

# **Argyll and Bute Council Equalities Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes 2023**

**April 2023**

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## Section 1: Background context

### 1.1 Public Authorities covered by this Mainstreaming Report

Argyll and Bute Council's Equalities Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes 2021 covers the following listed authorities:

- Argyll and Bute Council
- Argyll and Bute Education Authority
- Argyll and Bute Licensing Board.

### 1.2 Legislation

The Equality Act (2010) brought together for the first time legislation relating to the nine protected characteristics of race, disability, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

The Act requires public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 and subsequent amendments are designed to help public sector organisations meet their duties as set out in the Equality Act.

The requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty include:

- Report on mainstreaming equality.
- Publish equality outcomes and report on progress.
- Assess and review policies and practices.
- Gather and use employee information.
- Publish gender pay gap information.
- Publish statements on equal pay.

This mainstreaming report describes how the three public authorities it covers have been making progress in these areas.

That inequality of opportunities is not only an issue for people with protected characteristics is reflected in other legislation, including:

- Part 1 of the Equality Act (2010), commonly referred to as the **Fairer Scotland Duty**, which seeks to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and reduce inequalities of outcome.
- Islands (Scotland) Act (2018).

### 1.3 Mainstreaming Equality within Argyll and Bute

Mainstreaming equality means integrating equality into an organisation's day-to-day working. This means taking equality into account when acting as an employer, or planning and providing services.

### 1.4 Key Documents

*Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan.*

Currently, the council's corporate outcomes are aligned to the outcomes of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, referred to within the area as [the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan \(ABOIP\)](#).

These outcomes are as follows.

In Argyll and Bute:

1. The economy is diverse and thriving.
2. We have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth.
3. Education, skills and training maximises opportunities for all.
4. Children and young people have the best possible start.
5. People live active, healthier and independent lives.
6. People live in safer and stronger communities.

The Community Planning Partnership sets out its commitment to equalities, diversity, and inclusiveness on page 26 of the ABOIP.

The current ABOIP runs from 2013-2023 and is coming to the end of its life. The Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership currently is in the process of developing a new Local Outcome Improvement Plan and with it a new set of outcomes.

Following the council elections in 2022 and the formation of a new administration, the council has created a list of priorities.

*The Council's Priorities.*

In November 2022 the council agreed a set of [priorities for the next five years](#).

*The Council's Constitution*

The Council's Constitution ([Council Constitution \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)):

- Sets out the council's principles of decision making; these include a commitment with regard to human rights and the Public Sector Equality Duty (part A, pages 8-9).
- Sets out the Council's requirement that contracts awarded by the Council contain an obligation obliging contractors to comply with all duties arising from the Equality Act 2010 (Part E, Section 12, page 183).
- States that determination and implementation of policies in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity fall within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee (Part C, Paragraph 2.2.4, page 67).

### *Employee Code of Conduct*

Section 20 of the Employee Code of Conduct deals specifically with Equality and Diversity. It sets out the council's commitment to equalities and signposts readers to the council's Equality and Diversity Policy, Equalities Mainstreaming Report, and Dignity at Work Policy. Paragraph 20.4 states:

The Council will promote an ethos in which self-respect and respect for others are of the utmost importance. All individuals will be valued equally and therefore be given every opportunity to fulfil their maximum potential in society. The Council insists that those who suffer discrimination, whether direct or indirect, receive fair treatment and adequate remedies and affirms that it will address appropriately all sources of discrimination.

Paragraph 3.18.5 makes clear that 'any instances of discrimination, harassment or victimisation at work will be viewed as a serious matter'.

The [Employee Code of conduct](#) is available to all staff on the Council's employee website, *My Council Works*. It is also appended to the [Council's Constitution](#) (as Part F part 3), which is publically available on the Council website. .

### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy*

The purpose of the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is to make sure that the organisation, employees and elected Members do not unlawfully discriminate against people with protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act. It also ensures that we oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination, and ensures equality, fairness and respect for all in the council's employment. [The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) includes links to other relevant documents and resources:

- Manager's Guide to Recruitment and Selection.
- Dignity at Work Policy: Eliminating Workplace Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure.
- Disciplinary Procedures and Code of Practice.
- Grievance Procedure.
- Employee Code of Conduct.
- Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- Guidance on the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
- Advice Note for Councillors on Bullying and Harassment.
- Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment.
- Complaints.
- Phased Return to Work and Other Reasonable Adjustments: Manager's Guide.
- Supporting Attendance at Work Policy.

### *Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments*

The council has a process in place for carrying out Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (EqSEIA). The EqSEIA is a joint impact assessment, which takes into account the nine protected characteristics, as well as socio-economic disadvantage, and the needs of island communities.

Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments serve the following purposes:

- They help the officers who are designing new proposals to check that they have considered all equalities implications, including socio-economic inequalities, as well as impacts on island communities.
- They help to demonstrate that officers have considered all equalities implications, including socio-economic inequalities, as well as impacts on island communities.
- They help people who are interested in equalities, socio-economic inequalities, and island impacts to see that these have been considered, and how.
- They encourage better / more informed consultation around proposals while they are still in development
- They enable better scrutiny around decision making as issues around equalities and socio-economic inequalities are made more transparent.

Work is ongoing to consider how the EqSEIA process can be amended to incorporate Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments.

In addition, we are currently reviewing our EqSEIA process to make it more robust within the council's decision making processes and to ensure that guidance and outputs meet current accessibility standards.

### *Procurement*

Section 4.3 of the Council's [Procurement Strategy 2022/2025](#) states:

The Council is mindful that the impact of procurement is far greater than this definition of a 'process' and our vision, objectives and principles as set out in this Strategy illustrate the contribution that effective procurement arrangements can make to wide ranging socio-economic agendas. These include equality and diversity, a successful local economy, a thriving voluntary and third sector, environmental issues and value for money for Argyll and Bute residents.

Section 5.2 includes the following commitments:

Ensuring procurement activity contributes towards the Council's general Equality Duty towards all stakeholders in Argyll and Bute and beyond;

Continuing to promote sustainability, fair work practices and the importance of equality and equal treatment through procurement.

Section 5.5 covers the mandatory requirements of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and Statutory Guidance Obligations. Item 5 relates to 'Payment of a living wage – to persons involved in producing, providing or constructing the subject matter of regulated procurements'.

Argyll and Bute's [Sustainable Procurement Policy 2022/25](#) also makes reference towards equalities, including the following:

d) In relation to social considerations, our priorities will be:

- To ensure there is no intentional discrimination against specific groups of people when undertaking procurements - Equalities and Diversity considerations will be embedded throughout the procurement process;

- To ensure that our contract terms require suppliers to support the health, safety, welfare and rights of their employees and supply chain – ensuring that the Council does not support human trafficking or modern slavery.

### *Education*

The council's website contains key documents and information relating to the following topics:

- [Anti-Bullying Policy](#)
- [Additional Support Needs](#)
- [Argyll and Bute's Autism Strategy](#)
- The work of the [Corporate Parenting Board](#) and a link to the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- [Mental health](#): guidance about mental health and wellbeing in children and young people.
- [Argyll and Bute Children and Young People's Service Plan](#)
- [School uniform scheme](#): describes how Argyll and Bute Council is working with its schools and third sector partners to roll out an innovative scheme that sees school uniforms children have outgrown being reused or recycled, thereby ensuring all students have access to uniforms.

## **1.5 Learning and Development Activity**

All staff are required to complete equalities training. The council's Equality and Diversity e-learning course is mandatory for all networked staff and should be completed as part of induction. The training is available through our online e-learning platform, LEON.

To ensure that non-networked staff also receive training, we offer this in a variety ways.

- Non-networked staff can access LEON from outside the council's network (see [Online Learning – My Council Works.](#))
- Digital toolbox talks for mandatory training, including Equality and Diversity, were developed and are used for the majority of staff groups.
- Toolbox talks are supplemented by a guidance document created for staff groups where a video format is not suitable.
- Smartphones are being rolled out to cleaning staff to enable better access to information and resources.

Our e-learning equality training is also available to community groups within our area via the council's website.

Equalities is a standing item on the agenda of the regular meetings held by the council's Training Centre; these meetings involve all people who are involved in the delivery of training.

In 2022, some multi-agency training was delivered via the Child Poverty Action Group.

The Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership also delivered a number of training events in 2022; delivery will continue into 2023/4.

Within Education, Connect Membership has opened up training opportunities for Parent Councils and broader parent forums in relation to equality issues such as *Children's Rights*, *Engaging Refugee and Asylum Seekers*, and *Reaching out to All Families*.

In addition to professional learning offered to staff via the [Equality and Diversity Sway](#), newly qualified teachers now receive equality and diversity training as part of their wider probationary training.

LGBTQ+ Scotland delivered a professional learning twilight session to staff to raise awareness of how support children and young people can be supported within schools and inclusive environments created. Education continues to support the work of the LGBTQ+ Network's Outreach Worker, who is also a lead for Oban Pride. The outreach work supports schools in developing an inclusive curriculum, supports pupils, and develops staff capacity. The Outreach Worker also organised a *Purple Friday Conference* which engaged 30 people from across the local authority, including education staff and partners. This event helped to relaunch the LGBTQ+ Network as part of our recovery planning.

Two members of staff from the Education department have participated in Education Scotland's *Building Racial Literacy Programme*. Links have been established across to other local authorities to develop this learning in partnership with one another.

We continue to develop knowledge of children's rights across our schools. In November 2022, Head Teachers participated in a day of professional learning: *UNCRC: Rights at the Heart*.

We support schools in engaging with the *Rights Respecting Schools Award*; presently we have 31 (one partner provider) schools and ELCs which have achieved Bronze, 10 which achieved Silver (one partner provider), and four which have achieved Gold. This enables staff, learners, parents, and communities to develop their understanding of children's rights.

Work developed by the Education Psychology team around *Our Children Their Nurturing Education* is linked to the rights of the child and ensures we are creating an inclusive environment in which children and young people can thrive.

## 1.6 Workforce

Workforce planning has been embedded across the organisation.

Workforce planning requires we understand the current profile of our workforce and identifies how we can make sure it will meet the future needs of the organisation. Key outcomes of the workforce plan include ensuring we have a balance between younger and older employees and the health and wellbeing of our employees is supported.

Workforce planning meetings are held twice a year, during which HR Talent and Performance officers and Third Tier managers discuss the make-up of the workforce. Ahead of these workforce planning meetings, Services are provided with a dashboard showing the profile of their workforce. Because we have an ageing workforce, age is a key area of focus. Gender is discussed when there is an uneven gender balance within the team.

We also monitor the workforce through regular Health of the Organisation reports.

To meet challenges around recruitment, several areas of action are currently underway. See under equality outcomes 1 and 2 for more information.

### 1.7 Partnership working

Examples of partnership working and groups include the following:

- Community Planning Partners are invited to attend the council's Equality Forum meetings.
- We have an active Violence Against Women Partnership operating within the area.
- Ukrainian Multiagency Resettlement Group.
- Rural Growth Deal Equalities Steering Group.
- Employability Partnership.
- UNCRC implementation group.
- Ukrainian Resettlement Group.
- Child Poverty Action Group.
- Financial Inclusion Advisory Group (FIAG).

Much of the work relating to socio-economic disadvantage within Argyll and Bute is managed through the FIAG and the child poverty action group.

Membership of the FIAG is drawn from elected members, council officers and partners. The FIAG fulfils an anti-poverty role, covering and taking account of the **Fairer Scotland Duty**. The FIAG formed a group to focus on cost of living issues in 2022.

The HSCP (Health and Social Care Partnership) shares the Council's approach to Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments, thereby bringing Council and HSCP processes into closer alignment.

### 1.8 Equality Forum

The council's Equality Forum was set up in 2013, with the Terms of Reference for the forum subsequently being reviewed and updated in early 2018 and again in 2023.

The purpose of the Equality Forum is to enable issues relating to equalities to be raised. In turn, the forum helps Argyll and Bute Council to deliver its obligations as set out in the Equality Act (2010).

Meetings are scheduled to take place quarterly. However, members of the Equality Forum may use the forum as a 'sounding board' at any time, with such communications taking place outwith the formal meeting cycle.

Membership of the Equality Forum is drawn from across council Services and partner agencies, enabling better coordination and collaboration.

### 1.9 Other groups and representation

Other groups that deal with aspects of equality and fairness include:

- A multi-agency group has been working to ensure Children’s Rights Reports are embedded in the work around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).
- Trade Union Liaison Group.
- Strategic and Departmental Management Team meetings.
- LGBTQ+ Network (Education led).
- Mentors in Violence Prevention Steering Group (Education Led).

Education has continued to work with partners across the local authority in relation to Child Poverty. Key initiatives have been the development of a [single-page sketch version of the Child Poverty Action Plan](#) designed to make the plan more accessible to young people.

The My Tribe Period Product initiative has been key in addressing the accessibility of free period products for all.

Other examples of partnership working are given in Sections 1.5, 3 and 4.

## **Section 2: Monitoring and Continuous Improvement**

### **2.1 Review of our Equality Impact Assessment process**

The council has carried out Equality Impact Assessments for a number of years.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments were first developed and approved in the 2000s. These were subsequently updated in light of the Equality Act (2010) and an updated Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was approved by council in December 2012.

In light of changes to legislation, as well as a review of how effectively the previous EqIA was being used, the council’s EqIA process was been reviewed and updated again, in 2018. This review has resulted in the Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (EqSEIA) process (see [Equality legislation and reporting](#)).

The EqSEIA process was most recently reviewed in autumn 2019, after twelve months of implementation. Based on that review, the guidance was amended to make it clearer when an EqSEIA should be carried out.

We are again reviewing our EqSEIA processes to check their effectiveness and to ensure they will continue to be fit for purpose in light of changes to the legislative environment, notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, and the requirement to carry out Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments;

### **2.3 Disability Confident accreditation**

The Council reaccredited as a Disability Confident Employer in February 2022. The current accreditation is valid until February 2025.

### **2.4 Review of workforce data**

We continue to engage with COSLA and SPDS with regard to improvements to our workforce data across local government in Scotland, notably around pay gap reporting.

## 2.5 Awareness raising

The council undertakes a range of awareness raising activities within and without the authority, throughout the year. Examples of activity include the following.

The Council's communications team uses social media to raise awareness. Recent awareness raising activity has highlighted:

- Grants available to young carers.
- Kinship Care Week.
- Blood Cancer Awareness Month.
- Light Up recognising the work done by the care at home workforce during Covid.

The latter two examples coincided with lighting up of McCaig's Tower, Oban, in appropriate colours.

The Council's Wellbeing Team produces a regular 'newsletter', which is promoted by email to all networked staff and hosted on an externally facing website, [My Council Works](#). This enables non-networked staff to access information. (Earlier editions are on the [council's website](#).)

The newsletters have been used to highlight:

- Domestic Violence Awareness.
- Mental health.
- Movember (dealing with men's health issues).
- Diabetes.
- International Day of People with Disabilities.
- International Women's Day.
- Endometriosis Awareness Month.
- Neurodiversity.
- Deaf Awareness Week.
- Pride month.
- International Non-Binary Day.
- Benefits, Money, and Energy Advice.
- Child Poverty Action Plan.

In addition to promoting awareness raising messages, the Wellbeing Team also coordinates webinars and provides links to useful resources.

The Council's Chief Executive hosts a regular podcast, available through the Council's website ([Pippa's Podcast \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)). The podcasts has covered a wide range of topics. Of particular relevance to equalities and fairness have been episodes focused on:

- International Women's Day.
- Movember.
- Child Poverty Action Plan.
- Work with refugees.
- Cost of Living.
- Provision of free period products.
- Mental health.
- Epilepsy Awareness month.

Additionally, individual schools carry out awareness raising activities.

## 2.6 Working with refugees

The council and its partners have welcomed refugees from Syria, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Ukraine to our area and offers them support. The nature of the support given is tailored according to the relevant schemes.

With regard to Ukraine, humanitarian support in Argyll and Bute is coordinated by the multi-agency Ukrainian Resettlement Group. This meets fortnightly and includes council services, partner agencies and the third sector.

The Council's Resettlement Team has been increased in size to enable the provision of advice and support to Ukrainians living with sponsors. It provides a wraparound support to those in temporary and social housing and provides welfare support for those in hotels. Interpreters and translators have also been recruited to the team.

We have four hotels accommodating Ukrainians within our area. Supporting Ukrainians in hotels allows the Resettlement Team to progress local matching. Local matching processes have proved more successful for Argyll and Bute than matching through the national service. This is because we build a relationship of trust with the Ukrainians and we know our area, our job market, our schools, and our sponsors, and can make informed decisions on what will be a good and sustainable match.

In addition to hotel accommodation and sponsors properties, some housing has been made available by Registered Social Landlords.

We provide ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes. Interest and uptake is high so we have recruited additional ESOL tutors.

At the beginning of August 2022 we launched a three months free bus pass scheme for those who do not qualify for the national travel schemes for under 22s and over 60s. Our Argyll and Bute scheme has been put in place with the support of all of the local transport providers.

We have signed up our first cohort of Ukrainian education professionals onto our career pathway. This will see them working in our schools initially in a support role to gain experience and knowledge of our curriculum. We intend in time for this to lead GTCS recognition or registration. A benefit of this approach is it provides Ukrainian speakers in schools with Ukrainian pupils.

In August we held two successful Welcome Fayres in Dunoon and Oban where Ukrainians had the opportunity to engage with a wide range of council and partner services, and community organisations. The fayres also offered an opportunity to meet with other Ukrainians living in the area. More fayres will be planned in the next few months.

We offer support to our sponsors through a peer support group which gives them the opportunity approximately once a month to meet the resettlement team and one another and ask questions about the scheme. These online sessions have been well attended by sponsors at all stages of their sponsorship journey.

## 2.7 Other activities

The education department has developed an action plan to roll out the delivery of *Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme* (MVP). This is a secondary school-based programme which addresses the issues of gender-based violence and links in with *Violence Against Women*

and Girls project work and *Safer Together*. Currently this programme is running in three schools and being developed in another three. The programme should be embedded in all secondary schools by 2026.

Health and wellbeing has remained a high priority for Education with a range of support strategies developed for both staff and pupils. This includes *The Mud Partnership Programme* for supporting head teachers and *The Exchange* school counselling service for pupils.

### **Section 3: Building back from COVID**

Extensive engagement was undertaken with hard to reach groups and third sector organisations at the end of 2020. This shaped a *Building Back Better* programme of work that was delivered across 2021 and into 2022.

Progress was reported and posted on the council webpage for consultations. Progress was also, and continues to be, reported within our Community Planning Partnership quarterly meetings.

As part of Education's post COVID recovery, live drama production tours in partnership with NHS Highland have been re-established. The *You Are Not Alone* performance deals with issues that include gender identity, bullying, peer pressure, sexuality and mental health. This production promotes the supports available to young people across Argyll and Bute and is supported by the presence of key partners.

Hermitage Academy is the only school in Scotland to have achieved gold accreditation in *Investors In Young People*, recognising the work the school does in relation to its young staff as well as its learners. The Developing Young Workforce team has also been a key part of the recovery planning, reconnecting employers with schools and young people. A Developing Young Workforce conference will be held in May, focussing on the theme of *Guaranteeing Opportunities for Young People and Employers in Argyll and Bute*. A working group is currently developing Relationship Policy guidance.

Also as part of the recovery planning, the Addressing Non Attendance group has been developing practice and policy to help support pupils in returning to the classroom. The group has been working to establish a sound understanding of the barriers to attendance and how young people and their parents/carers can be supported to increase school engagement and therefore close the attainment gap.

More information around closing the attainment gap post Covid is provided in Section 5.

Since returning from lockdown periods there has been an increase in children showing distressed behaviour and many younger children are behind with the development of their social skills and the ability to regulate themselves when interacting with other children. Taking this into account alongside the national landscape and government publications we took the decision in Argyll and Bute to review our guidance in this area.

We carried out a review wherein we consulted with head teachers, pupils, and professional associations. Following this review, we updated our processes and documentation around distressed and dysregulated behaviour.

We also responded to staff feedback that more training is required for staff to feel confident in managing distressed behaviour. In response to this we have made a commitment to provide appropriate staff training with a focus on avoiding and reducing the use of physical intervention, restraint, and exclusion from school. We have liaised with the CALM organisation and have committed to an extensive roll out of theory training and physical intervention training, where appropriate.

#### Section 4: Cost of Living Crisis

The Council is working with partners to do as much as possible to support vulnerable people affected by the Cost of Living Crisis.

We host a page on the Council website: [Advice services - Cost of living support](#). This offers a range of information and links which support people to access money and benefits advice, heat their home and manage rising energy costs, and feed themselves and their family.

In addition, the Council and its partners have produced leaflets and posters to signpost people to a support agency called *Worried about Money?* These are being circulated around Argyll and Bute by public and third sector partner organisations.

A 100 page book containing contact details for support agencies dealing with benefits and money advice, and foodbanks has been produced. It includes a household budget calculator dealing with credit and debt, savings, and insurance, and also energy advice. The book, [Do you have money worries?](#), is available online.

The Council, with partners at Bute Advice Centre and ALLenergy, set up the Flexible Food and Fuel Fund in January 2021. The fund offers grant payments to people on low incomes and limited savings and tags on provision of income maximisation through benefits and energy advice offered by ALLenergy.

In two years of operation the fund has supported 1,700 households and realised a combined client gain of £2.4 million by maximising disability benefits, housing related benefits, crisis grant, Scottish Social Security Agency benefits and energy debt relief schemes and fuel vouchers. This equates to an average client gain of over £1,400 per household. Access to the fund is available online: [Flexible Food and Fuel Fund Application Form](#).

The fund has been extended to March 2025 part funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

## Section 5: Equality Outcomes (2019-2023)

### 5.1 Argyll and Bute's Equality Outcomes (2019-2023)

The Council, Education Authority and Licensing Board developed Equality Outcomes for the period 2019-2023. These are set out in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Equality Outcomes (2019-2023).**

	Education Authority	Rest of Council	Licensing Board
Workforce	We support our workforce, encouraging participation across all age groups		
	We promote diversity across occupational groups		
Engagement	We have improved engagement with protected groups		
Services	People with protected characteristics have improved experiences of services		
	We take the views of people from protected groups into account when we change our services		
Education	We do not tolerate bullying and harassment of people from protected groups		
	The gap in educational attainment between people with and without protected characteristics is reduced.		

#### Workforce:

#### **We support our workforce, encouraging participation across all age groups**

**Duty:** Advance equality of opportunity

**Protected characteristics:** All, with particular attention to age

**Purpose:** We believe that all employees, including those from all the protected characteristics, should be encouraged, and have equal opportunity, to participate fully within the workforce. This principle is set out in the council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

We recognise that the Council, in common with the population of Argyll and Bute more widely, has particular issues and risks relating to the age of our workforce. This is why this outcome emphasises age.

We actively encourage young people to join our workforce, to provide long-term opportunities for them in our area and to create our workforce for the future.

At the lower end of the age range, in the past two financial years (2021/22 and 2022/23) we have employed twelve modern apprentices across a variety of subject areas. One apprentice has moved onto a further apprenticeship to continue their learning. One has completed and left the organisation and one dropped out early as it wasn't right for them; this person has gone onto college. The remaining apprentices are progressing well through their qualifications.

Over the same period, five apprentices who had started in previous years completed apprenticeships. Three went onto secure employment with Argyll and Bute Council.

Since starting our apprenticeship programme in 2014, the Council has offered 72 apprenticeship opportunities. 73% of these apprentices have secured employment with the council.

We continue to work with our partners such as Developing the Young Workforce and the Employability partnership to offer opportunities for people looking for experience which will help them access the job market. For example, in 2022, we successfully offered two paid work placements through the UK Government's Kickstart scheme.

At the upper end of the age range, we offer flexible working / flexible retirement arrangements.

To meet an increasingly challenging labour market and to address recruitment challenges, the council has set up a strategic group to look at these issues. Work is also ongoing to improve our recruitment and onboarding processes.

### **We promote diversity across occupational groups**

**Duty:** Advance equality of opportunity

**Protected characteristics:** All, with particular emphasis on sex

**Purpose:** The Council has a highly segregated workforce in some types of job. For example, people working in home care are 99% female. By contrast, employees in Roads and Amenities and IT are predominantly male. We aim to widen opportunity for people in job roles that they may not have considered otherwise and create opportunity for all.

Where gender imbalances are identified in the course of our workforce planning activities, managers are encouraged to identify actions to address them. Thus, in areas such as early years, which has a predominately female workforce, we are working with managers to promote roles in such a way as to attract males into the workforce.

The strategic work around recruitment (see above) will also consider issues around diversity and inclusion in attracting new employees.

With regard to election work, staff across all age groups are given the opportunity to work at Polling Stations and in the Count process. Experience is more important than any age considerations.

As an example of good practice within the council's workforce, one Service has highlighted they have a team member with dyslexia who expressed a wish to gain experience minute taking but who felt scared of doing so. Solutions to overcome their barrier to learning were identified and the team members has gone on to successfully minute meetings, with their line manager taking a 'shadow minute' at each meeting to make them feel more comfortable.

We have positive female role models in our senior management team. We have a female Chief Executive, one of two Executive Directors is female, and our Heads of Service are 50% female.

We value neurodiversity and have examples of employees who have disclosed their neurodiverse status to their managers and are supported, through reassurance and openness by their managers, to contribute fully in the workplace, maximise the use of their skills, and feel fully included their team.

## **Engagement:**

### **We have improved engagement with protected groups**

**Duty:** Foster good relations

**Protected characteristics:** All

**Purpose:** We aim to make sure the voices and opinions of people from protected groups are heard when we engage with our service users. This is particularly important when people from particular protected groups may have different experiences or needs and whose voices may not be heard so clearly.

We can demonstrate examples of good practice in how we engage with various groups.

### *Accessibility:*

We pay for the Reachdeck feature on our website to help engagement with those having visual impairments and language issues and we subscribe to the SilkTide Accessibility monitoring service to ensure our online offering is amongst the best in the UK and is improving to reach the new WCAG 2.2 standard.

### *Community Engagement:*

The Community Development and Planning Team have been working to improve engagement by developing resources suitable for interaction with young people, people with disabilities and young people with disabilities.

The Council has set up a cross-Service working group to further develop and improve our approaches towards community engagement.

### *Community Planning:*

The Community Planning Partnership continues to encourage young people to be actively involved in Community Planning.

Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament are included on the Community Planning Management Committee. Their attendance at the meetings is supported by having pre meetings to go through the papers in advance; the young people are actively encouraged to engage by alternative means if preferred, for example through the use of video updates rather than paper reports. Feedback shows the Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament feel heard and valued. See, for example, [Cameron Garrett MSYP CPP Presentation June 2021 - YouTube](#)

Throughout the consultation period for the identification of the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan's new priorities, the community development team monitored participation in its survey, which was made available in languages other than English. The team took into consideration protected characteristics and geography (e.g. islands, remote rural areas) of respondents. This enabled the community development team to ensure relevant population groups were targeted and gaps which had been identified were addressed.

Adaptations were made to the consultation survey to enable non-digital engagement and engagement with hard to reach groups. For example, when some youth organisations were first approached, including one with young people with disabilities, feedback suggested they would not find the consultation as developed engaging. Working with those groups, more suitable alternative materials were developed. These materials improved the experiences of those engaging with the consultation.

Face-to-face engagement activity included engaging with young people and young people with disabilities. Appropriate materials were developed in conjunction with third sector organisations.

Over 1,900 people participated in the consultation and over 40 groups engaged in face-to-face engagement activity.

#### *Democratic processes and elections:*

In terms of work on elections, we engage with young people to encourage participation in local democracy, using them to use their voices, and register to vote at earliest opportunity.

Welcome to Your Vote Week is an annual campaign carried out in January of each year. We engage with schools to promote this and to encourage a focus on democracy, promote voter registration, and participation in democracy for young people.

We take action to reach those affected by homelessness and we support them to participate in elections. We do this by directly approaching housing associations and service providers with information highlighting the ways that those without a fixed address can register and use their vote.

We work to reach anonymous voters, including those affected by the likes of domestic abuse, by proactively reaching out to service providers highlighting that it's still possible to use your vote while ensuring your anonymity is protected.

#### *Other examples of engagement carried out in the last two years:*

- A survey for Hard to Reach citizens so their voice was heard in our post pandemic recovery plan for customer engagement.

- Helensburgh Waterfront Development engaged widely in design process of new Leisure Centre including with disability groups like Enable.
- We have involved the local access group in the initial discussions for the development of Mossfield Stadium. We also had discussions and agreed in the partnerships with Friends of Oban Play Group regarding the Atlantis play area, all-inclusive equipment.
- The Scottish Government Play Park funding has given us an opportunity to engage with communities as well as disability forums. We are in the process of doing this to identify the best way to provide improvements to our play park infrastructure.
- Liaison with rural and island communities on ferry services transport links, and out of hours emergency cover.
- Liaison with communities regarding relief vessels during disruption and maintenance periods.
- Consultation event in Fionnphort: we are providing transport to the venue from the ferry for protected groups and those without transport. During consultations hard copies were provided at locations for participants with barriers to online access. .

### **Services:**

#### **People with protected characteristics have improved experiences of services**

**Duty:** Advance equality of opportunity; foster good relations

**Protected characteristics:** All

**Purpose:** We aim to make sure that, as far as possible, our services meet the needs and aspirations of people from protected groups and that we work to improve their experience of our services.

#### *Website accessibility*

See above.

#### *Refugees:*

See section 2.6.

#### *Marriages and Civil Partnerships*

Our new Marriage Civil Partnership website is aimed at the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnerships. We have introduced Gaelic Blessings to our wedding ceremonies. (See [Marriage and Civil Ceremonies.](#))

#### *Other*

- To address specific accessibility issues relating to islands communities, we have retained uneconomic service points. We also support the Scotland Loves Local card and other anti-poverty initiatives aimed at reducing socio-economic inequality.
- Our catering team is in consultation with children in the design of menus through pupil focus groups.

- We offer an assisted Bin Pull Out Service to customers unable to move their bins to the kerbside themselves.
- Assistance has been provided for mobility restricted customers at Rothesay Harbour while repairs are ongoing. Training for staff in use of wheelchair restraints has been provided.
- Recent parks improvements have seen access improvements, particularly the Heritage Lottery Fund project at Hermitage Park.
- We ensure that pathways within play areas and burial grounds are accessible, including the garden of remembrance at Cardross Crematorium.
- At Cardross crematorium, we removed the separate disabled access in favour of having an all-inclusive access point.
- Recent play area improvements include the provision of accessible equipment, for example at Campbeltown and Kidston Park.
- Recent depot improvement projects: Jackson's Quarry and Blackhill have all-inclusive accesses, with a lift being introduced at Jackson's Quarry.
- We have made adjustments to the way the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee operates to enable greater accessibility to applicants.

### **We take the views of people from protected groups into account when we change our services.**

**Duty:** Advance equality of opportunity; foster good relations

**Protected characteristics:** All

**Purpose:** We aim to make sure that the needs and opinions of people from protected groups are taken into account when we make changes to the way we deliver our services. This helps us to make sure that people with one or more protected characteristics have equal opportunity to access the services we provide as those who do not share a protected characteristic.

Expectations around consultation and engagement are set out in our impact assessment guidance.

As the council moves towards adopting the Scottish Approach to Service Design, work is underway to improve and embed the way we undertake user research. In conjunction with this, we have set up a group to develop a revised Community Engagement Strategy. Equalities will be explicitly built into this.

See also above regarding examples of recent engagement activity.

### **Education:**

#### **We do not tolerate bullying and harassment of people from protected groups**

**Duty:** Foster good relations; eliminate discrimination

**Protected characteristics:** All

**Purpose:** As part of wider work to tackle bullying in schools, we will take action to reduce bullying on the basis of one or more of the protected characteristics.

Education's [Anti-Bullying Policy](#) is available online. Individual schools also have their own anti-bullying policies and carry out related activities, for example [Respect for All at Islay High School](#).

To support managers in addressing issues arising from conflict situations, in 2022 the council published its [Workplace Conflict Manager's Toolkit](#). Bullying and harassment is one of the areas of conflict highlighted in the toolkit.

Handling conflict in a proactive way can help improve team morale, reduce sickness absence and reduce turnover of staff. However, if a complaint is serious, for example bullying, harassment, or discrimination, an individual may request the conflict situation be formally investigated. Where conflict is not been resolved using informal methods then it will be appropriate to use the Council's Grievance Procedures.

The Guardian service is also available for HSCP employees. The Guardian service is independent and confidential and is for staff to discuss matters relating to patient and service user care and safety, whistleblowing, bullying and harassment, and workplace grievances.

### **The gap in educational attainment between people with and without protected characteristics is reduced.**

**Duty:** Advance equality of opportunity

**Protected characteristics:** All

**Purpose:** We work to provide a high standard of education to all pupils, and we want to reduce gaps in attainment between people with, and without, protected characteristics. This will help us to advance equality of opportunity for young people who share one or more of the protected characteristics.

All education establishments routinely discuss and report on the attainment by sex and of looked after children.

The Addressing Non Attendance (ANA) group has been developing practice and policy to help support pupils in returning to the classroom. The group has been working to establish a sound understanding of the barriers to attendance and how young people and their parents/carers can be supported to increase school engagement and therefore close the attainment gap.

The Lead Teacher for Recovery and Renewal: Literacy and Numeracy has led a range of initiatives to close the attainment gap widened by Covid.

The Principal Teacher Recovery and Renewal has worked with head teachers to provide targeted interventions and, where appropriate, offer training in delivering interventions to Additional Support Needs and teaching staff. This is central to closing the attainment gap

Parents / carers have been supported through the development of a website outlining simple ways in which they can support their child's learning at home.

Bespoke training in a range of literacy and numeracy resources has been delivered to staff.

Individual school support has been provided as well as a range of CLPL opportunities for staff across the authority.

The Education Management Team have worked alongside Education Scotland Attainment Advisor to support schools to produce robust Pupil Equity Fund plans. The Education Management team have helped identify schools for supporting visits to discuss plans in detail.

The Argyll and Bute Corporate Parenting Board provides leadership and direction to the Corporate Parents of Argyll and Bute in working together to improve the outcomes and maximise the life opportunities for all our care experienced children and young people.

Within Argyll and Bute we have a team of staff dedicated to improving outcomes for Care experienced children and young people. The team members have completed training in the areas of trauma informed practice, PACE; attachment theory; assistive technology and numeracy.

The team includes a dedicated Education Lead for Care Experienced Children and Young People. This leader maintains a high level overview of Care Experienced Children and Young People's:

- Attendance
- Attainment
- Transitions
- Post-School Destinations
- Exclusions
- Wellbeing

The team works closely with partners across agencies to provide early intervention to support improved outcomes and close the gap between care experienced and their non-care experienced classmates. The Education Lead for Care Experienced Children and Young People is the main contact for multi-agency working to support the above and take an active role in strategic initiatives such as our Addressing Non Attendance Strategy and our Corporate Parent Work Experience Steering Group.

We have set targets with the corporate parenting board for this cohort and track and monitor the progress towards them:

- Formal Exclusions will be reduced to fewer than 3 per session
  - There have been fewer than 3 exclusions in session 21/22 and 22/23
- Over 60% of eligible pupils will achieve a pass at N4 and N5 in Numeracy
  - In session 20/21 we had 100% successful presentations in Numeracy, however not all pupils were presented for award, therefore greater scrutiny is needed around this.
- Over 65% of eligible pupils will achieve a pass at N4 and N5 in Literacy
  - In session 20/21, we had 100% successful presentations. Again, more scrutiny needed around who is eligible against who is presented.
- School Attendance will increase to 94% for Primary and 90% for Secondary
  - Attendance has dipped, nationally.

We have 4 Health and Wellbeing Liaison Offices within the Care Experienced Team. These officers work closely with children and young people (and sometimes their families) to provide support and liaise with school staff and partner agencies to improve outcomes for the individuals they work with.

In addition we have 3 Lead Additional Support Needs assistants for Raising Attainment. These posts provide weekly sessions to pupils to support Literacy/Numeracy/Health and Wellbeing.

We have recently completed the recruitment process for a Virtual Head Teacher within Argyll and Bute. Our expectation is that the post holder will work collaboratively with Head Teachers in each establishment and offer support and robust challenge around data and the strategies in place to secure better outcomes for each and every one of our care experienced children.

## **Section 6: Workforce Monitoring**

### **6.1 Our workforce**

On the basis of the data we currently hold, along with a comparison with other data, we can make the following comments with regard to the workforce:

- The most obvious difference between the workforce profile and working-age population of the area more general relates to the high proportion of females (approximately three-quarters) within the council and Education workforces. The predominance of females is particularly noticeable in Education.
- When compared to the age profile of the wider working-age population (NRS 2021 Mid-Year Estimates), our workforce appears to be skewed towards the older end of the working-age range. Our workforce shows a lower percentage of people aged 16-24; however, this is not unexpected as this cohort covers the final year of secondary education and the period when many people go on to higher education. At 49 years, the average age of our workforce is several years higher than the average age of the working age population across the area (around 44 years).
- It is hard to make comparisons between 2011 Census data and our workforce data with regard to sex, disability and religion because of the high proportion of missing data and 'prefer not to say' within the workforce data. This is a position shared with other Councils in Scotland.
- Limited information is available about sexual orientation. Data from 2019 ([Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019](#)) suggested that around 95% of Scottish adults identified as being heterosexual / straight (94.5%  $\pm$ 4.7% in Argyll and Bute). On this basis, we would expect proportions of staff identifying as LGB to be low. Because of the amount of missing data, and the small numbers involved, no conclusions can be drawn with regard to under / overrepresentation of LGB people within our workforce.

### **6.2 Review of workforce data**

In autumn 2022, we carried out a campaign to encourage employees to update their equalities data. While this has resulted in some additional data being added to our records, the overall impact of the exercise has been limited and there remain large gaps in the equalities information we hold.

Currently the coverage rates for the individual protected characteristics are as follows (Table 1):

**Table 1: Coverage rates for protected characteristics among our workforce.**

<b>Protected characteristic</b>	<b>Coverage rate (as of January 2023)</b>
Age	100%
Gender (sex)	100%
Gender identity	19.7%
Sexual orientation	32.7%
Disability	97.3%
Nationality	100%
Ethnic origin	54.7%
Religion	33.5%

(Note: this is coverage by post, not by employee. Some employees will hold more than one post. These figures also include casual posts.)

There have been changes to the way data is collected and recorded in both ResourceLink and TalentLink.

The data, itself, is reported in Appendix 2.

### **6.3 Workforce reporting**

Our [detailed workforce reporting](#) has been published separately.

### **6.4 Workforce Planning and Health of the Organisation reporting**

In 2018 the Council approved a Strategic Workforce Plan, and put in place a programme of workforce planning activity. Included in this has been team profiling across the council. All third tier managers have been supplied with data highlighting the proportions of their staff aged 50 and over, and under 25. They have also been provided with information relating to the male / female split in their workforce.

Interview sessions between Talent and Performance officers and Third Tier Managers are now embedded. During these sessions, potential issues are highlighted, and managers are asked to develop actions to address them. Issues include areas where gender segregation may a particular challenge to the organisation. In turn, this helps to deliver on our outcome, *we promote diversity across occupational groups*.

The Council also has procedures in place to monitor the 'Health of the Organisation'. This is designed to enable better monitoring of issues and changes in the workforce, and for interventions to be made in a timely manner.

## **6.5 Policy Statement with regard to Equal Pay:**

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to the principle of equal opportunities in employment to ensure that employees are not discriminated against irrespective of their age, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender re-assignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, religion or belief.

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to ensuring that that all staff, irrespective of gender should receive equal pay for the same or broadly similar work, for work rated as equivalent and for work of equal value.

The Council's equal pay objectives are to:

- Eliminate any unfair, unjust or unlawful practices that impact on pay;
- Take appropriate action to address these accordingly;
- Regularly monitor and review the application of policies and procedures and;
- Conduct an equal pay review to monitor existing pay practices in line with the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Equal Pay Statutory Code of Practice.

In order to achieve equal pay for employees, the Council operates a pay system which is transparent, based on clear criteria and free from unlawful bias through the application of the nationally agreed job evaluation scheme and relevant legislation.

For Teachers the Council complies with nationally agreed pay and conditions of service.

Argyll and Bute Council is committed to ensuring equal pay structures for all its employees and will:

- Conduct regular audits to monitor the impact of its pay structure.
- Provide training and guidance for those involved in determining pay
- Respond to grievances on equal pay in accordance with the council's Grievance Policy
- Work in partnership with recognised trade unions to ensure that the Council provides equal pay
- Review progress every 4 years.

## **6.6 Equal Pay Audit**

Our 2022 Equal Pay Audit has been published separately.

The audit, carried out by Zellis Reward Consultancy Services, was based on the workforce as of October 2022. The audit explores gender pay gaps, where these manifest within the organisation, and why.

The audit's findings provide assurances that our processes and practices around pay and grading are robust with pay gaps (see table 2) arising from structural factors within the wider labour market.

**Table 2: Gender pay gaps including and excluding casuals (from Equal Pay Audit 2022)**

<b>Summary – Gender Pay Gaps – Basic Pay</b>				
Group	Total Workforce (Inc. Casuals)		Total Workforce (Excl. Casuals)	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
All Employees	9.05%	8.29%	4.81%	1.57%

Despite these assurances, the audit has made a series of recommendations for our consideration. The recommendations are as follows:

- Review what actions can be taken to enable a wider range of employees to progress to roles in higher grades. This could include a review of family friendly policies, training and development opportunities and increasing part time and job sharing throughout the organisation.
- Identify what prevents greater opportunities for part time working throughout the grading structure.
- Consider what the future impact of potential changes in the Scottish Local Government Living Wage will have on the design of the pay structure.
- Continue to review the overall gender pay gap and specifically require Service Areas to review the position in their own area.
- Ensure that decisions on market pay are evidence based and that such approaches to pay are applied to all relevant areas of the organisation.
- Continue action to address the availability of data on all protected characteristics and promote this as a means of recruiting and retaining employees from all groups.
- Continue to undertake a level of monitoring including casual appointments as included in this report.
- Undertake a further review of casual appointments to identify comparability with permanent employees undertaking the same role and that incremental progression also applies.