

EDI Making a Living Initial Action Plan:

Commitments for the next 6 months

Introduction

The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Making a Living Strategy outlines the development of the programme from the State of the Borough report through the community conversations and the EDI Making a Living Summit event. It demonstrates how communities have been at the heart of the approach, identifies the challenges raised by the people of Waltham Forest and outlines how to support everyone in the borough to make a good living, live well and make ends meet.

Sitting underneath the Strategy is this initial action plan. The action plan sets out the full range of policies, programmes and projects that Waltham Forest Council, partners and community groups are either currently delivering or are committed to deliver in the next few months. These commitments are based around the recommendations given by participants at the EDI Making a Living Summit.

This initial action plan is not the full action plan, which will be published later this year with measurable objectives and full costings. This document outlines the work that has already been committed to in the short term, separating these under each recommendation into two sections: What is currently being done; and what will be explored in the next 6 months. The full action plan will demonstrate the longer-term commitment to the recommendations created by summit participants.

The action plan has been developed with key teams from across the Council responsible for delivering services to residents to help everyone in the borough to make a good living. It has also been consulted upon by the summit participants, ensuring that the work fully responds to both the recommendations themselves and the wants and needs of the participants.

It is evident that the initial action plan is heavily focused on the delivery of existing Council services and programmes. It is not the intention of this report to show how much work the Council is doing, but to identify the gaps which need to be addressed by every actor in the borough through the full action plan. This will demonstrate the work needed by partners, stakeholders and voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups across the borough in the longer term. Building on the participatory approach of the engagement, the action plan must at its heart continue to build capacity within the VCS sector and work more closely with people in the borough so that everyone can make ends meet and make a good living.

There is much work still to do. Council services must better align with one another so that residents can access services in a simplified and holistic way, with more tailored opportunities for groups who experience the most significant structural inequality. By mapping the existing programmes and projects, this action plan will identify the gaps in the work and the scale of the challenge ahead.

Building Inclusive Workplaces

Recommendation 1: Reasonable Adjustment Passports (RAP's)

Aim: *To remove the need to repeat reasonable workplace adjustment needs throughout working life, make it easier to start the conversation, reduce stress and simplify changing roles.*

Who will benefit? Anyone with health needs, impairments, or disability, as well as employers who will be able to manage employees to increase productivity through support and understanding.

What is currently being done?

Summit participants noted there would be value in a dedicated process of reasonable adjustment passports. Whilst the Council does not currently have RAP's in place, significant steps forward have been taken including:

- **Disability Confident scheme:** Staff are able to discuss their adjustment requirements at the initial stages of recruitment. Council recruitment processes involve an early-stage occupational health study to understand the reasonable adjustments that are needed for any applicants, and the organisation fully supports the Disability Confident Scheme.
- **Differently Abled Forum:** Since 2020, the staff network has been supporting internal policy decision making, advising on how to make all aspects of recruitment and internal processes more accessible and to better support disabled people in work.
- **Safe Spaces programme:** Like most organisations, the Council has a low level of self-reporting disabilities, likely due to ingrained perceptions of discrimination. Working with the differently abled forum, the safe spaces programme supports culture change and ensures everyone feels able to disclose disabilities at work. The Council is working to create a standardised process to monitor and oversee the time taken for reasonable adjustments to be made.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

Following the recommendation of the Summit, the Council is now committed to implementing reasonable adjustment passports for staff by the end of 2022. This will:

- Reduce the demand on the employee to repeatedly explain their needs and automatically be provided with necessary adjustments. Based on the Civil Service carers passports, this can reduce the number of applicable staff reporting stress to reduce by almost 300%.
- Fully engage with the differently abled forum to ensure that disabled staff support the changes.
- Enable the Council to influence other organisations in the borough to introduce RAP's, so that they become commonplace across employers in Waltham Forest.

In addition to implementing RAP's, the Council will also be reviewing its application processes to ensure they better suit the needs of the borough. This will include looking at the digital platforms currently used, and where job opportunities are advertised. This review will focus on equality and inclusion to ensure that more residents from disadvantaged communities will be able to access London Living Wage jobs at the Council.

Recommendation 2: Facilitating flexible working

Aim: *To get the most from employees, remove barriers to optimising work, enable a wider range of employees and make the employer more attractive.*

Who will benefit? Everyone, but particularly people with caring and childcare responsibilities, disabled people, and people with mental health difficulties.

What is currently being done?

- **Modern Ways of Working:** New policies for the workplace which support flexible working, embrace virtual meetings as standard practice and encourage staff to work in the way that supports them to deliver their best work for residents. This supports a culture change enabling employees to work more flexibly, and managers to understand the benefits of flexible working.
- **People Strategy:** Published last year, the People Strategy set out plans to support Council staff's development and workplace requirements. Diversity and inclusion is central to the Strategy, with the ambition to achieve greater diversity of the Council's workforce so that staff reflect the community they serve.
- **Supporting working fathers:** Programme to increase shared parental leave provision and encourage fathers to take up the available leave and time off for infant appointments, supporting working fathers and also reducing gender inequalities around caring responsibilities. This has recently led to the Council winning the 2022 Working Dad's Employer Awards.
- **Mindful Employer Charter:** The charter is an NHS approved scheme for organisations to prove they are positive about mental health in the workplace. The charter also provides staff with access to resources and training on what an inclusive workplace is, re-enforcing commitment to staff wellbeing. Moving forwards, the Council could promote the scheme to partners and stakeholders, encouraging them to sign up and making it easier for residents to access jobs in workplaces which are inclusive of mental health needs.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

Although the Modern Ways of Working is an internal facing approach, the Council could look to encourage other employers in the borough to adopt modern ways of working by sharing advice and best practice. The Council could also encourage employers in the borough to sign up to the London Mayor's Good Work Standard, which brings together best employment practices, including flexible working, to help employers improve the inclusivity of their organisations.

Recommendation 3: Make job adverts and application forms available to all by making digital and hard copies

Aim: *To make it easier for people to find jobs available, with everyone having access to paper as well as digital applications (choice) because not everyone can access computers and internet.*

Who will benefit? People who are digitally excluded, particularly older residents and disabled people.

What is currently being done?

- **Reviewing application requirements:** All Council vacancies are available digitally through a website called Jobs Go Public. As this contract expires next year, the Council is currently reviewing the application requirements for all job advertisements. This review will focus on EDI to ensure that more residents from disadvantaged communities will be able to access London Living Wage jobs at the Council. A review of the practicality of advertising job opportunities in physical settings such as libraries and community centres will also take place. The review could also include implementing the ban the box scheme, which encourages employers to not unfairly include requirements to disclose criminal convictions
- **Steps into Work:** The scheme uses dedicated work coaches to offer CV and application advice, interview coaching, financial advice and mental health support, jobs skills courses and support into work for economically inactive residents. The programme also directly supports the 350-strong annual cohort into Council opportunities where possible.
- **Digital skills:** The Adult Learning Service provides equipment such as laptops and tablets to residents who are struggling financially, support those with no or low digital skill and offers an Essential Digital Skills Qualification.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Summit participant engagement:** There is an opportunity to work with summit participants to co-design new approach to job advertisements, understanding the barriers that currently exist to access information about jobs.
- **Customer Experience Strategy:** The draft strategy will identify how to ensure residents have excellent experiences of engaging with the Council, receiving relevant information and support in a way that aligns with their needs.
- **Digital Inclusion Strategy:** The Strategy, which has been engaged on with over 600 residents, will be published in the next 6 months and delivered over the next 3 years. The Strategy sets out how everyone in the borough will have the skills, tools and support to thrive digitally. Funding is not yet in place, but if secured the programme will look to reduce the number of residents who do not know how to access a device and who do not have essential digital skills by 1/3 by 2025, enabling more residents to take up online job opportunities and feel confident in online applications.

Recommendation 4: Consultation with all staff seeking their input for creating all-inclusive workplaces, including future proofing, acoustics, lighting, heating, accessibility, braille and inclusive toilets for male, female, gender neutral and disabled staff.

Aim: To support an open and honest inclusive environment for staff views and needs which supports the green agenda and is cheaper in the long run, using a loop system, recycled air and providing prayer rooms and wheelchair accessibility.

Who will benefit? Everybody, but particularly people who are deaf, blind, disabled, neurodiverse, LGBTQIA+ and members of religious groups.

What is currently being done?

- **Fellowship Square redevelopment:** The new Town Hall is fully wheelchair accessible, whilst the site contains 3 wellbeing rooms, including breastfeeding space, a dedicated prayer room and gender-neutral toilets throughout the building. Despite this, a review is needed on the impact of open workspaces on neurodivergent employees.
- **EDI Development Programme:** Starting last year, the development programme is a series of programmes to support Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the Council. EDI training has been delivered to all 540 managers in the Council to drive culture change, and a future leaders programme has been initiated, using positive action to support staff from under-represented groups into leadership and management.
- **Modern Ways of Working:** Following on from the People Strategy, the Modern Ways of Working programme allows employees to work flexibly around their commitments, and support a culture change to become more inclusive. This supports the Council's target to be the employer of choice for all residents.
- **Staff networks:** Over the last two years, 4 staff networks have emerged: The Race Equality Network (REN), Differently Abled Forum, Women's Network and LGBTIQ+ Network. Each group supports the People and Organisational Development team to create an inclusive calendar, pilot safe space clinics and promote conversations around inclusive workplaces.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

The EDI development programme will continue throughout 2022 and beyond. In the near future, all 2600 Council staff will take part in a digital programme which aims to create a culture of inclusion and support colleagues to become allies and ensuring the Council is a safe space. Additionally, as the other civic buildings are redeveloped they will be designed as more inclusive workplaces, featuring gender-neutral toilets as standard, as well as being fully wheelchair accessible.

Supporting Inclusive Workplaces

Outside of the 4 recommendations created by Summit participants, there are a number of actions the Council and partners are taking to ensure that inclusive workplaces are built both within the Council and across the borough, including:

- **Flexible working accreditation:** Camden Council is Timewise accredited, demonstrating that the organisation is committed to supporting employers to work more flexibly. Waltham Forest Council will explore signing up to Timewise or a similar scheme and support other organisations in the borough to sign-up. This would benefit people with childcaring or caring responsibilities and has been shown to reduce the gender pay gap in organisations who adopt it.
- **Good employment charter:** This is a membership scheme to encourage and support employers to identify how they can improve their workplace inclusion and working conditions. Should the Council sign the charter it would hold the Council to account and ensure it focuses on the problems raised by residents, as well as enabling the Council to encourage partners and businesses to improve the inclusivity of their own services.

DEVELOPING GOOD QUALITY JOBS FOR ALL

Recommendation 1: Improve transport and public transport accessibility and affordability so that more employees can access jobs in the borough and more customers travel to local businesses, leading to more sales, growth and economic opportunities.

Aim: *To provide affordable transport which enables everyone to access employment and reduce pollution, increase access to local shops, increase economic growth and employment, reduces loneliness and ensures everyone can safely travel to work.*

Who will benefit? Everyone, in particular local businesses attracting people to the borough.

What is currently being done?

- **Active Travel:** Since 2014, more than 40km of cycle paths have been built to encourage active travel and improve air quality. With over 500 bike hangars and 7 station cycle stores, those who cannot store bikes in their homes are able to elsewhere. Over 21,000 have been trained in cycle skills, and 6,000 bikes have been fixed free of charge, to remove financial barriers to active travel and enable employees and employers to move easily around the borough.
- **ZED delivery:** Businesses in the borough are able to use zero-emission-delivery cargo-bikes to transport goods around the borough as a low impact delivery solution for businesses.
- **Freedom Pass:** This scheme ensures anyone who is a resident of Waltham Forest ward is disabled or is of state pension age has free access to most public transport options in London, and buses around the Country, funded by Waltham Forest Council.
- **15-minute neighbourhoods:** Recent research has demonstrated the discrepancies in transport provision across the borough, with a direct correlation between higher deprivation and lower access to public transport, grocery shops, parks and green spaces and health centres. This research also found older residents have less access to local amenities. More work needs to be done to improve the equality of access to and provision of services across the borough.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

Although jobseekers in London can currently get discounted travel in London, this is time-limited to 3 months. The Council will look at whether it can lobby central government for free travel for everyone eligible for unemployment benefits, so that the cost of attending an interview is not a barrier to work.

Recommendation 2: Encourage and support the creation of local internships, apprenticeships and enterprise programmes (preferably paid), as well as mapping and co-ordinating existing provision, resulting in a clear online and in person (within community hubs) directory for people to use.

Aim: *To enable people, particularly groups who historically have been unable to access programmes due to prejudice and a lack of networks, to get a foot on the jobs ladder. This will be achieved through coordinated programmes and mapping what new programmes are needed, supporting residents' employment and development.*

Who will benefit? Programmes should be for all, but with a large number specifically for marginalised and under-represented groups, as well as those that aim to fill gaps within the community's needs.

What is currently being done?

- **Futures Programme:** The Council's Futures Programmes has supported over 200 young people to upskill themselves to enter the creative, tech, enterprise and green sectors. Over 75% of participants on the course have moved into employment, education or self-improvement following the courses, which are targeted at under-represented groups.
- **Jobs Fairs:** Fairs provide an opportunity for residents to access advice and employment opportunities in an open environment. Some are targeted at specific groups (e.g. young people) whilst others have focused on specific sectors (e.g. creative, green-tech). Times are often dedicated for vulnerable and disabled residents to access the fairs outside of main hours.
- **Kickstart scheme:** The Council has supported over 300 placements, 60% of which pay the London Living Wage. This has enabled 90 individuals to move from apprenticeships into permanent employment. The programme has included 3 targeted programmes for ex-offenders, low-income households and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. 47 organisations in the borough supported the scheme, which has been delivered in partnership with Project Zero.
- **Covid-19 business support grants:** The grants supported unemployed residents to start businesses, providing advice and financial support to purchase equipment. The service was over-subscribed, although funding for the Covid-19 support grants has now ended.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Online youth hub:** The online hub will be launched shortly for young people to access employment opportunities, internship and apprenticeships, as well as skills-building activities. The hub will be a partner-led offer and will be signposted through existing youth hubs, such as Project Zero and Leyton Youth Centre.
- **Summit participants:** Summit participants could continue to be engaged to map and develop a directory of jobs, apprenticeships and internships in time for the full action plan. This opportunity will be explored in the coming months.
- **Mapping opportunities:** Although there are lots of programmes to support internships, it is evident the Council needs to review how to map and co-ordinate available opportunities, and that the offer for residents is easy to use. In the next few months, the Council will look to review how these services can better support the needs of marginalised and under-represented groups and provide employment support once training, internships and apprenticeships are completed.

Recommendation 3: Employment support programmes tailored to different needs, for example for older people, people moving back into work and young people.

Aim: *To remove all barriers in a holistic way to support progression to higher wage work, creating a sense of worth and acceptance and positively impacting on mental health.*

Who will benefit? Vulnerable and unrepresented residents, including unemployed residents; people who are employed and poor (in-work poverty); people with mental health difficulties; Disabled people; older residents; young people; single parents; homeless people and ESOL speakers.

What is currently being done?

- **Passport to work:** The scheme is a free programme run by the Adult Learning Service for unemployed WF residents to access digital skills, interview skills, customer service and practical skills, with the aim of accessing employment. 50% of learners access employment after attending the course, with a wide range of industries and sectors represented.
- **Waltham Forest Jobs:** The website supports all residents to digitally access job opportunities, CV writing, support, practical advice and volunteering opportunities. It also offers apprenticeship advice and advertises upcoming job fairs in the borough.
- **Steps into Work:** Having engaged with over 30,000 residents, Steps into Work supports 350 economically inactive people annually into work with dedicated work coaches. The scheme offers CV and application advice, interview coaching, financial advice and mental health support, jobs skills courses and support into work for unemployed residents.
- **Kickstart:** Run in partnership with CRATE and Project Zero, the scheme supports young people to access employment during the pandemic. Kickstart has already offered over 300 work placements to young people, with more than 90 of these offering permanent employment. Three of the kickstart programmes are targeted, including for ex-offenders, low income households and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.
- **Futures Programme:** Initiatives to support underrepresented young residents to upskill and enter the enterprise, creative, tech and green sectors. Since inception, over 200 young people have been supported, with over three quarters of these moving into employment, education or self-improvement. 62% of the cohort are from Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Fair Deal Jobs Programme:** By 2023, the Council is aiming to engage 3,500 residents and support 350 into work placements, 300 mentoring opportunities and to train 2,000 residents in skills which support getting into employment. The programme has supported school leavers, people who are long term economically inactive or have recently become economically inactive.
- **Care Leavers Covenant:** Over the next 6 months, the Council will explore signing up to the Care Leavers Covenant. The covenant is a national inclusion process which supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently, offering education, employment, and training.
- **Additional opportunities:** Subject to successful external funding, there are a number of projects which would support key groups into work over the next year. These include programmes targeted at employment for 60 residents with Autism, 35 young people, 20 survivors of domestic violence, 25 residents impacted by the cost of living crisis and 10 care leavers.

Recommendation 4: Mental health training for local employers (including the Council) developed in partnership with mental health services, so that employers can better support employees, provided by local practitioners. This will include information packs for all employees, advice on rejection, enabling people to work from home, and testimonies from people with lived experience.

Aim: *To ensure everyone with mental health needs that need to managed is supported, tackling stigma and improving wellbeing to promote employability, flexibility and balance in employees lives, boosting productivity and connecting people to further professional support if needed.*

Who will benefit? Employees and employers, particularly people with mental health difficulties and organisations who work with people with mental health difficulties.

What is currently being done?

- **Employee Assistance Programme:** All Council staff have access to online, telephone and face-to-face counselling and mental health support. Every staff member is entitled to 6 free sessions of counselling about struggles in their personal, as well as working, lives. The Mental Health First Aid and wellbeing champions also provide support for Council staff in the workplace.
- **Modern Ways of Working:** Policies have been implemented to encourage Council employees to work flexibly and from home where suitable, and support culture change to support positive mental health in the workplace.
- **Thrive:** In 2021 the Council acquired access to the NHS-approved Thrive App. Free for all staff, the app provides digital therapy, teaches mindfulness techniques and offers 24/7 support. The Council could look to offer the Thrive app to partners in the borough, and encourage key employers to use it, highlighting the benefits to both staff wellbeing and reduced absenteeism.
- **Befriending Service:** Run by the social prescribing team, the scheme offers telephone and face-to-face befriending to adults aged 18-59. Eligible residents must be considered socially isolated, and to benefit from dedicated support to help them re-engage with their local community.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Mindful Employer Charter:** Having recently signed the charter the Council will look to promote the scheme with partners and stakeholders, encouraging them to sign up and improving the number of employers with good policies and practices to support staff with mental health. The Council could also share its Modern Ways of Working policies with anchor institutions, enabling employers to better support employees to maintain good wellbeing.

Supporting the development of Good Quality Jobs for all

Outside of the 4 recommendations created by Summit participants, the Council could look to build a network of anchor institutions to support residents to access good quality jobs. Building on the existing work with key businesses and partners, such as Strategic Partnership boards and the existing top 20 business forum, it may be possible to work at borough or sub-regional level to encourage organisations to provide employment support services and targeted employment for underrepresented groups. This

could build on the work as a London Living wage borough, which the Council is already committed to, although it may take more than 6 months to set up effectively.

LEARNING ADVICE AND SKILLS FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST

Recommendation 1: A physical local building hub that provides tailored support, meeting the diverse needs of the wider community and empowering people to access skills, support and interests, which can lead to social inclusion and / or employment.

Aim: *To provide a holistic system that identifies and picks up everyone, regardless of personal background, aiming to address and treat people as belonging to the borough. The system should build safer, integrated communities, giving confidence and belonging and making services easier to use and access by bringing them under one roof.*

Who will benefit? Everyone, particularly those who struggle to use and access current services such as those who are digitally excluded, ESOL speakers and disabled people.

What is currently being done?

- **Libraries:** The 8 libraries in the borough act as a front door for residents to receive support and signposting. Libraries offer a range of services including benefits and work support, digital skills training, children's clubs, signposting health services and pathways to training opportunities. Two libraries also use digital skills champions to support residents to fill in forms and access key services.
- **Children's and Families Centres:** These centres aim to improve outcomes for children under 5, which includes targeted support for families who are in the greatest need. This programme is run in partnership between the Council, the NHS, Citizens Advice and local VCS groups to provide holistic support around families in a physical setting to support social inclusion and improve employment and training opportunities.
- **Ukrainian Residents events:** Two events to support Ukrainian residents were held in April and May 2022. The first had over 100 Ukrainian residents attend an event at Fellowship Square which brought multiple council services together under one roof to provide support on immigration, resettlement, housing, employment, health and external services. This model for bringing services together to provide support for target groups could be replicated in a physical hub to support key target groups into employment.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Pilot drop-in sessions:** Over the next few months the Council will look to pilot targeted drop-in sessions, where residents can visit community spaces such as libraries or VCS venues and get free support from multiple services. This will enable Council services to reach residents in a new way, and better empower residents to access key services, information and support.
- **Family Hub:** Waltham Forest Council is one of 75 local authorities receiving central government funding to support Family Hubs. Building on the 4 Children's and Families' Centres, later this year the Council will develop a Family Hub. This will align to the 15-minute neighbourhoods' model by using community spaces where people are most comfortable.

Recommendation 2: Dedicated youth hubs that help young people and employers to take on young people on employment programmes that are paid and advertised well with thorough support, life skills and knowledge that is essential to the progression to the future of young people in Waltham Forest. This could be face-to-face and on social media, with online integration.

Aim: *To empower young people to be who they want and have the potential to be, teaching skills which are not taught in schools such as finance, mental and social health, and to support employers to understand the value of apprenticeships and young people.*

Who will benefit? Young people, especially those from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

What is currently being done?

- **Kickstart:** Project Zero and CRATE have been instrumental in delivering the Kickstart programme in Waltham Forest. Kickstart has already offered over 300 paid work placements to young people, with more than 90 of these offering permanent employment after the course. Three of the kickstart programmes are targeted, including for ex-offenders, low-income households and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. A challenge for young people has been the relatively low wages on offer, making it difficult for disadvantaged young people and those who do not have their own support network to take advantage of the scheme.
- **Futures Programme:** The programme supports underrepresented young residents to upskill themselves to enter the enterprise, creative, tech and green sectors. Since inception, the scheme has supported 200 young people, with over three quarters of these moving into employment, education or self-improvement. 62% of the cohort is from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Feasibility of 4 youth hubs:** The Council has committed to investing in the future for the communities of Waltham Forest, with 4 dedicated youth hubs for the borough. The Council are currently undertaking a pre-feasibility study to determine where the hubs would be best suited, what services they would provide and how the Council can maximise use of existing support services and locations run by the Council and through VCS partners. A key component of the offer of the 4 hubs is to support young people to make a living through education, training, life-skills and employment support.
- **Online youth hub:** Launching soon, the hub will help young people to access employment opportunities, internship and apprenticeships, as well as skills-building activities. The hub will be a partner-led offer and will be signposted through existing VCS-run youth hubs, such as the Outset centre and Leyton Youth Centre.
- **Summit participants:** Over the next 6 months the Council also has the opportunity to work with participants to map and develop a directory of jobs, apprenticeships and internships for the full action plan.

Recommendation 3: Evaluation of the wants and needs of under-represented groups, by signposting to relevant organisations. Follow-ups should ensure the signposting is a success through monitoring and evaluation. Ambassadors from groups should represent and support them by holding all services to account and ensuring members of the community get adequate support without bias.

Aim: *To ensure all members of the community get adequate support without bias, ensuring services are held accountable and have measurable outcomes published in a simple way, in various formats, such as braille, easy-read etc.*

Who will benefit? All members of the community, particularly underrepresented groups.

What is currently being done?

- **Passport to work:** Programme supporting unemployed residents to access digital skills, interview skills, customer service and practical skills, with the aim of accessing employment. The programme is constantly under review so that it can better support unemployed residents by signposting to appropriate services and monitoring the success of the programme. Half of previous learners on the course get a new job afterwards in a range of industries and sectors.
- **Social Prescribing Service:** Set up in 2016 as telephone only, it now delivers a range of services for vulnerable and marginalised people who require non-medical support to improve their health and wellbeing. This includes signposting to relevant services, welfare advice, benefit referrals and how to manage debt, as well as training and assistance to get back to work.
- **Waltham Forest Jobs:** The website provides an all-options portal for residents to digitally access job opportunities, CV writing, support, practical advice and volunteering opportunities. The Council are monitoring who uses the site and the flow of traffic so that the offer can be refined and improved to provide more tailored options for key groups.
- **Jobs and Courses information volunteers:** Volunteering programme to support the employment, business and skills team in community settings such as libraries. The scheme provided information about jobs and training courses to residents to help them get a job or gain a qualification.
- **Early Help:** Provides targeted support for individuals not in employment with multiple needs by addressing challenges at the earliest opportunity. The Early Help assessments review the needs of the individual and the family through the 'Our Family Journey' model so that the support services can be tailored to the needs of residents.
- **EDI Strategy development:** From the community conversations through to the Summit, the EDI programme is an example of the participatory approach to finding solutions to strategic priorities. Moving forwards, this approach to Strategy development is one that the Council hopes to use for more public-facing Strategies, enabling residents who use services and are most impacted by decisions the Council makes to hold power and exercise influence in decision-making.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Economic analysis of Waltham Forest:** Over the next few months, the Council is embarking on a comprehensive economic analysis of the borough, mapping the workspaces, business sectors and size and location of employers. More detailed analysis will also look at the competitiveness

of job sectors, economic linkages and analysis of the local economy, including where there are skills shortages. This project will undergo extensive engagement to identify which areas and sectors to focus on by working out the needs of employers and employees in Waltham Forest.

- **Digital Inclusion Strategy:** Engaged on with over 600 residents, the Strategy will be published in the next 6 months. Although the actions and funding for implementation are yet to be determined, the Council is targeting a one third reduction in the number of adults who do not know how to access a device and who lack essential digital skills, and a 50% reduction in residents who do not have access to Wi-Fi at home. This Strategy will help more residents to access key services and gain digital skills which are essential for the majority of employment opportunities in the borough. More engagement with residents and VCS groups is needed in the coming months to support the Strategy to effectively support residents who cannot engage.
- **Customer Resolution Centre:** As the first point of contact for residents who contact the Council via telephone, the Customer Resolution Centre plays a vital role in sign-posting residents to appropriate services. Over the coming months staff will be supported to provide additional information to digitally excluded residents to enable them to access services and understand where the gaps are. The Council will look to engage with appropriate VCS organisations and residents to map the existing challenges residents face when using the customer resolution centre and identify solutions to these.
- **Families in Housing Need:** As the cost-of-living crisis continues to deepen, the Council has committed £2m to support Families in Housing Need. 40% of people in temporary accommodation are employed, so the challenge is to not just supporting people into work, but to maximise their incomes. Interventions are currently being scoped to ensure that the programme will meet the demands of families in housing need.

Supporting the provision of learning, advice and skills for those who need it most

Outside of the 3 recommendations created by Summit participants, there are a number of actions the Council and partners are taking to ensure that all residents, and particularly those who experience the greatest disadvantage, have access to learning advice and skills support.

- **Economic analysis:** As highlighted in the recommendation 3 of this section, the Council's economic analysis of the borough will shape the future provision of learning, advice and skills support.
- **Linking Adult Learning and Jobs Brokerage:** The Council is looking to strengthen the ways of working between the adult learning service and jobs brokerage services, ensuring that the thousands of learners taking part in courses in Waltham Forest are offered a smoother progression into employment and employment support. This will ensure that pathways are created between the training and skills provided by adult learning and the employment opportunities in the borough, refreshing the service to meet residents needs post-pandemic.

CREATING A FAIR AND CARING SYSTEM

Recommendation 1: Creating a safe space where residents, especially those who are marginalised or vulnerable, can access a wide range of services and resources.

Aim: *To address the local need for an accessible hub where people can access multiple services and career opportunities without being hindered by obstacles or barriers.*

Who will benefit? Vulnerable and marginalised people who are excluded from accessing services, VCS groups who deliver services for vulnerable individuals and the individuals who access them.

What is currently being done?

- **Children's and Families Centres:** Examples of physical spaces where support is given to families in the greatest need, with signposting to support services such as wellbeing charities and citizens advice, and hosting services for other groups such as the ageing well sessions.
- **Ukrainian residents event:** Multiple council services came together in one place to provide support to over 100 residents on immigration, resettlement, housing, employment, health and external services. This model for bringing services together to provide support for target groups is one that could be replicated in a physical hub to support key target groups into employment.
- **Jobs Fairs:** Fairs provide an opportunity for residents to access advice and employment opportunities in an open environment. Some are targeted at specific groups (e.g. young people) whilst others have focused on specific sectors (e.g creative, green-tech).

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Families and Homes Hub:** With a new hub in 2024, over the next few months the Council will scope how the space should be designed and what services residents want in the hub. The hub is an opportunity to design a safe space where residents will be given targeted support.
- **Targeted drop-ins:** The Council will look to pilot targeted drop in sessions, with multiple services which enable residents to make a good living to visit community spaces such as libraries or VCS venues to offer free drop-in support to residents in a physical setting. This will enable marginalised and vulnerable residents to access a range of services in a single physical setting.
- **Family Hub:** As one of 75 areas receiving government funding, later this year the Council will be developing a new Family Hub. This will align to the 15-minute neighbourhoods' model, using community spaces where people are most comfortable.
- **Libraries:** Libraries offer a huge range of services which support people, particularly those who experience inequalities, to live well and access services as conveniently and inclusively as possible. Over the next few months, the Council will review how the range of services libraries offer are advertised, in particular for digitally excluded, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Recommendation 2: The council to change its systems for accessing information and services so that people who are digitally excluded and/or not able to leave their homes can easily access all Council services.

Aim: *To address digital exclusion within Council services and change and improve services for digitally excluded and those who are not able to leave their homes.*

Who will benefit? Older residents, disabled people and residents who can't afford broadband, smart phone contracts or don't have a laptop or printer.

What is currently being done?

- **Digital Champions:** The programme provides opportunities for residents to learn skills to access services and information online. The scheme provides laptops and tablets for residents who are struggling financially and offers an Essential Digital Skills Qualification.
- **Adult learning offer:** The Adult Learning Service provides equipment such as laptops and tablets to residents who are struggling financially. The service also supports those with no or low digital skill and offers an Essential Digital Skills Qualification.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Digital alternatives - Libraries:** Although most people prefer to access Council services online, this is not the best approach for everyone. Libraries offer a wide range of services, including digital support. Over the next six months the Council will review the skills and staffing within libraries to look to meet demand and improve advertising of the services available at libraries so that vulnerable residents and the digitally excluded are aware of support.
- **Digital alternatives – Phoneline:** Should residents be unable to access services digitally or physically, the Council maintains a phoneline which residents can call to access the vast majority of Council services. However, it was evident through the summit engagement and community conversations that the phoneline does not adequately support many residents, who find that the number of options is confusing, and that it takes too long to get through to a staff member. The Council will review the phoneline to identify barriers to accessing services and develop solutions to the challenges identified.
- **Digital alternatives – frontline services:** Over the next six months, the Council will review key frontline services with summit participants. This review will identify how current pathways through Council services can exclude residents who face barriers to accessing support, and what alternatives can be developed for digitally excluded and housebound residents. Services to review may include physical hubs, phoneline, housing and families. The Council will also scope how to support housebound residents to access Council services.
- **Digital Inclusion Strategy:** The Strategy and action plan will be established within the next 6 months, for delivery in the next 3 years. Should funding be secured, the actions for the Strategy will help more residents to get online and access services digitally, reducing demand for non-digital services. It will also provide laptops and equipment to be loaned to disadvantaged residents so that finances are not a barrier to accessing online services. The digital inclusion Strategy will also look at the customer journey of various Council services to understand how to improve the provision for those who are not digitally confident and understand the barriers to accessing services for digitally excluded residents.
- **Review of applications:** As part of the review of Council applications, a new website to advertise job opportunities will be utilized next year. A review of the practicality of advertising job opportunities in physical settings such as libraries and community centres will also take place. This may enable those who are not confident in digital skills to access Council job opportunities.

Recommendation 3: There needs to be a system of employment (with policies in place) with fair hours and leave and where it is easier to raise issues regarding work conditions. This should apply across all sectors for marginalised groups – to include the whole community, new and old.

Aim: *To allow employees to be treated fair and equitably, without making assumption that everyone benefits from the same support. This would deliver an improved and positive workforce.*

Who will benefit? Vulnerable and underrepresented groups including young people; older people; survivors of Domestic Violence; people with mental health difficulties; disabled people; women; people with childcare and caring responsibilities and students.

What is currently being done?

- **London Mayors' Good Work Standard:** The Standard goes beyond statutory requirements to bring together best employment practices, including flexible working, to help employers improve the inclusivity of their organisations. Moving forwards, the Council will look at how it can promote the Good Work Standard to other organisations and businesses in the borough.
- **Modern Ways of Working:** The People Strategy sets out how the Council has adopted a flexible approach to the return to the office following the pandemic. Building on this, the new Modern Ways of Working demonstrates the commitment to flexible working, embracing virtual meetings as default for all non-frontline services and encourage staff to work in the way that supports them to deliver their best work for residents. This supports all Council staff through a culture change to become more accepting of flexible working.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **EDI development programme:** The training offer will continue throughout 2022 and beyond. Following the inclusivity training given to all 540 managers across the Council, all 2600 staff will take part in a digital programme which aims to create a culture of inclusion and support colleagues to become allies and ensuring the Council is a safe space.
- **Future Leaders:** Programme will support more than 150 Council staff members from under-represented groups into leadership and management roles. The programme will help the Council to continue on its path to being a safe space for all to work, and to reflect the diversity of Waltham Forest.
- **External partners:** Although much progress has been made to make the Council an equal and safe place to work, over the next few months a review will take place to see how the Council can support all employees to be treated fair and equitably by organisations in the borough.

Recommendation 4: The Council 'goes to' community spaces to engage with people who are prevented from leaving their homes or are unable to due to coercion or domestic violence. This would highlight available services rather than expecting them to come to the Council.

Aim: *To provide knowledge and services to groups, particularly those who have experienced domestic violence, giving them greater confidence to make decisions and deal with their life circumstances.*

Who will benefit? Everyone will benefit from this but specifically survivors of domestic violence.

What is currently being done?

- **VAWG Partnership:** The violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) partnership has a number of programmes where the Council goes to the community, including the Safe Homes programme which provides support and gives a drop-in service for domestic abuse survivors and looks to break the cycle of harm and reduce reoffending. The VAWG partnership also works in schools to raise awareness and give support and bystander intervention training. More recently, the Safe Streets App has been launched, which anyone in Waltham Forest can use to report street harassment and get access to specialist support.
- **EDI Summit:** Held at WF Community Hub, the Summit is an example of the commitment of the Council to undertake deliberative democracy in community spaces and bring services and key policies to the community.
- **Wellbeing cafes:** The cafes have been used to support mental health services and develop new skills in community spaces, featuring at MTC (Leyton), Hornbeam (Chingford) and Salvation Army (Walthamstow). Each café provides activities for 10-12 residents to access benefits, search for jobs and develop volunteering skills.

What will be explored in the next 6 months?

- **Families and Homes hub:** To design the new Families and Homes hub the Council will look at existing examples of bringing targeted services under one roof and research current customer experiences to discover what would work best for residents of Waltham Forest. This provides an opportunity to design a safe space where residents will be provided with targeted support. It is evident however that more needs to be done to understand the needs of residents who are unable to leave their homes and determine how best to highlight services which can support all residents.

Supporting a more fair and caring system

Outside of the 4 recommendations created by Summit participants, there are a number of actions the Council and partners are taking to ensure that the wider system of support services is more caring and fair towards under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

- **Customer Experience Strategy:** A full review will take place of how the Council contacts residents, specifically focusing on how vulnerable groups are helped to access services equally. It will also set out how current services will change to better suit the needs of residents.
- **Families in Housing Need:** The Council has committed £2m to help families tackle the cost of living crisis. This will support residents who live in social housing, temporary accommodation or are at risk of homelessness and who face an uncaring system in ways, from the benefit cap being lowered to the crisis of unaffordable housing and in-work poverty.
- **Shared Prosperity Fund:** The Council will look to lobby the Greater London Authority (GLA), who distribute London's share of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to ensure Waltham Forest gets a fair deal from the fund, so that it can be spent to best suit the needs of those who need it most.