

1 Introduction

1.1 This annual report informs the progress on the equality agenda covering the period January 2022 to December 2022. Building on our last report and work carried out since 2021, this progress report provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality. It highlights our achievements and sets out the different ways the council is seeking to ensure that our services are fair, inclusive, and accessible to all our residents and support good equalities practice for our employees.

1.2 The Council adopted its new Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026 during this year, this provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality, set out in one place our equality objectives and other arrangements for embedding equality into everything we do and, perhaps most importantly, set out where we must improve.

1.3 As we continued to recover from COVID-19, the Cost of Living hit and this impacted greatly the work being undertaken by the council and its partners, generating new activity to help support disadvantaged groups and promote equality during this challenging period.

2 The Council's Vision, Purposes and Priorities

2.1 Redditch Borough Council's vision is to enrich the lives and aspirations of our residents, businesses, and visitors through the provision of efficiently run and high-quality services, ensuring that all in need receive appropriate help, support, and opportunities.

2.2 The Council is committed to providing residents with effective and efficient services that understand and meet their needs. Through considering what really matters to our residents the Council's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 sets out six strategic purposes, underpinned by five community priorities.

Six Strategic Priorities for 2020-2024

- Run and Grow a Successful Business
- Finding Somewhere to Live
- Aspiration, Work and Financial Independence
- Living Independent, Active and Healthy Lives
- Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained and Green

Five Community Priorities:

- Economic development & regeneration
- Skills
- Housing growth
- Improved health & wellbeing
- Community safety & antisocial behaviour

Working to these purposes help us to understand the needs of the Borough and how, together with our partners, we can improve the lives of our residents and the prospects for Redditch Borough as a whole.

3 Meeting our Equality Duties

3.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. The Act covers nine protected characteristics, and these are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. The characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Although it is not stated in legislation as a protected characteristic, we also commit to treating everyone equally regardless of their socio-economic status and will work to eliminate discrimination and disadvantage caused by a person's socio-economic status.

3.2 The Equality Act 2010 consists of a General Equality Duty, supported by specific duties, and requires public authorities, like Redditch Borough Council, to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. The General Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In addition, public authorities also have specific duties and must do the following:

- Publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty.
- Prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

4 Population Overview

4.1 Between the last two censuses, held in 2011 and 2021, the population of Redditch increased by 3.4%, from around 84,200 in 2011 to around 87,000 in 2021. This is made up of 49.4% male and 50.6% female.

The age breakdown was:

- 19.2% aged under 15 years.
- 62.2% aged 16-64 years
- 18.6% aged 65 years and over.

The number of people aged 65 to 74 years rose by around 2,700, an increase of 40.5%, while the number of residents between 20 and 24 years fell by just under 700, a 13.3% decrease.

4.1 In 2021 people in Redditch identified their ethnic group as

- 82.4% White (English/Welsh/Scottish, Northern Irish/British), compared to 87.39% in 2011.
- 6.6% White: Other White, up from 3.88%
- 3.6% Asian/Asian British: Pakistani, up from 3.06% in 2011

4.3 In 2021, 48.9% of people in Redditch described themselves as Christian, down from 63.5%, while 5.5% did not state their religion, down from 6.3% the decade before. In 2021, 40.0% of Redditch residents reported having "No religion", up from 25.8% in 2011 and there has been an increase in those stating their religion as Muslim from 3.4% in 2011 to 4.2% in 2021.

4.4 In terms of disability, 10.6%, up from 10.3% of the population have a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activities a little, and 7.7%, down from 9.5%, stated that their day-to-day activities were limited a lot.

4.5 In 2021 Redditch residents described their health as followed:

- Very good was 45.3%, increasing from 43.9% in 2011.
- Good was 35.6%, increasing from 35.3%
- Bad was 4.3%, decreasing from 4.8%
- Very bad was 1.2%, like 2011.

The 2021 Census was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

4.6 Of Redditch residents aged 16 years and over, 35.5% said they had never been married or in a civil partnership in 2021, up from 32.1% in 2011.

4.7 The question about sexual orientation, which has not been asked in previous censuses, was voluntary and only asked of those aged 16 years and over.

- 91.2% identified as Straight or Heterosexual
- 1.2% identified as Gay or Lesbian
- 0.9% as Bisexual
- 0.1% as Pansexual or Asexual
- 6.4% did not answer the question.

4.8 The question about gender identity, which has not been asked in previous censuses, was voluntary and only asked of those aged 16 years and over.

- 94.3% stated their gender identity as the same as sex registered at birth
- 0.2% stated their gender identity different from sex registered at birth but there was no specific identity given
- 0.1% identified as Trans Woman or Trans Man
- 5.3% did not answer the question.

4.9 For more information from the 2021 Census including work, travel, housing, education and caring responsibility please go to [2021 Census Profile for Redditch](#)

5 Our Equality Objectives

5.1 During 2022 the new Equality Strategy for 2022 to 2026 was adopted by the council. This report sets out the progress on key areas of equality work, during 2022, that underpin our revised objectives and building on what we have already achieved. Our objectives for the next 4 years are:

Objective 1: Ensure we deliver inclusive and responsive services.

Objective 2: Engage and communicate with the community in appropriate and accessible ways.

Objective 3: Understand our communities and celebrate and respect diversity.

Objective 4: Develop and support a diverse workforce.

The key achievements and progress in 2022 provide the evidence of how we are delivering against the objectives in our strategy.

6 Key Achievements and Progress in 2022

The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 1: Ensure we deliver inclusive and responsive services.

6.1 Covid-19

6.1.1 Going into 2022, the Redditch and Bromsgrove District Incident Management Team (DIMT), chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, and supported by Public Health, continued to meet regularly, bringing together a range of local partner agencies focused on ensuring a collective approach to supporting local communities through providing guidance, information, advice, and support.

6.1.2 Although in March 2022, DIMT was stood down, elements of the work, such as covid vaccinations clinics for instance, including pop ups and mobile van, continued throughout 2022 and into 2023, supported by partners and the recently evolved Redditch District Collaborative (RDC) has effectively taken over from DIMT and is covered under section 6.2.

6.2 Cost of Living

6.2.1 Through the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF), all District Councils worked together with Worcestershire County Council to try and ensure funding was allocated in such a way that it reached those most in need, including working with Act on Energy to provide financial support with energy bills, whether that be current energy bills, energy debt or financial help to repair or replace heating systems. Originally HSF was only intended to last 6 months up to March 2022 but the Government continued it with a Phase 2 and Phase 3 throughout 2022/23 (and an HSF Phase 4 during 23/24 is planned). At a Borough level, working with partners such as Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, local foodbanks and white goods schemes, and our own Redditch Housing and Financial Inclusion Teams, support has been provided such as food parcels, essential while goods, supermarket vouchers, post office cash vouchers and more. Working with other local organisations and groups has helped us to identify eligible households (whether that be families, pensioners, disabled for instance) who were in need and eligible to benefit from this support.

6.2.2 At the suggestion of the Chief Executive, a Bromsgrove and Redditch Cost of Living Partnership Group was set up during 2022 including partners such as Act on Energy, Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, BDHT, Worcestershire County Council, Local Foodbanks, and more, in addition to Borough Council officers internally. The purpose was to facilitate partnership working between agencies with a shared commitment to minimise the depth of damage of the cost-of-living crisis and the length of its impact.

6.2.3 Through the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group, to help ensure residents were informed and knew who to contact for help, including those digitally excluded, an 'at a glance' Bromsgrove and Redditch cost of living leaflet containing brief advice and key contacts, was produced and printed copies were distributed by partner agencies during the latter part of 2022. This was alongside a wider digital campaign including dedicated [cost-of-living webpages](#). A draft poverty alleviation plan was also produced.

6.2.4 The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) is a DfE funded programme to support children aged 4-16 years (reception -Year 11) who are in receipt of pupil premium (or benefits related) free school meals (FSM) to access enriching activities and food during Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays. The Redditch Youth Provider Forum are used to support the project provision with information sharing and updates. During this year, free activities and food have been made available for young people to access across the main school holidays. By working with schools and local organisations we were able to target the young people in need to make this accessible for them. Activities were delivered by various providers under our umbrella who also provided either a breakfast, lunch box or hot meal to those eligible children participating.

6.3 Shopmobility

6.3.1 Shopmobility loaned 3,927 scooters and wheelchairs during 2022 with a 15% rise in customer usage. It anticipates this steady increase to continue with more customers returning and new ones registering on a weekly basis. Shopmobility is in the process of undertaking a survey of potential users to inform how we can improve the number of people accessing and raise the profile of the service.

6.4 Community Transport

6.4.1 Redditch Dial-A-Ride has continued to see an increase in customers as confidence in attending public places has grown since the pandemic with 18,218 journeys provided during 2022. Public Health Funding and a collaboration with Dial-A-Ride and Sports Development in 2022 increased the number of residents participating in classes to improve their strength, balance, and coordination. Many of those residents have continued to attend regularly after funding has ceased. Links with local businesses and community groups has provided an increase in social opportunities for residents. Dial a Ride group bookings for clubs, activities, lunch, and shopping are on the increase improving residents' social networks and interactions.

The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 2: Engage and communicate with the community in appropriate and accessible ways

6.5 Community Engagement

6.5.1 During 2022, the council continued to deliver a range of community engagement and consultations with the information gathered supporting service delivery and corporate decisions. The council continues to work hard to increase participation with responses encouraged from our diverse population to ensure a cross representation of responses.

6.5.2 The Redditch Community Panel, a list of Redditch Borough residents who have signed up to be kept informed about engagement and consultations carried out by the council, continues to grow. As of the end of 2022, there were 414 members with new members signing up regularly.

6.5.3 During the year, surveys have gone out to the public covering a range of topics including:

- Annual Community Survey
- Future of how RBC Grants Scheme will support the Redditch VCS
- Improved Car Parking Program – Hawthorn Rd, Batchley
- New Tenants Satisfaction Survey
- The Milward Square Mosaics Surveys
- Asbestos Removal Surveys
- Tenants Front Door Colour Surveys

- Changes to joining The Housing Register
- Understanding Residents feelings and Views of the Covid-19 vaccination

6.5.4 As part of a process to engage with the young people about the range of local business opportunities, the Redditch Business Network, with support from Council Officers, set up the Redditch Youth Business Forum. Engaging with Redditch high schools and the college, the forum met for the first time in June 2022, to build a network where young people can engage with business and start these conversations. Meetings continued through the year and the forum grew momentum.

6.5.5 Working with St Augustine's High School, key representatives from Redditch Borough Council, including the Leader and the Chief Executive, supported the delivery of an interactive day exposing their sixth form students to what it would be like to run and make decisions within a local council. Working in teams, students took on key council roles and carried out a set of time-limited tasks, with the odd, unexpected task arising throughout the day. It enabled the students to find out more about the range of career opportunities within the council and learn key skills in communication, timekeeping, report writing and making challenging decisions.

6.6 Interpreting and Translation

6.6.1 The Council continues to provide interpreting and translation services and in nearly all cases interpreting has taken place via telephone or video call rather than face to face, which has enabled a cost saving for the council. Languages supported by interpreting and translation in Redditch included Polish, Arabic, Ukrainian, Romanian, and Hungarian. The provision of a BSL interpreter was also used to support a resident. The service continues to be promoted internally across all services and managed within the Policy Team.

The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 3: Understand our communities and celebrate and respect diversity

6.7 Partnerships

6.7.1 Partnership working has continued throughout 2022 in different forms, helping to ensure different agencies address local need collectively rather than separately in isolation. This has been shown through Partnership structures such as Redditch Partnership and the Redditch District Collaborative (RDC).

6.7.2 The Redditch Partnership Theme Groups continued to meet virtually, specifically Redditch Community Wellbeing Trust, strengthening the links between agencies and continuously striving towards more joined up local provision. Redditch Business Leaders, connecting local business representatives, the Council and wider, also continued to meet, with a particular focus on working with schools around the skills agenda.

6.7.3 The Redditch District Collaborative (RDC) has continued to evolve. The Plenary Group is co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the Borough Council and relevant Council officers are linked in at Core Group too. Asset Based Community Development and Family Hub approaches are all being connected via RDC to help ensure a joined-up approach locally. Task Groups for three RDC priorities: Mental health; Obesity; and Frailty – have been re-established, including relevant Council officers, to help drive the work forward. The Redditch Partnership links are being used to ensure all relevant partner agencies are included wherever possible to help strengthen the collective approach necessary to make RDC a success.

6.7.4 The Borough of Redditch received £2.5m over 2022-25 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The UKSPF replaces EU structural funds and allows local communities to invest in local priorities from regenerating high streets, to tackling economic decline, and helps reverse geographical inequalities. Every place receives funding, with areas in greater need receiving more support. The Redditch Towns Deals Board oversee the funding, considers project proposals, and make recommendations.

6.8 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

6.8.1 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches show that connecting people and creating more resident-to-resident relationships builds interdependence and reliance on each other. Connecting people to their shared interests, and enabling them to exchange skills and resources, helps communities identify and act on the issues that are most important to them. This provides a brief update on the progress of ABCD work across Redditch borough and the county during 2022.

6.8.2 Following a successful joint bid for funding by Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council to Public Health, Redditch Borough Council were able to fund three Community Builder posts to support the embedding of the ABCD approach until March 2024. One community builder is based in Abbeydale and hosted by BARN and another is based in Woodrow hosted by Oasis. The third community builder supports BAME communities and hosted by Sandycroft.

6.8.3 The Community Builder with a remit to support ethnic minority communities across Redditch is a unique role as it is the only Community Builder across the county, employed to work with communities of identity. Following initial discussions with residents, host organisations and the district council a decision was taken to expand this role to working alongside all minority communities in Redditch.

6.8.4 All 3 Community Builders have spent time developing local relationships and supporting residents to act on the things that are important to them. Since being in post the Community Builders have supported new resident lead groups, connected individuals with shared interests, and supported increased use of community spaces including starting to change community perceptions of previously underutilised spaces. They have also formed strong links with local groups, statutory and VCSE

local organisations supporting residents to work in partnership on larger community events.

6.8.5 Anecdotal and case study evidence suggests that the role of the community builder has supported social connections, reduced loneliness, and increased wellbeing amongst residents. Below are some resident quotes.

'This has given me purpose and focus; I feel I am doing something that is making people happy and can socialise again'.

'The work carried out by young and old working together and having so much fun along the way was brilliant'.

'I'm going to do it every week now, it's nice to have something to look forward to and see everyone'.

'I'm having feedback all the time how much it helps the spiritual and emotional growth of families week after week.'

6.8.6 Following ABCD Guides Training in the Autumn of 2021, Redditch now has 3 active ABCD Guides, 2 based at the District Council and one within The Starting Well Partnership. These individuals work closely with the Community Builders. They also work alongside organisations to support the adoption of ABCD practice across the district. Contributing to this a joint Bromsgrove and Redditch ABCD Learning network has been established with the remit of supporting and embedding ABCD learning and practice.

6.8.7 Countywide ABCD Workshops continue to be delivered and anyone with an interest in ABCD is encouraged to attend. All community builders, relevant portfolio holder, several Borough Council officers and the host of community builders have all attended but it's open to all.

6.9 Starting Well Partnership

6.9.1 Our free service supports parents of children and young people 0 to 19 years and facilitates a variety of evidence-based groups for parents. The groups give the opportunity to learn new strategies build their confidence and strengthen their family relationships.

6.9.2 During 2022 our Community Team held several events across the borough and reached 3,898 Redditch residents (parents and children). The Parenting Team facilitated 23 parenting programmes with 338 parents completing them. We had 12 volunteers actively working as peer supporters in our parenting groups and breastfeeding support groups as well as recruiting and training new volunteers during 2022.

6.10 Community Safety

6.10.1 The North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) brings together Safer Bromsgrove, Safer Redditch, and Safer Wyre Forest. The NWCSP delivers a range of community safety initiatives and works with agencies and communities to achieve the Partnership's vision of keeping "North Worcestershire a safer place to live, work and visit".

6.10.2 In support of national Hate Crime Awareness Week 2022, North Worcestershire Hate Incident Partnership hosted its annual Hate Crime Awareness Conference, returning to a face-to-face event. This hugely successful event included three high-profile guest speakers who captivated the audience in discussing their own experiences of hate crime:

- Azeem Rafiq, inspiring anti-racism campaigner and former professional cricketer
- Rt. Hon. Stuart Lawrence, coach, motivational speaker, and younger brother of Stephen Lawrence
- Naughty Boy, award-winning music producer, songwriter, and musician Shahid Khan, better known nationally and internationally by his stage name Naughty Boy

6.10.3 The Respect Programme covering Redditch and Bromsgrove, provides crime prevention and community safety awareness workshops as part of schools personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) lessons. Respect provides sessions on subjects such as recognising and reporting hate crime, understanding healthy relationships/recognising domestic abuse, the dangers of substance misuse and promoting respect and community responsibility. The programme also received 192 referrals for 1 to 1 support through its therapeutic mentoring programme. This academic year, the focus for the programme was to reintroduce face-to-face sessions following the end of Covid restrictions.

6.10.4 A new youth facility, opened in a renovated shop unit in the covered market area outside of Kingfisher Shopping Centre. The unit came about because of an innovative approach to securing partnership funding, and it was refurbished by local young people working with mentors who helped them to gain valuable trade skills, experience, and qualifications. Since opening, the W.I.S.E Centre has hosted a variety of youth activities and workshops for young people across the Borough.

6.11 Community Events and Activities

6.11.1 During 2022, we celebrated the diversity, culture, and heritage in our community and with our workforces. Many events returned, some for the first time since 2019, enabling people to gather. Important dates included Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, Polish Independence Day, Ukraine Independence Day, World Mental Health Day, LGBT+, Black History Month, International Women's Day and White Ribbon Day.

6.11.2 Arts in Redditch (AIR), in partnership with the council, continued to run the Pop-Up Gallery (PUG) at the Kingfisher Centre in May and November/December

2022. The Redditch community fully supported the popular PUG with the 2 events being successful. The PUG's support local artists to exhibit, network and sell their artwork locally. The PUGs are run by the AIR charity and manned by the artists exhibiting volunteering their time. This has had a positive effect on AIR and the artists involved, reducing isolation and loneliness, and bringing likeminded people together through community activity.

6.11.3 From April, the Reimagine Redditch consortium received £852,000 from the Arts Council England as part of its £38.3m investment in Creative People and Places over the next three years. The funding will give local communities in Redditch new opportunities to engage in a whole host of creative activities, which they will help to design and deliver. The aim of the programme, with its initial funding and the support of local partners, will provide the foundations for a long-term approach which ensures that creativity is embedded in the life of the town, reflecting the town's industrial heritage. Arts, culture, and creativity can make the places we live vibrant, exciting, and inspiring, benefiting our wellbeing and helping to boost local economies. The Reimagine Redditch Consortium is formed of:

- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
- Severn Arts, an independent arts charity
- Redditch Borough Council (RBC)
- Arts in Redditch (AIR), the local arts network
- Forthright Arts (trading name of Jestaminute Community Theatre CIC)

6.11.4 In July the Queen's Baton Relay visited Arrow Valley Park on its way to Birmingham, as a part of the Commonwealth Games. The Positivity Rocks community artwork, based in the grounds of the Visitor Centre, was the final destination with Lauren Mernagh (the inspiration behind the community artwork) being the last baton bearer. Lauren encouraged everyone during the first lockdown in Spring 2020 to paint stones and place them in the local park, to help people feel connected and not feel so isolated. This became a community and arts project, to create a memorial public artwork.

6.11.5 Arrow Valley Country Park was successful with a bid of £85,000 from the Government's 'Levelling Up' fund, to extend the play area, along with a new orchard of at least 25 Worcestershire fruit trees to be planted in a community event during the winter planting season.

6.11.6 Some other events and activities that supported people in our community included –

- "Reach Out Campaign" took place at Arrow Valley Park with local musicians teaming up with the NHS to promote young people's mental health.
- Green Fair and Lions Fun Day, a free annual event by a partnership of Redditch Borough Council and Redditch Lions, featuring the 37th Signal Regiment, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, and West Mercia Police

- England's largest History and Culture Festival. Residents were invited to open days and events around Redditch with several short talks, exhibitions, and children's activities.
- A range of health and exercise sessions delivered across the borough, many of which returned following Covid and are free.
- A range of summer free fun activities were delivered.
- Enhancing facilities at Morton Stanley Park with the opening of the Morton Stanley Café and toilets.
- Arrow Valley Countryside Park commemorated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The Redditch beacon was lit at the same time as 1500 other Jubilee beacons up and down the country and the Council working with partners and community organisations to put on a celebratory event with food, street entertainment, and music.
- A Service of Thanksgiving for Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for the Redditch community to come together to pay their respects.

6.11.6 Positive Activities funding in Redditch was successful in a bid for additional funding until March 2023, providing opportunities for young people to engage with various activities including educational, life skills, sport & physical activities, arts & crafts with different youth organisations. This provision targets young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in high areas of deprivation in Redditch and the funding helps to support voluntary and community sector groups across the borough, such as Your Ideas Youth and Community Project, What's Your Point Youth Group, Redditch Youth and Community Enterprise (RYCE), YMCA, PAZ (Positive Activity Zone), UP Foundation CIC, Redditch Self Defence and Redditch Wheels Project Skate Park to deliver activities and youth groups.

6.12 Community Grants and Redditch Community Lottery

6.12.1 The Voluntary & Community Sector Grant Funding Programme for 2022/2023 enabled VCS groups to bid for funding from £500 up to £10,000 to help with their core costs or to support them to deliver great community projects and activities. This year the Council ringfenced £10,000 of this funding to create a separate 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' pot. VCS groups could bid for between £500 to £5k to help them deliver specific projects to support those Redditch residents who have suffered from mental health and wellbeing issues or increased mental health and wellbeing issues as a direct result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Feedback on those who were successful is available on our [website](#).

6.12.2 A charity that supports bereaved young people received a £15,000 donation from recycling efforts at Redditch Crematorium. Touchstones, which supports bereaved young people in North East Worcestershire, received the money from Redditch Borough Council's crematorium where families may permit any metal left behind after their loved ones are cremated, such as jewellery or metal hips and limbs, to be recycled under a nationally recognised scheme.

6.12.3 Since its launch in January 2020, the Redditch Community Lottery (RCL) has raised over £30,000 for the local community. RCL will celebrate its three-year anniversary in January 2023 and since it was set up it has supported 34 good causes, with local groups signing up as part of a fun and effective way to raise funds for their valued services in the community. All good causes supported by the lottery will benefit Redditch Borough and its residents.

The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 4: *Develop and support a diverse workforce*

6.13 Employee Support

6.13.1 We have developed and begun implementing our new four-year Workforce Strategy, which “sets out the Council’s vision and aspirations for its workforce, both now and in the future. In doing so it recognises the importance of our staff as a resource central to our success in delivering our strategic purposes. The strategy comprises 3 strands:

- Workforce Planning & Talent Management
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing
- Engagement



6.13.2 The Council provides an employee benefits platform for staff. This includes access to an employee assistance programme (EAP) which is available to all staff and their immediate family members. The employee assistance programme covers everything from health and wellbeing, finances, caring for the elderly, concerns at work, bereavement support etc. Staff can use this to access advice and support on just about anything including counselling sessions. There is also more tailored support available on an individual basis through HR and Occupational Health and Phone a Friend.

The benefits platform provides staff with a range of benefits including access to discounts, our cycle to work scheme, lease car hire and purchased annual leave etc. We try to tailor the benefits platform to the needs of our staff and ensure we provide opportunities to make their salaries go further.

6.13.3 We have a dedicated Wellbeing section on our intranet, signposting staff to wellbeing support and various wellbeing resources. We have implemented a Corporate Learning & Development Programme, which includes specific training to support our wellbeing agenda for staff and managers. This includes menopause awareness sessions, training for managers around how to build their team’s resilience & mental wellbeing, and coaching & mentoring opportunities.

All employees have access to an online training platform that provides various training sessions and resources (including videos podcasts, activity sheets and knowledge checks) which cover a range of soft skills, management, and wellbeing topics.

6.13.4 With the move to agile working we have introduced a mandatory eLearning platform for Display Screen Equipment (DSE) self-assessments (endorsed by the HSE). This takes staff through a DSE assessment process and provides personalised feedback around issues identified which then provides an individual action plan.

6.13.6 Following the success of remote working during the pandemic, we have launched a new Agile working policy. We recognise the positive impact that agile working can have on employee wellbeing. The policy ensures the customer is central to all our activities and service delivery, whilst providing a greater level of flexibility for employees, as deemed appropriate for each service area.

6.13.7 Chief Executive Q and A sessions have continued to be delivered via Teams, every month, providing an opportunity to hear the latest news from the Chief Executive and Heads of Service, and ask questions. The sessions are recorded to enable those to catch up. This continues to have a good attendance from staff across the council and provides a way of sharing information and keeping in contact. In addition we continue with formal staff surveys and short, snapshot surveys, as appropriate.

6.13.8 As an authority we continue to promote the use of one-to-ones and appraisals to support employee wellbeing and to encourage open, two-way communication between managers and employees, within teams and across the wider organisation.

7 Next Steps

7.9 The Council will continue to monitor progress against the Equality Objectives set out in the Equality Strategy (2022-2026) and will report annually on overall progress.

7.2 The Council will explore options for senior officers to undertake Accelerating Inclusion through Allyship training via west Midlands Employers. This training covers allyship, belonging, bias, discrimination etc. Allyship is important because it is:

- A strategic mechanism to promote equity in the workplace
- A way to drive systemic improvements to workplace policies, practices, and culture
- Essential in creating inclusive workplaces that attract the best talent

7.3 The council will explore options for establishing a staff equality, diversity and inclusion group.