.7 Working relationships with community groups, providing support to those protected by equality legislation, continue to be developed. The focus of the past 12 months was to ensure that groups could move their support and services on-line to continue providing the vital assistance to some of the most vulnerable sections of our communities. This was done extremely successfully and we should really be proud of the voluntary sector organisations in our Borough and the lifelines they provide.
- 2.8 Equality monitoring figures are produced annually for employment, looking at areas such as workforce profile, appointments, training, promotion and discipline and grievance issues. These are broken down according to race, gender, disability, age, sexuality and religion and belief. These are detailed in Appendix 3.
- 2.9 From 6 April 2017 employers in Great Britain with more than 250 staff are required by law to publish annually its gender pay gap (mean and median averages) and the proportion of men and women in each quartile of the organisation's pay structure.
- 2.10 This year's report, covering the 12 months up to 31st March 2020, showed that the Council has a mean gender pay gap of 19.28% and a median gender pay gap of 10.24%. The mean gender pay gap nationally is now 15.5% according to the October 2020 Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures. The main reason for Woking's gap is an imbalance of male and female colleagues across the organisation, the roles in which men and women work within the organisation and the salaries that these roles attract.
- 2.11 The Council is committed to reducing its gender pay gap and an action plan has been developed to look at how best to achieve this, including carrying out further analysis of pay, reviewing recruitment processes, promoting flexible working options and development opportunities. The full report and action plan can be accessed at

<https://www.woking.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Jobs/Pay%20Policy%20Statement%202020-21%20and%20Gender%20Pay%20Gap%20Data.pdf>

### **3.0 Future Plans**

- 3.1 Across the organisation a huge amount of work is done to address the needs of the most vulnerable sections of the local communities and the equalities agenda has successfully been mainstreamed into service plans. In the current climate of scarce resources, partnership working with the statutory and voluntary sectors is increasingly important.
- 3.2 Building the capacity of local voluntary and community organisations to support this is an essential part of ensuring this happens. The current pandemic crisis has highlighted the excellent work that can be done with partnership working to ensure the most vulnerable in our community are supported. The recovery will not be easy and there will be individuals, groups and businesses needing support for the foreseeable future. Employees also provided vital support throughout and again it is important to ensure all are supported in making the adjustments required going forward. Opportunities have also been created on how to work more effectively and efficiently going forward and a new Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has taken the lead at Woking so things are looking positive.

### **4.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 4.1 The equalities and well-being agenda ensures we meet our legal obligations under Equality legislation. Ensuring we have a healthy and flexible workforce which is able to meet the demands of service provision to some of the most vulnerable sections of our communities, including improving the health and wellbeing of all residents, reducing social inequality and engaging our communities. Strengthening partnership working is essential to this process, ensuring scarce resources are used to maximum effect.

### **5.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 5.1 Equality work is mainstreamed into annual Service Plans and budgets allocated accordingly. In addition external funding is identified for specific projects as and when required.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 Equality and Wellbeing Training is provided through Surrey Learn, a partnership of all Surrey local authorities. Internal awareness campaigns and training take place throughout the year. A Member awareness session is held annually.

#### Legal

- 5.3 The report ensures the organisation meets its legislative requirements under equalities legislation, including the Public Sector Equality Duty and outlines annual progress on the equality and wellbeing agenda.

### **6.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 6.1 Recovering from the pandemic, narrowing equality gaps and improving the life chances of different groups will require a pooling of evidence, resources and action planning. Working in partnership with the statutory, voluntary and community sectors will become increasingly important. Building and supporting the capacity of the voluntary/community sectors to enable this will be essential. The Council will have to become smarter at engaging and involving communities of interest in decision making, service and workforce planning, particularly

groups who may experience disadvantage and inequality; the Big Conversation will aid this process .

REPORT ENDS

**Equality Objectives:**

Overarching objectives that have been developed for the council's Corporate Equality Scheme which are relevant to each of the nine equality groups covered by the Equality Act, relate back to the General Duty and are designed to ensure a holistic approach to tackling inequality and promoting equality through the organisation. The overarching objectives are to:

**Tackle victimisation, harassment and discrimination**

Take reasonable steps to ensure that residents, service users and employees are not unlawfully discriminated against and take appropriate action to prevent & tackle victimisation and harassment.

**Improve access to services**

Take reasonable steps to ensure that services are inclusive, responsive to risk, physically accessible and provided through the most efficient and effective channels available.

**Close the gap in outcomes for citizens**

Take reasonable steps to improve life chances for citizens by reducing outcome gaps that may exist within the Borough as well as those that may exist between the Borough and elsewhere.

**Increase understanding and mutual respect between communities**

Take reasonable steps to build stronger communities and promote good relations, both within and between communities.

**Increase participation and engagement**

Take reasonable steps to remove barriers that may exist to engagement and help residents (especially those who are under-represented) to participate in local decision making and influence local decisions.

**Ensure equitable employment policies and practices**

Provide equality of opportunity for all Council staff by ensuring all employment policies and practices, (concerning recruitment, retention, promotion, training and discipline), are designed to reflect and attract the communities that Woking serves.

**Equality actions/achievements: 2020/21:**

A significant part of the work covering this period involved the Council's emergency response to the pandemic.

Staff re-deployed to support the frontline – 143

158,000 messages delivered via social media, email, print and broadcast.

Phone calls made to vulnerable & shielding residents - 2370.

Residents given support and advice via our helpline - 1156 calls

Prescriptions delivered – 575

Community meals delivered – 85588 meals

Pieces of PPE handed out - 70,120

Volunteers signed up to offer their help - 977

Emergency accommodation provided – 161

Households provided with council tax support – 4188

Supporting businesses with advice on re-opening following lockdown, including small businesses, community centres etc.

Supporting with contact tracing.

Support follow up on an outbreak relating to a variant of concern, which led to targeted testing of a population of Eastern European employees.

Support surge testing.

Secure vaccinations of Hepatitis A at a local traveller site where an outbreak was identified.

Interfaith work via, Woking People of Faith, Surrey Muslim Association and bespoke engagement with Shah Jahan Mosque

Armed Forces Covenant – Armed Forces panel driven work in supporting the forces community in Woking and engagement with Army Training centre, Pirbright, 11 infantry brigade, Aldershot and helping to establish a Veterans Hub in Woking as well as working with SERFCA.

WBC achieved MOD's Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in 2020.

Community engagement work with residents in Sheerwater, eg. gardening and time capsule.

**Equalities Monitoring Data for the period 1/4/2020 – 31/3/2021**

**1. \*Breakdown of all employees by:**

\*These figures are based on 447 employees; this includes all employees all on the payroll including casual employees who may only work very occasionally.

**a) Ethnic background**

Asian/ Asian British	40
Black/Black British	14
Chinese/Other	4
Mixed	4
White	341
Gypsy/Traveller	1
Romany Gypsy	0
Irish Traveller	0
Other (please specify)	31
Not Known	8
Prefer not to say	4

**b) Gender**

Male	155
Female	292
Transgender	0
Prefer not to say	0

**c) Declaration of Disability**

Yes	21
No	407
Prefer not to say	14
Not known	5

**d) Age**

Under 25	20
25 - 34	69
35 - 44	109
45 - 54	115
55 - 64	109
Over 65	25

**e) Sexual orientation**

Heterosexual/Straight	294
Bisexual	3
Gay or Lesbian	5
Prefer not to say	16
Not Known	129

**f) Religion**

Christian	218
Buddhist	2
Hindu	8
Jewish	2
Muslim	34
Sikh	2
No Religion	147
Other (Please specify)	4
Not Known	7
Prefer not to say	23

**2. How many people belonging to each group applied to the Council for employment during the period?**

**a) Ethnic background**

Asian/ Asian British	202
Black/Black British	91
Chinese/Other	11
Mixed	42
White	704
Gypsy/Traveller	0
Romany Gypsy	0
Irish Traveller	0
Other (please specify)	28
Not Known	31
Prefer not to say	20

**b) Gender**

Male	420
Female	670
Transgender	2
Prefer not to say	8
Not known	29

**c) Declaration of Disability**

Yes	32
No	1093
Not known	1
Prefer not to say	3

**d) Age**

Under 25	213
25 - 34	380
35 - 44	265
45 - 54	164
55 - 64	77
Over 65	6
Not Known	24

**e) Sexual orientation**

Heterosexual/Straight	976
Bisexual	21
Gay or Lesbian	35
Prefer not to say	59
Not Known	38

**f) Religion**

Christian	412
Buddhist	22
Hindu	42
Jewish	3
Muslim	119
Sikh	24
No Religion	400
Other (Please specify)	27
Not Known	18
Prefer not to say	62

**3. How many people belonging to each group applied for/received training during the period?**

**a) Ethnic background**

BME	20
White	78

**b) Gender**

Male	30
Female	48
Transgender	0

**c) Declaration of Disability**

Yes	3
No	75

**d) Age**

Under 25	4
25 - 34	24
35 - 44	28
45 - 54	21
55 - 64	20
Over 65	1

**4. How many people belonging to each group were promoted during the period?**

**a) Ethnic background**

BME	1
White	8

**b) Gender**

Male	4
Female	5
Transgender	0

**c) Declaration of Disability**

Yes	0
No	9

**d) Age**

Under 25	0
25 - 34	0
35 - 44	5
45 - 54	3
55 - 64	1
Over 65	0

**5. How many people belonging to each group "benefited or suffered detriment as a result of formal performance assessment procedures"?**

There were no formal assessment procedures carried out during the period.

**6. How many people belonging to each group were involved in grievance procedures?**

There were no formal grievances during the period.

**7. How many people belonging to each group were the subjects of disciplinary procedures?**

There were no formal disciplinary procedures during the period.

**8. How many people belonging to each group ceased employment with the Council during the period?**

**a) Ethnic background**

Asian/ Asian British	11
Black/Black British	1
Chinese/Other	0
Mixed	1
White	52
Not Known	1
Gypsy/Traveller	1
Romany Gypsy	0
Irish Traveller	0
Other (please specify)	0
Prefer not to say	0

**b) Gender**

Male	25
Female	42
Transgender	0

**c) Declaration of Disability**

Yes	4
No	60
Prefer not to say	3

**d) Age**

Under 25	6
25 - 34	15
35 - 44	14
45 - 54	8
55 - 64	15
Over 65	9

**9. Flexible Working Requests:**

Number received	14
Number agreed	14
Success rate	100

**10. Return to work from maternity**

Number taking maternity leave	9
Number returned to work	7
Success rate	77%