

## Appendix 2: Equality Action Plan Report 2023/24

This Action Plan Report details the progress made by the Council in 2023/24 to meet its five equality objectives.

### **Equality Objective 1: Meeting the needs of an aging population**

- The Mid Devon Meeting Housing Needs Supplementary Planning Document was approved at Cabinet in March 2023 for public consultation. The public consultation ran from Monday 17 July to Friday 25 August 2023. This planning document highlights the growing need for housing for older persons and people with disabilities. It includes sections on accessible and adaptable homes, wheelchair accommodation, and bungalow provision.
- Where a tenant or household member has a disability or a long term illness, the council may provide equipment or adaptations to their home to enable them to remain living in that property. The council will provide minor adaptations for works under £250 where the tenant feels that they may help them or their household member to live more independently. The council requires a referral from the Occupational Therapist for adaptations costing between £250- £1,000.
- Mid Devon Housing (MDH) adapted 155 homes where the value of the work was less than £1k in the period 1 April 2023 until 31 January 2024. MDH carried out works to 59 properties to adapt them in cases where the value of the work was over £1k during the same period.
- In addition, MDHC have approved 77 grants to provide a range of adaptations for adults with disabilities and completed 46 grants helping them to remain safe in their homes in the period 1 April 2023 until 31 January 2024.
- MDH host a community cuppa every other week in Tiverton (weekly from November 2023). It is attended by a number of elderly residents and provides an important opportunity to socialise.
- MDH have prepared a questionnaire (“Getting to Know You”) which will be sent to all tenants. This will ask all tenants to tell MDH about their needs and it includes questions relating to age, disability and communication preferences. This will help MDH to ensure services can be tailored to meet the needs of our tenants. The survey was launched in January 2024 and MDH will collect data in a rolling programme over a period of 24 months.
- Lifeline Alarms can provide peace of mind to people that feel at risk in their own homes. These are provided to tenants and private householders for a fee: <https://www.middevon.gov.uk/residents/mid-devon-housing/help-and-support/lifeline-alarms/>

### **Equality Objective 2: Overcoming the problems faced by vulnerable individuals caused by rural isolation**

- Neighbourhood Officers signpost and refer MDH tenants to help and support where appropriate. MDH provide ad hoc surgeries in specific areas, including some that are designed to combat issues associated with rural isolation. For those that are unable to travel into a larger town, we offer online events alongside in person events which

offers an opportunity for tenants to discuss any concerns, problems, or seek general advice.

- MDH complete bi-annual Neighbourhood Walkabouts. Tenants in rural areas are encouraged to join and can request a door knock from their Neighbourhood Officer on the day.
- Care Leavers Discount Policy: If Care Leavers have been in the care of Devon County Council and are leaving care they may be entitled to a reduction in Council Tax until they reach the age of 25, up to 100% depending on your circumstances (Policy in place from 1 April 2023).

### **Equality Objective 3: Overcoming the effects of multiple disadvantage in families with complex needs.**

- Since October 2021, the council has appointed a Customer Engagement Coordinator who works to support tenants' involvement.
- In 2022, Mid Devon Housing adopted a revised [Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard Policy](#). The aim of this policy is to ensure that our tenants live good quality lives in a place where people come together and contribute as one community, where people value decency and dignity and where neighbourhoods are clean, safe and well maintained.
- Neighbourhood Officers work with vulnerable tenants on a daily basis and signpost to further support as necessary. Neighbourhood Teams conduct multi-agency partnership work for example with The Police, Social Services etc. to provide support where necessary.
- MDH Tenancy home checks are also used to identify safeguarding issues.
- The MDH "Getting to Know You" project will help us better understand and support the needs of our tenants. This includes supporting families with complex needs.
- The Council has worked closely with Devon County and partners as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Since the scheme began in March 2022, there have been 293 guests through the scheme. The current number of guests being hosted in the district is 93 (February 2023). We have helped guests to move into the private rented sector using the Ukrainian Guest Grant and landlord incentive:
  - 30 grant applications received (22 approved so far) relating to 55 guests in total (families and individuals)
  - 29 applications for the landlord incentive (18 approved so far).
  - Providing the grant and incentive payment has prevented guests potentially presenting to the council as homeless, whilst supporting their stay in the district.
- The MDH Damp and Mould Policy was approved in 2023. The aim of the new policy is to take every reasonable action to identify, remedy and provide advice on damp and mould in Council homes in order to ensure safe, healthy and comfortable environment for our residents, as well as to protect the fabric of our buildings. This policy also ensures that, wherever possible, residents are not adversely affected by the causes of damp and mould and drives forward an agenda of proactive action to tackle/ manage the causes of damp and mould.

- The Council works with partners through the Safer Devon Community Safety Partnership (and the local partnerships) and is committed to becoming more trauma informed in the way that we work, design strategies, and deliver services. Training is being offered to members of the Community Safety Partnership to raise awareness, and individual organisations are promoting trauma informed approaches in specific areas of activity. A good example is the new countywide Serious Violence Strategy, reported to Cabinet in January 2024. The strategy has a trauma informed approach at its core, with one of the cross-cutting objectives being 'Priority 6 - We will work towards trauma, shame and neurodivergence-informed systems'. This strategy is also informed by lived experience.
- MDDC have approved four grants to provide a range of housing adaptations for families with disabled children and completed one grant helping them to remain safe in their homes in the period 1 April 2023 until 31 January 2024. In the same time period, there have been 164 cases (with 2 or more household members) provided with housing advice following approach to MDDC.
- 26 full inspections of private rented homes have been undertaken so far this year with 10 of those having damp and mould resulting in further action being taken.
- A new Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) System is being implemented at MDDC. This will aim to provide a more complete record of our residents and customers so that we can provide even better levels of support. The new CRM system will make it easier for residents and customers to access council services.

Work on the implementation of the new CRM started in January 2023. The portal went live in October 2023 with a small number of processes such as waste, clinical and assisted waste collections. Complaints is in the process of being tested to go live in Spring 2024. We are also looking to implement a solution where contact centre calls, general emails etc. will move to the new platform and council services will be required to access/ manage these through the new platform. The new CRM System will eventually be able to track resident/ customer contact and ensure people are receiving appropriate responses in a timely manner.

**Equality Objective 4: To continue to concentrate on mental health issues within MDDC and the wider community.**

- Regular articles have been posted in the council staff newsletter (The Link) regarding wellbeing and mental health. Examples from 2023/24 include:
  - My whole self-talking tips from Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England
  - My whole self MOT from MHFA England
  - Articles from Work Right – Working Minds make it routine campaign (Health and Safety Executive)
- December saw the launch of the Mental Health Champions – a rebranding of MDDC's Mental Health First Aiders – supported by a poster campaign.
- Details of organisations who can support mental health are available on the [council's website](#).
- The council's Reasonable Adjustment policy includes mental health impairments (this includes mental health issues). Examples of adjustments that can be made under this policy are – time off for counselling, extra breaks to help cope with fatigue (which can be a symptom of mental illness), additional supervision or mentoring, and allowing an

employee to work in a private room instead of being in an open plan office (could be good for those who suffer with anxiety, etc.).

- The council can flag the account of someone who may be struggling to pay their council tax due to mental health issues so that officers are aware and can treat the individual accordingly.
- Following a successful pilot offering free leisure access to unpaid carers, parent carers and young carers at Mid Devon Leisure Centres in 2022/23, the council is considering introducing this scheme in the near future. The pilot ran at all three MDDC leisure centres (Culm Valley, Exe Valley and Lords Meadow. Unpaid carers had access to all activities, excluding swimming lessons, and in order to access this scheme, all they had to do was show identification that they are an unpaid carer (a 'Carers Passport'). The purpose of this scheme is to enable unpaid carers to exercise freely and boost their own physical and mental wellbeing.
- The MDH "Getting to Know You" project will help us better understand and support the needs of our tenants. This includes supporting families with mental health issues.
- The Neighbourhood Officers responsible for collecting income on behalf of MDH will refer cases to Wiser£money if the tenant discloses that they are experiencing financial difficulty.
- MDH Vulnerability Policy states that MDH has due regard for tenants with mental health issues and will look at ways to support them including making reasonable adjustments in the way we communicate with them. The Policy gives guidance to officers on ways to identify vulnerable tenants with mental health issues and offers a range of procedures to help support the tenant, this can include signposting to other support services.
- MDH works closely with other partners including Devon County Council (DCC) through the Early Help Locality partnership in East and Mid Devon. We are involved at a strategic, as well as a more operational level, and the Neighbourhood Officers work with other agencies to support vulnerable children and families in Teams Around the Family. DCC is moving to a new model of involvement with other agencies and is also looking at implementing family hubs but MDH will continue to work within the partnership, as appropriate.
- Mid Devon District Council is currently updating its Safeguarding Policy, with mental health and vulnerable adults as a major theme.
- The Council has produced an internal guidance document for staff who may be working with clients who threaten suicide. This supports staff to take appropriate action to support the client, details a large number of support organisations, and outlines support for the staff member in terms of their own wellbeing.

#### **Equality Objective 5: Secure decent digital connectivity for all of Mid Devon (Corporate Plan aim).**

- In Spring 2023, 84% of homes in Mid Devon have superfast (at least 30 Mbit/s) broadband available (data from Connected Nations, Ofcom). This compares to 97% for the UK as a whole. As operators focus increasingly on delivering gigabit capable services, any future increase in superfast coverage across the UK are expected to be modest and publically funded.

- Airband is undertaking a programme of work to connect more than 40,000 homes in Devon and Somerset to full fibre broadband by the end of 2024. Updates are provided regularly by Devon County Council through press releases, e.g. [Airband rolls out full fibre broadband to another 1,700 homes and businesses](#).
- MDH organised digital access workshops in Tiverton library in 2023/24. These aimed to help get tenants online, set up an email address, complete online forms, etc. – upskilling tenants and reducing digital exclusion. Tenants are encouraged to go paperless when receiving our annual report and newsletters. The launch of Let's Talk Mid Devon also enables tenants to get more involved online through surveys, forums and polls.