

Item: 9

Policy and Resources Committee –20 September 2022.

Equalities Outcomes and Progress Report.

Report by Corporate Director for Strategy, Performance and Business Solutions.

1. Purpose of Report

To present the Council's Equalities Outcomes and progress report for 2022.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That the Equalities Outcomes 2018-2022, approved by Council in October 2018, set out three key outcomes to help deliver on the Council's duties under equality legislation.

The Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.2.

The Equalities Outcomes and progress report 2022 for Orkney Islands Council, Education Authority and Orkney Islands Area Licensing Board, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, in order to obtain assurance that satisfactory progress has been made in relation to achieving the three key outcomes, in so far as they relate to the remit of the Council.

It is recommended:

2.3.

That the undernoted Equality Outcomes be extended for a further year, pending a full review in 2023 which will enable closer alignment with the organisational strategic planning and delivery of a new Council Plan:

- People in Orkney have the opportunity to fulfil their potential throughout life.
- Orkney Islands Council is an inclusive employer.
- People in Orkney have an equal opportunity to access and shape public services.

3. Equalities Outcomes and progress report

3.1.

In 2018 the Council published its Equality Outcomes and related action plan. The outcomes set out how equality and diversity are essential to how the Council operates both as an employer and as a service provider. The related action plan set out how the Council will deliver its Equality Outcomes 2018 to 2022 which are to ensure that:

- People in Orkney have the opportunity to fulfil their potential throughout life.
- Orkney Islands Council is an inclusive employer.
- People in Orkney have an equal opportunity to access and shape public services.

3.2.

The Equalities Outcomes and annual progress report, attached at Appendix 1, provides information on activity in relation to delivering the Equality Outcomes 2018-2022, demonstrating progress against the action plan.

3.3.

As work to deliver the Equality Outcomes has progressed, some of the work has now been integrated into every-day activities and where that is the case, it is noted as mainstreamed on the equality outcomes progress update section of the report at Appendix 1.

3.4.

It is recognised that, whilst progress has been made since the last report in 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic and the full review of the operating model for the Council and the resulting large-scale restructure has had an impact on the capacity to deliver planned progress in some areas.

3.5.

A proposed extension of 12 months will be utilised to progress those existing equality outcomes not fully achieved and to further build on those outcomes where good progress has already been made.

3.6.

The equality outcomes will be reviewed and re-set for the next reporting period in 2023, aligning the outcomes and their associated indicators, as far as appropriate, with those of other relevant plans including the newly developed Council Plan.

4. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and scrutiny and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

5. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

6. Legal Aspects

6.1.

The Equality Act 2010 imposes a general equality duty on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.2.

The general equality duty is supported by specific duties which are imposed by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (the Regulations). The key duties are:

- Report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty.
- Publish equality outcomes and report on progress.
- Assess and review policies and practices.
- Gather and use employee information.
- Publish gender pay gap information.
- Publish statements on equal pay.
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement.
- Publish in a manner that is accessible.

7. Contact Officers

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8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Equalities Outcomes and Progress Report 2022.

Equalities Outcomes and progress report

2022

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Introduction

Purpose

This report details progress that Orkney Islands Council, Education Services and Licensing Board have made on the delivery of the equality outcomes committed to in 2018.

This report sets out progress to date and identifies the work still to achieve under the agreed outcomes published in 2018. Commitment is made to use the forthcoming 12-month period to deliver on these actions under a one year extension of the current equality outcomes.

Insights from the COVID-19 pandemic and wider community engagement activities provides assurance that these ambitious equality outcomes set out in 2018 remain more relevant than ever.

The report complies with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to publish equality outcomes and report on progress.

Our commitment

We are committed to promoting equality, which means recognising that everyone has different needs and taking action to ensure that we are all able to participate in society. Our aim is that Orkney is a community where we all have the opportunity to fulfil our potential.

Orkney Islands Council is the public body responsible for all local government services in Orkney. We have an impact on many aspects of everyday life and our activities touch the lives of everyone living in our island community, from schools to the care of older people. Our Councillors meet regularly to make decisions about local services and about various aspects of life. These decisions are then implemented by our workforce. With equality at the heart of everything we do, we never forget that we are here to serve the public and have a big role to play in improving the quality of life enjoyed by people throughout the islands.

Equality outcomes progress

Orkney Islands Council's Equality Outcomes Action Plan published in 2018, explains how equality and diversity are essential to how we operate both as an employer and as a service provider.

It sets out our Equality Outcomes for 2018 – 2022 making a commitment to ensure that:

- People in Orkney have the opportunity to fulfil their potential throughout life.
- Orkney Islands Council is an inclusive employer.
- People in Orkney have an equal opportunity to access and shape public services.

Our equality outcomes help us to deliver on our duties under equality legislation. This report provides an update on our progress against the action plan that will deliver these outcomes.

We believe strongly that equality sits at the heart of everything we do – as an employer and as a service provider.

In 2018 we set an ambitious set of equality outcomes, drawing on local and national evidence as well as best practice examples to set out an action plan that will support delivery of these.

This is our third update on the progress we have made against our four-year equality outcomes. We are committed to ensuring that Orkney Islands Council is an organisation where our colleagues are treated with dignity and respect, building an inclusive culture that enables people to do their best.

Whilst we have made some progress since the last progress report in 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 has impacted the way in which many of our services are delivered and the ways in which many of our employees are required to work. There is much more still to do, and we need to maintain our momentum to continue to improve and to adapt to the ongoing challenges and inequalities that are being faced by many of our community members.

Recognition is given to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which local authorities have had to re-prioritise everything that they do. Over the past two years large-scale changes were introduced in order to adapt to meet the challenges of providing remote learning, services online and equipping our people to work from home, and

frequently pivoting in very short time periods to meet the unprecedented challenges presented by responding to COVID-19.

It is also recognised that during 2021 the organisation committed to a full review of its operating model resulting in a large-scale restructure. Delivery of this work has inevitably had an impact on the capacity to progress some of the actions in this plan, particularly those focused on delivery of Outcome 2.

We acknowledge that there is scope to build on the progress made to date. In recognition of this we have extended the existing equality outcomes for a further 12-months to focus and drive forward the delivery of actions in these areas.

A further review of the equality outcomes will be undertaken in 2023 and will enable alignment with the organisational strategic planning and delivery of a new Council Plan.

A more integrated approach to equality outcomes into strategic planning and performance frameworks further strengthen a mainstreaming approach to equalities and can improve progress in this area.

People in Orkney have the opportunity to fulfil their potential throughout life.

Carry out an audit of existing pathways from education into positive destinations and employment by protected characteristic.

Complete.

Working to the principles of No One Left Behind, the Orkney Local Employability Partnership (LEP) Plan coordinates employability provision for those who are seeking employment or looking to enter positive destinations including education or training, supporting them to gain fair and sustainable work. Key policy drivers which connect with the ambitious delivery priorities of No One Left Behind include:

- Tackling Child Poverty
- Addressing the Gender Pay Gap
- Closing the Disability Employment Gap
- Promoting and Embedding Fair Work
- Delivering the Young Person's Guarantee
- Delivering on The Promise.

Priority groups include those with disabilities or long-term health conditions, care experienced young people, individuals disengaged with education, employment or training, young parents, those with / or at risk of criminal convictions, low-income households, long term unemployed, those at risk of homelessness, low skilled or those in precarious work or underemployed.

The delivery of the recent Kickstart Scheme, a national programme to support people aged between 16 and 24 years old, on Universal Credit, at risk of long-term unemployment and who were work ready into paid work placements provided insight into the wider need for supported employment opportunities. This has led to recommendations to improve pathways into employment to address this gap for those who did not meet the specific eligibility criteria of the scheme but who would benefit significantly from supported employment opportunities.

This includes those who are:

- Unemployed young people not in receipt of Universal Credit.
- Aged 25 years plus and long term unemployed.
- Care experienced young people
- Individuals with a disability / learning disability.
- Lone parents.
- Individuals with low attainment qualifications.
- Individuals with limited or no work experience.

An early intervention approach to supported employment opportunities to a wider group of people is highly beneficial to those facing barriers into employment and will

likely have positive economic benefit supporting individuals into fair and sustained work.

Further development of the principles of the Kickstart scheme providing additionally funded 6 month supported work placements within the Council for a wider group of targeted people as priority groups under No One Left Behind is now underway.

The Orkney Local Employability partnership has reviewed the employability provision and has produced an overview guide to simplify the routes available for people in Orkney into employment. This is published on the Council website and widely promoted by a range of partners.

Whilst some progress has been made, consistency of data collection within the relevant workstreams remains a challenge. This work still needs to progress to develop a shared approach to collecting appropriate data including equalities data across the partnership and with the process for data collection to be formalised and agreed by the LEP.

Audit the existing modern apprenticeship scheme by gender and work with stakeholders to identify opportunities for increased promotion of gender balance in particular courses and schemes.

In progress.

Current data shows that there has been an overall decrease in Modern Apprenticeship starts over 2020/21 and 2021/22 in comparison to previous years.

2021/2022 Modern Apprenticeship starts in Orkney:

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
108	65	120	102	135	140	142	99	83

There has been an increase in starts by gender in 2021/22 with 20.75% of Modern Apprenticeship female starts in Orkney in comparison with 18.2% in 2020/21.

In 2021/22 Orkney Islands had the highest achievement rate (number of certificated leavers) in comparison to other local authorities at 81%. This was the third consecutive year that Orkney has had one of the highest achievement rates and was an improvement on 2020/21 at 80%. However, this is a decrease from the achievement rate of 95% in 2019/20 prior to the pandemic

As part of the Our People, Our Plan initiative the Council has made a commitment to create employability opportunities for more young people. The plan outlines 13 jobs identified as modern apprenticeships, trainee or graduate trainee opportunities across a range of professional disciplines.

The People Plan 2022-26, which replaces the previous HR Strategy, is focused on supporting the priority projects 1, 2 and 3 from Our People, Our Plan and the new Council operating model. It identifies that in growing our workforce we will provide valuable employment and training opportunities for our communities in Orkney.

The People Plan commits to develop specific pathways for young people helping them to achieve their ambitions within a supportive environment to secure sustainable employment opportunities either within the Council, with our partners, or our supply chain.

Work is outlined to further cement our partnership with Skills Development Scotland and other agencies, with plans to create an additional 50 apprenticeships or training opportunities over a 3 year period to help us meet the future workforce needs for Orkney, with a particular focus on ensuring that care experienced young people are offered opportunities that will support them to realise their potential.

This work will provide opportunities to progress delivery on this outcome over the forthcoming year.

The delivery of this action is closely linked to action 1 and methods of data collection continues to be developed and analysed in order to better inform actions to increase

promotion of gender balance in particular courses building on the established partnership approach. Work will continue to develop the Modern Apprenticeship programme to ensure that positions are advertised to all potential applicants, through events with employability partners, mainstream and social media advertising at attendance at school events.

Challenge gender stereotypes that influence education, training and career choices through inclusive communication and awareness raising opportunities including national awareness days.

In progress.

Progress in this area is closely linked with the first action and work continues in developing and embedding this theme in partnership through the Inclusion and Diversity sub-group of the LEP.

The No Wrong Path campaign continues to be well supported locally and remains important in highlighting that many people in interesting jobs don't necessarily take a straight, obvious or traditional path to get there.

Careers Week activities provide an opportunity to insights into the different pathways pupils can take into some of the careers available to them in Orkney.

Highlights of the Careers Week 2022 included games to increase exposure to a variety of different jobs, including many which pupils may not have considered to help them understand there is no wrong path into a chosen career.

An inspirational talk was delivered from a former pupil Corrine Sinclair who works with EMEC. Corrine spoke about her own career journey and encouraged the pupils to explore all options available to them, reminding them that even if they choose one career path or option out of school, they can always change path later in life.

Other inputs through careers week included activities with STEM Orkney to design and build a marble run and an online activity with Robert Gordon University to develop entrepreneurship and innovation skills.

Lunchtime question and answer sessions with NHS Orkney and building site visits to Orkney Builders' construction site offered further insight into careers in healthcare and construction.

International Women's Day 2022 provided further opportunity to showcase a number of women who have been involved with the work of Orkney Islands Council. Meredith MacBeth, who is a Historic Buildings Conservator spoke about her pathway to working with the Council and her experiences throughout her career and as a parent. Meredith provided words of encouragement and some advice to those looking to move into a similar line of work.

Orkney's Lord Lieutenant Elaine Grieve – the first woman in the role in Orkney, and the recently appointed Vice Lord Lieutenant, Dr Sarah Scarth were also interviewed. They both spoke about their personal experiences through their careers and offered some words of advice and inspiration to other women in relation to gender equality and stereotyping.

Plans are underway to deliver awareness sessions at the forthcoming Careers and Skills Fair in September. These sessions will aim to highlight to employers the added

value and business benefits of diversity and signpost them with additional support and information. The sessions will encourage employers to consider recruiting from a wider pool and to challenge common stereotypes around protected characteristics and will increase awareness on making reasonable adjustments to optimise the chances of success for under-represented groups.

Deliver actions relating to closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children in the Education Improvement Plan.

In progress.

Progress in this area is closely linked with the first action and work continues to develop and embed this theme with the Inclusion and Diversity sub-group of the LEP.

There is a considerable body of evidence which has emerged to date that generally shows that school building closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are likely to have had a negative effect on pupil progress and attainment. The literature has highlighted evidence of exacerbated impacts for pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds, pointing to increased inequality of educational attainment. Studies have further indicated that pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to experience a larger decline in learning compared to their more advantaged counterparts, with the suggestion that such increased inequality may persist overtime. (Closing poverty-related attainment gap report progress 2016-2021).

Inevitably, this has had a detrimental impact on the progress being made in this area. This disruption reinforces the continued need to focus on this work. A range of actions are well underway in response to COVID-19 to support education recovery and help close the attainment gap.

A key issue for children and families in some of the isles and rural parts of mainland Orkney is poor connectivity and lack of digital access, which has made remote learning challenging. The Education Service issued a survey for parents which indicated that one in three families in Orkney with school-age children were experiencing difficulties with digital access. With dedicated Scottish Government funding, the Education Service purchased and allocated 165 Chromebooks and 230 iPads and continue to provide more as resources become available.

Young people, staff and parents have worked incredibly hard to support learning both in school and at home. To provide equity and continuity of learning experiences, staff prepared and delivered both face-to-face lessons and virtual remote lessons.

Connectivity has been adopted as a top strategic priority and a Connectivity Delivery Group co-ordinates partnership action to overcome barriers to improvement.

Despite the challenges, there is evidence of systematic change in terms of culture with a focus on equity becoming more embedded and sustained in schools. A greater awareness and understanding of the barriers facing children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage is apparent and interventions are being implemented to meet the needs of children and young people.

The Orkney's Children's Services Plan 2021-23 contains a range of performance indicators which will enable partner agencies to better measure the collective progress towards the eight target outcomes of Getting it Right for Every Child framework.

In March 2021, the Good Parenting Plan 2020-2025 for the Education Service were updated and included the following outcomes:

- Compile an accurate and up to date list of care experienced children and young people (CECYP).
- Complete a tracker for school-attending CECYP across Orkney in relation to attainment and progress.
- Ensure CECYP transition into positive destinations when they leave school.

Significant progress has been made in relation to developing tracking and monitoring structures for the Broad General Education for Care Experienced Young People.

Next steps identified in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Recovery and Progress Report 2021-2022 include further support to Headteachers and their staff in identifying gaps using the tracking toolkit with FSM / CECYP as a measure and a focus on narrowing those gaps.

Ongoing priorities for the Education Service include:

- Early identification and support for pupils who intend to leave school at the end of S4 or S5.
- Development of tracking, monitoring and intervention programmes to ensure that learners receive timely support and to maximise the potential of all learners.
- Continued development and impact of the Pathway Planning group to support all young people who may not achieve or sustain a positive destination.

The Anti-Bullying Policy for our Children and Young People was launched in August 2018 and sets out a strategic approach to addressing bullying and provides clear definitions and guidance for schools and settings to review or develop local anti-bullying policies to address and monitor any incidences of bullying.

The majority of schools and settings have updated their local Anti-bullying policies and use SEEMIS management information system to record incidents of bullying.

All primary schools are implementing Jigsaw as a key resource for their health and wellbeing curriculum. Additional resources including those on relationships have supplemented this programme and help to develop good practice in tackling unwanted behaviours.

Experiences of bullying and harassment can be significantly detrimental the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Improvements in this area is a priority for schools and is also intrinsically linked to closing the attainment gap.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic added to the pressure that children and young people were already feeling in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Shared resources, expertise and plans were implemented for pupils, staff and communities during the reopening of schools.

The Education Service has a progressive programme for Health and Wellbeing across all primary schools in Orkney. The programme for secondary schools is being revised and developed with involvement from the Youth Forum who have also identified mental health and wellbeing as a top priority.

Particular needs have been identified around more resources for managing stress and mental health, knowing where to go for help, being able to self-refer to services or getting help to refer if preferred, and education around the LGBT+ community. The Youth Forum have also highlighted a need for better education around LGBT+ identities and issues, in order to eliminate stigma and misunderstanding of LGBT+ people in our community. It is recognised that LGBT+ young people can have a particularly difficult time in Orkney and may experience homophobic, biphobic and / or transphobic bullying, may feel excluded, disrespected and even unsafe.

Specific actions to address this are outlined in the Orkney Education Services Report and include the achievement of LGBT Charter Award by Junior High and Secondary Schools within year one of the delivery plan.

Further development work to improve overall health and wellbeing has included in school Health Zones providing drop in / groups sessions covering internet safety, healthy relationships, sexual health, mental health and wellbeing.

Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service provides information, advocacy and support to young people over the age of 13 affected by any form of sexual violence and the Connect Project hosts an eight-week course delivered by Orkney Rape and Sexual Assault Service on healthy relationships, consent and gender equality.

Further progress in this area will be reported in September 2023.

Orkney Islands Council is an inclusive employer.

Review of flexible working plan for ageing workforce and review of sickness absence process to be more inclusive of age-related conditions and mental health of older workers.

In progress.

Previous work has been undertaken to incorporate resources and services such as the Workplace Mental Health Support Service delivered by Remploy as part of the Access to Work programme, into our Sickness Absence Management process and training. The Workplace Mental Health Support Service is a free service that people in employment can access independently and is designed to support colleagues who have a mental health condition (diagnosed or undiagnosed) that has impacted their work.

Focus is now needed to deliver specific actions relating to this outcome. The newly developed People Plan 2022-2026 further strengthens emphasis on this action and sets out our positive response to the changing needs of our existing and future employees. Recognising the value of flexibility for employees across all generations the People Plan makes commitment to drive forward the work already underway to deliver flexible working opportunities that meet the needs of our employees.

Both the People Plan and the Pay Gap and Occupational Segregation Action Plan will support the delivery of this work and will include:

- Delivery of flexible working policies including homeworking / remote working.
- Developing inclusion passport to better support unpaid caring responsibilities (including adaptations for menopause).
- Offering mid-career reviews to all employees.
- Developing and promoting additional manager and employee guidance for supporting people with the menopause.
- Investment in occupational health services that promote wellbeing as well as support to those with ill-health.

HR System development has included the requirement for the reason for absence as mandatory in the reporting which is enabling greater consistency and accuracy in the statistics available. Improvements have also been made to the reporting functionality of these systems and will be rolled out over the forthcoming months. Baseline data will be established and will continue to help inform and prioritise the activities and interventions offered to improve flexibility and inclusion.

Work will continue in raising awareness and providing guidance to line managers to utilise the new reporting functions available to best support their teams and inform people management practices to develop best practice in this area.

Review Employee Survey responses by age to assess baseline evidence and to develop proactive age-inclusive communications, promotion and development opportunities.

In progress.

Any highlighted differences in survey data by age and gender are being fed into the ongoing work to develop the three key thematic areas identified following initial analysis of the overall survey results.

Age-inclusive actions will now be delivered through the People Plan 2022-2026 and through the Pay Gap and Occupational Segregation action plan.

Carry out regular employee surveys.

In progress.

There has been limited progress on this action due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however increased staff engagement has been a key focus through the Our People, Our Plan initiative and has included new approaches such as the creation of a Leadership Forum and Lunch and Learn sessions which provide routes for sharing of information, and feedback on priorities.

Actions relating to employee engagement will now be delivered through the People Plan 2022-2026, which in itself involved considerable engagement across Council services to understand better the people challenges we face. The Council has committed to adopting Investors in People, and regular surveys of our staff will be conducted in accordance with the accreditation requirements.

In addition to this is the development of Growth Groups which will aim to put the insight of staff at the forefront of development seeking to improve employee engagement and satisfaction. Four groups will be developed in the first instance to progress this work and will include a specific group on the employee experience.

Promotion of activities is continuing to increase awareness of mental good health and wellbeing across the organisation.

Significant work has been delivered in this area throughout the pandemic. The Council website was initially identified as the best means of sharing information relating to mental health and wellbeing for all employees, specifically in relation to dealing with the associated impact of COVID-19 and the restrictions during lockdown. A section of the COVID-19 information pages was developed to provide information and signposting on a variety of themes including:

- Resources for a mentally healthy workplace including links to iLearn courses on relaxation, dealing with stress and recognising stress.
- Information and resources from the Educational Psychology team ranging from more general guidance on supporting mental health and wellbeing, to comprehensive information for staff supporting vulnerable children, those working in the Hub and for teaching staff and other professionals supporting young people with school closure and the impacts of COVID-19.
- Wellbeing advice for working from home.
- Coronavirus and your wellbeing advice and guidance from Mind, the mental health charity.
- COVID-19 and your mental health resources produced by Caring for People, a task-force made up of public and voluntary organisations in Orkney to help people recover and build resilience in challenging times.
- Information and links to the Grampian Psychological Resilience Hub which was set up to directly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a virtual hub providing support by telephone for self-referral regarding mental health and wellbeing.

This information has been replicated on the Council Intranet with a focused section on Health and Wellbeing. It is acknowledged, however, that not all employees have access to the Intranet and so it is important to continue with alternative methods of delivery in this area.

Health and Wellbeing training sessions have continued to be delivered and over the past 12 months have included:

- Scottish Mental Health First Aid – 21 attendees.
- Mental Health Awareness for Managers – 20 attendees.
- Coping with Change for Managers – 12 attendees.
- Personal Stress Management – 10 attendees.
- Introduction to Coaching – 8 attendees.

Ongoing communications are provided to employees to signpost to resources online and to highlight other sessions including:

- Promotion of Mental Health Awareness Week (9-15 May 2022) seeking to inspire action to promote the message of good mental health for everyone. The focus for this campaign was tackling loneliness and provided advice, support and tips on how to cope with loneliness and how to help others to cope with loneliness.
- Targeted information and resources around specific days throughout the year including when clocks went back and in preparation for the Christmas period.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact on this action. During the lockdown period, many office-based jobs have been required to be delivered from home and the IT infrastructure, management practices and many work-related processes rapidly developed in order to accommodate this.

It is recognised that the pandemic has had a profound negative impact on Scotland's wellbeing, particularly in terms of health, the economy and fair work. This has brought further impacts on already marginalised communities and in many cases exacerbating inequalities such as an increasing reliance on technology, accelerated by the pandemic, can bring new opportunities as well as risks of excluding certain groups where technology is not as accessible.

The People Plan 2022-2026 makes a commitment to develop a clear integrated strategy setting out how we will exploit the full benefits of mobile and smart technology for the benefit of our employees which will be key to the delivery of this action.

People in Orkney have an equal opportunity to access and shape public services.

Further develop guidance for inclusive engagement and embed within the Council's Community Consultation and Engagement guide and in-house training.

Ongoing – move to mainstreaming.

The Council's Community Consultation and Engagement Policy was launched in 2019, bringing a greater focus on areas such as engaging with seldom heard groups, peripherality and island-proofing and the Fairer Scotland duty to better consider the impact of socio-economic deprivation on groups.

Training sessions have previously been provided by the Consultation and Engagement Officers Group with topics including consultation and engagement with young people, inclusive communications, making meetings accessible guide and mainstreaming participatory budgeting.

Orkney Matters – Your Place, Your Future has been a significant piece of engagement and consultation work delivered in partnership with the LEADER Local Action Group, the Council and Voluntary Action Orkney. It sought to hear what is important to communities about the place in which they live. Engagement began with a short online questionnaire with paper copies available in key areas across various local outlets. There was a significant focus on encouraging those less frequently heard through usual consultation exercises aiming to ensure inclusivity of all.

An innovative approach was adopted at the outset and as part of the consultation. Virtual Community meetings were held across all areas of Orkney, inviting Community Councils, Development Trusts and other community groups to participate alongside community members. The Council worked alongside the Pier Arts Centre, local artists, the Education team and schools to enable a six-week project using art as a way for young people to express how they feel about their community and their hopes for it. The Pier Arts Centre held workshops with local artists and groups in the community whose members may not usually share their views, such as Employability Orkney, Connect, Young Person's Guarantee, Orkney Blide Trust, Age Scotland (Orkney), LGBT+, Kirkwall Foodbank and Women's Aid, amongst others.

An exhibition was held in the Pier Arts Centre at the end of the project to showcase the artwork produced which also formed part of the consultation feedback to influence policies, projects and future funding themes going forward.

Findings from the consultation are being utilised to assess community priorities for funding streams and development planning. They are also being used to further inform a variety of other plans across the Council.

Insights from this innovative approach to inclusive consultation and engagement will now be used to further inform the ongoing development of best practice guidance and training.

Prior to an election, review and develop inclusive practices to support participation in the democratic process.

Ongoing – move to mainstreaming..

A review of resources and communications was undertaken in the lead up to the local elections in May 2022. Content for the OIC website was developed to improve and increase the information available to community members including general information, news posts, videos and signposting to better inform people on what to expect, how to vote and to explain the voting system changes.

All households were written to providing information on current registration to vote and information on postal voting and ongoing communications through a variety of channels were aimed at encouraging people to apply for postal voting if this would be the best option for them. Feedback was sought from a number of community groups in terms of increasing the accessibility to polling stations.

The turnout for the 2017 elections was 49.7% with one ward uncontested. The overall turnout for the 2022 elections was 48.83%. Nationally, turnout stood at 44.8%, lower than 2017 at 46.9%. It is noted that the Scottish-wide average doesn't reflect the wide range of turnout figures across the 32 local authorities which ranged between around 53% and 38%.

Work will now focus on the review of resources available nationally to continue to improve the inclusive participation in the democratic process and feedback following the most recent election will also be used to inform any future actions as business as usual.

Audit of existing elected office by protected characteristic and prior to an election, engage with stakeholders to develop an action plan to promote inclusion.

In progress.

In November 2019 Orkney Islands Council formally adopted the Family Leave Guidance for councils that had been endorsed by CoSLA ensuring that there is a consistent approach for those elected members who wished to take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption and to help remove the barriers that deter women and younger people for election.

The Council hosted online sessions in early February 2022 aimed at encouraging more women to stand for election to the Council in May 2022. Mind the Gap: Women for Council was delivered in partnership with Elect Her, a non-partisan organisation working to motivate, support and equip women in all their diversity to stand for political office.

The sessions were designed to provide a dedicated space to learn more about the process for standing for election and to discuss barriers to standing, with women who have experience of the process, and to support the development of an action plan for community members to get their name on the ballot paper. The sessions complemented the wider 'So You Want to Be a Councillor?' sessions that provided opportunities for those considering standing to find out more about the process and to hear from Councillors to get a first hand experience on what it is like to serve on the Council.

These sessions, along with additional support information and signposting were promoted through a wider social media campaign aimed at encouraging greater diversity of potential candidates looking to stand for the forthcoming elections.

International Women's Day saw a further opportunity to showcase some of the work that the Council's current Elected Members deliver on. Three of our Elected Members who are women gave their views and experiences of life in the Council Chamber and encouraged anyone to consider standing for election, no matter what their background. The resounding message being that Orkney needs a chamber that truly reflects our community and each and every one of us has something to contribute.

Local elections in May 2022, saw an increase in the gender diversity of candidates standing for election in comparison to elections in May 2017, with around 13% increase in female candidates. The election results also reflected greater diversity seeing an increase of around 9.5% in the gender split of Elected Members.

Since March 2022, Scottish Government officials have been collecting data through a non-mandatory survey of candidates and should be publishing the findings this autumn. The Scottish Government has committed to improving data collection in this area.

Work will continue over the next 12 months to utilise these published findings to better understand potential barriers into elected office for particular groups and will help to inform ongoing actions to address these barriers.

Improve the accessibility of services provided online through the delivery of the Customer Services Platform and Council Website redesign.

Ongoing – move to mainstreaming.

This action is closely linked to the delivery of the Customer Services Platform (CSP) project and the final work plan for the CSP has now been delivered. The CSP is providing more accessible information on the Council and its services with the ability to carry out transactions on a 24/7 basis. This provision runs alongside the option for non-digital alternatives to provide choice to customers and greater flexibility of accessibility.

In March 2020 the UK Government and Scottish Government ordered a nationwide lockdown as the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the UK and subsequently in-person services were suspended. This has driven local authorities to deliver services in very different ways and for most, almost entirely digitally and has helped to provide further insight into continuing inequalities in this area.

To mitigate digital exclusion, many mobile devices and digital skills support were provided to communities, however, poor connectivity and poor mobile coverage have remained significant challenges for delivery of some services across Orkney.

Organisational priorities outlined in Our People, Our Plan include improvement to connectivity with an emphasis on improving life for everyone in Orkney covering both digital and transport connectivity.

A refreshed Digital Strategy has been produced to focus work on three core strategies; Digital Local Government and Services being one of them. This programme of work sets out clear aims to ensure that all public services are designed through the lenses of isles proofing and inclusion more broadly which is key to the continuing improvement of accessibility to online services.

Further impact of the Digital Local Government and Services delivery plan and a summary of the improvements made to the accessibility of services provided online will be reported in September 2023.

Audit existing processes for recording personal information to ensure it is inclusive of gender identity requirements.

Ongoing – move to mainstreaming.

The Council recruitment processes have been reviewed following the revised Census 2021 data collection in this area and now mirrors these categories to improve recruitment reporting through My Job Scotland and to enable better benchmarking at a national level.

There has been wide-ranging work at a national level in this area of data collection. Recent research on equality data collection has been published in the Understanding Equality Data Collection in the Scottish Public Sector report, commissioned by the Scottish Government. This report reviews the barriers and challenges in relation to sex and gender. There is ongoing development work through a Scottish Government Working Group looking at the way data on sex and gender is collected and published with a view to guidance being provided for public bodies.

We remain committed to a full review of the collection of equalities data once further recommendations and guidance has been identified. This will ensure that we operate with a model of best practice, provide robust and consistent methods of equality data collection that can be adopted across the organisation, and will enable better benchmarking.

The British Sign Language (BSL) local plan was developed in partnership with OHAC and Orkney College UHI and was launched in October 2018.

The BSL Progress group meets on a monthly basis to progress the actions within this plan. The primary focus for this group has been centered around actions relating to children and young people and education. Resources have been purchased for each of the schools and training has been delivered around BSL.

Some of the key actions delivered include:

- BSL pendrive training resource provided to all schools.
- BSL and hearing support resources regularly provided to Nurseries.
- Delivery of short online BSL courses at Stromness Academy and Kirkwall Grammar School.
- Let's Sign established as the resource to be used in Orkney Schools and resources regularly updated and shared.
- Support Deaf Awareness Week to continue to raise awareness and set challenges on finger spelling.
- Class signing projects with signed stories and signed songs.
- S3 Wider Achievement BSL class delivered at Kirkwall Grammar School.
- A group of S3 KGS students have been awarded National 3 Introduction to BSL.
- Lunchtime informal group of signers meet at KGS.
- 10 people undertook a six-week introductory BSL course delivered by a Deaf BSL instructor.
- 6 people including one student at KGS have completed the Level One BSL course.

This ongoing work is creating an impact with one KGS pupil planning to study BSL as a career option. These BSL skills have also been put to the test when a group of six tourists who were all deaf visited the Italian Chapel where one of the Level One BSL course attendees was working. Having the recently acquired BSL skills meant that the group were able to benefit from a far more inclusive experience visiting one of Orkney's iconic tourist attractions.

The BSL Progress group will continue to engage with other areas of the organisation to offer support and guidance to support the delivery of the actions identified within the BSL Local Plan.

Consult with taxi and private hire car operators and the public to identify any unmet need in relation to wheelchair accessible vehicles and promote a list of wheelchair accessible vehicles on the Council website.

In progress.

In 2019, consultation was undertaken with taxi and private hire car operators, representatives of persons with disabilities and the public to identify any unmet need in relation to wheelchair accessible vehicles in Orkney.

Ten responses were received from the survey and nine of those were in favour of more Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles. In addition to the survey responses, feedback from an accessible travel event, hosted by Disability Equality Scotland and the Scottish Government's Accessible Travel Framework for Scotland, were considered when recommending options for approval.

It was agreed by the Licensing Committee that the Council would encourage operators to deploy increased numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles in their taxi and private hire fleets, and to advertise their WAVs more, without introducing formal requirements

It was agreed that this position would be reviewed over the following three years, with a report to Committee in 2023 detailing the outcome of the review and recommending any necessary amendments to the policy.

In light of amendments to the Equality Act 2010 which came into effect on 28 June 2022, the Council must now maintain and publish a list of designated wheelchair accessible vehicles which are operated as taxis or private hire cars. In terms of the Equality Act 2010 as amended, a driver of a designated WAV, which has been hired by or for a disabled person who is in a wheelchair or by another person who wishes to be accompanied by a disabled person who is in a wheelchair, has a number of duties. These include: to carry the passenger while in the wheelchair; if the passenger chooses to sit in a passenger seat, to carry the wheelchair; if the passenger has with them any mobility aids, to carry the mobility aids; to give the passenger such mobility assistance as is reasonably required; and not to make or propose to make any additional charge for complying with these duties.

There are currently two designated WAV private hire cars and one designated WAV taxi on the Council's list.

Meeting the specific duties of the Equality Act

Duty.	Requirements.	Frequency.	Last published.
Mainstreaming progress.	Publish a report on progress made to make the equality duty integral to the exercise of functions.	At least every two years.	September 2021.
Equality outcomes.	Publish a set of equality outcomes using available evidence relating to protected characteristics.	At least every four years.	This report September 2022.
Progress against equality outcomes.	Publish a report on the progress made to achieve the equality outcomes.	At least every two years.	This report September 2022.
Equality Impact Assessments.	Conduct equality impact assessments for new and revised policies, plans and processes and publish these.	Ongoing.	Ongoing on our website.
Gather and use employee information.	Gather information on staffing mix and recruitment and development against protected characteristics.	Annual.	April 2022.
Include employee information in mainstreaming report.	Include employee information and progress made in gathering and using this in mainstreaming report.	At least every two years.	April 2021.
Gender pay gap information.	Publish percentage difference between hourly pay rates for men and women.	At least every two years.	September 2021.
Statement on equal pay policy and occupational segregation.	Publish equal pay policy and analysis of employment by grade or role for men and women, disability and race.	At least every four years.	September 2021.