

Report to: **Equal Opportunities Forum**
Date of Meeting: **13 September 2023**
Report by: **Executive Director (Education Resources)**

Subject: **Annual Report on Mainstreaming Equalities and Diversity – Finance and Corporate Resources**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise the Forum of the strategic and operational work being undertaken and planned by Finance and Corporate Resources to meet the commitments within 'South Lanarkshire Working for You' Mainstreaming Equalities Report 2021 to 2025

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation:-

- (1) that the work being undertaken by Finance and Corporate Resources in terms of mainstreaming equalities be noted.

3. Background

3.1. The Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources) is responsible for supporting and developing strategies to meet the Council's commitment and statutory duties on equality and diversity, both within the Resource and Council-wide. This is in the Council's role both as an employer and as a provider of services. This is a complex area of work that has increased greatly in recent years.

3.2. The Public Sector Specific Duties, as previously reported to the Forum, outline the key responsibilities for public bodies and include statutory requirements to report against equality outcomes and to continue to evidence that decisions relating to policy and practice are accurately assessed against the general duties which are to:-

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

3.3. The first 4-year cycle for the Specific Duties ended in April 2017. The Scottish Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) are currently reviewing the Scottish Specific Duties with a view to revising these in 2025 in time for the next Mainstreaming Reports.

4. Supporting Equalities

- 4.1. The Resource is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of equality and diversity legislation, good practice, and advancing equality for all.
- 4.2. Officers from the Resource provide both lead and support roles for several equalities related working groups, networks, and forums including:-
 - ◆ the Corporate Equality and Diversity Working Group and any of its short life groups, for example., on equality impact assessment
 - ◆ the network of Diversity Liaison Officers aligned to Resources, who monitor recruitment and provide advice to managers on equality issues in employment and the employee forums
 - ◆ the co-ordination of the Employee Network – Caring, Disability, Ethnicity and LGBT Matters
 - ◆ Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire and the Older People's Assembly
 - ◆ partnership working arrangements with other public agencies and the voluntary sector for example, the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership (incorporating the South Lanarkshire Access Panel) and the Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group (LEMAG)

5. Mainstreaming Equalities

- 5.1. The Council meets its statutory duties by ensuring that equality and diversity issues are effectively “mainstreamed” and built into its strategic planning and performance monitoring.
- 5.2. In the strategy the Council indicate that this can be achieved by:-
 - ◆ carrying out a process of “impact assessment” for any new policy/practice or change to policy/practice which is relevant to the duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination or harassment. The online toolkit has facilitated approximately 981 assessments. The review of the online toolkit is ongoing. The revised toolkit will incorporate the requirements of the Fairer Scotland Duty, Human Rights Act, and the UN Convention on Child Rights (UNCRC)
 - ◆ requiring each Resource to identify how it will mainstream equalities and its commitments in this area in its Resource/Service Plan. This can be evidenced through Resources having equalities as a standing item on the agenda of Resource/Senior Management Team meetings and Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs). It is further evidenced through their annual reporting to this Forum and in the updates they provided as part of the 2023 mainstreaming equalities progress report.
- 5.3. The latest mainstreaming progress report was published on the Council's website in April 2023.
- 5.4. Whilst leading on the mainstreaming framework for the Council, the Resource has also progressed a number of mainstreaming matters within its service areas. A brief overview of some of this work is provided below.
- 5.5. **Administration and Legal Services:** In addition to its support to elected members and the Council's decision-making process, Administration and Legal Services has responsibility for providing a full range of legal advice and support, managing electoral events and licensing and registration services to the public.

5.6. **Communications and Strategy:** Promotes the Councils commitment to equality and diversity externally and internally. It provides access to information on Council services, oversees the co-ordination of Resource and Service Planning, and takes the lead role in promoting the work of the Council through the media, the design of publicity material and the development of the Council website. This is a vital area of equality and diversity work. The Council's commitment to equality must be communicated effectively both to employees and members of the community. The Community participation and empowerment team engages with communities and citizens to ensure all groups engage in how services are shaped for the future. Some examples of its contribution to the Equality and Diversity Strategy in last year have been:-

- ◆ a continued approach to improving the accessibility of the Council's website and complying with new legislation and industry accessibility standards. Accessibility is tested using online tools as well as citizens and the website has an application which reads out text for those with visual impairments or for those whose first language is not English. The Service develops new forms and content with the customer in mind and tests early with members of our community, including those with disabilities
- ◆ an update to the Council's website to include the use of *Recite Me* a tool that offers a range of on-demand accessibility solutions to ensure that the website is user-friendly for people with disabilities and language support, through customisable options

5.7. **Consultation, Involvement and Engagement** are a key aspect to the impact assessment process which Resources undertake on all existing and new strategy, policy, and procedure development. Finance and Corporate Resources has led the way in improving the ways in which Resources consult and engage with the South Lanarkshire community.

5.8. The Community Engagement Team works with communities to help them identify and meet their local priorities. They work together with members of the Community Planning Partnership who are working together to make South Lanarkshire a better place to live and work. The aim is to work with communities to deliver better services targeted at reducing poverty and tackling inequalities and deprivation across South Lanarkshire.

5.9. Activities to note include:-

- ◆ **The Lived Experience Fund** – This fund is allocated annually to the Community Planning Partnership with the aim to capture the lived experience of people experiencing poverty, inequalities and/or deprivation. It can be accessed by communities of place and of shared characteristics. In 2022/2023 it has been accessed to support a range of groups to involve their community in identifying their needs and their feedback was connected into a range of Community Planning Partnership resources and planning groups.
- ◆ **Liber8 Lanarkshire**, a charity based in Blantyre that provided a wide range of counselling services to adults and young people affected by mental health problems, alcohol misuse and substance use, ensuring that professional therapy was accessible to anyone who required it. The fund was used to support Lived Experienced Peer Volunteers at the Beacons to design and deliver a community and partners consultation. Feedback from the organisations would be used as part of the evidence to help identify any policy issues and gaps in service provision.
- ◆ **REACH Lanarkshire Autism** is a charity based in Whitlawburn, Cambuslang who provides support to families who have a young person with an Autism

Spectrum Condition living within the South Lanarkshire area. The Community Planning Progress Group was provided with the Lived Experience feedback provided by REACH Lanarkshire Autism. It was agreed that partners would review the feedback and provide details of the current interventions and support that they provide.

- ◆ **Free Period Products-** the Council continues to ensure that period products are free and widely available through a high level of public and community owned venues across South Lanarkshire. In addition, an online ordering and delivery service for the products is offered.

5.10. The team continue to support the community and third sector to work together and in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council to address a range of community needs. Benefits identified from this work include:-

- ◆ developing stronger links with community groups
- ◆ increasing volunteering capacity
- ◆ creating locality partnerships and networks where organisations are working together to address local need

5.11. Neighbourhood Planning continues to focus support on the areas in South Lanarkshire facing the greatest inequalities of outcome, engaging with communities to identify priorities and solutions which they can work on alongside delivery partners. Progress on neighbourhood planning has continued and there is now have 9 Community Plans with two more in development.

5.12. Small scale, place based participatory budgeting programme have taken place in in neighbourhood planning areas and a total of £43 thousand pounds funded small projects that meet identified priorities. In 2023/2024, the team are working with priority communities experiencing inequality with a much larger investment of £200,000 for participatory budgeting work.

5.13. **Benefits and Revenue Team** provide support to south Lanarkshire residents, including payment of Clothing Grants/Free School Meals. The application process for this support has been changed to make the application process more streamlined. The change to the process is outlined below:-

- ◆ Clothing grants and free school meals – migration of the process from annual paper applications (7,000) to initially an online form, then to an automatic process for those customers in receipt of housing benefit and/or council tax reduction (80% of applications) and an online form for the remaining customers (20% of applications). Paying clothing grants by BACS from cheque payments; more than 80% of customers receive payment via this method which provides instant access to the funds. Automation was also developed between the education benefits system and Education Resources' SEEMIS system so that the SEEMIS system is instantly updated when free school meals have been awarded.
- ◆ Introducing the automatic process, as described above, was seen as the way forward from an entitlement perspective i.e., customers didn't need to make a claim and we didn't need to rely on customers making a claim, it takes place automatically for them.
- ◆ Moving to online application forms was the preferred direction of travel from a service provision perspective. However, for customers who have to submit an application (for example, customers who live in neighbouring Council and their children attend a SLC school) and are not able to engage online they are directed to public online outlets such as libraries. Where this is not possible, assistance

can be offered with taking an application via phone for those who do not have online access.

- 5.14. **Customer Services Centre** acts as the initial point of contact for all South Lanarkshire residents looking to report initial repairs to council houses, issues with Land and Waste Services or any other general enquiry that residents may require assistance with. All initial contact is done via telephone or online via emails or online forms. This allows residents to interact with South Lanarkshire Council 24 hours 7 days per week. This is especially useful as everyone can't always contact their local council within office hours. As an organisation, there are multiple means for residents to contact, and report repairs or issues.
- 5.15. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council's one-stop shop QandA offices which were located in Cambuslang, East Kilbride, Hamilton, and Lanark, provided a face to face drop in service. This service was removed due to enforced government lockdowns where telephone and digital methods of communication were the only options available.
- 5.16. Once restrictions were lifted the Q and A offices did not re-open, telephone and digital options continued. It is acknowledged that not everyone is able or wants to use online platforms and on occasions may look to meet with officer's face to face and conventional contact methods have not been totally removed. Any individual who requires to meet with an officer face to face can have a pre-arranged appointments booked for them to attend at an office to receive the service which they require.

6. Partnerships

6.1. The Resource supports several partnerships including:-

6.1.2. **Seniors Together in South Lanarkshire:** Works as a multi-agency partnership that involves people aged 50+ from the local community in meaningful engagement to enable them to influence the policy and service provision of partner agencies. The Executive Group and an Operational Group continue to deliver a series of responsive focus and consultation groups and the project facilitates older people to access services and opportunities to enhance their retirement. Seniors Together provides ongoing support and engagement to its members using a range of interventions including social media and technology such as Microsoft Teams, to have ongoing conversations and consultations with them and talking about issues of importance including living with long-term illnesses. The project is supported by the Council's Older Peoples Champion who represents them on the National group of Local Authority Older people Champions.

6.1.3. Activities of note have included:-

The project is taking the lead with South Lanarkshire Council in developing the local authority into Scotland's first Age Friendly Community. This will mean that Seniors Together representatives will work with members of the South Lanarkshire Community Planning Partnership Board to develop an Action Plan that will deliver the eight domains that make a community 'age friendly' as set out by the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age Friendly Communities.

6.1.4. **Men's Shed Development and Mobile Men's Shed Project** – Seniors Together is the lead agency for the support and development of men's sheds in South Lanarkshire. With funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, a Mobile Men's Shed Project was delivered to assist in reducing loneliness and isolation in older men. This saw the men's shed programme increase particularly in rural South Lanarkshire with the latest shed being developed in Leadhills. Ongoing support is provided to assist local

communities to develop their own static sheds and continued support is provided to those sheds currently up and running in South Lanarkshire. A Men's Shed Network is supported by Seniors Together where representatives from sheds attend monthly and share learning and advice with each other. Developing sheds are assisted through the process and speakers are invited to attend.

A dedicated Men's Shed Newsletter has also been produced by this group so that they can connect with all individuals across South Lanarkshire who attend the range of sheds now available.

There are now 4 sheds that have gone through the asset transfer process.

6.1.5. **Successfully re-engaged** with older people after lockdown by arranging a series of themed Information events in local areas. This encouraged older people to reconnect with their communities, the Seniors Together Project, and their peers.

Providing information from trusted partners around the topic of 'Safety' from, Police, Fire and Trading Standards, older people felt more confident about getting back out into the community, while colleagues from Health improvement and South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture (SLLC) were able to provide further reassurance by offering health checks and advice.

6.1.6. **Staying connected** – using Facebook, newsletters, leaflets, Microsoft Teams, community events, face to face meetings and the Council website, this has seen an increase in the Seniors Together membership. Microsoft Teams has allowed the engagement of people who were unable to attend meetings in person previously. It has helped to be more inclusive.

6.1.7. Seniors Together representatives attending Health & Social Care Partnership Locality Implementation Groups – ensuring older peoples voices are heard in planning local services.

6.1.8. **Older, Wiser, Stronger Campaign** – publicity produced as part of Age Friendly activity work. Seniors Together leaflets and banners produced showing older people in 'Age Positive' photographs.

6.1.9. **South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership (incorporating the South Lanarkshire Access Panel)**: A user led partnership that brings together the Council, NHS Lanarkshire, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other local agencies with representatives from the voluntary sector. The objective of the group is to improve communication between the organisations and the community and to give people with disabilities an opportunity to influence policy and service provision.

6.1.10. As well as the normal business meetings of the Panel, where Members receive updates from Resource representatives, they have met with:-

- ◆ Fiona McCormack from Social Security Scotland (SSS) in relation to the SSS Disability and Carer related benefits
- ◆ Jeremy Balfour MSP, Convenor of the cross party group on disability at the Scottish Parliament, to discuss accessibility issues
- ◆ Brian Borland, Community Engagement Team to discuss the Community Wishlist
- ◆ Patrick Nyamurundira from Scotrail in connection with improving services for disabled people

Members have also had the opportunity to:-

- ◆ review the Lanark Interchange scheme proposals
- ◆ visit the Blantyre Community Care Facility, Glasgow Road, Blantyre
- ◆ participate in a study around inclusive kerb design facilitated by Edinburgh Napier University's transport research institute working on the behalf of transport Scotland, the Scottish Roads Research Board, and the Department for Transport
- ◆ comment on the planning application for the old UWS site in Hamilton

7. Performance Measurement

7.1. Improvements to capture equalities related data on service provision are ongoing and, as mentioned above, the use of online technologies for consultation and the impact assessment process are driving these changes forward. Some of the progress in the past year has been:-

- ◆ supporting the members on this Forum with regular reports and updates on changes to legislation and its implications for the Council as well as co-ordinating the programme of Resource annual reports
- ◆ supporting the work of the Council through:-
 - ◆ the employee development process and training programmes including the vocational development programme
 - ◆ reviewing and designing a suite of equalities online courses
 - ◆ introducing a mandatory element to equalities training
 - ◆ partnership working with Trade Unions

8. Employment

8.1. Personnel Services: The Council depends on the competence and commitment of its employees to deliver its services and has always aimed to be an "employer of choice." This has been underpinned by the partnership working agreement with the trade unions and Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) members who make a valuable and important contribution to the corporate Equality and Diversity Working Group. The Council's employment strategies and approach to joint working are consistently recognised externally.

8.2. The Resource continues to work in the best interests of the Council and its employees to ensure that there is a fair and equitable pay structure and job evaluation scheme.

8.3. The Statutory Performance Indicators in relation to the percentage of women coming in the top 5% of salaries, women now make up 55.27% of South Lanarkshire Council employees in this range. The increase in these figures is due to the significant number of females who have received an increment or have been regraded and or promoted, thus increasing their earnings at the grades included in the top 5%. The Council pay gap has reduced, and this will continue to be monitored to identify any unfair, unjust, or unlawful practices that impact on pay, and take appropriate remedial action.

8.4. A particular focus of work is in relation to attracting and engaging people who identify their ethnic origin as BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (defined as all ethnic groups except White ethnic groups)). The Council started this process with a survey that has been issued to current employees, candidates who have been unsuccessful in securing a council job and organisations who support people who identify their ethnic background as BAME. Respondents have been invited to self-nominate to take part in online focus groups to further explore the issues. Response rates have been low; however, several people have volunteered to be part of a follow-up focus group.

Evaluation of the survey results is underway. Findings from the survey will be used to improve the recruitment process and will be reported to the appropriate committees.

- 8.5. In addition, South Lanarkshire Council is committed to providing support to members of the armed forces, veterans and their families which is set out in the Armed Forces Community Covenant. Veterans are guaranteed an interview where their previous employer was the armed forces and who meet the minimum requirements for the position.

9. Employee Development and Vocational Training Programmes

- 9.1. When recruiting for the Modern Apprenticeship programme, the Council includes positive about disability messages in all adverts, diverse images are used on marketing materials, and have increased use of social media to promote vacancies. Vacancies are shared with all South Lanarkshire Schools, including those with ASN bases, as well as across the Equality Forums and partner Resources. Any participants who fall into the looked after care leavers are tracked to ensure positive destinations following the programme. Identified care leavers are also guaranteed an interview. The Council continues to work in close partnership with colleagues in Education Resource to promote and support young people from a variety of school programmes and backgrounds and the Council continues to see good success with care leavers and Foundation Apprentices progressing to various options within the MA programme. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) continue to offer enhanced funding for care leavers and people with disabilities and/or health issues and/or learning disabilities.
- 9.2. The Vocational Development Team will also be looking at further on-line opportunities to promote the programmes with the use of case studies and good news stories as well as celebrate success and highlight what opportunities are available and when. The Council will be taking this forward over the next few months with SLC Media Team.
- 9.3. South Lanarkshire Council's Supported Employment Team delivers six employability /transitional programmes supporting young people with significant additional support needs and or communication disorders such as autism and or a learning disability. One programme works with young people in their transition from school to employment, education, or training with an aftercare support for 1 year to sustain these destinations. The other is a Social Inclusion Project, a gaming café in the evenings promoting communication to clients with autism. This is delivered on site at ARCH and online an overview of the project is shown below.
- 9.4. The Social Inclusion Project (SIP) is a specialist programme supporting autistic young people at risk of social isolation. The project offers a community experience where social skills can be practiced in an autism informed environment with peer mentors that help facilitate. The group has access to a private online server where they can explore shared interests, connect with others in the community, or engage in a capacity they are comfortable with. The group also have the opportunity to meet once per week on-site to take part in tabletop activities and mix with other autistic young people from the local community – on-site activities include:-
- ◆ popular tabletop games
 - ◆ wargaming
 - ◆ tabletop role playing games
 - ◆ interactive social games
 - ◆ mixing and chatting in a supported environment
 - ◆ access to a quiet room and enclosed outdoor garden area

SIP explores themes such as cooperation, turn taking, patience, resilience, specialist interests, socialising, and self-acceptance.

- 9.5. Post school the Council offers employability training and support in to paid employment through a one-year employer-led internship model at Hairmyres Hospital called DFN Project SEARCH with various partners – NHS Lanarkshire, New College Lanarkshire, and ISS Facilities Management. The team also delivers a one-year course run in partnership with New College Lanarkshire and ASC Clothing in Eurocentral, Pathways to Textile Care and Warehousing. This provides participants with the opportunity to gain experience, skills, and many qualifications with the aim of gaining paid employment. In addition, the team has collaborated with South Lanarkshire College to deliver a National 4 Supported Employment course, where a job coach and lecturer will support students gain employability skills and progress their learning into a real working environment.
- 9.6. Finally, The Council have a Scottish Government No One Left Behind funded programme. Young adults who are unemployed are set up online and attend class sessions to gain employability skills, while receiving training within a simulated environment with dedicated staff from the Supported Employment team. The development of each trainee will see them progress into a live work placement with a real employer. A training allowance is paid to the trainees and if progression is made to become an employee a wage subsidy is offered to employers for period of time, with end of goal of employees being kept on and sustaining their role.

10. Communication/Support

- 10.1. The Employee Network is an ongoing area of work whose aim is to raise awareness of the Council's equality commitment both internally to employees as well as to the community. Each of the four themes can be attended by any employee and the Network is there to not only provide support to individuals but also to influence the work of the Council, shaping policies and practice.
- 10.2. The Council is committed to promoting its values externally. This is shown through its continued support for a range of voluntary organisations such as Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group (LEMAG), projects such as Seniors Together and partnership working arrangements such as the BSL Steering group, the SeeHear Strategic Working Group, the Disability Partnership, and the South Lanarkshire Access Panel. The Council work with these organisations to raise public awareness of equality issues will continue and their support in developing equality outcomes now and in the future is key to the success the Council will have in improving the quality of life of everyone in South Lanarkshire.

11. Finance and Information Technology Services

- 11.1. IT provides a critical support function to all Resources of the Council as the single provider of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).
- 11.2. Finance Services conducted its annual budget consultation exercise to engage with a wide variety of community members and representative groups. This included the South Lanarkshire Youth Council, employee forums, Disability Partnership and Access Panel, as well as Seniors Together and the Citizens Panel. Attendance at the sessions show continued support for the approach and methods the Council is using to make savings as well as support for the Council's revised priorities.

12. BSL Activities

- 12.1. The BSL steering group continues to meet and work on the actions from the BSL Plan. The Council are continuing to work to include more BSL content on the Council's

website. This will help us meet our actions from the BSL plan and help to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty.

- 12.2. A series of BSL videos to supplement English videos demonstrating the use of assistive technology have been recorded in house and are now available on the Council's website.
- 12.3. The Council will be reviewing and revising the BSL Lanarkshire Plan later this year. This will be produced in partnership with the BSL Steering Group, North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire. A survey will be carried out to ask BSL users in our community what information they would specifically like to see included as BSL content.

13. Action Plan

- 13.1. During 2023 the Council will continue to develop its partnership working to ensure that good practice in equalities is shared and to ensure that the Council share a similar vision in relation to the Equality Act and the Scottish specific duties.
- 13.2. In terms of the British Sign Language (BSL) Plan, work towards achieving the actions contained in the action plan will continue to be co-ordinated with North Lanarkshire Council and NHS Lanarkshire and will include input from the D/deaf and Deaf/blind community of Lanarkshire. Links will also be made to the SeeHear Strategy Action Plan. The BSL Lanarkshire Plan will be reviewed and revised following the publication of the Scottish Government Plan that is due for publication in October 2023.
- 13.3. Work is ongoing to progress the actions of the second Gaelic Language Plan approved by Bòrd na Gàidhlig on 21 April 2020 published on the Council's website in English and Gaelic.

14. Employee Implications

- 14.1. As outlined in the report, the Equal Opportunities Policy and accompanying legislation has implications for the Council as an employer and work here is reflected in the Council's employment and training strategies as described above.

15. Financial Implications

- 15.1. As equalities considerations are being "mainstreamed," they will be contained within existing resources. This position will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as the Resource Action Plan is developed.

16. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 16.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability, or the environment in terms of the information contained in this report.

17. Other Implications

- 17.1. The risk to the Council is that, if the Resource does not have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, it may lead to non-compliance with equalities legislation. The consequence of this could be an unlimited financial penalty.

18. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 18.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy and, therefore, there is no requirement for an impact assessment to be carried out.
- 18.2. There was no requirement to undertake consultation in terms of the content of this report.

Paul Manning
Executive Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)

1 August 2023

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

Values

- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Working with and respecting others
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient, and transparent
- ◆ Ambitious, self-aware, and improving
- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable
- ◆ Excellent employer

Previous References

- ◆ Equal Opportunities Forum – 23 February 2022

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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