



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

CABINET

30 October 2023

7.00 pm

**Rooms 201/202, Annexe, Town Hall,
Watford**

Contact

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Cabinet Membership

Mayor	P Taylor	(Chair)
Councillor	A Dychton	(Deputy Mayor)
Councillors	J Pattinson, K Rodrigues, G Saffery, I Stotesbury, M Watkin and T Williams	

Agenda

Part A – Open to the Public

1. Apologies for absence

2. Disclosure of interests (if any)

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The [minutes](#) of the meeting held on 2 October 2023 to be submitted and signed.

4. Conduct of meeting

Cabinet may wish to consider whether there are any items on which there is general agreement which could be considered now, to enable discussion to focus on those items where the Cabinet sees a need for further debate.

5. Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Pages 4 - 48)

Report of the Community Commissioning Lead

6. Community Engagement and Participation Strategy (Pages 49 - 91)

Report of the Strategic Initiatives Officer

7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (Pages 92 - 141)

Report of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead

8. Continuous Improvement Framework (Pages 142 - 150)

Report of the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead

Part A

Report to:	<i>Cabinet</i>
Report author:	<i>Community Commissioning Lead</i>
Report sponsor:	<i>Associate Director of Environment</i>
Portfolio holder:	<i>Councillor Aga Dychton</i>
Report title:	<i>Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024 - 2028)</i>

1.0 Executive Summary

The key focus of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSCF) 2024-2028 is on achieving positive outcomes for the residents of Watford and supporting the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to provide services that are fully responsive to local needs going forward.

- 1.1 The council recognises and values the range of skills and experience offered by the town's VCS organisations. The VCS is often best placed to deliver vital support and activities for local people. The VSCF sets out our approach and key principles to commissioning services from the VCS, which respond to our community's needs and deliver a range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits.
- 1.2 The last iteration of the VSCF was approved by Cabinet in January 2019 and was intended to be implemented over a four year cycle., However, due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, where some services were partly suspended or closed, a further one year extension was approved on the 13 June 2022 to enable the council time to review and evaluate the impact of the current framework and reassess future priorities.
- 1.3 The council has long standing and positive relationships with VCS organisations and it allocates a considerable proportion of its budget to support a number of groups and organisations operating in Watford in a variety of ways. However, like councils across the country, Watford is facing significant budget pressures and this, combined with public sector funding cuts, means future funding to the voluntary sector needs to be considered in the context of an overall reduction in the council's budget.
- 1.4 The need to review the grant funding the council has available for commissioning services through the VCS, brings an even greater focus for efficiency, value for money, clear and measurable outcomes and an increase in partnership working and co-production.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028 priorities and principles identified in section 5.13 and 5.15 and Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2 To approve the budget profile 2024-2026 as set out in section 5.28 of this report.
- 2.3 To delegate the responsibility to the Community Commissioning Lead in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community to implement the next steps, key milestones and actions identified in sections 5.11 and 7.0 are in place from the 1 April 2024.

3.0 Report pathway

- 3.1 Review body: *Not applicable:*
- 3.1.1 Indicative date: Not applicable
- 3.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*
- 3.2.1 Indicative date: 30 October 2023

3.2.2 Contact Officer:

For further info contact: Community Commissioning Lead
Email: Semeta.bloomfield@watford.gov.uk
Reviewed and signed off by: Paul Stacey Associate Director of Environment

4.0 Detailed proposal

Why we need a Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework

- 4.1 The council has a positive and productive partnership with Watford's VCS. The council recognises the unique position and role of the sector and the critical role it plays in supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.
- 4.2 Our longstanding commitment to a Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VCSF) recognises the contribution that VCS groups, organisations and networks make to Watford. The sector plays a vital role in maintaining and empowering strong local communities, reaching residents that some statutory services may struggle to reach.
- 4.3 The commitment is reflected in the fact that we have continued to invest in this sector, through grants, commissioning and subsidies that include reduced rents for council owned buildings and discretionary rate relief.

Despite significant challenges to our budget in recent years, we have managed to protect the grants programme budget,

- 4.4 The current VSCF (2019-2023) sets out the council's strategic approach and priorities that support a broad range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits delivered by VCS organisations on behalf of the council.
- 4.5 Three iterations of the VSCF (2013, 2016 and 2019) have been in place since 2012. In 2012 the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2013-2016 was approved by Cabinet, which saw the council change from an open grant application process to a commissioning approach, which has informed subsequent versions of the VSCF.
- 4.6 The partnership between the council and the voluntary and community sector has been positive and productive for many years. The council acknowledges within this, the VCS has a unique place in helping some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. However, we also need to find new ways of preventing people from needing to rely on public services over the long term. The council seeks to understand some of the underlying issues driving demand and pressures on services such as mental and emotional ill health, poverty and debt, housing and inequalities. We also need to identify ways of promoting self-help and early intervention, preventing the reliance on these support services over the long term.

The proposed VSCF 2024-2028 sets out how the council will target its limited resources to best address these issues.

How we developed this framework through research and consultation

- 5.0 In June 2022, Cabinet agreed a one-year extension to the current, 2019-2023 framework in order "to allow the council time to conduct a review of the framework going forward to meet the Council Plan priorities and actions". This was in recognition of the impact and pressures Covid-19 had on the VCS and that an additional year would allow for a period of stabilisation and renewal after a very difficult period.
- 5.1 To guarantee our commissioning model and priorities are fit for purpose and responsive to future need, the council and its partners explored a wealth of rich insights into our community and services, linking to the Council Plan aspirations. Continually building on this knowledge is crucial to effective commissioning and a key part of the "community needs analysis" stage of the commissioning cycle. This framework has been informed by

evidence-based research and engagement including but not limited to the following:

- **Local needs-** based on demographic and socioeconomic and qualitative insights about our communities.
- **Local priorities-** based on the political direction set out by our Elected Mayor, and in line with feedback from our residents and partners.
- **Existing provision-** review of the existing service level agreements and key performance indicators of the commissioned organisations over the previous four years.
- **Opportunities for development-** based on national and emerging trends, best practice inside and outside of the council and current service delivery and offers.

- 5.2 The research and engagement undertaken found that, during the current climate of change and uncertainty, our communities have an increased dependency on a number of the services we commission. Local intelligence and the monitoring of key performance indicators shows that all currently commissioned VCS organisations have not only experienced an increase in demand since 2019, but the impact of the cost of living crisis has led to more complex interconnected problems, with the marginalised most effected. The 2021 Census data revealed that almost half of the residents of Watford fall into at least one of the four dimensions of deprivation, education, employment, health and housing.
- 5.3 A recent survey by Watford’s Citizens Advice showed one in four local residents are accessing foodbanks, over half are struggling with debt and nearly 70% are reporting detrimental effects on their mental health.
- 5.4 Further inquiry of our existing local priorities mapped against the 2021 Census data found that the priorities identified in the previous framework, 2019-2023, continue to align with the current and future needs of the community and our Council Plan commitments.
- 5.5 In April 2023, a Members Steering Group was established to review the current VSCF and make recommendations to Cabinet for its next iteration. The group held a series of meetings between May and September 2023 with structured discussions to understand the current output, demands, needs, opportunities and risks from the current providers, reflect on their delivery and performance, and agree the approach to discussion, review and negotiation to co design future delivery and evaluate how the council and VSCF providers could achieve the financial targets.

- 5.6 Information relating to the work of the group is referenced in the background papers to this report.
- 5.7 To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the organisations currently commissioned within the current framework, officers led a series of structured meetings held between July and September 2023 in order to build a profile of the following:
- How the organisations have sought to innovate / add value during the period of the Framework to the benefit of the Watford community.
 - Where the council's funding sits within the organisations overall funding, what other funding the organisations are receiving and if they are maximising income raising opportunities.
 - What processes and changes organisations have been implemented in order to become more sustainable and less reliant on the funding
 - The funded organisation's vision, objectives and future priorities
 - Understanding of how commissioned organisations can support the wider local voluntary sector, as enablers for further services
 - To seek their feedback on the current VSCF and how it has supported their service delivery
 - Review of the proposed framework and alignment with the business plans
 - Understand their risk and issues to service delivery
- 5.8 In June 2023 the council hosted an open invite Community Network event, offering the local voluntary and community organisations the opportunity to network, contribute to the development of various key initiatives and strategies relevant to the VCS and discuss any key challenges they were experiencing.
- 5.9 The event was attended by over 40 small, medium and large organisations. A number of key themes that emerged from the engagement have helped to provide a shared direction of travel and define the principles included within new iteration of the framework and informed a number of emerging strategies.

Key themes delivered by council officers at the event included:

- Access to grants and funding
- Access to community space

- Access to corporate businesses
- Celebrating achievements and promotion of impact
- Supporting collaboration and sharing best practice

5.10 A post event survey revealed that organisations found it difficult to know what support was available and how to access it at the right time. Smaller groups in particular were looking for more 1:1 advice and help with filling in fundraising applications, and more opportunities to network and share information with each other. There was a common desire to find more affordable spaces for groups to share – desk space with meeting space and event space – close to where their communities are based. There was also a strong desire to collaborate and for the council to play a key role in enabling this across the VCS.

5.11 Following the event and the feedback from the survey, the council is taking forward the following actions:

Table 1 actions

A council led stronger VCS digital presence in the borough, with introduction of more interactive web material and VCS case studies
An enhanced community web page on WBC website to publicise information about available buildings, including their location and how they can be accessed by VCS organisations
Increasing the VCS’ role in consultation and engagement in order to amplify residents’ voices, by making use of its strong roots with local communities to ensure the community intelligence that they have is at the heart of consultation and engagement in the borough to support the development of new local policies and strategies.
Improving data sharing across the borough. Maintaining a live community needs document/map that can assist VCS organisations with prioritising service requirements and funding application.

5.12 Engagement with the VCS has enabled the council to develop a better understanding of the sector’s resilience and their views on intervention and strategic support needed. The council has also considered its own strategic objectives and the future direction of its support and investment, driven by wider corporate and community priorities, including the need to find further savings.

Priorities and principles of the framework

- 5.13 The research and engagement undertaken found the existing priorities and commissioned organisations identified in the previous framework, 2019-2023, remain aligned with the current and future needs of the community and our Council Plan 2022-26 commitments. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and as the cost of living crisis deepens, there is a need for the council to continue working closely with the VCS to protect our residents from the impact of the pressures they are facing. Any major changes to the current commissioned providers could destabilise the effective delivery of targeted and effective crisis support and put many households at greater risk of both immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing. Therefore, at this time we will not be entering into a new commissioning exercise for the VCSF.

The commissioning priorities and organisations for this framework will remain as:

- **Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector**

We will continue to support and strengthen the VCS in Watford, developing and supporting the local voluntary sector infrastructure. This service will continue to be delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who have extensive networks across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors within the town and beyond.

- **Advice and support services**

We will continue to support a universal advice service, which can provide detailed and expert advice and support for Watford's diverse community and, particularly, our vulnerable residents. This service will continue to be delivered by Watford Citizens Advice, who have a proven track record in the advice and support sector and who we will work closely with to address and respond to any emerging national issues, legislative or policy changes that may impact local people.

- **Support services for families**

We will continue to provide targeted support for families, to help parents cope with the many difficulties life can bring ensuring that they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their young children. This service will continue to be commissioned by Home Start Watford and Three Rivers, whose trained volunteers will continue to provide early intervention by supporting families in a variety of emotional and practical ways.

- **Mobility services**

We will continue to support services that allow independence and enhanced living for anyone with limited mobility, whether it be temporary or permanent. This service will continue to be commissioned to Shopmobility

Watford who have the experience and infrastructure to deliver a range of mobility services to ensure that our town centre and all its associated services, and retail outlets remain accessible to people with limited mobility.

- **Arts and culture**

We will continue to support access to arts and culture ensuring that is accessible for all of its residents. Watford Palace Theatre and the Pump House Theatres will continue to be commissioned to deliver arts and culture services through a range of theatre productions and performances, projects and outreach programmes that bring people together and support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Community centre provision**

We will continue to support the management of four council owned community centres across the town to provide a programme of activities designed to meet the needs of the community they serve. The following centres will continue to be commissioned by:

- Holywell Community Centre- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Orbital Community Centre- One YMCA
- Meriden Community Centre - Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust
- West Watford Community Centre- West Watford Community Association

5.14 This approach will allow the council and the commissioned organisations to build on the lessons learnt during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the cost of living crisis.

5.15 To ensure that the framework fully meets our ambitions we have developed four key principles to support collaborative commissioning and improvements in outcomes for the providers and our residents. The principles have been informed by reviewing the existing framework, analysing the current and future needs of the community and the findings from our engagement with the VCS. The defined deliverables demonstrate the expected outcomes for funding and offer a structure for measuring impact alongside bespoke Service Level Agreements and Key Performance Indicators:

Principle 1: Community Cohesion

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide our residents with accessible advice and support services, training and education, art, culture, leisure and wellbeing opportunities to build healthier, more resilient and connected communities.
- ✓ Provide spaces and programmes that promote neighbourliness and activities for all ages and interests.

- ✓ Seek opportunities to work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations to harness corporate social responsibility.

Principle 2: Enable opportunities

Deliverables

- ✓ Address inequalities, focusing on those in greatest need
- ✓ Support community-based models of prevention, self-help and early intervention activities which help build resilience, improve quality of life by reducing the negative impacts of poverty, disability and ill-health.
- ✓ Support strategic partners to identify and connect with groups within our community who are not yet known to us.
- ✓ Value the work of grassroots organisations, recognising and enabling their contribution to our shared outcomes
- ✓ Make best use of technology to deliver more effective and efficient solutions

Principle 3: Community capacity and Impact

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide access to information, advice and tools to build capacity, where volunteering is promoted and developed, and communities are supported and empowered to find their own solutions.
- ✓ Support greater partnership working and co-production, working collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector to address long term challenges.
- ✓ Encourage our commissioned organisations to support each other, promoting best practice, sharing of skills and a space for strategic conversations
- ✓ Commission projects via existing funding streams that seek to broaden engagement and improve participation from hard-to-reach groups
- ✓ Diversify income sources to best meet community need
- ✓ Assess delivery and outcomes in terms of social value and the most efficient use of public money

Principle 4: Environmental Sustainability

Deliverables

- ✓ Make sure commissioned organisations contribute to the council's Environmental Strategy, working to targets and deliverables outlined in the people power theme, and our overarching borough targets.

- ✓ Use voice and influence to provide community leadership on sustainability initiatives and addressing our borough wide targets.
- ✓ Influence meaningful change on addressing our key sustainability targets.
- ✓ Support disadvantaged people / communities to benefit from sustainability initiatives. Provide advice, information and signposting, where appropriate, on addressing the climate change and ecological emergency issues and impacts; including reduction, mitigation and adaptation.

5.16 The framework does not sit in isolation and should be read and enacted in conjunction with council's wider strategies, including but not exclusively:

- The Council Plan 2022-2026
- The Community Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023-2027
- Environmental Strategy 2023-2030
- Economic Growth Strategy 2021-2025
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-2027
- Community Asset Strategy (in development)

5.17 These strategies and frameworks provide a toolkit for change that will support the delivery of projects and aspirations through shared vision and goals.

Revised Governance

5.18 Recognising and monitoring the contributions and quality of services commissioned by the council is an essential part of the framework. In order to provide a clearer account of the impact of the commissioned organisations, we will review and refresh how we gather data, create more transparency within the governance arrangements by making changes to the process for collecting, analysing and presenting performance data. We have identified the need to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data and insights into the monitoring, and we will also continue to capture the social value.

The data will form part of the council's quarterly performance report

Proposed pathway for data returns



Future funding

- 5.19 The current Medium Term Financial Strategy sets savings targets of £50,000 in 2024/25 rising to £100,000 in 2025/26 for the council's community commissioning budget, to be achieved by working with the voluntary sector to identify alternative sources of finance, which will provide improved finance resilience and organisational sustainability .
- 5.20 Having assessed the impact of community need going forward it is clear that some services will need to take a higher overall reduction of funding than others. We understand the value of Arts and Culture within the town and economic and quality of life benefits the sector delivers. However, in the context of the cost of living crisis faced by our communities, we must prioritise the advice and support services to ensure that the most vulnerable can be helped.
- 5.21 Despite the savings targets, this iteration of the VCSF must respond to the current climate and anticipate the future needs of a community in crisis. It must ensure that all our residents have access to multiple points of intervention by providing a wide range of support groups, detailed expert advice and deliver a range of community socioeconomic and cultural benefits to all residents whilst protecting the most vulnerable from the worst effects of deprivation.
- 5.22 Nationally the number of people whose monthly income isn't enough to pay for their essentials has more than doubled in the last two years, from 1 in 20 to 1 in 10 UK households. Locally we are seeing a spiralling number of people struggling with negative budgets. The socioeconomic profile of those struggling has changed, its people in full-time work, people with a steady normal income who just can't make ends meet.

- 5.23 The results of a survey launched by Citizens Advice Watford, in December 2022, made clear the devastating impact that rising prices is having on the financial security of the residents of Watford. The survey and subsequent reports have highlighted the increased demand that the Citizens Advice Watford is experiencing.
- 5.24 The VSCF budget profile 2024-2026 demonstrates our commitment to address inequalities and respond to the needs of our residents, based on the evidence presented during the structured discussions with the members steering group, a recommendation was made that the Citizens Advice funding should be protected.
- 5.25 A consistent and fair approach was taken in assessing the future funding for the commissioned organisations. A funding matrix was used during the assessment process, officers applied set scoring criteria, which included a number of weighted questions that ensured a transparent, unbiased formula to rank how any funding reductions would impact the organisations ability to support the delivery of the framework.
- 5.26 The level of funding reductions, was considered on a case by case basis using evidence and information, provided by the organisations during the consultation process.
- 5.27 Consideration was also given to organisations that will continue to receive discounts from full market rent through the lease agreements that are in place.
- 5.28 See the table below for the budget profile 2024-2026. Due to the financial uncertainty we face, we are unable to forecast or provide any certainty for these or future funding arrangements.

	2023/24 Management grant	Accommodation grant	% Reduction year 1 from 23.24 grant	Year 1 Management grant	Cash reduction	% Reduction year 2 from 24.25 grant	Year 2 Management fee	Cash reduction	Overall reduction over 2 years	% total reduction in funding from 23.24 grant
Watford Palace Theatre	£231,957	Lease at peppercorn rent	9.00%	£211,081	£20,876	9.50%	£191,028	£20,053	£40,929	17.6%
W3RT - Holywell Community Centre	£76,680	£21,000	8.25%	£70,354	£6,326	8.25%	£64,550	£5,804	£12,130	15.8%
One YMCA -Orbital Community Centre	£72,965	£25,000	8.25%	£66,945	£6,020	8.25%	£61,422	£5,523	£11,543	15.8%
WFC Community Trust - Meriden Community Centre	£72,159	£19,750	8.25%	£66,206	£5,953	8.25%	£60,744	£5,462	£11,415	15.8%
Homestart	£30,000	£0	8.0%	£27,600	£2,400	8.0%	£25,392	£2,208	£4,608	15.4%
Pumphouse	£25,773	£0	7.0%	£23,969	£1,804	7.50%	£22,171	£1,798	£3,602	14.0%
Citizens Advice	£204,190	£39,500	0.0%	£204,190	£0	0.0%	£204,190	£0	£0	0.0%
W3RT	£79,173	£0	6.0%	£74,423	£4,750	7.75%	£68,655	£5,768	£10,518	13.3%
West Watford Community Centre	£23,415	£4,300	4.0%	£22,478	£937	5.0%	£21,354	£1,124	£2,061	8.8%
Shopmobility	£36,459	£0	4.0%	£35,001	£1,458	5.0%	£33,251	£1,750	£3,208	8.8%
Total	£852,771	£109,550		£802,247	£50,524		£752,757	£49,489	£100,014	
Savings				£50,524			£100,014			
Existing Budget		£962,321								
Accommodation grant				£109,550			£109,550			
New VSCF Budget				£911,797			£862,307			
Total funding to VSCF		£1,071,871		£1,021,347			£971,857			

- 5.29 The review highlighted funding as a key concern of Watford’s voluntary and community sector. In response whilst we will continue to operate a four-year commissioning framework as highlighted in 5.28 above, funding is only proposed at the level set out in the table above until 2026 but subject to an annual review. Our budgets will continue to be reviewed and, as with the previous frameworks, the council is not able to guarantee the level of funding across the framework term. Organisations directly affected by any changes will be given sufficient notice in order to manage their budgets.
- 5.30 As funding is reduced across the VSCF, if providers need additional help our Economic Development team will work with them to connect them with relevant business support services which could help them evolve their operating models.
- 5.31 Outside of the commissioning framework we will continue to support all voluntary sector organisations via a broad range of council led funding streams available annually as set out in the table below.

Funding opportunity	Timeframe
The Mayor’s Small Grants Fund	Annual
Neighbourhood Grant	Annual
Watford Community Lottery	Annual
The Community Fund	Annual

6.0 Implications

6.1 Financial

- 6.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is an existing cash-limited budget for the Framework but that the current Medium Term Financial Strategy sets savings targets of £50,000 in 2024/25 rising to £100,000 in 2025/26, to be achieved by reducing dependency on council funding and working with the voluntary sector to identify alternative sources of finance.

6.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

6.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the council has a number of legal powers that enable it to provide financial and physical support to the community and voluntary sector, in addition to its general power of competence. It needs to have regard to its equality duty in developing the framework and an EIA has been prepared and will continue to be updated.

6.3 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate , transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Impact to the voluntary sector and residents as a result of decisions made	Groups/organisations unable to deliver their services	An EIA is to be carried out	Treat	6
Impact to the voluntary sector and residents as a result of decisions made	Residents current priorities and needs not supported by the VSCF	Close alignment with the council plan and key areas of service delivery	Treat	6
Commissioned organisations do not deliver services outlined in the SLA	The facility or services is not available for residents and customers to use	Regular contract monitoring by the council to review the contract and KPI'S requirement are being met by the commissioned organisation	Treat	6

6.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

6.4.1 An EqIA has been undertaken as part of this exercise and will be continually updated. Officers note the key risk that organisations require adequate time to carry out their financial planning, in the event of any changes to their funding arrangements.

6.4.2 Sustainability

6.4.2.1 The new VCSF principles demonstrate a number of clear outcomes and deliverables that are linked to the council's Environmental Strategy.

6.4.3 Data Protection Impact Assessment

6.4.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

6.5 People Implications

6.5.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

6.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

6.6.1 The positive activities resulting from the services provided by many of the commissioned services particularly in relation to older adults and youth activities will contribute to a safer environment.

6.7 Property

6.7.1 Council owned community centres are currently in the scope of the commissioning framework and several commissioned organisations are currently tenants in council assets. There are, therefore, implications for Property and close alignment with the CFRB have been conducted.

7.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

7.1 If Cabinet adopts this refreshed iteration of the fourth Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework the following tasks will need to be completed prior to implementation on the 1 April 2024 with each organisation.

- Negotiate and enter into individual service levels agreements, service specifications and key performance indicators for each provider.

8.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028

Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment

9.0 Background papers

- *Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework: 2019 – 2023*
- *Extension of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSCF) for 1 Year: 1 April 2023- 31 March 2024*

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

Watford Borough Council

Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024 - 2028)

DRAFT

Introduction

Watford Borough Council (WBC) recognises the range of skills and experience offered by the town's voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. This means they are often best placed to deliver vital support and activities for local people. Our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework sets out our approach and key principles to commissioning services from the VCS which respond to our community's needs and deliver a range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits.

The term Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) applies to organisations that are not-for-profit, social value driven and that reinvest their financial profits into social, environmental or cultural objectives. The groups that make up this sector are as varied as the services and activities they offer. They can range from small, volunteer driven organisations to large organisations, with links to national agencies.

Watford has a rich history of widespread community activity that adds value to the quality of lives of our residents and their neighbourhoods. Supporting this activity is a vibrant and engaged VCS, delivering high quality and value for money services that benefit those who live, work and visit Watford.

Watford's diverse and vibrant VCS played an integral role in supporting the borough's response to, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic brought forward a new cohort of voluntary and community groups that demonstrated a shared commitment to delivering positive outcomes, particularly to vulnerable people in the town. It also highlighted the opportunities of new ways of delivering services and the different approaches taken by all partners who increased or changed their service offering during the Covid-19 response.

It is recognised that many VCS organisations do not receive funding directly from this framework but collaborate closely with the organisations commissioned within and with the Council. The priorities set out in this framework take this into consideration, seeking to deliver benefits not just to service users of the commissioned organisations but more broadly to deliver support, improve collaboration and to foster inclusive working across the VCS.

To ensure the commissioning model and priorities are fit for purpose and responsive to future need, we have reviewed and refreshed our Commissioning Framework 2019-2023. This iteration of the framework, therefore, is an extension of the fourth commissioning framework approved by WBC. Informed by comprehensive research and engagement and aligned to the aims of our Council Plan 2022-26 and Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26, it sets out a shared set of priorities, principles, responsibilities and expectations for all stakeholders.

What is commissioning?

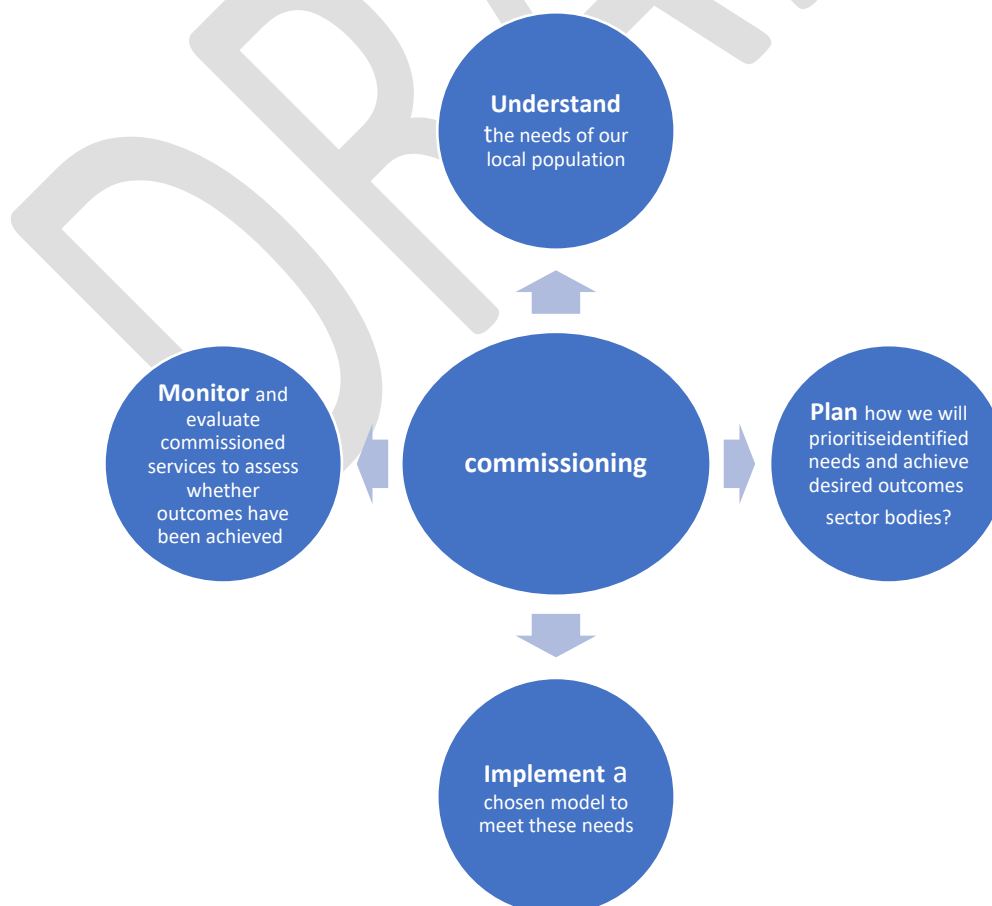
There are many definitions of commissioning, but, for the purpose of this framework, we are using:

Commissioning is the process for ensuring that quality services meeting the identified priority needs of the community are provided by the best placed organisation to do so at an affordable cost to the council

The VCS is a key partner in transforming local services and forging new relationships between the council and local residents. Voluntary organisations are well positioned to respond to the challenges ahead – notably to develop services for prevention and early intervention and to build capacity within local communities to promote resilience and make improved outcomes sustainable.

When we commission the sector to deliver services on behalf of the council, the following four point commissioning framework will be applied:

1. **Understand** the needs of our local population
2. **Plan** how we will prioritise identified needs and achieve desired outcomes
3. **Implement** a chosen model to meet these needs
4. **Monitor** and evaluate commissioned services to assess whether outcomes have been achieved



Priorities and evidence of community need

To guarantee our commissioning model and priorities are fit for purpose and responsive to future need, the council and its partners explored a wealth of rich insights into our community, services and the aspirations of our Elected Mayor. Continually building on this knowledge is crucial to effective commissioning and a key part of the “community needs analysis” stage of the commission cycle.

This framework has been informed by evidence-based research and engagement including but not limited to the following:

- **Local needs**- based on demographic and socioeconomic and qualitative insights about our communities.
- **Local priorities**- based on the political direction set out by our Elected Mayor, and in line with feedback from our residents and partners.
- **Existing provision**- review of the existing service level agreements and key performance indicators of the commissioned organisations over the previous four years.
- **Opportunities for development**- based on national and emerging trends, best practice inside and outside of the council and current service delivery and offers.

The research and engagement undertaken has found that the existing priorities and commissioned organisations identified in the previous framework, 2019-2023, continue to align with the current and future needs of the community and our Council Plan commitments.

The commissioning priorities and organisations for this framework will remain as:

- **Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector**

We will continue to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in Watford, developing and supporting the local voluntary sector infrastructure. This service will be delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who have extensive networks across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors within the town and beyond.

- **Advice and support services**

We will continue to support a universal advice service, which can provide detailed and expert advice and support for Watford’s diverse community and, particularly, our vulnerable residents. This service will be delivered by Watford Citizens Advice, who have a proven track record in the advice and support sector and who we will work closely with to address and respond to any emerging national issues, legislative or policy changes that may impact local people.

- **Support services for families**

We will continue to provide targeted support for families, to help parents cope with the many difficulties life can bring ensuring that they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their young children. This service will be commissioned by Home Start Watford and Three Rivers, whose trained volunteers will continue to provide early intervention by supporting families in a variety of emotional and practical ways.

- **Mobility services**

We will continue to support services that allow independence and enhanced living for anyone with limited mobility, whether it be temporary or permanent. This service will continue to be commissioned to Shopmobility Watford who have the experience and infrastructure to deliver a range of mobility services to ensure that our town centre and all its associated services, and retail outlets remain accessible to people with limited mobility.

- **Arts and culture**

We will continue to support access to arts and culture ensuring that is accessible for all of its residents. Watford Palace Theatre and the Pump House Theatres will be commissioned to deliver arts and culture services through a range of theatre productions and performances, projects and outreach programmes that bring people together and support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Community centre provision**

We will continue to support the management of four council owned community centres across the town to provide a programme of activities designed to meet the needs of the community they serve. The following centres will continue to be commissioned by:

- Holywell Community Centre- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Orbital Community Centre- One YMCA
- Meriden Community Centre - Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust
- West Watford Community Centre- West Watford Community Association

Principles and expected outcomes

Directly commissioned providers will work to the following set of principles, which align with the themes and commitments identified in the Council Plan 2022-26.



The principles, have been informed by reviewing the existing framework and analysing the current and future needs of the community, to guarantee the activities and services provided reflect the needs of our residents, as identified in our commissioning model.

The council will work with directly commissioned providers to ensure the outcomes they deliver meet these principles.

The defined deliverables demonstrate the expected outcomes for funding and offer a structure for measuring impact alongside bespoke Service Level agreements and Key Performance Indicators:

Principle 1: Community Cohesion

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide our residents with accessible advice and support services, training and education, art, culture, leisure and wellbeing opportunities to build healthier, more resilient and connected communities.
- ✓ Provide spaces and programmes that promote neighbourliness and activities for all ages and interests.
- ✓ Seek opportunities to work in partnership with community and voluntary organisations to harness corporate social responsibility.

Principle 2: Enable opportunities

Deliverables

- ✓ Address inequalities, focusing on those in greatest need
- ✓ Support community-based models of prevention, self-help and early intervention activities which help build resilience, improve quality of life by reducing the negative impacts of poverty, disability and ill-health.
- ✓ Support strategic partners to identify and connect with groups within our community who are not yet known to us.
- ✓ Value the work of grassroots organisations, recognising and enabling their contribution to our shared outcomes
- ✓ Make best use of technology to deliver more effective and efficient solutions

Principle 3: Community capacity and Impact

Deliverables

- ✓ Provide access to information, advice and tools to build capacity, where volunteering is promoted and developed, and communities are supported and empowered to find their own solutions.
- ✓ Support greater partnership working and co-production, working collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector to address long term challenges.
- ✓ Encourage our commissioned organisations to support each other, promoting best practice, sharing of skills and a space for strategic conversations
- ✓ Commission projects via existing funding streams that seek to broaden engagement and improve participation from hard-to-reach groups
- ✓ Diversify income sources to best meet community need
- ✓ Assess delivery and outcomes in terms of social value and the most efficient use of public money

Principle 4: Environmental Sustainability

Deliverables

- ✓ Make sure commissioned organisations contribute to the council's Environmental Strategy, working to targets and deliverables outlined in the people power theme, and our overarching borough targets.
- ✓ Use voice and influence to provide community leadership on sustainability initiatives and addressing our borough wide targets.
- ✓ Influence meaningful change on addressing our key sustainability targets.
- ✓ Support disadvantaged people / communities to benefit from sustainability initiatives. Provide advice, information and signposting, where appropriate, on addressing the climate change and ecological emergency issues and impacts; including reduction, mitigation and adaptation.

Related strategies

The framework does not sit in isolation and should be read and enacted in conjunction with Council's wider strategies, including but not exclusively

- The Council Plan 2022-2026
- The Community Participation and Engagement Strategy 2023-2026
- Environmental Strategy 2023-2030
- Economic Growth Strategy 2021-2025
- Community Asset Strategy (in development)

These strategies and frameworks provide a toolkit for change that will shape Watford in the years ahead and support the delivery of projects and aspirations through shared visions and goals.

Wider opportunities

Watford is fortunate to have over 500 voluntary community sector organisations. We recognise all of the town's VCS organisations share our commitment to delivering positive outcomes to vulnerable people and making Watford a vibrant place to live and work.

It is recognised that many VCS organisations do not receive funding directly from this framework however, the Council does support the VCS in a variety of ways, including the Council's volunteering scheme which permits all employees 15 paid hours during any 12

month period to volunteer and support the VCS by “giving something back” to the community.

The council will continue to encourage and nurture voluntary activities by commissioning the CVS under this framework, delivering wider funding streams, sharing resources and skills, supporting with funding applications and signposting, rental of council assets, and building partnerships.

Table 1 below sets out a broad range of council led funding available to all voluntary sector organisations annually.

Table 1

Funding opportunity	Timeframe
The Mayor’s Small Grants Fund	Annual
Neighbourhood Grant	Annual
Watford Community Lottery	Annual
The Community Fund	Annual

Future funding of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework

The principles within the framework require our commissioned organisations to review the way they currently provide and deliver services. During the lifetime of the framework they will need to identify innovative changes, focusing on efficiency, value for money, clear and measurable outcomes and a commitment to collaborative and partnership working, which will help secure the long term sustainability of services and activities that are important to local people and support a welcoming and thriving community.

In view of the scale of the financial challenges and budget pressures future funding to the voluntary sector will be kept under review.



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework
Lead officer	Semeta Bloomfield
Person completing the EIA	Semeta Bloomfield
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 1.0 18 October 2023

1. Background

Watford Borough Council is committed to supporting a vibrant, flourishing and engaged voluntary sector which can collaborate in order to deliver sustainable, high quality and value for money services that benefit those who live, work in and visit Watford. Through its Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSF) the council sets out its strategic approach and priorities for commissioned organisations delivering services on behalf of the council. The framework currently in place ran from 2019-2023, and was extended for an additional year to end in March 2024 to account for the impacts and uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A review of the 2019-2023 Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework was undertaken in order to identify the approach and outcomes required from the next iteration of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028).

The outcomes of the review identified:

1. The services to be commissioned
2. The expected deliverables and governance required in order to measure them
3. The budget available and options for its allocation
4. The approach to engagement with the voluntary sector and with the wider community impacted by the framework.

This Equality Impact Analysis considers the potential impacts, both positive and negative, of the refreshed iteration of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework 2024-2028.

The framework has been informed by evidence-based research on local needs, based on demographic and socioeconomic and qualitative insights about our communities, engagement with the commissioned organisations and the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS), the identification of local priorities in line with the the Council Plan 2022-26 and a review of the performance of the commissioned organisations over the previous four years.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028) on the people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010.

These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief

7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership.

3. Engagement and consultation

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the organisations commissioned within the current framework and their service users, officers led a series of structured meetings between July and September 2023, to seek their feedback on the current VSCF, understand what processes and changes organisations have implemented in order to become more sustainable and less reliant on the funding, review the proposed framework and consider any initial concerns from organisations regarding the impact of the proposed changes on their service users.

As this EIA considers the impact of the proposed reduction of funding to organisations commissioned by the framework, all organisations were asked to provide evidence of the impact of a 5%, 10% and 15% reduction to their annual funding and the effect on its service users.

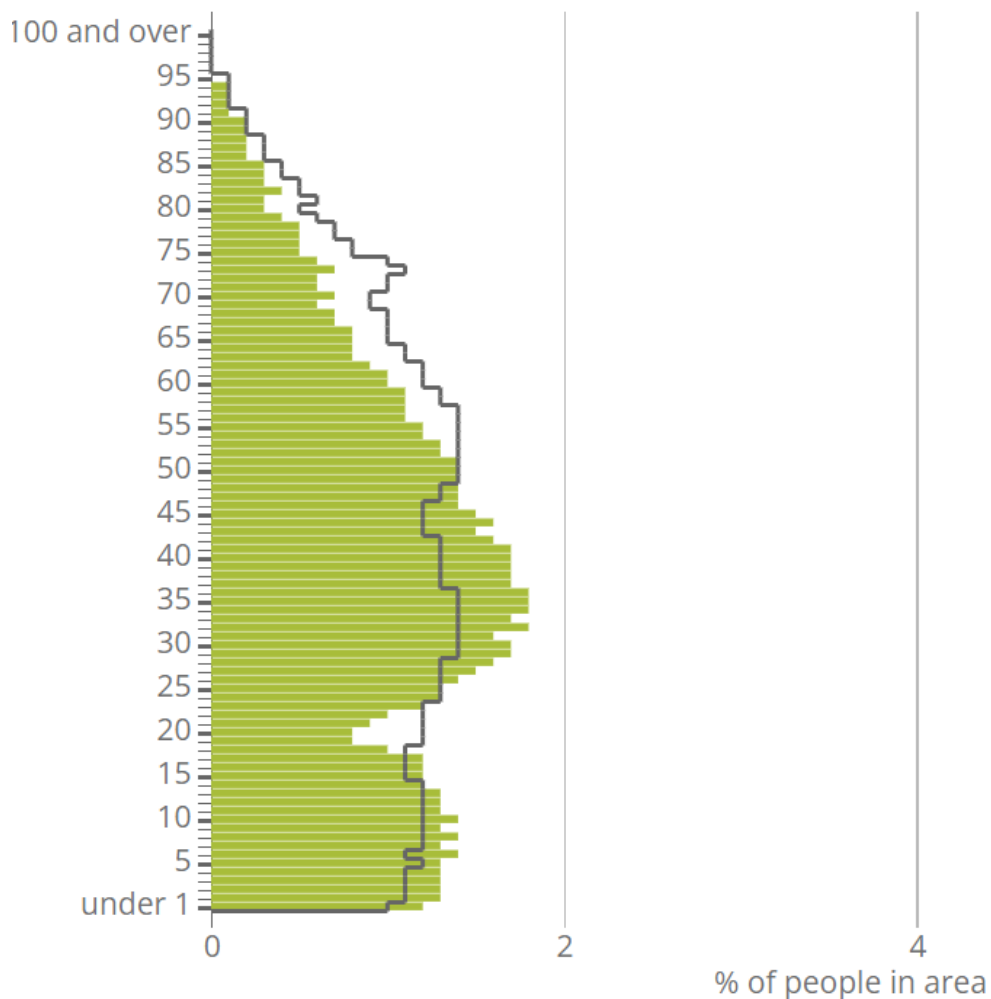
4. What we know about the Watford population

[Understanding our population is the basis of the needs assessment we have undertaken to inform the VCSF and this EIA.](#)

Population

Watford is a town with a growing population. The census data 2021 indicates that Watford has a population of 102,300, an increase of 13.3% since the previous census in 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

The chart below shows Watford's age ranges between 0 – 100 and over in percentage of the population (green) compared with the England / Wales percentages (black line).



Overall, this comparison shows that Watford is a relatively young town. This is particularly the case in the 0 to 19 age range. Similarly the 30 to 49 cohort accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the Watford population than nationally.

The median age in Watford is 36 compared with 40 for England. This means that we are a town which is popular with families and, whilst we are a town for all, we recognise that our plans need to reflect our large number of young people and families. In terms of voluntary and community sector organisations, this means there are likely to be demands for help across all age profiles but those supporting families and younger children may face higher than average demand.

Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,770 people per square kilometre. This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country (434 per square kilometre). This is a reflection that we are an urban district, with many characteristics of a metropolitan borough. In comparison with many metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, our density is relatively low.

Households

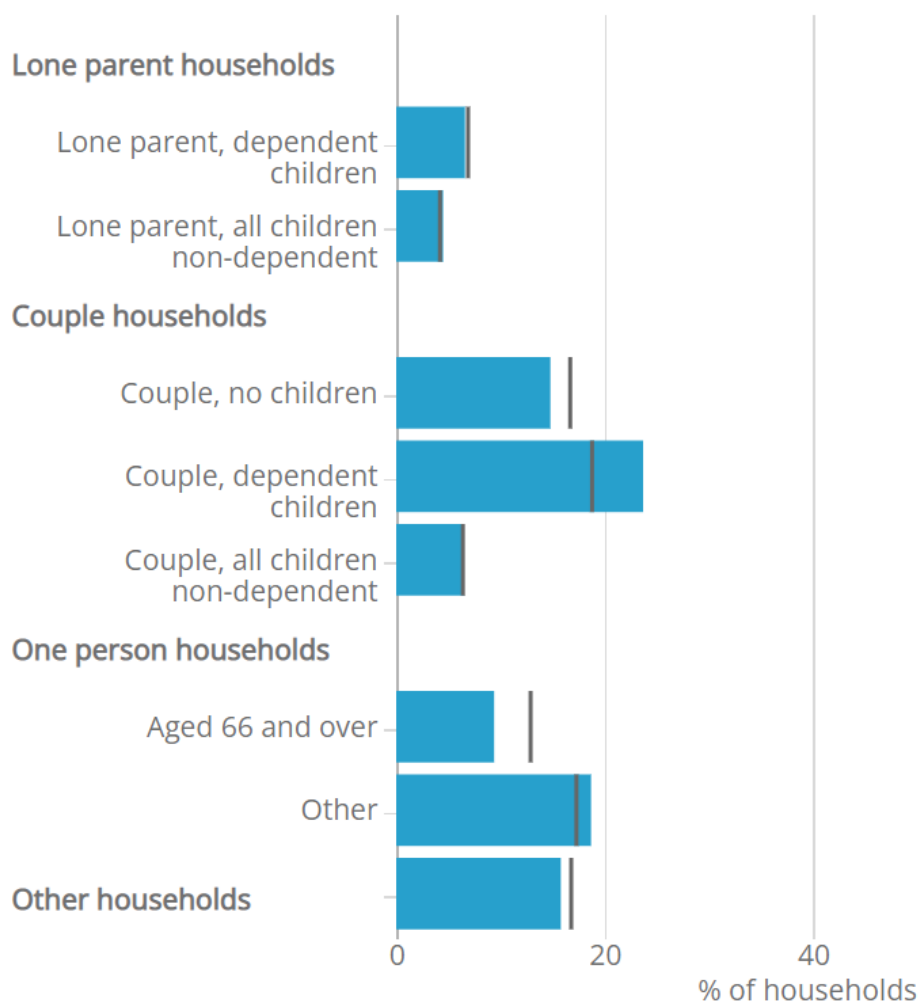
Number of households

The ONS data, based on the census, says that there were 39,628 households in Watford at the time

of the Census. The average household size in Watford is currently 2.57. This is slightly higher than the national average of 2.45 and is in line with the Census 2021 household composition data below.

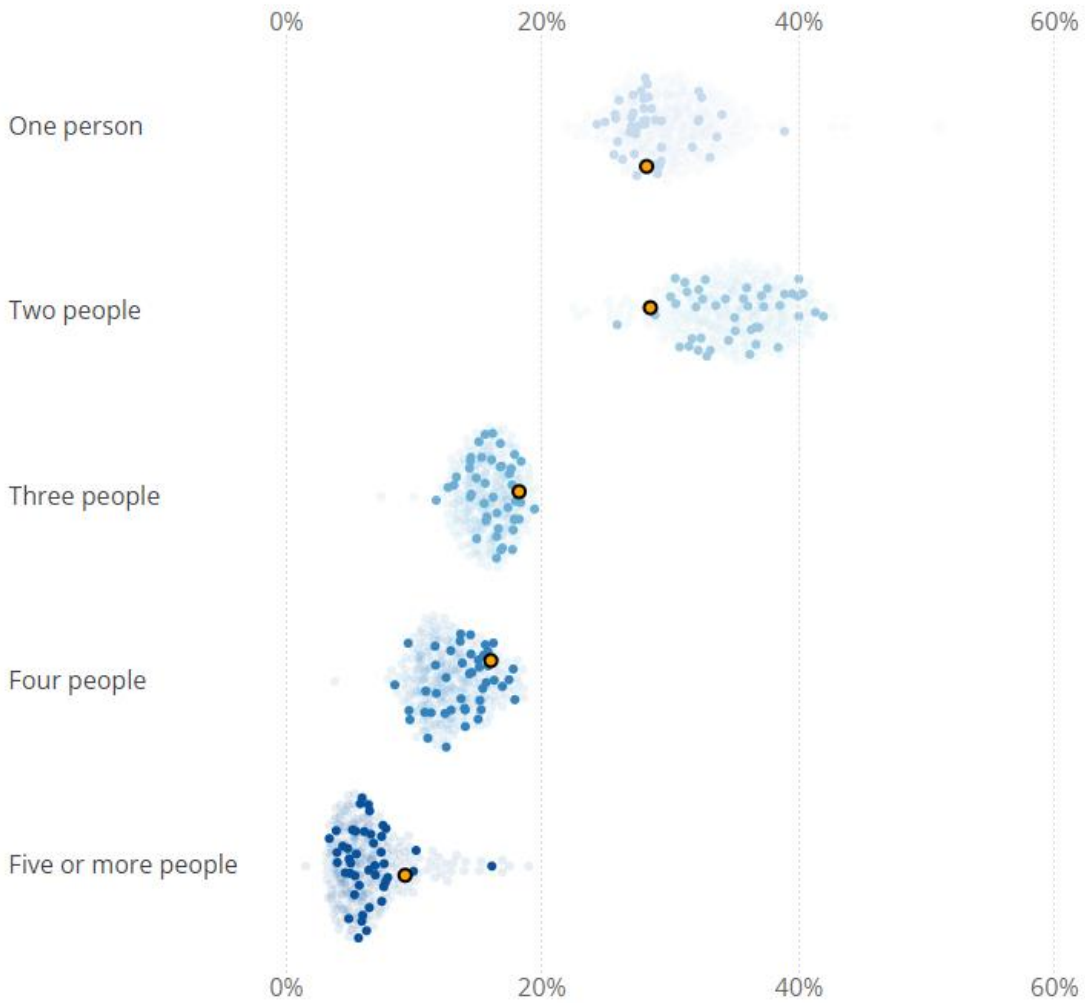
Household Composition

The chart below sets out the composition of Watford households in the Census 2021, with Watford’s percentage shown in the blue bars compared to the England and Wales percentages shown by the vertical black bar. Watford has a higher percentage of both households with couples with no children and households with dependent children than England and Wales. As a town with a relatively young population it has fewer one person households with residents aged 66 and over.



The second chart on household composition shows that Watford has higher than England and Wales average for larger sized households – 3 or more people. Again this reflects that Watford is a ‘family town’ with different generations living together in one household.

Local authorities within the same region are highlighted



DEPRIVATION

Deprivation is based on four selected household characteristics.

Education

A household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.

Employment

A household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or disabled.

Health

A household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any member is disabled.

Housing

A household is classified as deprived in the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Category	Number of Watford households
Household is not deprived in any dimension	20,051

Household is deprived in one dimension	13,115
Household is deprived in two dimensions	5,091
Household is deprived in three dimensions	1,264
Household is deprived in four dimensions	107

Gender

The 2021 census did not allow for any option other than female or male.

FEMALE	50.8%
MALE	49.2%

LIVING STATUS

The “living arrangements” classification combines responses to the question on marital and civil partnership status with information about whether or not a person is living in a couple. This topic is only applicable to people in households. Living arrangements differs from marital and civil partnership status because cohabiting takes priority over other categories. For example, if a person is divorced and cohabiting, then in results for living arrangements they are classified as cohabiting.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Living in an opposite-sex couple: Married or in a civil partnership	35,782
Living in a same-sex couple: Married or in a civil partnership	166
Living in a couple: Separated, but still married or in a civil partnership	94
Living in an opposite-sex couple: Cohabiting	9,408
Living in a same-sex couple: Cohabiting	442
Not living in a couple: Single (never married and never registered a same-sex civil partnership)	22,868

Not living in a couple: Married or in a registered civil partnership	1,872
Not living in a couple: Separated (including those who are married and those who are in civil partnerships)	1,479
Not living in a couple: Divorced or formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	4,743
Not living in a couple: Widowed or surviving partner from a civil partnership	3,397

LEGAL PARTNERSHIP STATUS

For Census 2021, this has been updated to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	30,974
Married: Opposite sex	38,023
Married: Same sex	192
In a registered civil partnership: Opposite sex	85
In a registered civil partnership: Same sex	60
Separated, but still married	1,744
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	7
Divorced	6,074
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	18
Widowed	3,782
Surviving partner from civil partnership	5

Sexual orientation

Category	Number of Watford residents	Percentage of Watford residents

people aged 16 years and over - straight or heterosexual	72,016	88.95%
people aged 16 years and over – lesbian, gay	914	1.1%
people aged 16 years and over – bisexual	962	1.2%

Language spoken at home:

Below is the data collected in Census 2021 with regard to household language. This is another indication that Watford benefits from groups and organisations set up to support those who may have arrived in the town more recently.

	Number	Percentage
All adults in household have English as a main language	30443	76.8%
At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language	3486	8.8%
No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language	1438	3.6%
No people in household have English in England as a main language	4261	10.8%

Main Language

The Census asked people their main language, with over 90 choices. Whilst English was significantly the most chosen language with nearly 80,000 residents citing English as their main language, there are a substantial number of residents with other main languages. The top ten after English are below (see Appendix 1 for the full list of languages).

Language	Number
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140

South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435

Disability/Health

Category	Percentage of Watford residents
Disabled under the equality act: day-to-day activities limited a lot	6.2%
Disabled under the equality act: day-to-day activities limited a little	8.7%
Not disabled under the equality act	85.1%

General Health – age standardised

Category	Percentage of Watford residents
Very good health	48.2%
Good health	34.7%
Fair health	12.4%
Bad health	3.6%
Very bad health	1.0%

The 2020/21 NHS Health Profile's summary conclusion is that the health of people in Watford is 'varied' compared with the England average. About 12% (2,256) of children live in relatively low income families and about 10% live in absolute low income families.

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire; it is one of the strengths of our town and what makes us such a vibrant and diverse place to be. This diversity is an

opportunity for our voluntary and community sector in terms of how they respond to the various needs of the Watford community and how they reach out to engage and include people in what they do.

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
		102,245 TOTAL
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	61.9% (55,875)	46.0% (46,820)
White Irish	2.3% (2,063)	2.1% (2,149)
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1% (61)	0.1% (80)
White: Roma	Not a category in 2011	0.3% (343)
White: Other White	7.7% (6,947)	12.6% (12,836)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	1.1% (990)	1.3% (1,300)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.5% (412)	0.7% (692)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.0% (939)	1.4% (1,408)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8% (763)	1.4% (1,444)
Asian/Asian British/ Asian Welsh: Indian	5.5% (4,923)	9.7% (9,954)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Pakistani	6.7% (6,082)	8.0% (8,197)

Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	0.4% (362)	0.5% (493)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Chinese	0.9% (822)	1.0% (1,024)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Other Asian	4.4% (3,981)	5.3% (5,369)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	3.5% (3,142)	3.9% (3,954)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1.7% (1,558)	1.7% (1,733)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	0.6% (529)	0.8% (801)
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.3% (294)	0.7% (763)
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	0.6% (558)	2.8% (2,885)

Religion or belief

Religious groups in Watford, 2021 census:

- Christian - 45,447 people or 44.6%
- Buddhist - 1,021 people or 0.85%
- Hindu - 8,398 people or 8.2%
- Jewish - 944 people or 0.93%
- Muslim - 13,262 people or 11.0%
- Sikh - 664 people or 0.6%
- Other - 859 people or 0.71%
- No religion – 25,340 people or 24.8%

6,311 people did not answer this question

5. How will the council ensure equality is promoted through the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the review:

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

A. Positive impacts

Potential positive effects based on what you know from your analysis

The key message of the framework is to set “out the council’s strategic approach and priorities that are intended to support a broad range of community, socio-economic and cultural benefits, that will be delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations, to local people on behalf of the council”

Informed by comprehensive research and engagement and aligned to the aims of our Council Plan 2022-26, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26 and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-27, the framework sets out a shared set of priorities, principles and responsibilities for all stakeholders that will have significant benefit to and positive impact on those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The framework seeks to improve the provision of community, cultural, social, and leisure activities in line with the deliverables defined within the four principles of the framework:

- **Principle 1: Community Cohesion**
- **Principle 2: Enable opportunities**
- **Principle 3: Community capacity and Impact**
- **Principle 4: Environmental Sustainability**

In the wake of the pandemic and as the cost of living crisis deepens, there is a need for the council to continue working closely with the voluntary sector to protect our residents from the impact of pressures. Any major changes to the current commissioned providers could destabilise the effective delivery of targeted and effective crisis support and put many households at greater risk of both

immediate hardship and reduced opportunity and wellbeing.

Following the review, the commissioning priorities and organisations for this framework will remain as:

- **Infrastructure support to the voluntary and community sector**

We will continue to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in Watford, developing and supporting the local voluntary sector infrastructure. This service will be delivered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) who have extensive networks across the voluntary, statutory and business sectors within the town and beyond.

- **Advice and support services**

We will continue to support a universal advice service, which can provide detailed and expert advice and support for Watford's diverse community and, particularly, our vulnerable residents. This service will be delivered by Watford Citizens Advice, who have a proven track record in the advice and support sector and who we will work closely with to address and respond to any emerging national issues, legislative or policy changes that may impact local people.

National (such as the Fairness Foundation and local research (Watford Citizens Advice) shows that the recent cost of living crisis has impacted on certain protected characteristics disproportionately, including single parents, people with disabilities and those from minority ethnic communities.

Supporting advice services will have a positive impact on all the community but particularly those from the groups who are finding it hardest to manage.

- **Support services for families**

We will continue to provide targeted support for families, to help parents cope with the many difficulties life can bring, ensuring that they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their young children. This service will be commissioned by Home Start Watford and Three Rivers, whose trained volunteers will continue to provide early intervention by supporting families in a variety of emotional and practical ways.

Watford has a high proportion of families with young children and supporting Home Start responds to the needs of this part of the Watford community, particularly those facing vulnerabilities.

- **Mobility services**

We will continue to support services that allow independence and enhanced living for anyone with limited mobility, whether it be temporary or permanent. This service will continue to be commissioned to Shopmobility Watford who have the experience and infrastructure to deliver a range of mobility services to ensure that our town centre and all its associated services, including retail, leisure and hospitality remain accessible to people with limited mobility.

- **Arts and culture**

We will continue to support access to arts and culture ensuring that is accessible for all of its residents. Watford Palace Theatre and the Pump House Theatres will be commissioned to

deliver arts and culture services through a range of theatre productions and performances, projects and outreach programmes that bring people together, fosters good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not and support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Community centre provision**

We will continue to support the management of four council owned community centres across the town to provide a programme of activities designed to meet the needs of the community they serve. The following centres will continue to be commissioned by:

- Holywell Community Centre- Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT)
- Orbital Community Centre- One YMCA
- Meriden Community Centre - Watford FC Community Sports & Education Trust
- West Watford Community Centre- West Watford Community Association

The centres will support the needs of their individual communities, fostering a sense of community spirit and cohesion by providing spaces and programmes that promote neighbourliness and activities for all ages and interests.

It is proposed that facilities provide a range of centre activities that address evidenced need in their ward in one or more the following areas:

- Public health focusing on mental health and wellbeing
- Youth and young people focused activities
- Activities for older adults
- Activities for people with disabilities

B. Negative impacts

Potential negative effects based on what you know from your analysis

The current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets a savings targets of £50k in 2024/25 rising to £100k in 2025/26 to be achieved by reducing dependency on council funding and working with the voluntary sector to identify alternative sources of finance. The Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (2024-2028) promotes a new collaborative approach amongst the VCS which encourages more self-sufficiency and partnership working.

Potential negative effects could arise if:

1. No mitigating steps are taking if a decrease in funding is necessary for a currently commissioned organisation.
2. Organisations are informed too late of any changes that impact their financial planning
3. The VSCF fails to deliver upon the council priorities or needs of the sector

4. The VSCF does not allow for pivots in service delivery where new/urgent priorities arise
5. Care is not taken of disproportionate impact on those protected by law.

Whilst areas have been identified through this EIA which could impact on the local community and potentially those with protected characteristics, mitigations for the negative impacts have been identified within the principles set out within the Framework.

Any equality impacts identified through this EIA will be evaluated through new internal and external governance arrangements.



6. Overall conclusion

The main conclusion is that, overall, the refreshed Voluntary and Community Sector Framework will have a positive impact on those in Watford sharing a protected characteristics particularly around age, disability and race. The Framework will continue to provide access to detailed and expert advice and deliver a range of community, socioeconomic and cultural benefits to all residents.

This EIA notes that this is a refresh of the Framework not a review and that the principles of allocating funding, whilst modified to reflect the council’s strategic framework, remain as for the previous framework and that it continues grant funding the organisations as set out above. The EIA also recognises that the council’s financial position means that it has had to review its commissioning budget and make decisions on how this should be allocated across the commissioned service. The equality impact of these changes to funding will be reviewed and the impacts monitored and mitigated as far as possible but it is acknowledged that this will have an impact on those organisations affected.

The proposal to ring-fence the funding for Watford’s citizens advice demonstrates our commitment to address inequalities by focusing on the most vulnerable and those in greatest need, which includes those with protected characteristics as evidenced by recent data and information. The new principles that have been embedded into the framework, will help all commissioned organisations to deliver self-help and early intervention activities which help to build resilience and improve the quality of life by reducing the potential negative impacts of poverty, disability and ill health and those with protected characteristics

Summary of potential positive impacts and ways in which they can be ensured

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
Providing voluntary and community sector infrastructure that enables the setting up of new groups and existing ones to survive and thrive including those that support protected characteristics	All (there are established groups in Watford that support protected characteristics such as disability)	Commission Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics
Providing high quality advice and support services for those in need of support across a range of issues but including debt, housing and welfare advice	All	Commission Watford Citizens Advice to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics
Providing support to people with mobility issues to gain access to services in the town centre	Disability Age	Commission Shopmobility to provide this service and monitor effectiveness through a robust SLA including monitoring across protected characteristics

Summary of potential negative impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
Reduction in the level of service delivered/programmes offered	All	Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups. For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
Increased cost in some instances to end user for activities and reduced concessions	All	<p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p> <p>For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.</p>
Reduced time available for recruiting	All	<p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p>
Possibility of discontinuing some activities	All	<p>For WBC officers and the CVS to signpost and support organisations with identifying and submitting applications to other external funding opportunities.</p> <p>Continue equalities monitoring of commissioned organisations service users to gain a better understanding of the impact of proposed changes to funding on protected characteristics and other vulnerable groups.</p>

This EIA has been approved by:

Kathryn Robson Date 18th October 2023

Agenda Item 6

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 30 October 2023

Report author: Strategic Initiatives Officer

Title: Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

1.0 Summary

1.1 Watford Borough Council has undertaken a cross cutting review to establish a more strategic approach to community engagement and participation.

1.2 The aspirations of the review included to:

- join together and strengthen activity already taking place, building upon the town's diverse, vibrant and engaged voluntary sector
- harness the insights and energy of the Watford community, establishing a collaborative and productive relationship that serves our residents
- improve the way in which we conduct engagement, supporting the community to shape decisions and ensuring all voices are heard equally
- explore an Asset Based Community Development approach, with the council as an enabler for communities to support themselves and one another, and for community development to flourish

1.3 Following Cabinet approval in July to commence consultation activity and provide an opportunity for Watford's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to test the strategy and shape the final version, this report provides a summary of the consultation activity and feedback received and presents the final strategy.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
The Council does not adopt a more strategic approach to its community engagement	Parts of the community are not heard and fail to access support and resources	Develop a strategic approach to ensure new, emergent and unseen communities are all engaged	Treat	4

Watford's voluntary and community sector do not feel able to shape the strategy and do not recognise their own experiences in the strategy	The strategy does not lead to the step change in the council's engagement and participation with the community and VCS	A programme of consultation	Treat	6
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3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet reviews the feedback, learnings and outcomes of the consultation activity undertaken within development of this strategy.
- 3.2 That Cabinet reviews and adopts the Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-2027.

Further information:

Natalie Frost
natalie.frost@watford.gov.uk

Report approved by: Kathryn Robson, Director of Performance

4.0 Detailed proposal

Background to the strategy

- 4.1 In line with the ambition in our Council Plan to focus on engaging and listening to our community, the new Community Engagement and Participation Strategy aims to deliver upon our commitment 'to listen to, and hear, the diverse voices of Watford'.
- 4.2 A strategic review of the council's community engagement activities has been undertaken, in order to understand and evaluate the key touchpoints with the community across the whole organisation. Within this, the council's relationship with the voluntary sector and role in community development has also been examined, in order to enable a strategy that establishes a collaborative relationship that is inclusive of, and beneficial to, all.

Aims and objectives

- 4.3 The strategy seeks to develop a consistent and forward looking strategic approach and set out how we will proactively work with and engage with our community, and

voluntary and community sector. Celebrating the contribution of our community and recognising the invaluable role they continue to play through each of the recent crises including the Covid-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis, it sets out how the council can support a strong and resilient community, where people's voices are heard and individuals, groups and organisations feel valued and inspired by our town.

- 4.4 Starting with the commitments set out in our Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan, the strategy will act as a golden thread running through our key strategies and into delivery. It will connect our commitment to work alongside our community to find the right ways to reach net carbon zero with our Environmental Strategy and how we seek to engage with people to understand their barriers, what is important to them, and what opportunities we have to facilitate change. It supports our dialogue as we review the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework, our strategy for community assets, our Communications and Conversations Strategy and our Customer Experience Strategy to help us deliver upon our commitments to celebrate and promote our town's rich and diverse culture and creativity, to support improved health and wellbeing across the town, and to listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.
- 4.5 The strategy recognises there is great potential to join together and strengthen the activity already taking place, recognising our communities as contributors and establishing a long term, collaborative relationship that is inclusive of all and allows all to flourish. At the same time, we want to enable new and emergent communities to access support and resources and build for themselves a fulfilling and thriving role within the life of Watford. This opportunity to connect the layers of help and support already so well established in Watford under a unifying vision and clear outcomes, underpins this strategy and approach.
- 4.6 We have taken a strategic review of how we as a council engage with the community, the challenges and opportunities within this activity, and worked to define our emerging vision for engagement and participation. We have outlined four key themes, accompanied by a delivery plan which sets out how we can implement this vision.

Consultation

- 4.7 The Community Engagement and Participation Strategy has been developed in alignment with, and shaped by, our understanding of the priorities and needs of the local VCS.
- 4.8 In order to develop the strategy, a comprehensive exercise was undertaken to understand and evaluate the key touchpoints with the community across the council, investigating the ways in which the organisation carries out a wide variety and range of engagement with the community. Within this, the council's

relationship with the voluntary sector and role in community development was examined. A social consultancy was engaged to offer insight and advice on best practice and to support the review by undertaking a period of listening and discovery, hearing from a range of people individually and in groups, including the Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community, other Cabinet Members and senior officers. Within this research, day to day feedback provided by organisations to service areas across the council was heard. A variety of approaches by other local authorities and recommendations from bodies such as the LGA were also reviewed.

- 4.9 Consultation on the draft Community Engagement and Participation Strategy took place during June-August 2023 and was open to the VCS across the borough. This included:
- an initial stage of detailed pre-engagement with partner organisations
 - consultation involving an interactive presentation and discussion session
 - an online survey that was open for a six week period.
- 4.10 49 organisations participated in the consultation, representing charities, not for profits, sports clubs, community interest companies delivering across a wide range of areas in the borough. A full list of participating organisations is detailed in the feedback report appended to this paper.
- 4.11 The consultation found a very positive response to the strategy, with participants responding that the emerging strategy set out an excellent vision and ambition, clearly aligned with their own objectives, conveying appropriate ambition and resonating with feedback that they had raised particularly around making connections within the VCS in Watford.
- 4.12 Participants provided detailed feedback on the strengths and challenges of Watford's VCS. There was a consensus that Watford has a very positive and active local VCS, delivering a huge amount for Watford's community with a strength and culture to be proud of.
- 4.13 Particular strengths included the collaboration and support organisations provide to one another, the exemplary relationships between the VCS and council underpinned by the vital role of councillors in engaging at the local and neighbourhood level, and the value of existing initiatives such as the council convened Cost of Living Forums and the CVS' Volunteer Fair.
- 4.14 The key challenges were set out to be accessing funding and recruiting volunteers, juggling resource constraints with making and building upon collaborative connections, and the issue of seeking premises whilst balancing the cost of rent or leases.

- 4.15 Participants encouraged the council to continue to facilitate and coordinate, helping the VCS to share resources, skill sets and focus on issues together. Suggestions for new ways to expand upon this included a source of signposting to understand the other organisations delivering across an area or needs, for example when trying to help a family in crisis, providing packs of information such as the Census data to support funding applications, showcasing the great initiatives happening across the VCS, and continuing to seek new ways to amplify the voices of those less often heard.
- 4.16 The Community Network Event, a deliverable of this strategy, was welcomed by participants and encouraged as a means of collaborating, networking, sharing news and inputting into the council's strategic workstreams.
- 4.17 Direct feedback on the strategy included:
- 1) To broaden the focus to include more on the socio-economic context, underlining the value of investing in residents via the VCS so that they stay and become economic drivers in Watford;
 - 2) To strengthen focus on collaboration and creating opportunities to network/collaborate with diverse range of conversation;
 - 3) Revisions to the vision statement to reflect a goal of enabling the VCS to influence decisions that make maximum impact for residents, extending their impact rather than things that impact them as organisations.
- 4.18 The feedback received has helped us to shape the final strategy, ensuring that feedback is reflected in its aims and translates through into the themes and actions. It has helped us to ensure that we fully understand the challenges, opportunities and strengths of the VCS and correctly reflect these in the strategy. The clear alignment found during consultation underlined that we are taking the right steps in this approach, and we will continue to ensure that we hear and take action upon feedback raised.
- 4.19 The strategy is accompanied by a detailed delivery plan that sets out responsibilities for each recommendation and strategic oversight of the strategy will be held by the Director of Performance, with the delivery plan monitored as part of the council's quarterly performance reporting. The delivery plan will be monitored by reporting into the EPMO, in line with internal EPMO processes on strategy progress reporting.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications within this report, noting that actions in the delivery plan will be met from existing budgets.

5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications within this report.

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 As this is a new strategy, an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix 5 to this report. The main conclusions of the analysis are that the potential positive impacts of the strategy will deliver benefit not only to the community, who will be better enabled to deliver their vital work, access support and resources and collaborate with one another and the council, and directly to residents, who will benefit from the strengthened outputs of these organisations.

5.3.2 There are no human rights implications under this report.

5.3.3 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 Resourcing of the strategy has been carefully considered and ownership of individual components has been set out in the accompanying delivery plan.

5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 There are no implications in this section. There is a recommendation to review the approach to community assets and this approach will be assessed under the emerging Community Asset Strategy.

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 There are no implications in this report.

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 There are no sustainability implications within this report.

Appendices

This report is accompanied by:

- Appendix 1 – Community Engagement and Participation Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Delivery Plan
- Appendix 3 – Our layers of support for thriving communities
- Appendix 4 – Levels of engagement
- Appendix 5 – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 6 – Feedback report

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-27

Introduction

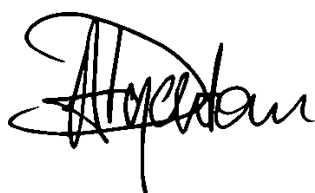
“One of the many things that makes Watford such a special place is the outstanding dedication and enthusiasm of our voluntary, community and charity organisations.

At different times in our life, many of us need that little bit of extra support and understanding that this vital part of our town offers. Every week, we hear amazing stories about how they are changing lives for the better. This was shown so clearly during the Covid-19 pandemic but the energy and concern has not diminished as we continue to face challenging times, including the cost of living crisis, which has impacted so many across Watford. We are also fortunate in how willing our community organisations are to be part of the wider life of the town and build relationships that make us stronger than the sum of our parts.

This is why we are so pleased to introduce our new Community Engagement and Participation Strategy. This sets out our commitment to upholding and supporting the voluntary, community and charity organisations that do so much for Watford. It also recognises how important it is for the sector to lead and advise where their knowledge, skills and experience means they are best placed to do so. They are the experts in so many areas and, by working together we will strengthen and support each other. This means vital help will continue to get to local people when they need it most. We are a town that is united by possibilities and this Strategy is a great example of this in action.”



Elected Mayor of Watford, Peter Taylor



Councillor Aga Dychton, Deputy Mayor, Portfolio Holder for Community

Setting the scene – who we are in Watford

Watford Borough Council's (Watford BC) Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-2027 celebrates the contribution of the town's diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector (VCS). Having recognised, and experienced, the outstanding impact our community makes to Watford and the lives of local people, it opens up a meaningful, two-way conversation on how the council can support a strong and resilient community. This is grounded in trust and appreciation of the power of people coming together to act collectively where people's voices are heard and individuals, groups and organisations feel valued, inspired and empowered by our town.

Connecting and transforming

We recognise the success of this strategy will be demonstrated across all we do and will underpin how we work with our community to shape and influence what happens to the town. Starting with the commitments set out in our Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan, the strategy will act as a golden thread running through our key strategies and into delivery. It will connect our commitment to work alongside our community to find the right ways to reach net carbon zero with our Environmental Strategy and how we seek to engage with people to understand their barriers, what is important to them, and what opportunities we have to facilitate change. It supports our dialogue as we review the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework, develop our strategy for community assets, our Communications Strategy and implement our Customer Experience Strategy to help us deliver upon our commitments to celebrate and promote our town's rich and diverse culture and creativity, to support improved health and wellbeing across the town, and to listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.

Our community

Watford is a wonderfully rich and diverse place, recognised as a 'rainbow town', which celebrates the benefits people from different backgrounds, their experiences and cultures bring. We value our diverse communities but also see the town as 'one community', which, together, builds a strong, supportive and successful place to live, work and enjoy.

A strategy to build and strengthen relationships

A vital part of the town's fabric is our voluntary and community organisations, including those of faith, who support and deliver for local people. Through this strategy we want to strengthen our relationships, building the links to the Watford community through current and emerging groups and organisations.

Understanding Watford

Unprecedented times and rising to the challenge

Watford is a town with a growing, relatively young population made up of a wide range of communities and cultures. Our strength lies in our ability to join together and help one another through times of need, harnessing the enthusiasm and commitment across the town to support each other and step in where needed. There is no question that the last few years have presented challenges that we could never have anticipated and have transformed how we live and see the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had far reaching impacts upon our physical and mental health as well as fundamental changes to how we live and work. The war in Europe has seen our community pivot to help people seeking safety, helping to house refugees arriving from the Ukraine, with other areas of the world continuing to face disturbance and displacement. We now face the impacts of the cost of

living crisis, which is hitting our more vulnerable residents particularly hard and risks restricting their opportunities without interventions to support them through this crisis.

For our VCS, this state of permacrisis has meant a rising level of demand for services, against a backdrop of increasing competition for funding, a changing landscape around volunteering, and increasingly constrained resources.

A vibrant and engaged voluntary and community sector

Throughout these crises, we have seen our community step up, without hesitation, to channel their insights and energy for Watford in its time of need. Our voluntary and community organisations came forward to help one another to keep delivering by sharing assets, ideas and resources, and local people also took responsibility in playing a part. The council took this opportunity to build on our already mature relationships with the VCS, with whom we convene regularly, initiating forums such as the Cost of Living Crisis Group to help lever collaboration and offer our support. There is even greater potential to join together and strengthen activity already taking place, recognising our communities as contributors and establishing a long term, collaborative relationship that is inclusive of all and allows all to flourish. At the same time, we want to enable new and emerging communities to access support and resources and build for themselves a fulfilling and thriving role within the life of Watford.

This opportunity to connect the layers of help and support already so well established in Watford under a unifying vision and clear outcomes, underpins this strategy and approach.

Role of our Elected Mayor and Councillors

Part of the strength of our vibrant town, is the role the Elected Mayor and councillors play in engaging in conversations and dialogue across the community. They have strong relationships with, and knowledge of, our communities, and continuously seek to broaden their engagement with a range of local voices. This gives them the insight and opportunity to understand the views, needs and challenges of the VCS and encourage further collaboration and participation.

Taking Watford to the next level for our community

An engaged community can drive real change and make it happen

We are an ambitious town and community. This strategy matches this ambition, seeking to implement tangible changes, resulting in a more collaborative relationship with a truly engaged, well-represented and empowered community.

We have taken a strategic review of how we as a council engage with the community, the challenges and opportunities this brings, and worked to define our emerging vision for engagement and participation. We have outlined four key themes, accompanied by a delivery plan which sets out how we can implement this vision.

We fully appreciate that this is about 'us' as the community of Watford. We want to move to the next level of community engagement and participation and vital to this is to continue to hear from,

and listen, to the community. This strategy is underpinned by your input, dialogue and ideas, which will continue to shape the themes and priority areas for action. It is not an end of discovery and learning but the beginning!

We believe in the value of a collaborative community where everyone is involved

Community engagement is a fundamental part of who we are as a council. It is vital in our decision-making and plays a key role in how we listen to and deliver for our residents and voluntary and community groups and organisations.

The strategy will deliver an approach that opens up opportunities for all of Watford's communities to be heard, to participate in, and shape council decisions, to understand how feedback influences and evolves our approach, and to be empowered to reach their full potential. Our aim is for everyone to feel motivated to participate and collaborate with the council and one another because they recognise their voices are heard and make a difference, in order to reach our aspirations for and commitments to the town.

Our vision for working with you

There is a real partnership between council and community, which unlocks the experiences, imagination and resources of local people who collaborate to help build a more diverse, safe, happy and healthy, greener Watford.

Watford's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is informed, involved, engaged and can influence the decisions which affect the people they serve and they are empowered to join in and contribute to the life of the town

Themes

Theme 1 – We will improve how we engage with Watford's communities

We want to have inclusive, open dialogue, with opportunities to hear from and recognise our new and emerging communities as well as those that are more established.

We will:

- Work with our key partners to connect and build relationships with a broader section of the Watford community
- Further engage the new and emergent voices in our town
- Understand and grow relationships and networks to enable more two-way conversations
- Maximise opportunities to share information and break down barriers

We will do this by:

- ✓ Building upon our key partnerships across core areas including leisure, business, arts and culture to deliver stronger relationships, links into and collaboration with community organisations

- ✓ Implementing strategic priorities in the next iteration of our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework that enable strategic stakeholders across key interest groups to identify and connect with groups within our community who are not yet known to us
- ✓ Implementing and delivering a biannual Community Network event to enable organisations to network, collaborate with one another and the council, amplify the voices of their clients, and facilitate long term connections
- ✓ Continuing to deliver our effective and timely engagement with the VCS across areas including health inequalities, arts development and broader consultations and engagement initiatives
- ✓ Supporting the strategic role of the VCS in our response to the health agenda, setting commissioning priorities that encourage and enable engagement and partnership working so that the VCS can represent the views of communities experiencing the greatest health inequalities and help to deliver services that address health and wellbeing needs
- ✓ Continuing to utilise the contacts, skills and experience of councillors and to explore opportunities and challenges raised to them
- ✓ Building best practice approaches into how we design, carry out and report back on consultation and engagement activities
- ✓ Developing a clear forward plan so that communities can be kept informed of upcoming activities

Theme 2 – We will address barriers to and encourage broader participation

We want to make it easier to participate in and influence areas that affect our community

We will:

- Enable our communities to help shape decisions that drive positive change
- Identify and take action to address barriers to participation, taking guidance from our residents and community on what works for them
- Improve how we let people know about what we do and the benefits to them of sharing feedback

We will do this by:

- ✓ Testing and learning from best practice approaches to remove barriers and encourage participation, including exploring new digital approaches as well as more traditional methods
- ✓ Trialling new participation initiatives such as a People’s Panel, to provide opportunities for local people to take part and be directly involved in decision making and linking to engagement with the VCS
- ✓ Commissioning projects and organisations via existing funding streams that seek to broaden engagement and improve participation
- ✓ Promoting opportunities to take part in democratic processes, such as observing council meetings and committees
- ✓ Improving the quality of our consultations to make them interesting, easy and accessible
- ✓ Creating a forum for officers and members to exchange information, ideas and engagement skills that encourage participation

Theme 3 – We will improve how we demonstrate that we listen and respond to views that you share

We want to be more transparent about feedback received and highlight the value of contributing to consultations and engagement.

We will:

- Demonstrate that the council listens to, and acts upon, feedback
- Deliver greater transparency and encourage further participation

We will do this by:

- ✓ Committing to publishing how feedback will and has shaped what we do and embedding this in the consultations toolkit
- ✓ Improving how we share best practices and outcomes for the community within the council, including regular updates/milestones on projects after the consultation stage
- ✓ Working more closely to share feedback with strategic partners in the community, delivering regular updates at key forums

Theme 4 – We will empower our communities, enabling opportunities to network and share information, resources, assets and services so that all can flourish

We want to identify and build upon what is strong in our community, facilitating further collaboration so that everyone can benefit from the assets and opportunities in our community

We will:

- Empower local organisations to connect and work together to achieve shared goals
- Enable an environment with opportunities for all to grow and flourish
- Help the VCS to meet the rising needs and challenges of the people they support

We will do this by:

- ✓ Recognising the strength of our local assets (including skills, knowledge, resources and volunteers) and using our leadership role to facilitate better connections between our communities and allow everyone to benefit from these shared opportunities
- ✓ Empowering our commissioned organisations through the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework to enable delivery across the wider VCS
- ✓ Implementing a new approach to community assets, improving our policy and processes so that communities can make the most of council assets
- ✓ Establishing a space in the Town Hall for VCS organisations to collaborate and network in a vibrant co-working environment
- ✓ Through Community Wealth Building, empower our business community and voluntary sector to work in partnership and build strong, local networks of support
- ✓ Exploring the creation of Community Network in Watford, reviewing existing forums and facilitating a centralised forum which enables opportunities for direct dialogue across groups, at regular events with a focus on the key priorities of the town
- ✓ Continuing to engage with the voluntary and community sector in the design of key strategies, initiatives and place based projects such as the Town Hall Quarter, that create opportunities for them
- ✓ Continue to convene valuable forums which are well instigated and attended

Keeping you informed

Progress against the delivery plan, which sets out how and when we will deliver against the commitments within this strategy, will be reviewed on a quarterly basis, with reports to Cabinet and a midway update and review as part of our commitment to keep the community informed of progress.

At the end of the term of the strategy, we will review next steps to further our progress in improving Community Engagement and Participation in Watford.

How we will measure success

We will continually check back and discuss the progress of this strategy but will also:

- Support a biannual survey of Watford's voluntary and community organisations
- Use opportunities, such as the People's Panel and the council's Big Watford Conversation survey to find out local people's views on Watford and their local community

Alternative versions

We want everyone in our community to be able to understand, and benefit from, this strategy. We can provide a large print version or can translate into other languages where there is a community need – contact [**enquiries@watford.gov.uk**](mailto:enquiries@watford.gov.uk)

Appendix

1. Community Engagement and Participation Strategy Delivery Plan
2. Our layers of support for thriving communities
3. Levels of engagement
4. Equalities Impact Assessment

Delivery Plan - Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-27

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 1 - We will improve how we engage with Watford's communities			
1. Building upon our key partnerships across core areas including leisure, business, arts and culture to deliver stronger relationships, links into and collaboration with community organisations	Community Lead	New	Small project: Review approach and implement recommendations across lead officers
2. Implementing strategic priorities in the next iteration of our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework that enable strategic stakeholders across key interest groups to identify and connect with groups within our community who are not yet known to us	Community Commissioning Lead	Existing	Within existing project: Implement this as a recommendation of the VSCF review
3. Continuing to deliver effective and timely engagement with the VCS across areas including health inequalities, arts development and broader consultations and engagement initiatives	Area leads	Existing	Small project: Bring key workstreams engaging with VCS into an internal officer forum to update and share outcomes

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 1 - We will improve how we engage with Watford's communities			
4. Supporting the strategic role of the VCS in our response to the health agenda, setting commissioning priorities that encourage and enable engagement and partnership working so that the VCS can represent the views of communities experiencing the greatest health inequalities and help to deliver services that address health and wellbeing needs	Health Lead	Existing	Within existing project: No change to current workstreams
5. Continuing to utilise the contacts, skills and experience of councillors and to explore opportunities and challenges raised to them	Area Leads	Existing	Within existing project: No change to current workstreams
6. Building best practice approaches into how we design, carry out and report back on consultation and engagement activities:			
i. Developing a toolkit for consultation to ensure consistency and quality of approach	Communications and Engagement	New	Small project: Develop, test and implement toolkit

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 1 - We will improve how we engage with Watford's communities			
ii. Implementing best practice recommendations underpinned by skills training for officers across our content, making sure that information we present is always interesting, accessible and easy to read	HR	New	Small project: Set out recommendations and collaborate with HR to implement skills training
iii. Promoting ways to keep updated with news and to share information with the council	Communications and Engagement	Existing	Small project: Regular small campaign
iv. Establish ownership of and process for a publicly available consultations forward plan, ensuring awareness of cultural events and faith festivals is at the forefront of planning	Communications and Engagement	New	Small project: Create plan and process for updates

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 2 - We will address barriers to and encourage broader participation			

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
1. Testing and learning from best practice approaches to remove barriers and encourage participation, including exploring new digital approaches as well as more traditional methods	Communications and Engagement	Existing	Within existing workstream: Continue to test approaches in community engagement activities
2. Trialling new participation initiatives such as a People's Panel, to provide opportunities for local people to take part and be directly involved in decision making and linking to engagement with the VCS	Director of Performance	Existing	Within existing project: No additional work required
3. Commissioning projects and organisations via existing funding streams that seek to broaden engagement and improve participation	Community Commissioning	Existing	Within existing project: Build this into the VSCF review
4. Promoting opportunities to take part in democratic processes, such as observing council meetings and committees	Communications and Engagement	New	Small project: Review how we communicate this information and implement recommendations
5. Creating a forum for officers to exchange ideas, information	Community Commissioning	New	Small project: Establish a Community of Practice'

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
and engagement skills that encourage community participation			

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 3 - We will deliver a clear feedback loop to show the difference sharing views makes			
1. Committing to publishing how feedback will and has shaped what we do and embedding this in the consultations toolkit – ‘you said / we did’	Communications and Engagement	New	Within existing project: Carry out under the toolkit development action
2. Establishing an internal officer forum to improve how we share best practices and outcomes	Associate Director of Environment	New	Small project: Agree governance and implement

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
around the VCS within the council			
3. Working more closely to share feedback with strategic partners in the community	Community Lead	New	Small project: Scope a quarterly update for strategic partners

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
Theme 4 - We will empower our communities, enabling opportunities to network and share information, resources, assets and services so that all can flourish			
1. Recognising the strength of our local assets (including skills, knowledge, resources and volunteers) and using our leadership role to facilitate better connections between our communities and allow everyone to benefit from these	Community Lead Community Network (output)	New	Small project: Define local assets and create the opportunity to share updates at Community Network events

Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
shared opportunities			
2. Empowering our commissioned organisations through the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework to enable delivery across the wider VCS	Community Commissioning Lead	Existing	Within existing project: Make this a priority of the VSCF review
3. Implementing a new Community Asset Strategy, improving our policy and processes so that communities can make the most of council assets	Property and Asset Management CFRB	Existing	Within existing project: This is already happening
4. Establishing a space in the Town Hall for VCS organisations to collaborate and network in a vibrant co-working environment	EPMO Lead	Existing	Within existing project: This is already happening
5. Through Community Wealth Building, empower our business community and voluntary sector to work in partnership and build strong, local networks of support	Economic Development Lead	Existing	Within existing project: Align with the Community Lead
6. Exploring the creation of a Community Network in Watford	Community Commissioning Lead	Existing	Within existing project: Continue to deliver this event, first established

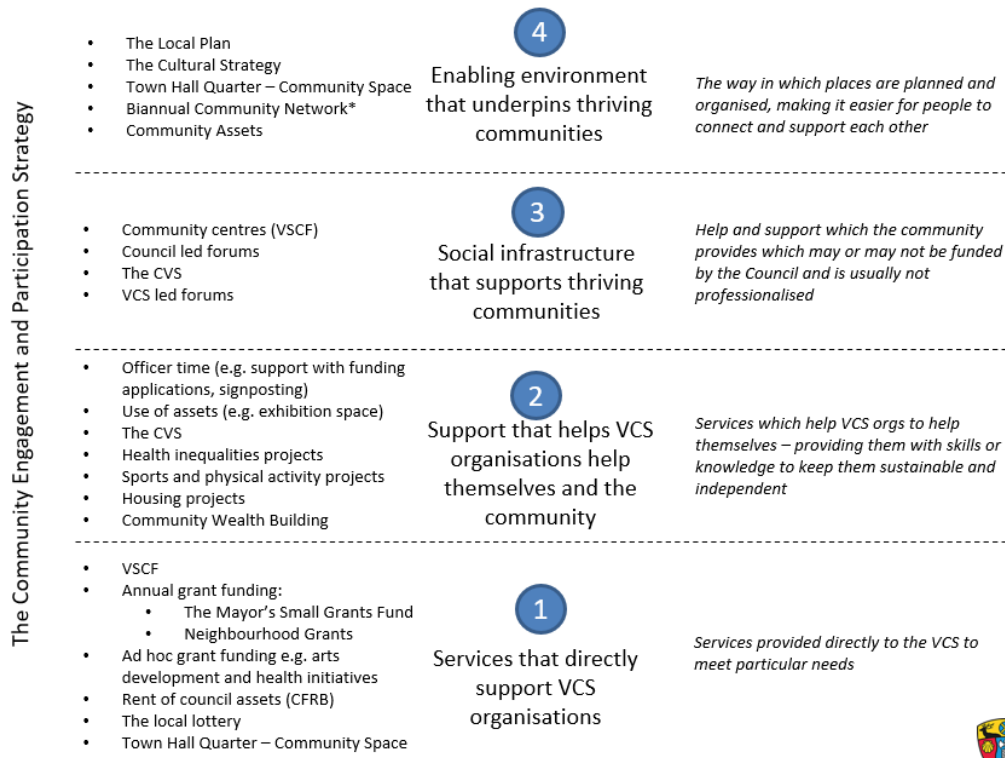
Action	Suggested Lead	New or existing workstream	Resources
to enable organisations to network, collaborate with one another and the council, and facilitate long term connections, reviewing existing forums and facilitating a centralised forum which enables opportunities for direct dialogue across groups, at regular events with a focus on the key priorities of the town			in June 2023 under this emerging strategy
7. Continuing to engage with the voluntary and community sector in the design of key strategies, initiatives and place based projects such as the Town Hall Quarter, that create opportunities for them	Service Area Leads Communications and Engagement Community Network	Existing	Within existing project: Establish a process to ensure delivery of this action

Governance			
Implement monitoring and governance of the strategy	Director of Performance	New	Within existing project: Provide quarterly updates to the EPMO

Our layers of support for thriving communities

The following diagram sets out the layers of support we have put in place. This strategy and its actions enable us to progress further in developing the enabling environment we aspire to for our communities.

Layers of council support for thriving communities



* A recommendation of the strategy



Levels of engagement

Our commitment within this strategy is to ensure a transparent and inclusive range of engagement across our decisions. There is not a one size fits all approach, given the nature of some decisions such as statutory changes, but where we can, we will seek to use techniques across the spectrum set out below.

Purpose	Expectation	Tools/Techniques
1. Inform	Telling people what is planned but without feedback or comment	Fact Sheets Websites Stalls/Displays Newsletters
2. Consult	Offering a number of options and listening to feedback but no opportunity to propose alternatives	Surveys Public Meetings Online Consultation Focus Groups Consultations
3. Involve (Deciding together)	Encouraging others to provide additional ideas and options, and to join in deciding the best way forward	Workshops Community Events Forums
4. Collaborate (Acting together)	Working with others to make decisions and forming a partnership to carry it out	Participatory decision making (People's Panel)
5. Empower (Supporting local initiatives)	Helping others do what they want – perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided	Ballots Delegated Decision Making Neighbourhood Grants Small Grants Voluntary Sector Commissioning



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Community Engagement and Participation Strategy
Lead officer	Natalie Frost
Person completing the EIA	Natalie Frost
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 1.1

1. Background

Watford Borough Council's (Watford BC) emerging Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-2026 celebrates the contribution of the town's diverse and vibrant voluntary and community sector (VCS). Having recognised, and experienced, the outstanding impact our community makes to Watford and the lives of local people, it opens up a meaningful, two-way conversation on how the council can support a strong and resilient community. This is grounded in trust and appreciation of the power of people coming together to act collectively where people's voices are heard and individuals, groups and organisations feel valued, inspired and empowered by our town.

In order to develop the strategy, we have taken a strategic review of how we as a council engage with the community, the challenges and opportunities this brings, and worked to define our emerging vision for engagement and participation. We have sought input from a wide range of stakeholders as set out under section 3 below.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

As this is a new strategy for the council an Equality Impact Analysis has been undertaken as the initial review progressed and strategy developed. This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of a local lottery on the people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010.

These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership.

3. Engagement and consultation

A social consultancy was engaged to offer insight and advice on best practice and to support the review by undertaking a period of listening and discovery, hearing from a range of people individually and in groups, including the Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community, other Cabinet Members and senior officers.

Initial engagement took place within the council in order to understand the current consultation and engagement approach and the feedback arising from experiences, whereby both officers and members have been consulted. This has continued throughout the review, engaging with officers

across service areas with different levels of relationship with the community and varying approaches to consultation.

Engagement has also taken place with officers at wider local authorities who are implementing or have implemented measures to improve their own community engagement and participation. Officers have also attended workshops on topics such as ‘embedding community engagement in a council’s functions’, by the LGA.

Early engagement sought the input of key partners in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to help reflect on the background to and direction of the emerging strategy.

Further and full engagement took place via a consultation with the VCS in summer 2023. 49 organisations participated in the consultation, representing charities, not for profits, sports clubs, community interest companies delivering across a wide range of areas in the borough. A feedback report (appendix 6) has been produced summarising the approach to and outcomes of the consultation.

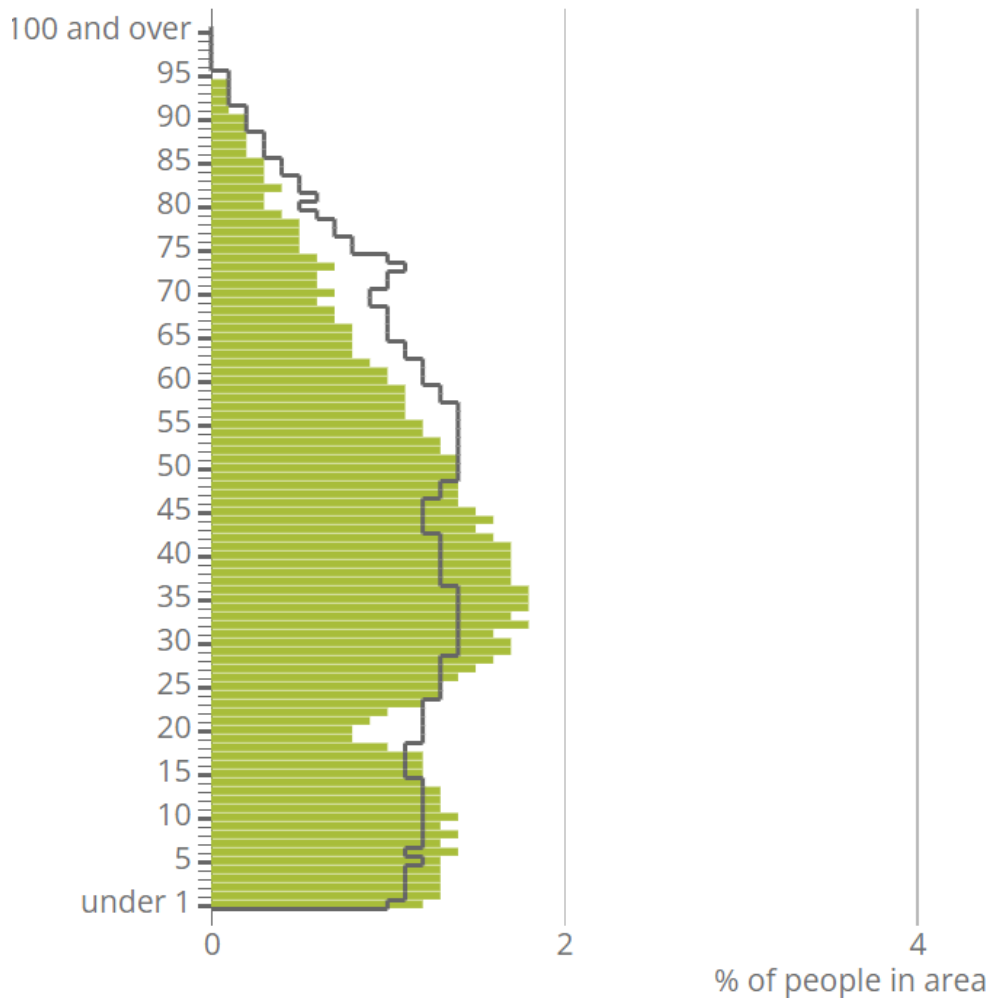
4. What we know about the Watford population

Population (including age)

Watford is a town with a growing population. The census data 2021 indicates that Watford has a population of 102,300, an increase of 13.3% since the previous census in 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

Watford’s population is currently projected to increase to 110,300 by 2035, a rise from 2016 of 14.2%. This growth will be a challenge for Watford, given our tight borough boundaries and is recognised within the Council Plan, shaping a number of our commitments and areas for action in the Delivery Plan.

The chart below shows Watford’s age ranges between 0 – 100 and over in percentage of the population (green) compared with the England / Wales percentages (black line).



Overall, this comparison shows that Watford is a relatively young town. This is particularly the case in the 0 to 19 age range. Similarly the 30 to 49 cohort accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the Watford population than nationally.

The median age in Watford is 36 compared with 40 for England. This means that we are a town which is popular with families and, whilst we are a town for all, we recognise that our plans need to reflect our large number of young people and families. In terms of voluntary and community sector organisations, this means there are likely to be demands for help across all age profiles but those supporting families and younger children may face higher than average demand.

Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,770 people per square kilometre. This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country (434 per square kilometre). This is a reflection that we are an urban district, with many characteristics of a metropolitan borough. In comparison with many metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, our density is relatively low.

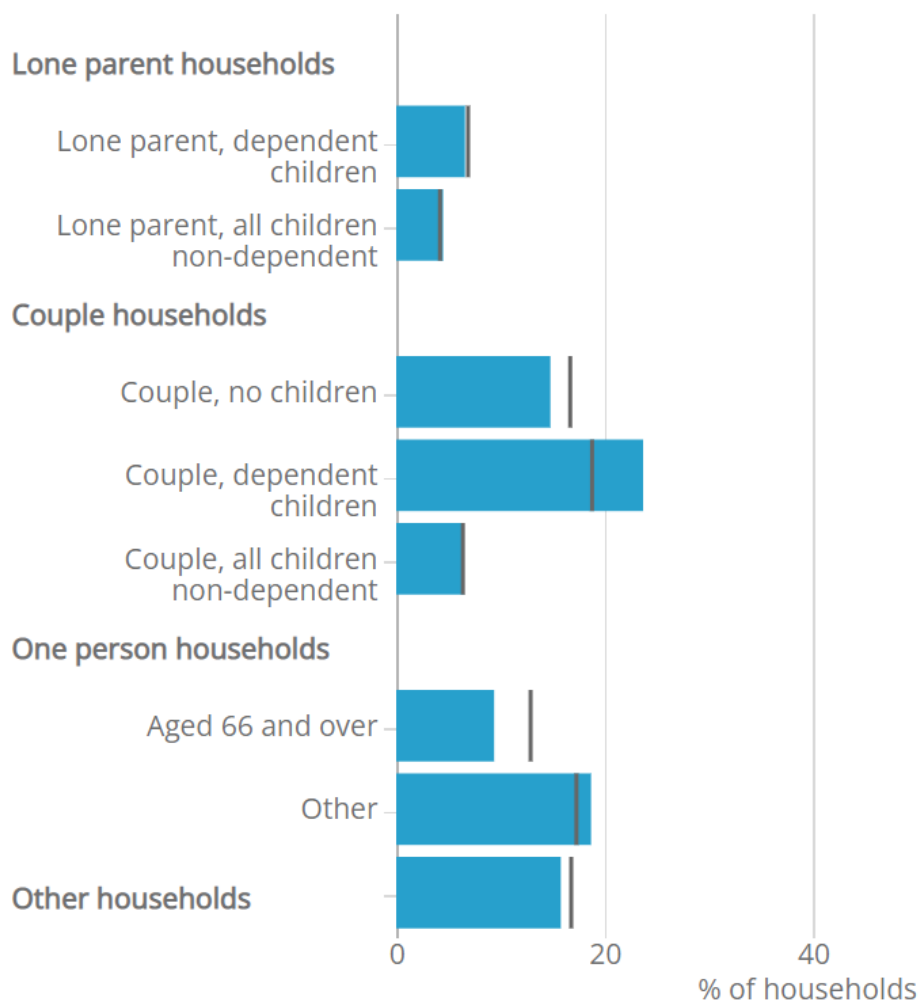
Households

Number of households

The ONS data, based on the census, says that there were 39,628 households in Watford at the time of the Census. The average household size in Watford is currently 2.57. This is slightly higher than the national average of 2.45 and is in line with the Census 2021 household composition data below.

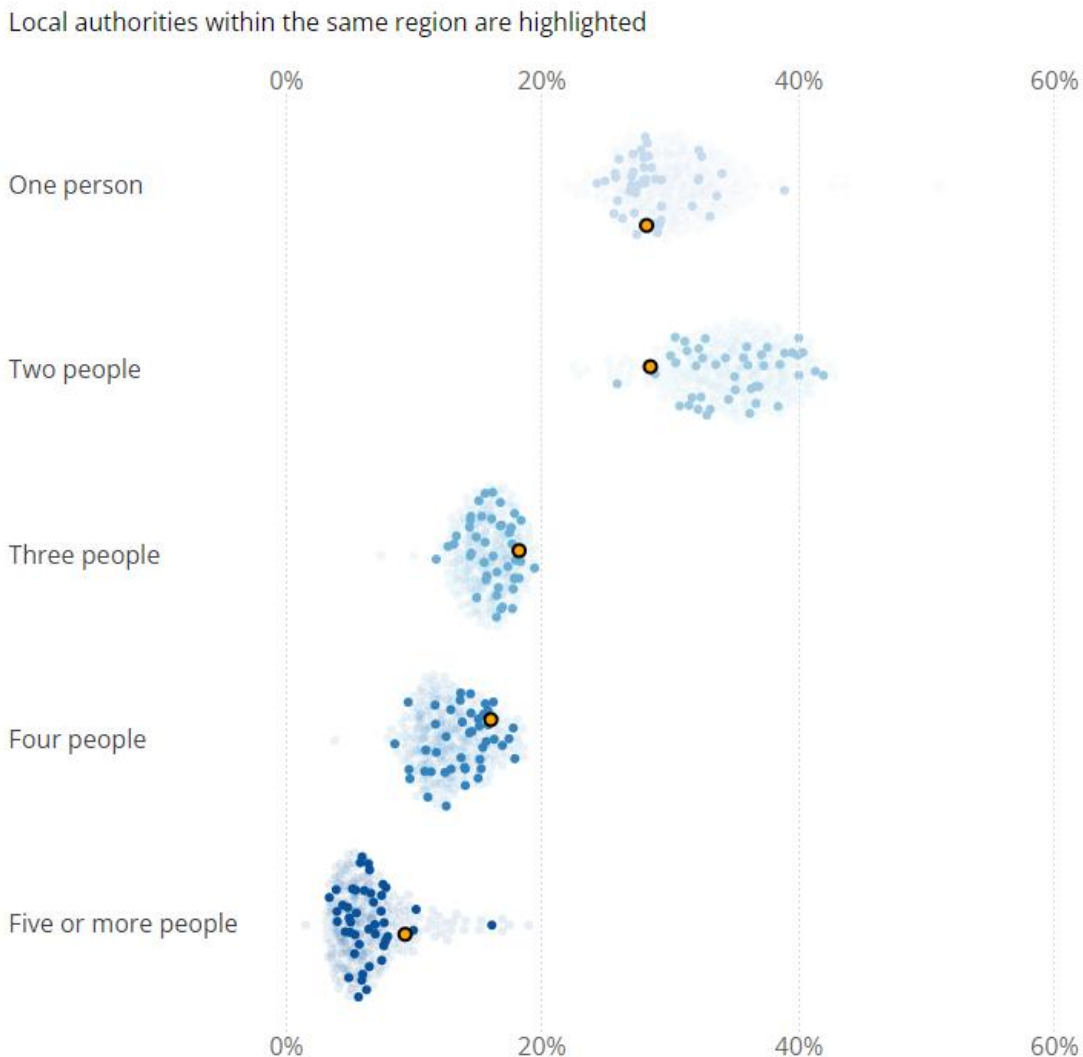
Household Composition

The chart below sets out the composition of Watford households in the Census 2021, with Watford's percentage shown in the blue bars compared to the England and Wales percentages shown by the vertical black bar. Watford has a higher percentage of both households with couples with no children and households with dependent children than England and Wales. As a town with a relatively young population it has fewer one person households with residents aged 66 and over.



The second chart on household composition shows that Watford has higher than England and Wales average for larger sized households – 3 or more people. Again this reflects that Watford is a 'family

town' with different generations living together in one household.



Language spoken at home:

Below is the data collected in Census 2021 with regard to household language. This is another indication that Watford benefits from groups and organisations set up to support those who may have arrived in the town more recently.

	Number	Percentage
All adults in household have English as a main language	30443	76.8%
At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language	3486	8.8%
No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language	1438	3.6%
No people in household have English in England as a main language	4261	10.8%

Main Language

The Census asked people their main language, with over 90 choices. Whilst English was significantly

the most chosen language with nearly 80,000 residents citing English as their main language, there are a substantial number of residents with other main languages. The top ten after English are below (see Appendix 1 for the full list of languages).

Language	Number
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435

Disability/Health

Watford has a lower percentage of residents with a disability (15% than England overall (17.7%). A higher percentage of people in Watford also declared they were in good health (48.2%) compared to England overall (47.5%). .

Sexual orientation and gender reassignment

Census 2021 included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time. 2.7% of those who selected to answer the sexual orientation question identified as LGB+ orientation (“Gay or Lesbian”, “Bisexual” or “Other sexual orientation”). 0.31% of those who selected to answer the gender identity question answered ‘no’ to whether their gender identity is the same as their sex registered at birth.

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire; it is one of the strengths of our town and what makes us such a vibrant and diverse place to be. This diversity is an opportunity for our voluntary and community sector in terms of how they respond to the various needs of the Watford community and how they reach out to engage and include people in what they do.

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
		102,245 TOTAL
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	61.9% (55,875)	46.0% (46,820)
White Irish	2.3% (2,063)	2.1% (2,149)
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1% (61)	0.1% (80)
White: Roma	Not a category in 2011	0.3% (343)
White: Other White	7.7% (6,947)	12.6% (12,836)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	1.1% (990)	1.3% (1,300)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.5% (412)	0.7% (692)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.0% (939)	1.4% (1,408)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8% (763)	1.4% (1,444)
Asian/Asian British/ Asian Welsh: Indian	5.5% (4,923)	9.7% (9,954)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Pakistani	6.7% (6,082)	8.0% (8,197)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	0.4% (362)	0.5% (493)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Chinese	0.9%	1.0%

	(822)	(1,024)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Other Asian	4.4%	5.3%
	(3,981)	(5,369)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	3.5%	3.9%
	(3,142)	(3,954)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1.7%	1.7%
	(1,558)	(1,733)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	0.6%	0.8%
	(529)	(801)
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.3%	0.7%
	(294)	(763)
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	0.6%	2.8%
	(558)	(2,885)

Religion or belief

Religious groups in Watford, 2021 census:

- Christian - 45,447 people or 44.6%
- Buddhist - 1,021 people or 0.85%
- Hindu - 8,398 people or 8.2%
- Jewish - 944 people or 0.93%
- Muslim - 13,262 people or 11.0%
- Sikh - 664 people or 0.6%
- Other - 859 people or 0.71%
- No religion – 25,340 people or 24.8%

6,311 people did not answer this question

Gender

The 2021 census did not allow for any option other than female or male.

FEMALE	50.8%
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MALE	49.2%
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Marriage and Civil Partnership

For census 2021, this has been updated to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	30,974
Married: Opposite sex	38,023
Married: Same sex	192
In a registered civil partnership: Opposite sex	85
In a registered civil partnership: Same sex	60
Separated, but still married	1,744
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	7
Divorced	6,074
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	18
Widowed	3,782
Surviving partner from civil partnership	5

5. How will the council ensure equality is promoted through the strategy

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the strategy:

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

A. Positive impacts

The potential positive effects of the strategy can have significant benefit to residents and the VCS across the borough and the positive impacts are set out in line with the four themes.

The first positive impact is that the strategy will deliver better engagement with Watford's community, allowing the unheard or underrepresented voices to emerge and take a stronger role in providing feedback, input and driving the strategic direction of the council's work.

The second positive impact is that the strategy will deliver better participation, seeing participation from a broader, more diverse range of organisations across the VCS. This translates to better representation of Watford's communities.

The third positive impact is that the council will better communicate feedback resulting from consultation exercises and updates on projects that have been consulted on, meaning that residents and the VCS will be better informed and therefore better able to collaborate with and benefit from the work of the council.

The fourth positive impact is that the community will be better enabled, with the council facilitating and connecting members of the VCS so that they can flourish. Organisations will be better able to collaborate and able to share resources, supporting one another as well as their service users.

Overall, the strategy by opening up opportunities for the community to engage and network will foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not.

B. Negative impacts

The following negative impacts have been considered during the course of this analysis.

If the strategy were not to be taken forward, there is a risk that some organisations and communities would be unable to participate as they would not be aware of or engaged with consultations

If the strategy were not implemented effectively, there is a risk that a section of the community would not be engaged, meaning that new or underrepresented voices would not be heard.

6. Overall conclusion

Through comprehensive consultation through the development of this strategy, detailed consideration has been given to its implications and impacts and it is felt that the positive benefits of implementing this strategy outweigh the negative impacts, which will be mitigated for under the delivery plan.

This EIA has been approved by: Kathryn Robson

Date: 15th September 2023

Appendix 1

Full details of main languages spoken in Watford

Language	Number of residents
English (English or Welsh in Wales)	79,640
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435
Spanish	432
East Asian language: Tagalog or Filipino	411
Arabic	390
South Asian language: Panjabi	380
South Asian language: Telugu	350
South Asian language: Hindi	343
South Asian language: Nepalese	310
West or Central Asian language: Persian or Farsi	270
South Asian language: Sinhala	268
Other European language (non EU): Albanian	260
French	244
South Asian language: Any other South Asian language	228
African language: Akan	224
Other European language (EU): Greek	223
Russian	199
Turkish	195
East Asian language: All other Chinese	170
South Asian language: Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	158
Other European language (EU): Lithuanian	156
East Asian language: Cantonese Chinese	136
Other European language (EU and non-EU): Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin	116
West or Central Asian language: Pashto	96
Other European language (EU): Czech	89
South Asian language: Marathi	78
Other European language (EU): Slovak	77
African language: Any other African language	58
Other European language (EU): German	54
African language: Any other West African language	54
East Asian language: Japanese	53
East Asian language: Mandarin Chinese	49
African language: Shona	48

South Asian language: Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari)	46
African language: Somali	46
Sign language: British Sign Language	45
Other European language (non EU): Ukrainian	44
East Asian language: Any other East Asian language	38
Other European language (EU): Latvian	34
Other European language (EU): Dutch	34
East Asian language: Thai	33
East Asian language: Korean	31
East Asian language: Vietnamese	28
African language: Igbo	26
African language: Afrikaans	25
West or Central Asian language: Kurdish	24
Other European language (EU): Swedish	21
Other European language (EU): Any other European language (EU)	21
African language: Swahili or Kiswahili	19
Other UK language: Romany English	17
West or Central Asian language: Any other West or Central Asian language	15
East Asian language: Malay	13
African language: Yoruba	12
African language: Tigrinya	10
Other European language (EU): Danish	9
West or Central Asian language: Hebrew	9
Other European language (EU): Estonian	8
Welsh or Cymraeg (in England only)	7
Caribbean Creole: Any other Caribbean Creole	7
African language: Amharic	7
Sign language: Any sign communication system	7
Other European language (EU): Slovenian	5
Other European language (EU): Finnish	4
African language: Any other Nigerian language	4
Other European language (non EU): Northern European language (non EU)	3
African language: Krio	3
African language: Lingala	3
Sign language: Any other sign language	3
Other UK language: Gaelic (Irish)	2
Other European language (EU): Maltese	2
African language: Luganda	2
Other European language (non EU): Any other Eastern European language (non EU)	1
Oceanic or Australian language	1
Caribbean Creole: English-based Caribbean Creole	1
Other UK language: Gaelic (Scottish)	0
Other UK language: Manx Gaelic	0
Other UK language: Gaelic (Not otherwise specified)	0
Other UK language: Cornish	0

Other UK language: Scots	0
Other UK language: Ulster Scots	0
Other UK language: Irish Traveller Cant	0
Other European language (non-national): Any Romani language	0
Other European language (non-national): Yiddish	0
North or South American language	0
Does not apply	3,892

Feedback report – Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

Overview

The Community Engagement and Participation Strategy has been developed in alignment with, and shaped by, our understanding of the priorities and needs of the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Learning and listening

In order to develop the strategy, a comprehensive exercise was undertaken to understand and evaluate the key touchpoints with the community across the council, investigating the ways in which the organisation carries out a wide variety and range of engagement with the community. Within this, the council's relationship with the voluntary sector and role in community development was examined. A social consultancy was engaged to offer insight and advice on best practice and to support the review by undertaking a period of listening and discovery, hearing from a range of people individually and in groups, including the Elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community, other Cabinet Members and senior officers. Within this research, day to day feedback provided by organisations to service areas across the council was heard. A variety of approaches by other local authorities and recommendations from bodies such as the LGA were also reviewed.

Consultation on the draft Community Engagement and Participation Strategy took place during June-August 2023 and was open to the VCS across the borough. This included:

- an initial stage of detailed pre-engagement with partner organisations
- consultation involving an interactive presentation and discussion session
- an online survey that was open for a six week period.

Timeline

- Feedback session with W3RT – 1 June 2023
- Feedback session with Watford Community Housing Trust – 5 June 2023
- Feedback session with Citizens Advice Watford – 8 June 2023
- Feedback session with Home Start Watford -13 June 2023
- Feedback session with Pump House Theatre – 15 June 2023
- Presentation and interactive feedback session with 40 attendees at the council's Community Network Event – 19 June 2023
- Survey emailed to attendees of the Network Event
- Survey shared by the CVS on LinkedIn and in their newsletter
- Member briefing, including a request for the survey be shared with their networks
- Request to community centres to share with groups and organisations using the centres
- Survey emailed to groups and organisations in WBC contact lists
- Survey responses up to 22 August 2023

Participation

49 organisations participated in the consultation, representing charities, not for profits, sports clubs, community interest companies delivering across a wide range of areas in the borough.

A full list of participating organisations is detailed at Appendix 1.

Key areas

The areas in focus were:

1. The aims and ambition of the strategy
2. The strengths and challenges of Watford's VCS
3. Barriers to engagement
4. New ideas and opportunities

1. The aims and ambition of the strategy

The consultation found a very positive response to the strategy, with participants responding that the emerging strategy:

- Clearly aligns with their own objectives
- Conveys appropriate ambition
- Resonates with the feedback they have raised with the council, particularly around making connections within the VCS in Watford
- Sets out an excellent vision and ambition

2. The strengths and challenges of Watford's VCS

Strengths

- A consensus that Watford is well served, highlighting pride in the strength and culture of the local VCS
- Watford has a very positive and active local VCS, delivering a huge amount for Watford's community
- Organisations are generally very supportive of one another and there are good example of collaboration
- Councillors play a vital role in engaging at the local and neighbourhood level. As community leaders and community advocates, they can be the closest to the community voice, often acting as the first point of contact
- Existing initiatives deliver value, such as the council convened Cost of Living Forum and the CVS' Volunteer Fair
- There are exemplary relationships between the VCS and council
- Voting at the Community Network presentation particularly identified the following key strengths: collaboration, closely followed by partnership, passion, and knowledge

Challenges

- Accessing funding and recruiting volunteers were set out as the biggest challenges faced by organisations
- Collaboration, although found to be a strength, also came through as a challenge in that it can be difficult to juggle resource constraints with making and building upon connections
- Premises were also raised, with organisations seeking space but the cost of rent / leases a challenge

3. Barriers to engagement

- Time constraints and logistics make attending events a challenge
- Smaller organisations may find it more difficult to be part of the wider fabric of the local VCS – particularly when also delivering services in other areas with limited resources

- Some areas of the VCS may not be aware of help and connections that the council can facilitate – feedback suggested considering how to raise awareness of funding available, strategic initiatives involving the VCS, and other ways the council can support organisations
- Within the VCS, visibility of organisations was raised as a barrier to collaboration and networking, with suggestions for signposting or a directory

4. New ideas and opportunities

- The council to continue to facilitate and coordinate – helping the VCS to share resources, skill sets and focus on issues together
- Continue to deliver valuable forums like the Cost of Living Forum, which is well instigated and intended. Meetings like this are successful where there is a draw for organisations to attend, they have something in common
- Organisations requested a source of signposting or a directory to help understand the other organisations delivering across an area or needs, for example when trying to help a family in crisis
- Support with data, for example delivering packs of information such as the Census data
- That consistency of approach is key to reach hard to reach groups – build on connections made
- The VCS is often asked their opinion which is very positive, but make sure this is easy and accessible, and make it clear the value of sharing feedback
- Suggestions of creating a Watford VCS Festival (or Health & Wellbeing Day or other themed events) showcasing the great things that already happen
- Continue network event, share wins and barriers
- Continue to focus on and find ways to amplify voices of those less often heard with e.g. homeless

Direct feedback on the strategy

- Broaden the focus to include more on socio-economic context – opportunities and ambition for the residents and community of Watford, and the value of investing in residents so that they stay and become economic drivers in Watford – helping them to contribute to the economy of the town.
- Strengthen focus on collaboration and creating opportunities to network/collaborate with diverse range of conversation
- The wording ‘influence the decisions which affect them’ should be reconsidered – We should be enabling VCS to influence decisions that make maximum impact for residents, extending their impact rather than things that impact them as organisations. They are more ambitious than join in and contribute – they want to create positive change for people and individuals whether through influencing policy or direct work that they do.
- Add ‘safer’ to aspirational characteristics relating to the town

How this has shaped the strategy

The feedback received has helped us to shape the final strategy, ensuring that feedback is reflected in its aims and translates through into the themes and actions.

It has helped us to ensure that we fully understand the challenges, opportunities and strengths of the VCS and correctly reflect these in the strategy.

The clear alignment found during consultation underlined that we are taking the right steps in this approach, and we will continue to ensure that we hear and take action upon feedback raised.

Appendix 1

Our thanks to the following organisations for their engagement and participation in the consultation:

- Impactful governance
- W3RT
- Watford Womens Centre
- Herts Schools Outreach
- Citizens Advice Watford
- Veterans Support Group Abbots Langley
- Watford Muslim Youth Centre Trust
- Watford Jazz Junction
- Bobath Centre
- Rennie Grove Peace Hospice
- Home-Start
- Dan Tien
- Herts Inclusive Theatre
- Small acts of kindness
- Mediation Herts
- Ascend
- Church of Seventh-day Adventists/One Vision
- Random café
- Watford Blind Centre
- West Watford Community Association
- Building Heroes
- MCR pathways
- Raise - West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals Charity
- Chamber of Commerce
- Pump House Theatre and Arts Trust
- Ngorli
- Positive Bright Minds
- Mencap
- Cathartic
- Watford FC CSE Trust
- West Herts Sports Club
- Croquet Club
- Garston Ladies FC
- Watford Palace Theatre
- One YMCA
- West Herts ABC
- Imatter Health and Wellbeing Support CIC
- Herts Mind Network
- Watford Community Housing Trust
- Watford Table Tennis Club
- Watford Cycle Hub
- Watford Writers
- Watford FC Trust

- Shopmobility
- Watford Town centre Chaplaincy
- Mediation Hertfordshire
- Music24
- New Hope
- RefillAbell

Part A

Report to:	Cabinet
Date of meeting:	30 th October 2023
Report author:	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Lead
Portfolio holder:	Cllr Aga Dychton and Cllr Mark Watkin
Report title:	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
Nature of Report:	For Approval

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Watford Borough Council is committed to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. This Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (EDI) demonstrates the council's commitment and responsibility to our residents, community, workforce and sustainability. The council is strengthening its equalities, diversity, and inclusion agenda to demonstrate compliance with its legal duty, implement best practice and to work towards recruiting a workforce with a closer demographic to the communities we serve.
- 1.2 The equality objectives established within the Policy set out how we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to embed equal, diverse, and inclusive practices in all that we do to build on our existing progress and achievements to ensure excellence. The accompanying EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will steer the council's work on equality, diversity, and inclusion from 2023-2027.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval of the policy, which demonstrates how the council will comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010, as well as going beyond our legal duty and implementing best practice, creating a culture where diversity is celebrated and ensuring that Watford is an inclusive borough.
- 1.4 The policy also demonstrates the council's commitment to EDI as influential community leader, service provider and employer, making clear that the responsibility extends to anyone who represents or is commissioned by Watford Borough Council.
- 1.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of this policy. Conclusions found that the policy will have positive impacts on a wide range of the community and employees beyond

those defined under the Equality Act 2010 as having protected characteristics.

2.0 Why this Policy is Needed

2.1 The EDI Policy will strengthen the council's ability to meet the Equality Act 2010 which includes the Public Sector Equality Duty.

2.2 The EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will help the council make decisions and provide services fairly and promote equality and inclusion across its functions.

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That Cabinet approves the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives (Appendix A) that are established in the policy.

3.2 That Cabinet approves the Delivery Plan (Appendix B) that underpins the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy.

4.0 Report pathway

4.1 Next review body: *Not applicable:*

4.1.1 Indicative date: Not applicable

4.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*

Contact Officer:

For further info contact: Christella Menson, EDI Lead

Email: Christella.menson@watford.gov.uk

Reviewed and signed off by: Lee Pound

5.0 Detailed proposal

5.1 Watford Borough Council is committed to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. This Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy demonstrates the council's commitment and responsibility to our residents, community, workforce, and sustainability. The equality objectives established within the Policy set out how we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to embed equal, diverse, and inclusive practices in all that we do to build on our existing achievements to ensure excellence.

5.2 The Equality Act 2010 and The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 require public authorities to set and publish equality objectives at least every four years to demonstrate how they aim to eliminate discrimination and advance equality. The council's approach to equality and diversity underpins all its key plans and policies. The Policy

outlines the Watford Borough Council's priorities, interventions and aims for the next four years.

- 5.3 The Equality Act 2010 identifies the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. In addition, the council recognises other groups may also be considered vulnerable or disadvantaged, such as neurodiverse people, people with caring responsibilities, and war veterans.
- 5.4 The new EDI Policy Action Plan is designed to integrate equalities into all the Council Plan themes. The delivery plan will be a live document, with lead officers updating their areas and adding actions over the year.
- 5.5 This policy will be reviewed every four years; however, reviews will be steered by any new guidance or legislation that may be produced before the next review date.

5.6 Strategic Context

- 5.6.1 We will continue to promote Watford as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued. The Council Plan and Delivery Plan commit to developing an Equality and Diversity policy for Watford, making sure it reflects our diverse town and our commitment to being a place where everyone can thrive.
- 5.6.2 The council's ambition is to be recognised as the leading local authority for achieving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for our residents and our organisation.
- 5.6.3 The vision of the EDI Policy therefore aims to have a significant impact on all future work on equalities underpinned by data and insight, also recognising that climate justice and sustainability are key aspects of this vision.
- 5.6.4 The policy is developed through strong relationships with colleagues, partners, and inclusive employer forums.

5.7 EDI Policy Vision and Objectives

- 5.7.1 Watford Borough Council's aims are established under three core themes:
1. Our role as community leader
 2. Delivering Services
 3. Our workforce

Each theme is underpinned by focused objectives that detail what the council will do to advance equality and how we aim to achieve them.

These equality objectives build on our current commitments and achievements, and take the council's aspirations even further to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the needs of those with protected characteristics
- Embed this understanding into every level of decision-making and practice
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership, and clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality, diversity and inclusion
- Reach out through community engagement and conversations to give everyone an opportunity to participate and influence decisions taken by the council
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to the diverse needs of Watford's communities, partnerships, businesses and workforce

5.7.2 The EDI Delivery Plan reinforces the council's commitment to actions to ensure continuous improvement through clear actions that are designed to meet the current needs of the borough and builds in resilience to recognise future issues that may arise.

5.7.3 This approach enables linkages between the EDI Policy and other council policies and strategies to be understood and embedded at all levels of the organisation. In line with the approach of new and emerging policies and strategies, explicit links are set out on the concluding page of the EDI Policy.

5.8 Consultation and Engagement:

5.8.1 Prior to formal consultation, the draft policy was subject to pre-engagement to ensure that it was developed in collaboration and consultation with other key stakeholders, including Watford Borough Council Corporate Management Team, Service Delivery Leads, Union Representatives, Staff Engagement Groups, and Watford Football Club as a key partner of the organisation. The findings and recommendations were used to adapt the draft policy and delivery plan further.

5.8.2 Consultation on the draft policy was undertaken over a period of 8 weeks with all council employees and Elected Members, and community partners and organisations including CAB and Veolia.

5.8.3 Overall, the feedback was very positive with high levels of agreement for the vision. The policy has been reviewed and updated taking into consideration the consultation responses to deliver this final version of the EDI Policy. Consultation responses informed the following changes.

5.9 Key findings from the consultation and resulting actions:

5.9.1 EDI Policy Vision – some of the consultation responses asked for clearer clarification on the responsibilities, actions, and deadlines in the delivery plan.

- The council's strategic partners have also been referenced more and the policy has been updated to make it clearer that this is a policy that will be delivered in partnership with other agencies who we expect to share our values.
- The vision has been updated to make clearer the actions to be achieved in service areas and the associated deadlines.
- Emphasis has been added in the Delivery Plan to partnership working in particular with further reference on the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors (VCFS).
- To help address some concerns around a lack of clarity on how we will achieve these aims, and how success of the approach will be measured, more detail has been included on the EDI Policy's approach and what we are doing to achieve the aims set out within the policy.

5.9.2 Delivery Plan – some respondents wanted to see more actions around anti-racism campaigns, LGBTQ+, reaching out to communities and making information accessible.

There were also a few comments within the different consultation strands that the vision should state how the council will deal with structural inequalities; however, after careful consideration it was felt there is sufficient emphasis on this.

The Delivery Plan is an organic document and will be updated over the life of the policy to ensure it includes more action covering these areas. The Delivery Plan has been updated to account for strong relationships with our existing workforce, third sector equality groups and forums to help us map all areas of inequalities faced by all our communities and to also gather quantitative data to tackle inequality.

6.0 Monitoring and Performance

6.1 Progress on the actions will be monitored by HR&OD, the Corporate Equalities Working Group and reported up to Corporate Management

Board, Cabinet, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee through the organisation's established Performance Improvement channels.

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial

7.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the proposals are within current budget. Any individual actions requiring additional funding will be brought forward as part of the normal budget process.

7.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

7.2.1 Adoption of the EDI Policy and Delivery Plan will strengthen the council's ability to meet its legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010.

7.3 Risks

The setting and publication of Equality Objectives will ensure that the council is not in breach of its statutory duty and that mitigation is not required.

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
That Cabinet decline to approve the EDI Policy and Delivery Plan	The council will be without an EDI policy and fail to meet its commitment in the Council/Delivery plan to develop an EDI Policy	The EDI Policy provides clarity on the vision and required actions to bring the Delivery Plan to fruition. Some complex work has been carried out considering an approach that fits with the culture and ambitions of the organisation; the finalised proposal demonstrates the council's commitment to deliver a wide-ranging programme of work establishes EDI as everyone's responsibility and throughout all that we do.	Treat	2

<p>The council fails to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010</p>	<p>Lack of consistent council-wide knowledge on the Public Sector Equality Duty and how to take equalities into consideration</p>	<p>HR&OD together with EDI Lead have already taken steps to meet the range of training needs. The Delivery Plan commits to compile a suite of resources as a toolkit that will support service areas to develop and implement robust service plans that embed EDI.</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>We may not achieve parity of focus and priority for all with protected characteristics due to limitations of data, knowledge, and resources</p>	<p>Engagement is compliance-driven rather than insight based on good analysis</p>	<p>Additionally, the role of Service Delivery Leads includes the responsibility to identify and address EDI within their respective areas: identifying resource, priorities, and action plans.</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Actions of the delivery plan are not fulfilled or kept in line with the EDI landscape</p>	<p>The council fails to deliver on its vision and commitments in the policy</p>	<p>Progress will be monitored against actions in the delivery plan. At the end of the life of the policy a self-assessment can be undertaken against the Local Government Equality Framework</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The policy sets out aspirations that are not achievable</p>	<p>Our aspirations are not achieved, and positive impacts are imperceptible</p>	<p>Commitment has been sought at Corporate Leadership Board, and from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, to ensure ownership and leadership at the senior level. Included in the policy is the revival of the Corporate Equality Working Group to ensure</p>	<p>Treat</p>	<p>2</p>

		the Delivery Plan is driven forward.		
Residents and community fail to embrace the aims of the policy	Our aspirations are not achieved which could result in the opportunity for EDI progress and benefits is missed or delayed	Strategic links across service areas place stakeholders at the core of the ambitions of the EDI and other policies. Eg. Customer Experience, Comms and Conversations, and Community Engagement.	Treat	3
Employees view the policy as box-ticking	Poor decisions are likely to be made without a challenge to the status quo	Targeted training will include leadership training for colleagues with line management/supervisory roles so that employees can be supported to meet their EDI responsibilities.	Treat	2
Service areas may focus on what they consider their core business and consider EDI as less relevant.	Inconsistent ownership and accountability of the policy across service areas.	Each service area will be required to produce an equality work plan and held accountable for it.	Treat	2
	Competing demands within services	The Delivery Plan sets clear timescales for actions to be delivered or updates on progress through periodic reports	Treat	2
Employees consider the policy as unnecessary	Some employees do not grasp the importance and purpose of the policy	The Delivery Plan includes actions to identify where challenges lie within service areas to focus on those and ensure high standards are met across the organisation. A phased approach underpinned by training options will support employees with	Treat	3

		developing and delivering priorities.		
	Fail to play a role to reduce the likelihood of people developing prejudices now or in later life which in turn helps in creating a more welcoming and diverse society	Consultation feedback is overwhelming positive and reflects an appetite among employees to improve their learning to deliver better quality of services and to express and learn about lived experiences to aid their understanding on EDI matters.	Treat	3
Residents and the community experience no difference and perceive the policy as ineffective	Damage to the council's reputation and criticism of policy lacking impact for residents and the community	The Delivery Plan sets actions to develop and deliver EQIA training as well as embedding other equalities related training into Learning Development offers. Implementation of Delivery Plan will produce visible and tangible outcomes with positive impacts for residents and the community	Treat	2

7.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

7.4.1 Equalities

7.4.1.1 As this is a new policy an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as Appendix C to this report. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken which indicates that the Policy and Delivery Plan will have positive impacts for all protected groups.

7.4.1.2 The legal requirements of the 2010 Equality Act outlined above describe the requirement for public bodies to pay due regard to equalities.

7.4.2 Human Rights

7.4.2.1 The 2010 Equality Act created a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The characteristics protected by the 2010 Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act is therefore of pertinence to the Human Rights of freedom of thought, belief and religion; freedom of expression; the right to marry; and protection from discrimination.

7.4.3 Data Protection Impact Assessment

7.4.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

7.5 Sustainability

7.5.1 Equality, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability interact, and this policy can enable better understanding of the relationship between the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and factors that can produce inequalities, especially of health and wealth. In turn, these can have associations with differential environmental impacts and the carbon footprints of individuals.

7.5.2 Climate justice is a key part of equity and inclusion, as the most disadvantaged who are the most impacted or likely to be impacted by the ongoing climate emergency. Actions in the Delivery Plan should therefore aim to ensure that inequality and environmental issues are not considered in isolation, and that growth is fair, green, and sustainable.

7.6 People Implications

7.6.1 HR&OD has a direct link into EDI. Equal, diverse and inclusive workplaces benefits employees and organisations, with positive impacts on recruitment and retention. The EDI policy can help to create a workplace culture that values and respects all employees regardless of the characteristics or abilities.

7.6.2 The HR&OD agenda will be focused on educating our workforce, creating safe spaces for employees, and building EDI into the overall development of our people.

7.6.3 HR&OD will be responsible for overseeing the delivery plan, ensuring that the council creates an environment where employees feel safe and empowered to discuss EDI issues free from worry.

7.6.4 Resourcing to implement the actions in the delivery plan will be drawn from existing approved budgets.

7.7 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

7.7.1 The policy provides a framework for services, decisions, and work to enable the organisation to meet its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Additionally, to fulfil its commitment that Watford is a place where people feel safe and everyone in our diverse borough feels that they are treated fairly and included.

7.8 Property

7.8.1 This policy has no direct property implications; however, Watford Borough Council must ensure that any property used for council, and third party purposes are appropriate for the expected users. As such, property may require adaptations and give due regard to the suitability of property, particularly for potential users and occupiers with protected characteristics.

8.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

8.1 Should Cabinet approve the recommendations in this report, the Equalities, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy will be formally published and adopted.

8.2 The Delivery Plan will become a live document, with Service Delivery Leads updating their service areas and adding actions over the year. Progress will be reported to the Corporate Equalities Working Group and updated shared for recording by the corporate management channels including Performance Improvement Management for reporting to Overview and Scrutiny.

9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix A – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy 2023-2027
Appendix B – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Delivery Plan 2023- 2027
Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

10.0 Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.



Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Foreword

Today, more than ever, the importance of a firm and unwavering commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is undeniable. There are those who seek to bring division globally, nationally, and locally, focusing on what divides, not unites, us. For Watford, this is not our way or who we are. We recognise the strength that comes from our diversity. Our approach to EDI is not just about compliance but recognising the richness that different perspectives bring to what we do and ensuring that we are genuinely inclusive. We are proud to celebrate what makes each of us special and appreciate the role everyone plays in our town and council.

We are fully committed to placing EDI at the forefront of everything we do, from our role as an employer, across the services we deliver and, vitally, in our role as community leader, where we can lead by example and inspire others. It sets the standard for how we treat each other, our partners, and the community we serve. It reflects our dedication to creating an environment where everyone, irrespective of their background, identity, or circumstance, can thrive, feel valued, and contribute to the best of their abilities.

Having a robust EDI policy ensures we are responsive to the varied needs of our diverse population and by promoting an inclusive environment, we can harness the full potential of our staff and community, ensuring Watford benefits from a broader range of skills, experiences, and ideas. We believe our dedication to EDI strengthens public trust, enhancing our reputation as a progressive, fair, and responsible council.

We invite you to embark on this journey with us, as we strive to create a Watford where everyone feels a sense of belonging, where opportunities are accessible to all, and where the vibrancy of our diversity shines through. Together, we can build a brighter, more equitable, and inclusive future for Watford.

Councillor Aga Dychton
Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community

Councillor Mark Watkin
Portfolio Holder for Resources

Introduction

Watford Borough Council is an ambitious organisation that is committed to championing equality and embracing diversity in everything we do. We see this commitment as going beyond our statutory duty so that we understand the community we serve and are working with them, to make sure everyone in Watford feels part of our town and can access and enjoy all that it has to offer.

When we talk about equality, diversity, and inclusion in Watford, we mean treating people fairly, impartially and without bias. We are creating conditions in the workplace and our community which encourage and value diversity and promote dignity and inclusion.

Equality does not mean treating everyone the same; it takes account that people, whilst similar in many ways, are also different. Therefore, equality means treating people as individuals and recognising their different needs.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion make a vital contribution to our aspirations for the town and our community. In Watford, we want everyone to feel welcome, accepted, valued, respected, and included to strengthen our unity, sense of belonging and mutual trust. This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy will guide our efforts to:

- Understand and celebrate the diversity of our communities so that everyone feels welcomed, respected and accepted in Watford.
- Deliver accessible, inclusive, and responsive services to our community.
- Employ a workforce that reflects and embraces the diversity of Watford's population.
- Ensure we address the climate and ecological emergency effects in our community in an equitable and just way.

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is guided by three key pillars:

- Our Role as Community Leader
- Our Workforce
- Delivering Services

Meeting our statutory requirements

Watford Borough Council aims to demonstrate excellence in equality and diversity issues across all areas of policy and practice. In addition to meeting the legal requirements and responsibilities as a public body, we seek to always fulfil our public duty in ways that are:

- accessible
- inclusive
- responsive
- fair

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. Everyone has at least one of the protected characteristics, so the Act protects everyone. The Act defines the protected characteristics as:

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

The Equality Act 2010 also includes the Public Sector Equality Duty, which aims to ensure that all public bodies have ‘due regard’ to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and any other prohibited conduct.
- 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.

Having due regard involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Fostering good relations involves:

- Tackling discrimination, and
- Promoting understanding between different groups of people.

Watford Borough Council is committed to championing equality and embracing diversity and inclusion beyond just complying with our statutory duty in the Equality Act. The Act also requires councils to annually publish relevant, proportionate, information to demonstrate its compliance with the Equality Duty and to publish its equalities objectives at least every four years.

To comply with the Equality Duty, we may treat people with protected characteristics differently in order to treat them fairly and ensure that discrimination does not occur. As both a service provider and an employer, we recognise that the specific requirements for equality, diversity and inclusion in Watford can change. Therefore, community engagement helps us to continue to meet the changing needs and demographic of our residents, visitors, employees, and businesses. As an employer of choice, we ensure that mutual respect is embedded into the culture of the organisation through a suite of policies that include Employee Code of Conduct, Safeguarding, Bullying and our Behavioural Framework.

Our approach to equality, diversity & inclusion

- **Equality** is treating everybody equally and fairly, regardless of their personal characteristics, such as their ethnicity or sexuality. It is also ensuring that everybody has equal opportunity.
- **Diversity** is recognising and celebrating the difference between people and communities. A welcoming borough celebrates its wide range of cultures. A diverse workplace welcomes the variety of ideas, innovations, and representativeness that diversity brings.
- **Inclusion** is creating an environment that actively includes, welcomes, and values everybody, regardless of their background. This policy represents our ambition to become more proactive in our inclusion, reaching into communities, meeting people where they are, and attracting the best talent to our inclusive workplace.

Watford Borough Council is a borough that is full of potential. We have a richly diverse and growing population; an emerging and strengthening business sector; an ambitious regeneration and housebuilding programme; and an attractive natural environment. Exciting prospects lie ahead for the borough, and it is essential that Watford's growth and development aims to support disadvantaged residents in order to reduce inequality gaps and increase community engagement.

Our Council Plan 2022-26 has identified equality, diversity, and inclusion as a key area for action to create a diverse, happy and healthy town and to listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.

The Delivery Plan 2022-24 expands this to deliver our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy so it underpins what we do and how we engage with our community; making sure it reflects our cosmopolitan town where everyone can thrive. This is important because knowledge and discovery help us to understand what matters to Watford's community.

Everyone who works for the council has a part to play in our vision to provide a lifetime of opportunities for all. Equality, diversity, and inclusion lies at the heart of everything we do as we embark on ambitious regeneration and commercial projects, grow our business sector, and attract new industries into the borough, provide vital services for our communities, and ensure that we adapt and mitigate against climate change impacts.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to publish equalities objectives every four years. We have established our equalities objectives through three key themes: –

- Our role as community leader
- Delivering services
- Our workforce

Our role as community leader

We are committed to building on our reputation as an organisation that is inclusive, provides relevant and accessible services, and recognises the value of every individual. We also realise the importance of encouraging a sense of belonging, to a place, organisation, and community and we will work together with faith, voluntary and community sectors as key partners for us on this journey. Our values and behaviours aim to reinforce this commitment through informal and formal working practices that promote mutual respect and co-operation.

We are developing a Borough Profile based on data from the Census 2021 to help us to understand who lives in Watford because it is important that we understand the varied needs of our diverse community. We also recognise that it is important to ensure all residents feel welcomed, valued, and can contribute to the attractiveness of Watford.

As community leader our objectives are to:

- Work with our partners to implement the Council Plan, which seeks to improve the social, economic and environment aspects of the borough.
- Lead by example by modelling good practices of equality, diversity and inclusion as a service provider, commissioner and employer.
- Maintain good relations between communities through our communications and promote cultural diversity.
- Celebrate the inclusiveness of our borough, making Watford an accessible and safe borough for all.

Delivering services

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are also central to the decisions we make on how to deliver the best outcomes for our communities at a time of considerable financial challenge for the council. We will continue to use our limited resources efficiently, and our workforce will continue to maintain high standards in service delivery to support all residents in the most effective and efficient way possible.

As a further part of this commitment, we undertake equality impact assessments (EIAs) of policies and functions which impact on employees and/or external contacts or the wider community. These impact assessments are a means of promoting equality and good relations, supporting inclusion, whilst

also ensuring that we carefully consider the different needs of those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The assessments contribute to the social value we seek to deliver by raising awareness and understanding, and by promoting equality through the work we do.

As a service provider our objectives are to:

- Deliver services that are accessible to all and that are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of our community.
- Demonstrate behaviours in line with the Employee Code of Conduct. Employees are expected to promote equality by not discriminating against anyone and by treating members of the public, colleagues, and elected members with respect.
- Engage with all groups in our community when making decisions about our services; and purposeful engagement with those groups where involvement is low.
- Consistently collect and monitor relevant equalities data from our service users so that we can understand how effective our services are at reaching and improving outcomes for our diverse communities. This helps us to understand the needs of our different residents and design policies and services to meet those needs.
- Embed the EIA process more thoroughly to support effective decision-making.
- Ensure that commissioning and procurement arrangements comply with equalities standards and add social value to the borough.

Our workforce

At Watford Borough Council we consider equality issues alongside other factors when making decisions as an employer of choice. We are committed to ensuring that we have effective policies, strategies, procedures, and processes and that we encourage behaviour which promotes equality, encourages diversity, and contributes to an inclusive organisational culture. Our Workforce Monitoring Report provides an analysis of council employees in relation to the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.

We recognise that the talent and commitment of our employees is key to delivering high-quality services, so we want our workforce to benefit from development opportunities and feel empowered to direct their own progress and to achieve even more.

As an employer our objectives are to:

- Provide appropriate and on-going equality training and support to enable employees and councillors to manage and/or work within a diverse workforce.

- Increase equalities disclosure on recruitment and workforce monitoring information to support our aim for a diverse workforce, reflecting our community.
- Raise the profile of our Staff Ambassador, Mental Health, Career Coaches, and Wellbeing groups and support their work.
- Promote a working environment that promotes dignity and respect where individual differences, and the contributions are recognised and valued.
- Demonstrate zero tolerance of any unfair and unacceptable treatment in the workplace, and to discipline those that breach this policy.

Our Human Resources and Organisational Development Team will promote fairness in the workplace and ensure that all employees are informed of this policy, and of their obligation to comply with its requirements.

How We Will Deliver

A delivery plan underpins this policy to ensure that we meet our objectives and monitor our progress. Strategic accountability for the delivery plan will be through the Corporate Equalities Working Group (CEWG). This group consists of senior leaders from the council, representatives from employee networks and EDI Champions with collective breadth of experience or insight to represent as many of the protected characteristics as possible. Oversight by the CEWG enables us to keep this policy under review, monitor and evaluate Watford Borough Council's progress on our equality journey and identify any improvement opportunities.

Operationally the delivery plan will be driven by project leads/responsible officers who will have responsibility for individual actions. This could either be led from within individual services or leads of task and finish groups that are likely to be established to deliver specific pieces of work. Engagement and feedback from Staff Ambassador Group, employee engagement sessions, and employee training workshops may play a key role in the implementing the actions in the delivery plan. Risks, delivery, and reporting will be monitored through the council's internal governance arrangements including updates to the Corporate Management Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy links to other council strategies

Our commitment to EDI is demonstrated across the full range of our services, and strategic links including:

Council Plan 2022-2026

People Strategy

Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

Domestic Abuse Policy

Values and Behaviour Framework

Environment Strategy

Housing Strategy and Housing Nomination Policy

Local Plan 2021-2038

Customer Experience Strategy

Communications and Conversations Strategy

Safeguarding Policy

Employee Code of Conduct

Workforce Monitoring Report

Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-27 Delivery Plan

Our Role as Community Leaders			
What we will do	How	Responsibility	Deliver and/or Progress Report By
Work with our partners to implement the Council Plan, which seeks to improve the social and economic environment of the borough.	Deliver accessible and inclusive policies and services that meet the diverse needs of communities	All Service Areas	At next review date for each policy/strategy and quarterly thereafter
	Work closely with the police, support agencies, voluntary groups, faith groups and wider partners to signpost those who need their support, e.g. Watford Community Network, Community Safety Partnership	Community Partnerships & Safety	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Use our influence to encourage other employers and service providers in the borough to comply with our standards for equality, diversity and inclusion, including through our Watford Business Charter	All Service Areas	On-going
	We will engage across our health partners to make sure the health and wellbeing needs of Watford are represented in new health structures and commissioning of services	HR &OD	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Demonstrate leadership in supporting communities, linking to One Watford Place Board	Community Partnerships Safeguarding	June 2024 and on-going

	Work with our partners including through the One Watford Place Board on emerging and future areas that impact our town and community, such as Ageing Better and in response to health inequalities	Planning Strategy & Infrastructure Community Partnerships	June 2024 and on-going
	We will work with our partners, volunteers, community groups and businesses to support residents who do not have access to technology, choose not to do so or do not currently have the skills to use IT so that they have the same opportunities as others in our town	Customer Experience ICT	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Clearly define the role of our Elected Members to promote equality, diversity and inclusion as part of their responsibilities to the community, including compulsory training and reestablishing the role an EDI Champion for Members	HR &OD	January 2024
What we will do	How		Deliver and/or Progress Report By
Engage closely with Watford's diverse communities	Develop a Borough Profile so we know the characteristics of the residents of Watford's richly diverse community	EDI Lead	December 2023
	Listen to, and learn from, Watford's diverse community using the Watford People's Panel	All Service Areas	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Support our Community Engagement and Participation Strategy to actively reach and secure input from our communities in the borough so that	All Service Areas	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter

	everyone has the opportunity to influence our decision-making, service planning and service delivery		
	Encourage people from protected groups to get involved in our town and recognise their voices and contribution to help shape our services	Community Engagement & Partnerships	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Work with partners to support and promote festivals and events celebrating diversity	Culture & Events Arts Development & Events	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
What we will do	How		Deliver and/or Progress Report By
Lead by example by modelling good practices of equality, diversity and inclusion as a service provider, commissioner, and employer.	Develop communication messages and campaigns to celebrate diversity and promote respect and inclusive	Communications & Conversations	December 2023
	Ensure that EDI is a core part of service planning processes and initiatives	Service Delivery Leads	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Encourage partners to promote their events in our cultural calendar that celebrates diversity and inclusive events	Community Engagement & Partnerships	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Review and refresh the Equality Impact Assessment template and develop supporting guidance	EDI Lead	December 2023
	Develop the Watford Wheel sustainability tool to include a set of social indicators that can be measured as part of Equality Impact Assessments	Sustainability Lead	March 2023

	Make training available on how to assess sustainability using the Watford Wheel, and how to ensure decisions and practices are adapted and mitigated against climate change impacts.	Sustainability Lead	July 2023
	Consider developing, consulting on, and delivering a BAME definition that embraces the diversity of Watford's community	EDI Lead	December 2023
Our Workforce			
What we will do	How		Deliver and/or Progress Report By
Provide appropriate and on-going equality training and support to enable staff and councillors to manage and/or work within a diverse workforce	Provide all staff and councillors with appropriate and on-going equality training and compile a suite of resources as a toolkit to support their work	HR & OD	December 2023
	Develop an engaging onboarding and induction experience to shape the expectation of the culture and behaviours	HR & OD	December 2023
	Place inclusivity and wellbeing being at the heart of service delivery by sharing customer feedback and examples of good practice with employees	Service Delivery Leads	2024 & on-going
What we will do	How		Deliver and/or Progress Report By
	Consult with employees to understand barriers to data disclosure and to identify how to increase disclosure	HR & OD EDI Lead	March 2024

Increase equalities disclosure on recruitment and staff monitoring information to support our aim for a diverse workforce that reflects our community	Share how employee equality data is used, with examples of changes or improvements we have made so employees can understand how disclosing their data on protected characteristics can benefit themselves and others	HR & OD Communications & Conversations	March 2024 and biannually
Raise the profile of our Staff Ambassador, Mental Health, Career Coaches, and Wellbeing groups and support their work	Develop communications and email signoffs so that colleagues in these groups are highly visible across the organisation, and their roles and remit are clearly understood	EDI Lead Communications & Conversations	January 2024
	Encourage employees to participate in learning and support groups as part of their professional development and wellbeing	Service Delivery Leads	December 2023 and quarterly
To promote a working environment that promotes dignity and respect where individual differences, and the contributions are recognised and valued.	Develop an equality statement to include in all our recruitment adverts	EDI Lead	December 2023
	Work to secure the next level of the government's Disability Confident accreditation status	EDI Lead	December 2023
Demonstrate zero tolerance of any unfair and unacceptable treatment in the workplace, and to discipline those that breach this policy.	Clearly describe, define and embed the behaviours that are accepted and expected as part of the culture of the council	People Transformation Lead	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	To develop a Zero-Tolerance behavioural initiative that brings together expectations from different areas, including how unacceptable behaviour can be challenged and reported	EDI Lead and People Transformation Lead	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Consider developing a mechanism to collect data and measure complaints about unfair treatment towards employees and by employees	HR & OD	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter

		Customer Experience Lead EDI Lead	
	Develop communications and place them in prominent locations in staff and public areas and workspaces to deliver strong message that Watford Borough Council has zero tolerance of discrimination, unfairness	Communications & Conversations	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Investigate promptly and act appropriately on any complaints about unfair and unacceptable treatment by employees or customers	HR & OD Service Delivery Leads	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter
Delivering Services			
What we will do	How		Deliver and/or Progress Report By
Deliver services that are accessible to all and that are tailored to the diverse and changing needs of our community.	Provide appropriate services, adapting these to meet the needs of the whole community promoting equal access to services, including producing clear information about how to access our services	Customer Experience Lead Communications & Conversations	December 2023, and quarterly thereafter
	Ensure that reasonable adjustments are provided where necessary to help our customers to access services and to support employees to carry out their work	HR & OD Customer Experience Lead	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter

Demonstrate behaviours in line with the Employee Code of Conduct. Staff are expected to promote equality by not discriminating against anyone and by treating members of the public, colleagues, and elected members with respect.	Provide and publicise clear information on how dissatisfied customers can complain about the services they have received and how we manage complaints. Information will also enable satisfied customers to praise or general feedback on a service	Customer Experience Lead Communications & Conversations	December 2023 and quarterly thereafter
	Develop inclusive leaders by supporting managers to be confident in having courageous conversations about race, discrimination and inclusion and challenging behaviour that is not in line with the council's Code of Conduct	HR & OD All Management	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
Engage with all groups in our community when making decisions about our services; and purposeful engagement with those groups where involvement is low.	Ensure that all Council functions and policies are carried out in a way that complies with statutory requirements, minimises adverse impact on any section of the community and meets (as appropriately as possible) the needs of all local people	All Service Areas	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Through our Community Engagement and Participation Strategy review how we work, including our contributions to the voluntary and community sector to ensure that we are providing them with the best possible support	Community Engagement & Partnerships	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Collect participation and engagement data to ensure particular groups are not under (or over) represented to inform decisions on the services we provide	Community Engagement & Partnerships	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	We will work towards making Watford an age-friendly town which residents and visitors of all ages can enjoy, ensuring local services are accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities		
Consistently collect and monitor relevant equalities data from our service users so that we can understand how effective our services are at	Ensure we have an informed workforce who understand the importance of equality when making decisions	Service Delivery Leads	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter

reaching and improving outcomes for diverse communities.	Foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement, using evidence, data and feedback, compliments and complaints to ensure our services are accessible to all and meet the needs of our diverse communities	All Service Areas	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Develop guidance and tools to standardise how services collect and share relevant and proportionate equalities data making sure the information we collect drives accessible and inclusive services	EDI Lead	June 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Regularly disaggregate and analyse the data that is collected to support the assessment of local need, service planning, commissioning and decision making	All Service Delivery Leads	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Provide employees with training and supporting guidance to establish EIAs as an early and on-going assessment tool that are carried out robustly and consistently across the organisation	HR & OD	March 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Publish Equality Impact Assessments for all major decisions, projects, and initiatives	All Service Areas	From January 2024 for each major decision, project and strategies initiative
Ensure that commissioning and procurement arrangements comply with equalities standards and add social value to the borough	Ensure that the services we commission comply with equalities standards and add social value to the borough	Commissioning & Procurement	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter
	Review the commissioning process, to ensure that equalities considerations given due regard early in the process and that equalities data is a requirement of the commissioning gateway documents	Commissioning & Procurement	January 2024 and quarterly thereafter



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023- 27 and Delivery Plan
Lead officer	Christella Menson
Person completing the EIA	Christella Menson
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 0.1

1. Background

As a town and as a council we are ambitious to achieve more and continually look at how we can do things better for our people and our community, which is clearly expressed in our Council Plan 2022-25 and Delivery Plan 2022-24. These plans also highlight that the people of Watford – the community and businesses we serve – are always at the heart of everything we do and that as an organisation, our staff are here to deliver high quality services and support and improve life for the community we serve. These principles are woven throughout the council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy 2023-2027.

Our EDI Policy is supported by a focused delivery plan, which will bring the commitments in the policy to life, setting out what actions and activities we will take and making a promise to keep local people and the town up to date on what the council is doing and indicating we welcome hearing the views and taking feedback from our community in our role as both community leaders and deliverer of services as well as from our staff in our role as employer. Both the policy and delivery plan reinforce the diversity and vibrancy of Watford and how this should inform and influence our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

In terms of our approach, the policy has been developed around key themes and has drawn on good practice, including the [Local Government Association](#). Legislation that informs local government communications is also taken into account.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

As this is a policy an Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) has been undertaken. This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of the council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy on the people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010.

These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership.

3. Engagement and consultation

Internal engagement was undertaken with Corporate Management Board (CMB), UNISON representatives, the council's Service Delivery Leads and Staff Ambassadors Group and was presented at all staff briefings. It was shared with individual officers who initiated more in-depth discussions with the EDI Lead Officer. In-person discussions have also taken place with Watford Football Club, as one of our partner organisations for insight and feedback on the policy, as well as an exploration of potential opportunities to partner on key actions.

A survey was also undertaken to seek feedback from staff, elected members, and key partners within the borough to allow for any issues to be raised and to ensure that respondents felt able to identify and relate to the policy.

The survey gave people an opportunity to read both the policy and delivery plan and contained a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended responses to questions because it was felt important that respondents could express views in their own words, particularly on those areas that are important to them. The survey asked 22 questions with the aim to capture quantitative data and qualitative insight. The analysis below indicates the results from the number of respondents who answered each individual question and are not interpreted to represent the views of the organisation in general.

Feedback from the three surveys overall

The survey results show that the majority of respondents agree with the council's overarching vision for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and find it relatable and consider it will move the council forward in terms of the commitment and objectives for staff and our community. Some qualitative responses drew on people's personal experiences and welcomed the vision of the policy in terms of how it relates to employees' experiences and how it will benefit individuals, when carrying out their roles, as well as the organization overall.

Staff

In response to a question asking what elements of the policy respondents felt worked well, a common theme that was expressed is that the policy is clear to understand and the delivery plan effectively established the council's expectations of employees:

"Can recognise how the EDI policy relates to the work I do and wider community. Easy to read, clear language with links to work the council do (sic) and the workforce."

However, some comments suggested that the definition of equality should be expressed more explicitly, and that including images would help to communicate the aims and vision of the policy. This links with the 43% of respondents who felt that the actions set out in the delivery plan should be strengthened.

The majority of respondents (79%) answered 'yes' or were 'unsure' whether they felt that any actions in the delivery plan were missing. Suggestions on how the delivery plan could be improved included clarity on the monitoring and scrutiny arrangements, and unacceptable behaviour and zero tolerance.

The qualitative responses inviting comments on the ED&I Policy and Delivery Plan produced a wide range of responses:

Employees

<p>“Really good and happy to see that we are adopting this: ”</p>
<p>“It was good to see that the aspiration around an age-friendly town has been captured. As this commitment moves forward, it will be helpful to build it into other documentation as they emerge.”</p>
<p>“This needs to be embedded in everything we do. Our residents need to see the results of our work and surveys to ensure they feel included, involved and engaged.”</p>
<p>“Those who have responsibility on the EDI Delivery plan have important roles to bring effective & positive change. It is good to know the working group will keep this at the forefront.”</p>
<p>“The actions need to be clear identified and with timescales. they are a bit lost in the document as it stands...”</p>
<p>“Good start to have a strong commitment. Our culture is so important and this delivery plan will help us create the positive culture that we all want to work in.!</p>
<p>“think the delivery plan may benefit from some more specific deadlines - where we say ongoing at what point do we know we have delivered this outcome. Are there more specific, timebound actions that could be set out in the plan which cover the next 12- 18months. It was not clear how we will measure success against the deliver plan.”</p>
<p>“In the section on "How we will deliver", the Corporate Equalities Working Group is referred to and then an EDI Board (without introduction to it). I was wondering if the Corporate Equalities Working Group was meant to be there and should actually read Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Board? On the links to other policies and strategies, the Housing Strategy is noted which is a high level statutory council strategy (S87 LGA2003) ratified by Full Council. The Local Plan is the same level of strategy so I think should also be included in this list.”</p>
<p>“How do you plan to deal with areas where the EDI of various groups may clash in some way e.g. trans women in women's spaces, religious groups reserving the right to be exclusive”</p>
<p>“It seems too long and repeats itself ad nauseum. Extremely dull. Skipped through the last 4 pages.”</p>

Elected Members

<p>“The statements are clear and the breakdown within the policy is good.”</p>
<p>“The language is clear and relatively simple to understand. It reflects the culture and philosophy of our Borough”</p>
<p>“... all the wording was carefully considered and thoughtful of all people that live in our community whilst creating clear guidelines for everyone to follow.”</p>
<p>“It is straight forward”</p>

“I feel that it looks at different sectors and how they interact with the council; public, employees etc.”
“... it feels like a Watford Policy”
“Not sure it addresses gives any policy outline to address the multiple inequalities that some minorities experience in Watford.”

Although most Elected members found that all elements of the policy works well, one respondent stated that the policy is too generic. Suggestions for how the policy could be improved focused on greater clarity, eg:

“Referencing policy/strategies in how to achieve certain things means the policy lacks accountability. I think it needs to reference some specifics on what success for this policy looks like. For example, under workforce, there could be something around posting on job boards that are more likely to access a more diverse candidate base. It could also reference existing policies for employees e.g., maternity, paternity, shared leave, and adoption policies.”

68% of Elected Members felt that the ED&I policy and delivery plan moves the council forward in terms of its EDI commitment and objectives for staff and our community. The most common suggestions were for a robust plan to address multiple inequalities for some minorities.

Demographic data - staff

The survey sought to understand the dominant response group among employees. 42% declined to submit data for this question, but of those who responded, employees on Band 7 (23%), Band 9 (23%) and Band 10 (18%) were the groups with most responses. No data was obtained for colleagues on Bands 4/4+ or Bands 11+ and Band 12. Bands 11+ and 12 are Leadership levels of the organisation; however, the policy was approved by CMB and amendments made to the policy prior to the employee engagement and subsequent consultation exercise.

The survey asked consultees to complete a number of equality related questions so the analysis could understand and synthesise the responses across the protected characteristics.

Sex

Two-thirds of respondents indicated their sex: 76% female and 24% male; this does not reflect the data recorded for employees in the organisation (52% female, 48% male).

Age

The highest category of respondents was aged 35-44 (35%) followed by 45-54 (26%), and 55-64 (26%).

Health

14% of respondents reported having a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more.

Race

Most respondents (76%) consider themselves as belonging to the white English/ Welsh or Scottish group. One respondent stated, “prefer not to disclose as I do not wish to be identified and the vast majority of the council are white.”

Sexual Orientation

One respondent described themselves as 'gay/lesbian' and one described themselves as being 'bisexual'. Most respondents described themselves as 'straight/heterosexual'.

Gender reassignment

All respondents indicated that they identify with the same sex as registered at birth.

Religion

The majority of respondents to this question (55%) stated that they have no religion, and 41% described themselves as Christian, and 5% as Hindu.

Married or Civil Partnership

Most respondents are in the following categories: married-59%, never married or in a civil partnership-23%, divorced-14%, and in a legally dissolved legal partnership-5%.

Pregnant

One respondent who answered this question described themselves as pregnant.

This data show that all the protected characteristics, apart from gender reassignment are represented within the council's employee demographic.

It also reflects one of the aims of the policy, which is to strengthen our approach to understanding the demographics / equality data of our staff.

4. What we know about the Watford population

Population (including age)

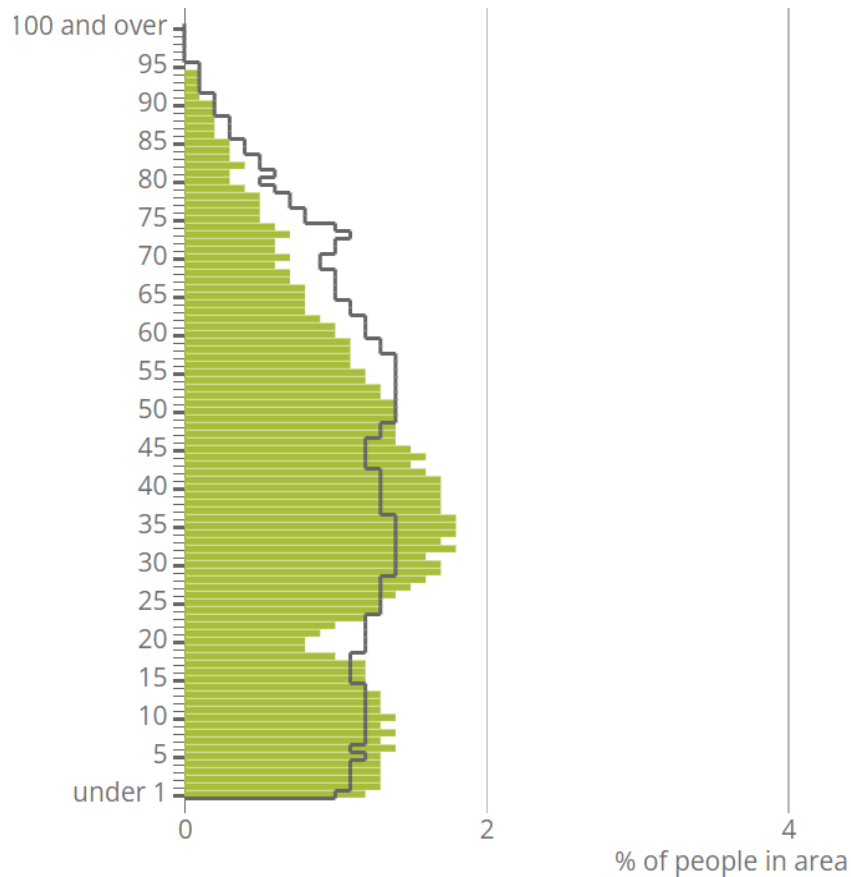
Watford is a town with a growing population. The census data 2021 indicates that Watford has a population of 102,200, an increase of 13.3% since the previous census in 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

Watford's population is currently projected to increase to 110,300 by 2035, a rise from 2016 of 14.2%. This growth will be a challenge for Watford, given our tight borough boundaries and is recognised within the Council Plan, shaping our commitments and areas for action in the Delivery Plan.

The chart below shows Watford's age ranges between 0 – 100 and over in percentage of the population (green) compared with the England / Wales percentages (black line).

Overall, this comparison shows that Watford is a relatively young town. This is particularly the case in the 0 to 19 age range. Similarly, the 30 to 49 cohort accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the Watford population than nationally.

The median age in Watford is 36 compared with 40 for England. This means that we are a town which is popular with families and, whilst we are a town for all, we recognise that our plans need to reflect our large number of young people and families. In terms of overall service provision throughout the borough this means there are likely to be demands for help across all age profiles but those supporting families and younger children may face higher than average demand.



Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,770 people per square kilometre. This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country (434 per square kilometre). This is a reflection that we are an urban district, with many characteristics of a metropolitan borough. In comparison with many metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, our density is relatively low.

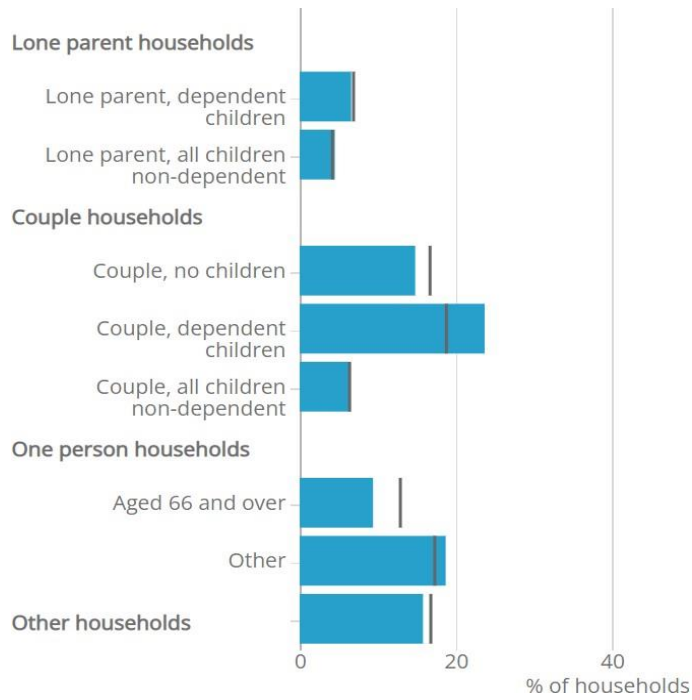
Households

Number of households

The ONS data, based on the census, says that there were 39,628 households in Watford at the time of the Census. The average household size in Watford is currently 2.57. This is slightly higher than the national average of 2.45 and is in line with the Census 2021 household composition data below.

Household Composition

The chart below sets out the composition of Watford households in the Census 2021, with Watford's percentage shown in the blue bars compared to the England and Wales percentages shown by the vertical black bar. Watford has a higher percentage of both households with couples with no children and households with dependent children than England and Wales. As a town with a relatively young population, it has fewer one-person households with residents aged 66 and over.



The following chart on household composition shows that Watford has higher than England and Wales average for larger sized households – 3 or more people. This reinforces that character of Watford as a ‘family town’ with different generations living together in one household.

Language spoken at home:

Below is the data collected in Census 2021 regarding household language. This is another indication that Watford benefits from groups and organisations set up to support those who may have arrived in the town more recently.

	Number	Percentage
All adults in household have English as a main language	30443	76.8%
At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language	3486	8.8%
No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language	1438	3.6%
No people in household have English in England as a main language	4261	10.8%

Main Language

The Census asked people their main language, with over 90 choices. Whilst English was significantly the most chosen language with nearly 80,000 residents citing English as their main language, there are a substantial number of residents with other main languages. The top ten after English are below (see Appendix 1 for the full list of languages).

Language	Number
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435

Disability/Health

Watford has a lower percentage of residents with a disability (15%) than England overall (17.7%). A higher percentage of people in Watford also declared they were in good health (48.2%) compared to England overall (47.5%).

Sexual orientation and gender reassignment

Census 2021 included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time. 2.7% of those who selected to answer the sexual orientation question identified as LGB+ orientation (“Gay or Lesbian”, “Bisexual” or “Other sexual orientation”). 0.31% of those who selected to answer the gender identity question answered ‘no’ to whether their gender identity is the same as their sex registered at birth.

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire; it is one of the strengths of our town and what makes us such a vibrant and diverse place to be. This diversity is an opportunity for our residents, employees, partners and businesses in terms of how the council engages with, listens to and gains participation from people of all ethnicities within Watford.

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
		102,245 TOTAL
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/ Northern Irish/British	61.9% (55,875)	46.0% (46,820)
White Irish	2.3% (2,063)	2.1% (2,149)
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1% (61)	0.1% (80)
White: Roma	Not a category in 2011	0.3% (343)
White: Other White	7.7% (6,947)	12.6% (12,836)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	1.1% (990)	1.3% (1,300)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.5% (412)	0.7% (692)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.0% (939)	1.4% (1,408)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8% (763)	1.4% (1,444)
Asian/Asian British/ Asian Welsh: Indian	5.5% (4,923)	9.7% (9,954)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Pakistani	6.7% (6,082)	8.0% (8,197)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	0.4% (362)	0.5% (493)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Chinese	0.9%	1.0%

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
	(822)	(1,024)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Other Asian	4.4% (3,981)	5.3% (5,369)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	3.5% (3,142)	3.9% (3,954)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1.7% (1,558)	1.7% (1,733)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	0.6% (529)	0.8% (801)
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.3% (294)	0.7% (763)
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	0.6% (558)	2.8% (2,885)

Religion or belief

Religious groups in Watford, 2021 census:

- Christian - 45,447 people or 44.6%
- Buddhist - 1,021 people or 0.85%
- Hindu - 8,398 people or 8.2%
- Jewish - 944 people or 0.93%
- Muslim - 13,262 people or 11.0%
- Sikh - 664 people or 0.6%
- Other - 859 people or 0.71%
- No religion – 25,340 people or 24.8%

6,311 people did not answer this question

Gender

The 2021 census did not allow for any option other than female or male.

FEMALE	50.8%
MALE	49.2%

Marriage and Civil Partnership

For census 2021, this has been updated to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply not eligible for a legal partnership	21,282
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	30,974
Married: Opposite sex	38,023
Married: Same sex	192
In a registered civil partnership: Opposite sex	85
In a registered civil partnership: Same sex	60
Separated, but still married	1,744
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	7
Divorced	6,074
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	18
Widowed	3,782
Surviving partner from civil partnership	5

Mosaic Profile

Mosaic is a classification system which segments our population into 15 groups and 66 types. This mosaic profile helps us to understand the lifestyle and demographics of Watford's population.

WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT WATFORD?

Rental hubs 22% of our community

Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods
7% nationally

Urban cohesion 19% of our community

Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity
5% nationally

Domestic success 16% of our community

Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers
7% nationally

Employee Monitoring Data

The following tables outlines the employee data for the council for 2022.

Age

Age Group	Number of employees	% of employees	% of local population (from mid-2016 population estimates)
29 and under	16 (23)	6.61% (9.66%)	38.95%
30 – 39	49 (42)	20.25% (17.65%)	17.56%
40 – 49	67 (64)	27.69% (26.89%)	14.57%
50 – 59	75 (73)	30.99% (30.67%)	11.67%
60 – 64	25 (31)	10.33% (13.03%)	4.24%
65 +	10 (5)	4.13% (2.1%)	13.02%
Total	242 (238)	100.00%	

Employees declaring that they have a disability

Disability	Total no of employees	% of employees
No	102 (71)	42.15% (29.83%)
Yes	8 (8)	3.31% (3.36%)
Not Stated	132 (159)	54.55% (66.81%)
Total	242 (238)	100.00%

Gender Identity – data not asked for in 2022

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Marital Status	No of employees	% of employees
Divorced	12 (13)	4.96 % (5.46%)
Married	64 (60)	26.45% (25.21%)
Separated	3 (4)	1.24% (1.68%)
Single / Never Married or in Civil Partnership	30 (26)	12.4% (10.92%)
Widowed	2 (2)	0.83% (0.84%)
Not Stated	131 (133)	54.13% (55.88%)
Total	242 (238)	100.00%

Pregnancy

During 2021/2022, four female employees took maternity leave

Race

Ethnic Origin Description	No of Employees 2021/22	% of Employees 2021/22	% of Employees 2020/21	% of local population (Census 2011)
Asian British: Bangladeshi	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.40%
Asian British: Indian	8	3.31%	3.36%	5.50%
Asian British: Other	8	3.31%	2.1%	4.40%
Asian British: Pakistani	2	0.83%	0.84%	6.70%
Black British: African	4	1.65%	2.84%	3.50%

Black British: Caribbean	2	0.83%	0.84%	1.70%
Black British: Other	0	0.00	0.42%	0.60%
Mixed Ethnic Group	7	2.89%	1.26%	3.40%
Other Ethnic Group	0	0.00%	0.42%	0.00%
White: British	78	32.23%	33.18%	61.90%
White: Irish	3	1.24%	1.26%	2.30%
White: Other	7	2.89%	3.78%	7.70%
Prefer not to say / not stated	123	50.83%	50.82%	0.00%
Total	242	100.00%	100.00%	

Religion or belief

Religion	No of employees	% of employees
Christian	57 (56)	23.55% (23.53%)
Declined to say	10 (5)	4.13% (2.1%)
Hindu	9 (9)	3.72% (3.78%)
Jewish	0 (1)	0 (0.42%)
Muslim	2 (2)	0.83% (0.84%)
No religious belief	37 (36)	15.29% (15.13%)
Sikh	3 (2)	1.24% (0.84%)
Other	1 (1)	0.41% (0.42%)
Not stated	123 (126)	50.83% (52.94%)
Total	242 (238)	100.00%

Sex

Sex	Total no of employees	% of employees
Female	151 (144)	62.40% (60.5%)
Male	91 (94)	37.6% (39.5%)
Total	242 (238)	100.00%

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	No of employees	% of employees
Bisexual	1 (3)	0.41% (1.26%)
Gay or Lesbian	3 (2)	1.24% (0.84%)
Gender Reassignment	0 (0)	0.0% (0.00%)
Heterosexual	109 (103)	45.04 % (43.28%)
Not Stated	127 (129)	52.48% (54.2%)
Prefer not to say	2 (1)	0.83% (0.42%)
Total	242 (238)	100.00%

5. How will Watford Borough Council ensure equality is promoted throughout council leadership, employees and service delivery?

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the brand policy:

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

Protected Characteristic	Potential Impact and mitigation
Age	The Delivery Plan makes specific reference to actions that underpin Watford’s identity as an Age-Friendly town. This work intends to include the members of our community who are war-related veterans and will be clear in the comms developed alongside this work.
Disability	The Delivery Plan has a positive impact on people who identify themselves as having a disability and includes actions to improve engagement and accessibility. We will highlight support available through the website, as well as consider feedback to learn how we might best meet the needs of those within this group.
Gender Reassignment	The EDI Policy does not specifically establish actions relating to gender reassignment in the Delivery Plan. We will consider introducing a Trans Inclusion Policy and Transitioning at Work Guidance, which would be subject to a separate EIA, consultation and approval.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Marital status does not specifically feature within the policy of delivery plan, however there may be incidental positive impacts as a result of the actions and decisions within service areas.
Pregnancy and Maternity	The policy supports the delivery of family-friendly policies and practices, and underpins the existing strategic approach to maternity, paternity, adoption and carers leave. We will recognise the sensitivities around sex-based rights and make a conscious effort to ensure that we include women in discussions around any changes to policies that are seeking to become more inclusive to ensure that there are no unintended negative impacts for women. For example, decisions will be made whether we will retain use of the word ‘mother’.
Race	Inclusion is a key element of this policy and aims to embrace and

	celebrate the diversity of people and different racial groups in Watford. The EDI Policy commits to re-establish the Corporate Equalities Working Group, whose responsibilities will include how we teach, learn, and engage with racial issues. We will focus on community engagement and consider services to meet all needs.
Religion & Belief	We recognise that understandings of beliefs that are protected in law are varied, evolving and progressing. For example, gender critical beliefs and ethical veganism are protected in law, therefore we aim to ensure that our knowledge in this area remains up-to-date.
Sex	We recognise the sensitivities around sex-based rights and we will make a conscious effort to ensure that we include women in discussions around any changes to policies that are seeking to become more inclusive to ensure that there are no unintended negative impacts for women. For example, by excluding women or using the word 'gender' when it should be 'sex'. It is important that everyone feels included.
Sexual Orientation	The council policies are inclusive and welcoming of all people and make clear a zero-tolerance approach to bigotry and homophobia. Sexual orientation is continually evolving, and the Delivery Plan is framed in a way to learn and respond to the all people in Watford, regardless of their sexual orientation.

A. Positive impacts

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy is underpinned by the council's commitment to delivering its Council Plan 2022-26 and recognises the importance of understanding and responding to the town's diverse community and residents.

The policy aims to deliver equality, diversity and inclusion for everyone through action detailed in our Delivery Plan, which seeks to:

- ensure our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reflects the full diversity of Watford
- deliver equality outcomes for all
- mainstream against our legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010
- use our influence as community leaders to progress ED&I in collaboration with partners
- treat our employees fairly and reinforce our reputation as an employer of choice
- embed equality, diversity and inclusion as everyone's responsibility
- deliver services to meet the needs of Watford's diverse community
- establish the identity of Watford as a place where knowledge and learning about ED&I matters

This EIA identifies this will have a positive impact on all those with protected characteristics and that the importance of equality of opportunity, demonstrating understanding about diversity and inclusion are reflected in our behaviours, actions, decisions, and all that we do.

Through this the council will be actively meeting the public sector equality duty, removing barriers and seeking ways that communications can foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.

The policy explains how the council aims to promote understanding of equity and difference as an enabler of positive relations between people with difference characteristics and beliefs. The Delivery Plan is designed to ensure that the responsibility for EDI is shared across the organisation, with clear lines of accountability and timescales to ensure that the work is progressed and monitored.

B. Negative impacts

The following negative impacts have been considered during the course of this analysis.

As a diverse town, with residents from a range of ethnic backgrounds, we know language can be a barrier to participation and access to services and facilities. Equally, language and imagery can make people feel excluded where they do not reflect their lives and experiences. We will work with our employees and community to understand how the commitments in the policy can be effectively delivered and so that everyone can feel included across all council services, decisions, and actions.

We will ensure that our actions and decisions demonstrate particular consideration to those with protected characteristics, and listen and learn from the voices of Watford to ensure all people feel that they are treated fairly, can access our services, feel included and experience Watford as a place where they can participate and enjoy what the town has to offer.

6. Overall conclusion

The new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-26 will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics as it has identified the importance of making sure the council recognises that it needs to understand the different needs of its diverse community to deliver effective and successful communications and to build conversations that matter.

Service planning and delivery aim to reflect the needs of the Watford community, including those with protected characteristics and should actively promote our diversity as a town are ways the council can signal this. The policy recognises this is a minimum and there will need to be ongoing and forward-looking thinking that responds to the community and what we learn from feedback and engagement. The policy and delivery plan also recognise that understanding lived experiences allows for important and valuable insight into how people access and engage with the council as an organisation, and each other.

This EIA has been approved by:

Date: (version 1)

Summary of potential positive impacts and ways in which they can be ensured

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
<p>Delivery of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-26 particularly in relation to the theme: Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences</p> <p>Ensure that the services provided to people are fair, accessible and inclusive to everyone.</p> <p>Staff retention is likely to increase because employees will feel respected, listened to and included.</p> <p>The policy consciously promotes a positive environment where everyone has equal opportunities regardless of gender, age, race, orientation, background and other factors which increases feelings of belonging and employee satisfaction.</p> <p>Organisations that prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion training and implementation can establish a good reputation among jobseekers and become known for being employers of choice.</p> <p>When employees feel their work is valued, and know that everyone is treated fairly everyone, they are more likely to deliver work to a high standard and genuinely feel motivated to improve and develop within the organisation.</p>	<p>All</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep our commitment to diverse channels at the forefront of our communications thinking and planning, recognising that not all people receive information and messages in the same way or feedback their views • Remain committed to diverse images that represent Watford, recognising the power of images to make people feel included and part of their town • Recognise that our commitment will mean being proactive and asking our community how they want to receive information and hear from us – and how they want to share their views • Stay up to date and informed on any new ways of communicating and engaging • Identify opportunities where the community can be the 'right voice' for Watford, recognising these can be the best way to tell our story and share our messages

Residents in areas that have active equality and diversity policies feel welcomes and are more likely to contribute and feel pride in value living in Watford.		
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Summary of potential negative impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
<p>Potential if Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are not sensitive to those with protected characteristics, which could mean people face barriers or are excluded from accessing council services or other activities and services in the town</p> <p>Actions of the delivery plan are not fulfilled</p> <p>Responsibilities within the EDI Policy and Delivery Plan do not keep in line with legislation and the EDI landscape</p> <p>Employees view the policy as box-ticking</p> <p>Residents and the community experience no difference and perceive the policy as ineffective</p>	<p>All</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to diversity and inclusion within the new policy and delivery plan is embedded and actioned • Actions in the delivery plan are monitored and constantly reviewed • Ensure the policy links to other key council policies, including the emerging EDI policy • Establish performance indicators and evaluate progress throughout the span of the policy to underpin the culture of continual improvement within the organisation

Appendix 1

Full details of main languages spoken in Watford

Language	Number of residents
English (English or Welsh in Wales)	79,640
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435
Spanish	432
East Asian language: Tagalog or Filipino	411
Arabic	390
South Asian language: Panjabi	380
South Asian language: Telugu	350
South Asian language: Hindi	343
South Asian language: Nepalese	310
West or Central Asian language: Persian or Farsi	270
South Asian language: Sinhala	268
Other European language (non EU): Albanian	260
French	244
South Asian language: Any other South Asian language	228
African language: Akan	224
Other European language (EU): Greek	223
Russian	199
Turkish	195
East Asian language: All other Chinese	170
South Asian language: Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	158
Other European language (EU): Lithuanian	156
East Asian language: Cantonese Chinese	136
Other European language (EU and non-EU): Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin	116
West or Central Asian language: Pashto	96
Other European language (EU): Czech	89
South Asian language: Marathi	78
Other European language (EU): Slovak	77
African language: Any other African language	58
Other European language (EU): German	54
African language: Any other West African language	54
East Asian language: Japanese	53
East Asian language: Mandarin Chinese	49
African language: Shona	48

South Asian language: Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari)	46
African language: Somali	46
Sign language: British Sign Language	45
Other European language (non EU): Ukrainian	44
East Asian language: Any other East Asian language	38
Other European language (EU): Latvian	34
Other European language (EU): Dutch	34
East Asian language: Thai	33
East Asian language: Korean	31
East Asian language: Vietnamese	28
African language: Igbo	26
African language: Afrikaans	25
West or Central Asian language: Kurdish	24
Other European language (EU): Swedish	21
Other European language (EU): Any other European language (EU)	21
African language: Swahili or Kiswahili	19
Other UK language: Romany English	17
West or Central Asian language: Any other West or Central Asian language	15
East Asian language: Malay	13
African language: Yoruba	12
African language: Tigrinya	10
Other European language (EU): Danish	9
West or Central Asian language: Hebrew	9
Other European language (EU): Estonian	8
Welsh or Cymraeg (in England only)	7
Caribbean Creole: Any other Caribbean Creole	7
African language: Amharic	7
Sign language: Any sign communication system	7
Other European language (EU): Slovenian	5
Other European language (EU): Finnish	4
African language: Any other Nigerian language	4
Other European language (non EU): Northern European language (non EU)	3
African language: Krio	3
African language: Lingala	3
Sign language: Any other sign language	3
Other UK language: Gaelic (Irish)	2
Other European language (EU): Maltese	2
African language: Luganda	2
Other European language (non EU): Any other Eastern European language (non EU)	1
Oceanic or Australian language	1
Caribbean Creole: English-based Caribbean Creole	1
Other UK language: Gaelic (Scottish)	0
Other UK language: Manx Gaelic	0
Other UK language: Gaelic (Not otherwise specified)	0
Other UK language: Cornish	0

Other UK language: Scots	0
Other UK language: Ulster Scots	0
Other UK language: Irish Traveller	0
Other European language (non-national): Any Romani language	0
Other European language (non-national): Yiddish	0
North or South American language	0
Does not apply	3,892

Part A

Report to: *Cabinet*

Date of meeting: *30 October 2023*

Report author: *Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead*

Report sponsor: *Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services*

Portfolio holder: *Cllr Mark Watkin*

Report title: *Continuous Improvement Framework*

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Council Plan 2022-26 sets out an ambition for the organisation to 'pioneer new ways of working that challenge us to innovate, transform and improve'. The concept of 'continuous improvement' has been present across the council for some time, and the proposed approach builds upon this existing good practice by creating a framework.
- 1.2 Whilst there are many good examples of services constantly striving to improve, there has not, to date, been an agreed definition, framework or approach in relation to continuous improvement within Watford. Following engagement with officers from across the organisation, and Portfolio Holders, this paper sets out the work undertaken to develop our continuous improvement framework, the key components of the framework and some example case studies setting out examples of already good practice.
- 1.3 The framework essentially conveys an organisational mindset and is intended to provide a guide to officers and members to support the embedding of continuous improvement across the council and to collectively learn from areas of good practice. It does not introduce a new bureaucratic process or a detailed programme of service reviews and is intended to be applied to everyday examples of improvement (amending content on the website following feedback, streamlining a service process or working more closely with other services) right through to more significant service reviews (such as the Strengthening Housing project, our Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework or Facilities Management review). In line with the feedback from our people, it focuses on identifying opportunities, utilising insight available to us and celebrating successes. As such, there is a recognition that the empowerment of our people is crucial in embedding a culture of continuous improvement right across the organisation, set within the context of our values and behaviours which encourage trust amongst our people to work together and be bold to provide the very best service for our customers.

1.4 The framework could be applied to strategies across the organisation but have specific links with both the Information and Insight Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy, with the concept of continuous improvement forming a central plank within both.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is requested to approve the Continuous Improvement Framework for adoption by the council.

3.0 Report pathway

3.1 Next review body: Not applicable

3.1.1 Indicative date: Not applicable

3.2 Final review body: Not applicable

3.2.1 Indicative date: Not applicable

4.0 Contact Officer:

For further info contact: Claire Dow, Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead

Email: Claire.dow@watford.gov.uk

Reviewed and signed off by: Liam Hornsby, Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services

5.0 Detailed proposal

5.1 The mandate for developing a corporate Continuous Improvement Framework was included as part of the council's Delivery Plan 2022-24. Over the last few months, engagement has taken place across the organisation, including two workshop sessions with Service Delivery Leads and the Staff Ambassador Group and one online session. It has also been discussed with the Portfolio Holder and other Cabinet members. The feedback provided from this engagement has been invaluable in developing the Framework and included the following:

- There is a strong culture of looking externally to identify better ways of working at Watford with extensive continuous improvement happening on a regular basis in many services across the council.
- It was acknowledged that some services have improvement activities 'baked in' to the way they work, whereas others find it more challenging, such as regulatory services.

- Language used is important. The definition of continuous improvement, and the process diagram will focus on identifying opportunity.
- Service Delivery Leads were keen to empower officers to identify improvements and suggest/implement fixes where appropriate, with minimal red tape.
- Space and time to reflect provide an opportunity to form potential solutions and should be supported and endorsed by the organisation (and supports our corporate objectives in relation to health and wellbeing).
- The ability for our people to suggest ideas in a simple and easy format should be embraced.

Although, the Office of Local Government (OFLOG) and the new best value guidance were both launched after the work on this framework commenced, the approach will satisfy the requirements of these new regimes.

- Creation of a simple repository attached to the Continuous Improvement Framework which could help support our people when considering improvements to services.

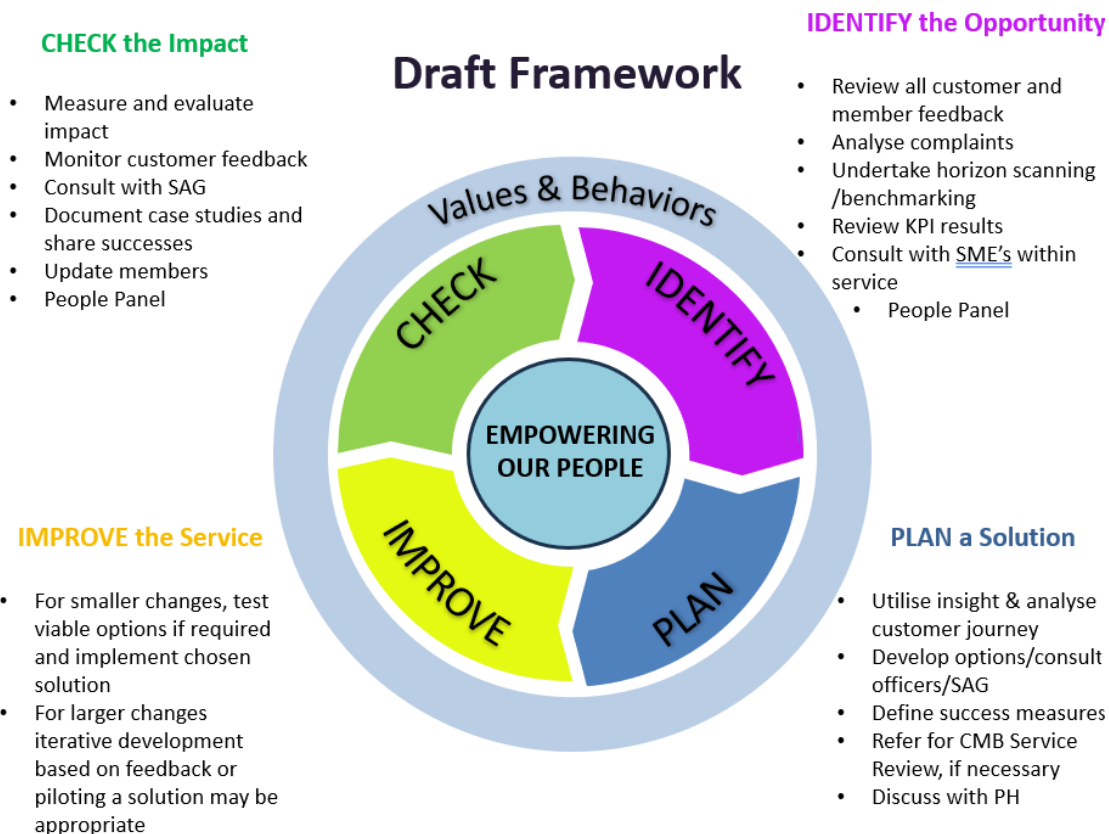
5.2 Feedback also indicated that a clear definition of Continuous Improvement would be beneficial but that this should be 'simple and concise'. As a result, the following definition for Watford is proposed:

Continuous improvement is an ongoing mindset, where improvements are made over time based on evidence, reflection and feedback.

5.3 This definition reflects the fact that continuous improvement is not a finite process but something that can be incremental and part of everyday working or a more significant change across a service area. In all cases, our people are able to use the tools at our disposal (such as data, feedback, benchmarking, endorsed reflection time and horizon scanning) to identify opportunities for services improvements.

5.4 Based on the above, the framework itself sets out four stages of continuous improvement and includes suggestions of aspects our people may consider when seeking to improve services as part of their day to day working. These also reflect the feedback received from the workshops.

5.5 The draft framework is shown below:



5.6 As can be seen from the above, the four proposed stages are as follows:

- **Identify the Opportunity** - Continuous improvement is more focused on proactive activities that identify opportunities to improve, rather than reacting to issues/problems raised. If an issue is raised within a service, it may be a good opportunity to take a more holistic approach and review the whole customer journey end to end, rather than focusing only on fixing the issue raised. Proactive activities for continuous improvement could include:
 - Reviewing feedback from all channels (E.g. - online forms, CSC phone, web, social media, queries raised through Scrutiny Committees or by Portfolio Holders)
 - Analysing KPI results (internal and external) looking for underperformance/negative trends
 - Horizon scanning/Benchmarking/Information sharing with external organisations
 - Taking time to reflect
 - Regular meetings with services, (e.g. CSC monthly meeting with services to discuss customer experience)
 - Collecting staff ideas

- Working with our People Panel
- **Plan a Solution** - The suggested improvement is analysed in detail at this stage, and depending on the size of the change, could include:
 - Analysis of customer journey and data available to gain insight
 - Review of internal tools and solutions that may be utilised, (e.g. technology)
 - Develop possible solutions and define success measures
 - Consult with relevant people (e.g.- Customers, Corporate Management Team, Portfolio Holders, Service Leads, Staff Ambassador Group)
 - This may also be the stage where a more significant improvement plan is needed but this would be based on the identification of an opportunity rather than a set programme of service-by-service reviews (which would contrast with the concept of continual, incremental change and improvements led by our people).
- **Improve the Service** - At this stage the chosen solution is tested and implemented. How this is managed will depend on the size of the change. An update to a web page is likely to be straightforward with minimal testing. Larger changes may need to be extensively designed, piloted or developed in stages or as a part of a project to manage risk and cost.
- **Check the Impact** - The change is reviewed. This could be by:
 - Monitoring customer feedback
 - Consulting with the service/and or staff groups
 - Measuring against performance indicators if relevant
 - Reflecting on the changes
 - Checking back with our People Panel

This is an important stage to check the change has been effective. It is sometimes missed or reduced due to time and resource challenges. This is also an opportunity to document improvements and share successes internally and externally if appropriate. This could support:

- Shared learning/problem solving across the organisation
- Recognise good work undertaken by officers
- Embedding a culture of continuous improvement, inspire others to look for opportunities to improve, and ensure everyone is aware of

the tools and processes available at WBC that support continuous improvement.

5.7 These activities are set within the context of our values and behaviours and with the empowerment of our people at its core. There are examples of good practice from across the organisation but the diagram below provides a low level of example of how the framework could be applied:

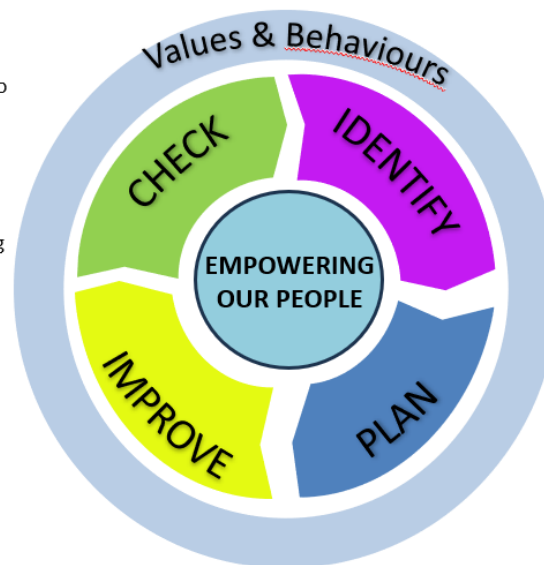
CHECK the Impact

Process closely monitored after go live to ensure bookings were passing through the system correctly. Some changes made based on feedback from the service. Vast majority of inspections now done online, freeing up time for officers who no longer need to take phone calls. Currently working on replicating this process for St Albans, who currently spend approximately 2 hours at the beginning of every day booking building inspections over the phone.

IMPROVE the Service

Form was successfully implemented, creating an online service that allows customers to book an inspection at a time that suits them, without having to phone the Planning Support Team.

Case Study



IDENTIFY the Opportunity

Builders were required to contact the Planning Support Team by phone to check inspector availability and book inspections. The service asked the Digital Improvement Team if there was a way this could be managed online, improving accessibility to the service for customers and saving time for officers.

PLAN a Solution

Digital Improvement Team created an Inspection Booking Form using *Firmstep*, linked to a central inspector calendar, allowing customers (primarily builders) to check inspector availability online and book an inspection.

5.8 There were many other good examples of continuous improvement activities happening across the organisation on a regular basis discussed in the workshops. Another example is summarised in brief below:

- **Identify the Opportunity** – While analysing data received through the online General Enquiry form, it was noted that a lot of the enquiries were related to services that had a dedicated online form in place that customers should be using. Further testing was undertaken to understand why this might be happening, including testing various customer journeys starting from the council website through to online form submission. It appeared that some paths through our website lead to the right online forms, however the customer experience was not always consistent, and customers were sometimes led to our General Enquiry form or the

Complaints, Comments and Compliments form, depending on where they started their journey.

Plan a Solution – Testing results were sent through to the Digital Improvement Team, who are in the process of building a review in to their work plan.

Improve the Service - The solution will aim to ensure that customers are directed to the right online forms where possible, regardless of where their customer journey starts. We will also aim to build in new pathways in the General Enquiry form that direct the customer to the correct online service, should it become clear that they are trying to use the General Enquiry form for a service that has a valid online service available.

Check the Impact – Once the change has been implemented further analysis of the General Enquiry form will be carried out to see if the number of queries related to services with online forms reduces. Customer journeys will also be retested to ensure we are sending customers to the right forms consistently.

5.9 Activities to promote and support continuous improvement are built into the Information and Insight Strategy Delivery Plan and will be implemented over the next two years. These include:

- Development of new Performance App within the council’s Business Intelligence platform, to enable better analysis of internal and external KPI results, and highlight areas for improvement
- Expansion of Customer Experience dashboards to include more customer feedback as well as analysis of all customer contact through the website, phones and online forms
- Extending access to Customer Experience dashboards to provide greater visibility
- Officer sharing sessions focused on continuous improvement, and sharing examples of successful case studies from across the council
- Feedback loop established to ensure continuous improvement of the corporate reporting platform

5.10 Subject to the approval of the framework by Cabinet it is proposed that the Customer Experience Lead retains responsibility for the Continuous Improvement Framework and develops a more detailed plan to work with services to embed the framework and capture examples of good practice and successes.

6.0 Implications

6.1 Financial

6.1.1 There are no immediate financial implications as a result of this proposal although it should be noted that an outcome of a continuous improvement culture can be more efficient, and therefore less costly, ways of working helping to deliver value for money.

6.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

6.2.1 There are no legal implications expected as a result of this proposal.

7.0 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Council does not have a clear approach to continuous improvement	Opportunities for improvement are missed	Development and approach of Continuous Improvement Framework	Treat	4 x 1 = 4
Staff do not feel empowered to improve services	Opportunities for improvement are missed or not embedded – staff perceived changes as being 'done to' rather than a service-led collaboration	Place the empowerment of staff at the core of the framework	Treat	4 x 1 = 4
Continuous Improvement Framework is not embedded across the organisation	Customers do not see improvements in services and the council is unable to maximise the	Lead assigned responsibility for Continuous Improvement Framework and roll out	Treat	4 x 1 = 4

	efficiency of services			
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8.0 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

8.1 Equalities

8.1.1 Having had regard to the council’s obligations under s149, it is considered that an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required for this piece of work.

8.2 Data Protection Impact Assessment

8.2.1 Having had regard to the council’s obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

9.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

9.1 Subject to the approval, the framework will be designed and embedded into the organisation through officer sharing sessions, team meetings and looping back round to both Service Delivery Leads and the Staff Ambassadors Group. Working with these groups, a more detailed plan to roll out the framework and capture examples of good practice and successes will be developed.

10.0 Background Papers

None