

Bracknell Forest - The borough of opportunity for everyone

Our journey



March 2014

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1. Foreword by the Leader and Chief Executive

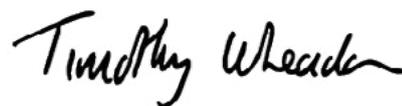
We extend a warm welcome back to the LGA peer review team. The 2010 equalities peer review was valuable in highlighting our strengths and areas to prioritise for further improvement, as well as raising the profile of equalities across the organisation. This peer review provides an opportunity to recognise how far we have come since 2010 and celebrate our achievements, as well as to benchmark ourselves against other local authorities across the country. We look forward to learning from the review team's perspective on how we can further develop our approach to addressing inequalities and continue to promote good relations between our communities.

This report summarises our self assessment against the Equality Framework for Local Government and demonstrates how we have taken on the challenges of responding to the economic climate, significant national policy reforms, a reducing budget and changing community. We have mainstreamed equalities through our core business to ensure we make fair financial decisions and mitigate impacts. This has involved a focus on continual improvement and an ongoing evolution of the culture across the organisation. In our role as community leader, we continue to seek every opportunity to influence the business and voluntary sectors to address equality issues and have developed strong partnership working with these and other statutory organisations to address inequalities in the Borough.

Our long term vision for the Borough is to make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive – living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment. Bracknell Forest is a relatively affluent Borough with a dynamic economy which has survived the recession well; however, amidst this affluence we recognise that there are pockets of deprivation and need in the Borough. Bracknell Forest has changed significantly in recent years; we have an ageing population and one that is more ethnically diverse than ever before. We recognise that to continue providing excellent customer services we need to ensure we regularly review the changing needs of our communities and provide fair and appropriate access to services that are tailored to meet the individual needs of our residents and diverse communities. Furthermore, we are committed to being an 'Employer of Choice', providing a flexible and supportive working environment, and ensuring that our workforce reflects the community we serve.



Cllr. Paul Bettison
Leader of the Council



Timothy Wheaden
Chief Executive

2. Introduction

2.1. Context

- 2.1.1 In July 2010 Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) participated in a Local Government Improvement and Development diversity peer review and was confirmed as having attained the 'Achieving' level of the Local Government Equality Framework. The peer review was the culmination of two years of sustained work to improve the Council's performance on equalities following a challenge laid down in the Council's 2008 CPA to progress to Level Three of the Equality Standard for Local Government. To meet this challenge the Council invested additional resources in equalities and gave significant focus to an equalities improvement programme.
- 2.1.2 Three years on BFC is seeking reaccreditation against the 'Achieving' level of the Equality Framework and confirmation that our self assessment is an accurate reflection of the Council's progress over the last three years. The 2010 peer review provided valuable feedback to prioritise improvements in our equalities work as well as highlighting best practice from elsewhere. The Council has made significant progress since 2010 across all five areas of the Framework and particularly in continuing to streamline and mainstream equalities.
- 2.1.3 The 2010 peer review report made a number of recommendations on how the Council could progress towards becoming excellent. The Council produced an action plan to implement these recommendations and continue its improvement journey; all actions in the plan have been completed or are ongoing pieces of work. This action plan is submitted with our evidence.
- 2.1.4 Since the 2010 peer review, the Council has streamlined and simplified its equality objectives and action plans through producing a single equality scheme to replace its gender, disability and race equality schemes. The ['All of Us' Equality Scheme 2012-16](#) was produced following extensive consultation in 2011/12 and contains the Council's equality objectives. The Council also improved its equality analysis and transparency through publishing detailed [annual equality information reports](#) each January to summarise the results of our equality monitoring in key services.

2.2. Members, governance and management

- 2.2.1 [Bracknell Forest Council](#) is a unitary authority made up of 42 elected, [councillors](#) representing 18 wards. The Council is Conservative led with 38 Conservative, 2 Labour and 2 UKIP councillors. The Council has a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making with portfolio review groups (PRGs) to support Executive decision making and an independent scrutiny function. The Leader Cllr. Paul Bettison is the portfolio holder for Council strategy, community cohesion, equalities and community engagement, leading our work to address inequalities with the Executive, who have overall responsibility for equality and diversity.

- 2.2.2 The Council employs over 4000 staff, including staff in schools. The Chief Executive leads the Corporate Management Team and oversees service delivery through four departments. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services leads the Council's equalities, community cohesion and engagement agenda and chairs the Corporate Equality Group made up of managers from across the Council. Departmental Management Teams are responsible for leading departmental action to improve our performance in tackling inequalities. The Head of Community Engagement and Equalities coordinates work on equalities, community cohesion, engagement and community centre provision.
- 2.2.3 The [Bracknell Forest Partnership](#) Equality Group, led by the Council, supports the Bracknell Forest Partnership Board in championing work to address inequalities in the Borough, with representation from the Police, Fire Service, Parish and Town Councils, Bracknell Forest Homes and the voluntary sector. It is chaired by the Head of Community Engagement and Equalities. Both the Partnership Equality Group and the Council's Corporate Equality Group report into the Partnership's Community Cohesion and Engagement Partnership, chaired by the Council's Director of Corporate Services, reporting to the Partnership Board.
- 2.2.4 Please see 'Bracknell Forest Story of Place' for a concise summary of the demographics and key issues facing the Borough and also the Organisational Chart of the Council in the additional evidence folder. Since the Council's 2010 peer review the Housing and Benefits section has moved into the Adult Social Care and Health department. The Council has also taken on responsibility for Public Health. The Council's Public Health team is based in the Adult Social Care, Health and Housing department. The Council has taken a leading role in setting up the cross Berkshire Public Health team and hosts the team at our Time Square Offices. Having Public Health within the Council has brought additional resources and new approaches to our equalities and communities work strengthening it further.

2.3 Embedding Equalities

- 2.3.1 The Council's commitment to reducing inequalities as a service provider and employer and promoting good community relations has been tested and reinforced since 2010 in the context of the challenging economic climate, significant policy reforms since the election of the Coalition Government and pressures on public sector budgets. Our objectives for addressing inequalities and supporting vulnerable groups have been further mainstreamed through the core business of the Council and its [performance management system](#).
- 2.3.2 The Council has six priorities:
- A town centre fit for the 21st century
 - Protecting and enhancing our environment
 - Promoting health and achievement
 - Create a borough where people are safe and feel safe
 - Sustain economic prosperity
 - Value for money.

Underpinning these, following the local elections of 2011, the Council published its [11 medium term objectives](#) for the period 2011-15, each with key actions and our annual departmental service plans provide the detailed delivery plans for these.

2.3.3 While addressing inequalities and supporting vulnerable groups underpins all of our corporate priorities and medium term objectives, the Council has specific medium term objectives to:

Objective 4: Support our younger residents to maximise their potential

Objective 5: Work with schools and partners to educate and develop our children, young people and adults as lifelong learners

Objective 6: Support opportunities for health and wellbeing

Objective 7: Support our older and vulnerable residents

Objective 8: Work with police and other partners to ensure Bracknell Forest remains a safe place.

2.3.4 Medium Term Objective 11 specifically focuses on equality and access, 'Work with our communities and partners to be efficient, open, transparent and easy to access and to deliver value for money'. This objective is delivered through a number of key actions including the delivery of our equality priorities published in the '[All of Us](#)' [Equality Scheme 2012-16](#) and our annual [Workforce Monitoring Report](#).

2.3.5 The 'All of Us' Equality Scheme and workforce objectives are integrated into departmental service plans and are monitored quarterly in the Council's [quarterly service plans](#) (QSRs). [The Equality Scheme Action Plan](#) is monitored annually by the Corporate Equality Group, scrutinised by the Partnership's Community Cohesion and Engagement Partnership, the portfolio holder for equalities, Overview and Scrutiny and the Partnership Board. An [Annual Impact Report](#) is also produced consisting of case studies which highlight the outcome of the Council's work to reduce inequalities. In addition, this is scrutinised by the community through for example the Access Advisory Panel whose membership is made up of voluntary and community sector disability groups and elected members.

2.3.6 The Council has a two stage equalities analysis process. [Equalities screenings](#) are produced on all its major services, policies and strategies and full impact assessments are completed if the potential for an adverse impact is identified in the initial screening which can not be easily mitigated. Equality screenings are completed on all new policies, services and strategies and are made public. All reports that go to our Corporate Management Team and Executive requiring a decision have a completed equality screening and full impact assessment if appropriate attached to them and an equality impact assessment comment in the covering report.

2.3.7 The equality screening template has a SMART action plan integrated into it to capture follow on actions. All actions agreed as a result of screenings or full impact assessments are either integrated into the section's business or work plan, or where these do not exist, they are monitored by departmental management teams. Examples of impact assessment mitigating actions are provided in the self assessment document. The screenings are informed by the 'Equality Story of Place', a copy of which has been provided in the additional evidence folder in addition to other sources of data where relevant.

3. Our journey since 2010

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Bracknell Forest is a thriving, active and caring community. Bracknell Forest Council works closely with partners to support and engage our different communities, groups and organisations. As our community grows and changes, we are committed to ensuring that no-one is left behind, isolated or disadvantaged. We take great pride in our support for vulnerable groups and individuals. Members and staff are committed to ensuring that Bracknell Forest is a borough of opportunity for everyone.

3.1.2 The Council participated in an LGA peer challenge in March 2013 and the team confirmed that Bracknell Forest is a good council, in a relatively sound financial position. However, we are not complacent about the future and the challenges ahead. The recommendations from the peer team are being considered together with the Council's 'Good to Great' improvement programme to develop an action plan which includes work on community empowerment which compliments our equality and cohesion objectives.

3.1.3 This section of the report demonstrates how we have made progress since 2010 to advance equality of opportunity and good community relations and to eliminate discrimination and it demonstrates the outcomes we have achieved. We are confident we continue to work at the Achieving level of the Equality Framework and in some areas of the Framework the peer review team may judge that we are making good progress towards the Excellent level of the Framework.

3.2 Equality Framework – summary of detailed self assessment including reporting on the recommendations from the 2010 peer review

3.2.1 Knowing Your Community

The Council has taken the actions listed under 'strengths' below to address the 'areas for improvement' that we identified in the 'Knowing Your Community' section of our last self assessment narrative report in 2010; all the areas for improvement have been addressed. The recommendations suggested by the peer review team in their report have also been acted upon.

2010 areas for improvement identified by the Council:

- The Corporate Management Team have agreed plans for a central data repository to ensure that all the data used across the Council comes from a single central source and is consistent.
- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, the Council's key inequalities mapping document, will continue to be improved in terms of the breadth of information collected.

- The consistency of equality monitoring will be improved; increasing the evidence available for equality impact assessments.
- Where data is disaggregated and we do not have information for all equality strands we will work with partners to try to plug gaps in our knowledge.

Strengths

- Thorough research and consultation informed the development of the Council's ['All of Us' Equality Scheme 2012-16](#) with diverse communities in 2011-12.
- [Equality information reports](#) have been published annually since January 2011 covering satisfaction levels, outcomes and performance data and access to key services, as well as comprehensive workforce monitoring data which is now broken down by departments and schools and non schools data.
- Significant improvements have been made to the Council's consultation activity during 2012/13 and 2013/14. New best practice guidance and quality checking processes are in place; a ['Have Your Say'](#) consultation portal has been launched and accredited consultation training provided to key staff members in each department.
- The 'Stats Share' data hub was launched in 2010/11 which ensures consistency and up-to-date figures are used in all strategies and equalities monitoring across the Council.
- The first of its kind nationally; the public health team have commissioned a local survey of health and wellbeing to generate primary data on our local population. The results are due to be published in April.
- A new Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) highlights key health and wellbeing inequalities. The JSNA has been significantly improved in 2013/14 and is now shorter, clearer, easier to use.
- A new JSNA website has been developed to significantly improve access to this data by the Council, partners and communities.
- Web based JSNA ward profiles have been produced and are available to members, staff and the community to help better understand local community needs.
- The Public Health team has also funded a number of innovation projects, many of which gather data on health and wellbeing inequalities and community needs.
- Comprehensive analysis and dissemination of the Census 2011 data including the production of the ['Changing Face of Bracknell Forest' summary document](#)
- Census data is used to produce a Story of Place and Equalities 'Story of Place', summary documents which inform the production of equality screenings and link service planning and corporate equality objectives.
- The changing nature of our communities is tracked annually using data from the Schools Census and DWP national insurance registrations; this information is shared with our departments and partners between national censuses.
- Comprehensive service-based research and consultations inform the design of services, including customer insight methods.

- A wide range of national and local data and information is collected and disaggregated by equality strands to support the development of the Council's key strategies e.g. the Children and Young People's Needs Analysis.
- The Council has a good understanding of its communities and we work with partners to plug any gaps in our knowledge e.g. ICoCo was commissioned to conduct research into the borough's faith and belief communities in 2011, see [Faith and Belief in Action 2011](#) and in 2013 The Children's Society were commissioned to run a [survey with children and young people](#).
- Experian were commissioned to provide data to support the Benefits Service and to provide our Customer Services team with customer insight information and the preferred communications channels of our residents to explore their receptiveness to digital communications.
- Key indicators from the Office of National Statistics and Job Centre Plus are reported on through the [quarterly economic indicators report](#) to the Corporate Management Team and partners
- Anecdotal community information from elected members is shared with directors and managers through meetings, training sessions and workshops.
- An equalities monitoring audit was completed to assess where the Council needed to improve and refine its collection of equality monitoring data including increasing and reducing the collection of data in some service areas. Guidance has been produced on monitoring and a standard corporate monitoring form produced.

Areas for Improvement

- The Council continues to improve the sharing of data across the organisation and promotes 'Stat Share' as a vehicle for doing this.
- The Council wide equality information report for services needs to be reduced to an Executive summary of the service-based report in 2014/15 to make it more succinct.
- Further guidance will be provided to heads of service to improve the monitoring of the 'All of Us' Equality Scheme.
- Opportunities to provide greater interpretation of data to inform priorities will continue to be explored.

3.2.2 Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

The Council has taken the actions listed under 'strengths' below to address the 'areas for improvement' that we identified in the 'Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment' section of our last self assessment narrative report in 2010; all the areas for improvement have been addressed. The recommendations suggested by the peer review team in their report have also been acted upon.

2010 areas for improvement identified by the Council:

- A single equality scheme will be developed during 2010-11 to replace the existing lengthy race, gender and disability equality schemes, enabling the Council to review its priorities and focus limited resources carefully.
- There is a need to integrate all detailed equality actions, not only our equality objectives, into the departmental service plans and recently piloted Paris corporate IT performance monitoring system.
- Continue to take positive action to improve the diversity of those participating in civic and public life, e.g. recent activity to increase the number of school governors from black and minority ethnic communities.
- Community engagement in Overview and Scrutiny needs to be increased, action has been taken to address this already and further plans produced.

Strengths

- Strong and visible leadership from the Leader of the Council as portfolio holder, executive members, member champions and senior managers on the equalities agenda.
- The Leader of the Council has championed many cohesion projects including the signing of a Local Community Covenant with the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the IESE award-winning Sandhurst town as a '[Respect, Responsibility and Rights Community](#)'.
- SMART and strategic equality objectives published in the 'All of Us' single equality scheme based on what our communities and partners told us were their priorities. Equality objectives streamlined and made more proportionate and outcome-focussed moving from three equality schemes and a separate community cohesion strategy to one equality scheme which includes our objectives for promoting good community relations.
- Overarching equality objectives to deliver on these listed in our departmental [service plans](#) linked to the delivery of our corporate priorities and medium term objectives.
- The corporate performance management system Paris is now used to monitor performance on delivering our equalities objectives, mainstreaming equalities further.
- The Council has continued to take positive action to improve the diversity of those participating in civic and public life
- Excellent partnership working to address inequalities and promote cohesion through the Bracknell Forest Partnership's Community Cohesion and Engagement and Equality Partnership.
- A wide variety of community cohesion and equalities projects have been supported through successful partnership bids including projects with migrant communities, the service community, people with disabilities, young and older people.
- High performance on the old National Indicator 1; percentage of people who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in the local area; the [Residents Survey result](#) for 2012 was 87% an improvement from 82% in 2008.

- The Institute for Community Cohesion (ICoCo) conducted research in 2011 into faith and belief communities and cohesion issues more generally in the borough. Their report [Faith and Belief in Action 2011](#) noted that Bracknell Forest was one of the most cohesive communities that they had ever worked in.
- Clear partnership equality priorities, a strong partnership scrutiny structure and robust performance monitoring on these priorities.
- Well supported partnership Equality Group improving the coordination of partners' work and reporting to the Partnership's Community Cohesion and Equalities group.
- [Equalities screenings](#) and, as relevant, full impact assessments completed on all budget proposals in the context of a challenging public sector financial climate to assess the impact on communities of any changes to services.
- There is a full programme of [Overview and Scrutiny Reviews](#) many covering equalities issues.
- Positive work with the business community to encourage the employment of people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- Robust monitoring of community relations and hate crimes, working with the Police to promote an anti hate crime campaign. Reports of hate crime to the police down by over 20% in the context of a campaign to increase reporting.

Areas for Improvement

- There is a strong and supportive working relationship with the voluntary and community sector (VCS); but work is needed to support the re-establishment of the voluntary and community sector forum and a system for representation in the VCS.
- Further work is needed to develop business engagement and establish mutually beneficial partnership between business and the community in areas such as volunteering, secondments, mentoring and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups.
- Continue to take positive action to improve the diversity of those participating in civic and public life.

3.2.3 Community Engagement and Satisfaction

The Council has been working to address the issues identified in the Council's 2010 self assessment on community engagement and satisfaction and the recommendations suggested by the peer review team in their report.

2010 areas for improvement identified by the Council:

- Strengthen engagement with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.
- Improving consultation feedback has been recognised as an area for improvement in the Partnership's Community Engagement Strategy.
- Further coordinate community engagement activity with our partners.

Strengths

- The Council is led by experienced elected Members with extensive community knowledge who are proactive in engaging their communities.
- [The Bracknell Forest Partnership \(BFP\) Community Engagement Strategy 2013-16](#) has equalities issues firmly embedded within its aims, objectives and action plan.
- [A Community Engagement Protocol](#) has been signed by the Partnership members setting out the standards expected for engagement.
- The Partnership's Community Cohesion and Engagement Partnership ensure good coordination of engagement activities between partners.
- [BFP 'Community Engagement Toolkit'](#) and Consultation 'Step by Step' guidance supports staff working on engagement.
- Significant improvements have been made to the Council's consultation activity during 2012/13 and 2013/14. New best practice guidance and quality checking processes are in place; a '[Have Your Say](#)' consultation portal has been launched and accredited consultation training provided to key staff members in each department.
- Sound community engagement in the development of the 'All of Us' equality scheme including with our local LGBT community.
- A consultation forward plan is produced by departmental management teams and shared corporately to reduce duplication and encourage cross council working on and awareness of consultations.
- Proactive partnership engagement activities with diverse communities' e.g. interfaith week activities and the 'Healthy Voices' EIF project with the Nepali community.
- The partnership framework contract with QA Research to provides research and consultation services and has been operational for four years and is currently being retendered. QA are used when a consultation requires independence from the Council or confidentiality is crucial to gaining a high response rate such as the Council's staff survey.
- Strong engagement with minority ethnic communities, faith and belief groups, children and younger people, older people, people with disabilities, carers, service users, young offenders and other vulnerable groups.
- [Participative forums](#) including Youth Council, Older People's Forum, Access Advisory Group, Minorities Alliance, Mental Health Forum, Faith and Belief Forum and regular engagement with people who need support to be independent and voluntary and community groups representing people with disabilities, carers and other vulnerable groups.
- Partners work well together to balance diverse and sometimes conflicting interests in the community.
- Elected members have participated in a workshop on community engagement, sharing their experience of engaging diverse communities in February 2014 in the context of the run up to the next local elections.

Areas for Improvement

- Continue to improve the feedback provided to communities who engage with the Council through consultation and other engagement activity using the 'Have Your Say' consultation portal and other communication channels.
- Improve engagement with the business community and links with the voluntary and community sector.
- Measuring the impact of consultation and engagement on service development, commissioning and provision to ensure that it has a genuine influence; this is one of the priorities in the [Bracknell Forest Partnership \(BFP\) Community Engagement Strategy 2013-16](#).

3.2.4 Responsive Services and Customer Care

The Council has been working to address the issues identified in the Council's 2010 self assessment on responsive services and customer care and the recommendations suggested by the peer review team in their report.

2010 areas for improvement identified by the Council:

- Consistency of contract monitoring across service areas.
- Assessment of resource implications to improve equality outcomes following equality impact assessment production.

Strengths

- The Council's equality impact assessment processes have been streamlined to make them more proportionate and outcome focussed.
- Short equality screenings are produced with an integrated SMART action plan and only if adverse impact has been identified that can not be easily mitigated is a full impact assessment produced.
- Strong evidence of mitigation across a range of services.
- The screenings and full EIAs go to Corporate Management Team and the Executive.
- Impact assessment training has been rolled out across the Council and the quality of screening and full impact assessments has improved with greater use of evidence and clearer actions.
- Impact assessments have influenced Executive decisions for example in the case of proposed cuts to the subsidised bus service and concessionary fares budget.
- An increase in elected Members and senior management engagement in the impact assessment process since 2010 in the context of a reducing budget and ensuring that fair financial decisions are made.
- Further guidance has been provided on interpretation and translation services and when it is and is not appropriate to use staff members as volunteer translators. Regular monitoring of the take up and spend on these services also now takes place by the Corporate Equality Group.

- Excellent performance in delivering increased choice and control to vulnerable groups.
- A programme of customer service and cultural awareness training sessions has been rolled out.
- A good range of services are provided to vulnerable groups that are designed to ensure people are treated with dignity and respect and improve their life opportunities.
- Human rights issues are central to service delivery.
- Clear evidence of service delivery outcomes which address inequalities.
- Evidence of high levels of customer satisfaction.

Areas for Improvement

- There is an inconsistent approach to the monitoring of contracts across the Council with some areas of good practice e.g. in Adult Social Care, Health and Housing. A more consistent approach could be taken across the Council and it would be interesting to learn from best practice in other local authorities.

3.2.5 A Modern and Diverse Workforce

The Council has been working to address the issues identified in the Council's 2010 self assessment on a modern and diverse workforce and the recommendations suggested by the peer review team in their report.

2010 areas for improvement identified by the Council:

- Sexual orientation equality strand to be more positively managed in workforce monitoring and training.
- Continue to take positive action to improve the diversity of the workforce.
- Further increase the profile of equalities issues in management and staff appraisals; this will improved in 2011/12 when the appraisal process will be updated to integrate the new middle managers' competency frameworks.

Strengths

- Regular and accurate [workforce monitoring](#) is undertaken including job applicants; strategies and actions plans are in place to improve diversity in the workforce.
- Since the 2010 peer review, workforce monitoring is broken down by departments, school and non school employees and includes data on sexual orientation.
- Clear equality objectives and achievements are highlighted in the annual workforce monitoring report.
- The target for disabled employees was reviewed to ensure it is based on the proportion of disabled people in the economically active local population rather than on those who are economically inactive - and therefore unavailable for work.

- A comprehensive training programme is in place to increase workforce and elected Member knowledge and awareness of equality and diversity issues
- Work has been completed to review all lesson plans and mainstream equality issues into all relevant training courses delivered and commissioned by our Learning and Development Team.
- Proactive and contemporary review of all HR policies to ensure equalities considerations are embedded and we have assessed the impact on different groups within the workforce.
- Positive engagement with the workforce including through change programmes such as the 'Time for Change' accommodation programme and 'Good to Great' improvement programme.
- Equality and diversity has been into all competency frameworks for managers.
- Equality and diversity is integrated into manager's competency frameworks.
- Joint working with unions to introduce a new pay and grading structure - implementation has now been postponed for further consideration in 2015. However, a pay supplement has been introduced to assist lower paid employees.
- There have been a wide range of improvements to the working environment since 2010. Upgrade of Time Square offices is nearly complete, with works to Easthampstead House to follow in 2014. Staff have been enabled to work flexibly where their work allows.

Areas for Improvement

- Continue to take action to improve the diversity of the workforce.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The Council is proud of improvements it has made since 2010. We are confident that we have evidenced that we are working at the Achieving Level of the Equalities Framework, that equalities are mainstreamed through our delivery of our corporate priorities and of our commitment to continual improvement on this agenda. We have made significant progress in improving our approach to equalities over the last three years and we are on target to improve further; the whole Council has participated in this, strongly supported by our political leadership and senior managers.
- 4.2 We have demonstrated our strengths in our community knowledge, engagement, excellent partnership relationships and delivery of responsive services. We believe we have particularly improved in terms of 'Knowing Our Community', 'Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment' and 'Community Engagement and Satisfaction' and 'Responsive Services and Customer Care' with many examples of excellent practice now in these areas. Steady progress has been made in terms of the 'Modern and Diverse Workforce' with low levels of recruitment and staff turnover making increasing the diversity of our workforce challenging. However, over the past three years there have been significant improvements to the Council's working environment, workforce monitoring, staff engagement and a Bracknell Forest supplement has been introduced to address issues of low pay.
- 4.3 We recognise that this is not the end of our journey, more remains to be done to ensure that we continue to recognise that new communities are emerging, existing communities are changing and that we continue to meet the needs of communities and vulnerable groups. We have identified a number of areas for improvements. There is still more work to do to ensure in the context of reducing public sector budgets that fair financial decisions are taken with mitigation of any adverse impacts on the community. There is great potential to build on our strong partnership working to ensure that our residents continue to enjoy responsive services which are amongst the best in the country, delivered in a way that is fair and accessible and offer choice and control to vulnerable groups.
- 4.4 Economic development is a top political priority and the Council will shortly be recruiting a new business and enterprise team which will help improve engagement with the businesses for the benefit of the community. The Council is also focusing on community empowerment through the 'Good to Great' improvement programme to promote volunteering and civic engagement in order to help enhance the quality and availability of our services and the diversity of people involved in public life. Close partnership working with the public health team on equalities issues will continue to be developed. During the team's first year within the Council, they have had a very positive impact in terms of gathering community data and information on health and wellbeing inequalities and on delivering joint programmes to benefit the community.

- 4.5 We are also committed to continuing to work towards being an 'Employer of Choice', providing support and flexibility to our staff. We also need to do more to positively work to attract and retain a diverse and representative workforce. We need to improve our contract monitoring, feedback to communities on engagement activity and continue the process of increasing the knowledge and confidence of our staff and elected Members in equalities issues.
- 4.6 We are confident that addressing inequalities is embedded in the thinking of elected Members, senior managers and officers. But ongoing evolution of our culture is vital to moving towards achieving the Excellent level of the Framework. We look forward to learning from the feedback provided by the peer review team to help us with this onward journey.

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

Nepali

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Tagalog

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Urdu

اس دستاویز کے خلاصے یا مختصر متن جلی حروف، بریل لکھائی یا پھر آڈیو کیسٹ پر ریکارڈ شدہ صورت میں فراہم کئے جا سکتے ہیں۔ دیگر زبانوں میں اس کی کاپی بھی حاصل کی جا سکتی ہے۔ اس کے لیے براہ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 01344 352000 پر رابطہ کریں۔

Polish

Streszczenia lub fragmenty tego dokumentu mogą być dostępne w wersji napisanej dużym drukiem, pismem Brajla lub na kasecie audio. Można również otrzymać kopie w innych językach. Proszę skontaktować się z numerem 01344 352000.

Portuguese

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