#

# Equalities Scheme Position Statement 2024

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 2024.

During 2024 the Council set up an Equalities Monitoring Group. The purpose of the Group is to work collaboratively with all Directorates within the Council to ensure that the Council continues to meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and to support the strategic ambitions of the Council’s Equalities Scheme 2022 - 2026 and the new Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy (approved by Cabinet in April 2024).

The main objectives and responsibilities of the Group are to champion the delivery of improvement actions across the Council and wider District in order to make Ashfield a place where no-one experiences discrimination or disadvantage because of their individual characteristics, and where the diversity of our community and employees is recognised, supported and valued, as well as engaging and educating key stakeholders to deliver behaviour change strategies.

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. 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 policies including Special, Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Shared Parental, Adoption and Disability Leave 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 Organisational Development 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 Organisational Development 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 Organisational Development Strategy has been reviewed and refreshed and is underpinned by an action plan.

## Recruitment

The Council’s Organisational Development 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 new Policy and Performance Team has built in career graded and graduate roles which seek to enhance opportunities for younger people.

## 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 (including flexible retirement). A new flexible working policy was introduced in April 2024.

The Council is currently working on guidance for carers so that they can be given additional support and guidance to those with caring responsibilities.

## 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.

Potential incidents (including verbal abuse etc.) are reported and actioned through the Council’s Incident Reporting System (AIRS) and use of the Corporate Employee Protection Register to highlight individuals and risks.

Employees have also accessed free, confidential and independent advice and support on a variety of different subjects, including mental health support through our Employee assist scheme (EAP) which is through Health Heroes. In addition, the Council has introduced support via the Access to Work Mental Health service Maximus, Able Futures and Talking Therapies which provides support to help employees to improve their wellbeing with a personalised wellbeing support plan.

The Unreasonable and Unreasonably Persistent Complaints Policy has been reviewed and updated and conflict resolution training has been provided to Customer Services staff.

## Training and work experience

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

Between January 2024 and December 2024 the Council employed 27 apprentices, graduates and trainees, facilitated seven existing employees to undertake apprenticeships and facilitated nine work experience placements. A number of our teams and apprentices 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. Training for managers on equality impact assessments took place in December 2024, and will be refreshed in May 2025. Wider equalities training for all staff (and Council members) is under review with a pilot training course for members of the Housing Repairs team set to take place in February 2025 before potential wider roll out.

Courses have been offered to promote skills and career development, including the DCN Leadership Programme, the Council’s 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.

The Housing Team have supported employees to undertake the CMI level 3 – Leadership and Management Training Course, one employee has been seconded to a Team Leader role (as a development opportunity), coaching has been provided to some employees in the Section to assist with their development, one employee has been supported to access a Level 3 housing qualification and two apprentices have been employed within the Housing Management Team, who are learning practical skills associated with the service area and undertaking a professional qualification.

The Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service Team have employed two trades apprentices, three officers have commenced training on damp and mould, which includes guidance and training on how damp and mould can impact on tenants and residents’ lives. Several external (specialist in terms of Repairs & Maintenance) training courses have been provided to the Repairs & Maintenance Team over the past year and formal external CMI Leadership and Management training courses have been provided.

The Strategic Housing Team have supported two employees through the Council’s Aspiring Leaders programme, one employee has completed the CMI Leadership and Management course (level 3), two employees have enrolled on BSc courses as part of their professional development and one employee has been supported to complete his professional qualification.

The markets staff are to receive First Aid training, this will add value to their roles and their personal development.

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.

A hybrid working policy is being developed and is due to be implemented early 2025.

## Employee Survey

Employees have recently had the chance to complete a survey focused on their workplace health needs. This provided an opportunity for employees to shape the workplace health offer provided by the Council. It identified the benefits employees gain from hybrid working, and a need to increase awareness of the support available to help people with caring responsibilities. The Council is in the process of launching a new guidance on carer support and has trained six carer champions. The survey also highlighted over 75% of staff feel optimistic about their future with the Council, feel a sense of accomplishment and have overall good job satisfaction. The Council has 35 trained mental health champions.

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/>

The Council continues to review the findings of the last residents survey. This helps policy to be underpinned by what the residents of Ashfield want to see. The Council is committed to continue to review and expand the ways we engage with our communities, initially through a review of the Community Engagement Strategy.

Information on tenants (Nature of Disability/Preferred method of contact/Religion) is recorded on the Housing Management System and updated on a regular basis so that staff are aware of requests for information in other formats, specific preferred method of contact etc. to ensure that this is administered correctly when sending out information and meeting residents face to face so that Officers are aware if the customer has communication problems. This information is available to all Sections within the Operations Directorate, the Community Safety Section can also access this information.

Profiling of our tenants is undertaken to ensure that we know our customer base and can adapt service delivery/services to their specific needs. A profiling report is produced twice yearly and shared with all Assistant Directors in the Operations Directorate for use when service planning, developing services etc. 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. The Vulnerable Tenants Policy sets out how will we do this.

Work is underway to introduce annual tenancy audits. Tenancy audits will be used to review and update data to ensure that this is up to date. As part of the project vulnerability indicators have been updated on the Housing Management System.

We profile services users who have accessed the Tenancy Sustainment and Money Management Advice Services. Reports are produced monthly and annually. These are used to identify trends and gaps in the service. We also profile the ethnicity of complaints that fall within the jurisdiction of the Housing Ombudsman Service, which is compared to the tenant base, to look for any inequality.

The Citizens’ Panel 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 has been relaunched, a meeting was held in July 2024 and the next meeting is due to take place in March 2025. The Citizens’ Panel is a great way of gathering residents feedback on a range of subjects. This feedback will help to drive customer experience and service improvements across the Council in our overarching vision to deliver ‘great’ services. We will also be able to gather insight into any areas of concern that residents have and address them before they become an issue or have an adverse reputational impact on the Council. The July 2024 meeting was held at Kirkby Leisure Centre, we held one formal session in the morning and one in the evening and a drop-in session in the afternoon.  Approximately 20 people attended across the day however more recently membership has increased to 76 and this should improve the success of the Citizens’ Panel.

The sessions covered the following points: What is the Citizens panel? What does it mean to be a panel member? We shared some outcomes of the residents’ survey and got the panels perspective on them and gathered topic ideas for the next meeting.

The Corporate Plan is published for residents to understand the actions and goals of the Council, ward profiles have been created that all staff can access.

Our projects include the Kirkby Long Term Plan, Kirkby Young People’s Mental Health and Playzones, Community Partnerships, Sport England Place Partnership and Young People Mental Health. We are working with the Neighbourhood Forum in Stanton Hill on an investment project. This includes face to face meetings and regular digital communication. The ambition being that the Council supports the ambitions of the local residents.

## 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 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, 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. A Community Engagement Strategy is being drafted.

## Tenant Engagement

The Council’s Housing Teams have continued to engage with our tenants and leaseholders in a variety of different ways*.*

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.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Health and Safety has attended a Tenant’s Gateway meeting to deliver a short presentation on the management arrangements put in place for housing health and safety compliance and the ‘Big 6’ Tenant Satisfaction (building safety) Measures from the Charter for Social Housing Residents and newly introduced legislation (Social Housing [Regulation] Act 2023). This type of engagement will be ongoing.

We have recently recruited to a Tenant Scrutiny Panel, who are in the process of undertaking their first investigation. There is a new Occupier Survey re-introduced for new tenants to seek their views on the quality of the lettings service and their new home. Tenants of those flats where there is a local lettings policy in place were consulted on plans to continue with the criteria for the foreseeable future.

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. Prize draws have been used to encourage feedback.

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 Housing Management Section has responsibility for tenant involvement, empowerment and consultation. 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.

A 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 service and opportunities for tenants to get involved.

The Operations Directorate has 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).

A Tenant Engagement Strategy has been drafted.

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.

Transactional surveys have been undertaken with tenants on the Housing Management Service. These cover various elements of service delivery e.g. Money Management Service, Tenancy Sustainment Service and Tenancy/Estate Service. The results are used to identify service improvements.

Transactional surveys continue to be undertaken following the completion of responsive repairs to gauge and review levels of service delivery and future shape services.

Regular housing surgeries are held in sheltered housing courts to obtain tenant’s views on the services they receive. 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.

Operations Directorate - A survey is sent out to tenants with each complaint response. Return of this survey assists with making improvements to the complaints process/services. Complaints are also used as a valuable source of learning, wherever possible learning outcomes are identified and implemented as part of complaint investigations.

A Vulnerable Tenants Policy has been developed in conjunction with the Tenants Gateway. This Policy sets out how we will deliver our services to vulnerable tenants and how they can access services. Learning Outcomes Feedback is provided to Officers where issues of conduct are identified e.g., via complaints and other feedback. Quality checks are undertaken of incoming telephone calls to the department (ad hoc basis). Officers have provided with guidance and information around the stigmatisation of social housing tenants.

A Compensation Policy was developed for social housing tenants to recompense tenants when the service hasn’t been to the standards expected

## 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 updated. 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. The system is being further developed in 2025.

The complaints and compliments process for tenants has been made as accessible as possible, in an attempt to remove any potential barriers. Complaints can be made in person, by phone, via the website in writing or by email, and are also accepted from third parties acting on a tenant’s behalf. Support is offered to tenants who require this to access the process. Complaint handlers are advised to assess the complainant’s vulnerabilities and agree any adjustments that may be required, the outcome of which is documented. Complaints are accepted from representatives of tenants/leaseholders, should they require support to submit these to the Council. Complainant’s ethnicity is monitored (based on the information held within Capita) and reported to senior managers/members/Tenant’s Gateway to ensure that certain groups are not discriminated.

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.

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. Assisted self- service is undertaken in the Council’s Digital Zone by Customer Services staff. Further courses are due to be delivered by local colleges in the Digital Zone in 2025.

When we undertake service reviews we look at the customer journey/experience as part of the review

Customers are offered support from the Revenues and Benefits Section 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 Tax 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.

Event Safety Management Plans provide details on accessibility.

## 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. We offer a range of ways to access services, through online channels, telephone, face-to-face or in customers’ homes in relevant circumstances.The Reasonable Adjustments Policy is supported through the facilitation of hybrid and remote working facilities.

The Council’s standard letterhead is used to write letters which includes information on how to request reasonable adjustments. We have utilised the use of the interpreter/translation service for residents and tenants, 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. Officers assist tenants with literacy issues by reading or writing letters on their behalf.

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.

The Vulnerable Tenants Policy also sets out what reasonable adjustments are available to Council tenants when accessing the housing services. This Policy refers to the Reasonable Adjustment Policy. Complainants are asked specifically about any vulnerabilities and associated reasonable adjustments required to engage with the process, which are then documented in the response.

## 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.

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.

We can provide transport for tenants so they can attend Tenant’s Gateway meetings. When we undertook the Tenant Satisfaction Measure Survey, we visited sheltered housing courts to provide enhanced support and the remainder of surveys were undertaken by phone to attempt to make the process as accessible as possible. A small number of surveys were sent in alternative formats to assist with participation.

Tenants are offered various accessible ways to engage with Council Services so they can participate in the decision-making process. Tenant engagement mechanisms are advertised in the Tenants Magazine ‘Tenants Matters’. Arm-chair options for engagement are offered to tenants.

## 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.

Equality impact assessments have been undertaken on the introduction of service charges and vulnerable tenants’ policy, the Compensation Policy and the Repair and Maintenance Policy. Equality impact assessments have also been conducted in respect of new house building schemes.

Equality Impact (screening) Assessments are in place for the Corporate Health and Safety Policy and a screening assessment has been produced for the recently introduced 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.

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 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.

The Vulnerable Tenants Policy sets out the Council’s commitment to supporting and assisting vulnerable council tenants to ensure they have access to high quality services. We continue to promote the tenant’s portal and Council’s website to assist tenants to self-serve.

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 Housing Management Department 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. 1071 tenants, between April 2023 and March 2024, 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 Section provides a Money Management Advice Service to 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. 532 (included in the 1071 figure above) tenants were supported between April 2023 and March 2024.

The Money Management Advice Service and Tenancy Sustainment teams secured £100,831 in backdated benefits, additional benefits, and charitable donations between April 2023 and March 2024.

A Welfare Support Fund has been set up (through external donations/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. A number of tenants have benefited from this fund between April 2023 and March 2024.

The Council undertakes a range of property adaptations to assist with independent living and liaise with Occupational Health in relation to large scale property adaptations / extensions. We administer and maintain six properties on behalf of a women’s aid organisation, ensuring that a readymade, secure home is available at short notice for those fleeing domestic violence. We participate in the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation programme and delivery the Sanctuary Scheme for survivors of domestic abuse. The Housing Repairs and Maintenance team have their own dedicated Domestic Abuse Champion as part of the Sanctuary Scheme.

The Council is involved in a range of resettlement and asylum related schemes, working with a partners to accommodate and support many families moving to Ashfield for the first time. We are the lead authority in the delivery of the countywide Rough Sleeper Initiative Programme, aimed at preventing and reducing incidence of street homelessness.

Disabled Facilities Grants continue to be made available to private residents for adaptations to enable them to remain independent in their home. 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. Housing Officers are patch based and undertake inspections as and when they identity issues with property condition. We review new housing developments at completion to ensure the standard of new homes is maintained and we identify changes to meet future tenant’s needs.

We undertake ongoing performance monitoring work to ensure compliance with the Housing Regulator’s Tenant Satisfaction (building safety) measures - the key housing health and safety risks (the ‘Big 6’). This includes managing, monitoring, measuring, recording and reporting on relevant areas of service delivery (in-house or by 3rd parties) to ensure regulatory compliance and that ultimately, tenants remain safe in their homes.

**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. We have responded to the MHCLG consultation on proposed changes to the guidance on Lettings and have had initial conversations with partners including registered providers regarding areas for possible change. A full review and proposals for the new Lettings Policy will be considered in 2025.

## Homelessness

The Council continues to be the lead for the Countywide Rough Sleeper Initiative Programme, focused on delivering a range of interventions to prevent and relieve street homelessness. Rough Sleeper Action Group meets frequently to discuss multi-agency approach to dealing with entrenched rough sleeper cases. We have an active homelessness prevention service with newly launched Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.

**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. Between April 2023 and March 2024, 168 referrals were 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.

A review of the ASB procedure has been undertaken and improved ways of working have been introduced over the past year. All cases of hate crime, harassment and domestic violence are reported to the Community Safety Team under the ASB Principles agreed between Housing and the Community Safety Team.

## Partnership Working

Our Wellbeing team continue to drive the delivery of the Health and Happiness theme of the Corporate Plan, and Ashfield Be Healthy, Be Happy Strategy 2021-2025, which includes focused work in our three most deprived areas. Community Partnerships have been established in Broomhill/Butler’s Hill and Leamington and provide a space where system partners can collaborate around work, services and projects within the areas.

In Leamington, £200,000 has been secured through the Sport England Place Expansion Fund. This money will provide additional capacity to accelerate the work of the Community Partnership. It will enable further community engagement to better understand the barriers residents face to being physically active and provide start-up funding to get activities started.

The Council has been working closely with Ashfield Voluntary Action to provide a weekly ‘get together’ at Willets Court. This comes on the back of engagement with older people in the area, who said they felt lonely, and wanted a place to come together with others in a similar position. The group has been meeting for over 12 months, and enjoy singing, board games, and have regular visits from other services, who provide useful information to the group.

The Council has worked closely with Active Notts, to better understand the mental health needs of young people and their families in Kirkby. Engagement took place in a wide range of settings within the area. The engagement highlighted a need for more safe places and positive activities for young people and quicker access to services and more long-term support. The findings of this work have been reported to Mid Notts Place Based Partnership and Nottinghamshire Wellbeing Board. To date, the findings are helping shape investment from Kirkby Long Term Plan, informed the need to invest in a Playzone on Morven Park, and made space available free of charge for a local Community Interest Company, to offer informal parent support sessions.

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 experienced persons can access free gym, swim and classes at our Leisure Centres, with over 45 of our residents taking this offer up currently. Approximately 75 people with long term health conditions, per month, receive additional support through the Exercise Referral Scheme, with a further 170 monthly attendances at the Good Boost and MSK (Muscular-Skeletal) Escape Pain sessions.

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.

The Council funded a new learner pool at Hucknall Leisure Centre. The pool opened in July 2023 and provides additional water space for swimming lessons, parent and toddler swimming, and sensory sessions.

The Council worked in partnership with Art Explora to bring the Mobile Museum to Ashfield. The museum featured artwork from the Tate Gallery. Opportunities were created for school children and residents to visit the museum, and take part in a range of interactive activities, that may have otherwise be inaccessible to Ashfield Residents. The Council has worked in partnership with Inspire and Nonsuch Studios, to successful apply for £1million worth of Arts Partnership funding to create and develop more opportunities in the District for residents to engage with and enjoy a wide range of arts activities.

The Council has confirmed investment of over £300,000 into Playzones in Ashfield. The Playzones will be situated in areas of deprivation. The Council worked alongside Ridewise to engage with over 500 residents. The community engagement helped us to better understand where Playzones should be located, and what activities should take place. The Council will continue to work alongside residents and community groups as the work progresses. Playzones will provide safe spaces for residents, local groups and sports clubs to be active.

The Council has invested over £80,000 this year to support four key infrastructure organisations within the District. The funding supports the running costs of the organisations, which enables them to continue to support residents with a range of matters including finance, debt, transport, food, and loneliness.

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.

**Supporting the Third Sector**

The Ashfield Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is a coalition of different agencies that works together to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and protect vulnerable people across the District. The CSP is made up of services from Nottinghamshire Police, Ashfield District Council, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, Health and Probation Services.

As part of the CSP’s approach, annual surveys and data analysis is conducted to understand residents’ reviews and support with local priority setting and delivery. The CSP have set priorities for 2024-2027 as:
1. Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour
2. Protecting Vulnerable People
3. Addressing Serious Violence, Domestic Abuse, and Violence Against Women and Girls
4. Tackling Neighbourhood Crime

The Council’s Community Safety Partnership Strategic Plan was updated and approved in April 2024.

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.

We continue to provide grants, advice and support to organisations within the Voluntary and Community Sector.

**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. £11,000 worth of grants have been awarded to local organisations, who have created and developed opportunities for residents to get involved in growing activities, to increase awareness of healthy eating, reduce food waste and provide free, and local activities for residents to engage with. Learn to cycle and bike maintenance sessions have been running weekly at Sutton Lawn. The Discover Ashfield Partnership continues to meet every six weeks and provides focus and drive to deliver priorities. Local people, organisations and businesses have been recognised for their contribution to Ashfield through the Discover Ashfield Awards.

The Council has worked through the Discover Ashfield Board to set up the Kirkby Long Term Plan Board. The Board is made up of organisations, people and businesses from the Kirkby area, and will oversee the investment of £19.5m funding subject to confirmation from Government. Surveys have been created to understand what matters to people living, working and learning in Kirkby, and how they would like to see the funding utilised. This included support with completing paper versions of surveys and group sessions facilitated through Voluntary and Community Sector partners.

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.

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.