Report to:	**HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**
Date	16 March 2023
Executive Member / Reporting Officer:	Councillor Leanne Feeley – Executive Member for Education, Achievement, and Equalities
	Simon Brunet – Head of Policy, Performance, and Intelligence
Subject:	**TAMESIDE INEQUALITIES REFERENCE GROUP (IRG)**
	TAMESIDE COUNCIL EQUALITY STRATEGY 2023-27
Report Summary:	Tameside Inequalities Reference Group (IRG) was established in November 2020 and aims to reduce inequality in Tameside by providing advisory recommendations on tackling key issues within the community. This report provides an update on work undertaken in the last year (2022) and plans for the year ahead. It also provides information on the Council's new Equalities Strategy 2023-27 for information and awareness of the Health and Wellbeing Board.
Recommendations:	That members of the Board note the content of the report and support the proposals for ensuring that recommendations emanating from the IRG are considered in the most appropriate forums.
Links to Health & Wellbeing Strategy:	This report links directly to the stated aims in the recently adopted Charter of reducing and preventing inequalities in Tameside.
Policy Implications:	There are no direct policy implications as a result of this report but the activity summarised and associated reports do outline a number of challenging recommendations. Should they be taken forward they will have policy implications and will need to be subject of further reports from the relevant lead areas.
Financial Implications: (Authorised by the statutory Section 151 Officer & Chief Finance Officer)	There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The recommendations from the activity and associated reports could have financial implications where policy or service delivery changes are implemented as a result. Any changes, and the associated financial implications, will need to be the subject of separate reports.
Legal Implications: (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)	The work of this group is designed to complement the Council's objectives to comply with its statutory duties under The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
	These require the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between all irrespective of whether they fall into a protected category such as race, gender, religion, age, disability gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership (in employment only) and pregnancy and maternity when discharging all of its functions.
	It is important that the outputs from this group are embedded across the Council.
Risk Management:	The approach and activity outlined in the report ensures that a range of partners across Tameside work to address inequalities

and thus meet their indirect obligations as part of the Equality Act 2010.

Access to Information: The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting Simon Brunet, Head of Policy and Performance, Tameside Council.

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1.   BACKGROUND

1.1   The Tameside Inequalities Reference Group (IRG) aims to reduce inequality in Tameside and help build back better and fairer from the COVID-19 pandemic. The group does this by providing a forum for the sharing of ideas and thoughts on carrying out responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

1.2   The IRG is chaired by Councillor Leanne Feeley in her role as Tameside Council Executive Member with lead responsibility for equalities. Membership of the group is drawn from (amongst others):
- Tameside Council elected members
- NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Tameside (GMIC)
- Tameside & Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust (ICFT)
- Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCSFE) sector
- Tameside Independent Advisory Group

A complete list of organisations and groups represented on the IRG can be found in **Appendix 1**.

1.3   While the group is not a decision-making body, it is able to make recommendations and steer overarching action to address inequalities, providing constructive challenge in an advisory role to providers – that being all bodies that provide public services. Delivery, achievement and management of inequality objectives lies with relevant organisations and services. Responsibility for noting and responding to the recommendations falls on all partners across Tameside including the Health and Wellbeing Board, not just the Council.

2.   ACTIVITIES IN 2022

2.1   In 2022 the group has met virtually on:
- 16 March 2022
- 9 August 2022
- 2 November 2022

2.2   During these meetings, IRG members have received presentations on the final outputs from each strand of the work programme, as well as other work that is being conducted in the area of inequalities, such as the Tameside Poverty Truth Commission and Manchester Pride's All Equals Charter.

2.3   Members of the IRG also receive a monthly email that contains information and updates relevant to inequalities issues. Members are asked to disseminate this information where appropriate.

3.   WORK PROGRAMME

3.1   The IRG developed a work programme centred on a number of areas of focus. These were selected based upon feedback received from members of the public across a range of engagement activities, and reflected the expertise that members of the group bring.

3.2   Work within each area of focus consisted of involving the voices of people with lived experience of the issue, the use of data and evidence, and benchmarking against other areas. This work has taken the form of assurance updates, rapid pieces of research, and in-depth reviews.

3.3   The areas of focus are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Areas of focus within IRG work programme.

Area of focus	Lead(s)	Description
Barriers to accessing information	Rehana Begum (Diversity Matters North West)	Feedback from a range of engagement activity found that access to information for people without English as a first language was a large concern through the pandemic. Communications and services must be accessible for those with different language needs. Language barriers can be present in spoken and written language skills, so both must be being considered.
Community cohesion	Rev. Jo Farnworth (Tameside Independent Advisory Group)	Community cohesion is and will be important during and post Covid-19, particularly as the longer-term socio-economic impacts emerge. This area of focus links in closely with the work of the Tameside Independent Advisory Group.
Digital inclusion	Councillor Janet Cooper (TMBC)	It is widely understood that Covid-19 and the shift to digital services and communications has excluded those who do not have access to the internet or online services. Lack of access can be caused by economic factors, poor digital skills, or no availability of devices or connectivity. A focus must be placed on enabling people to gain access to services and information, through digital means or otherwise.
Voice of people with learning disabilities	Liz Wright (People First Tameside)	Insight gathered during the pandemic has indicated that the voices of people with learning disabilities have not been heard to the extent they should during the pandemic. More needs to be done to engage with this group in a meaningful way.
Young people	Aisling Bouketta (TMBC) / Gemma Whittaker (Infinity Initiatives) / Melissa Hopwood (TMBC)	Feedback throughout the pandemic has highlighted that young people want to participate more in discussions around the future beyond Covid-19. There needs to be a focus on what young people want and need post Covid-19.
Emotional Wellbeing – isolation / loneliness	Sobiya Ahmed, Tameside, Oldham & Glossop MIND	Covid-19 has led to large increases in reports of mental health and wellbeing issues, particularly around feelings of isolation and loneliness. People who have been instructed to shield have been particular exposed to worsening mental wellbeing.

3.4 This work programme is now complete. All projects were presented in the regular meetings (paragraph 2.1) and have produced outputs that are now published (hosted) on Tameside Council's website.

3.5 A summary of the reports is provided at **Appendix 2**.

3.6 The recommendations from the reports have been circulated to relevant bodies, service leads, and organisations. Feedback is being sought against each recommendation from all

partners. Below are some Tameside Council work-streams and activities that directly address some of the key recommendations:

- The Independent Advisory Group has now been developed with 37 members from every area and ethnicity in Tameside. A membership review took place in October 2022 to ensure coverage and representation.
- The Young Person's Independent Advisory Group is now established with its own independent chair.
- In August 2022 a Digital Inclusion Officer was appointed in Tameside Council's Employment and Skills Service to develop and deliver a two-year programme of activities to address digital exclusion and increase digital skills within the borough.
- Tameside Council have developed a Digital Inclusion Plan, which includes what projects we currently are working on, GM projects, mapping of digital provision in Tameside, key contacts and resources.
- Tameside Council and Voiceability are working closely to develop the Advocacy Service, including looking at developing opportunities for self-advocacy, the provision of training, and improving the existing communications and information on advocacy.
- Tameside Council Adult Social Care are hiring a Communications Officer to refresh information relating to local offer and services, ensuring that it will be easy to read, accessible, and meaningful.
- Tameside Council Adult Social Care are initiating an Information and Engagement Steering Group and will develop a co-production framework to actively engage with vulnerable people and their families/carers.
- Tameside Council's Equalities Strategy 2023-2027 (forthcoming) has pledged to address barriers to accessing information and services so that these are accessible to protected groups. This includes the development of inclusive and/or tailored communications methods.
- Tameside Council's Engagement Strategy 2023-2027 (forthcoming) has prospectively pledged to improve relationships with VCSE organisations that work with and support protected groups. There will be a focus on outreach and the maximisation of seldom-heard voices in engagement.
- Tameside Council's Poverty Strategy (forthcoming) has prospectively committed to ensuring that all council services access communication and interpretation services.
- Tameside Council's Engagement Strategy 2023-2027 (forthcoming) has pledged to implement a policy or set of guiding principles for meaningful and fair engagement with young people.
- Work is being undertaken to embed children and young people in Tameside's Domestic Abuse Strategy.

4. NEXT STEPS - IRG

4.1 The IRG are in the process of finalising the work programme for the next 12 months. Using the Health & Wellbeing Board work-streams of Poverty, Work & Skills and Healthy Places the members of the group have considered a long list of nine topics and then voted to bring it down to a shortlist of four projects. The scope of each of the four work-streams will be finalised at the IRG meeting on 15 March 2023.

4.2 In 2023 the Inequalities Reference Group also intend to:
- Continue with capturing progress on all recommendations with all partners represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board, and others where appropriate.
- Formalise the relationship between the IRG and the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that future and existing reports have an appropriate platform and are promoted with key partners.

5.   TAMESIDE COUNCIL EQUALITY STRATEGY 2023-27

5.1   In February, the Executive Cabinet of the Council agreed a new Equality Strategy for the period 2023 to 2027.   The new strategy meets the Council's statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to publish equality objectives on a four yearly basis.   The same statutory duty applies to other public sector partners.   To inform the development of the strategy a range of insight was used including an LGA self-assessment, an independent assessment of equality practices from Manchester Pride, IRG reports and a range of consultation and engagement activities.

5.2   Under the Equality Act 2010 the following are identified as the nine protected characteristics:

Age	Disability	Gender Reassignment
Marriage/Civil Partnership	Pregnancy & Maternity	Race
Religion or belief	Sex	Sexual orientation

5.3   In addition, Tameside Council has chosen to adopt a further seven local protected characteristics. They are:

Carers	Mental Health	Breastfeeding
Socio-Economic Disadvantage	Current & Former Armed Forces	
Cared for Children	Care Leavers	

5.4   'Cared for Children' and 'Care Leavers' were adopted as part of the new strategy. 'Socio-economic disadvantage' was part of the Council adopting the socio-economic duty in 2022.

5.5   The Tameside Equality Strategy 2023-27 is attached at **Appendix 3** for information and awareness.   Many of the recommendations and actions will require work across the partnership.

5.6   Tameside as a place should also be aware of and pay regard to the work of the Greater Manchester Equality Panels, which include the following:
- Disabled People's Panel – They have produced a survey, the results of which can be found here GM Disabled People's Panel (gmdisabledpeoplespanel.com)
- LGBTQ+ Equality Panel
- Women's & Girls Equality Panel
- Race Equality Panel – Have begun work on a GM Race Equality Strategy
- Faith & Belief Advisory Panel
- Older People's Equality Panel

6.   RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   As set out at the front of the report.

Appendix 1: list of organisations and groups invited to be part of the IRG.

Action Together
AGE UK
The Anthony Seddon Fund
Children in Care Council
Diversity Matters North West
Greater Manchester Poverty Action / Tameside Poverty Truth Commission
Infinity Initiatives
LGBT Foundation
NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Tameside
People First Tameside
Tameside & Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust
Tameside & Glossop Maternity Voices Partnership
Tameside Council
Tameside Independent Advisory Group
Tameside Youth Council
Tameside, Oldham and Glossop MIND

Appendix 2: summary of IRG reports to date.

Community Cohesion report (was also reported in the 2021 annual update):

The report begins by providing an overview of the concept of community cohesion in the UK, before detailing its development within Tameside. Insight and evidence of community cohesion issues – at a national, regional, and local scale – are explored. Current projects and work programmes that promote community cohesion in Tameside are then detailed, before best practice approaches to community cohesion in other local authority areas are issued.

The report provides a basis for the development of a community cohesion strategy in Tameside, and outlines the need to gather more lived experience of community cohesion issues in the area. The full set of recommendations made in the report are:
- Commit to developing a 5 year Community Cohesion strategy
- Develop a set of local community cohesion indicators
- Ensure that insight and engagement work is conducted on an ongoing basis
- Establish and commit to a 'Charter of Belonging'
- Identify full scope of community cohesion work done by the VCSE sector
- Invest in and continue to develop the pioneering model of Independent Advisory Group (IAG) in Tameside
- Ensure that all groups, committees and networks that are led by the range of public sector partner organisations in Tameside are representative
- Use appropriate and consistent language when describing different groups.

The full report can be viewed **here**

Digital Inclusion report (was also reported in the 2021 annual update):

The report begins by exploring the scale of digital exclusion in the UK, and the factors that drive it. This is complemented by the inclusion of insight from people with lived experience, gathered through a range of engagement activities. An overview of the work currently being undertaken to tackle the issue in Tameside & Glossop is then provided, before the report examines the approaches taken in other local authorities.

The report provides a basis for the implementation of a shared place-based Digital Inclusion strategy for the borough. The full set of recommendations made in the report are:
- Identify a Strategic Lead for Digital Exclusion in Tameside & Glossop and establish a digital exclusion working group
- Develop a place-based strategy and action plan to tackle digital exclusion
- Develop an investment plan
- Build a strong evidence base

The full report can be viewed **here**

Voice of People with Learning Disabilities report:

People First Tameside conducted research on the experiences of adults with learning disabilities in Tameside during the COVID-19 pandemic. Insights were obtained through surveys and interviews. The report explores the experiences of adults with learning disabilities in terms of their mental health, the impact of lockdowns, feelings regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, and the information that they received.

The report made the following recommendations:
- Strengthen the voices of those with learning disabilities in the borough of Tameside through investing in self-advocacy and creating opportunities for people's voices to be heard, enabling people with learning disabilities to take control of their lives.
- Ensure organisations and services engage with people with learning disabilities at every stage co-designing instead of presenting people with a "done deal". This includes the design of housing, health plans, and support services.
- Build back the confidence of people with learning disabilities to re-enter an improved life after the pandemic. Ensure improved communication, that information is accessible, reasonable adjustments are made, and support services are available within Health, Social Care, Education, GPs, Policing, Social Workers, the VCSE sector, and other settings. Leave no-one behind.
- Develop good practice guidance, which adheres statutory services to inclusion at every stage of service planning and development, and good practice to ensure measurable outcomes to address inequalities in service design and delivery.

This report is presented in an accessible format and is available [here](#)

Barriers to Accessing Information report:

Diversity Matters North West conducted research on the barriers that local ethnic minority communities faced when accessing information during the COVID-19 pandemic. They devised a survey and conducted qualitative engagement.

The report starts by detailing the importance of accessing information, highlights research that has been conducted nationally on the barriers that people from ethnic minority communities faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It subsequently highlights other local findings on barriers to information. The main part of the report discusses the research's methodology, findings, and conclusions.

The report made the following recommendations:
- Improve digital accessibility.
- Improve accessibility of translation and language support.
- Develop more inclusive and/or tailored communication methods.
- Services need to be culturally sensitive and aware as to the barriers that people face when trying to access services.
- Public services need to develop and improve links with community organisations supporting those communities, and individuals who are seldom-heard and may struggle to access information.

The report is published and available [here](#)

Experiences of Children and Young People in the COVID-19 Pandemic report:

This report starts by describing the context of the experiences of children and young people during the COVID-19 pandemic. It subsequently describes the findings that were obtained through various channels of engagement: Tameside's Youth Summit, Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Survey, the Partnership Engagement Network, and the Make Your Mark Campaign. The report also highlights findings from research conducted at the national level.

The report makes the following recommendations:
- Agree strategic approach to recognise the issues faced by young people as a result of missed education.
- Implement a joined up approach with existing digital exclusion work to focus on children and young people.

- Tailor important communications that affect children and young people in Tameside, so that they can be understood.
- Agree and implement a policy or set of guiding principles for meaningful and fair engagement with young people.
- Launch a one-stop webpage detailing the offer of mental health support, so that children and young people know exactly what support they can access.
- Domestic violence – link in with the Domestic Abuse Strategy Manager.
- Strengthen local support to asylum-seeking families/children in families with no recourse to public funds.
- Missed milestones – package to acknowledge that it has been difficult for young people who have missed key events whilst in lockdown or encourage schools to hold events to mark the milestones young people missed in lockdown.
- Inequality – pledge to listen to and recognise the concerns young people have about inequality that has come out the pandemic.

The report has been published and is available [here](#)

Mental Health and the Pandemic:

Tameside, Oldham, and Glossop Mind (TOG Mind) conducted research on the experiences of mental health service users during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of their mental health and emotional wellbeing. A survey and focus groups were employed.

The report details the findings from the survey and focus groups, and makes the following recommendations:
- Maintain wellbeing services that were on offer throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which were deemed as vital as therapeutic interventions.
- Keep the option of phone/Zoom services after the pandemic to ensure vulnerable and isolated individuals can continue to access therapies and wellbeing services.
- More or better promoted early interventions and preventative services, including drop-in support and immediate walk-in provisions. Services that don't have waitlists or appointments with the capacity to meet the needs of those in crisis at the moment.
- Flexibility in service delivery hours – clients who work and are experiencing mental health difficulties find it harder to get support due to the sector's limited business hours.
- Transparency with funding – show the public where the money goes to and what differences it is making to mental health services in their area.

The report is published and is available [here](#)