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# Equalities Scheme Position Statement 2023

We know that we have, and have always had, a key role in building a more equal district and will identify and design accessible, inclusive, services that meet the diverse needs of our communities, along with being an excellent employer for people of all backgrounds.

Our Equalities Scheme 2022 – 2026 explains our duties and role in respect of equality and diversity and sets our objectives to meet these. Each year a Position Statement will be published to demonstrate what progress has been made against the objectives each year. The information below covers progress towards our objectives up to December 2023.

1. **To maintain a modern and diverse workforce, which is reflective**

**of the local community, who feel valued and treated fairly**

## Our Workforce

Information about our workforce and our Gender Pay Gap report can be found on our website and we are diversifying staff skills through recruitment, e.g. multi-lingual staff members. The annual workforce profile is published on an annual basis and is used to identify future areas for focus and intervention. The data is collected and analysed so that we can build on the previous year’s reporting and forms part of the information that we collate, monitor and publish to help us ensure that equality considerations are embedded within our employment policies and practices.

## ADC as an employer

The Council are a signatory of the Mindful Employer Charter and a level 2 Disability Confident employer. We also have a variety of polices including Special, Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Shared Parental, Adoption and Disability Leave Polices to support employees back to work or/and support them in the workplace. Equality and diversity is considered in the development and review of policies through the use of equality impact assessments.

The Council recognises and values employees as their greatest asset and the People Strategy details how we attract, retain and develop employees within the Council. It also drives cultural and organisational change, leadership, talent management along with continuous development of both the people and the organisation. Linked to the objectives set down in the Corporate Plan and Transformation Programme, it identifies the people management implications and makes it clear that all employees are vital to the delivery of improving services for local communities. The People Strategy is an integral part of the Council’s performance management framework. It provides the link between valuing and developing people, with improving and developing services and enabling local leadership. The People Strategy is currently being re-drafted as the Organisational Development Strategy.

## Recruitment

The Council’s People Strategy sets out how the Council aims to be an Employer of Choice, this includes recruiting and retaining excellent people, recognising and developing our existing talent pool, ensuring equality and diversity is reflected in service provision and employment practices, fair and equitable treatment of employees in pay, grading and reward structures, developing and maintaining a range of flexible working options, motivating employees and valuing their contribution to organisational objectives, ensuring we fulfil our duty of care to our employees including actively promoting Health and Well Being and Attendance strategies and employing a workforce that reflects the diversity of the local population.

Work is being undertaken to review the current recruitment and selection process which will feed into the revised Recruitment and Selection Strategy. The Council adopts the latest recruitment practice, and a programme of recruitment training has taken place to address workforce challenges and tackle issues around recruitment and retention of staff. Reasonable adjustments and support are provided to assist candidates with the recruitment process and interviews. The business case for the new Policy and Performance Team is building in career graded and graduate roles which seek to enhance opportunities for younger people and the Community Safety Team have developed and promoted domestic abuse champions to support inclusion and to enable survivors to get the help and support they need.

## Working arrangement adjustments

Working arrangement adjustments have been made to allow employees to maintain employment, these have included facilitating flexible working for a number of employees with different circumstances, including employees with caring responsibilities, children or those nearing retirement.

## Workplace support

The Council has continued to support employees with other adjustments to enable them to maintain employment, examples of this include the provision of sit/stand desks for a number of employees, templates to support dyslexia, specialised software and specialised keyboards, risers, office chairs, ancillary devices and adjustments to desks. The Corporate Health and Safety Team assist with individual display screen equipment (DSE) assessments including identification of potential adaptations and suggested reasonable adjustments to provide and maintain safe working conditions including for colleagues with individual needs, helping to keep employees safe/healthy whilst in work as well as providing health and safety advice for all.

Employees have also accessed free, confidential and independent advice and support on a variety of different subjects, including mental health support through our PAM assist scheme. In addition, the Council is currently introducing support via the Access to Work Mental Health service Maximus, which provides support to help employees to improve their wellbeing with a personalised wellbeing support plan.

## Training and work experience

The Council is committed to its employees and their ongoing development.

In October 2022 the Council started a rolling programme of digital skills courses for employees in partnership with local and regional education providers. In the last 12 months the Council has employed 18 apprentices or trainees and facilitated nine work experience placements. A number of our teams, including Housing and Planning, have attended schools and job fairs, providing practical activities and insights into working for us.

Mandatory equality in the workplace training is undertaken by all staff every year. Courses have been offered to promote skills and career development, including the DCN Leadership Programme, our Aspiring Leadership Programme, graduate roles in a number of our teams and service specific courses.

Secondments are advertised across the Council to encourage employees to progress their career and for us to retain valuable employees. Coaching has been provided to assist employees with their career and other areas e.g. time management and confidence. Conflict Resolution Training has been arranged for staff operating in front facing roles such as Customer Services. The Council has rolled out Mental Health First Aid training with 47 employees trained and offering support.

The Housing Team have supported two employees to undertake the Level 4 Certificate in Housing (Chartered Institute of Housing) which they passed in June 2023. Several external specialists in housing management and housing repairs and maintenance have provided training to the Housing Management Team and the Support Services Team over the past year. Formal external ILM Supervisory and Management training courses have been provided and employees are encouraged to participate in the Aspiring Leaders Course. Specialist technical training has been delivered to assist staff in their roles.

Staff have the ability to access face-to-face training for Health & Safety courses and HR are developing a full range of face-to-face courses to assist those with limited access to online training. Staff are offered and undertake training as appropriate to ongoing professional development and in relation to specific skills.

## Hybrid working

Where roles allow it, hybrid working is offered to employees. This has also enabled rationalisation of office space, reducing outgoing costs. Flexible working request arrangements have been agreed to enable staff to balance work/life demands.

Flexible and agile working arrangements are agreed across teams where roles make this possible to support employees with productivity, wellbeing and maintaining a healthy work/life balance. This is facilitated in a variety of ways including access to Office 365, provision of mobile phones and the allocation of laptops, as required.

## Employee Survey

The bi-annual employee survey took place in November/December 2022 and all officers were encouraged to complete the survey. This included monitoring employees’ perception regarding feeling valued by management and Members, being treated fairly and being supported by the Council. The Working Together Group and the Policy and Performance Team is looking at the actions arising from the survey and Council wide focus groups have been held with staff following the employee survey to identify areas for improvements before feeding back to management.

1. **To ensure community engagement and consultation**

**is effective, enabling participation**

## Understanding our communities

Information about our residents can be found here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/areas/E07000170/>

On 1 August 2023, the Council launched a survey of Ashfield residents which ran for a three-month period until 31 October 2023. In the survey we asked residents to tell us what they think about the area they live in and the services we provide, and what they think our priorities over the next few years should be. We wanted to hear from as many people as possible, and staff were asked to promote the survey to residents. The results of the survey will soon be available.

We also monitor place data, either that we own or at partnership level, in order to analyse and understand which areas of the District are in most need of support. The place/resident survey was re-introduced this year and will now be undertaken on an annual basis. Questions within the resident survey ask residents what their priorities for the District would be, as well as their perception of different services across the Council. This helps policy to be underpinned by what the residents of Ashfield want to see.

The Council records information about tenants (including for example the nature of a disability or a preferred method of contact) and this information is updated on a regular basis so that staff are aware of tenants’ needs when sending out information and meeting residents face-to-face. This information is available to all staff within the Housing and Community Safety teams. Profiling of tenants is undertaken to ensure that we understand our customer base and can adapt our service delivery/services to their specific needs. A report has been produced which summarises that whilst we hold characteristic information on the majority of our tenants, we do have some gaps in the data. An action has been created to review the characteristic information we hold on tenants. The action plan will also introduce tenancy audits to ensure that the information we hold on our tenants is accurate and up to date. It is expected that as part of the day-to-day interactions with tenants, officers will review the information we hold on tenants. It is an expectation of the Housing Ombudsman Service and the Regulator of Social Housing that we will know our tenants and will adapt/adjust our services based on their needs.

We monitor services users who have accessed the Tenancy Sustainment and Money Management Advice Services to identify trends and gaps in the service. An end of year profiling report is produced for both services.

Community ‘pop up living rooms’ have been arranged with residents in Coxmoor as part of the Safer Streets Project to understand what interventions and ideas residents had for improving feelings of safety within the area. The Community Safety Team have taken part in ASB awareness week which included events for public feedback, consultation and information relating to accessing support for ASB in the area. NHSEI funded work in Coxmoor and Broomhill/Butler’s Hill has helped develop an understanding of these areas, and increased awareness across the system.

We endeavour to engage with representative groups for example, staff in the Place Team listened to a complaint about access to shops from a wheelchair user and produced a leaflet on disability and discrimination for local shops which was distributed by the Town Centre Manager.

The new Corporate Plan and priorities are based on an understanding of community needs. The corporate scorecard contains a range of annually published data on Ashfield as a place and its people. This data is publicly available, available nationwide, and comes from a variety of sources. The annual resident survey also gives us the chance to understand feelings of perception across the District from different communities and gives residents the opportunity to feed back their thoughts on the District and the role of the Council.

The Citizens’ Panel also gives residents a platform to hear more about the Council and express views. The Citizens' Panel is a dedicated group of people who are actively willing to engage with us either face-to-face, over the phone or take part in regular surveys to help us improve our services and as a Council. The Citizens’ Panel is currently being re-invigorated following the resource and communication challenges of the Covid Pandemic.

The Corporate Plan is published for residents to understand the actions and goals of the Council.

## Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The SCI sets out our approach to involving communities, businesses and organisations in all aspects of planning, with the aim of making the planning system accessible to all, enabling communities to be well informed about, and involved in, the planning process. This encourages greater participation and a more efficient and inclusive decision-making process that recognises the varied needs of different sectors of the community and the understanding that some groups are more able to participate than others.

The SCI has been updated to reflect our Community Engagement Strategy and the requirement introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SCI sets out how, where and when there are opportunities to engage, contribute and participate in the planning process. We will look to facilitate engagement through a variety of means.

## Consultation and Engagement

We have employed wide ranging methods of engagement, this has included face to face in town centres, social media, workshops, activity sessions, social media and including graphics and image content to present information as well as text. We are working with partners to improve the reach of consultation and engagement and continually assess consultation methods to ensure engagement reaches those who find services hard to access.

Whilst the resident survey was conducted predominantly online, we also provided an accessible version and the chance for residents to contact the Council for help completing it over the phone. Surveys were also completed face-to-face at a range of events, including Ashfield Day (held in Sutton), as well as outside leisure centres in both Kirkby and Hucknall.

Public consultation was undertaken to gauge feelings of safety in the Ashfield District as part of the Safer Streets project, partnership responsibilities and obligations under the Serious Violence Duty and Community Safety Partnerships requirements.

## Tenant Engagement

The Council’s Housing Teams have continued to engage with our tenants and leaseholders in a variety of different ways*.* This has included commencing surveys with tenants on the Housing Management Service. These cover various elements of service delivery e.g. housing repairs, major works, Money Management Service, Tenancy Sustainment Service and Tenancy/Estate Service. The results will be used to identify service improvements. Working with tenants and leaseholders to review and develop services is embedded into our day-to-day practices and is a regulatory requirement. The Regulator of Social Housing expects landlords to ensure tenants are well informed and are able to participate in the decision-making process about the Housing Services they receive.

We hold bi-monthly Tenant Gateway Meetings with Gateway Members (tenants who represent the various areas of the District). The Tenants Gateway representatives consider proposals for service developments and innovation, improvements to policies and procedures and review performance and complaints. The Tenant Engagement Officer leads on this involvement. We have presented information at the Gateway meetings on the management arrangements put in place for housing health and safety compliance and the ‘Big 6’ Tenant Satisfaction Measures from the Social Housing White Paper and forthcoming legislation (Social Housing [Regulation] Act 2023). This type of engagement will be ongoing.

Other ad hoc meetings are held to discuss service specific issues and our Tenant Magazine includes articles which encourage tenants to provide feedback on service delivery.

We have in place a customer opinion and influencing network (COIN). COIN members (tenants) can tell us about their experience of the housing services they have received and give their opinion on how things could be improved. This may include giving feedback via our website, email, face to face or by telephone.

The Tenants Charter outlines the mechanisms that the Operations Directorate has in place to consult and involve, tenants, leaseholders and service users in the decision-making processes and the provision of services and opportunities for tenants to get involved. We have a dedicated Tenant Engagement Officer whose role is to co-ordinate all tenant involvement activity as set out in the Co-regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2011 (Consumer Standards). Staff also attended Ashfield Day in August 2023 and obtained feedback from tenants’ views on housing service standards.

2023/24 saw the first collection of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures tenant perception survey as a regulatory requirement. These have been undertaken with a sample of tenants, with a census approach to underrepresented groups of tenants, in order to seek the maximum level of representation. Characteristic information was logged against the survey results and will be reported internally, as well as to the Regulator. The characteristic information was collected by generating a unique survey link in Lime Survey, using the tenant’s unique person reference number, in order not to deter tenants from completing the survey by increasing the number of questions asked. Surveys were completed over the phone with the majority of respondents and face to face sessions were available within the sheltered courts, in an attempt to maximise participation. As part of this, information on a range of characteristics and demographics is captured, enabling the feedback to be considered in the context of different communities and groups.

Regular housing surgeries are held in sheltered housing courts where tenants are invited to attend. This assists elderly and vulnerable tenants with accessing the housing service. Over the past year, we have conducted several estate inspections across the District, tenants and residents are invited to attend these.

## Customer Feedback

We monitor complaints and compliments received to inform service delivery and to make any required improvements. Our policy relating to complaints and compliments has been reviewed and amended to ensure compliance with the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code and a new system was launched in November 2022 to better monitor this feedback. As part of the complaints process and customer satisfaction surveys, any learning points are addressed with staff to ensure a continuous culture of learning and development.

1. **To provide advice, information and services in a**

**way that is effective, inclusive and accessible**

## Customer Support and Accessibility

Service requests can be made via telephone, email, web form and in person to ensure that residents are supported in accessing services. Consultation and engagement activities are also undertaken out in the community. As part of triaging service requests, key questioning is included to ensure that resident vulnerability is understood and assessed.

The Tenant’s Portal allows tenants to see the status of their repairs request. All Housing Register services are available online, from application through to bidding and the offer of accommodation. The system upgrade is due to be completed in 2023/4 and will further improve online functionality, giving applicants access to documents, letters and all written communication via their portal.

A digital zone at our Urban Road offices provides free access to the Council’s digital services for customers who are unable to access the internet at home or on the go. Our Digital Zone includes reasonable adjustments as assessed and recommended by Disability Nottinghamshire.

We have engaged with two local colleges who are running digital upskilling courses at Urban Road every week and our Customer Services Team has assisted self- serve options available at the Urban Road offices. Customers are offered support from the Revenues and Benefits Team to set up and access our Open Portal to enable them to access their own details and service online at any time. The Revenues and Benefits Section have conducted a review of Single Persons Discount for Council this year to over 45,400 customers and offered a range of options for them to complete the review, the form was completed by 64% online, 17% over the telephone and 19% by postal return.

Whilst the resident survey was conducted predominantly online, we also provided an accessible version and the chance for residents to contact the Council for help completing it over the phone. Surveys were also completed face-to-face at a range of events, including Ashfield Day (held in Sutton), as well as outside leisure centres in both Kirkby and Hucknall. The Community Engagement Strategy and toolkit is published, and a training module is available for all employees.

We provide transport for tenants on the Tenant’s Gateway to enable them to attend meetings. In March 2023, the Council varied the terms of the Tenancy Agreement. Tenants were consulted about the proposed changes to the Tenancy Agreement in October and November 2022. They were able to provide feedback in a variety of ways which included face to face sessions at sheltered courts, by post, and via email.

## Reasonable Adjustments

Our reasonable adjustments policy can be found here <https://www.ashfield.gov.uk/your-council/strategies-plans-policies/policies/equalities-and-diversity/> Large print items are available on request, for example, the provision of rent statements in large print and a translation service is available for all service areas to access. We offer a range of ways to access services, through online channels, telephone, face-to-face or in customers’ homes in relevant circumstances. Our Digital Zone includes reasonable adjustments as assessed and recommended by Disability Nottinghamshire.The Reasonable Adjustments Policy is supported through the facilitation of hybrid and remote working facilities.

We write letters on the standard letterhead which includes information on how to request reasonable adjustments. We have utilised the use of the interpreter/translation service for residents and have signposted officers to work with organisations such as Nottinghamshire Deaf Society in order to ensure that residents have appropriate support in place for contact with officers. We support residents to read and understand any correspondence, and also signpost to Ashfield Voluntary Action who can assist residents with reading, understanding and responding to written correspondence from the Council.

The Revenues and Benefits Section offer a Visiting Officer service to assist customers in their homes who are unable to access our services in any other way.

## Inclusive and Accessible Housing Services

Information on Housing systems has also been used to establish if any additional requirements or service delivery changes need to be made to accommodate needs. Officers assist tenants with literacy issues by reading or writing letters on their behalf.

Assistive technology has been provided for our tenants, including flashing light fire alarms and doorbells, instead of sound, fall detectors, monitored smoke alarms and exit sensors following an assessment of need.

We have also provided adaptations within both our own properties and private rented/owned properties to support independent living and specialist refuge accommodation for residents fleeing domestic violence has also been provided.

## Equality Impact Assessments

Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken on strategy/policy changes to inform decision making and identify what we need to do to mitigate any negative impacts as appropriate.

We undertake equality impact assessments prior to considering any legal proceedings undertaken as part of our Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure. Equality impact assessments have been undertaken on the mobility scooter policy, lifeline service review, the Damp and Mould Policy and the Recharge Policy. Equality impact assessments have been conducted in respect of planned housing developments, and in relation to committee reports. Equality impact (screening) assessments are in place for the Corporate Health and Safety Policy and also a new screening assessment has been produced for the new Corporate Clothing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Policy.

## Modified Waste and Environment Services for Accessibility

To ensure services are accessible, the Neighbourhoods team offer smaller general waste bins for residents who struggle with moving larger bins. We also provide assisted collections for residents with protected characteristics related to age and disability, and additional disposal capacity for residents with medical waste needs. We also provide a dedicated collection service for offensive waste.

Our waste collection calendars include shapes to make them easier to read and understand and we also have braille sizing on the lids of our general waste bins to help those who are visually impaired identify the correct bin.

We provide every property in the District with an annual free bulky collection of up to three separate items, ensuring that everyone can have a collection when it’s convenient for them rather than at a set time of the year.

## Polling Station Accessibility

All new polling stations are reviewed for accessibility as part of a risk assessment when considering any new locations.

Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 councils must complete a review of polling districts and polling places at least once every 5 years in a compulsory review period, the latest review was undertaken in 2023. In addition to this there has been a number of interim polling places reviews undertaken during the last couple of years following the Covid-19 Pandemic that have considered accessibility.  The Elections Act 2022 also placed new requirements regarding accessibility for all polling stations during an election.

## Website Accessibility

A digital zone at our Urban Road offices provides free access to the Council’s digital services for customers who are unable to access the internet at home or on the go.

We have maintained a modern website with relevant content and improved access via different devices. The website is compliant with current legislation, with an action plan to develop further accessibility improvements, and allows contrast and text size adjustment. There is dedicated resource in the Digital Team, through the web content lead, plus the use of tools to identify any issues.

The Council also responds to external assessment of the accessibility of our website, meeting deadlines for rectification of any areas for improvement.

1. **To support individuals and communities to achieve a better quality**

**of life particularly targeting resources at areas of most need**

## Council Tax Support for Care Leavers

We work with Nottinghamshire County Council to support care leavers with their Council Tax. This can be a discount of up to 100% on their Council Tax bill until they are aged 25-years-old. Care Leavers are not expected to apply for this discount as we work closely with the County Council to identify who is entitled to the discount and apply it to their account.

## Tenancy Sustainment and Money Management Services

The Council has a Tenancy Sustainment Service. Two specialist Tenancy Sustainment Officers deliver a short-term floating support service to vulnerable tenants to enable them to establish and sustain a tenancy, live independently and access external support. The pre-tenancy process now provided by the Money Management Advice Team has been reviewed to strengthen affordability checks and encourage a ‘rent first’ culture. 955 tenants, between April 2022 and March 2023, have been assisted with welfare and money management advice, and all tenancy support cases have been able to successfully remain in their tenancy following targeted support. Support is promoted through the Tenant Magazine and in correspondence, conversations, and home visits etc. The service has a 100% success rate (tenants remaining in their tenancy 6 months after support has ended). Referrals to the Tenancy Sustainment Officer are monitored to determine who is being referred and if there are any trends.

The Money Management Advice Service is provided for tenants who are struggling financially. Two specialist Money Management Advisors are responsible for providing a money management advice service to tenants to maximise their income and enable them to access appropriate benefits and charity awards. The aim of the service is to prevent tenants from being evicted and losing their home. 549 tenants were supported during 2022/23. The Money Management Advice Service and Tenancy Sustainment teams secured £108,798 in backdated benefits, additional benefits, and charitable donations during 2022/23.

A Welfare Support Fund has been set up (through external funding) to support vulnerable tenants i.e., victims of Domestic Abuse/homeless tenants in obtaining basic essential items for their home including bedding and white goods etc. and we uundertake a range of property adaptations to assist with independent living and liaise with Occupational Health in relation to large scale property adaptations / extensions. We adjust our repair priorities where vulnerabilities are known and consider necessary adjustments when undertaking major works – we work around availability and adapt works programmes to suit special needs/circumstances.

Disabled Facilities Grants continue to be made available to private residents for adaptations to enable them to remain independent in their home. There is a Better Care budget of circa £1m per annum to assist with a range of minor to major adaptations. The Council has a Complex Case Team which provides intensive holistic support to tenants and residents which helps them to live independently.

## Ensuring the quality of homes

Lifetime homes standards are applied to Council new build housing. Recent developments have included bungalows and family homes specifically developed for those with full time wheelchair users. New homes built by the Council include additional energy efficiency measures to minimise carbon use and be affordable for low-income households. The type and size of properties being developed is linked to housing need. The planning application process supports the provision of quality housing standards.

There are substantial dedicated budgets for the improvements, repairs and maintenance of tenants’ homes. There is an Aids and Adaptations budget for major and minor adaptations to tenants’ homes where there’s an identified need; four large extensions were completed in the last financial year.

**Providing a fair Housing Allocations policy**

The Council’s Housing Allocations Policy ensures fair and equal access for all residents in housing need. The Council ensures that properties with pre-existing adaptations are ringfenced to applicants with a need for those adaptations, thus ensuring the best use of stock.

## Homelessness

The Council continues to be the lead for the Countywide Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme. This includes a range of targeted interventions to prevent and relieve rough sleeping. A review of temporary accommodation for homeless households has been conducted and new arrangements put in place to utilise self-contained accommodation made available by Framework, thus reducing the need to use unsuitable B&B type accommodation.

**Tackling Anti-social Behaviour and Hate Crime**

The Council uses tools and powers under the Housing Acts and the Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, and incidents of anti-social behaviour are reported, recorded and managed in line with the Council’s Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and procedures. These interventions regulate tenant behaviour and helps to provide safe and secure homes and communities. Cases of serious ASB including hate crime, harassment and domestic violence are reported to the Community Safety Team. Key questioning at initial point of contact with the Community Safety Team highlights the risk and threat of harm and vulnerability to ensure that appropriate interventions can be put into place at the earliest opportunity, including support from the complex case team and external partners such as Nottinghamshire Police, Social Care, Fire Service, Substance Misuse Services, Domestic Abuse Services, Probation and Health professionals. Referrals are made to MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and other support agencies to safeguard vulnerable adults and children and protect them from further harm or abuse. Employees have hate crime training as part of their equality and diversity training.

We look to minimise opportunities for anti-social behaviour and crime by designing it out when assessing planning applications, for example encouraging the closure of alleyways and overlooking of public open space.

## Partnership Working

Our Health and Wellbeing team have focused work on our three most deprived areas. 3 Community Partnerships have been established in Leamington, Broomhill/Butler’s Hill and Leamington and provide a space where system partners can collaborate around work, services and projects within the areas. There are Health Hubs at our Leisure Centres, alongside concessionary memberships for a range of people, including armed forces veterans, young people living in care and people living with Parkinson’s. Care Leavers can access free gym, swim and classes at our Leisure Centres, with over 20 of our residents taking this offer up currently.

Free access to swimming during school holidays is provided in our leisure centres for children and young people, alongside free holiday activities and food programmes for children receiving free school meals. At the new Kirkby Leisure Centre accessible toilet, changing and shower facilities and a Changing Places room are provided. In the pool area a variety of access options are available, including stairs, a hoist and a pool pod, making access possible by wheelchair. Accessibility has also been improved at Hucknall Leisure Centre.

Our Feel-Good Families scheme provides free of charge activities online and in parks. We have employed a Food Coordinator to support food banks and food clubs in the area and to develop a strategic approach to food poverty.

The Council’s Business Support Team is at the fore of supporting primary, secondary and adult skills partnerships. On 6 October 2023 we held our Careers Day where all partners were involved.

**Supporting the Third Sector**

The Complex Case Panel and Vulnerable Adult Support Scheme are a group of professionals who meet monthly to discuss complex cases and vulnerable residents. At these meeting, case management plans have been devised with wrap around support for our residents who face multiple interconnected challenges relating to housing, substance misuse, mental health and wellbeing, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and wider care needs.

Work has also been undertaken to divert individuals away from criminality through extensive work of the Complex Case Team and Operation Reacher Team under the work of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP).

A Tenancy Sustainment Directory has been developed for staff, this includes details of agencies and organisations in the third sector that we can signpost tenants to or contact to arrange support.

Our Helping our Community Day in March 2023 brought together internal service areas, educational establishments, the voluntary sector and other partner organisations to provide help and information to our residents. We continue to provide grants, advice and support to organisations within the Voluntary and Community Sector.

**Devolution**

The Place Directorate has been working to identify significant projects for the Combined Authority Deal. We have undertaken work to understand the structure of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA), including preliminary work in understanding the sub-structures and focuses, speaking with Council employees who are engaging with the EMCCA and compiling a list of relevant organisations/meetings attended by those employees.

The Council has bid for and accepted funding to retrofit homes to improve thermal efficiency and reduce fuel poverty, there have been high levels of success in the last few years. We target works where possible and in train is a move to improve and align data from other key/public services, including district wide regarding vulnerabilities/deprivation to enable a more focussed targeting of works to social and private sector properties in the future.

**Discover Ashfield**

Through the Discover Ashfield Partnership there is regular liaison and proactive working to identify projects and tasks and to monitor delivery. We are running UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) projects to develop skills and to assist businesses. The Discover Ashfield Partnership continues to meet every six weeks and provides focus and drive to deliver priorities.

In town centres we are adapting layouts to encompass the needs of a wide range of the community including people living with disabilities, this includes; the layout of outdoor markets and the public realm to ensure accessibility; seeking customer and trader feedback as to how effective measures are in achieving aims and embedding good design principles for signage; and information to prevent any restrictions to access to information.

## Working with Businesses

The Council undertakes initiatives to support businesses and regeneration. i.e. safer streets safe space accreditation and shop watch scheme. Selective Licensing schemes were re-introduced in designated parts of Sutton Central and Stanton Hill and there is a new, streamlined approach to the application process which has enabled officers to spend more time working with tenants and landlords to improve property conditions and management practices. A dedicated Private Sector Housing Enforcement Officer has been introduced to ensure speedy and robust action is taken against those landlords who fail to comply and whose properties and management practices fail to meet the required standards.

Our licensing team works with landlords of licensed premises and taxi drivers to encourage safeguarded and appropriate standards and to minimise the potential for antisocial behaviour.