

Equalities Monitoring

Annual Report Place, Planning & Regeneration 2023



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1. Background

This report provides a summary to demonstrate the approaches taken by Place Planning & Regeneration Directorate (PP&R) (comprising Parks and Countryside, Planning, Public Health, Highways and Transport, Buildings and Land Charges and Regeneration and Economic Development) to ensure that through its workforce, policies, and services, it pays due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act and Equality Objectives.

In their response, each section in the Directorate was asked to consider the following:

- The public sector equality duty:
 - General duty on public bodies and others that carry out public functions.
 - Ensures that public bodies consider the needs of all through:
 - Shaping policy
 - Delivery of services
 - Employees.
- The Council's general duty under the Equality Act
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between those who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- The Council's equality objectives detailed its 'All of Us' Equality Scheme, which includes the following key principles:
 - Inclusive in all we do
 - Accessible for all
 - Accountable and Fair
 - Diverse and inclusive workforce

2. Evidence to demonstrate due regard towards Equalities.

The evidence is summarised according to four key area defined in the diagram below. Additional detail for each department can be found in the appended Excel spreadsheet.

Diagram 1: Key themes for demonstrating the PP&R Directorate fulfils its responsibility for Equalities.



2.1 Addressing inequalities and meeting the equalities duty in recruitment, training and CPD

In line with council policy, as part of the recruitment process all candidates are asked a question relating to Equality and Diversity at interview (e.g., '*Please share with us what equality and diversity mean to you and why are they important?*'). Recruiting managers ensure that all newly recruited staff complete mandatory training on equality and diversity. There are also additional courses for Equalities available for staff to complete and they are encouraged to do these. The table below shows the number of staff across PP&R who have completed these additional courses within the last three years (January 2021 to end December 2023):

Table 1: Non-mandatory Equalities training courses completed by staff within PP&R

Training course	Number of staff from PP&R completed 2021-2023
Inclusive Conversations	106
Equality Impact Screening Workshop	7
Inclusive Conversations for Managers	6
Unconscious Bias	5
Equality Scheme 2021 - 26 Workforce Engagement	5
LGBT+ Inclusion in Practice (Team Version)	4
Faith and Belief	4
Trans and Non-Binary Inclusion in Practice (Team Version)	3
Neurodiversity Inclusion in Practice (Team Version)	2
Equality Allies - Listening Skills	2
Trans Awareness	1

Through regular CPD and training, all staff within PP&R strive to follow the council's equality objectives. In particular, the Public Health team practice according to the standards set by the UK Public Health Register:

- Act in ways that promote equality and diversity
- Act in ways that value people as individuals
- Act in ways that recognise people's expressed beliefs and preferences.

In partnership with Learning and Development, Public Health have funded Health and Wellbeing Champions and offered Mental Health First Aider training to help reduce stigma around mental ill-health. There are three members of staff within the Directorate who are Wellbeing Champions. The purpose of the champion role is to help promote, implement, support, and embed a wellbeing culture. This is done through raising awareness of wellbeing activities, as well as promoting healthy lifestyles and positive mental health.

Four members of staff within the Directorate have been trained as Mental Health First Aiders and are available to other staff who need mental health support or signposting to local support. In addition, Public Health fund Mental Health Awareness training '*Let's Face It!*' which is offered to any member of staff, partner and volunteer working within Bracknell Forest in a front facing role. In total, 140 individuals who have been trained in Mental Health Awareness (around 85% of participants who are from the Bracknell Forest Council workforce). This includes 18 members from the Senior Leadership Group who received this training in November 2023.

The Wellbeing Network is made up of various employee wellbeing support groups including: Disability and Mental health groups, Neurodiversity working group, the Pause for Menopause group, and Get Active group. There is active participation from PP&R staff with relevant council working and interest groups such as the Learning and Development Steering group. There is also a LGBTQIA+ staff and ally's network, which is led by a Wellbeing Champion and encourages staff to be involved in the direction of the network. The various strands of the Wellbeing Network, including our Inclusion Networks, engage directly with our CMT, Equality Group and leaders to share insight and challenges. Actively helping shape the inclusion, diversity, and wellbeing (ID&W) strategy.

Two members of the Directorate are an Equality Ally. Equality Allies serve as an impartial person to listen to the experience of staff members and form part of a network of support so that every staff member has someone to speak to confidentially if they want to raise an issue related to equality or discrimination.

Team members from departments across PP&R provide representation in the Health in All Policies (HiAP) working group which considers health inequalities amongst residents of Bracknell Forest and how to embed a HiAP approach in council policies.

2.2 Embedding equalities and addressing inequalities in policies and strategies.

2.2.1 Strategies and Policies

All strategies and policies approved by the Executive prepared within PP&R are subject to consultation and an Equalities Impact Assessment. For example, Bracknell Forest Council have just approved an Economic Strategy. This included an online consultation and workshops with key stakeholders and resident groups. The proposed strategy was also available in printed form in locations across the borough, and was widely published using

social media channels. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out to inform this work.

Within Planning, all policies and guidance documents are subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment at key decision making stages. Any public consultation on planning policy documents includes targeting disability and minority group umbrella organisations.

The need to ensure public rights of way are accessible for all is a policy (RoWIP1) in the Bracknell Forest Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2021-2026. The CROW Act 2000 also requires local highway authorities to assess the accessibility of local Rights of Way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems. This can include disabled users, the visually impaired, elderly, or those with children or pushchairs.

Policies within Highways and Transport follow national guidance and good practice to ensure everyone's needs are considered. For example, the Electric Vehicle charging strategy including reference to the BSI's PAS1899 standard for accessible charge points. In addition, the use of tactile surfaces is within the council's schedule of standard drawings for highways. As with all other sections of PP&R, public are consulted on key policies and plans developed by Highways and Transport, such as the Local Transport Plan.

Public Health continues to deliver its Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Its strategic work consistently considers local data – quantitative and qualitative - about individuals who represent the protected characteristics in the 2022- 2026 Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This has enabled the understanding of relationships between the protected characteristics and mental health. It also allows us to identify specific mental health and wellbeing needs for each of these groups, particularly in relation to the wider determinants such as education, housing, and employment.

2.2.2 Use of data and intelligence on equalities

Within Public Health, a community engagement approach is adopted, which seeks to gather intelligence from our all communities within Bracknell Forest, prioritising those who may form minority groups. In 2023, the analysis packs on the most recent Census (2021) were produced by public health intelligence, have been used at Community Forums and have also led to further work to address inequalities locally. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) steering group have produced local authority specific topic packs analysing health inequality groups, namely homeless people and vulnerable migrants. These topic packs will be to address gaps in service provisions for these groups and carry out more in-depth intelligence gathering through community engagement activity.

In April 2023, Public Health commissioned a survey to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Bracknell Forest. In addition to a large telephone survey, the work included structured interviews and focus groups targeted at some protected characteristics that research had identified as being particularly impacted by the pandemic. The findings of this survey have driven the COVID recovery work.

Public Health are in the process of carrying out an Equity Audit of our smoking cessation service. Once the report from the smoking cessation audit has finalised learnings will be applied to conduct equity audits for all our other lifestyle services (weight management and physical activity) to determine any issues relating to access to services and ensuring that the services are accessible for all and do not exclude any groups. The Equity Audit results will help examine the ways in which our services are serving different minority groups and how it can help to achieve more equitable access and uptake of these services e.g., through improved, targeted communication and culturally sensitive service provision.

The Parks Satisfaction survey contains equalities monitoring questions, and the findings are used to inform decisions about the delivery of the service based on how it is accessed.

2.3 Meeting equalities duty and addressing inequalities in contracted services.

Service user statistics are routinely collected for all services as part of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and criteria set in service specifications and are used to identify any gaps in uptake amongst minority groups or groups where there is low representation when compared to the overall population in Bracknell Forest (see section 2.3 Contracted council services). The Equity Audits mentioned above have been used to:

The smoking cessation health equity audit will consider the rate of smoking between different population groups in Bracknell Forest (BF), whether population groups are accessing the smoking cessation service relative to their population group's health need, the rate of successful attempts at stopping smoking using the smoking cessation service and identify possible actions to address any inequities found. Once this audit is complete learning will be extended to other lifestyle services.

Other examples of the way in which equalities is considered in the contracted services is as follows:

- **Adult Weight Management Programme:**

The 12-week programme targets adults with a BMI of 30 or 27 from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, those with mild learning disabilities, and men (from the protected characteristics strands). It combines face-to-face and online sessions, focusing on diet and physical activity. Referrals are accepted from various sources, and demographic data reviews informs service development.

- **Children Weight Management Programme:**

A family-oriented 12-week programme addresses children with a BMI centile over 80 and learning disabilities. Venues are selected in deprived areas, and referrals come from GPs, Community Paediatricians, Schools, and self-referral. 6-week schools programme targets children in years 4-6, prioritising schools with the highest need.

- **Stop Smoking Service:**

Solutions4Health provides telephone and face-to-face support for individuals aged 18+ in Bracknell Forest. Demographic data, collected for monitoring, includes age, gender, ethnicity, pregnancy status, occupation, and postcode. The service targets high-risk groups, collaborating with stakeholders like faith forums, Frimley CCG, PCN, social prescribers, and voluntary organisations.

- **0-19 Nursing Service and Programme**

This comprises of the 0-5 Health Visiting and 5-19 School Nursing services. These services constitute the Healthy Child Programme (HCP) which is a national evidence-based public health programme aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people and reducing health inequalities. The Health Visiting team consist of specialist

community public health nurses (SCPHN), and nursery nurses who specialise in working with families with a child aged 0 to 5 to identify health needs as early as possible and improve health and wellbeing by promoting good health behaviours, preventing ill-health and reducing inequalities. This is accomplished through health and development reviews, health promotion and education, parenting support and screening and immunisation programmes. In addition, these services provide expert information, assessments and interventions for babies, children and families, including first time mothers and fathers who have more complex needs. The School Nursing teams are comprised of specialist community public health nurses and staff nurses who work with school-aged children, young people and their families to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities. In addition to the core, universal offer of health promotion and prevention education, the School Nursing Service provides targeted support to children and young people who require extra help or who are identified as vulnerable and at risk of poor health outcomes such as those with physical or learning disabilities.

- NHS Health Checks programme

This is delivered by GP across BF. The programme supports early prevention in CVD, diabetes, hypertension and other long term conditions. The services provide targeted support to individuals in the priority groups such as BAME and adults with Learning Disabilities, adults with a mental health diagnosis and those in the most deprivation area.

2.4 Meeting equalities duty and addressing inequalities in directly provided services and information.

PP&R are responsible for delivering a range of direct (i.e., not contracted) public facing services and signposting information for residents. For example, Public Health has an in-house Social Prescribing service and delivers free Making Every Contact Count training to upskill staff. In other cases, the departments may host stakeholder groups, such as the Local Partnership Group hosted by Economic Development. In addition, Parks and Countryside ensure that the grounds and open space can be used by all by ensuring they have input from residents who are disabled and have accessibility needs. Detailed examples are provided below.

Many of the clients who access the Social Prescribing service often form the protected characteristics. The service collects demographic data for age, gender, ethnicity, and post code. This data is reviewed on a quarterly basis, enabling to review distribution across each of the categories and tailor our approach in targeting individuals or groups that are not currently accessing the service. In 2023, of those accessing the service, 37% were male, 59% female and 2% identified as 'non - binary' gender. Age groups were spread across 18-29 (7%), 30-49 (20%), 50-69 (23%), 70 + (50%). 4% of referrals were for individuals from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. The BAME population for Bracknell is 13.9% so referrals from this group are under-represented.

Public Health offers Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training to all frontline staff including those within and outside the council. The purpose of this is to equip staff to have health related conversations with residents and signpost to local support and services. As part of the training, participants are also introduced to the wider determinants of health and how these factors may also contribute to health inequalities. Whilst the training does not directly address equalities, the content raises awareness of the challenges which may be faced by individuals who may be at risk of poorer health (both physical and mental) and the relationship between equalities and health. For example, participants learn about the

protected characteristics and how these can impact on their everyday life. The population level approach of MECC can help address equity of access, by engaging residents who will not have otherwise engaged in a healthy conversation or considered accessing specialised local support services.

Public health delivers the Young Health Champions (YHC) programme, a peer education programme delivered to secondary school students across Bracknell Forest. Young people completed a Royal Society of Public Health qualification as a Young Health Champion, which gives them the skills, knowledge, and confidence to act as peer mentors by teaching young people about their wellbeing and how to promote health messages to their peers. The programme also provides opportunities for young people to participate in a co-production network, working with Local Authority and NHS to support the improvement of services. Recruitment of YHC is through the school setting and any young person is welcome to apply for the programme. Following feedback from the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) inspection, the registration process now includes a process to identify young people who may need additional support to complete the qualification.

My Community Map provides residents with information on local groups, activities and societies that are run by local people for local people. Many smaller groups are promoted on the platform, helping to increase awareness of their activities, many of which may be delivered and designed for those in minority groups. As part of the work to promote the map, the team has been working with People Power and the Learning Disability forum to get feedback on the map and develop accessible communication materials. In addition, the Community Map is available in town centre Kiosks and designed to support those who may be less digitally literate or have limited/no access to the internet at home.

Both My Community Map and the Young Health Champions programme are examples of the work being carried out to support children are learning or physical disability.

Economic Development run a Local Partnership Group, which comprises a range of representatives from organisations in the borough. Effort is made to make this as inclusive as possible. The Economic Development team also work with partners in other directorates to deliver activities that aim to reach all groups. Some examples include Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) sessions for events in the town centre, working on *The Great Wellness Exchange* event, the Healthy Workplace Alliance and the Preparing for Adulthood Roadshow. Those who have been responsible for designing and delivering events on behalf of PP&R have been mindful of the need to pay due regard to groups with different needs. For example, *The Great Wellness Exchange* was designed to be Dementia Friendly to enable and encourage people with Dementia to attend and participate.

In Natural Estates, a programme of works takes place to repair and replace furniture on Rights of Way. To conform with the Equality Act 2010, and the principles BS5709:2006 Gates, Gaps and Stiles, new bridle gates and mobility kissing-gates are being installed along Rights of Way. Climb over stiles and squeeze stiles are considered to limit accessibility to those with mobility impairments and so are gradually being replaced with gates with level thresholds where practicable. As part of its service to provide parks for all, Parks and Countryside have a Local Countryside Access Forum with a disabled representative (wheelchair user) and his activity coordinator as members to the Forum. They carry out audits of spaces and provide feedback about how it access to them can be improved. In many cases, positive reviews are given about how easy it is to access these spaces. Parks and Countryside team refer to guidance from the charity the Sensory Trust to create accessible and engaging nature experiences.

When carrying playground upgrades, Parks and Countryside use contractors who are specialists in providing accessible and inclusive play equipment. This includes design of site

interpretation, which is created so it is accessible for all. For example, font size, contrast, use of plain English, positioning (accessible to those in wheelchairs), inclusion of braille etc. Comms via our various channels (e-newsletters, social media, newspapers, website) is also designed with accessibility in mind.

Greenspace accessibility information is provided on the Council's website. This is provided for residents and visitors, so they can better plan their visits to local green spaces. Work is underway with AccessAble, to provide new access guides for sites such as Westmorland Park, Savernake Park and Pope's Meadow. Guides are already available for Lily Hill Park and Bill Hill.

The greenspace volunteering opportunities are open to all and comprises a diverse range of residents who regularly get involved. For example, those with different ethnic backgrounds and with physical and mental health disabilities. Many of the volunteers benefit from this social interaction and opportunity to improve their local environment for the benefit of all.

The council ensures transport services can be accessed by as many people as possible. For public transport for example, there is a free bus pass for eligible older and disabled residents and the local scheme extends the entitlement to free travel at times exceeding the statutory national scheme. There is also a discount for over 60s railcards, and the council makes a grant payment to a community transport provider for those unable to access mainstream public transport through either age or disability. The real time information screens at the bus station can be activated with a RNIB fob so that they audibly broadcast the information on the screen.

3. Gaps and Actions

The assessment of evidence has allowed each department to review their current approach to equalities and consider ways in which they can improve on their work to support the equality duty in the future. It is proposed that the Directorate focuses on following three main areas for improvement for the coming year:

1. Increase uptake of additional non-mandatory courses which relate to equalities and aim to increase the proportion of PP&R staff trained in these courses compared to last three years.
2. Create community profiles of three minority groups residing in Bracknell Forest. This will comprise detailed data on aspects of the lives of these groups, including health and wellbeing data. This intelligence will be shared across the Directorate to help inform service delivery and policy development.
3. Consider health inequalities through an integrated impact assessment tool and train staff to use the tool so they can review the impact of their work and plans on equalities in a more consistent manner.

4. Summary

The report provides evidence for the commitment within PP&R to furthering equality and diversity across the board, encompassing workforce practices, strategic planning, commissioned services, and direct service provision. The approach taken to equalities is evident in initiatives such as the integration of equality principles into policies, survey mechanisms, and active engagement and capacity building in community groups. The approach taken by each department demonstrates a positive ethos and due regard for the responsibility held by the council towards equalities. The gaps and actions outlined in the

report illustrate how the Directorate's departments can build on the existing work to ensure equalities are considered and become embedded into all aspects of the council's work.