

EQUALITIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22



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FOREWORD

Rotherham Council is committed to achieving equality for all and a cohesive society built on tolerance and mutual respect, where no-one is left behind. Our approach to agreeing policy priorities is underpinned by this, with a focus on tackling inequalities running through everything that we do.

I am proud that equality considerations have influenced and been embedded in our council plan. As reflected in this report, engagement with diverse communities has directly influenced our approach, and we have continued to work closely with the voluntary, community and faith sectors to mitigate the worst inequality impacts from the pandemic.

Of particular note, has been the work of the Council in obtaining Real Living Wage accreditation. This demonstrates that the Council is committed to ensuring staff and those employed on council contracts will be paid the living wage or above. Equalities have been embedded in service plans and our 2022-25 council plan. A corporate equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) steering group was created in 2021 to take the lead and monitor our progress across the council, to drive our equalities agenda forward.

Since the production of last year's annual report, I am pleased that our strategic approach and commitment to equalities has continued to move forward. Our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2022-25 has been produced, setting out our commitment to further embed equalities throughout the Council, whilst working with partners, voluntary, community and faith organisations to challenge discrimination and promote good community relations.

The commitment to achieve “Excellent” under the equality framework for local government (EFLG) remains a priority, as we want to be among the best in the country in our approach to equalities. This will be a major milestone for the council and will help to drive better outcomes for local people.

The past two years have been a challenging time for our public services, partners and our communities. We are now seeing a significant rise in the cost of living. Many families across our borough are struggling, especially those already facing barriers. As a council, we will continue to put equality at the heart of what we do and work with partners and communities to ensure Rotherham is a fairer and more equal place for all.

I invite everyone to join us in celebrating our successes to date and in our positive agenda for equalities, diversity and inclusion. As we continue to navigate a Covid-recovery environment, now is a critical moment for us all to come and work together for the benefit of all communities.



Councillor Alam

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services,
Community Safety and Finance

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Alam'.

INTRODUCTION

The Council wants to see a borough that is based on social justice, where all residents have a good quality of life and can achieve their potential. This is underpinned by the recognition that individuals, families, and communities do not all have the same starting point or access to the same opportunities.

The past year has been a challenging year, as the council continues to recover from Covid-19 and deal with new challenges as living costs rise. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, with the most disadvantaged communities being hit the hardest, and has also uncovered latent vulnerability within communities. Throughout the response to the pandemic, equalities remained a priority for the council, and it will continue to be a priority as the borough moves into recovery.

Publishing an annual equality report is part of the Council's public sector equality duty. The purpose of this report is to highlight the progress made over the past twelve months on the equality agenda, as well as outlining next steps. The report covers key achievements and case studies from across the council, focusing on the four themes of the EFLG:

Understanding and working with our communities.

Leadership and organisational commitment.

Responsive services and customer care.

Diverse and engaged workforce.

The "Looking ahead" section sets out our priority work for the coming year under each of the new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy objectives.



ROTHERHAM CONTEXT

Rotherham is one of four metropolitan boroughs in South Yorkshire. The borough is divided into 25 wards covering a wide diversity of urban, suburban, and rural areas. Rotherham developed as a major industrial centre of coal mining and steel making, which have shaped the borough's character. Following the decline of traditional industries, regeneration has brought new opportunities to the area, including advanced manufacturing.



Rotherham's population has grown from 247,000 in 2000 to **264,984** in 2020. Population growth has resulted from natural increase (more births than deaths), net inward migration and longer life expectancy.

General demographic and socio-economic trends have included a growing and increasingly diverse population, with significant international migration, mainly from other EU countries. The population is ageing, which not only means more older people but also more disabled people. Inequalities persist for workless, disabled, and low paid people, who have been adversely affected by welfare reform since 2012. Health inequalities are also significant in Rotherham, where average healthy life expectancy in the borough is well below the national average.

The data available on population estimates indicate that the borough is becoming increasingly diverse. However, much of the data is becoming increasingly dated. The full data sets will be reviewed over the next year as information becomes available from the 2021 census, providing a new reliable set of baselines.

Rotherham is a diverse borough, and the ethnic profile continues to change. Based on the 2011 census, the proportion of residents from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities increased from 4.1 % in 2001 to 8.1 % in 2011. Ethnic diversity is most evident amongst young people, as 16 % of school age children were from a BAME background (DfE 2020). The Pakistani community is the second largest ethnic group in Rotherham after white British.

Rotherham's BAME population is very concentrated in the inner areas of the town whilst the outer areas were 96 % white British in 2011. 42 % of BAME residents live in areas that are amongst the 10 % most deprived in the country and for some groups the figure is higher. This compares with the borough average of 19.5 %.

Rotherham has 52,388 people aged 65 years plus or 19.8% of the population, above the national average of 18.4 % (2019). The population aged over 65 is projected to increase to 58,074 people by 2026, with the largest increase being in the number of people aged over 75.

Rotherham has a polarised geography of deprivation and affluence. The most deprived communities are concentrated in the central area whilst the most affluent areas are to the south, although the overall pattern is complex.

Rotherham is in the top 20% most deprived areas in England with 12,667 children living in “absolute poverty” (Department for Work and Pensions) in 2018/19 according to Department for Work and Pensions figures.

No local data is currently available for LGBT+, though census 2021 will provide this data. The Office for National Statistics (2018) estimate 2.7% of the UK population are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). 2.7% of Rotherham’s population equates to 7,155 residents being LGB. Stonewall estimate 1% of the UK population is transgender or non-binary and this would equate to an estimated 2,650 identifying as transgender or non-binary in Rotherham.

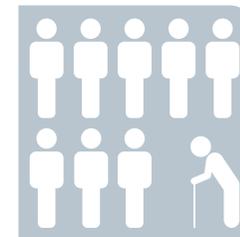
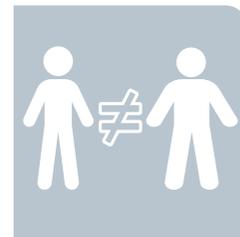
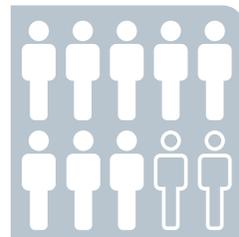
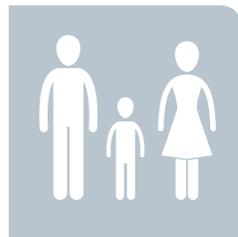
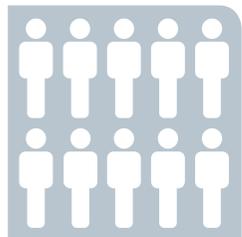
A continuing inequality is the pay gap between men and women, whereby male workers in Rotherham earn £13,409 more than female workers on average (median gross annual pay). Women’s pay in Rotherham is only 54.6% of men’s pay compared with 64.5% nationally. The pay gap for full-time workers is smaller at £9,705, but women still only earn 69.9% of male earnings, again lower than the

national average of 81.8%. Such differences in earnings also mean that pensions tend to be lower for women than men.

Rotherham has comparatively low skills, particularly at degree level, and struggles both to retain and attract graduates. Only 34.2% of working age people in Rotherham are educated to degree level or above, compared with 43.1% nationally.

Rotherham had 56,588 people, or 22% of the population, with a limiting long term health problem or disability in 2011, with 11.3% saying this limits their activity a lot, compared with the average of 8.3% nationally. Although there have been health improvements, health inequalities remain and in some cases are widening.

People in the most deprived parts of Rotherham experience poorer health and a higher mortality rate than residents living in the least deprived areas. Life expectancy in the borough is 77.9 years for males and 81.7 years for females, which is below the national averages. The gap between the most deprived 10% and least deprived 10% of Rotherham is 9.9 years for males and 9.5 years for females.



THE PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

The Equality Act 2010 places a general duty on the council and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to:

- **Eliminate discrimination**, harassment, victimisation, and any other prohibited conduct.
- **Advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not.
- **Foster good relations** between people.

The act reminds us that there can be no fair society if some groups and communities remain disadvantaged because of their legally protected characteristic. The stated protected characteristics are:

The equality duty requires the Council to take a proactive approach to embedding equality into everything we do. The council has a responsibility to ensure that suppliers also take a positive approach to equality. Furthermore, the duty encourages us to understand how different people will be affected by decisions.

In addition, the EFLG requires the council to consider socio-economic inequalities. This means ensuring that, when making strategic decisions about how functions are carried out and services delivered, there is a focus on reducing the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.



EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2022-2025

In 2021, the council set out plans to refresh its equality objectives and take into account the impact of Covid 19 on local people. This has been achieved through the development of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which has been informed by consultation with elected members, council officers, partners and local communities.

The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (EDI) 2022–2025 is a supporting document to the Council Plan 2022-2025 which has equalities, diversity and inclusion woven through it. The EDI strategy looks at what the Council has already committed to through an equalities lens and effectively maps out how the council aims to remove and reduce obstacles preventing some people from fully participating in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of the borough.

The strategy set out priority equality objectives with an alignment to the EFLG. The objectives inform an annual workplan set out in this annual report each year. As the strategy supports the Council Plan, many of the actions within the annual workplan are activities that the Council is already reporting on quarterly. The objectives are:

- Understanding, listening to and working with Rotherham's communities.
- Delivering accessible and responsive services that meet diverse needs.
- Providing leadership and organisation commitment to actively promote equalities.
- Ensuring a diverse, supported and engaged workforce.

The Aim For “Excellent”

Throughout the pandemic, equalities have remained high on the agenda and have been an integral part of both the Year Ahead Plan that ran from September 2020 to November 2021 and in the new Council Plan 2022-25. In 2020, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement led the Local Government Association (LGA) to further consult local authorities and officers nationwide to update the equality framework, making it more inclusive and relevant.

In late 2021, this consultation resulted in a revised equality framework with the LGA setting more challenging actions to reach “Excellent”. The council has embraced these changes and moved its target to reach “Excellent” to 2023, ensuring equality principles are not only embedded but that outcomes can be measured to reflect positive changes made. The Council's equality strategy aligns with the equality framework and supports our goal of reaching “Excellent”.

2021/2022

The Equalities Annual Report, published in June 2021 set out “next steps” for actions over the coming year, aligned to the modules of the EFLG. This report gives an overview of achievements since then with case studies that help to inform future policy and service developments.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

To reduce inequalities and challenge discrimination, it is essential that the council understands the needs and priorities of communities. This includes collecting and analysing equalities data, as well as engaging with local people, fostering good relations within communities, and supporting local people to participate in public life.

Key achievements in 2021/22 have included:

Establishing a more consistent approach to equalities data collection

Having a consistent approach to data collection is an integral part of “understanding and working with our communities”, so it is important to ensure that equalities monitoring is embedded as part of council systems and incorporated into the information we provide. Some examples of this include:

- Corporate consultation and engagement – all services are now using more in-depth equalities monitoring information (which includes questions covering all protected characteristics), as part of any consultation and engagement work undertaken.
- The joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) has been updated over the last year as part of an ongoing refresh. This data will be used to inform commissioning decisions and strategy development. In particular, the findings of the updated JSNA will inform the refresh of Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and the strategic approach to tackling health inequalities.

- Ward profiles have been updated in the past year to reflect the new ward boundaries. The profiles include demographic information, ethnicity, general health and disability information and lifestyle and health issues for each area. They are on the council website and available to members of the public.

Involving communities in the development of the new Council Plan 2022-2025

The new Council Plan sets out the strategic aims for the council, providing a foundation on which all council activities are based. To help inform this, a public consultation and engagement exercise took place from 9th August to 19th September 2021, seeking the views of residents and other local stakeholders.

The consultation used various engagement methods to capture residents’ views. This included:

- Focus groups with members of the public and staff from voluntary and community sector organisations, including Age UK, Rotherfed, Speakup, Rotherham Carers Forum, Victim Support and the Unity Centre. 48 people participated in total.
- Interaction sessions throughout the borough, including at Rotherham Show were held in September 2021.
- An online survey and postal survey, which included in-depth equalities questions covering the nine protected characteristics. There were 298 respondents in total online, and 52 postal survey responses were received.

Conclusion of the 5 year Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) programme

The CMF is a multi-agency programme involving the council, local schools, South Yorkshire Police, the NHS and local voluntary, faith and community sector organisations.

This programme has supported Rotherham Together Partnership's broader community cohesion strategy, Building Stronger Communities, which addresses a major policy priority for the borough. Although the ethnic minority population in Rotherham is well below the national average it has risen rapidly, with recent growth largely through migration from Eastern Europe. Rapid migration has placed demands on statutory and voluntary sector service provision. Underpinned by a partnership approach to community cohesion, the broad aims of the CMF programme were as follows:

- Maximise the positive impact on host communities and mitigate pressure on services.
- Improve relationships within communities (i.e., community cohesion).
- Improve relationships between communities and the council.
- Improve wellbeing (environmental, economic, social/family) for deprived communities.

Almost all outputs were delivered within timescales, with many targets exceeded (through creative use of resources). Highlights from the programme include:

- 6,968 people engaged in cohesion and community activities (target 3,000).
- 3,420 advice appointments (target 2,500).
- 548 adults gaining functional literacy skills (target 100).
- 565 members of the local community attending sessions to understand hate crime and how they can report it.
- 1,395 tenants supported to access help from statutory agencies appropriately (target 200).



CASE STUDY:

Active Regen CMF Programme

“Eric” is 21 years of age and lives with his mother and 5 younger siblings. Eric is originally from Ethiopia, in eastern Africa, and fled his homeland to escape the civil war, leaving behind his father and 14 other siblings. Since coming to the UK, Eric has learned English and entered the education system and is currently studying at college. In addition to his studies, Eric works at a fast-food chain to support his mother and family.

Eric was referred to the Active Regen CMF programme from the Yorkshire Sport Foundation. He successfully completed both the theory and practical elements of the community sports leadership award and participated in voluntary programmes at Maltby, Dinnington and Kiveton. Whilst completing his voluntary hours, Eric developed a strong relationship with the mentor team and was well liked by the children and support staff from the youth service and early help team. Eric engaged with the children and young people, taking the opportunity to share his experiences of life in Ethiopia and demonstrating how different life is in the UK. Active Regen observed that the children and young people were very interested in Eric’s experiences, listening intently and asking questions.

Eric gained the respect of the young people, which for a young Ethiopian man in a predominantly white British community is

commendable. He also helped to raise the aspirations of some of the young people that he worked with and helped to break down some of the cultural barriers that exist between the white British residents and migrants.

Since completing his training and voluntary hours, Active Regen have employed Eric on a casual coaching basis. He has now worked on various programmes in Rotherham, Sheffield and Doncaster.



CASE STUDY:

Easter Healthy Holidays 2022

The Holiday Activity and Food Programme (known locally as Rotherham healthy holidays) is funded by the Department for Education. The programme identified that school holidays can be pressure points for some families because of increased costs (such as food and childcare) and reduced incomes. This can lead to children from disadvantaged families being less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, more likely to experience ‘unhealthy holidays’ in terms of nutrition and physical health and more likely to experience social isolation.

Free holiday clubs are a response to this issue and evidence suggests that they can have a positive impact on children and young people. It also shows they work best when they provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities, when they offer more than just breakfast or lunch, and when they involve children (and parents) in designing

and evaluating the activities. This programme required that free holiday places be made available for all children and young people from foundation stage 2 to year 11 who are eligible for the following:

- Benefit related free school meals.
- Looked after children.
- Asylum Seekers.
- Elective Home Educated.
- All children who have a Social Care or Early Help plan.
- Children who attend Pupil Referral Unit or Alternative Education Provision.

The aims of the programme are that children and young people attending the clubs will:

- Eat more healthily.
- Be more active.
- Take part in engaging and enriching activities.
- Be safe and not isolated.
- Have greater knowledge of health and nutrition.

- Be more engaged with school and other services.
- Have greater knowledge and awareness of holiday club provision.

For Easter 2022, there were 31 providers running 50 programmes across the borough. Providers offered children and young people an array of activities from: arts & crafts, outdoor adventures, BMX biking, pottery, musical instruments, fitness classes, performing arts and many more activities.

All of the holiday clubs received fantastic feedback. There was feedback from schools stating that school refusers who attended holiday clubs have returned to school, there is a reduced attainment gap in learning when children have attended the clubs.

One parent advised how her child has loved mixing with new people at one of the open access groups and making new friends. Other comments included:

Children having **“Lots of fun”**, **“Food was yummy”**, **“I met lots of new friends”** and **“I hope it’s back on for Summer”**.



LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

The council has a vital role to play as a local leader in promoting equality across the borough. This means considering equality and diversity in decision making, communications, partnership working, priority setting and policy development.

Key achievements in 2021/22 have included:

The Prevention and Health Inequalities Strategy

In April 2022, Rotherham Council and its partners across health and care in Rotherham agreed and signed up to The Prevention and Health Inequalities Strategy and action plan. The strategy aims to reduce health inequalities – both between the Rotherham population and the England average, and within Rotherham itself.

To achieve this, the strategy commits to taking targeted action to support those living in the most deprived communities, as well as a number of other inclusion groups, including ethnic minority communities, people with learning disabilities, neurodiverse people and carers.

Delivery of the strategy will be led by partners across health and social care, with strategic oversight from Rotherham’s Place Board and Health & Wellbeing Board.

Formation of corporate EDI steering group

In 2021, the council established a corporate EDI steering group. The purpose of the group is to support the council with its commitment to integrate equality, diversity, and inclusion throughout the organisation. The group oversaw the refresh of the council’s Equality, Diversity and

Inclusion Strategy including aligning the equality objectives with the new Council Plan themes. Some of the group’s responsibilities include:

- Steering the delivery of the council’s aspirations and obligations in relation to equality and diversity.
- Raising awareness and reinforcing the message that equality and diversity is “everyone’s business” by helping embed equalities in all organisational activities.
- Finding practical solutions to barriers hindering the council’s EDI aspirations and obligations.
- Monitoring progress against the schedule of equality assessments.
- Influencing the council’s training plan for equalities.

The Corporate EDI Steering Group will drive project outcomes to achieve “Excellent” under the EFLG.

Equality training for elected members

Following the local government elections in May 2021, councillors were provided with training on “roles and responsibilities of conduct” which incorporated equalities. Specific equality training was carried out in June 2021, giving elected members an overview of the importance of equality, diversity and the role members have in ensuring this. Scrutiny members have engaged in the review of the council’s equality objectives and are working towards equalities playing a bigger role as part of the scrutiny agenda.

CASE STUDY:

Rotherham Youth Cabinet, Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge

Rotherham Youth Cabinet (RYC) is a group of young people aged 11 to 18 from across Rotherham, who work on campaigns and help make decisions which make a positive difference to the lives of young people in Rotherham.

On 16th of March 2022, RYC took up the Office of the Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge and used the opportunity to explore climate change. Takeover Challenge was originally launched in 2007 as a fun, imaginative and exciting activity to encourage organisations across England to open their doors to children and young people to take over adult roles.

When it returned for 2022, RYC called a special meeting to question council officers on climate change. They also used the session to explore actions taken by the council to reduce emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change. During the two-hour session, questions covered a wide range of topics, including electric vehicles, waste and recycling, nature and energy efficiency at public buildings and council properties.

RYC member Curtis Yip said:

"The Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge provides an excellent opportunity for young people to directly hold local climate leaders and actions to account. For years, climate change has become an issue where many people talk at young people, about young people, but very rarely talk with young people. By involving youth cabinet members in the local decision-making process [this] will politically democratise young constituents across Rotherham."



RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE

Ensuring that services are accessible to customers and residents, including those with protected characteristics, is a core part of the council's equality duty. Equalities and inclusivity are a key part of the planning and delivery of council services, as well as commissioning and procurement.

Key achievements in 2021/22 have included:

Delivering social value through commissioning and procurement

The council agreed a social value policy in October 2019. This policy made it a requirement to incorporate social value commitments in tender specifications, procurement processes and the letting of contracts. In 2021/22 over £1.5m of local economic commitments were delivered. This means that council contracts are supporting the promotion of local skills and employment, the protection and improvement of the local environment, the capacity of the voluntary and community sector, and local spend in Rotherham. Some examples include that:

- 31 local employees were hired or retained as a result of the Council's social value policy.
- 2,558 tonnes of CO2e will be saved (up from 4.04 tonnes of CO2e in 2020/21).
- £14k of charitable donations will be made to local community organisations and £64.4k of equipment/resources will be donated to voluntary, community and social enterprises.

The approach to social value directly interrelates with equality objectives by helping to address socio-economic inequalities, aiming to build local economic resilience.

In May 2022, the Council launched a commissioning toolkit, providing guidance to help commissioners, procurers, and providers embed the principles of social value into the council's processes in a proportionate way. The toolkit contains an equalities section helping officers understand equalities and how designing commissioning plans with equalities in mind can help tackle inequalities, support local communities, and create a fairer society.

Real Living Wage accreditation

In September 2021, the council was formally accredited as a Real Living Wage (RLW) employer by the Living Wage Foundation. This underlines the commitment to paying staff a fair wage, supporting the local economy, tackling economic inequality, and encouraging other local employers and partners to follow suit.

Through the RLW, the Council will ensure contractors pay employees working on council contracts the RLW. Further work will be carried out this year to identify contractors not paying RLW on Council contracts and supporting them to navigate the RLW journey.



Service plans embedding equalities

In 2022, council service plan templates were updated to include a specific equalities section. Services are asked to provide actions taken during the previous year to improve outcomes for different communities and protected characteristics. Services are required to set out learning captured from

equality impact assessments and how this has informed service design and delivery, work being conducted to embed equality, diversity and inclusion and actions taken to ensure future priorities take account of the journey too.

By embedding equalities in service plans, officers will be held accountable for delivering fair and equal service outcomes for all, which will be integral to achieving 'Excellent' status against the LGA framework.

CASE STUDY:

Target Housing rough sleeper initiative - Queen Street service

The target housing rough sleeper initiative, managed by Target Housing, is an 8-unit accommodation service, comprising a 7-bed emergency accommodation and assessment hub, with scope to provide 1 additional bed space as an interim emergency night bed for single people experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.

The number of local direct employees hired or retained is currently at 66.67% and all staff are paid above the living wage. When setting up the service, Target advertised through local channels, including Voluntary Action Rotherham, and a team of 3 people

were appointed, all of whom were Rotherham residents. One team member had been long-term unemployed and had experienced a period of homelessness prior to being appointed.

Following their experience and the support they received working on the team, the employees have since been successful in applying for another role within the organisation, supporting the Housing First provision (which is also commissioned by the council). Although there have been limitations in the ability to source meaningful work placements and pre-employment courses throughout the pandemic, Target have engaged service users in weekly sessions looking at work aspirations and options.

This client group includes people who are furthest from the jobs market, with complex needs and a history of rough sleeping.

By dedicating time to deliver this support, Target are able to give them the tools and resources to take their first steps into employment. Where applicable, some service users have enrolled onto ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses and one service user secured voluntary work as a cleaner for the hostel, widening his experience for his CV and future employment opportunities.



CASE STUDY:

Dementia café for BAME people

An example of the effective use of an equality analysis is the carers support worker and dementia café service. This café was developed in 2010 to support people experiencing the symptoms of dementia and their unpaid carers.

In September 2020, an equality analysis revealed elderly people with dementia from a BAME backgrounds were not using the dementia café or accessing other dementia support services across the borough. When the service was recommissioned in 2022, there was a specific ask for services to be tailored to reflect the diversity of Rotherham and to ensure inclusivity.

Adult social care required its future dementia support provider to:

- Build upon existing links with BAME organisations and communities to create culturally sensitive memory Cafés & focus on supporting BAME carers and People Living with Dementia.
- Develop links with the Rotherham Ethnic Community Alliance & explore how they can work in partnership to overcome barriers and make a positive difference for families living with Dementia in local BAME communities throughout Rotherham.
- Explore, identify & apply for funding opportunities that will enable further development around increasing dementia service profile within local BAME communities and supporting carers and people Living with dementia.

An action plan was created aiming to quantify the numbers of people from the BAME communities who have a

diagnosis of dementia and what services they access. Adult social care hoped this would assist in establishing if there were gaps in this type of support for the BAME cohort.

Early in this year care provider Making Space successfully entered into a grant agreement with the council for dementia support. Upon consultation with BAME communities and service users the provider set up specific ethnicity minority dementia café for BAME men and women. These cafés launched in January 2022 taking place at the Tassibee centre, Rotherham.



DIVERSE AND ENGAGED WORKFORCE

The Council wants to have a diverse workforce at all levels, which is confident and competent in working together for equitable service delivery. This includes a commitment to supporting the workforce, in terms of inclusive working practices, health and wellbeing support and learning and development around equalities.

Key achievements in 2021/22 have included:

Staff from protected characteristic groups engaging in the equality strategy consultation

As part of the equality strategy consultation, six focus groups for council staff were held throughout January and February 2022, covering groups on specific equality issues: BAME, women, disability or long-term health conditions, LGBT+, carers, and faith. Amongst these groups, the women's, BAME and LGBT+ groups were the most well-attended, while the faith group attracted the fewest participants.

Disability/long-term health conditions, women, faith and carers groups mainly raised internal and HR issues, while the BAME group discussed organisational issues about RMBC as an employer within the borough, and the LGBT+ group reflected on the situation of LGBT+ communities across Rotherham.

Internal issues raised by several of the groups covered the importance of flexibility of the online HR systems, the importance of managers' awareness and understanding of equality issues, improving staff engagement, and the accessibility of council facilities.

Issues covered by individual groups were the importance of support for carers and awareness of needs, questions around BAME representation

within the workforce and the importance of support and expertise on disability issues and staff needs.

These issues will be considered in the review of the corporate learning and development offer. They have also been fed back to the HR team. Several groups voiced an interest in improved staff engagement, such as through staff equality networks. These networks are to be established over the coming year.

Apprenticeships and careers fairs to promote council opportunities to local people, including to young people, and people with special educational needs and disabilities

Throughout the year, up to 154 apprentices worked across the council at any point in time, with a total of 63 apprentices appointed under the government's Kickstart scheme. Apprenticeships offer opportunities for local young people (16–17-year-olds), as well as continuous development for existing council staff.

The council has also organised the annual LEAF Careers' and Jobs' Fair, an annual event held in partnership with the Local Employment Advisory Forum (LEAF). This event has been virtual for the last 2 years due to the pandemic and is planned to return to an in-person event for 2022. Exhibitors are from businesses across different sectors and local colleges.

All events are inclusive, LEAF is open to the public and all secondary schools in Rotherham including special schools and SEND units. A quiet room is provided for students/visitors, who may be overcome by the event. This is to ensure that these visitors do attend LEAF and do not miss out on employment/education opportunities. There are also,

specialist exhibitors such as Autism Plus who specialise in supporting adults with autism and other Neurodiverse conditions to live meaningful lives and Landmarks Specialist College who provide specialist education

and employment opportunities to adults with learning disabilities. A variety of additional jobs and careers fairs were held over the last year to improve access to jobs and employment for local people.

CASE STUDY:

BAME staff network

The BAME Network was relaunched by BAME council staff in April 2021 to positively help the council's commitment to seeing a borough based on equality and social justice. The network is open to all BAME workers within the council through an online forum and the BAME Workers Steering Group meets quarterly.

The network and steering group aim to inform and influence change that promotes diversity and improves the working lives of BAME staff within the council. Crucially, they are led and developed by BAME workers who are passionate about promoting positive action to deliver a diverse and engaged workforce for the council.

The role of the network is to identify and discuss emerging issues that affect members of the

network as workers and as members of the community. The group has identified a number of key actions relating to workforce equalities data and ensuring the council's workforce mirrors the local population in all areas.

The network also aims to influence new and existing policy and practice and suggest new practices to improve employment opportunities and retention. This includes issues such as:

- Recruitment.
- Retention.
- Career progression.
- Training and development (coaching, mentoring, role models etc).
- Cultural/religious issues.
- Employment rights.

In addition, the network acts as a forum for consultation on issues affecting BAME workers and was involved in the consultation on the corporate equality strategy in January 2022. It also functions as a forum for mutual

advice and support and hopes to establish links with other staff representative groups once these are set up.

The Steering Group has developed an action plan which is monitored and updated as appropriate.

Further work is ongoing to ensure that the identified issues are brought before the appropriate body (i.e., relevant cabinet member, strategic leadership team, directorate management teams). It is further envisaged that the steering group will inform and link in with the corporate equalities group to ensure BAME workers are influencing the council at a strategic level.

The BAME Workers Steering Group worked with HR and Communications to promote Black History Month in 2021 through promoting events in Rotherham and positive case studies about people in Rotherham from BAME backgrounds.

LOOKING AHEAD

The looking ahead section gives an overview of what appears in the EDI action plan for 2022/2023, working towards the medium-term priorities set out in the EDI strategy. The action plan draws primarily from the Council's "Year Ahead Delivery Plan" to identify where equality outcomes are embedded in Council Plan priorities. Other actions work to embed standards that will assist in the journey to achieving "Excellent" under the EFLG.

Understanding, listening to and working with Rotherham's communities

The Council will listen to residents and service users through consultations and feedback to improve the evidence base that informs service delivery.

Actions include building stronger connections with representative groups and individuals around equalities along with refreshing the Council's consultation and engagement policy and toolkit. This will enhance the way that the Council engages with communities including those with protected characteristics, to ensure all voices are heard and there is an opportunity to provide lived experience.

There will continue to be development of joint partnership approaches and activity including the use of intelligence to tackle inequalities, promote equalities and good community relations that have a positive impact.

New ward plans will be produced with ward priorities informed by local communities and a review of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy to address inequalities at the local level and build community intelligence.

The Council will work with children and young people across the borough to co-design the Children's Capital of Culture 2025 programme and

agree a new universal Youth offer including the contributions of both the Council and voluntary sector partners.

The Rotherham Together Plan will be refreshed by the Rotherham Together Partnership with equalities embedded within the priorities for the borough.

Delivering accessible and responsive services that meet diverse needs

The Council will work with partners in collaboration to deliver the Council Plan commitments to tackle inequality and disadvantage.

This will involve delivery of actions in service plans to achieve equality outcomes from service provision. This will build good practice from case studies and review that inform further service developments.

The Council will be developing a Digital Inclusion Strategy and delivering public Wi-Fi to the new town centre library and markets building and investigating the feasibility of delivering Wi-Fi to other Council owned public spaces within the Town centre.

Improvements to the use of Equality Assessments will aid in service design and delivery. They will enable capturing challenges and opportunities at the very beginning, ensuring barriers are considered and mitigated where possible. Service plan templates will be developed to make equality objectives SMART and support partnership initiatives and partnership groups to have due regard to advancing equality and tackling inequality. This will involve active promotion and engagement on around the EDI strategy, objectives along with tools such as the Equality Assessment.

Providing leadership and organisational commitment to actively promote equalities

The Council will continue to work with a range of partners, including statutory bodies to address issues around community safety including addressing hate crime, whilst taking a zero-tolerance approach to prejudice and discrimination.

Actions will include refreshing the action plan that supports the Council's EDI Strategy on an annual basis and publishing an annual report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and acting upon it.

The Council, working with partners will develop interventions that seek to reduce hate crime and improve community safety by tackling harmful narratives.

Prevention action will take forward the Council's Black Lives Matter resolution, continuing to work with communities to understand the challenges faced.

There will be support for awareness and understanding across communities to promote good relations across the range of protected characteristics. Actions will also create a cultural programme including events, theatre, libraries, music and museums for residents aged 55+ to help with grief, mental wellbeing and physical conditioning.



Diversity will be celebrated with communities through a range of events, marking occasions that are of most importance to people.

There will be cultural and sporting events across Rotherham to appeal to a range of ages and backgrounds, including:

- Women's Euro 2022.
- Rotherham Show.
- Rotherham 10k.
- Summer reading challenge.
- Fun palaces.

Ensuring a diverse, supported and engaged workforce

The Council will continue to improve workplace equality and diversity through the delivery of the Workforce Plan 2022-2025.

There will be continuous review of each stage of the employee lifecycle (from initial recruitment and development to the point that people leave their role), to ensure it meets the needs of the whole workforce and with an renewed focus on underrepresented groups and those with particular needs.

The Council will act on feedback from the workforce and staff representation groups to undertake a review and refresh of the values and behaviours and develop a proposal for the future supporting new ways of working. There will be increased workforce engagement from underrepresented groups through the development of staff representation networks.

Regular Employee Opinion Surveys and polls will be undertaken with the whole workforce to better understand the issues that matter the most. There will be continual improvement of the Discover Wellbeing Programme which seeks to support individuals' health and wellbeing.

There will be evaluation of Learning and Development activity in relation to equality and diversity to ensure learning is fit for purpose, meets the Council's and learners' needs and can be implemented effectively into the workplace. A corporate Learning & Development (L&D) plan will be developed annually, that is based on identified needs and trends and which supports our EDI journey.

