



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

EQUALITY PLAN 2021-25

Tackling Inequality Together

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1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Our Community Vision is for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow, and a great place to do business. This Vision is delivered through a set of priorities in our Corporate Delivery Plan (2020-2024).

The ambition of this Equality Plan 2021-25 is to ensure that our Community Vision is realised for all our residents, irrespective of their background or characteristics. Our ambition is to ensure that no-one is left behind, and that unfair and discriminatory barriers are removed.

This Equality Plan 2021-25 describes how equality, diversity and inclusion are essential to the way we operate as a community leader, a service provider and an employer.

Our Equality Plan 2021-25 will build on what we have already accomplished in relation to Equality and Diversity and sets out our priorities and objectives for achieving more in the years to come.

Our objectives set out clearly how we will achieve these results, and we will monitor our progress closely to ensure we are on track to achieve our goals and learn as we deliver.

A range of stakeholders were surveyed and consulted, generating valuable evidence, insight and feedback which has directly informed the development of our strategic priorities and objectives. Included within this evidence base are nearly 1800 responses to key questions about areas of strength we can build on and areas for further improvement.

Achieving this plan will require commitment, leadership and collaboration over the next four years, so that we build a more equal and inclusive borough, where nobody is left behind and where all residents are able to prosper and thrive.

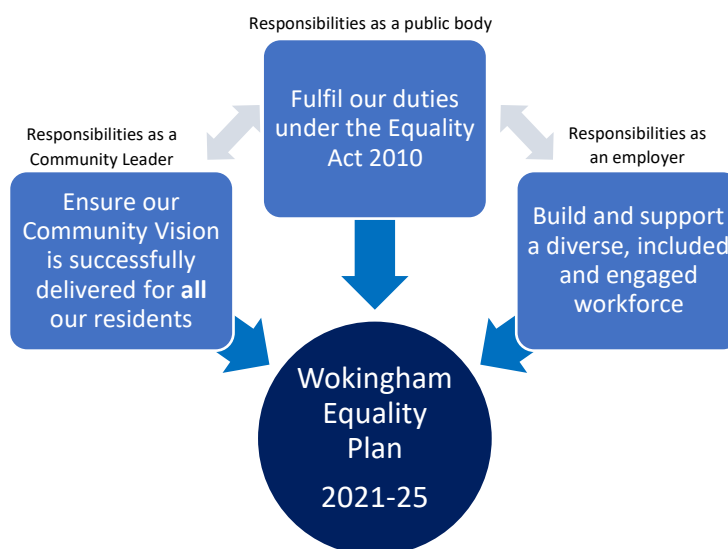
Why we need an Equality Plan: three Key Drivers

There are **three key drivers** which create the need for a comprehensive and strategic Equality Plan:

1. To ensure our Community Vision is successfully delivered for **all** our residents;
2. To fulfil our duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 as a public body;
3. To build and support a diverse, included and engaged workforce and meet our responsibilities as an employer.

These Key Drivers are set out in Figure 1 and explained in greater detail below:

Figure 1: Drivers behind the development of the Equality Plan 2021-25



Driver #1: Deliver our Community Vision for **all** our residents

Our Community Vision for 2020 to 2024, is for Wokingham to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business. Our Community Vision is delivered through a set of priorities in our Corporate Delivery Plan (2020-2024). These priorities set out our commitment to equality in all that we do and how we will enrich the lives of all members of our community.

The ambition of our Equality Plan is to ensure that our Community Vision is realised for all our residents irrespective of their background or characteristics. Our ambition is to ensure that no-one is left behind, and that unfair and discriminatory barriers are removed.

Driver #2: Fulfil our duties under the Equality Act 2010

As a public body we have a legal duty to have due regard to the Equality Act 2010. Although we are determined to do more than just fulfil our statutory obligations, this Equality Plan also provides the basis for how we will address the requirements of the Act. The Equality Act places statutory duties on the council to:

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

The protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Public authorities also need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status.

These public sector equality duties mean that we need to take actions to minimise disadvantage, meet needs and encourage participation for people protected by the Act. The Equality Act applies not just to the council's responsibilities as a direct provider of services, but also to our suppliers or anyone working with us.

Driver #3: Build and support a diverse, included and engaged workforce

As an employer, we are committed to promoting equality and diversity amongst our workforce. We will take action to ensure that we are a great employer that values and welcomes the different ideas, skills, behaviours and experiences of our colleagues.

The Equality Act also relates to the council's responsibilities as an employer. We have a legal duty as a public body to ensure due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and foster good relations between our staff. We want to make sure that we promote equality and diversity inside our organisation, ensuring that our HR policies and procedures reflect good practice in terms of equality and diversity, and that anyone who works for the council or applies to work for us feels confident they are treated fairly.

Building on success

Since 2017 the council has already delivered several actions and initiatives designed to have a positive impact on promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with the objectives of its previous Equality Plan. A summary of these can be found in **Appendix 2**.

In addition to responding to current and likely future challenges, and addressing the key points which emerge from the analysis of data, evidence and feedback from consultation which follows in the next section, our future actions will also build on the most successful aspects of our delivery in previous years.

2. INSIGHT FROM DATA, CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In the development of this Equality Plan we reviewed some key data from sources including the following:

- Office of National Statistics (ONS), Census and Local Population Estimates
- Various data sources from the NHS, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England
- The British Crime Survey
- Stonewall and LGBT Foundation
- Wokingham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)
- POPPI & PANSI

Data from the sources listed above were reviewed and analysed in order to gain insights into the Equality needs of our local community and help identify some key priorities for this Equality Plan.

In addition, we have undertaken consultation and engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure that the priorities and objectives within this plan are underpinned by evidence.

Summary of insight from data and research

- **We serve an increasingly diverse community** with different needs, in both rural and urban settings. Although the 2011 Census recorded that 11% of the Wokingham population were from Ethnic Minority backgrounds, this proportion has undoubtedly grown: review of schools and education data shows that the percentage of pupils in our schools from Ethnic Minority backgrounds has increased from 26% in 2014 to 34% in 2020 (Schools Census). The 2021 Census is expected to reflect Wokingham's growing diversity
- National research studies (Stonewall, LGBT Foundation) estimate that 5-7% of any given local population in the UK will identify as LGBT+. In Wokingham Borough this means that **around 8,000-10,000 residents could identify as LGBT+**. The Wokingham JSNA sets out that some members of the LGBT+ community are disproportionately more likely to experience discrimination and barriers to good outcomes, including challenges around mental health and well-being. According to research by Stonewall (2018), 11% of 'LGBT' people have faced domestic abuse from a partner. This increases to 17% of Ethnic Minority 'LGBT' people.
- **We have an ageing population.** 18% of our residents are aged 65 and over. Using data for England as a guide, the proportion of our residents aged 65+ is expected to increase to 20.7% by mid-2028. The fastest growing age group is aged 85 and over, which is likely to double by 2041 and treble by 2066 (ONS). There are implications of an ageing population in relation to health and wellbeing, the effects of loneliness and isolation, and vulnerability to crime
- There are likely to be **increasing numbers of residents with disabilities that require support**. As our population [grows](#) older and young people with disabilities live longer, forecasts show that Wokingham Borough will experience: a 42% increase in people whose day-to-day activities are limited a little or a lot by a disability; a 23% increase in people living in care homes, particularly those aged 85 and over, and a 20% increase in people who are 65 and over and have dementia (POPPI & PANSI). We also know

that the number of adults with learning disabilities that we support is higher than in many other parts of the country and is the second highest in the South East.

- Trend data shows that the **demand for SEND support in Wokingham is increasing**. Over the last few years there has been a significant upward trend in the numbers of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and numbers of children and young people requiring SEN support in schools. There have been notable increases in demand for support in relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) in particular. The numbers of younger children (aged 7-11) requiring some form of SEN support has increased significantly over the last three years, partly as a result of changing demographics and needs, and partly as a result of better assessments and more successful early identification and prevention.

Summary of insight and outcomes from engagement and consultation

Successful action against inequality requires teamwork and collaboration and is not something the council can achieve without the support and engagement of key stakeholders.

We held focus sessions with staff at different levels. This included our: Members Equality Steering Group, Employee Equality Steering Group, Managers Network, Leadership Teams, Commissioning Managers, Ethnically Diverse Staff Network, Adult Social Care Staff, Equality Champions and Customer Delivery Managers. We also held community sessions with our 'Involved Tenants', service providers, community groups such as CLASP (a charity that supports people with learning disabilities) and other residents who wanted to share their specific ideas.

We received **563 consultation responses** on key questions relating to the suggested priorities and objectives of this Equality Plan. Engagement sessions built on nearly **1800 comments** to highlight areas of strength to build on, and areas for future improvement.

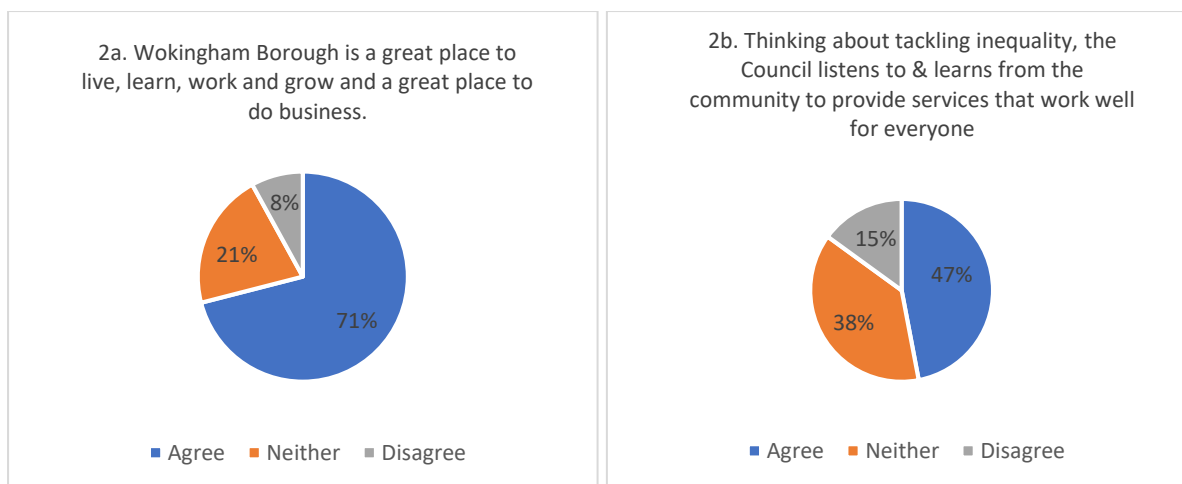
There were **three objectives** behind this consultation and engagement:

- a) To temperature check stakeholder views on our current approach to equality
- b) To identify areas of strength in relation to equality, and areas for improvement
- c) To take feedback from stakeholders on suggested priorities for the Equality Plan

a) Temperature check stakeholder views on Wokingham's current approach to Equality

Stakeholders were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that Wokingham Borough is a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business, and with regard to tackling inequality, the Council listens to and learns from the community to provide services that work well for everyone. The results are set out in Figure 2a and 2b below:

Figure 2a and 2b: Stakeholder responses to questions relating to the Equality Plan



These results show:

- While most stakeholders agreed that Wokingham Borough is a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business, a significant proportion (21%) were unsure and 8% disagreed. There is opportunity for improvement.
- We have to do more listening and learning from the community: just under half agreed that this is something we do well, over a third were less sure and 15% disagreed.
- Where data was available, responses from those with protected characteristics were analysed. Analysis showed that responses from Ethnic Minority backgrounds did not differ significantly from the overall pattern of responses, people with disabilities were more likely to disagree with both statements (+3% greater disagreement with Wokingham as a great place, +9% greater disagreement with the council listening and learning from the community).

b) *Identify areas of strength in relation to the current approach to Equality, as well as areas for improvement*

Nearly 1800 feedback responses in relation to questions about our priorities for this Plan generated useful feedback, which can be grouped into two main areas:

- Areas of strength we should build on
- Areas for improvement we should focus on moving forward

Areas of strength included:

- The pandemic response and partnership working to help vulnerable people
- Provision of inclusive events and spaces for children
- Support for older people and people with disabilities
- Some communication and surveys
- Great schools and great place to live for most people
- Feedback stating that there is a good community spirit in Wokingham, and staff care about residents

Areas for improvement included:

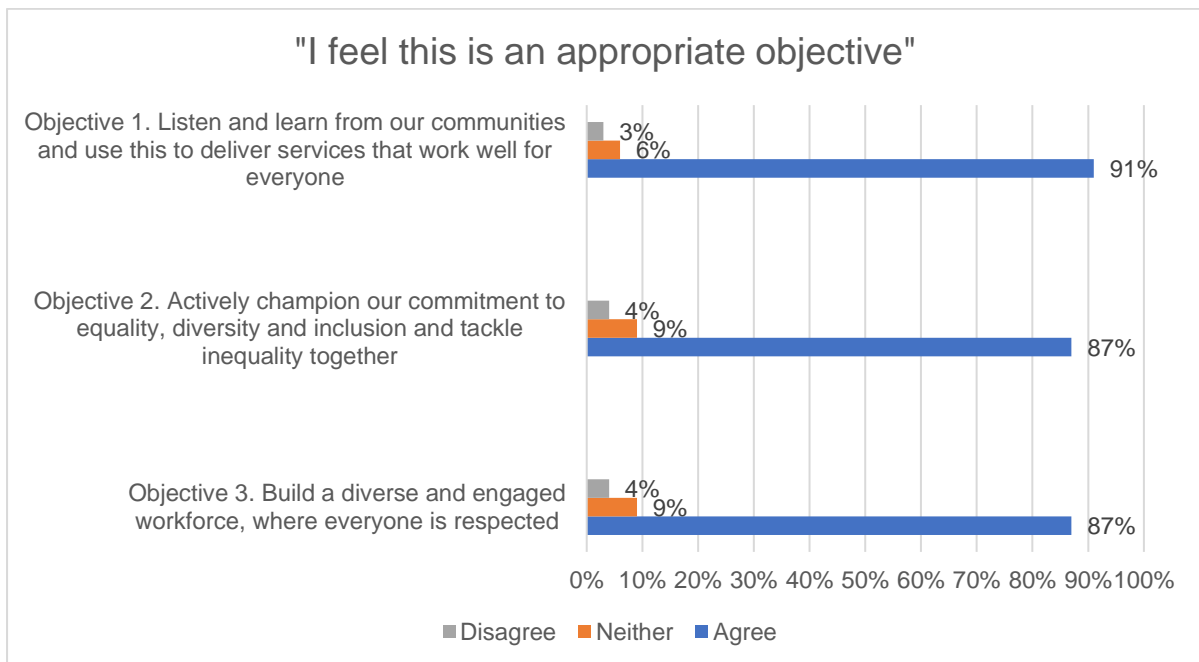
- The need to take action on inequality, publish it and assess the impact of changes
- Co-produce and avoid tokenism
- Could do more to encourage diversity and improve accessibility
- Greater focus on tackling poverty

- Deliver a greater focus on racial equity in schools
- Could do more to give groups with protected characteristics a voice, and improve anti-discriminatory activity particularly in relation to Ethnic Minority and LGBT+ communities
- Communicate better through “easy read” and translated versions
- Encourage diversity at all levels of the council
- Take feedback and monitoring data into account when designing or adapting services

c) Take feedback on suggested priorities for the Equality Plan

Stakeholders were asked for feedback on some suggested priorities for the Equality Plan. The overall responses are set out in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Responses from stakeholders to suggested priorities for the Equality Plan 2021-25



Collectively, feedback from the consultation and engagement exercises has helped to shape and inform the priorities and objectives set out in the section which follows.

3. OUR PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

The Priorities and Objectives which will achieve the ambitions of our Equality Plan are set out in Figure 4 below. These directly reflect the areas identified through insight into evidence and outcomes from consultation and engagement, and by delivering against these we are confident we will achieve our ambition to ensure that Wokingham is a great place for all our residents; that we deliver best practice in terms of fulfilling our duties under the Equality Act; and will be a great employer that builds a diverse, inclusive and engaged workforce.

Figure 4: Equality Plan 2021-25: Our Priorities

Priority 1 - Listen to and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone	
Objective 1	We will improve the collection of data about our communities, publishing it in a transparent manner and acting on this information to improve the way we work. This will help enable us to make the greatest possible positive impact on tackling inequality and ensure that our delivery meets the needs of the communities we serve.
Objective 2	We will engage and communicate with our residents to encourage participation, learn and adapt so that we build trust, strengthen collaboration in delivery, and generate insight and learning to continually strengthen and improve our services. We will adapt our methods of communication and engagement to the needs of our increasingly diverse population to make sure everyone is included.
Objective 3	We will use feedback from residents to identify barriers to equality of opportunity, and continuously improve our approach and learn from mistakes.
Priority 2 - Act on our commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion in the way we plan, deliver and shape our services	
Objective 4	We will embed our commitments and ambitions to promote equality into the way we plan, purchase and deliver. We will assure equality in our approaches in a meaningful way that uses feedback and robust performance and contract management to ensure we address needs for all our residents, and continuously improve.
Objective 5	We will model active community leadership by driving commitments to tackle inequality in our work with strategic partners, including our local area and partnership strategies and plans, and through our collaboration and coproduction with the communities and customers we serve
Objective 6	We will strengthen and improve our use of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that at the appropriate stages of planning and delivery we take account in a timely way of the various potential impacts of our decision-making and delivery, have due regard to our duties under the Equality Act 2010, and do what we can to promote positive equality impacts and minimise negative equality impacts
Priority 3 - Build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected	
Objective 7	We will support staff at all levels of the organisation, including our leadership, to equip them with the right tools to understand how best to tackle inequality and meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community
Objective 8	We will honour the commitments agreed in our Equality Workforce Monitoring Report to help strengthen our approach to equality, diversity and inclusion in our workplace

Our priorities will be delivered through a comprehensive **Action Plan**. This can be found as **Appendix 1**.

4. MEASURING SUCCESS

To ensure that we are successful in making a meaningful impact on key measures of equality and achieve the ambitions set out in this plan, we have adopted an established, credible and objective performance framework to measure our performance and results.

The Framework selected for this plan is the [Local Government Association \(LGA\) Equality Framework](#). This Framework helps councils, in discussion with local partners and local people, to review and improve their performance to advance equality for people with protected characteristics.

This Framework has four parts:

1. Understanding and working with your communities;
2. Leadership and organisational commitment;
3. Responsive services and customer care;
4. Diverse and engaged workforce.

There are three possible levels of achievement described in the Framework:

- Developing
- Achieving
- Excellent

As we implement this plan, we will self-assess ourselves against three levels for each part of the Framework. We will monitor our progress and delivery to ensure that we progress to the highest levels possible for each element of the Framework.

At a future point, we will be able to invite peer challenge and support to ensure that our assessments of our performance and progress are credible and robust.

Focusing on delivery: Equality Action Plan (2021-22)

A detailed Action Plan (attached as Appendix 1) has been developed to ensure immediate focus on delivery, and that actions are taken in the coming financial year to ensure our Priorities and Objectives are achieved.

The various groups involved in Governance of the Strategy (see the section below) will help to monitor progress against delivery of this Action Plan, and ensure that our delivery is having the intended impact on Equality outcomes.

5. GOVERNANCE

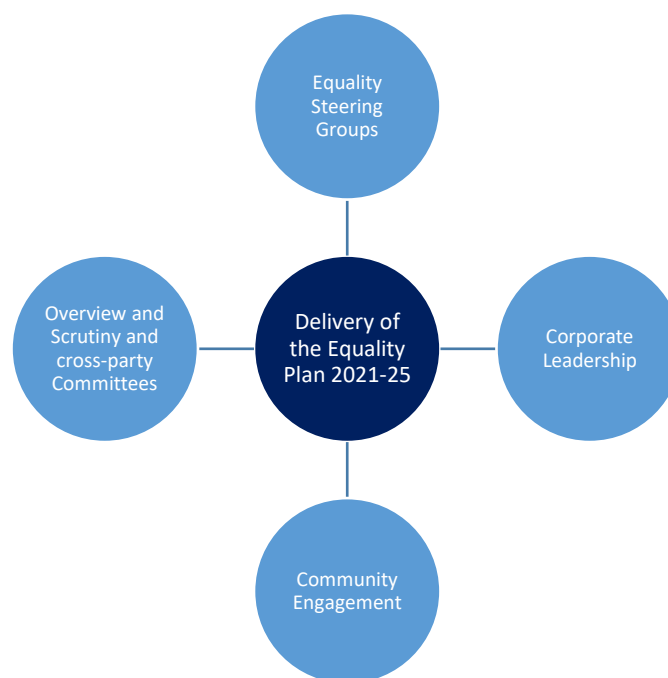
In order to ensure that we take a robust approach to Governing the delivery of this Plan, we have put Governance arrangements in place to ensure the right balance of support and challenge as we implement the Actions set out in the Action Plan.

Given the complexity of the Equality agenda, it is appropriate to engage a range of different groups in the process of helping to steer delivery of the Equality Plan, and help us assess our progress.

Collectively, these groups will help us to ensure that our commitments and actions set out in the Action Plan (**Appendix 1**) are successfully delivered.

The Governance arrangements for the Equality Plan 2021-25 are set out in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Governance Arrangements for Delivery of the Equality Plan 2021-25



Equality Steering Groups

In order to help steer development of this Equality Plan a cross-party **Members' Equality Steering Group** was established. The group met at key stages to provide oversight, advice and feedback and help steer the development of the Plan. This helped to effectively align equality activities with our vision and set accountable direction for the Plan.

Internally, our **Employment Equality Steering Group** is chaired by the Head of Human Resources & Organisation Development and made up of representatives from each Directorate in the Council as well as UNISON. The group meets quarterly, and is responsible for ensuring that no potential or existing member of staff is excluded from career and training opportunities or experiences discrimination.

Our newly formed **Ethnically Diverse Staff Network** is agreeing terms of reference so that it can support our equality priorities. In addition, multiple workstreams, including Equality Champions, have been mobilised to tackle racism in the workplace through a network of more than 100 staff volunteers.

Corporate Leadership

Tackling inequality is a key priority for us and we are committed, at every level of the organisation, to take effective and measurable action. The Director for Communities, Insight and Change has been appointed as the corporate lead for equality. As an employer, our staff and Councillors adhere to our code of conduct and we will continue to make clear our position of zero tolerance of harassment and bullying. We embrace constructive challenge at all levels, and the Corporate Leadership Team will ensure that we make measurable progress towards developing an inclusive culture that strives for excellence in everything we do, for all members of our local community.

Overview and Scrutiny and Cross-Party Committees

Our Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, Audit Committee and Personnel Board (which all have cross-party membership) are responsible for oversight and scrutiny of progress on this Plan, which is included on their forward programmes of work. Their support, advice and challenge will help ensure our actions demonstrate results.

Our Community

We value and welcome the opportunity to hear from all members of our community about how well we are doing against the commitments set out in this Plan, and how we could improve. Although members of the public can present questions at Council meetings to actively participate in democracy and decision making, we recognise that we must do more to ensure that all members of the community have their voice heard in the decision-making process.

Internal audits and external inspections will also help us to quality assure and help us improve. Actions we will take to deliver this Plan include those to continue to strengthen our approach to customer complaints, and ensure that we learn from this feedback and address areas of concern in a timely and appropriate manner.

We have many residents, community groups, partners and voluntary organisations that provide regular opportunities for active engagement in the decisions and services which affect them, including: The Children in Care Council, Wokingham Youth Climate Conference, Wokingham Borough Connect, COVID Community Champions, BME Forum, Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, One Front Door, Involved Tenants, CLASP and the Learning Disability Partnership Board. We will ensure that we engage with and learn from the work of these valuable groups throughout the implementation of this Plan.

6. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Equality Plan: Action Plan (2021-22)

Appendix 2: Summary of delivery since 2017