

Three Rivers District Council

# Equalities Duty Information Report

March 2023

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. This is the Council's annual Equality Duty Information Report, setting out the achievements made in supporting equality, diversity and inclusion in Three Rivers. The report highlights key pieces of work undertaken by the Council and, where relevant its partners, and sets out the future direction in the provision of fair and inclusive services.
- 1.2. Progress is reported against the context of the Councils Comprehensive Equality Policy 2018-22, which contains the following objectives:
  - 1.2.1. Promoting Community Leadership and Community Cohesion
  - 1.2.2. Improving Community Engagement and Communication
  - 1.2.3. Promoting Equality in Service Delivery
  - 1.2.4. Promoting Equality of Opportunity in Employment and Training
  - 1.2.5. Evaluating the Success of Our Equalities Commitments
- 1.3. The future direction is outlined against the context of the emerging Equality Policy 2023-2028. The objectives of which have been identified as:
  - 1.3.1. To promote equality of opportunity in employment & training
  - 1.3.2. To improve equality and access to services for all residents
  - 1.3.3. To strengthen knowledge and understanding of all Three Rivers communities.
  - 1.3.4. To celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and enhance community life in partnership with communities
- 1.4. Details of the councils Equalities policy and related work streams can be found at: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/eqcl-page/equality-and-diversity> The Policy is currently under review with a revised policy scheduled for publication later in 2023.

## 2. Legislative Framework

- 2.1. As a public sector organisation, the council has statutory duties governed by the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010 and related regulations. Under the Act, public sector organisations with over 150 employees are required to show that they have identified and considered the impact of their activities on people with "protected characteristics".
- 2.2. Protected characteristics are defined in legislation as Race; Age; Sexual Orientation; Disability; Sex; Religion or belief; Gender reassignment; Marriage and civil partnership; Pregnancy and maternity. In addition to considering the needs of those with protected characteristics, the council's Equality Policy has regard to disadvantage arising from income or skill level, by virtue of where people live and the councils work as a signatory to the Armed Forces Community Covenant.
- 2.3. The Equality Act 2010 also includes a general equality duty which requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:
  - 2.3.1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
  - 2.3.2. Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
  - 2.3.3. Foster good relations between different groups

2.4. Due regard involves:

2.4.1. Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics and

2.4.2. Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups, where they are different from the needs of other people.

2.5. This general equality duty applies to the Council as an employer as well as a provider and enabler of public services.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

2.6. A core element of the council's work to ensure that it meets its equalities duties is the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). Where there are major changes to a service area, new policies or projects being considered, council officers and members must undertake, review and give consideration to an EIA at key scoping, planning, decision making and implementation stages.

2.7. EIAs are used to identify not only any negative impacts that could result from the proposals, but also where there may be opportunities to further promote equality, remove barriers to services which have or could have a differential impact on the protected groups in Three Rivers or address disadvantages which could arise from disparities of income, skill level and by virtue of where people live.

2.8. Completed impact assessments are included with relevant Committee reports (the inclusion of a section on equalities impacts is a mandatory requirement) and published on the Councils website.

2.9. The format of the Council's Equality Impact Assessments has been reviewed in 2022 to update and strengthen this work as part of the planned review of the Equality Policy.

### **Equalities Sub-Committee**

During 2022 the Equalities Sub-committee considered and agreed the council's new equalities objectives. The committee will reconvene in 2023 to consider the 2021 Census and the revision of the Council's Equality Policy in light of its results.

### 3. Equality, Diversity and Council staff

- 3.1. In addition to looking at improvements to services in the context of equality and diversity, this progress report also provides information about Council staff. As part of the requirement to publish Equality Data, the Council publishes an annual Workforce Monitoring Report detailing the composition of our staff compared to the background population of Three Rivers District. This includes information about age, sex, disability, faith and ethnicity and is published on the Council's website. The Council's gender pay gap is published separately at the end of each financial year.
- 3.2. At the end of September 2022, the Council had 316 employees. There is a low percentage of employees choosing to record their protected characteristics in relation to disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion with over 70% of staff choosing not to provide this information. It is therefore difficult to report on or draw conclusions as to the representation of a number of protected characteristics within the staff cohort.
- 3.3. **Age:** The median age of Council employees is unchanged from 2020-21 at between 40 and 49 years old. This is comparable with the working age demographic of the District. It is, however, notable that just under 50% of the council's workforce is over the age of 50 presenting succession planning challenges for the Council but also opportunities to increase diversity. A range of initiatives have been put in place to increase the number of young people coming to work in the council. Examples of these include recruitment to apprenticeships, provision of work experience placements and the continuation of the Customer Service Centre Academy.
- 3.4. **Gender:** 45.25% of the councils work force is female (compared to a 51.3% female population in Three Rivers as a District), a small decrease from the previous year. It is notable that whilst female staff are employed in 62.5% of the Councils most senior posts they are significantly under-represented in lower grade roles where male employees are disproportionate in number.
- 3.5. **Disability:** 2.53% of Council staff have declared a disability, a figure significantly below the 13.8% of the District population who identified as disabled under the equality act in the 2021 Census (Census data not currently available by working age profile). It is notable however that 72.78% of staff had not stated whether or not they are disabled so it is possible that the number of disabled staff is in fact higher. For staff with a disability, the Council is a "Disability Confident Committed" employer, recognising our commitment to the employment, retention, training and career development of disabled employees. This includes a commitment to interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities.

#### Equality and Diversity Training

- 3.6. All staff are required to complete an equality and diversity on-line training module and compliance rates with this requirement are reported at least quarterly to the Corporate Management Team. Equalities training for Members is also provided via the online training module with additional training on specific topics promoted regularly.

## 4. Delivering Council Services

- 4.1. This section identifies service provisions and improvements targeted for those with protected characteristics as well as for those who may find it difficult to access services by virtue of where they live, a lack of certain skills or low income. Some of the projects, services or initiatives address a range of equalities issues and often relate to multiple protected characteristics.
- 4.2. The Council's work to deliver against its equalities objectives in 2022 continued to be influenced by the pandemic, with those in many protected groups (for example older people, people living with disability and those from minority ethnic communities) known to have been disproportionately impacted.

### Community Services and Partnerships

- 4.3. The Healthy Hub and Place Based Health Inequalities: The Council's Healthy Hub continues to be developed with a high emphasis on targeting people in the community who are at risk of the poorest health, with their services of particular benefit to vulnerable groups. Additional funding has been secured from Hertfordshire Public Health for local projects targeting key health inequalities including those related to cancer screening, obesity, respiratory illnesses and mental health. User monitoring of the Health Hub indicates that users in 2022 were broadly representative of the ethnic makeup of the district, however, black ethnic groups were over represented and the Asian and Asian British population were significantly under represented. Further analysis is needed at ward level and will be undertaken as a greater level of depth in census data becomes available.
- 4.4. The Three Rivers Health and Wellbeing Partnership - is convened by the Community Partnerships Team and is currently made up of 16 organisations, both statutory and third sector, working within the broad field of wellbeing, across the district. This is a key source of information exchange between and signposting referrals to and from services. Subjects covered this year have included a JSNA on mental health need, targeted healthy lifestyle interventions for men and young families, programmes for those living with dementia, independent living support, and work to address health inequalities present in the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- 4.5. Hate Crime: A hate incident/hate crime is any incident where the victim or another person believes that they, the victim has been targeted because of their perceived ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender identity. Hate crimes tend to be under reported and increases can be a consequence of the success of initiatives to raise awareness of hate crime and how it can be reported. Training has been provided and continues to be offered to Council staff and Members on the Prevent Duty in recognising and responding to hate crime and extremism.
- 4.6. The Council is working with its partners to raise awareness of, as well as trust and confidence in, reporting processes to encourage more people to come forward when they experience discrimination and criminal hatred so that support can be provided and action taken against perpetrators. To that end the Council's Community Partnerships team, working alongside the Three River Hate Crime officers & Hertfordshire Hate Crime Team lead, have been working to increase the number and visibility of third party reporting centres. Our Healthy Hubs are now 3<sup>rd</sup> party reporting centres and our staff at the hubs trained to deal with such reports
- 4.7. Leisure Services: The Councils Leisure Centres aim to provide a balanced range of activities to suit as of the districts population. A wide range of targeted activities are provided across the centres, parks and open spaces for older people (e.g. seniors table

tennis, art groups and 50+ aqua aerobics) as well as youth clubs, play schemes and the HAPpy programme for young people, women only sessions for swimming at South Oxhey and those living with health issues and disabilities are supported with programmes as diverse as Art for Therapy, Arts on Prescription, Swimming after Stroke and supported sessions for the local special school. In addition, school holiday programmes are run for young carers in the district.

- 4.8. User monitoring of the leisure provision (Playschemes and Play Rangers) indicates that users in 2022 were broadly representative of the ethnic makeup of the district, however, Black and Asian groups were under represented. Further analysis is needed at ward level and will be undertaken as a greater level of depth in census data becomes available.

## **Housing**

- 4.9. Homelessness: The council's Housing Service undertakes equalities monitoring of customers presenting as homeless, focusing on causes of homelessness, age, sex, ethnicity religion and gender. In the period from 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022 the Council spoke with 652 households and took 375 homelessness applications. The applicants were broadly representative of the ethnic make-up of the district however white applicants were over represented with Asian and Asian British disproportionately low by a significant margin.
- 4.10. Housing Register: The ethnic make-up of the Housing Register for 12 months to 14 December 2022 whilst again broadly representative of the ethnic make-up of the district, does, however, differ in that white applicants were under represented with Black ethnic groups overrepresented. The Asian and Asian British population, again, is disproportionately low by a significant margin.
- 4.11. Housing Letting: When considering housing nominations resulting in a letting for the same period, [including customers housed in private rental tenancies and customers housed as part of the Council's Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP)], the monitoring shows the white population represented at figures closely aligned to the district demographic, black and mixed ethnic group populations over represented and again disproportionately low numbers from the Asian ethnic groups.
- 4.12. Across each of the housing data sets above, a consistent ten percent of customers declined to provide monitoring data.

## **Housing and Council Tax Benefits**

- 4.13. The councils Revenues and Benefits service undertakes equalities monitoring of customers. Females (64%) significantly outnumber male claimants of Housing benefits and Council tax relief. Ethnicity data is currently only available for 22% of claimants and shows that as with housing services there is under representation from the Asian and British Asian community.

## **Community safety and crime reduction**

- 4.14. Domestic Abuse Support Service: The Community Safety Partnership continued to fund the Domestic Abuse Caseworker Service in 2022 with this service provided by Herts Mind Network and complementing the County-wide Independent Domestic Abuse Service which works with high risk victims, through the provision of support services to standard – medium risk victims.



- 4.15. In the 2021-22 year the service received 358 referrals a further increase on previous year figures. Females continue to constitute the majority of referrals into this service.
- 4.16. Community Support Service: The Council commissioned Community Support Service, delivered by Herts Mind Network, supports residents with mental health and wellbeing needs. In the 2021-22 year the service supported 377 people (an increase from 249 the previous year) with female clients representing 60 % of those for whom gender data was recorded.
- 4.17. **Communications**
- 4.18. During 2022 a project to update the council's website commenced to improve performance and ensure compliance with the latest disability guidelines. Members of the public, staff and members have all been involved in user testing and had the opportunity to provide feedback. This project will be completed in April 2023 when the new site will go live.

## **5. Understanding and supporting the needs of people from protected groups**

- 5.1. The next section of the report identifies service provision and improvements for protected groups.

### **Disability**

- 5.2. The 2021 census showed that 13.8% of households in Three Rivers contained at least one person with a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities. This is below the national rate (32.3%)
- 5.3. The Census further recorded 5.2% of Three Rivers residents who identified as being disabled and limited a lot. This figure decreased from 6.5% in 2011. In 2021, just over 1 in 12 people (8.6%) identified as being disabled and limited a little, compared with 8.8% in 2011. The proportion of Three Rivers residents who were not disabled increased from 84.7% to 86.2%.
- 5.4. The decrease in the proportion of residents who were identified as being disabled and limited a lot in Three Rivers (1.3 percentage points) was similar to the decrease across the East of England (1.2 percentage points, from 7.8% to 6.6%). Across England, the proportion fell by 1.6 percentage points, from 9.1% to 7.5%. <sup>1</sup>

### **Specific Action in 2022 included:**

- 5.5. The Council has a budget of £500,000 for disabled facilities grants per year. Details of the scheme can be found at: <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk/eqcl-page/disabled-facilities-grant> . During 2021/22, 15 Disabled Facilities grants delivered a range of home adaptations to help disabled people to live more independently in their own homes, including wet rooms and stair lifts.
- 5.6. The Chairman's Charity for 2022 has been Pets as Therapy, a small national charity with an active presence in the district. Its objective is to enhance health and wellbeing

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<sup>1</sup> Census 2021 was undertaken during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived their health status and activity limitations, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond. Caution should be taken when making comparisons between 2011 and 2021 because of changes in question wording and response options.

through companion animal therapy. Volunteers and their temperament-assessed pets visit schools, care homes, hospices and hospitals where they improve educational outcomes, stimulate memories and relieve anxiety in those respective settings.

- 5.7. The Council continues to provide its assisted collection scheme for disabled and elderly residents with 904 residents currently supported.

## **Age**

- 5.8. Three Rivers district has an atypical age profile with a life expectancy well above that of the country, region and county.
- 5.9. The national, regional and local population has continued to age. In England, more than one in six people (18.4%) were aged 65 years and over on Census Day 2021, an increase of 20.1% and a higher percentage share than ever before. In 32 of the 309 local authority areas of England the total number of people aged 65 years and over increased by 30% or more between 2011 and 2021. In this context the increase in Three Rivers is lower than the national average.
- 5.10. In England, the largest age group in 2021 was people aged 30 to 34 years. The largest age group in the East of England has aged from those aged 45 to 49 years in 2011 to those aged 50 to 54 years in 2021. In Three Rivers the largest age group were those aged 45-49.
- 5.11. Overall, in England, there was an increase of 3.6% in people aged 15 to 64 years, and an increase of 5.0% in children aged under 15 years. In Three Rivers there was an increase of 5.1% in people aged 15 to 64 years, the district population is, however, notably below the county, regional and national trends in population numbers for 20-35 year olds. In contrast, the district has seen an increase of 7.6% in children aged under 15 years which is slightly above the region and national trends
- 5.12. Young people have been one of the groups most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic through disruption to their education, worsened mental health outcomes and worsened economic wellbeing from loss of work and earnings

### **Specific Action in 2022 included**

- 1.1. The Council facilitates a Seniors' Forum which meets regularly throughout the year with transport support available for attendance. The past year saw events held in Rickmansworth and Leavesden County Park.
- 1.2. The Council also, in addition to its youth leisure provision, organises and promotes the Youth Council – a project working with local young people from schools across the district to engage young people in the democratic processes of local decision making.

## **Sexual Orientation**

- 1.3. The question on sexual orientation was new for Census 2021. Data has previously been collected through the Annual Population Survey (APS), but including the question on the census questionnaire enables a much more detailed understanding of sexual orientation. The data will meet the needs for better quality information on the LGBTQ+ population for monitoring and supporting anti-discrimination duties under the Equality Act 2010 and will enable the Council and other local organisations to better target support for the LGBTQ+ community within Three Rivers.
- 1.4. From the data available it can be seen that the District population has a higher than the



national proportion of residents identifying as straight or heterosexual (91.54% against a national figure of 89.4%) with 0.9 % gay or lesbian (3.2% nationally), 0.77 bisexual with 6.57% of district population choosing not to answer this question.

- 1.5. During 2022, the Council continued to celebrate and support community activities within the LGBTQ+ community; the Pride flag was raised at the council offices and the Community Partnerships team continued to sponsor and attend Herts Pride. Involvement in Herts Pride is an important anchor and the council's involvement presents a unique opportunity to engage with local residents in this protected characteristic group to better understand and respond to their concerns and needs.
- 1.6. Hate crime reporting on the basis of homophobia continues to be reported through the Community Safety Board with 2 crimes reported in 2022 wherein hate, in relation to sexual orientation, was a marked factor.

**Specific Action in 2022 included:**

- 1.7. The Council is a proud supporter and sponsor of Herts Pride.

**Religion or Belief**

- 1.8. In 2021, 30.8% of Three Rivers residents reported having "No religion", a significant increase from 22.8% figure of 2011. The rise of 8.0 percentage points was the largest increase of all broad religious groups in Three Rivers.
- 1.9. Across the East of England, the percentage of residents who described themselves as having "No religion" increased from 27.9% to 40.2%, while across England the percentage increased from 24.8% to 36.7%.
- 1.10. In 2021, 47.6% of people in Three Rivers described themselves as Christian (down from 59.9%), while 8.3% described themselves as Hindu (an increase from 4.5% the decade before), 3.7% identified as Muslim, 1.6% identified as Jewish, 0.9% identified as Sikh, 0.5% identified as Buddhist, and 5.6% chose not to provide an answer
- 1.11. There are many factors that can cause changes to the religious profile of an area, such as a changing age structure or residents relocating for work or education. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses. Religious affiliation is the religion with which someone connects or identifies, rather than their beliefs or religious practice. The census question about religious affiliation is voluntary and has varying response rates, as such caution is needed when comparing figures between different areas or between censuses.
- 1.12. At its meeting on the 1 September 2020, Three Rivers District Council adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of Anti-Semitism and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) supported definition of Islamophobia.
- 1.13. Three Rivers does not have any mosques, synagogues, temples or gurdwaras located within the district. As a result of this efforts to create a local interfaith group have been unsuccessful, however, positive partnerships have been established with and through the Watford Interfaith Group. Meetings with local faith leaders have built on the successful partnership working of the pandemic response and allowed for further collaboration and shared learning on initiatives such as warm spaces, enabling a greater depth of understanding of the needs of our faith communities and how they are best placed to support each other.
- 1.14. Churches and other places of worship are often the first to recognise and both provide

and support responses to problems in their local communities Working with the various community group and faith leaders has allowed the Council to broaden our reach, share relevant and (where appropriate) faith sensitive information about services and support available to the community as well as broadening the representation of voices from all faiths and beliefs in our consultations.

**Specific Action in 2022 included:**

- 1.15. Active outreach has been undertaken by the Community Partnerships team with the Watford Mosques to engage with the Islamic community which commute from Three Rivers District.
- 1.16. The Council recognises the importance of its role in education, positive messaging and demonstration of the value that all our communities add to our district both regardless of and often because of their religious beliefs and this is a core stand of our communications and community engagements programmes alongside awareness raising of the impacts that discrimination and criminal hatred can have on our communities. Recent examples of this can be seen in the marking of Holocaust Memorial Day and the sharing activities as part of Mitzvah Day in November on a very personal level by our Council Chair Cllr Morris as well as the celebration of Black History Month in October 2022 and participation in Islamophobia Awareness Month in November 2022.

**Ethnicity**

- 1.17. In 2021, 77.1% of people in Three Rivers' identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with 86.2% in 2011), while 3.6% identified their ethnic group within the "Mixed or Multiple" categories (compared with 2.3% the previous decade).
- 1.18. In 2021, 15.2% of Three Rivers' residents identified their ethnic group within the Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh category, up from 9.2% in 2011. The 6.1 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area.
- 1.19. Across the East of England, the percentage of people from the Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnic group increased from 4.8% to 6.4%, while across England the percentage increased from 7.8% to 9.6%.
- 1.20. The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category increased from 1.8% in 2011 to 2.4% in 2021.
- 1.21. There are many factors that may be contributing to the changing ethnic composition of the district and the wider country, such as differing patterns of ageing, fertility, mortality, and migration. Changes may also be caused by differences in the way individuals chose to self-identify between censuses.

**Specific Action in 2022 included:**

- 1.22. Black History Month: Hosted at Watersmeet Theatre, the Community Partnerships team offered two free screenings to the public aiming at a Children/young person audience with a screening of "Spiderman Into the Spider Versus" & an adult screening of "King Richard", supported by guest speakers from the Watford African Caribbean Association (WACA) talking to the audiences prior to the screenings about the history and importance of Black History Month. The vents were further support by Services for Young People who supplied a range of art work at the event revolving around Black

History Month and what the month means to their young members.

- 1.23. Refugees: A range of community engagement work has been undertaken with local Ukrainian refugees being hosted by families in Three Rivers District and officers continue to support those Syrian and Afghanistan refugee families currently living within the District.
- 1.24. Census data shows significant increases in both the local Portuguese, and Romanian Communities. The Community Partnerships team have engaged with association's locally representing these communities involving them in local community events organised by the Council and promoting Council consultations through them to their members to ensure the voices of these communities are reflected.

## 6. Other Inequalities

### UK Armed Forces

- 6.1 Census 2021 was the first census in which residents (aged 16 years and over) were asked whether they had previously served in the UK armed forces, either as a regular, as a reserve or both. This includes those who have served for at least one day in the armed forces, either regular, reserves or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.
- 6.2 Of the Districts adult population, 2.6% had served in the Armed Forces or the Reserve UK Armed Forces with 5.3% of the districts households including a former member of the UK Armed Forces or the Reserve UK Armed Forces In March 2021
- 6.3 The Council is committed to the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant. This is a statement of support between the civilian community and its local Armed Forces community. Further information on the Covenant can be found at [Hertfordshire Heroes](#). As part of this commitment, Three Rivers District Council appoints an Armed Forces Champion, currently Cllr Jon Tankard.
- 6.4 The data collected 2021 will enable the Council and local organisations to better target support for the armed forces veteran community.
- 6.5 The Council is an active member of the [Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant Board](#) who work in partnership to deliver the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) locally. It brings together business, military organisations, charities, NHS and local authorities in a shared commitment to ensure that those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly.

### Nested Deprivation and Equality of Opportunity

- 6.6 Three Rivers is one of the 20% least deprived districts/unitary authorities in England, however about 9.7% (1,620) children in the district live in low income families<sup>2</sup> Whilst the District is prosperous in many areas, there are areas (South Oxhey, Mill End and Maple Cross) that are in the 10% most deprived. Added to this, there are often hidden pockets of deprivation within our communities, where individuals and families on low incomes live alongside more affluent neighbours. This leads to a perception that many of our communities are seen to be comfortable places to live, masking the real needs of many families living there.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/static-reports/health-profiles/2019/e07000102.html?area-name=three%20rivers>

- 6.7 Life expectancy is 7.2 years lower for men and 5.1 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Three Rivers than in the least deprived areas.
- 6.8 The Community and Voluntary Sector within Three Rivers are reporting significantly increased service demand. Three Rivers Citizens Advice have seen a 72% increase in clients presenting with debt problems compared with the same period last year – a concerning trend within this is the significant increase in numbers presenting who are already in employment. Local Food Banks are reporting increasing demand in the context of decreased donations – donations are down 3 tonnes per month
- 6.9 With three existing healthy hubs now located in some of the most socially deprived areas across the District, namely South Oxhey, Mill End and Abbots Langley, delivery of tailored interventions has become more accessible with residents able to access not only health but housing and benefits advice via the hubs.

## The Way Forward

This report includes many examples of how the Council, working with its partners, is providing for the needs of “protected” and underrepresented groups in the District. It provides a snapshot of the work taking place to prevent and where necessary address, disparities arising from protected characteristics, where people live, their income or skill level. This work is presented in the context of the longer term impacts of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, both of which have impacted the way that the Council delivers its services, greatly influenced partnership working with the community and voluntary sector and continue to have a disproportionate impact on those whose protected characteristics increase their vulnerability.

The Council will continue to maintain and where possible further develop its equality and diversity work in the year ahead. Specific areas for further development in 2023 include:

- Approval of an updated Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- Delivery of the Place Based Health Inequalities Programme
- Work to combat fuel poverty and to support those most affected by the increase in energy and other basic costs of living,
- Initiatives to support residents with mental health issues arising from the pandemic and the cost of living crisis,
- Livestreaming of Council meetings to increase accessibility to the councils democratic processes,
- Delivery of the UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan
- Encouragement of increased self-recording of equalities data from staff in relation to their protected characteristics in order to better understand the discrepancies and synergies of the staff cohort with the demographics of the wider district population
- Continuation of the Household Support Fund programme

