



EDI Action Plan 2024/25 Progress Report

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1. Background

1.1 Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It sets out the different ways it is unlawful to treat someone, all within one singular Act. It specifically protects individuals from unfair treatment based on the following characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Although socio-economic duty was removed from the Equality Act (2010), Councillors and Officers are also required to consider the impact of their decisions on people who might be disadvantaged because of their social and economic background. This is also the case for any other characteristics and circumstances that may put someone at a disadvantage, such as domestic abuse and carer status. By considering wider inequalities, Councillors and Officers ensure that policies and services are fair, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all members of the community.

1.2 Public Sector Equality Duty

Under the Equality Act (2010), local councils have a legal duty to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). As a result, Stevenage Borough Council is committed to carrying out its functions through this duty in a way that:

- Removes discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under the Equality Act (2010).
- Promotes equal opportunities and encourages good relations between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't.
- Further the council's fulfilment of the Equality Act (2010), as set out in the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Policy (2022) and Reasonable Adjustment Policy (2024).

To action these commitments, the council reaffirmed its intention to:

- Publish a series of clear equality objectives and actions every year.
- Annually publish equality information relating to people with protected characteristics (employees, service users, and residents), including workforce gender pay gap information.
- Complete and publish Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) whenever there is a new or revised policy, procedure, function, or service.
- Build upon the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan (MSEB) cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and further engagement with staff to nurture a progressive, inclusive safe and healthy working environment.

The EDI Strategy also set out the council's ambitions to go beyond these requirements through implementing an annual EDI Action Plan which would bring together all strands of EDI work across existing council strategies, services, and programmes. The intention would be to establish a clear link between the council's ongoing and planned policy objectives and projects between August and July every year.

This report reflects upon and summarises the achievements of Stevenage Borough Council's EDI Action Plan throughout 2024/2025 (Appendix A).

1.3 The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) Self-Assessment

The key to mapping out the council's existing projects and programmes was the self-assessment of council EDI activity against the EFLG. The purpose of the EFLG is to help organisations review and improve performance against 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' criteria. The council had previously assessed itself against the 'Achieving' level. According to EFLG criteria, there are four modules, 17 themes and 121 criteria in total. The green bubbles in the image below display the four key modules of the EFLG. Each of the council's EDI policy objectives (white bubbles) are then aligned with a module.

The Officers undertaking the self-assessment were required to provide specific examples of existing or future activities against modules and themes within the framework over a period of 10 weeks.

The outcome of the EFLG work indicated that whilst the council comfortably continue to fulfil the 'Achieving' level criteria, there were two areas they could develop further:

- The review of EqlAs as part of the service planning cycle to inform decision-making and the wider understanding of existing and future community needs.
- The extent to which the council's procured services inform and help to uphold and implement its equality objectives.

Both of the above activities would be delivered through existing corporate functions and explored further through the proposed EDI Action Plan.



2. EDI Action Plan 2024-25

The EDI Action Plan 2024-25 consisted of 18 actions that each aligned with one of the council's six policy objectives, as listed below and in Appendix A:

- 1) We will understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively.
- 2) We will actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups, and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion.
- 3) We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chain(s).

- 4) We will use local data to shape services so that the needs of our diverse population are met.
- 5) We aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels so that our communities are represented.
- 6) We are committed to ensuring our staff have the values, skills, and knowledge to maintain a positive and inclusive workplace culture that values all employees equally.

The council has made significant progress under these six objectives in advancing equality across the community and its workforce through the implementation of the EDI Action Plan.

These actions covered a variety of projects and programmes and action owners provided quarterly updates on the development of each throughout the year. These updates were then cascaded to OEG on a quarterly basis to ensure ongoing monitoring and consultation. These updates are summarised in the following report:

2.1 Objective 1: We will understand the diverse needs of our communities and how to meet them effectively.

2.1.1 Action 1a: Community Safety – ‘The council will continue to foster good community relations and social cohesion through the Community Safety Strategy programme of work’

Action Owner: Sarah Pateman OBE, Head of Community Advice & Support

The council's So Safe Community Safety Strategy programme of work seeks to understand the needs of the community through close partnership working. This year in particular has seen the revision of the Community Safety Strategy. Agreed by Full Council in February 2025, the Strategy will act as the overarching plan for the Community Safety Partnership for the next three years. It also included the SoSafe Action Plan, Strategic Assessment and the council's focus action plans on topics such as Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG).

Work has also been ongoing with schools across the town, with a series of sessions held for year six students on topics such as peer pressure, county lines and the dangers of drugs. As these talks have been an essential part of the council's engagement with young people, a bid to expand the programmes has been applied for through the Police and Crime Commissioner as part of the OpEdu8 partnership project. The voice of the child has also been gained this year through partnership working and the council's safeguarding and domestic abuse work. Data focussed on children ages 0-7 years old and was collected to document and support children through tough times. Further, through the 16 days of Action initiative focussing on domestic abuse, the council hosted an exhibition of survivor stories that displayed impactful photography to the public. The council are still looking for continued funding for these school OpEdu8 talks, so this will remain a priority into next year.

Partnership working with Hertfordshire Constabulary has also enabled greater support to be available for rough sleepers this past year. Initiatives such as Operation Urban combined the council's No More Service and the Rough Sleeper Team with police to target hotspot rough sleeper areas to offer support and advice during the winter months, including targeted support for women. Drop-in sessions offered customers food parcels, hot meals, advice, referrals, and festive events. Street meets also continue to be an essential part of the way the council and the police engage with the community, as well as capturing the voice of the customer through data from Hertfordshire Constabulary's system, ECHO.

Additionally, the Adult Offender Protocol project commenced this year across the County, with funding from probation and the Serious Violence fund. Clear Hold Build and the Safer Streets Funding projects also came to an end in March 2025, with a highlight report presented at the July SoSafe Meeting. Further, two Resettlement Co-ordinators were recruited to work with partners and the community to produce an action plan around Asylum Seekers/Refugees residing and working in Stevenage. Whilst Clear Hold Build has ended, other police projects and operations will be supported for 2025/26 including Male Violence Against Women and Girls (MVAWG) meetings as part of the council's existing VAWG Action plan.

The Community Advice & Support team have also been supporting the local elderly population this year through attending events such as the annual Older Persons Day to give residents an opportunity to talk to officers directly. This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan to continue to document the impactful Community Safety Strategy programme of work.

2.1.2 Action 1b: EqlA Service Plan Monitoring – 'The council will continue to monitor its approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EqlA) through Service Plans, and how the information is used to inform decision making and the wider understanding of existing and future community needs.'

Action Owner: Charlotte Bott, Corporate Policy & Research Officer

Following the review of the EqlA process and service plans last year, this action sought to continue to monitor the completion of EqlAs throughout the council's introduction of new or revised policies, strategies, procedures and services.

An EqlA helps to evidence, understand and mitigate the impact that the council's decisions might have on different types of people. As part of the council's approach to understanding the diverse needs of the community, equality objectives were integrated into service plans across the organisation, and progress towards them managed by key decision makers. This progress was then used to inform decision-making, and steps taken if any deficiencies are identified.

The council continues to provide guidance to staff on the EqlA process, through the internal publication of an updated EqlA Toolkit, guidance and embedded 'critical friend' review process for all staff.

Since this latest version of the EDI Action Plan was introduced in July 2024, a total of 19 EqlAs were received, independently reviewed and then revised within the council. These covered a variety of areas including:

- Commercial Food Waste Collections
- Community Safety Strategy
- Corporate Procurement Strategy
- Fees & Charges
- Flat Block Recycling
- Gambling Act & Licensing Act
- Green Spaces Strategy And Tree & Woodland Strategy
- Mission 44's Pioneering Young STEM Futures Programme
- Parking Permit Controls
- Safeguarding Adults

- Smoke Control Area Policy & Procedure
- Vulnerability Policy (Housing Service)

Going forward, Service Plans will continue to be utilised alongside the Equalities Inbox to monitor the receipt of EqlAs throughout the year. As a result this action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan, however it will be amalgamated with Action 5a to encompass the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan (MSEB) cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as EqlAs are now considered the main way the council regularly monitors EDI. It will be listed as follows:

- 5a: Through the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan, the council has committed to the cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This will encourage staff to consider the impact on equalities when designing and delivering services through Equality Impact Assessments (EqlA).

2.1.3 Action 1c: SEC Legacy Group – 'The council will continue to champion the work of the Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) through the facilitation of the SEC Legacy Group. The Legacy Group will work with partners for 12 months to deliver meaningful change in response to the findings of the SEC.'

Action Owner: Gemma Marat, Neighbourhood Warden Manager

The Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) was first set up in April 2021 following a motion carried by the council to address racial disparity in Stevenage and to assess the nature, extent, and impact of racism in the town. The recommendations of the SEC indicated that further work with partners was needed to identify next steps and opportunities for joint working. The SEC Legacy Group was facilitated by the council and a Legacy Group Action Plan introduced to set out the main activities of the group.

Following the successful delivery of the SEC's Beyond Barriers Conference at the Gordon Craig Theatre on 15th October 2024 to coincide with Black History Month and Hate Crime Awareness Week, commissioners reviewed the actions from the three themed workshops and guest speakers' recommendations to evolve the action plan and produce a dedicated priorities report that would be their focus for 2025.

As 2025 begun, and to formally incorporate this new revised action plan, the legacy group carried out steps to formally become a Multi Stakeholder Co-operative in consultation and collaboration with charity, Voice4Change. Thus far, secretariat support for SEC has been provided by the council through external funding. Going forward, the council will continue to champion the legacy of the SEC by supporting the establishment of the Stevenage Race Equality Co-operative (SREC). This new, legally incorporated, member-led organisation will carry forward the Commission's key recommendations in relation to race equality, representation, and accountability.

The SEC Legacy Group will transition into an advisory role within SREC's governance, helping maintain a clear link between the Commission's findings and their implementation. SREC will be organised around thematic working groups that reflect the original Commission priorities (e.g., Health, Education, Representation), with membership drawn from VCFSE organisations, public bodies, and local communities. This structure will provide long-term, community-led infrastructure and demonstrate the Council's continued commitment to the MSEB Corporate

Plan, especially regarding its aims around civic pride, inclusive growth, and building strong communities.

This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan to gain consistent continuous updates on the great work carried out by the SEC.

2.2 Objective 2: We will actively engage, encourage, and support local people, groups, and organisations to participate in local democracy to improve opportunity and inclusion.

2.2.1 Action 2a: Housing Management Forum – 'The council will strengthen the voice of tenants and leaseholders, including consideration of people's differing needs, through the development and implementation of a Resident Engagement framework.'

Action Owners: Matt Gough, Special Projects Lead (Housing)
& Jane Konopka, Head of Community Development

This year, the council has adopted a new Resident Engagement Strategy & Framework. Developed in consultation with tenants, staff and Councillors, the strategy sets out the councils' commitment to strengthen tenant engagement and also consolidates the way in which performance is scrutinised by residents. Similarly, the Tenants Annual Report was presented to Cabinet and published alongside the council's Annual Housing Complaints and Improvement Plan this year, which sets details of the work that has been undertaken in both the delivery and improvement of services. This was also undertaken alongside the development of a number of new core programmes and policies including for aids and adaptations, repairs and maintenance, dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB), and high-rise block improvements. These measures demonstrate how Stevenage Borough Council has sought to enhance the role of its tenants in decisions and have a direct influence on service developments.

Further, the Regulator of Social Housing new set of Tenant Satisfaction Measures, that provide quarterly feedback from tenants across a number of key service areas, have been fully integrated. This information is not only utilised within the council's Corporate Performance Framework, but also to inform the development and improvement of services through a dedicated Resident's Voice page on the council's external website that hosts a wide range of information relating to housing and ways to get involved with decision making.

As part of this Tenant Satisfaction Measures framework, tenants are annually surveyed and overall satisfaction with the council as landlord has increased by 10.9% over the last year to 66%. There has also been a 10% increase in the number tenants that feel that the council listens to their views, up to 55.1%. 61.6% also noted that felt they were kept informed, again an increase on the previous year from 50.9%. Overall, more than 73% of tenants surveyed felt that they were treated fairly and with respect. These results illustrate how positive the impact this improved programme of engagement has had on tenants.

This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan to continue to ensure tenant feedback, profiles and preferences are prioritised and captured.

- 2.2.2 Action 2b: Digital Engagement – ‘The council will digitally engage with residents as part of our UK Shared Prosperity Fund Local Investment Plan to help shape the approach to the development of local community plans and provide opportunities for people, including those who share protected characteristics, to participate in local democracy.’

Action Owner: Daniel Morrallee, Corporate Policy & Research Officer

As part of the 2024/25 Co-operative Neighbourhoods programme, the council engaged with over 1,300 residents through a combination of digital and in-person activities, despite challenges posed by pre-election periods during the summer and adverse weather conditions throughout winter. Increasing the council's presence on social media platforms and streamlining the neighbourhood team to specifically engage with residents at community centres, events, neighbourhood centres, in drop-in sessions, and on walkabouts was key to enabling consistent communication. Data collected from these sessions incorporated key resident insights and was analysed in tranches across the year with support from £275,000 in funding. Data was then presented to Cabinet members with the aim of further addressing residents' priorities in the 2025/26 period.

Further, throughout these efforts, key demographic information was gained to better understand who the council were reaching and then target the unheard voices across the community. Whilst their primary focus was on age and gender, a broad set of both quantitative and qualitative questions were also incorporated to help gain improved insights into local priorities, and ensuring they aligned with the needs and concerns of the community.

As the new financial year began in April 2025, resident engagement data continued to be analysed and an overview of the findings for each neighbourhood area presented at both the June and July Communities & Neighbourhoods Strategic Board meetings. This analysis will be instrumental in shaping the allocation of the council's 2025/26 UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), as well as determining area-based priorities and guiding the future direction of the Co-operative Neighbourhood Programme. Ensuring initiatives continue to reflect the needs of the community and support more targeted, community-led investment across local areas is a key priority for the council.

This engagement will also be further strengthened by the 2025 Residents Survey, which is currently underway and expected to capture feedback from an additional 1,100 residents. Combined, these datasets will provide a robust evidence base at a neighbourhood level, to support the continued development of the council's new Co-operative Neighbourhoods delivery model. This approach will ensure local voices remain at the heart of service design and community investment. Therefore this action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan to continue gain regular updates on engagement activities, as well as the upcoming UKSPF allocations and resident survey results.

- 2.2.3 Action 2c: Civic Leadership Programme ‘The council and its partners will work together to establish a Civic Leadership Programme that targets and provides support for underrepresented communities who are interested in political representation and standing for public roles.’

Action Owner: Gemma Marat, Cooperative Neighbourhoods Programme Manager

Targeting underrepresented communities who are interested in standing for public roles through a Civic Leadership Programme was an initiative put forward as part of Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) discussions. This proposal received widespread support from the commission, that includes membership from local Borough Councillors, County Councillors, and former Councillors, as well as a diverse range of industry leads from across Stevenage.

Following SEC's Beyond Barriers Conference in October 2024, the commission approached Operation Black Vote (OBV), who presented at the conference, to put together a civic leadership programme to be delivered in Stevenage in 2025. It was agreed that a Diagnostic/Familiarisation cycle would occur first to establish the Stevenage context. This would involve a review of data and statistics, engagement with local community partners, and a concluding feedback session summarising their findings. On completion of the diagnostic work, OBV would then design a tailored programme for Stevenage based on their findings. Civic Leadership Programmes are typically divided into three phases:

1. Phase 1: Attract and Recruit

OBV would work in collaboration with Stevenage partners to design a targeted recruitment campaign to attract under-represented groups to take part in the programme.

2. Phase 2: Programme Delivery

A combination of masterclasses, workshops, seminars, observations of live meetings and tailored personal development.

3. Phase 3: Celebrate and Evaluate

Opportunity for everyone involved in the programme to mark the readiness of participants to use their voice and agency in society to make a difference and to join the powerful community of the OBV Alumni. Evaluation of the course and a dedicated graduation ceremony would also occur.

In February 2025, it was officially confirmed that OBV had been commissioned to deliver a research and development piece over three months to examine the current situation for Stevenage in terms of BAME representation in Civic roles and look into how that could be developed and supported. This would occur in line with the prioritisation work being undertaken by the legacy group, with the commission's chair, Errol John, and group members regularly meeting with OBV and working with them to design and implement the research.

It was then agreed that OBV and SEC would deliver the aforementioned Diagnostic/Familiarisation programme between June and August 2025. This would specifically involve carrying out research and analysis of the democratic deficit in Stevenage to develop an understanding of the issues; engaging with Black and Brown communities and partners in Stevenage to understand their perspective on how to meet the challenges; and using research, data and feedback from the community and partners to understand the context of community leadership which will be used to design a civic and citizen programme for Stevenage.

This planned Civic Leadership Programme will help deliver on the Commission's recommendation to improve democratic inclusion. This programme will take place over 4–6 weeks and will empower residents from Black, Asian, and other minority communities to take

an active role in civic life, whether through local government, public boards, school governance, or other representative roles. This activity will also form part of the Council's broader strategic aim to create more inclusive systems and representative leadership at all levels of public life. This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan to continue to document the implementation of the Civic Leadership Programme by the SEC and OBV.

2.3 Objective 3: We will promote equality, diversity and inclusion through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chains

2.3.1 Action 3a: Social Value Procurement – 'The Council will review the extent to which its procured services inform and help to uphold and implement our equality objectives.'

Action Owner: Kirsten Brown, Corporate Procurement Manager

The Social Value Portal has been a great way for the council to understand the themes, outcomes and measures of community needs. Identified in response to the self-assessment against the EFLG best practice framework, this action sought to track EFLG's equality outcomes of monitoring and reporting on commissioned and procured services. These social measures would include monitoring improved opportunities for disadvantaged people; improved employability of young people; and implementing initiatives throughout the supply chain to identify and manage the risk of modern slavery.

The council's practices are proportionate to the value and complexity of the requirement and officers have to consider removing barriers to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME)'s in bidding. Consequently how equality diversity and inclusivity is included and what weight it carries will vary, however all contracts over the threshold of the Public Contracts Regulations will expect bidders to self-certify that they are compliant with the EDI law. A record of which contracts have EDI considerations over and above that is not kept.

This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan as it is an EFLG requirement and will continue to be considered as part of procurement practices and embedded within council culture.

2.3.2 Action 3b: Healthy Stevenage – 'Through its Healthy Stevenage Partnership, the council will continue to promote activities and events that reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of Stevenage residents.'

Action Owner: Ryan Ansell, Health & Sport Strategy Manager

The Healthy Stevenage Partnership fosters collaboration amongst partners to improve health, promote wellbeing, and reduce health-based inequalities locally. This project demonstrates how the council can effectively utilise partnerships to help shape future activities, as well as actively sharing and promote these. This was achieved primarily via monthly partner updates and through the Healthy Stevenage meetings, but in an effort to enhance their communication and outreach further, the partnership introduced a regular newsletter to highlight positive stories, celebrate the achievements of the council's partners, and provide timely updates on forthcoming events and activities.

The council also renewed their Healthy Stevenage Strategy this year, with the partnership playing a pivotal role in both the development and delivery of this renewal. The continued collaboration and input of all partners was instrumental in shaping the future of health and wellbeing within the community.

Through the Healthy Stevenage Partnership, the council continues to specifically promote initiatives that tackle health inequalities and enhance the wellbeing of residents. An example of this was through the ongoing delivery of the Stevenage Healthy Hub, which has secured funding for the next two years. This ensured the continuation of a valuable local resource with a targeted focus on delivering Stop Smoking support and free wellbeing checks to residents, particularly in areas of higher deprivation or greater need. Alongside this, the Healthy Hub continued to support a number of established programmes, including the Dementia Café, menopause support group, youth counselling services, and the exercise referral scheme. All of these schemes play an important role in supporting physical and mental wellbeing across different communities and age groups.

In an attempt to further expand this offer, the Council applied to the Hertfordshire Public Health Prevention Innovation Programme to develop a new wellbeing app, however, were unsuccessful in securing this bid. Nevertheless, the council achieved three other successful bids that will have a direct and positive impact on the residents of Stevenage, and engagement will continue with these initiatives to ensure they are embedded within local provision and complement the Healthy Hub's offer. This approach ensures that health inequalities remain at the forefront of partnership work and that services continue to adapt to meet local need.

Further, a key focus this year has been supporting Stevenage's ageing population, particularly through recent work to become an Age-Friendly Community. As part of this, the council has been working closely with Age UK to gather valuable insight from older residents through the Age-Friendly Communities Survey. This ongoing commitment to supporting an ageing population also played an important role in shaping the new Healthy Stevenage Strategy, ensuring that future health and wellbeing initiatives were inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all residents. The council will continue to strengthen partnerships with health providers, voluntary organisations, and community groups to improve access to services and promote a healthier, more connected Stevenage. As a result, a new action will be added to the EDI Action Plan that specifically documents the great work conducted by the council with specific regard to supporting Age Friendly communities. This action will sit within the same overarching objective of promoting EDI through strategic partnerships, service delivery and supply chains, and be listed as:

"Through Age Friendly Stevenage work, embed inclusive engagement with older people from diverse backgrounds to inform and shape Age-Friendly Stevenage priorities and services".

This Healthy Stevenage Partnership action will also be carried over into next year's EDI Action Plan to continue to gain consistent updates on the successful collaboration of the Healthy Stevenage Partnership.

2.3.3 Action 3c: Mission 44 - 'Through our ongoing partnership with Mission 44, the council will provide opportunities for young people to engage with STEM Education and careers, with a particular focus on those who are facing social injustice. This is linked

to the council's wider commitments around Enterprise & Skills, which is focused on ensuring that Stevenage residents are able to make the most of the opportunities on their doorstep.'

Action Owner: Daryl Jedowski, Corporate Policy & Business Support Manager

Whilst only added to the EDI Action Plan this year, the council's partnership with Mission 44 (M44) has become a key way that equality, diversity and inclusion is promoted since this collaboration first begun in 2023.

This strategic partnership with M44 has enabled the council to support young people in Stevenage to access emerging opportunities in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) through the Pioneering Young STEM Futures programme. Following the conclusion of the first Discovery phase of this programme, the council began making plans in October 2024 to move forward with the next phase that would look to increase the breadth and depth of the interventions the council has been able to deliver across both primary and secondary schools in Stevenage, as well as linking into additional businesses.

The initial proposal for Phase Two was shared with colleagues at M44 in January 2025, and reviewed and discussed throughout February ahead of being formally agreed by M44's board in June and Stevenage Borough Council's Cabinet in July. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund was also utilised as crucial bridge funding for the initiative so projects could continue delivery within this academic year, despite the gap in approval and funding from Mission44.

Through the extension of the Pioneering Young STEM Futures partnership with M44, the next phase of the programme will see £1.1 million investment over five years, from a blend of local and national funding sources. With Stevenage forecast to create up to 15,000 new jobs by 2040, including over 8,000 in STEM-related fields, the council is committed to ensuring all young people, particularly those experiencing social injustice, can benefit from the town's economic growth.

New partnerships, including a direct collaboration with Airbus, will also enhance the programme's offer by embedding industry expertise into delivery. The initiative remains a core element of the wider Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan - Transforming Our Town - Enterprise & Skills agenda and will again be complemented by UK Shared Prosperity Fund bridge funding in 2025/26 to ensure continuity of activity during the current academic year again. Due to the nature of this partnership continuing on for the next 5 years, this action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan for 2025/26.

2.4 Objective 4: We will use local data to shape services so that the needs of the diverse population are met

2.4.1 Action 4a: The Equality & Diversity Annual Report – 'The Council will publish the Equality & Diversity Report 2022/2023 and use the information it contains to help shape its services so that the needs of the diverse population are met'

Action Owner: Charlotte Bott, Corporate Policy & Research Officer

As part of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the council is committed to annually publishing equality information relating to people with protected characteristics, and this is

done through the Equality and Diversity Annual Report. Published in winter, this report utilises the most recent Census data, alongside other key data sources, to outline key demographic information about the residents of Stevenage. This information is then used to help shape the council's services, programmes and projects so they reflect the changing needs of the community.

This year, the report includes the Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census data for Stevenage, Hertfordshire and England, alongside updated statistics on population, sex and age following the publication of the ONS Mid-2023 Population Estimates. Key statistics from the recent ONS Births in England and Wales 2023 report were added to the Pregnancy / Maternity section of this report, as well as the latest council data has also been added to the Benefits Claimants, Community Safety and Workforce Information sections.

A few of the key highlights include a 0.7% population growth from 2021 to 2022; Stevenage has a slightly younger (15-64yrs) resident population than Hertfordshire and England (64% vs. 63.9% and 63%, respectively); a decreased total fertility rate of 1.46 children per women compared to 1.58 in 2022; employment rate increased (61.7% to 62.2%); and an increase in residents gaining degrees (22.1% to 29.6%) between the 2011 and 2021 census'.

Following senior leadership team approval, the report was shared on the internal intranet, external website, and amongst managers for dissemination. Due to the Equality & Diversity report being published annually, this action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan and has also been captured in the team's Service Plan 25/26.

2.4.2 Action 4b: Gender Pay Gap – 'The Council will publish the Gender Pay Gap report 2022 and use it to inform its findings to inform its review of the Workforce Strategy and gender pay parity in the workforce'

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

The council is committed to annually publishing their Gender Pay Gap report as part of their PSED, and using the findings of the to further inform its continuing focus on inclusive recruitment and retention practices as part of the wider Workforce Strategy. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average earnings of men and women, expressed relative to men's earnings based upon hourly pay. These figures are expressed as a mean and a median.

In line with the financial year ending, analysis was conducted on Stevenage Borough Council's workforce as of 31st March 2024. The mean gender pay gap was found to sit at -0.98, indicating that actually on average women are paid higher than their male comparators. This is compared to 3.73 in 2023, and 4.23 in 2022. Additionally, the median (mid-point) for 2024 for the whole workforce is 2.60%, which demonstrates that good progress is being made when compared to the figure of 4.40% in 2020.

The below table provides a comparison of the reported hourly pay gender pay gaps across Hertfordshire's county, district and borough councils for 2024-25.

Council	Mean Percent	Median Percent
Hertfordshire County Council	0.5	1
Broxbourne Borough Council	3.74	3.74

Dacorum Borough Council	-5	-7
East Hertfordshire Council	13	9
Hertsmere Borough Council	2.7	-3.5
North Hertfordshire District Council	14.6	13.1
St. Albans City Council	6.84	7.99
Stevenage Borough Council	-0.98	2.6
Three Rivers District Council	-16.09	-29.38
Welwyn Hatfield Council	12.44	13.71

The results were also compared to the ONS survey, calculated for each quartile and in line with guidance published by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and the Government Equalities Office. The findings were then shared with senior leaders and published publicly on social media and on the Data Transparency webpage on the external website. This year's report reflects the council's ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace, as well as how significant strides have been made to narrow the pay gap across all levels.

As it is an annual requirement for the council to publish their gender pay gap, therefore this action will be again included in next year's EDI Action Plan.

2.4.3 Action 4c: Workforce Data – 'The council will continue to review its workforce data and explore opportunities to collate specific ethnicity data that can help identify and address key issues in line with commitments made as part of UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter.'

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

This action was added at the last iteration of the EDI Action Plan in response to the Stevenage Equalities Commission suggesting that there was a significant absence of local data on ethnicity trends. The council then committed to exploring opportunities to collate specific ethnicity data upon review of their workforce data. As a result, Human Resources (HR) set out a year-long timeframe involving a data cleanse, specialised investment in system changes, and liaising with key officers to determine what information could be extracted, what data would be required, and what options were available to build a report to track progression/development opportunities internally. The commitment to introducing ethnicity pay gap recording was also in line with the council's pledge to instigate UNISON's Anti-Racism charter.

Since this commitment, the Race Equality Bill was announced in the King's Speech in July 2024. This bill seeks to specifically introduce specific race equality legislation "to enshrine the full right to equal pay in law", as well as set out equal pay rights for people from minority ethnic groups and disabled people, including mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting for employers with 250+ employees to help close the ethnicity and disability pay gaps.

Throughout the past year, the council have continued to work on this and build a report with the commissioned developer. However, this was delayed slightly whilst the council waited for statutory guidance on reporting methodology and legal definitions to be published. As of July 2025, the required report is complete and the council is now able to run ethnicity pay gap

reporting with the first report to be produced for the next EDI Action Plan update. This action will therefore continue into next year and be adapted to ensure ethnicity pay gap reporting is continually monitored.

2.5 Objective 5: We aim to improve the diversity of our organisation at all levels to be representative of our communities.

2.5.1 Action 5a: EDI Cross-Cutting Theme – ‘Through the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan, the council has committed to the cross-cutting theme of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). This will encourage staff to consider the impact on equalities when designing and delivering services.’

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

The Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan sets out the Council's priorities for the next three years. It provides a framework for decision-making and resource allocation in the shape of five priorities and three cross-cutting themes. One of these cross-cutting themes is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and the main way of which the council monitors that every policy, strategy, procedure and service considers and embodies the diverse needs of its community is through Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs).

An EqIA helps to evidence, understand and mitigate the impact that the council's decisions might have on different types of people. As part of the council's approach to understanding the diverse needs of the community, equality objectives were integrated into service plans across the organisation, and progress towards them managed by key decision makers. This progress is then used to inform decision-making, and steps taken if any deficiencies are identified. The council undertakes EqIAs for all employment policies, strategies, procedures, services and any employment related decisions. More details of the council's approach to EqIAs in the past year is outlined under Action 1b of this EDI Action Plan.

This action will continue into next year's EDI Action Plan; however it will be amalgamated with Action 1b to encompass the fact that EqIAs are the main way the council monitors EDI through its Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan cross-cutting theme.

2.5.2 Action 5b: EDI Cross-Cutting Theme – ‘Through the inclusion of Diversity and Inclusion as a key theme within the Workforce Strategy 2024-27, following Cabinet approval, the council will commit to continuing to develop its response to improving the diversity of the organisation.’

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

The council committed to continuing to build upon its ambitions of the Diversity and Inclusion cross-cutting Theme of the Workforce Strategy (2024-2027) or the next three years at the October's Cabinet meeting. Delegated authority was also approved for Heads of HR to agree an annual action plan with portfolio holders. Following approval, engagement with Business Units begun with feedback and suggestions gained to inform the actions for year one. The theme of diversity and inclusion was continuously monitored throughout the council's recruitment and employment practices. As of July 2025, the actions within the Workforce Strategy are reported on annually and a new action plan is currently being developed for year

two, with a review due in October 2025. This year, the council was also reaccredited for the third time as a Disability Confident Employer.

This will continue to be included within next year's EDI Action Plan to ensure the ongoing monitoring of the Diversity and Inclusion theme in 2024-27 Workforce Strategy.

2.6 Objective 6: We are committed to ensuring our staff have the values, skills, and knowledge to maintain a positive and inclusive workplace culture that values all employees equally

2.6.1 Action 6a: Champion Workshops – 'The council will work with the Officer Equality Group to develop individuals led 'Champion' workshops that focus on particular EDI subjects. The purpose of the events will be to share understanding and raise awareness.'

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

The council committed to working with the OEG to develop focused workshops on particular EDI subjects to raise awareness and understanding of each topic. A series of events occurred to raise awareness of EDI themes throughout the year. The council also relaunched Corporate Values to reinforce expected standards of behaviour. In line with the new prevention of Sexual Harm legislation that came into effect from 26 October 2024, HR rolled out mandatory training to all staff to reinforce their responsibilities for preventing sexual harm and expected behaviours. A series of Dementia-Friendly staff training sessions were also held in Autumn 2024 too.

An Officer Equality Group (OEG) comprised of officers from different business units also convenes bi-monthly to discuss equality matters and chart a course forward. This group, chaired by dedicated senior leadership team Equalities Champion and Assistant Director for the Strategic ICT Partnership, Matt Canterford, actively works towards discussing various equality subjects and raising awareness about topics that matter most to staff. Over the past year, OEG meetings have covered topics such as:

- EDI Action Plan quarterly updates
- Ethnicity terminology
- Future of LGBTQ+ Network
- Invisible Disabilities
- Older Persons National Network
- Prevention of Sexual Harm Strategy
- Social & Leisure Hub accessibility
- STEM Youth Action Group
- Stevenage Day 2025 – Pride stall overview
- Stevenage Equalities Commission Beyond Barriers Conference debrief
- Windows 11 Accessibility

Additionally, a dedicated Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller Community Training Workshop was recently held during OEG to increase understanding of the community amongst colleagues across the council. The OEG also refer to an events calendar that outlines all key dates from the world of EDI clearly for staff.

A dynamic and inclusive intranet has served as a vital platform for the council's ongoing initiatives too. Regularly published articles and blogs contribute to fostering empathy and understanding internally, with strategically timed posts during key dates for Ramadan, VE Day, Stress Awareness Month, and 16 Days of Activism to challenge violence against women and girls this year. These articles provide insights into diverse perspectives, creating a culture where inclusivity is not only acknowledged but celebrated. There is also a dedicated EDI intranet page that's designed to store all EDI information including individual stories, educational blogs, EqlA guidance and policies.

This action will carry over into next year's EDI action plan to continue to monitor the discussions, activities, and consequent actions of the OEG, however ownership will be reallocated to the members of OEG to advocate for topics more directly.

2.6.2 Action 6b: LGBTQ+ Network – 'The council will support the creation of an LGBTQ+ staff network group to ensure an inclusive workplace through encouraging discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding.'

Action Owner: Casey O'Brien, Customer Service Advisor

Following its addition to this year's action plan, the LGBTQ+ group has since been formed and met regularly throughout 2024/25 with range of topics being discussed including Stevenage Day, LGBTQ+ History month and organising dedicated staff events for anyone who wanted to could attend as their full authentic self, even if they didn't feel comfortable to do so at work.

However, following the retirement of the SLT champion spearheading this network at Christmas 2024, the decision was made to combine both the LGBTQ+ networking group and the Officer Equality Group (OEG) to offer a supportive environment for all colleagues and expand conversations on EDI topics to a wider audience. The LGBTQ+ Network have a standing item at every bi-monthly OEG meeting where the Supreme Court ruling that 'sex' means biological sex in the Equality Act 2010, approved flags, and a debrief from an LGBTQ+ History Month talk hosted at the local Airbus, Europe's largest aerospace company, site have all been discussed.

This action will continue to be included in next year's EDI Action Plan, to ensure the LGBTQ+ Network have a dedicated space to share their voice at future internal staff meetings.

2.6.3 Action 6c: Neurodiversity Network – 'The council will explore the possibility of establishing a Neurodiversity staff network group to ensure an inclusive workplace is in place and informed by discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding.'

Action Owner: Kirsten Frew & Clare Davies, Heads of HR & OD

Following a number of internal blogs posted on the intranet last year, this action was added to explore the possibility of establishing a Neurodiversity staff network group as a way to ensure an inclusive workplace is in place and informed by discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding. It was consequently added into the Workforce

Strategy action plan, details provided under Action 5b above, to ensure action was taken to explore this inclusive opportunity.

Networking groups are seen as a great way to meet colleagues from different areas of the organisation and share experiences, working together to make the council an even better place to work. The objective of a new Neurodiversity Network Group would be to ensure an inclusive workplace is in place and management and colleagues are informed through discussions, events, and initiatives that promote awareness and understanding. An internal blog post was posted on the intranet in July 2025 to ascertain interest, and findings will be shared at the next EDI Action Plan quarterly update, so this action will therefore carry over into 2025/26 to monitor if this new staff network will be established.

2.6.4 Action 6d: Staff Survey – ‘The council will continue to promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture, and following the results of the 2024 All Staff Pulse Survey, will develop specific corporate actions to advance inclusion and wellbeing amongst staff.’

Action Owner: Vicky Hickford, Assistant HR Business Partner

Following the results of the 2024 All Staff Pulse Survey, the council committed to developing a series of specific corporate actions to help advance inclusion and wellbeing amongst staff.

The first was to continue administering inclusion training, which has been a continuous programme of training since its introduction. A dedicated EDI session is also held as part of the Essential Manager training to ensure the new generation of managers embodies the principles of the council and is inclusive in every service or piece of work they provide. Further mandatory training is also being explored to expand the knowledge base of council officers and members.

The second sought to raise the profile of the Officer Equality Group (OEG) through marketing campaigns and continued meetings as trusted representatives. This is again a continuous action as OEG meetings are held bi-monthly throughout the year. Further details of the activities of the OEG are documented under Action 6a of this EDI Action Plan.

The third noted the success of Neurodiversity blogs posted in 2023/24, also mentioned at Action 6c above, and sought to explore options for specific e-learning or further sessions from speakers with Q&A options. Throughout the year, this has been explored by the Learning and Development team and will be scheduled in amongst future commitments.

Then finally the fourth corporate action addressed the desire for further comms around not tolerating bullying / harassment / discrimination and encouraging colleagues to report incidences. An article has been drafted; however it is scheduled to launch during the next Anti-Bullying week in Autumn, and will incorporate elements of the recent mandatory sexual harassment training to reiterate the council's principles.

The next staff survey was launched in April 2025, and the results were presented to Senior Leaders in July so this overarching action will be updated within the 2025/26 EDI Action Plan to create a new series of corporate actions that embody officers' priorities.

3. Consultation and Monitoring

To ensure that the revised version of the EDI Action Plan continued to include actions that were meaningful to Stevenage Borough Council staff as the actions directly impact them, a

two-week consultation survey was disseminated on the intranet. This gave staff a chance to share their views and flag any absent EDI issues. The EDI Action Plan was also shared for comment with Officers and Members of the Equality & Diversity Governance Group (EDGG) and the Officer Equality Group (OEG).

A total of 20 responses were gained, with the majority of respondents (75%) agreeing with all proposed actions and welcoming a range of existing projects and programmes that embody EDI across the organisation, which is an improvement from last year's consultation when 61% agreed with all proposed actions. Examples of comments provided include:

- "Good to see a range of activities across the organisation."
- "The EDI action plan covers all areas."
- "Very progressive in this area."
- "Important to keep focus on in current climate."
- "I am satisfied that the EDI Action Plan covers all six objectives."
- "Good to see SBC taking the initiative, particularly in climate where there is so much negativity getting publicity."
- "I think the proposed works well with the Town's core values. We are a unique and very mixed community and it is fantastic to see everyone being included."
- "I think this is brilliant and encompasses everything to ensure it is fair and proportionate. Equal opportunities is incredibly important to ensure everyone thrives no matter their advantages or disadvantages."
- "Makes everyone feel included, we are all humans trying to make ends meet."
- "These topics cover the diverse needs of staff well, looking forward to seeing them continue over the next year."

For the respondents that thought more could be done to advance EDI within the council (25%), their concerns focussed upon advancing the Neurodiversity offer available, specifically recommending the inclusion of management training to better ensure an inclusive workplace for all. As a result, this will be incorporated into Action 6c that is already looking into expanding the Neurodiversity Network within the council. Similarly, respondents also outlined their desire to strengthen the digital accessibility support available. Whilst it was acknowledged that the introduction of Windows 11 includes more accessibility options, staff requested that this be expanded to ensure there is wider user-friendliness across all digital platforms and greater reasonable adjustment options are available. This suggestion will be embedded into a newly introduced action that specifically seeks to integrate and implement technology to promote enhanced digital inclusion, further details are provided in section four of this report.

Finally, colleagues additionally expressed a desire to see greater promotion of this EDI Action Plan as "it doesn't seem to be widely known about" and many are "not aware of the details of the action plan". Consequently, future marketing opportunities will be explored to ensure the awareness of the EDI Action Plan increases, as well as the Officer Equality Group where staff can get directly involved in activities linked to EDI.

4. EDI Action Plan 2025/26

- 4.1 Following the consultation feedback, the draft EDI Action Plan 25/26 underwent a thorough review and is proposed to include a combination of existing programmes of work and two newly introduced workstreams. The overarching six equality objectives

will remain in place until 2027 when they are scheduled for review, but until then, 19 actions are proposed across the six objectives for 2025/26.

- 4.2 All 18 actions will carry over from the previous EDI Action Plan due to their ongoing nature. These actions cover elements such as the Community Safety SoSafe Strategy, SEC activities, resident engagement, procurement, Healthy Stevenage Partnership, and equality data reporting, as outlined throughout this report. However, actions 1b and 5a will be combined as they both address the monitoring of EqlAs through the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan Cross-Cutting Theme. Further details on the amalgamation of these actions can be found in section two of this report.
- 4.3 Two new actions are proposed for next year's EDI Action Plan 24-25, as follows:
- 3c: Through Age Friendly Stevenage work, embed inclusive engagement with older people from diverse backgrounds to inform and shape Age-Friendly Stevenage priorities and services.
 - 6d: The council will integrate and implement technology to promote digital inclusion and support neurodiverse staff members to ensure accessibility for all.
- 4.4 A complete draft EDI Action Plan for 2025/26 can be found at Appendix B.

5. Appendices

- A. EDI Action Plan 24/25
- B. EDI Action Plan 25/26

Table of Abbreviations

ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
EDGG	Equality and Diversity Governance Group
EDI	Equality Diversity and Inclusion
EFLG	Equality Framework for Local Government
EqIA	Equalities Impact Assessment
HR	Human Resources
M44	Mission 44
MSEB	Making Stevenage Even Better (Corporate Plan)
MVAWG	Male Violence Against Women and Girls
OBE	Order of the British Empire
OBV	Operation Black Vote
OD	Organisational Development
OEG	Officer Equality Group
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
SEC	Stevenage Equalities Commission
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SREC	Stevenage Race Equality Co-operative
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
UKSPF	United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls