

# EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

## CONSULTATION FINDINGS



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# I INTRODUCTION AND MAIN FINDINGS

In late 2021, Rotherham Council commenced the refresh of its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and its corporate equality objectives, as required by the Public Sector Equality Duty. This involved a 5-week public consultation period, including a survey and focus groups, to test and gather feedback on the proposed priorities and actions, and ensure these are the right ones for the council, the borough and its communities.

This report contains the methodology used, the engagement profile of respondents, main themes from the consultation, a quantitative analysis of survey results and finally a qualitative analysis of the findings from external and internal focus groups.

*The three proposed key priorities consulted on were:*

## 1 Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities

- Developing a network of equality champions both inside and outside of the council to be supporters and promoters of equality and inclusion
- Working together with partners, voluntary, community and faith organisations
- Publishing an annual report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and acting upon it
- Publishing the Gender Pay Gap report and plan to address the gap
- Sharing and presenting information in appropriate and accessible formats – available to all
- Leading by example and challenging what's wrong

## 2 Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services

- Making sure equalities are part of Council planning, including goods and services we buy

- Capturing equality issues and needs from the beginning
- Training staff to ensure they treat people with dignity
- Working together to tackle inequalities
- Supporting community-led social and economic projects e.g., social supermarkets and community enterprise

## 3 Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations

- Taking a zero-tolerance approach to prejudice and discrimination
- Promoting a positive and inclusive culture across our borough
- Working together to tackle inequalities.
- The Council promoting and supporting key events and activities
- Action and cooperation across our partnerships to improve community cohesion togetherness/relationships
- Celebrating what is good about our different communities.

*The feedback from the consultation was largely positive about the general themes, but respondents highlighted several issues:*

- **The need for priorities and actions to be more specific and monitored**
- **The need for clearer and more consistent two-way communication on Council priorities and activities**
- **The need to improve accessibility and to improve engagement around accessibility**
- **The importance of Council staff having a good understanding of equality issues and diverse communities' needs.**

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The consultation ran from 10th January 2022 to 14th February 2022. During this time, Rotherham residents were consulted on the three proposed priorities and accompanying actions via a survey (online and print copies), through focus groups and other engagement activities, including information and promotion sessions. Three promotional towers were located around the borough and there was social media promotion of the consultation, and also promotion via internal communications.

The online survey was available on the council website and residents were encouraged to fill it in via e-bulletins and social media, as well as via the promotional towers in libraries and a series of engagement sessions. Print copies were also available in libraries and library staff were briefed on the consultation to be able to answer questions. A total of eight engagement sessions were held to ensure a wide range of people from protected characteristics groups were aware of the consultation, and several of these sessions supported participants in filling in the survey. This resulted in an improvement in the diversity of survey respondents in comparison with the Council Plan consultation survey in Summer/Autumn 2021.

Focus groups organised around protected characteristics were arranged through a range of community organisations, as well as internally with staff groups sharing protected characteristics, and with two strategic partners, the Strategic Housing Forum and the Clinical Commissioning Group's Equality Steering Group. See details on the groups involved in section 3 below.

The focus groups involved semi-structured conversations around the priorities and actions and following the close of the consultation, notes and written comments on the survey were analysed by identifying themes across responses, and survey responses were analysed statistically.

External and internal groups were keen to get involved and feed into the equality consultation, however, there were difficulties in reaching out to LGBT+ groups externally, and the issue of capacity amongst LGBT+ community groups in Rotherham. This was also raised in the LGBT+ staff focus group, who reported there was no funded provision for these communities, and the few groups that did exist were volunteer run.

As always, learning has been taken from this exercise to help improve future consultations, in particular those with a focus on equalities and a key learning point is around the flexibility in approach. The consultation design would have benefited from different and more flexible approaches to reflect the different audiences.

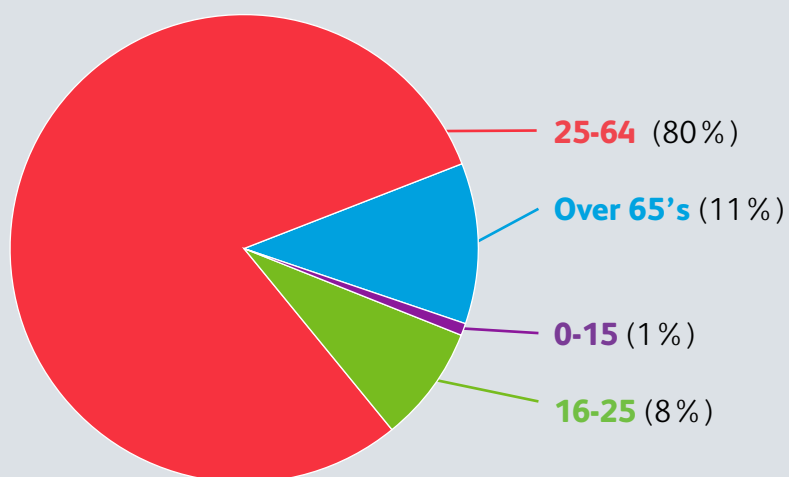
In future consultations, the towers, which were used successfully during the Council Plan consultation to elicit responses could be used to better advantage, particularly as they provide participants with the ability to self-reflect, discuss topics and provide feedback in a more interactive way. In future, it may be beneficial to include a question in online consultations such as 'where did you find out about this consultation?' so we can learn about the best sources of engagement.



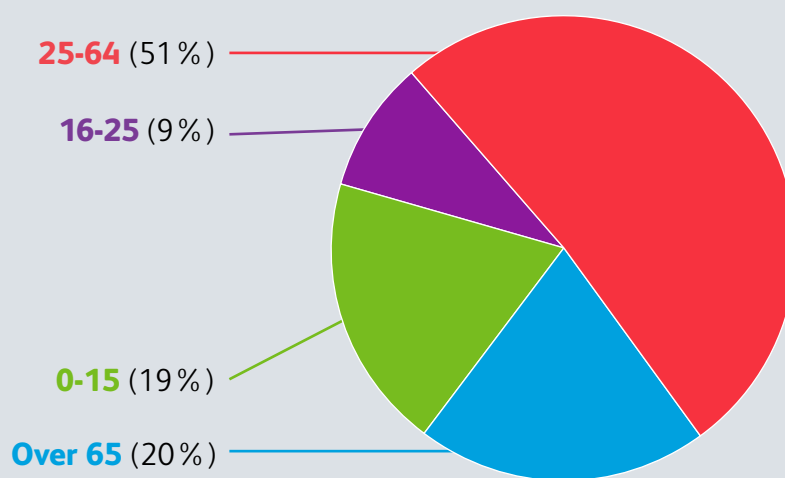
### 3. ENGAGEMENT PROFILE

There were **172 responses** to the online survey.

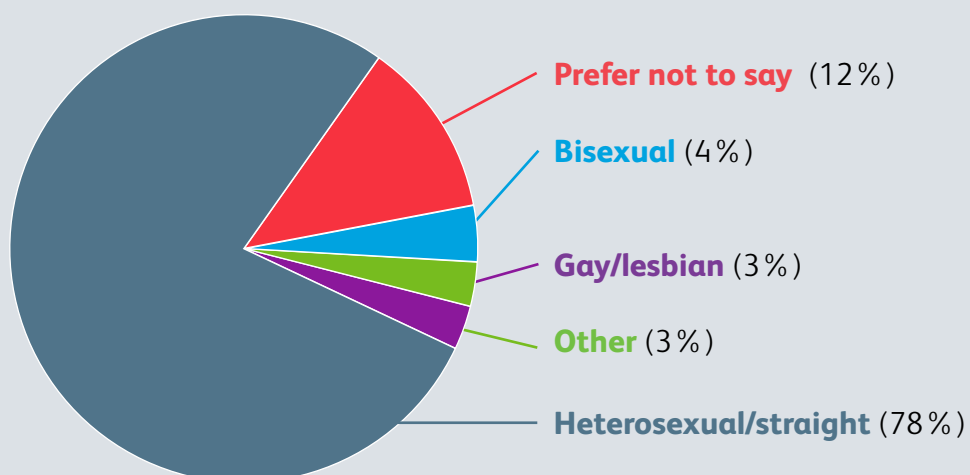
**Age** (all respondents)



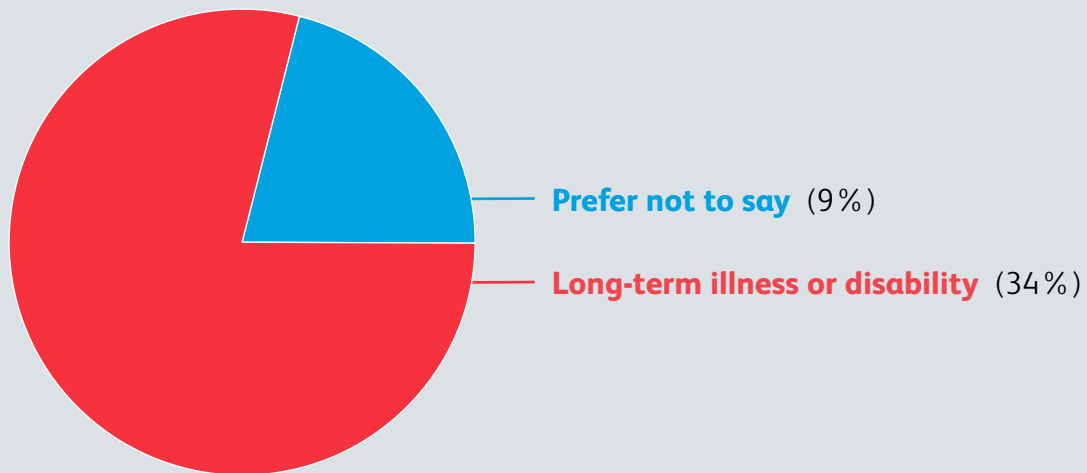
**Age** (Rotherham Residents)



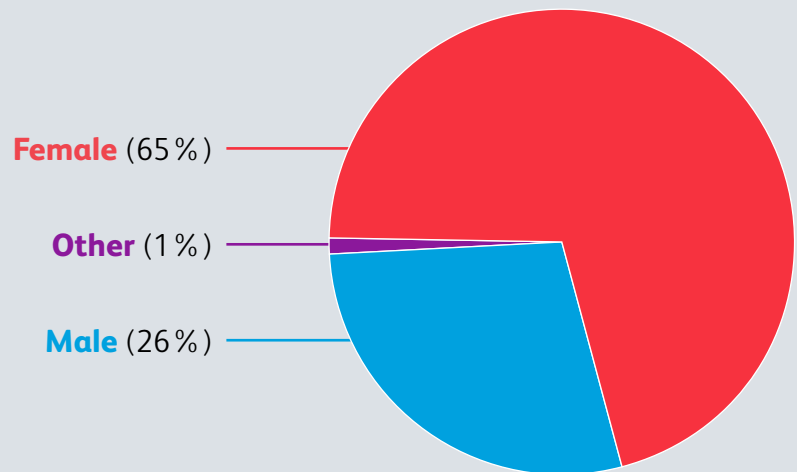
**Sexuality** (all respondents)



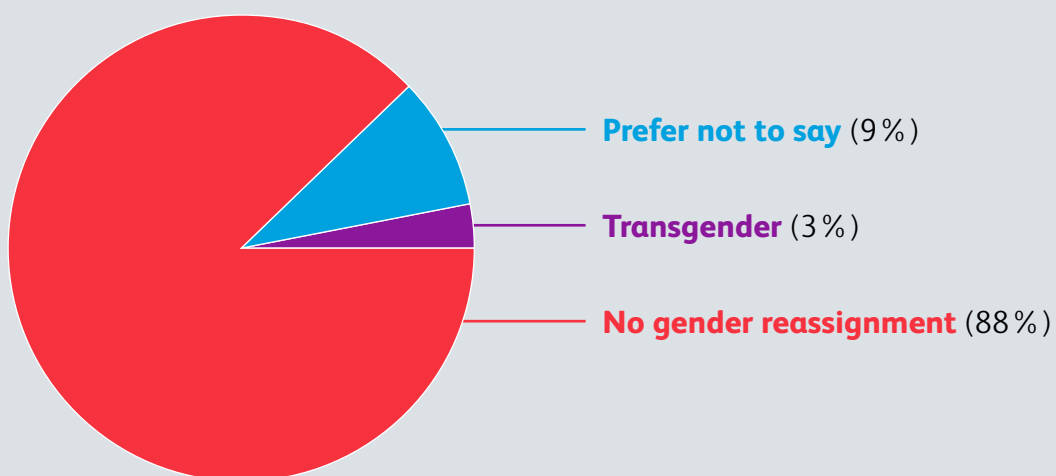
**Disability** (all respondents)



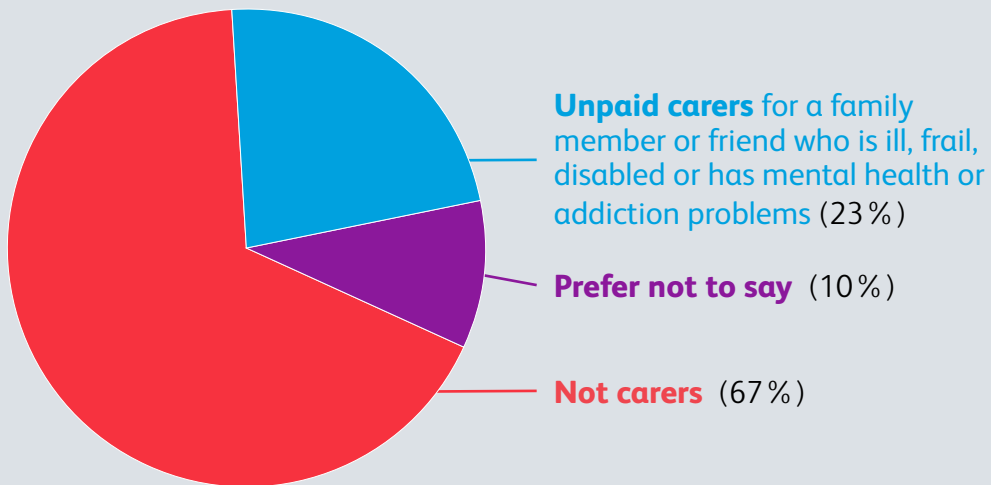
**Gender** (all respondents)



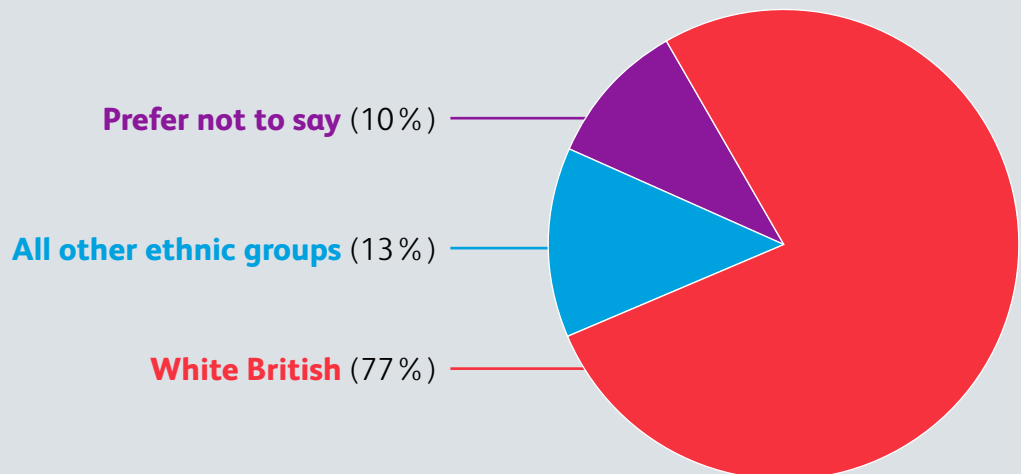
**Gender reassignment**  
(all respondents)



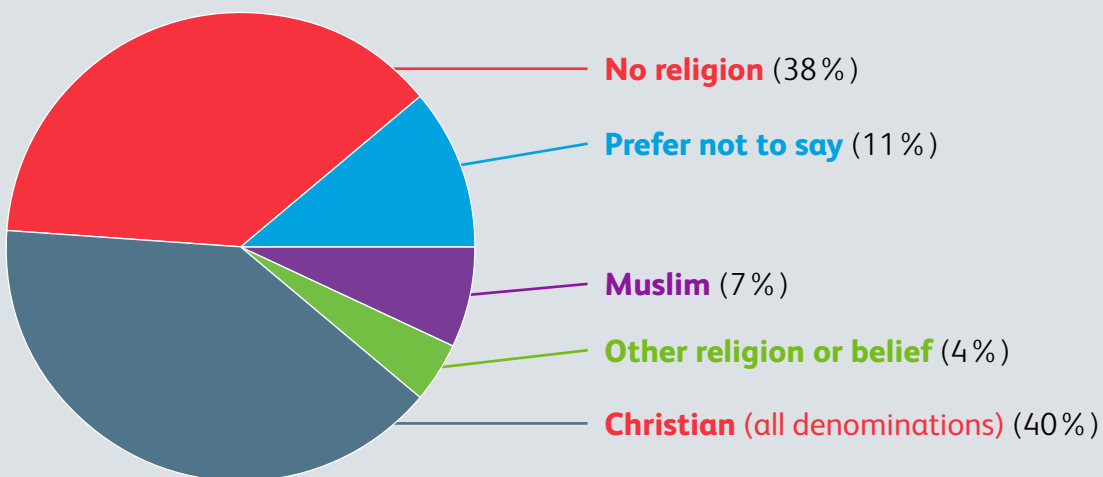
**Unpaid carers**  
(all respondents)



**Ethnicity** (all respondents)



**Religion** (all respondents)



Future consultations need to focus on improving the participation rates of children and young people, and elderly residents over 65, who are usually well-represented. Regarding other protected characteristics, the engagement profile compares well to borough figures, and national estimates, with many groups, such as ethnic minorities, Muslims, disabled people, who are often underrepresented in consultations, well-represented or even overrepresented in this engagement exercise.

**The 8 focus groups**, some virtual, some in person, engaged with borough residents on themes around ethnicity, gender, a range of disabilities (including conversations with carers), faith and older people, with approximately 30 VCS organisation involved. A BAME group was organised through Rotherham Ethnic Communities Network (RECN), which includes: REMA, RMCF, the Sudanese Community, Saifs Boxing and Fitness, Roma/Slova, Apna Haq, the Rotherham Interfaith Group. Three disability groups engaged: 1. users, carers and families around complex needs, through SENSE; 2. users, volunteers, staff, support workers around visual impairment through Sight and Sound; 3. members of the community support group for profoundly deaf Deaf Futures.

A focus group took place around Faith with Mosques, Methodist, Salvation Army, Liberty Church and Hope Church. Older people were engaged with through committee members of the Rotherham Older Peoples Forum, with includes Age Uk and HealthWatch. The women's focus group was held with service providers, including NHS, RUCST, Community Safety, Grow, Carers Forum and Rotherfed. The text below will report on these groups as: BAME, disability 1, disability 2, disability 3, faith, older people, women. There were between 5 and 18 participants in each focus group, with a total of 72 participants, and around 30 VCSE organisations represented.

The strategic partners consultation reached around 23 participants through the Strategic Housing Forum (referred to in the text as strategic housing) and 9 participants through the CCG Equality and Diversity Steering group, referred to in the text as CCG. 6 internal focus groups (women, LGBT+, carers, disability, faith, BAME) engaged around 45 staff, with between 2 and 12 participants per group.



## 4. FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT METHODS

### 4.1. Common themes

A few common themes emerged across all consultation activities, including the open comments in the survey, and internal and external focus groups. These covered the need for clarity of priorities and actions, improving community engagement, staff training, the accessibility of council services and facilities and visible support and celebration of diverse communities.

#### Clarity of priorities and actions

Feedback on the overarching priorities was largely positive, with respondents agreeing with the broad agenda and direction. However, many of the groups and survey comments focused on the need for more clarity and specificity in the priorities and actions (survey, BAME, CCG, internal women, internal disability, internal BAME). 17 % of residents filling in open questions thought priority 1 needed greater clarity, wanting the priority to be more specific, whilst 16 % felt the same for priority 3.

How actions will be monitored and measured was also widely raised, for example by the internal women's group, and the CCG equality steering group proposed collaboration across partners to track issues and share equality data. There were also questions about who will be accountable for implementing the actions (BAME, Women), and whether there was a role for the VCS to play'.

Some groups held views that previous council strategies and their recommendations had not been effectively implemented, and they sought assurances that the new equalities strategy would bring about real change. To overcome this, groups expressed views that they wanted to see the council commit specific resources to the plan.

#### Communication and Engagement

Another point raised across groups was regarding the need to improve community engagement and dialogue (BAME, women, disability 3, older people, faith, survey, internal LGBT+). Some groups stated there was a general lack of feedback from the Council regarding suggestions made during consultations, with participants not knowing whether changes have been implemented or not (BAME, women, disability 3). Indeed, the Council's own Consultation and Engagement Policy, as well as best practice (e.g. from the LGA) all specify that this is an important component of consultations, so this feedback needs to be taken on board and reflected upon. There was a clear desire for more continued dialogue and exchange, and a platform for discussion, some suggested feedback every 6 months (women, older people, disability 3).

There were positive examples from some areas of the Council, in particular Early Help and around hate crime, where communication and engagement were considered to be working well (Rotherham Children and Young People Consortium). There is also a wider issue around clear communication, as there was some misconception around a few issues (availability of workforce monitoring information, analysing the race pay gap), which clear communication could quickly resolve.

Some groups stated a difficulty raising issues, with some viewing consultations as a tick-box exercises. Carers and those with complex needs stated they did not feel like they were being heard, and that carers views were not always taken account of (disability 1), while the faith group stated the need for the council to actively listen, find new ways to engage with these communities and value everyone's experiences. 10 % of key priority open comments in the survey suggested listening to minority groups as the most important way to achieve all 3 priorities.

***“The Council should have service users at the heart of decision making and work with communities to find solutions.”*** (Faith)

There was also a desire for communities to be involved in decision-making as early as possible, in particular during policy reviews, to ensure that they feel their views and needs are represented. There was a view that the Council can do more to ensure feedback and challenge is both welcomed and received. Some groups stated that they used to have good contacts with senior staff (disability 2) and there was a desire for more engagement with RMBC senior management and especially as engagement returns to more physical forms after the restrictions of the COVID pandemic (older people, faith, disability 1, 2 and 3, BAME). There was a real desire to be involved and feed into council decisions going forward.

The internal BAME and women’s groups both raised questions about how the council will actively engage with its communities to enable people to participate and contribute towards council decision-making, and how to engage with women in communities considered ‘hard-to-reach’ and across protected characteristics. Specific further examples covered:

- A council representative on a steering group to ensure greater collaboration.
- Access to council representatives from social care and customer services to raise concerns/share views
- Looking for opportunities for the Council’s leadership to undertake shadowing so that as a council, we ensure we have better understanding of lived experiences.

## **Accessibility**

Several groups raised issues related to accessibility. They stated views around more accessible transport, disabled toilets, accessible leisure facilities and parks, giving wheelchair users priority on public transport (disability 1), while the older people’s forum raised the issue of digital exclusion (Older people, BAME). Further comments highlighted the accessibility of written information

and communication, with the CCG group raising the importance of appropriate and accessible formats for all council information. The BAME group expressed the view that policies, rights (such as tenants’ rights) and processes can be particularly difficult to understand for people who have English as a second language.

***“Equalities are part of Council planning. Therefore, when including goods and services they need to be accessible to all not just the IT literate.”*** (survey comment)

***“...Some people would be unable to complete surveys such as this because they either don’t have the equipment to allow them to do it, or don’t have the skills/knowledge. Their opinions are still needed and valid.”***

(survey comment)

Two groups also highlighted the need to be aware of multiple barriers, intersectionality, and inequalities within inequalities, such as gay BAME people, or BAME women (BAME and CCG). The BAME group expressed views around more awareness of specialised services and the barriers within universal offer/general approaches (also raised in Faith group), and there needed to be more support, in particular from people within those communities. The faith group raised that council policies should take into account the needs of faith groups. Disability groups specifically wanted to be involved in conversations on accessibility to feed in their views, in particular around planning and the built environment.

***Some specific points were raised regarding accessibility on:***

- Suggestions on improving council meetings and the council website.
- Improving accessibility in the complaints process.
- Use of information in customer services to ensure services and support are accessible.

## Awareness/Training

A variety of groups stated that RMBC staff needed to be more aware of the needs of people with protected characteristics, of equality issues in general (Faith), with age mentioned specifically mentioned specifically as needing further awareness (Older people). Many comments expressed the view that training on neurodiversity, LGBT+ issues, race, disability should be improved, and for the training and communication methods to be more innovative (internal BAME).

***“...They (council staff) need training in children/adults with disabilities especially parents with learning difficulties like Autism and ADHD.”*** (survey comment)

11 % of open comment responses for priority 2 mentioned wanting council staff to be given extensive training in understanding complex learning needs, local communities and unconscious bias. Two groups stated that they would like to see local organisations delivering training and that training should involve the community (BAME, CCG).

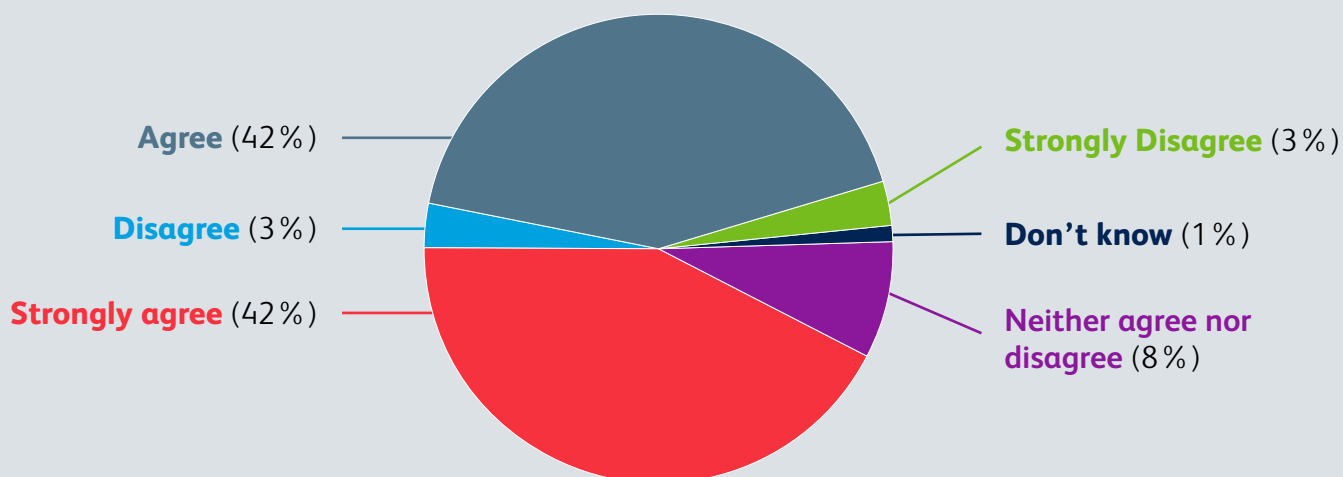
There was a view that high quality training was essential so that all staff are aware of equality issues recognise the diversity within equality categories and ensure people are treated with dignity ((internal LGBT+, Strategic Housing, internal women).

Improved training would enable staff to feel more confident about equality issues, to ask questions and to know when it is appropriate to ask questions, as well as heighten sensibility around equality questions (internal LGBT+). It was also raised that there should be further training for managers and HR staff to support staff when, for example, making reasonable adjustments (internal disability), or supporting staff returning from maternity leave (internal women).

## 4.2. Online Survey Results

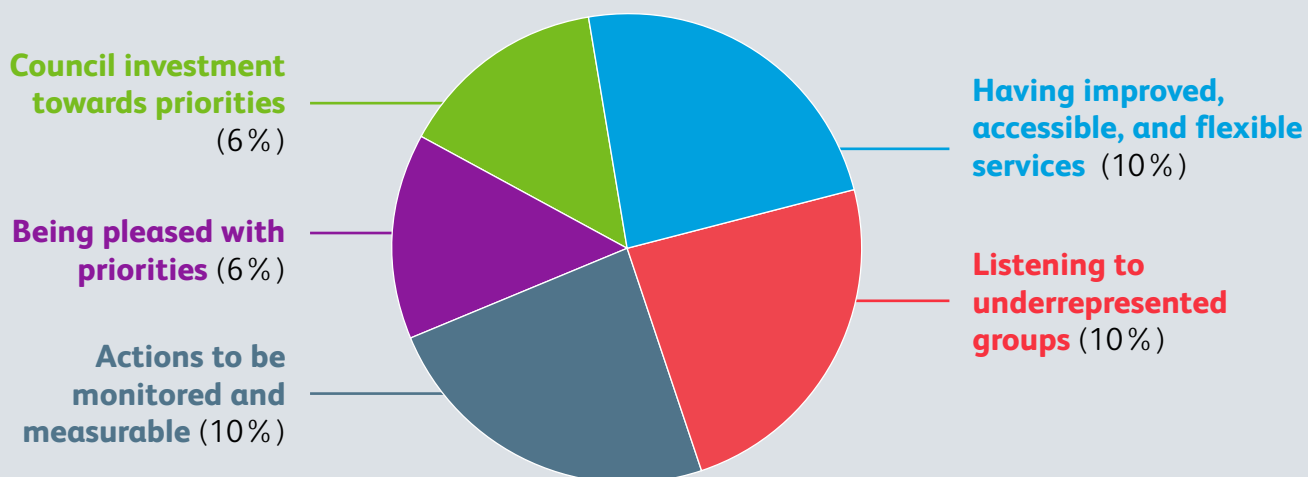
The equality consultation survey gathered **172 responses in total**. 100 respondents filled in 1 or more open comment sections.

### Are these the right priorities for us to collectively work towards?

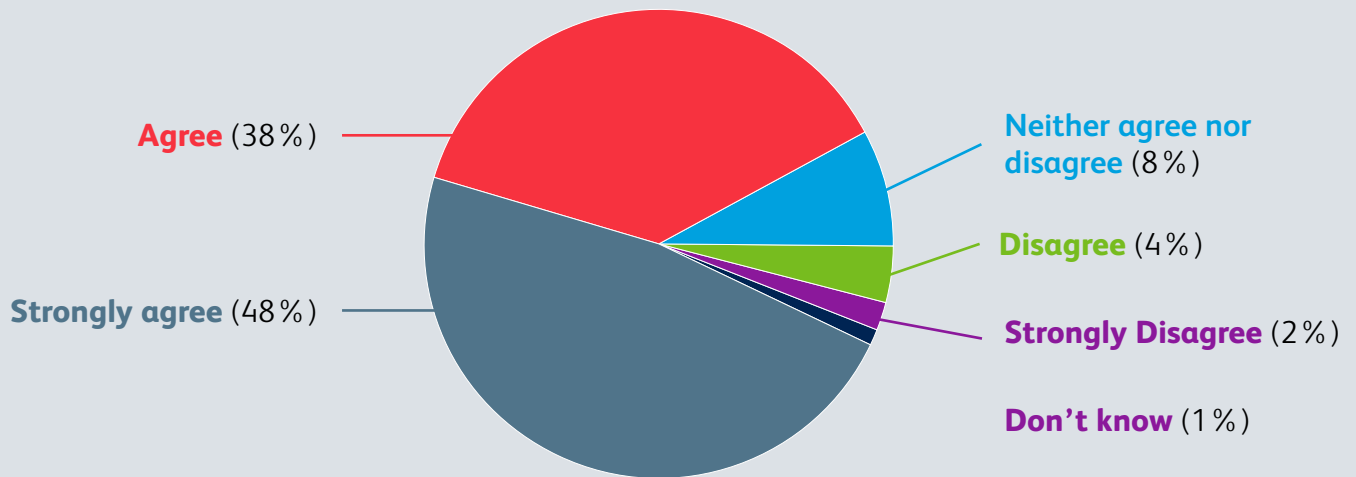


### Comments

(number of respondents 45)

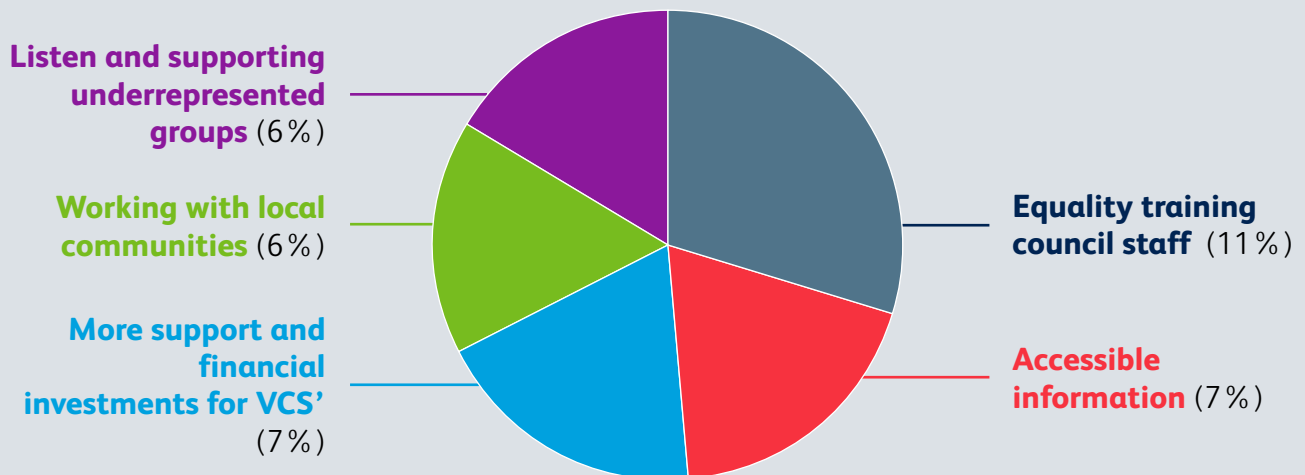


To what extent do you agree with **Priority 2** -  
Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services?

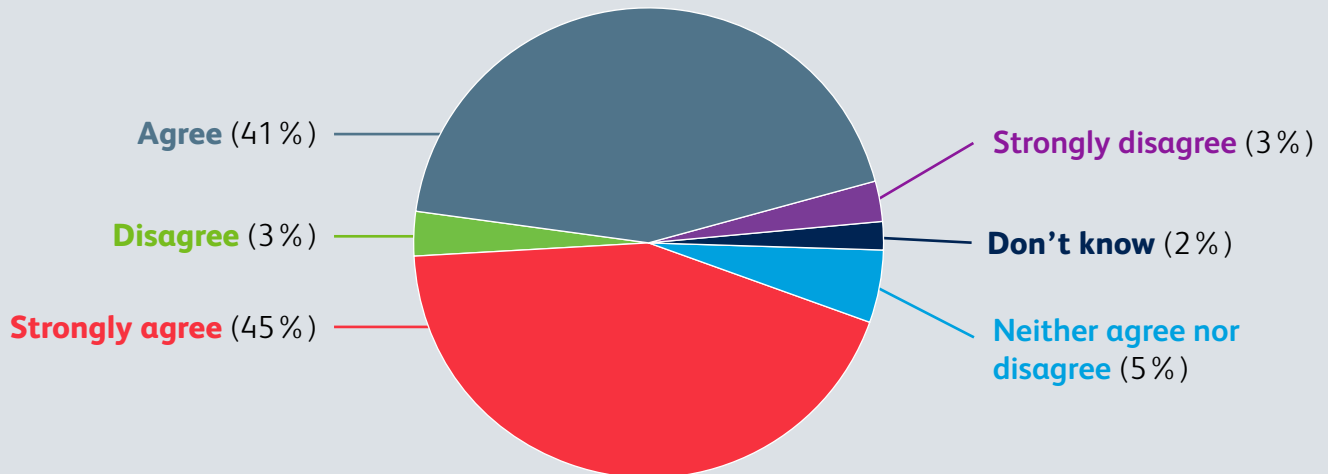


**Comments**

(number of respondents 33)



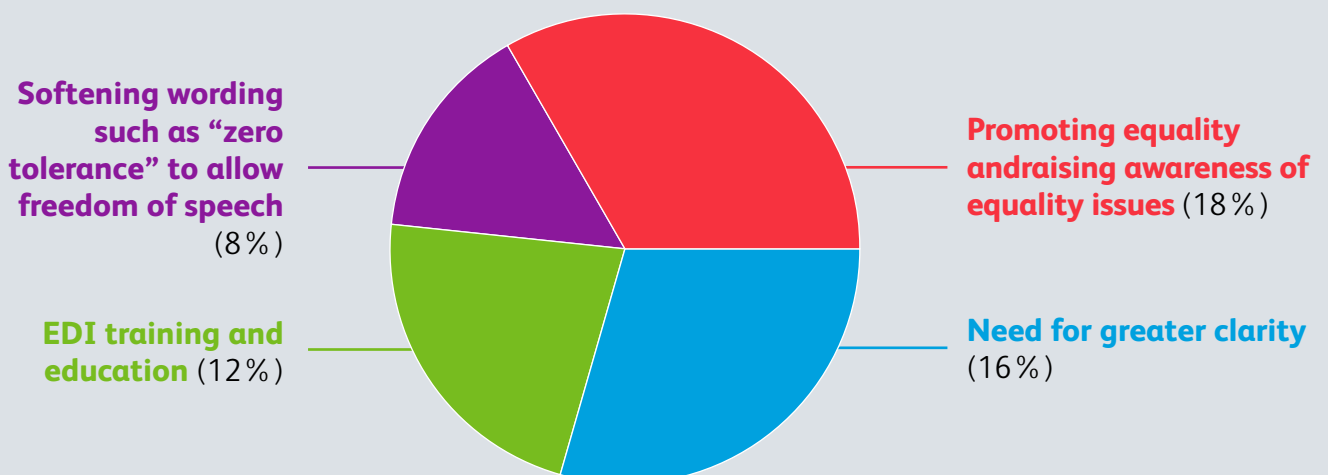
To what extent to you agree with **Priority 3** -  
Empowering people to engage and challenge  
discrimination and to promote good community relations



***"The promotion of a positive and inclusive culture needs to be hands on,  
not just adverts and posters."** (survey comment)*

**Comments**

(number of respondents 47)



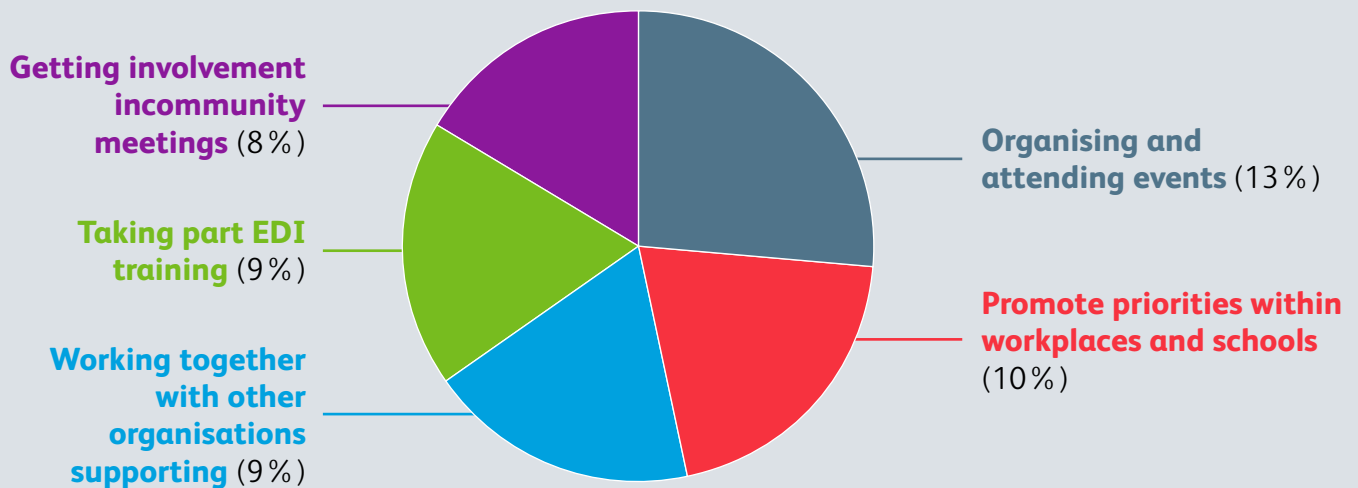


## Getting involved

*“Arranging and attending cultural exchange events to share knowledge and celebrate differences, include food vendors.” (survey comment)*

### How could you get involved to support the priorities and actions?

(number of respondents 54)



## 4.3. Focus Groups

Eight external and six internal focus groups took place within the consultation period. Various themes raised in focus groups are listed in section 4.1 above, but additional points can be found below.

One common point raised both internally and externally was around the council showing visible support for diverse communities and events, another around discrimination and hate crime, and a further point about information sharing.

### Visible support and celebrations

Groups internally and externally raised the importance for the Council to show outward support for diverse communities (BAME, older people, disability 1 and 3, faith), as well as internally (internal LGBT+, internal faith). Externally, this was about supporting Pride (BAME, internal LGBT+), promoting BAME role models, putting out messages celebrating cultural events (BAME), getting staff and communities involved in events celebrating women's history (internal women). Older people would like to see a firm commitment to age-friendly Rotherham status. The internal women's group expressed the view that the Council has done exceptional work over the last 10 years to build cohesive communities, through education, raising awareness of hate crime and taking zero tolerance of prejudice, community events, with Rotherham Show bringing communities together.

Internally, actions that would create an inclusive environment were visible rainbow flags, rainbow lanyards, a "pronouns in email signature" initiative, allyship and messages online and throughout council buildings (internal LGBT+), as well as establishing and communicating about staff networks (internal faith).

### Discrimination and Hate Crime

Some groups raised experiences of discrimination or exclusion within the borough (disability 2, BAME, older people, faith, internal LGBT+). LGBT+ staff mentioned not feeling comfortable to freely express themselves in the town centre or hold their partner's hand, as well as the need for diversity and representation on the hate crime scrutiny

panel. The other major issues discussed by this group were regarding the lack of funded support for LGBT+ communities. It was mentioned that the little support that did exist being volunteer-led and not widely enough known, which presents a critical problem, in particular with regard to LGBT+ people being victims of hate crime and needing support following this. The BAME group queried the support given after reporting a hate crime and stated that the reporting process itself needs to be better valued. The Faith group stated there was a need to define hate, as people have different perceptions of what it means, and the age group felt that the experience of older people experiencing hate crime was largely unrecognised.

### Information sharing

Connected to the issue raised around improving communication, several groups raised questions about what information was collected by the council, and what data the council held regarding specific issues relating to the organisation, such as the race and disability pay gaps (internal BAME, internal carers), and other equalities data on disability or long-term health conditions (Faith) – and communities in the borough (age, disability groups), all of which are collected and analysed by the council.

### External focus groups

These sessions included groups representing older people, people with disabilities, faith, race and women. There were difficulties in engaging with some groups, notably with groups representing the LGBT+ community – an action to strengthen and build relationships with these groups should be taken forward.

The groups were broadly supportive of and positive about the three proposed priorities; any reservations about the priorities stemmed from a belief that there may not be sufficient resources and funding available to fully implement them. Several groups commented that they had been asked similar questions in the past, yet no real change had occurred (disability 2, women). Generally, the groups stressed a real and genuine desire to work with the council to shape services to make Rotherham more accessible to their

communities. Any findings that were consistent with common themes across all methods of engagement are summarised in section 4.1 above. Specific points and actions raised by external focus groups not covered in section 4.1 are summarised below.

## Accountability

In terms of accountability, there was a general feeling that to really effect change across the EDI agenda, that accountability for the strategy should sit with those who have the power to make change.

In addition, it was raised that there was the need for performance management on equality, and equality targets for commissioned community services (BAME). The women's session further queried how the priorities/outcomes contained within the strategy, as well as any equality peer reviews, will be monitored and scrutinised. They suggested community involvement in this to obtain a different perspective from the internal council view.

## Positive developments

Groups highlighted some positive changes that had recently been made to council services and communications, including:

- Signing provision for performances at Rotherham Theatre (disability 2).
- Ward bulletins in an easier to read format (disability 2).

They also gave examples of work that partners had undertaken to make their services and buildings more accessible, including:

- Rotherham Interchange (disability 2).
- Rotherham Hospital.

## Strength of local community groups

The BAME group called attention to the fact that there are a variety of very good community groups within Rotherham and groups and individuals have a lot to contribute and experience of working in and with communities. The main

feedback in this area was to highlight to the council that there is already a range of activity undertaken by the sector and wealth of specialist support and knowledge available and that duplication should be avoided.

## Support

Some suggestions were received to support groups further, in particular around signing, interpreting, transcription and the use of Braille, digital access and disabled parking.

## Tension between groups

Differences of opinion amongst groups was referred to in the faith group, who expressed that it needed to be ensured the 'zero tolerance' action does not limit freedom of speech (Faith). This highlights the importance that the council is aware of differences of opinion amongst protected characteristics groups and to be well-informed in order to respond.

## Strategic partners

The Strategic Housing Forum and the CCG Equality and Diversity Steering Group were engaged with as strategic partners.

The main comments from the Strategic Housing Forum were around monitoring and specificity of action, as reflected in section 4.1 above. Additionally, they highlighted that the proposed objectives had no emphasis on race – particularly around the Black Lives Matter movement. This group also spoke highly of the council's autism strategy and its clear commitment to change.

## Measuring outcomes

In addition to comments reported above on the need to monitor actions, the CCG Equality group had a strong focus on measuring equality outcomes and impacts, in particular regarding the delivery of accessible services.

***'We need to be capturing data on access; on experience and on outcomes; having this data is the foundation, and without it, much other work falls.'* (CCG)**

There was a clear view that equality issues and progress against objectives needed to be measured, that quality equality information needed to be collected and impact evaluated on an ongoing basis, as well as identifying relevant information gaps and taking steps to fill these; and to be able to compare local data against regional and national figures/research.

***‘Where inequality is found, we should take steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where they are different from the needs of other people.’ (CCG)***

## Place-based working

A few comments on working together were raised in the CCG Equality group, in particular about partnership and place-based working, with a comment on the possibility to work towards having a place perspective on equalities, together with local organisations. Data was considered one area where joint working would be beneficial:

***‘Equality information/monitoring needs to be dynamic and available across partners and communities.’ (CCG)***

## Internal focus groups

6 focus groups for RMBC staff were held over January and February, 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 least members.

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 the borough.

Most external issues the groups discussed are covered above. Internally, participants were positive about participating in the focus groups, while requesting feedback and wanting to see where their input was going. Across the groups, there were some positive examples of supportive

line managers and supportive teams, the internal communications around wellbeing, and several respondents highlighted that their work at the Council was meaningful and important, that they felt the work culture and policies were better than in the private sector, or in their previous work experiences.

Internal issues raised by several of the groups covered: the importance of flexibility of the HR policies and practice, the importance of managers’ awareness and understanding of equality issues and improving staff engagement.

## HR Policy and Practice

Several groups raised the importance of flexible HR practices to accommodate specific needs. Staff highlighted the policies supporting carers and increased flexibility as positives. They also raised that the online HR system is not always easy to use when on unusual work patterns, staff working on rotas, 24/7, or compressed hours. The feedback highlighted that the flexible policies needed to be facilitated through supportive line managers and HR staff, as well as through flexibility in online systems, to be most effective.

## Manager support

The women’s, carers, disability and faith groups all raised the importance for managers to have a good understanding of equality issues. There were several examples of very supportive and understanding line managers, across the disability and faith groups, who had a high level of awareness of staff’s specific support needs, because of their religion or disability. This led to staff in the faith group reporting they would have the confidence to go to their line manager if they faced any problems related to equality issues. The disability group felt strongly that there needed to be extra support, as the quality of support was felt to be variable and whether managers understood or wanted to know what they were dealing with, and about what reasonable adjustments were required.

## Staff Engagement

A further shared theme was around staff engagement. Groups discussed the idea of staff networks, with a comment in the faith group that this would give visibility to faith within the organisation and staff would be more engaged. An interest in participation in events across the council was also expressed (internal women). The LGBT+ and women's groups found that staff groups could be a valuable networking opportunity, a forum to come together to share concerns, with the importance to have deliverable outcomes, formalised structures and clear responsibilities, and the possibility to give feedback on progress on equalities. Carers in the council and their needs was raised, with staff networks seen as potentially supporting a continued dialogue.

Information was shared in the carers group on ongoing work internally in Adult Social Care, who are working on providing support to carers.

## Accessibility of council facilities

A few issues were raised regarding the accessibility of council facilities. The LGBT+ group raised a request for gender neutral toilets in council buildings, providing better facilities for trans staff. The Disability group mentioned returning to the office as an issue in terms of the importance of adequate desk space to be available for staff with additional needs, rather than hot desking. Further, more communication is needed around facilities in Council buildings, such as the prayer room, as it was clear that groups were not always aware. This links to an earlier point raised in section 4.1 around the need for better general communication around equality issues and the provision available.

## Carers

The carers group highlighted that the council should be aware of the needs of staff who are carers internally and provide support and flexibility.

## Women

While this was not a universal experience, and many participants had positive experiences in their teams, a few participants raised concerns about culture of working witnessed in their own team and the need for best practice standards across the whole Council.

## BAME

The BAME group particularly focused on the representation of BAME workers within the Council, and also raised equality reporting and analyses as issues.

## Disability and long-term health conditions

The staff group on disability and long-term health conditions discussed issues reported above regarding the importance of support and understanding from a line manager, as well as issues regarding reasonable adjustments and support, discussed below.

Several participants raised issues concerning reasonable adjustments, saying the process of requesting these should be made easier. While there was mention of some supportive HR provision, there was a feeling that there should be more support and awareness.

***'If we can't support staff, how are we going to get it right for the community?'***

There was a feeling that the views that diverse staff and staff with different needs and conditions bring should be celebrated.

**The comments and outcomes from this consultation have been taken forward in building the Council's strategic direction for equalities and specific issues raised have been fed back to relevant services. A further document outlining the Council's response to the consultation and how the consultation outcomes have been taken forward will be published and communicated to those involved in the focus groups.**