

# ECC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

YEAR 2 PROGRESS  
REVIEW REPORT  
(2024)

**EVERYONE'S  
ESSEX**

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# FOREWORD

**It's a foundational role of public services to address inequality. It is something that we do through the provision of our services every day. The County Council is committed to ensuring that every part of the county and everyone who lives in it is equitably served and no one feels excluded or is unfairly favoured or disadvantaged.**

This means ensuring that everyone can access services regardless of their background, that we embrace the different communities across Essex, and that we build an inclusive organisation.

Advancing equality is one of our core principles and is at the heart of everything we do. We want to be an organisation which actively recognises the contribution that people from different backgrounds make to all aspects of the council's work. The council has made addressing inequalities and achieving levelling up a key pillar of its work. No one's future should be predetermined by where they are born, their family circumstances or financial situation. We are focused on ensuring residents have the education and skills they need to find good quality employment, take pride in where they live and make lasting improvements to their lives.

This annual publication sets out the progress we have made since setting our equality objectives in May 2022. These objectives do not cover everything the council does in relation to tackling equalities but identifies areas which will help us progress our equalities approach.

Our equality objectives are reviewed and align to our business planning business processes to ensure continued relevance and delivery against our corporate strategy "**Everyone's Essex**".

For further detail follow the links provided in each section or contact [ecc.equalities@essex.gov.uk](mailto:ecc.equalities@essex.gov.uk).



**Cllr Mark Durham,**  
Cabinet Member for Arts,  
Heritage, and Culture

## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The Public Sector Equality Duty sets out the broad parameters of our formal responsibilities. The Council must comply with both a 'general duty' which is focused on eliminating discrimination; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations between people who do and do not share a protected characteristic (these include: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation).

As a public body we also have 'specific duties'. This requires us to publish information to show our compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually. This includes publishing one or more equality objectives<sup>1</sup> and reporting on progress each year. The specific duty also requires us to analyse and publish both our workforce equality data and gender pay gap data, ensuring that any differential equality outcomes are addressed.

### How this links to our strategic aims?

In 2021, Essex County Council (ECC) launched the 4-year organisational strategy, Everyone's Essex. We make it clear in Everyone's Essex that we will seek equality so that opportunity is more fairly distributed across Essex – we want all our residents to be able to maximise their potential. In 2022, we agreed our new equality objectives and they complement this ambition. The first of these objectives is aimed at focusing our work to tackle inequalities within communities, whilst the second is focused on the corporate equality health of the council – ensuring that we strive for a workforce that reflects the communities it serves.

Each of our objectives is accompanied by a set of key activities – demonstrating how we are advancing equality of opportunity for our residents and employees. On an annual basis, equality objectives and related activities are reviewed and aligned to our business planning processes to ensure continued relevance and delivery against Everyone's Essex.

## **What's the purpose of this document and how is it set out?**

The purpose of this document is to bring together the key activities that underpin the two equalities objectives and monitor progress made against them. This enables the council to hold itself to account for how we are performing as an organisation in meeting our statutory duties under the Public Sector Equality Act (2010). It also helps us understand the breadth of the work being undertaken to help address inequality in the county, our successes, where the gaps are and what we plan to do next year.

This impact report articulates and brings together the work ECC has delivered in 2024 and sets out what we plan to do moving forward against our equality objectives. Each section of the report outlines what the objective is and sets out our understanding of the issues and the key data and insight. It also outlines the work that has occurred this year to make progress against each objective and what we plan to do in the coming year.

**THIS REPORT ARTICULATES WHAT WE'RE DOING TO MEET OUR EQUALITIES OBJECTIVES**





## OBJECTIVE 1

### COMMUNITY FOCUS

Focusing on inequality within communities involves addressing the various factors that contribute to disparities among different groups.

Essex is not as diverse as other parts of the country; however, we have seen an increase in the percentage of minority ethnic groups over recent years (10.5% of the Greater Essex population in 2011, increasing to 17% by 2021). We need to develop services that are cognisant of the increasing diversity of the county and reflect our communities. We know that we need to be a good partner when it comes tackling hate crimes and ensure that our streets are safe for those with protected characteristics. We also understand the importance of narrowing the gap between affluent areas and areas of deprivation, particularly in relation to health outcomes and education. This section looks across each of these areas identifying what we do as an organisation to tackle them, and what we plan to do in the future.

## a) Working with partners to tackle health inequality

As a key partner, we play a significant leadership role in improving the Health and Wellbeing of our population through our convening power. The Essex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026 (coordinated through the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board) (HWB) outlines the county's approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for people of all ages – ensuring everyone has access to the same health opportunities and promotes health improvements.

### Our understanding of the issues

Our evidence base to reduce health inequalities has, since 2022, been driven by the **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment**. Through the evidence collected through these data sets, our focus across the health system has been on 1) improving mental health and wellbeing, 2) increasing physical activity and healthy weight, 3) supporting long term independence, and 4) reducing alcohol and substance misuse.

**Our focus on mental health** and wellbeing remains challenging. It is well established that deprivation or being in a position of relative disadvantage is associated with poorer health, including mental health. There has been an increase in 2022/23 in the prevalence of depression in Essex (increasing from 11.6% in 2021/22 to 12.1% in 2022/23). Tendring, which is one of our most deprived areas in Essex, has the highest prevalence of depression in the county. This has risen from 12.9% to 13.9% between 2021/22 and 2022/23. Mental health conditions are also becoming more

prevalent in children, with an increase of SEN children with social, emotional, and mental health as the primary type of need. This has increased from 14.5% in 2021/22 to 16.5% in 2022/23. There are many factors for this, such as the continued impact of the pandemic, academic pressure, as well as family dynamics, or traumatic and adverse experiences.

In relation to suicide and suicide prevention, we know that deprivation and socioeconomic disadvantage continue to be risk factors. Since 2022, the Southend, Essex & Thurrock (SET) Suicide Prevention Partnership has been working on suicide prevention in the context of predicted increases in national suicide rates<sup>2</sup> - alongside acknowledging increased local suicide drivers, due to the cost-of-living crisis. In response to this, the SET Suicide Prevention Partnership set the objective to buck national trends by stemming the suicide rate in Southend Essex and Thurrock. This has been achieved. The England and Wales three year rolling rate has increased from 10.7 deaths per 100,000 in 2022 to 11.4 deaths per 100,000 people in 2023; the highest rate seen since 1999. The Essex three year rolling rate is unchanged, at 8.8 deaths per 100,000, illustrating that the partnership was able to deliver a suicide prevention impact. This puts the Essex suicide rate below national average for the first time since 2011. Although the rate across Essex remains unchanged, there are higher rates in both Tendring and Epping, 14.9 and 11.2 per 100,000, respectively. We expect and see variation year on year across locations due to individual differences, however both areas have shown consistent upward trends over time<sup>3</sup>.

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**Our focus on physical activity and healthy weight<sup>4</sup>**, highlights that there is a strong link between inequality, physical inactivity, poor diet, and socio-economic deprivation. Addressing diet and physical activity in more deprived groups has a role in reducing health inequalities in Essex. The percentage of Essex adults with excess weight is significantly worse than the national average and has increased at a quicker rate than nationally over the last 5 years. With nearly 70% of adults being overweight or obese in 2022/23, this is a major health issue in Essex which will have consequences in the short and long term. Obesity figures are particularly high in certain districts of the county, with adult rates as high as 73% in Basildon and as high as 40% in Castle point and Tendring for year 6 children.

Whilst we know that nutrition is a major contributor to the obesity issue, physical activity is also a major issue and predictor of future health outcomes on its own. Around 1 in 5 adults across Essex are physically inactive. Whilst this is lower than the national average, it still means 21% of the adult population in Essex are at increased risk of a range of health conditions and diseases which are deemed largely preventable through small lifestyle changes. There is also a correlation between inequality and inactivity, this is shown by our key levelling up areas having the highest percentages of physical inactivity in the county. For example, physical inactivity in Tendring is the highest at 27.2%, with Harlow, Castle Point and Basildon not far behind with 26.1%, 25.8% and 24.7%, respectively. Whilst more affluent areas such as Brentwood, Chelmsford and Uttlesford, have very low levels of inactivity. However, the level of physical inactivity has reduced slightly in Essex (21.6% in 2021/22 to 21.1% 2022/23 in Essex).

Some groups have a higher risk of obesity than others. In Essex, excess weight is more common amongst people with a learning and/or physical disability, and amongst specific minority ethnic groups, particularly those from Black and Asian backgrounds. In 2021/22, 25% of those with a learning disability who had a BMI assessment in the 15 months up to and including 31 March, were classified as obese. In children, the prevalence of being overweight or very overweight in year 6, was higher for those from black ethnic groups (48%). This compares to 33% of children from white backgrounds and 38% of Asian children in 2022/23. Children from Asian backgrounds also have a higher prevalence of being underweight compared to other groups (4% compared to 2% of white children in year 6)<sup>5</sup>.

**Our focus on supporting long term independence.** We know that in Essex that there are around 124,000<sup>6</sup> unpaid carers in the county. However, it's important to note that this figure is likely an underestimate, as many individuals may not identify themselves as carers. There are more than 10,000 young carers in Essex, some as young as five years old. Nationally the estimate of young carers in the UK is 1 in 12; that equates to an average of 2 children or young people in every classroom across the country.



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In the 2021 Census, over 16% of the Essex population reported having a disability that impacts on their day-to-day activities. As referenced in our CQC self-assessment, the population of people (aged 18+ years) with learning disabilities and autism is expected to grow by 4% and for people with autism by 5% between 2023 and 2030. The population of working aged adults (18-64 years) with some sensory impairments is also expected to grow in this time, with a 2% projected increase with serious visual impairment and a 2% projected increase with some hearing loss. Supporting Essex residents who have disabilities will remain a key focus.

**Our focus on alcohol** misuse remains a priority given the challenges associated with it. The estimated impact of alcohol related harm is costing the Essex health system over £728m<sup>7</sup> annually. To halt and reverse the trend of increased alcohol-related harm, we need to continue intervening early to identify those at future risk, and support and empower those affected to change their behaviour. People living in deprived areas generally consume less on average compared to those in more affluent areas. However, they experience significantly higher levels of alcohol-related harm such as binge drinking and drinking over the recommended 14 units a week. There are other factors such as poor diet, smoking, and limited access to healthcare which amplifies the harmful effects of alcohol in deprived communities.

Overall, Essex has a lower rate of admissions to hospital for alcohol related conditions than the national average at 366 per 100k of the population in 2022/23, compared to 475 per 100k nationally. There is variation through the districts and between males and females. Tendring consistently represents the highest rate across Essex for both sexes, with males lower than the National average at 619 per 100k vs 639. The rate for females in Essex was higher than National average in 2022/23 at a rate of 370 per 100k vs 326 nationally.

Within our adult treatment population (18+), in 2023-24 we had over 1,800 people receiving structured treatment who reported that they needed support with their alcohol use. 61% of these were male, with 39% female. Within our under 18 cohort in our young people's service, for 2023-24 we had nearly 230 in structured treatment, 43% of these reported a problem with their use of alcohol.

**IN 2023-24 OVER 1800 PEOPLE  
REPORTED THAT THEY  
NEEDED SUPPORT WITH  
THEIR ALCOHOL USE**



### What activity is supporting progress?

As a key partner, we have taken forward a range of work to support progress to tackle health inequality across Essex. A range of progress has been made.

**To support our focus on mental health and wellbeing** the SET Suicide Prevention Partnership Board, of which the County Council is a key partner, has agreed and been implementing an action plan that enables them to meet the short-term outcome of stemming suicide rates in Essex - on the way to a longer-term zero-suicide aspiration. Real Time Suicide Surveillance operates through joint working between Essex Police, Essex Public Health, Southend Public Health, and Thurrock Public Health Teams. This contributes to the stabilisation of suicide prevalence across Greater Essex. Suicide prevention has also been identified as a key area of focus in all three of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) joint forward plans. At a place level, Northeast Essex ICB are piloting a suicide prevention operations programme which is running between 1st January 2024 to January 2025. The pilot focuses on place based targeted intervention in an area of historic high need. The pilot action plan focuses on delivering a community focused, place-based, suicide prevention intervention through maximising existing local assets.

**To support our focus on physical activity**, we launched our 10-year Healthy Weight strategy this year, in consultation with our partners. The strategy focuses on preventing and reducing excess weight, but also the efforts required to reduce the risk of people being underweight. The focus of the strategy is on both tackling excess weight in places (areas of deprivation) and people (cohorts) – where we know that some groups have greater risk of excess weight and poorer health outcomes.

In terms of delivery to support physical activity, Essex is one of 12 local delivery pilots (LDP) chosen by Sport England to test innovative approaches and find replicable and sustainable solutions that increases activity levels. The pilots will run initially until 2025. As part of LDP, Active Essex has continued to run the Pedal Power scheme, at a place level (Clacton, Harwich, Colchester, Basildon, Harlow, and Canvey Island) to provide free bikes to residents in the county's most disadvantaged communities, to significantly increase cycling, active travel, and physical activity levels. This multi-partner programme delivering across multiple outcomes including health, employability, active travel, net zero and carbon reduction, has already delivered over 4,000 bikes to those most in need. Active Essex has recently launched another LDP called 'Reconnect.' Building upon the success of the Prevention and Enablement Model (PEM), this test and learn initiative in partnership with Adult Social Care and Sport for Confidence, will harness the power of physical activity to improve the lives of people living with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions in Essex, and help them lead more fulfilling lives.

**ACTIVE ESSEX HAS DELIVERED OVER  
4000 BIKES TO THOSE IN NEED**



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We know that school holidays remain a particularly difficult time for families living in deprived areas. Whilst at school, children from low-income families are entitled to and provided with a daily free school meal (FSMs). However, during the school holidays this stops resulting in low-income families having an added burden of providing nutritious meals, with finite financial resources. Since 2022, we have continued to mitigate this by launching the Essex Activate Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF). This scheme delivers approximately 200 clubs during the main holidays, and 90 clubs during half term breaks. All clubs provide different types of physical and enrichment activities, at least one substantial meal, food education and continuous support and guidance for households. These clubs are free for those on FSMs. The estimated social value generated by the 2024 programme in Essex is £22.5m. 96% of parents said their own mental health and wellbeing improved due to their child attending a HAF club, whilst 76% of parents said their child's mental health and wellbeing improved 'very much' due to the HAF clubs.

**To support our focus on long-term independence**, we launched our **All-Age Carers Strategy** in 2022, which pledges to support carers of all ages to improve the advice, guidance and support they receive. This has included promoting the Essex Wellbeing Service to carers. This has seen 600 carers access this service for advice and guidance between April 2024 to September 2024. In April 2024, we launched the Essex Carers Core Offer of Support (ECCOS) services. This support service, delivered by the charities Action for Family Carers (West Essex), Essex Carers Support (North Essex) and Carers First (Mid and South Essex), sets ambitious targets to identify and support more unpaid carers.

We expect to have supported 4,150 carers by April 2025, and 12,500 carers by April 2027. Since going live on April 2024, the providers are on track to achieve the target for this year.

In April 2023, we launched a four-year disability strategy called **Meaningful Lives Matter**. The strategy aims to create a more inclusive Essex by focusing on the needs of individuals with learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence (where experienced as a disability), sensory impairments and physical disabilities. Below sets out the key areas of progress this year against the four key themes in the strategy:

- we have established employment services and supported c.450 people into employment
- we have expanded our Local Linked Support team, who offer guidance and personalised support to residents with high support needs. This has helped over 120 people across Essex over the last year. The Autism Navigation Service has also been expanded this year, in partnership with the NHS, increasing peer support and providing a flexible offer following diagnosis
- we have delivered the Ageing Well programme for those with learning disabilities, working with providers to improve awareness of this important subject. We have improved the resources available to support end of life. Also, a new co-designed sensory service is now in place which increases the use of the voluntary sector to allow people to access the right support at the right time

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**To support our focus on alcohol and drug abuse**, we have successfully led on the regional commissioning of a medically managed in-patient detoxification provision at Broomfield Hospital, the first of its kind in the region. The service works alongside drug and alcohol support services across the region to provide dedicated support to patients who have complex issues with substances and co-existing mental and physical health concerns.

We have continued to provide a range of employment support to individuals with multiple and complex needs, namely the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) programme which is delivered on behalf of ECC Public Health by Open Road. The scheme supports some of our most marginalised service users, who generally find accessing employment difficult. In addition, our provider has also delivered the Multiple and Complex Needs Service, which supports individuals in contact with the criminal justice system and who have a range of other multiple and complex needs to access employment opportunities and or take steps to becoming job ready, i.e. education, training, and volunteering opportunities. As of October 2024, the service had received a total of 358 referrals; of these 45% had positive outcomes, into employment, training/education or a training opportunity secured.

**WE EXPECT TO HAVE SUPPORTED  
4,150 CARERS BY APRIL 2025, AND  
12,500 CARERS BY APRIL 2027**



## Areas for future focus

### **For mental health and wellbeing, we will:**

- focus our suicide prevention work in the west of the county. We will continue to work closely with the voluntary sector to agree on a 5-year strategic plan for focused suicide prevention work more generally across the county

### **For advancing physical activity, we will:**

- start to implement the activity set out within the Essex Healthy Weight Strategy

### **For supporting local term independence, we will:**

- develop an equality, diversity and inclusion action plan which will focus on addressing known differentials in care and support for carers
- take forward our 2025-2029 Supported Living Framework, requiring our providers to enhance support to people with disabilities in our communities and into employment

- expand the Aging Well programme for those with sensory and physical impairments
- develop our community-based support model outside the traditional 9-5pm offer to further meet the diverse needs of those with disabilities

### **For alcohol abuse, we will:**

- continue to channel the work of the Essex Recovery Fund to fund projects that are focussed on supporting diverse groups of people into and through recovery, including the continued involvement of those with lived experience of addiction
- reprocure the Psychosocial Alcohol Interventions and Recovery Service and Community Rehabilitation Service by April 2025 ensuring key support for those with addictions

## **b) Working with children, young people, and partners to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable<sup>8</sup>**

As a council we are under a statutory duty to work in conjunction with partners to support children and young people to achieve good outcomes. Through consistent monitoring of performance information and through sharing of information across professional networks, we have developed a strong understanding of the different vulnerable cohorts of children in Essex and areas for improvement. We are aware of enhanced vulnerability in cohorts such as the growing number of children not in education, the increasing numbers of separated migrant children arriving in Essex, growing mental health needs of children, and the developing complexity of threat to children at risk in their communities.

### **Our understanding of the issues**

Over recent years the school population in Essex has changed. 13% of children in Essex are estimated to be living in poverty which can have a huge impact on their education outcomes. One of the strongest indicators of low income is if pupils are on Free School Meals (FSMs). Numbers of children in receipt of FSMs has nearly doubled from 10.7% in 2015/16 to 19.6% in 2024. The pupil population has also become much more diverse. For example, the numbers of pupils from global majority ethnic groups has nearly doubled in number from 27,300 in 2015/16 to 52,712 in 2024. Over the same period, pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) has increased in number from 11,410 to 22,802, meaning that around one in ten Essex pupils do not have English

as their first language. With the level of complexity that children are exhibiting at school, there is much higher demand on special educational need (SEN) services and support. Children requiring SEN support in school has increased from 25,795 in 2023 to 28,165 in 2024 (an increase of 9.2%). For pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), this has risen from 8,666 in 2023 to 9,472 in 2024 (an increase of 9.3%). Of all pupils with special educational needs, those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health recorded as their primary need, have risen in number from 7,550 to 8,978 (an increase of 18.9% in one year). This shows the huge complexity and range of need that is evident in the Essex school system.

The Government and ECC are keen to promote the free funding entitlement for 2-year-olds, which supports low-income families to use Early Years provision. As of January 2024, 80.8% of eligible Essex children were registered at a provision, compared to 74.8% nationally. Increasing the take up of funding is expected to help improve outcomes for children from deprived areas and increase the number of children who are school ready. In 2023, 62.5% of Essex disadvantaged children were deemed to be school ready (similar to the national average of 62.6%). This is much lower than the 78.6% of Essex children who were not disadvantaged. At the end of the reception year (age 5), children are assessed for whether they have achieved a Good Level of Development (GLD). This continues to be a strength in Essex with performance of 69.0%, which is higher than the national average of 67.2%

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for all pupils. The gap, between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in relation to GLD, still remains in excess of 20%.

When aged 11, pupils are making the key transition from the primary to secondary phase. The expectation is that pupils achieve at least the expected standard in KS2 Reading, Writing and Maths. The Government has set an ambitious target of 90% of all pupils to achieve this standard by the year 2030. Essex, along with most other local authorities, has some way to go to achieve this. 61.1% of Essex pupils achieved compared to 59.6% nationally. However, there is again a significant difference in the performance of Essex disadvantaged pupils, with 42.6% reaching the expected level, compared to 67.6% of non-disadvantaged pupils. The gap is still evident nationally albeit slightly less than in Essex. There are also significant differences in outcomes for pupils according to their SEN status. In Essex, 70.7% of pupils in 2023 with no SEN needs, achieved at KS2, whereas for those with SEN Support it was 22.1%, and those with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) was 7.7%.

The end of statutory education is at age 16 when pupils sit KS4 exams. One of the priority measures is for pupils to achieve grades 9-4 in English and Maths. 63.7% of all Essex pupils achieved this, however, the disadvantaged/non disadvantaged gap increases, at this stage, to over 33%. 70.5% of non-disadvantaged pupils achieved, which is almost double their disadvantaged peers with 36.9% achieving. This is a sizeable gap that is also seen nationally although not to the extent seen in Essex.

## What activity is supporting progress?

In September 2023, we launched our [Inclusion Strategy](#), which is a comprehensive plan designed to ensure that all children and young people in Essex have access to inclusive, high-quality education- regardless of their protected characteristics. The strategy trials new initiatives such as inclusion reviews, which help secondary schools embed a culture of inclusion, focusing on relationships and wellbeing, regular school attendance and participation in school activities. It also provides advice and key strategies for schools to plan, implement, and review effective inclusion practices. As well as recognising the pressure on headteachers to increase the capacity of SEND (special educational needs and disabilities), pastoral support, attendance, and safeguarding teams.

This year we have delivered improvements for children and young people with **SEND**, including consistently high quality EHCPs and a more positive experience for families engaged in new assessment and planning processes. A variety of work has also been undertaken to better identify and support the SEND needs of children within the social care cohort. A recent survey conducted by the Essex Family Forum indicated that more families (61% rising from 51% in the previous survey) feel that their social care needs have been reflected in their child's EHCP. To support children with high levels of need, we have opened three new provisions in 2024 and have undertaken extensive work with the external market and district, borough, and city councils to encourage the opening of new provision and the ability of Essex County Council to access placements within this.

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We also launched our [Essex Early Years and Childcare Strategy](#), which is part of a long-term plan (2022-2027) that aims to continuously improve the early years' system in Essex, with a focus on better outcomes for all children and improve children's GLD. This strategy has launched initiatives this year, such as the Speech Club programme in Levelling Up Areas and the Essex Sing Together project. It also launched the Essex Music Service, aimed at early speech development, and the ['Early Years Ordinarily Available'](#) programme, which supports those with emergent additional needs. This year we have also recruited four Early Intervention Partners to support practitioners in their engagements with vulnerable children.

To improve our understanding of the daily childhood experience for children aged 9 plus, we have commenced a research piece called ['Childhood in Essex'](#). This will gauge useful insight around the experiences of young people around dealing with neurodiversity, discrimination, sexuality, and gender. Outputs from this work will be owned by the Children's Partnership Board and will feed into strategic planning and commissioning. Extensive scoping activity has also been undertaken around service provision for [Separated Migrant Children](#) (SMC). This includes forecasting to ensure we have an accurate understanding of the likely future numbers of separated migrant children we will be welcoming into Essex. We also need to have a clear understanding of the resource needs to ensure that they are adequately supported.





## Areas of future focus

Continued action to improve outcomes for SEND children is a key focus, particularly in relation to improving the timeliness of ECHP plans and improving confidence in the system. A large part of this will be through improving the EHCP needs assessment process, with the goal of issuing more plans within the 20-week timescale. To achieve this, we will recruit more Educational Psychologists and will share their advice with families and settings as soon as it is available, rather than waiting to include it in the draft EHCP. This shows our commitment to improve communication with parents throughout the process. We also are looking to expedite the drafting process of ECHP plans too. There will no longer be a need for a separate needs assessment report and a new meeting format has been introduced for families to discuss the draft EHCP and suggest changes.

### Other key areas of future focus include:

- further embedding of our work on Anti-Racist Practice including deepening our understanding of the levels of disproportionality in our system, ensuring a focus on race within partnership discussions around risk in the community, and seeking to further engage partners in our approach
- develop a guidance document for schools and other education settings (including Early Years) to support them in their approach to equality and diversity, to strengthen their processes in responding to concerns and to encourage consistency in reporting and recording
- continue the 'Childhood in Essex' research project to understand the changing nature of childhood in pre-teens and teenagers
- continued implementation of key strategies aimed at outcomes for our most vulnerable groups including our Inclusion Strategy, Children in Care and Leaving Care Partnership Strategy, Young Carers Strategy etc.
- continued implementation of our Children in Care Sufficiency Strategy including development of residential provision to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in care – 6 properties meeting different needs should be available by 2026
- a variety of on-going activity to support continued recovery of our children and young people from the on-going long-term impact of COVID, including the work of the Essex Education Taskforce with a focus on employability and skills
- contributing to the work under the Essex Anchors Strategy to further develop opportunities for vulnerable young people to access meaningful employment – e.g. supported internships, internships for care leavers etc.

## c) Working with partners to deliver an effective response to tackling hate crime

Tackling hate crime is a significant concern in Essex, and there are ongoing efforts to address it. Hate crimes are crimes committed against someone due to their protected characteristics. The council provides strong leadership by chairing the Strategic Hate Crime Prevention Partnership (SHCPP), which is a multi-agency partnership to understand and combat hate crime in the county. Overall, the partnership is focused on improving our knowledge and understanding of hate crime as a system, and to inform effective practice and interventions for victims and families.

### Our understanding of the issues

Hate crimes can manifest in various forms, including physical assault, verbal abuse, and incitement to hatred. Hate crime largely goes unreported in the UK, with the Crime Survey for England & Wales (CSEW) 2020 finding that only 47% of hate crime incidents were reported to the police. This can be for many reasons, including a fear of the perpetrator, distrust in authorities and normalisation of abuse. Reported hate crime has reduced in Greater Essex (which includes Southend and Thurrock)<sup>9</sup> by 9.1% from 4,525 Hate Crime offences in 2022/23 to 4,077 cases in 2023/24<sup>10</sup>. We work very closely with the police to advance the importance of reporting hate crime, as this is the only way to ensure justice for victims.

We know that hate crime is broken down by motivating factors relating to one's race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender. Across Greater Essex (including Southend and Thurrock) in 2023/24, race was by far the most prevalent motivating factor accounting for 2,770 cases, 65% of all motivating factors in 2023/24. Sexual orientation although also decreasing, has now become the second highest motivating factor in relation to hate crime in Essex, accounting for 13.8% of cases. In 2023/24 this is higher than the number of cases where disability was a motivating factor (588 cases of cases compared to 521 for disability). Hate crimes involving disability saw a significant decrease between 2022/23 and 2023/24 from 694 to 521. However, as stated, there continues to be a general decrease in reported hate crime in the county.

**REPORTED HATE CRIME IN  
GREATER ESSEX REDUCED  
BY 9.1% BETWEEN 2022/23  
AND 2023/24**



### What activity is supporting progress?

In early 2024, the Strategic Hate Crime Partnership (SHCPP) commissioned research to seek the voice of victims and families that are subjected to hate crime, as well as understanding their experiences of, reporting (or barriers to reporting) through the criminal justice system. The research survey received 430 responses. 20% of these said they had been a victim of hate crime in day-to-day life in the past 12 months, nearly half of these incidents occurred in the street or town centre, with only 44% of these reporting the incident to agencies. 26% of the respondents had been a victim of hate crime online in the past 12 months, with 32% reporting it and only 25% reporting it to the police. The research identified that one of the main reasons respondents did not report incidents was because they didn't feel that anything would happen as a result of it. On the back of this research the SHCPP has developed a delivery plan to increase awareness of hate crime and the importance of reporting it to the police or other trusted organisations across Essex.

**26% OF RESPONDENTS HAD BEEN A VICTIM OF HATE CRIME ONLINE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS**



### Areas for future focus

As a key partner of the partnership, we will be taking forward the recommendations of the research and implementing the delivery plan. This will help us to:

- develop a toolkit for business to raise awareness and empower employers to support and encourage their staff to report
- review the current use and purpose of the Hate Crime Ambassadors / Hate Crime Incident Referral Centres and support provided to them
- create an improved standard set of information for use on all partner websites
- review the scope and reach of current training offers

## **d) Working with partners to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG) and improve feelings of safety in public spaces**

The Council is committed to addressing the safety of women and girls – regarding this area of work as a critical issue that serves multiple important purposes. Ensuring safety allows women and girls to participate fully in society, empowering them to pursue education, leisure, employment, and other opportunities without fear. By addressing safety for women and girls, public services more generally can challenge and change harmful norms and behaviours, by creating a culture of respect and dignity for all.

### **Our understanding of the issues**

Earlier in 2024 the Police Chiefs Council<sup>11</sup> and the College of Policing outlined the scale of VAWG and have set out plans to tackle it, with partners across the UK. At a national level, data indicates that domestic abuse (DA) counts for 17% of all crime nationally. Approximately 26% of children under the age of 18 live in a household where an adult has experienced DA. 10% of all reported violence against women and girls is classified as Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO). 1 in 20 people are estimated to be perpetrators of VAWG per year, whilst 3,000 crimes of VAWG are recorded each day, with at least 1 in 12 women becoming victims each year.

In Essex we know that the number of violence against the person offences (including stalking & harassment offences) against females has decreased this year by 13.8% (36,668 offences in April 2023 to 31,604 in April 2024)<sup>12</sup>. Whilst the number of sexual offences against females also decreased by 11.3% (4,660 offences recorded in April 2023 compared to 4,133 in April 2024) the number of sexual offences against women that were solved has decreased in 2024 by 3.9% (307 in April 2023 and 295 in April 2024).

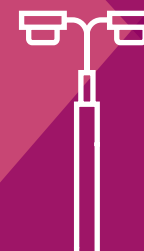
In 2022, the council conducted a safety survey to identify how people feel in the county. This found that 47% of women felt unsafe at night in towns and cities across Essex, compared to 16% in the day. Women in younger age groups were more likely to feel less safe in their local area than women in older age groups – both during the day and at night. Women with a disability felt less safe across all areas, but not significantly so. 45% of all the women surveyed felt that poor or no lighting is a key factor influencing the safety of a place, with younger women feeling this more than other age groups. Older women see a lack of visible policing as a key factor. Women with a disability were slightly more likely to select ‘people drinking alcohol in public spaces’ or ‘lack of clean & safe public toilets’ as key factors to their safety. 60% of women identified car parks as the least safe spaces at night, although half of women identified greenspaces and streets as unsafe at night too.

### What activity is supporting our progress?

We established the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) in 2021 to address the issues raised by the public. The main purpose of the SAG was to identify the changes needed to protect women against violence in Essex and also to help reduce the fear of violence. The SAG was instrumental in developing our understanding of women's safety in the county and undertook research, in collaboration with the University of Essex, which found that 44.5% of females felt safe walking alone in their area after dark compared to 74.9% of males. Recommendations from this research included engaging with young people in the town centres to understand what they need and reviewing the locations and working order of streetlights. The SAG also worked to strengthen the Essex Design Guide to ensure that it takes into account safety of women when planning new developments. The **Essex Design Guide** has now been updated to include a section with these considerations. Although the work of the SAG has been effective, to tackle this agenda, interventions require a more localised partnership approach. This is why the SAG was disbanded in 2023 and recently replaced with the VAWG Steering Group which feeds into the Safer Essex board. This group is chaired by the Chief Executive for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex.

Our strong stance and approach on VAWG has led to the organisation achieving White Ribbon status. This is given to organisations, who demonstrate over a period, that they have engaged in activities designed to raise awareness with men about violence against women (VAWG) and involve them in helping to bring VAWG to an end. One-way the council has achieved this, is through our Bystander Awareness Initiative. This encourages individuals to recognise and respond to potentially harmful situations, particularly those involving inappropriate or threatening behaviour and creating a safe and respectful environment for everyone. This has involved training for council employees and with partner organisations. 1,029 people have taken the module since it was launched. Of those providing feedback, 93% found it helpful, 94% said they were likely to put it into practice, 85% said they felt more confident in intervening.

**ONLY 44.5% OF FEMALES  
FELT SAFE WALKING  
ALONE IN THEIR AREA  
AFTER DARK**



### **Areas for future focus**

As a White Ribbon UK Accredited Organisation, the council will continue to take steps to make a difference in our communities to end violence against women. This will help improve the culture, safety, and morale of our workforce, and increase the knowledge and skills of our people to address violence against women and improve the experience of our customers and stakeholders. Our three-year white ribbon action commits us to:

- reviewing and updating our policies to ensure that they align with the Home Office Violence Against Women and Girls National Statement of Expectations
- establishing senior leader ambassadors and champions across all our business
- incorporating White Ribbon values into our procurement practices and make this part of our social value catalogue



## e) Improving our understanding of the race disparities that exist in our services and work in partnership to address them

### Our understanding of the issues

Since the publication of the Government's [Race Disparity Audit](#), the Government and public sector bodies have recognised the need for improved data collection and analysis to truly understand the disparity that exists in relation to differential equality outcomes for minority groups. In Essex we know that ethnic diversity has increased since the 2011 census<sup>13</sup>. In 2011 ethnic groups other than white British accounted for 9.2% of residents, compared to the 14.9% recorded in 2021. Although the percentage of minority ethnic groups is lower in Essex than nationally (14.9% compared to 26.4% nationally), the increase does show that our county is becoming more diverse<sup>14</sup>.

Minority Ethnic residents are more likely to live in built-up areas and major towns and cities, largely in areas neighbouring London boroughs, such as Epping and Harlow. Although the number of minority ethnic residents decreases with age in Essex, ethnic diversity reaches its peak in the ages between 30 and 49. The prevalence of disability is much lower in Essex's minority ethnic residents compared to the general Essex population – 9.5% of minority ethnic residents class themselves as disabled under the Equality Act (2010), compared to 16.7% of Essex residents overall and 17.3% nationally. Disability is strongly related to age, and Essex minority ethnic residents are on average younger than the general Essex population. This may explain part of these disability patterns.

Overall, we know that minority ethnic residents in Essex are well educated and are highly skilled, meaning that they are more likely to hold a level 4 qualification<sup>15</sup>. 15.9% of minority ethnic residents also work in higher managerial roles, compared to 13.5% of all Essex residents. Younger residents from minority ethnic groups are more likely to be full-time students (11.3% compared to 5.5% in the general population).

Yet there is no easy and straightforward answer as to why some minority ethnic groups experience consistently poorer outcomes. Our analysis suggests that, although economic deprivation may influence poor outcomes for some specific minority ethnic groups, others are not disproportionately represented across greater Essex's deprived communities<sup>16</sup>. Other factors, such as culture, engagement with education, length of time in the UK, language proficiency, and experience of discrimination may play a part. It is likely that the factors explaining poor outcomes will be different for different groups.

**THE PERCENTAGE OF MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS IS LOWER IN ESSEX THAN NATIONALLY (14.9% COMPARED TO 26.4% NATIONALLY), THE INCREASE DOES SHOW THAT OUR COUNTY IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE**

### What activity is supporting our progress?

Research conducted by ECC in 2024 has provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of minority ethnic and faith communities in Essex. Our aim is to engage with individuals from these communities, who are typically under-represented in our research, to understand their experiences and perceptions of accessing and using public and private services, as well as accessing opportunities.

#### The research revealed that:

**Good health and care, education, work, and family life** are the key opportunities valued by all communities, but that some residents reported that the needs of people from ethnic or faith backgrounds (e.g. specific cultural or dietary needs etc) are not always effectively supported by services, amenities, and businesses. While most residents did not find accessing services and support difficult, some suspect that they have experienced discrimination, exclusion, or unfairness due to their ethnicity or faith. Language and eligibility barriers are a particular source of disadvantage for those small sections of the Essex population who cannot speak English well.

**Barriers to employment** impact residents' ability to earn a good income and fulfil their goals. Competition for employment is high, and many residents suspect discrimination during recruitment. Those who have migrated often accept lower-skilled work as their previous work experience or qualifications are not recognised. Language barriers further disadvantage those seeking work.

**More inclusive communities**, many felt that cultural and faith events are not treated as visibly or equally in some schools and communities. Residents from minority ethnic groups would value moves to make schools more aware of, the inclusivity of other cultures and faith, and the undertaking of visible activities to celebrate these at the appropriate times. An understanding of different cultures and religions should be embedded in the education curriculum.

The research suggests that improving the consistency and quality of engagement with people from minority ethnic and faith communities will be crucial to building their confidence, trust, and awareness of their routes to engage and influence. As a result of this work, we aim to improve engagement pathways by developing a community engagement strategy. This will help to build capability to connect and improve dialogue with community groups and residents who are under-represented or seldom involved in engagement with the council and our partners.

This year we have become better informed about the different equality outcomes in our services, specifically in relation to Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Social Care (CSC). In late 2023, we started work on developing an Equality Insight Plan to improve both the quality and coverage of the data we hold on those who use our services.



### Key findings from the research tells us that:

- there is a higher proportion known to Children's Social Care: 27% of the children open to social care (Child in Care, Child in Need or Child Protection) are from minority ethnic groups. When you remove Separated Migrant Children, this remains at 21% which is 4% higher than the minority ethnic school population
- lower proportion of adults known to Adult Social Care: 12% of working aged adults supported by social care during the year are from minority ethnic groups compared to 17% of those aged 16-64 in the wider population
- similar proportion of older people supported by social care: 5.6% of older people, aged 65+ supported by social care during the year are from minority ethnic groups which is the same proportion in the wider population 65+ at 5.5%
- white ethnic groups are significantly underrepresented among our caseloads for Adult Social Care (even when standardising for age) and amongst care leavers (55%) and looked after children (73%)
- Asian minority ethnic groups are underrepresented across both ASC and CSC caseloads: However, over 50% of Asian children who become a child in care become a child looked after with no prior social care involvement compared to 32% for white children

### Areas for future focus

In relation to our research into the lived experience of our residents, we will be:

- improving engagement pathways by developing a community engagement strategy, building capability to connect with community groups and residents who are under-represented or seldom involved in engagement with the council
- developing internal guidance on the business benefits of collecting and recording equalities data on our service users
- putting in place data development plans, so that we can improve data collection for protected characteristics and capture more information from our Public Health, skills, and customer services areas



## OBJECTIVE 2

# WORKFORCE FOCUSED EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

At ECC we want everyone to embrace their diversity and truly bring their authentic self to the workplace.

We want all employees to feel valued, accepted and supported to succeed at work and reach their full potential for the benefit of employees, the organisation, and the communities we serve. Our Workforce [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) Strategy 2023-25](#) sets out our commitments and actions. Our vision is to have a workforce at ECC that is representative of the communities that we serve. We also want to enable the right environment and behaviours so that individual and organisational equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded in everything we do.

Last year we reported on nine workforce equality deliverables that complement our workforce equality objective (please see appendix 1). This year we have consolidated these into three thematic areas, as set out in the EDI strategy 2023-25. These themes include improving our understanding of the diversity of our workforce, building an inclusive culture, and ensuring equality. Setting the objectives and our progress in this way is intended to avoid duplication.

## a) Improve our understanding of our workforce

### Our understanding of the issues

We continue to use data and insight to inform our approach to improving the diversity of our workforce, including measuring our progress to prompt interventions. We know that we can do better in terms of using the data we have to track progress. For example, we know we have further to go if we want to increase the self-declaration rates amongst employees so that we can really understand the diversity of our workforce and the needs of our employees.

This will require us to identify ways in which we can improve confidence of our employees so that they can understand the business benefits of disclosing. This will also help us ensure that our employee information is accurate and up to date.

**In terms of our current staffing base**, we have a workforce of 8,142 as of 2022/23. 16.9% of employees are ethnically diverse which broadly reflects the composition of the Essex economically active population, which stands at 14.8%. Staff declaration rates continue to increase in relation to sexual orientation, increasing by 5% to 58%, in 2022/23. The percentage of employees identifying as disabled increased by 0.2% to 4.8% in 2022/23, yet we know we have further to go to improve this even further. 73% of the workforce at Essex County Council are women.

Despite this high percentage, their remains a mean gender pay gap of 5.7% (as of 2024), which is a decrease of 3.2% from last year<sup>17</sup>. There has been a slight decrease in employees aged under 25 reducing by 1% to 5.2% in 2022/23. In 2022/23 the majority of the workforce population was aged between 35 and 64.

**In terms of recruitment**, we know that over 35% of applications in 2022/23 were from ethnically diverse jobseekers. 21% of ethnically diverse applicants were shortlisted, which is a decrease of 1% from 2021/22 figures, although short of the percentage of White British applicants shortlisted (35%). The offer rate for ethnically diverse candidates was 22% in 2022/23, which is lower than the White British offer rate of 29%. Asian candidates had the lowest offer rate at 20%. Applicants that did not disclose their ethnicity was significantly high in 2022/23 at 40%, however this is much improved from the previous year (60%). 39% of applicants recorded as having a disability were shortlisted for roles. 21% of shortlisted applicants recorded as having a disability received job offers, which is a 2% increase on 2021/22. Although this shows positive progress, there are still improvements we can make in this area. We are now able to record gender identity during the application process and existing employees can now update their records to reflect their protected characteristic status.

### What activities are supporting our progress?

In 2023, we launched our EDI workforce strategy. Our strategy also draws on best practice from across sectors, research papers and insight from EDI thought leaders, alongside recommendations from CIPD and the Local Government Association. The EDI strategy has a number of interdependencies with our Corporate Resourcing Strategy which includes supporting diversity and inclusion within the selection process.

This year we produced our annual pay gap report, in relation to ethnicity and gender. This looks at the difference between the median (or mean) hourly pay of employees. This showed that the mean average Gender Pay Gap for 2024 is 5.7% which represents a 3.2% decrease from last year. Whilst in relation to the mean average of ethnically diverse employees, they earn 1.3% more than White British employees. Though overall the pay gap for ethnicity is positive, there are differentials within ethnicity that will need further analysis into the root causes.

To understand the needs of our workforce better, we need to collect relevant EDI data in relation to protected characteristics. However, we know that our Oracle system has some inconsistencies, which makes the recording of this data difficult. For example, feedback from disabled employees suggests we could make it easier for them to declare their diversity data. An EDI disclosure working group has been formed to help understand some of the issues with recording and reporting of this personal information.

### Areas of future focus

We continue to highlight the importance of disclosing diversity data through our communications channels and staff surveys. This will include working with our employee networks to promote and highlight the benefits of having richer workforce data to help identify future interventions.

We will continue to track how our staff are progressing. People Performance Reports are being further enhanced with employee survey data from autumn 2024, combining metrics with qualitative insights into the employee experience of working at ECC. This will also contain key EDI metrics including gender profiles. This cycle of review will help track and monitor progress on pay gap for both gender and ethnicity. We have also started to use our workforce data to pilot diverse interview panels in identified functional areas, so we have a more inclusive recruitment process.

## b) Building an Inclusive Culture

### Our understanding of the issues

As a council we understand that an ‘inclusive culture’ is achieved through training and development, and by creating an open environment where colleagues are empowered and feel able to share their lived experience. We want employees to feel a sense of belonging in the organisation, where they can bring their authentic self to work. 82% of our staff have told us that they can be themselves at work. However, we want to continue to develop an organisational culture where difference is celebrated and used to design and deliver better services to our residents. We want employees to be able to identify role models within the organisation and we encourage lived experiences and stories to be shared.

### What activities are supporting our progress?

**We have continued to grow our employee networks** with increasing membership across functions and better planning in place through the ECC diversity calendar. This includes the Ethnically Diverse Employee Network (EDEN), which plays a pivotal role in nurturing a culture of inclusion within the council and ensuring that employee voices are heard. The Women’s Network has been active for almost 5 years and has a membership of 1,200. Other networks across ECC include the LGBTQ+ Network, the MEN’s Network, the Inter-faith Network,

the Parent’s Network, the Armed Forces Network, and the Young People’s Network. Our Workforce Ambassadors scheme has also started to take greater effect, and we now have representatives from all our functions. Our series of the EDI webinars in 2023/24 brought together a broad section of employees at different levels. Key areas of focus include intersectionality, why diversity and inclusion is important for a modern workforce and how individuals can have a positive impact on creating an inclusive culture.

### To understand and support our under-represented groups

**better**, we have worked collaboratively with key stakeholders including the Differently Adept Employees Network (DAWN). Our re-accreditation as a Disability Confident Leader allows us to keep a focus on how we recruit people who identify with a disability. We have also completed access audits of our main sites, and we have continued to work with our staff network and the neurodiversity subgroup in refining our workplace adjustment passport and having clearer guidance for managers. This year we have trialled diverse interview panels in some of our functions.

We recognise that recruitment training is important to understand both biases and cultural differences. This year we have rolled out a pilot project to aid in the recruitment of a more diverse workforce, through the creation of diverse interview panels. We have also developed monthly functional and quarterly Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) workforce packs.

## ECC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

Each pack contains sections dedicated to EDI, bringing consistent and constant visibility of EDI metrics to functions and CLT. These packs provide an overview of the workforce profiles and offer insight into recruitment and turnover.

In relation to training, we are reviewing our My Learning EDI offer and are working with our employee networks to develop an EDI landing page to better sign post to our learning modules. We are also reviewing our corporate EDI training to include new legislative requirements under the Workers Protection Act. The aim of this work is to create a psychological safe space can create better understanding of issues affecting staff from diverse backgrounds.

Our Children and Families (C&F) service have funded an Anti-Racist Practice (ARP) project, which began in 2022 This project saw the appointment of an ARP Service Manager. This role provides a centralised leadership within the C&F function, prioritising the exploration of the issue of race and racism in social care practice. The ARP Service Manager successfully developed and launched the C&F Anti-Racist Practice (ARP) Strategy and Action Plan. 350 staff have attended mandatory core training around anti-racism, which has provided opportunity to reflect on challenges and best practice.

## Areas of future focus

The ARP agenda has helped support better understanding and needs of our diverse population in Essex and we will look to improve and expand this agenda. This includes recruiting a Practice Education Lead, which will play a key role in working towards implementing anti-racist practice.

We have made strong progress this year in setting up employee networks and listening forums, we need to continue to build on these forums as a consistent part of all employee engagement. This includes the continuation of the access to work working group, which helps identify and resolve issues in relation to necessary adjustment within a reasonable timeframe.

The introduction of diverse interview panels has been a positive step this year. As outlined, we need to do more work and analysis to understand the impact of this scheme and review its effectiveness. Our new talent strategy will support diversity in talent and equitable approach to internal mobility.

## **c) Ensuring Equality through our policy and processes**

In order to improve the diversity of the organisation we have to start at the very beginning – making sure those from diverse backgrounds consider ECC as an employer of choice and opportunity. We need to ensure our employment policies, practices, principles, and culture support our EDI ambitions. This includes increasing the proportion of women in senior roles and improve the diversity of officers at senior levels and grades across the organisation. It also involves creating diverse candidate fields in order to attract, develop and retain a diverse workforce.

### **Our understanding of the issues**

Despite efforts to close the inequality gap between men and women, it is still prevalent. In all pay bands, the proportion of female workers is greater than 50%. However, the only pay bands with a proportion of less than 60% are A-B and C (the highest bands), which shows that senior management positions are less commonly filled by women than other positions. The proportion of women at senior leadership positions has fallen from 61.5% in 2015/16 to 53.8% in 2024. The proportion of the ECC workforce that identifies as ethnically diverse has increased over the past 10 years. In 2015/16, 11.5% of the workforce (excluding those who did not disclose) were ethnically diverse, and this figure has risen to 16.9% today. There has been a similar change at a higher level in the organisation for those people in pay bands A-C, with a rise from 8.8% to 13%.



## ECC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

75% of the workforce who have declared a disability were graded F-J. There has been an increase in those grade C+ (our senior grades), increasing from 2% to 2.6%. Although we are unable to collect information around employees with learning disabilities, we know that there are 7,935 adults in Essex with a learning disability who are known to services. Securing employment can be an important lifeline for adults with learning disabilities. Not only does employment develop a sense of self-worth and independence for the individual, employers too, identify a number of benefits to employing someone with a learning disability, most notably loyalty, dedication, and a strong work ethic. Yet, many adults with learning disabilities struggle to access employment and take up these opportunities. At a national level, pupils with special educational needs are 25% less likely to be in sustained employment at age 27 when compared to their peers. Nationally only 17.6% of adults with a learning disability were employed in 2022/23. In the same year, of those known to local authorities this figure drops to 5% who are in paid employment nationally, whilst Essex is slightly below the national average at 4.5%.

**16.9% OF THE ECC WORKFORCE  
IDENTIFIES AS ETHNICALLY DIVERSE**



## What activities are supporting our progress?

We are embedding the effective hybrid ‘Ways of Working’ programme, which enables employees more flexibility around how and where they work. We have four workstyles, including an anywhere worker, who can work from home or remotely most of the time, for certain tasks or limited days or hours. Another element of this programme is how we use and embrace new technology to better connect our people and those they work with, including meeting rooms where the technology supports different workstyles. This flexibility helps improve the level of applications from diverse populations. Since before the pandemic, applications from disabled people has grown by 8%, whilst applications to roles from minority ethnic groups has grown by 7%. We are also a disability level 3 confident leader, which means that people applying for jobs under the scheme need only meet 50% of the job to be shortlisted. This may have contributed to the improving figures around the number of disabled people working at ECC.

With the pay gap identified under the ‘Improve our understanding of our workforce’ section and the proportionately low number of women in senior roles, the council decided to take some action to remove some of the barriers to progressing within the organisation. Firstly, when we recruit, we utilise the gender bias language tool when posting adverts to ensure that the language in job adverts is not biased towards a specific gender. We also launched the Women in Leadership programme in May 2023, starting with two cohorts of 10 women from across the organisation. The 18-month programme will complete in





November 2024. Participants have completed 3 out of the 5 modules and started Module 4 (Developing Strategy and Innovation) in April 2024 – continuing with a blend of online and in-person sessions. 84% of respondents said that they would recommend the programme to colleagues.

As part of our Corporate Resourcing Strategy, we developed a number of actions to support better outreach and promotion of our vacancies. These include:

- ensuring our advert wording and Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is inclusive and encourages diverse applicants
- continue to ensure our vacancies are on prominent diverse attraction sites
- continue to partner with external organisations with subject matter expertise who can maximise our position as an employer of choice to a diverse workforce
- building on the foundations of effective business as usual attraction channels

**10 WOMEN COMPLETED THE 18-MONTH  
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME.  
84% SAID THEY WOULD RECOMMEND  
THE PROGRAMME TO COLLEAGUES**



## ECC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

Our recruitment program supports people with reasonable adjustment to apply for roles within the council and our entry to work and anchors programme enables a number of staff to enter the workplace. Our Entry to Work team continues to create pathways to employment at ECC for those facing barriers to work. This team focuses on five pathways to employment including apprenticeships, our graduate programme, work experience, autism internships and the kickstart scheme. More recently this has increased to include, accessible apprenticeships, career insight days, return to practice and T Levels. This year the Entry to Work programme has:

- worked with 20 Care Experienced individuals at our Career Insight Day and offered all participants a work experience placement
- offered 12 Autism Internship placements on our 20-week paid internship
- partnered with the 10K Black Intern Foundation. So far, we have welcomed 25 individuals from black heritage via this programme

## Areas of future focus

We are to partake in the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), which is a framework introduced by NHS England to address race equality. It's designed to ensure that employees from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds have equal access to career opportunities and receive fair treatment in the workplace. Year one of this will focus on identifying data gaps.

We will continue to monitor progression of the employees on the Women in Leadership programme. We are also looking at how we can expand the Women in Leadership programme to include representative leadership, so that we can also close the gap not only for women but also for other under-represented groups. We will also continue to improve our outreach and promotion of vacancies through the measures outlined in the Corporate Resourcing Strategy, including diverse interview panels.

# APPENDIX 1

## In 2022 we agreed a set of equality objectives.

The first of these objectives is aimed at focusing our work to tackle inequalities within communities, whilst the second is focused on the corporate equality health of the council – ensuring that we strive for a workforce that reflects the communities we serve. Below is the list of these objectives that are consolidated in section 2 of this report in relation to our workforce.

1. developing a ‘women in leadership’ programme to increase the proportion of women in senior leadership
2. promoting and encouraging people with disabilities to apply for roles
3. identifying roles where women or men are under-represented and encourage applications from that group
4. placing strategic adverts and approaching agencies who support black and minority ethnic candidates, and other under-represented groups
5. using our Ways of Working programme to challenge how, when and where we work, opening up opportunities for more diverse talent
6. reviewing our diversity and inclusion training and its effectiveness
7. having inclusive recruitment training in place
8. ensuring any talent programmes include the ability to track people’s career progression
9. creating listening forums for senior leaders to understand the workforce’s experiences

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The specific duties require public bodies to set and publish, one or more equality objectives at least every four years.
- 2 Manchester University: National & Confidential Enquiry into Suicide & Safety in Mental Health [NCISH | The University of Manchester](#)
- 3 ONS 2021-2023 3-year age standardised rolling average mortality dataset, suicide verdicts
- 4 [High Level Essex JSNA Summaries | Essex Open Data](#)
- 5 [Healthy Weight Strategy 2024/34 - Our appetite for change](#)
- 6 Census 2021
- 7 [Cost of alcohol harm in Essex - Institute of Alcohol Studies](#)
- 8 Although there's no one definition, the government report '[No Child Left Behind](#)' defines vulnerable children as children at greater risk of experiencing physical or emotional harm and/or experiencing poor outcomes because of one or more factors in their lives.
- 9 Essex Hate Crime Partnership Research 2024
- 10 [hate-crime-england-and-wales-2023-to-2024-appendix-tables.ods](#)
- 11 [Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- 12 [06.0-PFCC-Monthly-Appendices-April-2024-v1.0.pdf](#)
- 13 [Census 2021 - Ethnicity, Language, and Religion | Essex Open Data](#)
- 14 [Greater Essex Trends 2024 210824.pdf](#)
- 15 A Level 4 qualification is equivalent to the first year of a bachelor's degree. Examples include a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), Higher National Certificate (HNC), and Level 4 NVQ
- 16 [Greater Essex Trends 2024 210824.pdf](#)
- 17 It must be recognised that having a gender pay gap does not necessarily mean the council has an equal pay issue (where women are paid less than men for the same job). It is in part due to a range of barriers that women in career progression and entering higher paid jobs, which includes access to flexible, part time work, career breaks. This can also result in many women working below their skill level.

This information is issued by:  
Essex County Council Equalities and Partnerships Team

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