

Equality, **Diversity and** **Inclusion in** **Local Councils** **Baseline &** **Impact Study**

CASE STUDIES

DECEMBER. 2022

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Introduction

In 2022 an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Local Councils Baseline and Impact Study was commissioned by the Local Government Equality & Diversity Group of the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC).

The purpose of the study was to establish a quantitative and qualitative baseline on equality, diversity and inclusion in local government in Northern Ireland. The research was carried out between July-October 2022 by independent consultants Macaulay Associates.

One of the objectives of the research was to collate and analyse reports, evaluations and case studies of best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion, to provide a baseline of the impact this has had on communities, elected members and employees. This supplementary report to the main research report presents the examples of practice that were collated.

All 11 Councils shared examples of their best practice in equality and diversity:

- *Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's Equality/Disability Plans*
- *Ards and North Down Borough Council's Age Friendly Charter Plus*
- *Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's Mental Health, Disability & Autism Work and Councillor Development Charter Plus*
- *Belfast City Council's Diversity Action Planning*
- *Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Equality Forum & Diversity Champion*
- *Derry City and Strabane District Council's Councillor Development Charter Plus*
- *Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's 'Everyone Belongs' & 'From Around the World'*
- *Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council's Inclusion in Sports Services*
- *Mid & East Antrim Borough Council's Menopause Policy*
- *Mid Ulster District Council's Mid Ulster Disability Forum*
- *Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group & Ethnic Minority Support Centre*

It is notable that many of these examples have a strong focus on disability, which suggests that as a baseline, this is the category where most good practice has been developed to date.

To measure the impact on employees of these practices, and other examples of best practice that are developed for other categories, will require gathering complete data sets for ongoing monitoring.

To measure the impact on communities would require robust research and evaluation of practices against their intended objectives in relation to equality and diversity.

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's Equality/Disability Plans

Equality and Diversity Working Group

The Elected Member and Officer working group, meet quarterly to collectively progress the Equality Action Plan, Disability Action Plan and discuss improvements. Examples of actions are as follows:

Summer Scheme

The mainstream scheme is inclusive of all disabilities and medical conditions, where possible, with the exception of children who require specialised medical or personal care needs. In such cases these children are best suited to attend the Inclusive Summer Scheme where their personal care needs will be met.

The Accessibility and Customer Services Officer contacts the parents to establish any personal needs or adjustments which will help integrate the child into the scheme and make them feel safe and welcome.

Adjustments are agreed between both parties to ensure the best interests of the child. This is then compiled into a report for the summer scheme staff detailing the different adjustments and any information to be aware of. The summer scheme staff are briefed by the Summer Scheme Co-ordinator on this information.

The Council has successfully integrated 307 children with disabilities and 617 children with medical conditions into the summer scheme in the past 4 years.

The main disabilities are:

- *Autism*
- *ADHD*
- *Moderate Learning Disability*
- *Asperger's*
- *Dyslexia*
- *Delayed Development*

The main medical conditions are:

- *Asthma*
- *Chrohn's Disease*
- *Allergies*
- *Food Intolerances*
- *Diabetes*

Inclusive Summer Scheme

The Council works in partnership with the Mae Murray Foundation to plan and deliver an Inclusive Summer Scheme over 2 weeks during the summer. The scheme is carefully planned to ensure that the activities are inclusive of all the children attending. The activities include inclusive biking, sensory/ messy play, and arts and crafts. This has supported 50 children in the 2019 and 2022 schemes to attend and participate in the Inclusive Summer Schemes independently with their individual personal care and medical needs catered for.

Some of the parent comments in regards to the scheme:

“ Extremely helpful and caring towards all the children and admire them for their time and patience with them. So lovely to see how much they cared for them and wanted them to enjoy the experience.

It was fantastic that the leaders were Mae Murray staff mixed with other staff. They had a good knowledge of working with children with additional needs and were very welcoming.

“Just wanted to say a massive thank you for the inclusive summer scheme. We were so lucky our son managed to get a place at it. The activities were amazing, I couldn't have imagined more and the care from the guys was next to none. They were absolutely brilliant with our son. Such a great scheme.”



Funding for Special Educational Need (SEN) Schools to facilitate Summer Schemes

To further promote the participation of children with disabilities and medical conditions the Council has provided access to funding of up to £5000 for each of the special educational need (SEN) Schools in the Borough to enable them to provide Summer Schemes. This works well for children who have specific needs such as Autism where they strive for familiarity and for those with more severe physical needs who may require specialist equipment.



Leisure Facilities

All leisure facilities are inclusive of children and adults with a disability or medical condition. The Council has made a range of improvements to its services and facilities such as:

- *Achievement of the Autism Impact Award*
- *Achievement of JAM Card Friendly Status*
- *Introduction of Inclusive signage (braille and hidden disability)*
- *Refurbishments of reception areas*
- *Inclusive programming/ classes*
- *Pool Pods at Antrim Forum and Valley LC*
- *Addition of Changing Places facilities at Antrim Forum and Valley LC*
- *Disability Hubs at Valley LC/ V36 and Allen Park*
- *Inclusive Leisure Membership*
- *Quiet Hour at Leisure Centres*

Play Parks

Inclusive playground equipment allows children with disabilities and specific needs to be active side-by-side with their able bodied siblings or friends. This ensures inclusivity for all. All children have the same opportunities to play and aren't isolated due to a disability.

A number of parents of children with disabilities from the NI Parents for Change group contacted the Council about the provision of accessible play equipment throughout the Borough. In support of these requests, the Council installed the first wheelchair accessible swing in the Borough in 2018 at V36 Play Park in Newtownabbey where there is a Wheelchair Roundabout and Sensory Play elements. They then continued to extend this provision in the new play park at Antrim Loughshore, which features a Wheelchair Accessible Boat, Wheelchair Accessible Swing, and Roundabout.



They have further opened another fully accessible play park at Lilian Bland Park in Glengormley which boasts a wheelchair Accessible Plane, Wheelchair Accessible Swing and Wheelchair Accessible Roundabout. There are plans to extend the accessible play provision to other areas of the Borough through the Council's programme of works.

Council Events

Council events are specially tailored to be inclusive of the needs of all Borough residents. There are several ways of doing this:

- *Pre-Event information detailing car-parking arrangements and map of event*
- *Accessible viewing area for children and adults with a disability or anxiety*
- *Sign Language Provision*
- *Language Interpreter*
- *Accessible event layout*
- *Mobile Changing Places facility*
- *Quiet Room*
- *Sensory Room*
- *Specific Inclusive Events - Relaxed Environment/ Reduced Capacity*
- *Bespoke Staff Training*

BSL and ISL Deaf Charter

The Council has signed the British Deaf Association Deaf Charter, this sets out a commitment to become a Deaf Friendly Council. The Charter includes the pledges below;

- *Ensure all Council services are accessible to those who are Deaf,*
- *Commit to providing signing on social media videos to highlight important events and announcements within the Council area,*
- *Promote the introduction of Sign Courses for staff,*
- *Appoint a Deaf Champion within the Council,*
- *Commit to working with neighbouring Councils and Deaf organisations to promote Deaf awareness.*

White Ribbon Charter

To pledge support the Council has signed the White Ribbon NI Charter which stands to protect women from acts of violence.

Website, Alternative Formats, Council Literature Provision

The Council provides communications in formats accessible to everyone. This includes:

- *Browse aloud and Text help services*
- *Opportunity for any Council publication to be provided in alternative formats/ language upon request*
- *Borough Life residents magazine provided in alternative formats such as braille, daisy, large print and audio*
- *Language Line Telephone and Video Interpreting service (Including Sign Language Interpreting) rolled out to all Council facilities and services.*
- *Google Translate Language selection available*
- *Website intelligent user experiences to tailor information to a range of different Section 75 categories to meet the needs of all of Customers. Now includes dedicated accessibility section*
- *Evaluation of accessibility of Council's corporate website carried out and recommendations implemented*
- *Provision of accessibility guides of Council facilities and Borough shops/facilities in partnership with AccessAble*



Ards and North Down Borough Council's Age Friendly Charter Plus

Age friendly - Charter Plus



Ards and North Down's Age Friendly Strategy provides a framework to help make the borough a great place to grow older and an area in which everyone is valued and respected. It provides the structure for cross-sector co-operation, which is essential to improve the quality of life of our older population.



Background

In October 2017, Ards and North Down Borough Council wrote to the World Health Organisation setting out its intention for the borough to be recognised as Age Friendly. Prior to this, Ards and North Down's Strategic Community Planning Partnership had agreed that the ageing population was a significant issue that should be prioritised within the new Community Plan.

An Age Friendly Borough is one that considers the needs of all ages by helping to create positive outcomes for everyone. The ethos is that if you plan and consider the needs of older people, you are considering the needs of all ages. The vision of Ards and North Down's Age Friendly Programme is to make the area a great place to live and grow older.

As part of the Community Planning Structure an Age Friendly Alliance was established and a Strategy and Action Plan (2019-2022) produced. The Alliance is composed of statutory community planning partners, including appropriate Ards and North Down Borough Council Officers, alongside representatives of the Community and Voluntary Sector. The Council's Age Friendly (or Older People's) Champions are also members of the Alliance.

Evidence

Within the Age Friendly Strategy and Action plan, evidence on population demographics and other official statistics were used to demonstrate need.

Since Covid-19, three Big Conversation Panel surveys took place alongside a South Eastern Area PHA funded survey across three neighbouring Council areas, the later of these surveys focusing solely on older people and their needs. The Big Conversation Panel surveys provided evidence that social isolation, loneliness, and emotional wellbeing have all been negatively affected as a direct result of the pandemic. The continued need to encourage responsible behaviour, in response to the ongoing pandemic, limits the ability of the Age Friendly Alliance to be overly pro-active in increasing the opportunities for people to interact with each other. Care is needed for the re-establishment of social opportunities. As this was the original focus of Elected Member involvement in helping to progress the Age Friendly aspirations, a revised programme was required. Elected Members could take a broader approach to creating a great place for people to grow older.

The Older Person's Survey identified the following issues in Ards and North Down:

- *Problems with communication and knowing who to contact. Over a third of respondents felt that they do not have the necessary information to make decisions. They also don't know how to find out what is happening or where to get support from.*
- *Being included in decisions that affect them. Many of the respondents felt that this was the first time they had been asked their opinion and they don't feel that their opinion is valued.*
- *Demonstrating listening and acting on input to help demonstrate the value of Civic Participation*

Proposed activities for Elected Members

Achieving Charter Plus will require evidence to be gathered that demonstrates Elected Members have fully participated in, and promoted, activities that move Ards and North Down towards Age Friendly Communities.

Evidence	Action	Elected Member Involvement	Outcome
People don't know what support is available for them and don't know what help they are entitled to	Creation of a Directory of Older People's Services (Physical and Online) Online version updated annually; physical version revisited every 4 years.	Workshop with Elected Members to gather feedback on information issues their constituents have and how this could be incorporated into a guide	Production of a physical guide to be distributed across the borough, empowerment of older people to access relevant support
Design and layout of public spaces does not always take account of the needs of older people, people with disabilities or mothers with prams.	Walking audit of Council maintained space such as parks to consider how people use and move about public spaces	Audit will include service users, Elected Members and Council Officers. All subject to Covid compliance.	Integration of generated ideas into the redesign of space and demonstration of authentic community engagement
People don't feel listened to or feel that they are asked for their opinion	Establish a mechanism to engage with citizens and use feedback to inform decision making.	Support the establishment of an Older Persons Council, agree ToRs and Elected Member involvement.	Decisions taken by Council have considered the needs, opinions and lived experiences of Citizens.

Big Age Friendly Guide

The Big Age Friendly Guide (formerly referred to as a directory) will help people, with limited digital access or capability, to understand where to find help across a huge variety of issues from health to social interactions. A workshop on the content of the guide was held with Elected Members and some of the topics they felt should be included in the guide were:

- *Mental health awareness and provisions across all age groups e.g. counselling*
- *Issues with the built environment e.g. streetlights*
- *Financial support e.g. information on benefits available to them*
- *Fear of becoming a victim of crime e.g. phone and online scams*
- *Home safety and maintenance e.g. issues with neighbours*
- *Public transport support*
- *Social isolation amongst all age groups, exasperated by lockdown regulations*

Elected Members were also asked about Council specific information should be included. They put forward requests for the following:

- *Information on Elected Members, including their role and responsibilities*
- *Information on waste disposal including recycling and assisted bin lifting scheme*
- *Information on local leisure facilities and their affordable memberships*
- *Information on local social clubs to improve resident's mental well-being and address loneliness*
- *Information on environmental health, for example, contact numbers for pest control and anti-social behaviour issues*
- *Information on what services are/are not provided by Council*
- *Information on who to contact if you lose water/electricity/gas*
- *Information on who to contact regarding issues with physical access e.g. narrow pavements, ramps etc.*

Elected Members were asked what information about others (non-Council) should be included within the guide. They put forward the following:

- *Information on out of hours health services*
- *Information on career advice and apprenticeships for young people*
- *Information on employment opportunities for those seeking employment*
- *Information on volunteering opportunities with local charities*
- *Information on emergency services and who to contact in adverse weather conditions including Rivers Agency, Coast Guard and NI Water*

Finally they were asked about the design of the guide to endues it was accessible to a wide range of users. They put forward the following:

- *A content page early in the document is useful to make it easy for people to locate information*
- *Useful to have the directory arranged by issue rather than organisation*
- *Phone numbers should be prioritised, however, it is also important to have websites for people*
- *Need to consider who needs a hard copy and who will be able to use the online copy that will follow - can people phone Council to request one?*

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council's Mental Health, Disability & Autism Work

Performance Improvement Plan 2022/23

In early 2022, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council carried out a consultation to seek views on their draft performance improvement objectives for years 2022 to 2023, which included: We will improve the availability of more inclusive services for those with autism and their carers - 91% of respondents agreed we should do this.

The feedback was that Council services should be extended beyond those with autism and their carers to other groups with special needs; that support is needed for a full range of age groups from under 5 years of age to adults; there was an emphasis on the popularity of swimming and suggestions of various sports that would be appealing to those with autism including parent-children-together activities along with suggestions for improvements for facilities.

In response the Council highlighted its provision of a wide range of inclusive services, not only to assist those with autism and their carers but for service users with a range of disabilities. Information on a range of Inclusive Services is available from the Council's website at <https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk/inclusive-information/>

The Health and Recreation Department in partnership with Disability Sport NI and Live Active NI, offer a range of programmes across the Borough for example:

- *The Inclusive Sport and Leisure Programme works with children and adults with disabilities e.g. Wheelie Active Club, South Lake Disability Sports Club, Inclusive Gym and Inclusive Cycling Programmes.*
- *The Get Out, Get Active Programme is open to everyone and inclusive of people with a disability or lifelong health condition.*
- *The Council's Summer Schemes are offered to children with a range of disabilities including Autism*
 - i) All Stars is for children (referred through Southern Health and Social Care Trust) who require a high level of support.*
 - ii) The Disability Sport NI Scheme is an inclusive scheme suitable for children who can attend independently.*
 - iii) The Autism in Sport Programme is delivered three times a year in Dromore or Richhill Community Centre, details of this can be found on the GetActive ABC Facebook page.*
- *A sensory room in South Lake Leisure Centre.*
- *Sensory soft play sessions piloted in Gulliver's, Orchard Leisure Centre on Sundays.*
- *The Orchard Leisure Centre offers swimming sessions at the weekend to people with a disability. They are offered a lane to themselves with a carer if required.*

- *Play parks are designed to be inclusive providing play opportunities for children regardless of their needs and abilities.*
- *Concessionary charging is also available.*
- *Key front-line staff have been trained in autism awareness and this remains a priority.*
- *The use of the JAM Card is welcome in all Council facilities.*
- *The Armagh Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre and the Navan Centre, have been recognised with Autism Impact Awards for introducing autism-friendly improvements.*

Autism Friendly Working Group

The Council committed to improving the availability of more inclusive services for those with Autism and their carers and established an Autism Friendly Working Group. As well as representation from a number of Council departments there is representation from the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. This group is tasked with developing a programme of staff training and to consider other measures that will assist in making Council services more inclusive and the Borough more Autism Friendly. These measures are included in an Action Plan. The Market Place Theatre and Arts Centre and the Navan Centre, two of the biggest tourism facilities in the Council area, have been recognised with Autism NI Impact Awards, for introducing autism-friendly improvements.

Other examples of the Council's action on mental health, disability and autism include:

Mental Health Charter

The Council has developed an extensive programme for health and wellbeing. There is a Wellbeing Committee and Members from different departments are represented on this Committee. Mental Health Champions have been appointed and in 2021 the Council signed up to the Equality Commission's Mental Health Charter committing to put in place the five charter commitments and develop best practice in the workplace in relation to mental health and well-being.

AccessAble

The Council has agreed to fund the review of the detailed Access Guides on www.AccessAble.co.uk relating to Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon. Working with over 150 partners AccessAble produces Access Guides to places people want or need to visit, publishing them on the website and the AccessAble App. The Access Guides are for anyone with accessibility requirements. The annual review of surveyed venues was carried out in 2021 and the review report was produced in December 2021. Three new venue guides were approved for The South Lake Leisure Centre, The Watersports Centre and the Palace Demesne.

Councillor Development Charter Plus

As part of the Councillor Development Charter Plus a Council commits that it 'actively promotes democratic participation, publicises the role of Councillors as community leaders and proactively engages with under-represented groups.' In providing evidence for Charter Plus the Council highlighted:

- *An internal Equality and Diversity Audit to capture all equality and diversity work undertaken across Council.*
- *Hosting Silent Christmas initiatives for children with learning difficulties.*
- *Autism Friendly Borough initiatives (as described above) to ensure that those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have full access to services within the Borough and those with ASD and their families will feel welcome and supported.*
- *A dedicated inclusive section for the Council web-site was launched in World Autism Week.*
- *Inclusive Activities include Swimming lessons, Pool Quiet time, Pool Pods, Inclusive Cycling, Sensory Walks amongst others.*
- *Pre-visit guides for 9 Community Centres, 2 Town Halls, 8 Leisure/Recreation Centres and 4 Tourism Venues.*
- *Presentations on 'Civility in Public Life' and Social Media were hosted by NILGA for all Elected Members to attend.*
- *Provision of Lord Mayor's Tours of Council Chamber for school children on an annual basis.*
- *Live streaming of Council and Committee meetings introduced to make governance arrangements more accessible for citizens and under-represented groups.*

Belfast City Council's Diversity Action Planning

In Belfast City Council the Equality & Diversity Framework is aligned with the 'Belfast Agenda' to give the strategic and corporate context for equality, diversity and inclusion. In terms of the governance and structures in place to deliver the Equality and Diversity Framework, all strategies and action plans are approved via the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and then ratified at full Council.

The Diversity Actions Plans are developed by various groups of Elected Members, Officers and Staff:

- *An Equality and Diversity Strategic Group and an Equality and Diversity Operational Group.*
- *A Women's Steering Group which is responsible for the development and implementation of the Gender Action Plan. The Women's Steering Group has been in place since 2008. In 2002, 8% of Senior Management were female and by 2019 this had increased to 37.3%.*
- *A wider women's support network.*
- *An LGBT+ Staff support network (PROUD) which works with HR to develop and implement the LGBT+ action plan.*
- *A Disability staff support network (ABLE) that feeds into the development of the Disability Action Plan.*
- *A recently established Race Equality and Diversity Action Planning Group which is working on a Race/BME Action Plan.*

Progress with delivery is monitored/reported at the various meetings of each of the groups and collectively reported in the Councils' annual report to ECNI. As part of its Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Council is also delivering a number of employability outreach initiatives to the long term unemployed and those furthest away from the labour market including people with disabilities, women returners, ethnic minorities and young people not in education, employment or training etc. This includes ring fencing job opportunities and the provision of pre-recruitment training and support to help marginalised groups compete for job opportunities within the Council. The latest LGBT+ and Gender Diversity Action Plans (approved in June 2022 and ratified in July 2022) are shown below.

LGBT+ Action Plan 2021-2024

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Source and deliver LGBT+ inclusion and awareness training. Include a specific session designed for senior leaders every year. Source and deliver specific training in relation to Corp Procurement Team.
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Source and deliver awareness training sessions focused specifically on non-binary identities.
Increased awareness specifically around Trans and Bi identities.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Source and deliver awareness training sessions focused specifically on Trans and Bi identities.
Explicit commitment to LGBT+ inclusion.	<i>Training and Development.</i>	Review corporate induction process – explicit statements to LGBT+ inclusion through a presentation from SMT including the referencing of Pride etc.
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Develop Peer Mentoring and Reverse mentoring – Senior champion, Kate Bentley.
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Review Senior Management appraisal process to recognise Diversity and Inclusion leadership activity.
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Revise E&D training to ensure awareness of the impact or potential sanction of inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour on service users.

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions
Better mental health awareness.	<i>Training and Development</i>	Allocate 5 places each year on Mental Health First Aider course to Proud members and offer spaces to the wider organisation. Participate in LGBT+ Awareness Week each year.
Reducing any perceived/realised bias experienced by LGBT+ individuals.	<i>Training and development</i>	Source and offer unconscious bias training to relevant staff e.g. HR chairs/recruiters/ Customer Hub.
Inclusive policies with appropriate language.	<i>Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours</i>	Review any relevant existing policies in terms of language, terminology and gender neutrality and inclusion including an effective consultation mechanism for all staff.
Inclusive policies with appropriate language.	<i>Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours</i>	Revise TOR. Make explicit openness to all LGBT groups especially the most marginalised.
Guidance for employees and managers around Trans issues and identities. Increased awareness and understanding of issues affecting Trans individuals and service users. Better service delivery.	<i>Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours</i>	Produce FAQ document to supplement Gender Identity Guidance
Increase Proud Membership. Improve awareness and accessibility to Network. Senior leaders engaged in promoting equality and participation.	<i>Visibility and Network Growth</i>	Continue to use online and Intranet as channels to promote Proud activities and membership. Provide promotional materials e.g. pens, lanyards and reusable water bottles for example.

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions
<p>Awareness of BCC as an inclusive employer to potential new applicants at the application stage.</p> <p>Attract a wide and diverse range of applicants.</p>	<p><i>Visibility and Network Growth</i></p>	<p>Distribute relevant posts and revised application info to NI LGBT+ organisations for wider circulation and dissemination.</p>
<p>Collaborate with other Diversity Networks in BCC to promote the wider Diversity and Inclusion message.</p>	<p><i>Visibility and inclusive growth of all Networks</i></p>	<p>Joint event (online or physical) addressing a cross-sectional issue or event e.g. Disability or Race issues.</p>
<p>Fully participate in Belfast Pride demonstrating BCC as an inclusive service provider and employer in the community.</p> <p>Visible and practical support for local LGBT+ charity/organisation. Communication of positive impacts</p>	<p><i>Community engagement and visibility</i></p> <p><i>Community engagement and visibility</i></p>	<p>Participate in Belfast Pride including BCC vehicles and staff as part of the official parade. Internal comms and Interlink article to promote. Flying of LGBT+ flag on City Hall.</p> <p>Build participation with Network members and wider workforce.</p> <p>Hold a fundraiser internally to support LGBT+ organisations bake sale or sponsored event. Internal comms and Interlink piece to promote. Social media platforms. Feedback from charitable cause on how the fundraising is used to improve LGBT+ lives. Organise networks own Pride celebration i.e. family walk</p>

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions
<p>Increased awareness of issues specifically affecting Transgender community. Celebration of LGBT+ contributions.</p> <p>Visible and tangible support for Trans community.</p>	<p><i>Community engagement and visibility</i></p>	<p>Continue hosting the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance event in November each year. Use of City Hall for the event. Flying Trans flag to demonstrate support.</p> <p>Celebrate and promote Transgender Awareness Week internally and using external BCC social media to promote relevant local events and programmes.</p> <p>Celebrate Transgender Day of Visibility</p> <p>Light City Hall on Transgender Day of Visibility in March each year including flying the Trans flag. Internal comms and external social media.</p>
<p>Explore option for expansion of gender neutral facilities in BCC buildings.</p>	<p><i>Visible inclusivity in the workplace and as a service provider.</i></p>	<p>Determine if feasible to expand existing provision.</p> <p>Comms around APUs around Belfast as they are gender neutral and designed for users with disabilities (could cross with Disability Network).</p>
<p>Improved visibility, networking and learning.</p>	<p><i>Social Networking and community engagement.</i></p>	<p>Contribute to an event facilitated by local LGBT+ service providers and other Networks across NI.</p>
<p>Improved knowledge of workforce mobility and demographics.</p>	<p><i>Monitoring/ Organisational analysis</i></p>	<p>Carry out a voluntary monitoring exercise for all staff when feasible.</p>
<p>Attracting talent and diversity</p>	<p><i>Diversity and Inclusion</i></p>	<p>Ensure relevant information on benefits of working for Belfast City Council communicated effectively using appropriate channels.</p>
<p>Attracting talent and diversity</p>	<p><i>Diversity and Inclusion</i></p>	<p>Include non-binary option in BCC application forms.</p>

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions
Understand reasons employees (including LGBT+) depart the organisation.	<i>Monitoring/ Organisational analysis</i>	Develop an exit interview process
Position in national benchmarking exercise with peers which provide a framework for continuous improvement.	<i>Organisational analysis/Continuous Improvement</i>	Annual Membership in Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme Stonewall Equality Index - prepare for submission in Sept each year and participate in Stonewall Staff Survey using previous feedback to make improvements across each area.
Better engagement and visibility with LGBT+ and allies	<i>Community Engagement/ Communications</i>	Explore feasibility of a Proud Instagram page to share relevant info/events/messages
Better engagement and visibility with LGBT+ and allies	<i>Community Engagement/ Communications</i>	Ensure regular communications on Allies, how important they are, how to become an ally etc.
Understanding needs of LGBT+ community and service users.	<i>Clients, customers and service provision.</i>	Explore opportunities for collaboration with suppliers on Employability and Diversity issues i.e. Matrix, Bryson, OH/ EC.
Understanding needs of LGBT+ community and service users.	<i>Clients, customers and service provision.</i>	New Customer Hub – main customer interface. Provide both general awareness and specific and relevant training in relation to bias. Engage with hub in relation to monitoring service use and customer satisfaction and Service User Journey. Use BCC social media more to promote BCC as an inclusive service provider. E.g. Pride/ TDOR/TDOV/LGBT+ History month (profile local LGBT+ Champion).

Gender Action Plan 2021-2024

Action
Review Terms of reference /structure for Women's Network Group and develop a programme of events and activity.
Hold annual International Women's Day event/celebrations for staff.
Deliver a mentoring programme for staff of all genders.
Develop guidance for managers to welcome staff back from periods of extended leave, maternity, parental leave etc.
Encourage all staff to work together to understand and champion gender issues through joint events, communications, workshops, outreach programmes etc.
Review and delivery Women's Leadership Programme for Members and Officers to include a focus on resilience and in particular around social media.
Participate in NI Gender Diversity Charter assessment work towards attaining Silver level accreditation.
Review "on boarding " for senior staff and all staff to include leadership responsibilities around equality, diversity and inclusion and responsibilities of all staff.
Explore and challenge existing culture/perceptions around "presenteeism", flexible working at a senior level, long hours culture etc. and develop actions to help address/change culture.
Ensure effective promotion of BCC as an employer that values and supports equality and diversity (external website, job info to potential applicants, press releases, City Matters article etc.
Develop and agree Menopause guidance for staff.
Review frontline job opportunities including apprenticeships, and associated working arrangements and facilities, to make these opportunities more attractive to female applicants and promoting BCC role models deliver targeted employability outreach to get more women into work.
Retain ' platinum level' status of the Onus Domestic Violence Charter by continuing to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse issues, support staff experiencing domestic violence and abuse and ensure employees know what support is available.
Review, update and communicate maternity, paternity, and other parental/caring related guidance for staff and managers, including flexible working, as part of the review of the Work Life Balance Handbook.
Fund annual external International Women's Day event.
Recognise Transgender Remembrance Day and Transgender Day of Visibility.
Increase awareness and understanding of the gender spectrum including "non-binary".
Working with BCC staff networks and external groups, hold a workshop to explore and identify "intersectionality issues" where women experience multiple barriers and identify actions to address .
Hold an event for Women's Steering Group to engage with the Youth Forum and to identify opportunities for future collaboration gender issues.
Input into/support the Young Leadership Programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Other Communities e.g. via mentoring, hosting meetings, briefings etc.

Identify opportunities for targeted employability outreach, ring fencing, employment academies etc. for women furthest removed from the labour market including City Deal opportunities.
Working in partnership with Women in Business NI Belfast City Council have put in place a series of boot-camps and networking events for female entrepreneurs in 2022/23. The purpose of these activities are to engage female entrepreneurs in business start-up activity, helping them to develop ideas, and create networks to support them to start a businesses.
This will also include support for Women in Business annual conference.
Enterprise and Employability support for underrepresented groups – Belfast City Council programme of support to enable underrepresented groups (including females) to overcome the barriers to starting a business or accessing employment opportunities.
Establish link with Area Partnership Boards where relevant, and other stakeholder groups to consider particular needs of women wishing to start their own business.
Work with city partners to deliver a STEM employability event for girls.
As part of the ongoing baseline audit of all Council assets determine if Council assets are 'fit for purpose' in terms of the needs of all genders and that gender needs are looked at as part of the development of any new Council asset. In particular link in with the Clean, Green and Safe survey.
Support and raise awareness of the Raise your Voice Project to help address misogyny, sexual harassment and violence, in particular consider engagement with all stakeholders in particular, males.
As part of the ongoing area working /place shaping work and the Physical Investment Programme look at opportunities of how the needs of women can be better met across the city.
Work with City Partners to retain Onus Safe City status by funding training and awareness raising across the city. Explore the Safe Haven initiative and its potential link to Safe City activity.
Deliver a pilot to provide free period products for staff.
Deliver a pilot to provide free period products for the public in Council buildings and facilities.
Evaluate both pilots and assess costs for future provision.
Fund a pilot to make available reusable period products for staff.
Develop an Anti-Harassment Policy for all Council facilities and Council-run events (linking in with Safeguarding Policy and relevant training).

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Equality Forum & Diversity Champion

The Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Equality Forum is an independent advisory, scrutiny and consultative network on issues relating to age, disability, dependants, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, political opinion, gender and sexual orientation for the borough. It provides strategic support to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council in meeting its statutory responsibilities in regards to equality. The purpose of the equality forum is to develop and support a network of statutory and voluntary agencies, local community groups, and individual activists to discuss and take action on equality and diversity across the borough. The equality forum supports the elimination of all forms of unfair treatment and discrimination, and supports making Causeway Coast and Glens Borough a welcoming place for all.

The Equality Forum is underpinned by five values:

1. Working in partnership with the people who live and work in the Borough;
2. Making services open and accessible so that everyone is listened to and treated with respect;
3. Seeking innovative approaches in order to provide better services;
4. Promoting diversity and ensuring that we recognise and celebrate difference within the context of fairness and equality; and
5. Empowerment so everyone can 'take part and take pride' as active citizens.

The Equality Forum enables representatives of the Borough's equality and diversity groups to engage formally with the Council in order to make a meaningful contribution and add value to its work and the work of other public service providers serving the community.

The role of the Forum is to:

- *Provide a single point of contact on equality and diversity issues.*
- *Raise awareness and provide 'soft' information on local needs and priorities in regards to the different equality groups and other marginalised and disadvantaged communities.*
- *Serve as a mechanism for ongoing engagement between the Council, voluntary sector organisations, community groups and individual practitioners working on equality and diversity issues.*
- *Promote greater understanding of equality matters by sharing, discussing current best practices, policy and research.*
- *Advise on, and evaluate progress against, the Council's equality objectives.*
- *Consider, inform and advise on the development and implementation of Council strategies and projects, which are relevant to equality, to help ensure they meet the diverse needs of the borough and deliver equality outcomes.*
- *Facilitate effective partnership working to drive forward and deliver a shared and coherent vision for equality and supports making Causeway Coast and Glens Borough a welcoming place for all.*
- *The Equality Forum includes representatives from statutory, voluntary sector organisations, community groups and individual practitioners who have knowledge, information and expertise on equality issues and marginalised communities.*

The Council shared a series of examples of communications from their Diversity Champion, Cllr Cara McShane, from 2021.

March 2021

Council's Diversity Champion has reviewed the impacts of the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order following its 15th anniversary.

In a video message, Councillor Cara McShane praised the important and hard work of Council staff who have been involved in making Council buildings and services more accessible and inclusive for all users.

She said:

“ It's important the spotlight remains on both equality and inclusion. I was especially pleased to see events, activities and practices in our services which brought people of all abilities together; as the breaking down of societal attitudes is essential.

As Diversity Champion I would urge everyone to reflect on the barriers others face in their everyday lives, not due to their condition but due to environmental barriers and help to make us all activists for equality.

“There are future opportunities for equality and inclusion. All of us can make a difference; small drops can start a ripple, which can lead to a wave of equality for all.”

October 2021

2020/21 Equality Update from Council's Diversity Champion Councillor Cara McShane

Over the last financial year we've dealt with lots of uncertainty and fast paced change to deal with the pandemic. This resulted in a Council-wide change to the way services are offered and how staff operate. This also means staff have had to develop more creative approaches to meet our equality goals within the 'new normal'.

What's been happening over the past year;

Priority 1 - Improved access to services and Improved digital communications

- A new Hub was set up to support citizens through the pandemic.
- Leisure Centres were repurposed as distribution centres.
- In addition 294 Covid response grants were award to voluntary and community organisations to support people who were adversely affected by the pandemic.
- 35,332 vulnerable people received access to food support through a combination of food parcels, food vouchers, hot meals, seasonal hampers, cooking equipment e.g. slow cookers this included older people, young people and carers.
- The Community Fridges within the Borough continued to grow and were of vital importance during the pandemic.
- Provision of support and advice (electronically and via the telephone) to individuals and families regarding home safety, hazards, energy efficiency and fuel poverty.
- Partnerships with other bodies and organisations continued to grow during the reporting period and supported a cohesive response programme during the pandemic.
- Council's Sign Video provision was further promoted.
- 15 groups attended Information sessions on how to use digital meeting platforms to keep connected for older people groups and other isolated groups.
- A number of sports development initiatives and summer schemes took place virtually to support inclusion.
- A number of inclusive sports sessions took place at the Disability Hub (Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre) when the restrictions supported this.
- The Environmental Resource Officers ran a wide range of events, projects and activities (virtually, email and via the telephone).
- Museum Services created virtual programmes to address loneliness and isolation. As well as providing history 'goodie' bags to over 154 families.
- The Social Inclusion Grant Programme supported community groups to keep connected and take part in virtual activities.
- Events were moved to a virtual platform for Halloween and Christmas to support inclusion. Some of these events reached over 25,300 viewers.

Priority 2 - Raise awareness of equalities issues and tackle prejudices, both internally and externally

- On-going equality engagement process to improve staff and Elected Members understanding of equality and tackle prejudices via the Staff News.
- A number of Good Relations Diversity programmes covering a range of subjects to explore cultural diversity and identity, historical impacts on the present, encourage shared spaces, reduce hate crime, educate and raise awareness.
- A number of grants were provided to support joint working and community initiatives.

- The Mayor undertook a number of Mayoral engagements and recorded messages of support covering a diverse range of individuals and groups representing a number of the protected categories.
- As part of an on-going programme to improve the way we communicate and consult with residents an accessible communication guide was developed to improve internal and external communications.
- Online equality was improved through the development of virtual meeting aids and videos were developed to demonstrate new Leisure Centre layouts and processes. This supported users to keep safe and maintain social distancing.

Priority 3 - Attract, recruit, retain and progress a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates diversity and inclusion

- On-going initiatives to increase awareness and improve health and well-being.
- To support employees during this challenging time Council offered 5 days paid leave for employees with caring responsibilities and 55 individuals availed of this leave.
- On-going training and awareness sessions for staff regarding Dignity and Respect at work, mental well-being and inclusiveness.
- All jobs are advertised on the internet to attract the attention of the widest range of diverse applicants.

Priority 4 - Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect

- A wide range of corporate training and events took place to support employees and educate them regarding diversity and equality for all.
- Various policies were reviewed and updated to better support employees.

In addition spontaneous initiatives were developed to guide and support residents during the Covid lockdown and this will continue.

Generally, things have been moving in the right direction and I hope this continues next year.

December 2021

A new Breastfeeding Policy has been developed and adopted by Council. This Policy uses best practice guidance to support mothers who may wish to breastfeed in any of our facilities.

December 2021

Do you have an interest in Diversity and Equality or have you become the person in your section or department who people ask about equality and rural screenings? Then Employee Diversity Champion is the title for you!

We will meet once a quarter via Zoom to discuss any equality and diversity issues across Council. As Champion, you will bring any discussion points or issues to the meeting or raise any via emails in-between. In addition you may be contacted to provide your input with other area's equality and rural screenings and will be welcome to attend the Equality Forum if you are available.

Although unpaid, the experience, learning and networking will be invaluable, so go on, forward your name by email to the Policy Officer.

Derry and Strabane District Council's Elected Member Development Charter Assessments

Derry City and Strabane District Council successfully completed their Charter Plus Reassessment in November 2021. Under criteria 1 of the Councillor Development Charter and Charter Plus, 'There is a clear commitment to Councillor development support', Sub Criteria 1.4 requires evidence to demonstrate how the Council actively promotes democratic participation, publicises the roles of Councillors as community leaders and proactively engages with under-represented groups.

The requirements are always more robust for a Charter Plus accreditation and emphasis the engagement with under-represented groups, so in terms of the DC&S Charter Plus reassessment Derry City and Strabane evidenced meeting this criteria through:

- *The programme of activities included in its annual local democracy week delivery*
- *The in development Youth Council (Ministry of Youth) structure*
- *The proactive engagements Council has had with under-represented groups such as youth/minority groups / elderly/ minority groups / disabled groups via visits, presentations, consultations, employment placements and deputations to council.*

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council's Inclusion in Sports Services

Lisburn and Castlereagh's Community Action Plan outlines the Council's vision of an 'empowered, prosperous, healthy, safe and inclusive community' with Sports Services feeding into two strategic themes - Health and Wellbeing and Children and Young People. The service also supports the Council's Corporate Plan commitment to help citizens live healthier, more fulfilling and longer lives through its provision of Vitality membership, tailored activities, and focus on providing an inclusive service and expanding participation in health and fitness activities.

Vitality Membership

Vitality Household Membership runs across 7 sites allowing households access to leisure and fitness activities including gym, classes, swimming and ice skating. To allow affordable and inclusive access, concessionary rates are available for juniors, 1 adult households, full-time students and senior citizens, customers with a disability and customers in receipt of benefits.

Inclusivity

Identifying disadvantaged, under-represented or hard to reach users is an important aim of Sports Services in order to ensure an inclusive programme the service monitors activities offered, participation, feedback and demographics to help shape their provision.

Lagan Valley LeisurePlex and Dundonald International Ice Bowl host regular Disability and ASD friendly Leisure Pool and Indiana Land sessions with ASD Champions and ASD and JAM card trained staff at both facilities. The Ice Bowl has a dedicated sensory room which complements the ASD Indiana Land sessions. The LeisurePlex provide free access to a 25m competition pool and learner pool for customers who are 60 years+ and run an adult disability swim.

All Sports Services facilities offer a Buddy Card Scheme which allows a buddy/carer to attend an activity free of charge with a disabled user to provide support and assistance allowing easier participation in activities.

The Vitality Programme provides activities for customers of all ages such as parent and baby classes, children's classes, family classes, women only classes, classes for new or expectant mothers and classes aimed at customers aged 50 years+ including Active Ageing sessions.

Vitality Plus Household was launched in April 2022 incorporating leisure, fitness and Golf. With juniors and females under-represented in Golf, this membership encourages a wider demographic of users into the sport through easier access, family participation and more affordable access.

Sports Development

Sports Development in partnership with Disability Sport NI provide a Disability Hub at Lough Moss for disabled users and their family allowing access to sports wheelchairs, tandem bikes and sensory activity packs. The team also runs an annual Council-wide summer Sports Programme for children and adults encouraging participation in sports and activities such

as Gaelic Football, 50+ walking groups and Disability Kids Club as well as a number of special events including the Lisburn Half Marathon & Wheelchair race, 10K and Fun Run. The team also organise funding opportunities and coaching courses to help support and develop sports clubs and coaches and, in turn, encourage more participation in their sporting field.

Health Initiatives

Sports Services deliver a number of health initiatives including the Physical Activity Referral Scheme (PARS). The GP referral scheme provides 12 weeks free gym membership to participants allowing accessing to the gym, pool and tailored classes as well as a personalised exercise programme with a trained referral instructor based around health conditions and personal goals.

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council has a dedicated Macmillan Move More Coordinator delivering a programme of activities and a 12 week free membership. The initiative aims to help and support anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer or is in recovery to get active and remain active.

The service runs Active Ageing classes and Active Ageing mornings as well as walking groups to encourage adults aged 50 years+. These sessions provide both social and physical benefits for participants.

Cardiac Rehabilitation is also offered to improve health after recovering from a heart attack and other forms of heart surgery or disease, with tailored workouts and classes to aid recovery.

Supported by Sports Development, athletes are offered the opportunity of free access to gym and swimming pools to support their training and athletic journey by helping them to fulfil their strength and conditioning.

Testimonials

The following testimonies were received from Vitality Members who outlined the impact of the membership package on their lifestyle and family. Testimonies included both individual and household members.

Vitality Household Member Carolyn and her Family

***“We have been Vitality members for several years and love that there is something that we can all enjoy together as a family or individually.*”**

***“We have attended a variety of classes at Lagan Valley LeisurePlex, from Tabata, Bootcamp and Yoga to name but a few. The classes are always challenging but extremely fun. More recently, it has been great to take advantage of the parent and infant classes on offer, including circuits, baby massage and baby yoga. They have been a wonderful part of maternity leave and a great way to meet other mums and their babies!*”**

***“On top of that, our boys just love the football and basketball sessions, as well as Pickleball and of course the Leisure Pool!*”**

***“I would highly recommend Vitality membership as it has been a great way to get fit and to meet other like-minded people as well as spend time as a family in a very affordable way!”*”**

"Vitality Individual Member Jackie Dyson Lyttle

"I have been a Vitality member for a while now and mainly use the membership to get fit and feel good.

"I attend Lagan Valley LeisurePlex five days a week and participate in a number of classes, including, Kettlebells, Boxercise, Tabata, Circuits and Table Tennis, as well as use the gym and health suite.

"Not only has Vitality Membership helped me to improve my health and fitness but it has also made working out very affordable and great value for money. The staff are also great and very informative. I would definitely recommend Vitality membership to everyone!"



Jackie pictured working out in the gym as part of his individual Membership



The Gillard Family enjoying all aspects of their household membership, which includes the use of the gym, skating and bowling at Dundonald International Ice Bowl and the Leisure Pool at Lagan Valley LeisurePlex

The following table provides an overview of class feedback from Vitality Members who attended a recent class at one of the Sports Services Facilities.

Class Feedback
"The pace and variety within the session including the differentiation of the moves to support different levels of ability. Class leader is always gentle and helpful throughout. I have not been able to attend for a number of months due to ill health and Maura Smyth was as always, welcoming and I didn't feel embarrassed about returning. I felt wonderful afterwards! The next morning I was a whole new me!"
"Maura is the most incredible instructor. She makes you feel calm and at ease as soon as you walk through the door. She talks you through every stretch in detail so that you do not need to have your eyes on her at all times. I feel her classes have helped my own mental health and would love to see more of her yoga classes on offer on other evenings during the week."
"I enjoyed the different exercises and the variety in the class, with the use of the TRX, bands, step and weights. Andrea took the class and she was excellent, good stretching session at the end of class was also very good. She was very motivating and explained everything very well."
"Even after a busy week it's a joy to do this class. Marina just makes me laugh and the water activity just washes away any stresses Wish there were more of these classes available"
"I love that I can access a ballet based class, there are so few opportunities for non-dancers to do this. Much appreciated and a lovely teacher. A second class would be great."
"The trainers are fantastic. The classes are always varied but enjoy that they also provide targeted works outs."
"Loved the dance moves and the music. The teacher is easy to follow and v good."
"Fab class with Damien...great mix of exercise"
"Great class today (18/07/22 at 630) a really good workout and variation from Phil. Good music played at the class as some classes I attend there is not music played."
"Fabulous class with fabulous instructor Linda...very thorough and explains everything in detail."
"Great vibe as usual. Great class by Cindy."
"Very good class and brilliant teacher"
"Great class with Sam - very varied and he explains everything in detail."
"Very active class and great fun"
"Great workout. Instructor just fantastic So friendly."
"Fab class as usual with Damien...full on but very good plus great warm up and cool down at end. Great stretches."

“Great class with Phil, plenty of variety of exercises, great workout”
“Fabulous Pilates class with Linda.”
“The lady taking the class is amazing. She is a brilliant tutor.”
“Circuits was a really good work out, it was exhausting! Targeting all areas Pilates was extremely good with Linda she was exceptional in her explanation of how to do all the exercises. Both classes and leaders were great.”
“Really great enthusiastic instructors, good work out and length of class is just right.”
“Full on and lots of variety”
“Billy is great and really passionate about his sport. The class is fun and interactive and it’s great to see a class that focused on more than just “burning some calories”.
“Fabulous class with Linda. Great instructor and very explanatory.”
“New instructor William. He switched things up. Very different class but I love variety! Very good at explaining etc. Made use of the space and structures around Lough Moss. Great mohican too!”
“Great varied class with Sam.”
“Fabulous class. Damien very varied.”
“Fab class with Sam. Definitely specialises in kettlebells...great variety and all over body workout”
“Great class with Phil this morning, good variety of exercises and great workout!”
“Great class with Damien as usual”
“Another fabulous class with Damien. He puts so much effort in such a variation of exercises.”
“Attended Friday morning circuits. Fantastic to see a different range of equipment at this class. Box jumps Slam balls Power bags.”
“Great varied class with Carol.”
“TRX was fantastic. Hard workout. But a great calorie burn in today’s class Only managed to attend as I’m off work this week. Would love to see it on the evening timetable @530/6.”
“I LOVE Wednesday class HIIT it’s just my favourite. Goes in so quick and it’s always a challenge! And obviously Claire is fab.”
“Making new friends & having fun while getting fit.”
“Just want to relay the appreciation to Eamon who takes this class and shares his knowledge and expertise to the both young and older members. He makes it both fun and informative. Very worthwhile class.”

"Fantastic instructor, Lynda Gregg, great to have her back after her summer break. Best class the Leisureplex runs."

"Great exercise and good fun. Andrea is really good and easy to follow."

"Fabulous Pilates class tonight with Linda Such a good instructor - very informative and helpful"

"Andrea took the class. It was excellent. Lots of variety."

"This class was led by Simon. He was pleasant and humorous while ensuring that everyone present was gaining a good work out. It would be great if he could be assigned to take this class on a permanent basis as he has a good understanding of the demographic which is not always the case."

"Fabulous class with Linda."

"The instructor Damian incorporated spin TRX and kettlebells into the class, was really well thought out and music was really good."

"It's a fun way to get a really good workout. Maria is terrific and very motivating."

"Fab class with Carol."

"Circuits was a really good work out. It was exhausting! Targeting all areas Pilates was extremely good with Linda she was exceptional in her explanation of how to do all the exercises. Both classes and leaders were great."

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's Menopause Policy

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council has taken a range of steps to improve a number of support mechanisms available to staff who are facing adversity.

An example of this relates to Council's intention to introduce a Menopause Policy, due in part to a recognition of the shift in social attitudes towards the menopause in recent years and a greater understanding of the physical, emotional, and psychological impact on quality of life, relationships, and work as experienced by staff affected by menopause symptoms. Government research has shown that menopausal women are the fastest growing demographic in the workplace so there was a strong rationale to introduce a supportive policy.

In addition, Council's Trade Unions had also identified the need for this policy as Members were advising that the conversation needed to be opened up and necessary support introduced to support staff experiencing menopause symptoms.

In developing the policy, the team looked at best practice in other organisations, including other local authorities across the UK, the NHS and a range of other case studies. The Trade Unions were consulted on the policy which has been finalised and is now ready for final committee and Council approval.

The Head of HR & OD and his management team were keen to recognise the demographics of the workplace and identified that nearly a quarter of staff are female aged between 44 and 56, the typical age range of menopause transition. The team know that symptoms vary between women and they wanted to ensure that employees felt that they could approach their manager to ask for support. Menopause is not something that is taboo but the Council recognised that HR also needed to help managers start the conversation with their employees. As such they were able to work together with their Trade Union colleagues to introduce a progressive policy into the workplace that will support staff who are going through what is potentially a time of upheaval and change.

The policy includes education about the menopause including information on menopause symptoms and guidance for managers on how to support an employee during menopause including:

- *How to approach sensitive conversations,*
- *Carrying out risk assessments and accommodations,*
- *Managing performance proactively and positively.*

This support for managers is a very important part of the policy as colleagues can be impacted both directly and indirectly, with managers playing a key role in educating the staff population and offering appropriate support. Breaking the stigma by ensuring managers are informed and comfortable to discuss the menopause openly with their team will be key to its success. This awareness raising will also have the added benefit that employees can apply their knowledge to the women in their own personal lives, providing support in a more constructive way.

Upon implementation of the policy, awareness raising sessions will be provided to line managers and staff and further awareness raising communications will be circulated during the lifetime of the policy for line managers and staff

Feedback from employees at this initial stage of development has been positive. One employee stated:

“ As a Peri-menopausal employee I’ve been feeling much more tired, have frequent hot flushes and regular brain fog, I’m delighted MEA has introduced a Menopause policy as I feel able to talk more openly to all my colleagues and managers, both male and female about what I’m experiencing and am hopeful that they will have a better understanding of how this is affecting me in my work role. It’s a first step forward in supporting me at this challenging time of life. ”

Mid Ulster District Council's Disability Forum and Actions

Mid Ulster Disability Forum

Mid Ulster District Council works closely with the Mid Ulster Disability Forum (MUDF) to deliver equality and diversity. The Forum includes representatives from a range of organisations and groups who are working towards the inclusion of people with disabilities and their carers. The Forum covers the entire Mid Ulster Council area and adopts a pan disability approach to its work. The Council helped MUDF to develop the following strategy:

Aims

- *Providing a Forum and voice for those with disabilities and their carers to highlight local priority needs.*
- *Providing opportunities for those with disabilities to engage and socially integrate within the community.*
- *Consulting with local statutory, community and voluntary agencies to help address social isolation, discrimination and improve access to services for people with disabilities.*

Work

Representing Needs and Lobbying

Members represent and lobby for the needs of those affected by disability through a range of panels including: Town Centre Forums; Housing Forum; Policing and Community Safety Partnership and Community Planning Partnership to name a few. The Forum is also the named Equality Consultee for Mid Ulster District Council.

Awareness Raising and Sharing Information

The Forum meet on a monthly basis to promote the inclusion of disabled people in the area. Through its work it raises awareness of the needs of those affected by disability and signposts to and shares information and good practice.

Project Delivery

Examples of recent project delivery include: Access Mid Ulster Website; Youth Included Project and the Provision of Specialist Equipment to promote social inclusion e.g. The www.accessmidulster.com website provides access information on shops, leisure and commercial buildings in the main towns in Mid Ulster. This is an ongoing project which promotes accessible social and community infrastructure.

Intended Outcomes

Outcome 1 - The needs and issues of those affected by disability within the Mid Ulster Area are highlighted and addressed at a local level and beyond.

Outcome 2 - District wide awareness of disability issues and strong connections with decision makers.

Outcome 3 - Children and adults with disabilities will be less isolated and have access to more inclusive social opportunities.

Examples of best practice include:

Capital Build Projects

One example of best practice working with MUDF is the group's involvement in capital build projects. MUDF have continued to be involved at an early stage of the planning of Council's Public Realm Schemes. This practice was developed and implemented in 2017/18 in order to ensure that equality of opportunity continues to be integrated into the planning process at the earliest possible opportunity. Associated activities include 'walk through' sessions in order to point out aspects of the development that could be amended in order to make the towns/spaces more accessible and pointed out practical issues to the capital development team who facilitated the process. Drawings and plans for other projects were also provided to the group for comment/feedback. To date MUDF have been involved in numerous capital build projects such as Public Realm Schemes, upgrading parks, changing places installations, board walks and accessible accommodation (glamping pods).

One of the most notable projects was popular rural recreational site, Ballyronan Marina. MUDF provided advice to the Council which contributed to the opening of an accessible playground that includes wheelchair accessible and sensory play equipment. The Council has also provided a Changing Places facility on-site as well as an upgraded accessible toilet and baby changing facilities. This site also consists of a flat, firm and even surfaced accessible walkway with resting points which includes a Viewing Platform over Lough Neagh. The site will also offer on-water glamping pod facilities which are suitable for families. One of the glamping pods has been adapted to accommodate wheelchair users and is fully accessible.

In addition to supporting MUDF, other examples by Mid Ulster District Council include:

Audit of Hearing Support in Council Facilities

RNIB (then Action on Hearing Loss) also worked together with Council to carry out an audit of a number of Council facilities. This identified areas/locations where Council provision for service users with hearing loss could be improved upon. As a result of this joint working, a report was developed that informed the relevant heads of service who have responsibility for Council buildings. This directly resulted in funding being sought and awarded to provide an infra-red loop system at Ranfurly House in Dungannon. Similar systems were already available in Seamus Heaney Homeplace and the Burnavon, Cookstown.

Linking Generations NI

In 2019 Council hosted a Linking Generations NI event. It was attended by a range of organisations representing older people (e.g. AgeWell, Mid Ulster Seniors Network) and young people (local schools and colleges) and other community groups.

Connecting Carers Project

This project targeted full time carers of adults or children with disabilities, offering a pottery course and the opportunity to increase IT skills so participants could continue to engage with other attendees when the project ended.

Leisure Services

- *Quiet Soft Play - dedicated sessions for individuals with Neurodiversity needs. These sessions have reduced numbers and noise levels, which will be key in the enjoyment of the users during the session. A quiet room/area can be made available during these sessions.*

- *Quiet Leisure Swims - dedicated sessions for people with Neurodiversity needs. These sessions have reduced numbers and noise levels, which will be key in the enjoyment of the users during the session. A quiet room/area can be made available during these sessions.*
- *Concessionary Pricing, Concessionary membership applies a 50% discount off the full membership packages and activities for individuals who have a disability.*
- *Individuals can be assigned a concession membership to allow them to book online or at reception and for group activities for a club/organisation these can be made via a management booking with the discounts being applied.*

Autism Awareness

MUDC passed a motion in 2021 to ensure that Council explored the best ways to support people in District who have autism and their families and carers. This motion has been implemented to date via the following actions:

- An individual with Autism has been employed by the Council via the Lenard Cheshire Employment Programme for a period of 3 months with the aim of providing practical employment experience in the individuals area of third level education
- A sensory audit has been completed of Council's leisure services with recommendations of changes to be made to make the centres more accessible for individuals with autism. Suggestions have included making social stories etc available
- Employers for Disability provided Autism Awareness Training for 30 staff across two sessions
- The Council's Chief Officer and Equality Officer completed a CACHE Level 2 Awareness Course via Empower and has also joined the Northern Trust ASD Forum which meets quarterly and has access to a Members' Forum for comments/advice. MUDC has also contributed to the group's Action Plan for 2022/23
- Mid Ulster Disability Forum (Council's Disability Advisory Group) has increased membership of Autism Support Organisations and it now includes and works directly with Sunflower Support, Tobin Centre, Empower and Aspire as well as the EA Youth Included programme which welcomes all neuro-diverse conditions.
- Forest School sessions for children with autism is being explored by parks via a Forest School trainer who has a child with autism and she also volunteers with the Tobin Centre
- The Burnavon has achieved an Autism Impact Award
- Just a Minute Training (JAM Card) is being scheduled for front facing staff in the next few months. The initiative supports individuals with autism and their carers to access Council services while discreetly requesting support if it is required.
- Parks, OM Dark Skies and The Bridewell have all recently completed Autism Impact Award training and should be in receipt of their Autism Impact Award before the end of the summer. SHH and Ranfurly House are also exploring taking part in Autism Impact Award training
- The Council promoted Autism Awareness Week on social media platforms
- Leisure services also provide an Autism Activity Club for 6-12 years in 4 centres across the District

The following Age Friendly Projects have been delivered in partnership with Mid Ulster Loneliness Network and a local Men's Shed:

Chatty Benches

Following on from interest and the success of the first chatty bench a further 5 chatty benches have been identified in other popular areas throughout the Mid Ulster District Council estate. This brings the total number of chatty benches in the district to 8. The other areas include Ballysaggart Lough Dungannon, Iniscarn Forest Desertmartin, Portglenone Riverside Walk, Ballyronan Marina and The Roundlake, Fivemiletown. Mid Ulster Loneliness Network with the support of Mid Ulster District Council are working together to install further benches in new locations in 2022/23 and have approached local Men's Sheds to help with the construction of the benches.

Kindness PostBox

The Age Friendly Co-ordinator, together with Members of the Mid Ulster Loneliness Network Steering Group and a local Men's Shed group worked together to deliver the "kindness postbox" to a local primary school and a nursing home in the Mid Ulster area. The intergenerational initiative took place before Christmas 2021, the children from the primary school created letters and words of kindness for the residents of the nursing home to help tackle loneliness identified in older people. A further primary school and two nursing homes have taken part in the project.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council's 'Everyone Belongs' and 'From Around the World'

Everybody Belongs

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council launched a new innovative campaign that demonstrates its commitment to valuing each and every resident in the district. The #Everybody Belongs campaign was developed in line with the vision of the Council's Good Relations Programme. It strives to oppose racism, sectarianism and discrimination against any of its residents irrespective of background, identity or ethnicity and ensure that everyone feels they belong in a district that is welcoming, shared and inclusive.

The campaign was officially launched by the Chair of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Councillor Errol Thompson, who was the first citizen in the district to sign the Everybody Belongs pledge. This pledge of belonging clearly demonstrates that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council recognises that diversity and multiculturalism greatly enriches our society.

Everybody is encouraged to commit to the pledge and all public agencies, businesses and community organisations are invited to display the Everybody Belongs logo on their premises. This is an opportunity to strengthen and diversify community networks and promote greater involvement of people of all backgrounds and ethnicities in the civic and public life of Fermanagh and Omagh District.

Everybody Belongs Pledge

We pledge to oppose racism, sectarianism and discrimination against any people regardless of their background, identity or ethnicity. We condemn hate speech and oppose prejudice. We recognise that diversity and difference enrich us all and enrich this District.

The Everybody Belongs pledge is available for signing online by clicking [here](#).

Since the launch of the Everybody Belongs campaign in January 2022, 150 people have completed the pledge online and 326 Everybody Belongs Logo stickers have been distributed across the Council area. The Everybody Belongs Display cabinets are attracting good attention as well as the online Everybody Belongs campaign featuring different cultures on social media platforms.

'From Around the World; Celebrating Our Cultures'

The 'From Around the World; Celebrating Our Cultures' project celebrates the rich cultural diversity that exists within the district. It demonstrates the importance of the preservation and promotion of the various cultures both local and from all over the world. It also highlights the many similarities between the different cultures, showcasing that while we may differ, we are the same in many ways.

The project presents different cultures and traditions through participants' photographs, personal stories, cultural artefacts and voices in a virtual exhibition and a book. It encourages everyone to embrace diversity, learn new things and enjoy the beauty in everything.

From Around the World;

Celebrating Our Cultures' virtual exhibition

The virtual exhibition tour provides the opportunity to view the gallery exhibition from the comfort of your home. It is an enjoyable film, offering a walk through the gallery with an insightful narration and subtitles. It is also an excellent educational tool and cultural resource for schools, youth clubs, community groups and individuals.

'From Around the World;

Celebrating Our Cultures' book

The book is a written reflection of the gallery exhibition and its official launch. It presents fourteen different cultures, telling the stories of people who have made their home in or have strong connections to the district, and sharing their beautiful cultural artefacts. It is important to point out that these are not all the cultures present and represented in the Council area, but rather a sample of the great diversity locally. The Council Chairs regularly give the book to official visitors to the Council and in meetings elsewhere. Since April 2021, 1643 books have been distributed across the Council area and beyond.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council's Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group and Ethnic Minority Support Centre

Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group

Established in 2015 by the Chief Executive of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, the Councillors' Equality and Good Relations Reference Group is a facilitated discussion space. It serves as a 'barometer of opinion', playing a role in considering and discussing politically sensitive and contentious issues.

The Reference Group consists of the following:

- *Council Chairperson*
- *Council Deputy Chairperson*
- *One Councillor nominated from each of the following parties - Sinn Fein, SDLP, DUP, UUP, TUV, Alliance and 1 Independent member.*
- *Further nominees, as required, from the two largest political parties in line with their entitlement to hold a maximum of two membership positions.*
- *Council Chief Executive, Head of Corporate Policy and the Corporate Policy and Equality Officer*

The Equality and Good Relations Reference Group is independently facilitated, and meetings are held each quarter. The Reference Group operates under 'Chatham House Rules' meaning anyone who comes to a meeting is free to use information from the discussion but is not allowed to reveal the identity of those who make particular comments. It is designed to increase openness of discussion and a trusted environment to understand and resolve complex matters.

During the last seven years, issues discussed and debated with consensus reached have including the following:

1) Boundary signage

Agreement reached on the design, wording and the erection of bilingual (Irish and English) boundary signage for the new Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.

2) 2016 centenaries programme (Easter Rising / Battle of the Somme)

Council established a Decade of Centenaries Working Group, which led to Council agreeing an overall budget of up to £40,000 towards agreed civic initiatives to acknowledge and recognise the Centenaries of the Easter Rising and Battle of the Somme. This also included a specific financial assistance programme, lecture series managed by the Council's Museum officers, the hosting of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity Play Halfway House which was supported by the Good Relations section within Council.

3) Naming of Raymond McCreesh Park

The Reference Group considered and discussed ongoing matters related to the decision to retain the name of Raymond McCreesh Park, the Judicial Review and actions related to the disposal of the park.

4) Naming of facilities

Further to recommendations from the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland related to the naming of Raymond McCreesh Park, the Reference Group considered and developed a draft policy and guidelines on Naming of Council Facilities and agreed the scope of the policy also include requests regarding benches and plaques.

Additional policies and guidelines related to requests to plant trees and to locate artworks and sculptures on Council property were also developed.

5) Minority languages / support for Ulster Scots culture and Funding for minority communities

Elected Members agreed to develop a Minority Communities funding programme. The financial assistance programme has two specific themes:

Theme 1: Cultural Expression – this theme is an open call for projects/initiatives that positively promotes minority community culture, tradition, and identity.

Theme 2: Positively engaging minority communities – this theme is an open call for community engagement projects/initiatives to build positive relations, raise awareness and understanding, address perceptions and promote respect for minority communities.

6) 2018 centenaries programme and initiatives

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council supported a number of initiatives to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the events of 1918. This included seminars and lectures as well as providing financial assistance to the 'Killyleagh Remembers the Great War' group for a beacon which was part of a UK wide initiative entitled 'Beacon of Light' acknowledging the end of World War One. Another initiative supported was a cross community schools' event which acknowledged the 100th anniversary of the Suffrage movement in Ireland.

7) Culture Awareness to acknowledge Chinese New Year 2020

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council held events across the district to recognise the Chinese New Year. The events were assisted by the Confucius Institute and were attended by over 200 school children and business representatives.

8) Irish Language Strategy and funding

Members discussed and reached agreement on the positive actions and measures detailed within the Council's Irish Language Strategy. The Equality and Good Relations Reference Group also supported the introduction of an Irish Language Bursary Scheme and an Irish language Financial Assistance Programme.

The Reference Group is also a space to consider Notice of Motions before these are brought forward and discussed at full Council meetings

They have included:

1) Notice of Motion re Commemorating WW2 Veterans living in the district

A notice of motion to formally acknowledge surviving World War II veterans living in the district. Further to identifying four surviving veterans living in the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council commissioned four Silver Poppies for presentation to the veterans and families.

2) Notice of Motion - Northern Ireland 100 years

Council established and delivered a funding programme to mark the Northern Ireland centenary anniversary. Almost £45000 was allocated to the Financial Assistance call.

3) Notice of Motion - Irish Unity Working Group

Matters discussed included the proposed working group's role and purpose, how discussion at such a working group would be framed, whether in establishing the working group was Council taking a corporate position on said matter, and the legal competency of Council in relation to becoming directly involved in what is a constitutional change issue. Further to this, Council agreed a Terms of Reference and that a New Ireland Working Group be established.

The above examples are a snapshot of some of the potentially sensitive and contentious issues that were discussed with agreement reached by the Members of the Council's Equality and Good Relations Reference Group. The success of the Equality and Good Relations Reference Group is due to the commitment by the Elected Members to ensure that those in attendance are speaking freely as individuals and issues are discussed in confidence and without judgement.

Ethnic Minority Support Centre

Newry, Mourne and Down Ethnic Minority Support Centre provides free and confidential advice to Minority Ethnic communities living in the district. Information is available in a range of languages including Bulgarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian.

It offers support and information on issues such as rights, access to services, education, benefits, housing and signposting to relevant agencies.

The Centre aims to facilitate active participation of Minority Ethnic communities in the district's civic, cultural and political life and to increase community cohesion.

During the 2021-2022 financial year, the Ethnic Minority Support Centre had 2688 contacts (50% in person), with approximately 4000 phone calls taken. 75% of clients came from the Roma community. The remaining 25% were Bulgarian, Polish, Lithuanian migrants and Syrian refugees.

During this time, the Centre worked in a blended mode: front-line services were delivered over the telephone and through online contacts, but face-to-face appointments were also available.

Key elements of the Ethnic Minority Centre's work in the previous 12 months included:

1) Emergency funding from The Executive Office

£10,000 was secured from The Executive Office to help migrants in financial hardship.

2) The Centre made 213 interventions

Between September 2021 and March 2022, the centre distributed Lidl cards averaging at £46.90 spent per intervention.

The Roma families who had suffered hardship due to Covid19 and isolation benefited the most. Another category of beneficiaries were migrants who needed financial assistance due to the Home Office delays in processing their EU migration status.

3) The EU Settlement Scheme

The Ethnic Minority Centre was used for EU Registration as part of the EU Settlement Scheme. EU share codes are special codes for employers/doctors to prove EU citizens' right to live in Northern Ireland. Approximately 300 EU share codes were generated in the last financial year. To generate them, one must be computer literate and be able to write in English.

4) Ethnic Support/ Bolster Community/DFC Poverty Relief Fund and Homelessness prevention pilot

The Ethnic Minority Support Centre, through the link provided by the Bolster Community, Newry referred migrant families to the Poverty Relief Fund. Between Christmas and March 2022, the Centre conducted assessments and referred around 60 migrant families to receive heating oil and electricity. The Centre also took part in the pilot project preventing homelessness among migrant families and provided immediate assistance to 49 Roma families (79 adults and 81 children), at least 19 Eastern European families, and 15 individuals.

5) Christmas Appeal

The Centre distributed 50 food hampers and 100 toy packages among migrant families. Courtesy of the Polish Consulate in Belfast, the Centre provided £700 to 8 Polish families in need.

6) Ukraine Appeal

The Centre took part in the Ukraine Appeal on the first Saturday and Sunday of March 2022. Together with Chernobyl Aid Newry, it packed 200 big boxes of dry food, medicine, toiletries, nappies, sleeping bags, flasks and torches donated by people in Downpatrick.

Established in 2006 through the Challenge of Change programme and located in Newry Town Hall, the services available in the Centre have increased greatly over the years and above is a snapshot of some of the most recent initiatives undertaken.

The support service is also available in Downpatrick Civic Centre, Down Arts Centre, Housing Advice Centre, and Citizens Advice Newry.

