

Appendix 5

2020 Equalities Surveys

Preliminary Report

Demographics

Between 10 August and 15 September 2020, 167* people took part in an online survey through Google Forms, and an additional seven took part in survey conducted with Aberdeen's Gypsy/Traveller community. The results of the latter are covered at the end of this report.

In the main survey, there was a good demographic balance reflected: 65% (109) of participants were women, 43% (73) were from ethnic minority backgrounds,[†] 30% (50) were disabled, 22% (36) were from minority religious communities,[‡] 20% (34) were LGBT+,[§] and 16% (27) were aged 60+. More than half of participants (91) had two or more protected characteristics, for example ethnic minority women, or disabled religious minorities.

For context, in the 2019 population estimate for Aberdeen City,¹ women comprised 50.2% of the population, and 16% of the population were aged 65+. 2018 data² showed that 20% of Aberdeen residents were born outside the UK, including 12% from Europe and 4% each from Asia and the rest of the world. 2017 data³ estimated that 2% of the UK population are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), and estimated that 0.6% of Scotland's population are transgender.⁴

* 15 additional responses did not engage with the questions, so have been omitted from the report. Details in Appendix E.

[†] Ethnic minorities included non-European ethnicity, non-Scottish/British nationality, or a Gypsy/Traveller background.

The most recent data for other characteristics comes from the 2011 Census,⁵ according to which 8% of Aberdeen residents are from a non-European ethnic minority, and 16% have a disability that limits day-to-day activities. The Census data also shows that nearly half of Aberdeen's population (48%) are non-religious, 25% belong to the Church of Scotland, and 16% belong to other Christian denominations, including Catholicism.

It is worth noting that nearly half of survey participants (48%) left the religion question blank, or answered atheist, agnostic, 'none,' or 'N/A.' 5% belonged to the Church of Scotland.

Life in Aberdeen

The first section examined how participants felt about living in Aberdeen. Overall, most responses were positive, with two-thirds agreeing that Aberdeen is a welcoming place (66%), that they feel comfortable walking alone at night in their neighbourhoods (69%), and that there are enough spaces to socialise safely (64%). 59% felt included and part of their local communities, and 62% felt part of a community with shared interests, like a religious community or the LGBT+ community.

Across the five questions, ethnic minority, trans/non-binary, and male participants had an average or higher rate of positive answers, while disabled participants had lower rates. For example, 71% of ethnic minority participants felt that Aberdeen was welcoming and 59% felt included in their local communities, compared with 38% and 48% of disabled participants.

The pattern was mixed for other groups. A higher proportion of older participants felt included in both their local communities and

[‡] Including Catholic, Christian Orthodox, Mormon, Seventh Day Adventist, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Pagan.

[§] 8 participants were transgender or non-binary.

communities of interest (67%), and felt comfortable walking alone at night (74%). However, only 56% felt that Aberdeen is welcoming, and 59% felt there are adequate spaces to socialise safely. Similarly, 54% of LGB+ participants felt there is adequate social spaces, and only 46% felt included in their local communities, and 50% in communities of interest.

Overall, 53% of all participants (89) answered negatively to at least one question in this section. This included 66% (33) of disabled participants, 57% (62) of women, 46% (25) of men, 48% (13) aged 60+, 53% (39) of ethnic minorities, 65% (17) of LGB+, and 57% (4) of trans/non-binary participants.

When prompted for details, less than a third (26) felt excluded because of to specific characteristics: ethnicity (14), age (8), disability (5), religion/belief (4), sex/gender (3), sexual orientation (2) and transgender identity (1).

Indicative examples of comments:
(total comments: 25)

Employers do not understand or accommodate social or generalised anxiety disorder.

There are only few places I can attend to socialise without having to pay.

Not many safe spaces for LGBT+ people [...] not anywhere I can gather with likeminded people in a down to earth setting. And as AFAB [assigned female at birth], there are very few gender neutral bathrooms within Aberdeen.

Feel aware that people look at me differently because of the colour of my skin. Subtle racism as in not sitting next to me on the bus.

I feel is unwelcoming that I had to register with the police when I first came here and that I have to do it every time a change addresses. There aren't many socializing places beyond the pub and it can be

sometimes very exclusive if you are not a local. Not enough events/places for racialized people. Although I study, work and pay taxes here, I don't have the same rights as others and that makes me feel unwelcome.

Harassment at street, shops, schools, work, and even by government institutions. We are not believed or undermined when complaining about racism. Our kids picked on by schools and neighbours just because they are different.

Aberdeen is cursed with a large number of ignorant and small minded people who actively harass anyone not born in the city

(possibly add some material from other research on people's opinions of living in Aberdeen)

Equality Outcomes

The next section quoted Aberdeen City Council's first Equality Outcome for 2017-2020:

We have engaged and committed leaders, with the Council and partners working together to reduce inequality, remove barriers and promote a culture of respect and positive relations.

8% (13) of participants felt that ACC had 'definitely' achieved this goal, and 34% (57) felt that it had 'somewhat' achieved it. 26% (43) felt that the goal had 'not really' been achieved, 11% (19) 'not at all,' and 19% (32) were unsure. In most demographic groups, less than half of participants answered positively, from a low of 29% (2) and 32% (16) of trans/non-binary and disabled participants, to a high of 44% (24) of male participants. Just over half (52%) of ethnic minority participants (38) answered positively. Still, around a quarter (24%) of those who answered negatively in the first section felt that ACC had 'somewhat' or 'definitely' achieved the quoted Equality Outcome.

Following the multiple choice question here, there was a text box: *Can you please explain your answer? Do you have any examples of how the Council has (or has not) been meeting the goal above?* 93 participants commented, and unsurprisingly, the content broadly aligned with participants' responses to the previous question.

More than half of the comments (52) were negative, 20% (19) were positive, and 14% (13) had both positive and negative elements, or were non-committal. The rest (9) were either irrelevant (e.g. 'no idea') or unclear ('You can't change folks' way of thinking'). Other indicative examples below.

Just under half of the comments (41) comments noted specific characteristics in their examples of how the Council has (or has not) met its Equality Outcomes. 21 mentioned race/ethnicity (15 negative, 4 positive, 2 mixed); 12 mentioned disability (10 negative, 2 positive); 5 mentioned religion (2 negative, 2 mixed, 1 positive); 2 mentioned sexual orientation (1 negative, 1 positive) and one mentioned age (negative).

There was also an interesting ratio within different types of comments. The majority of negative commenters (71%) provided specific examples to illustrate their views, 22% made vague statements without examples, and 8% were not directly relevant to the question. For positive and mixed comments, 40% contained specific examples, a third were vague, and a quarter were not relevant to the question.

This may indicate that for some participants, a positive view of the Council comes from a general impression of its work as 'not-bad,' while a negative view may arise from negative personal experience. One participant noted that they were unaware of the concept of Equality Outcomes, and felt that it should be more publicised.

Positive Comments

Positive themes included a general sense that Aberdeen is an inclusive city, personal experience of inclusion, and lack of awareness of inequality. The Council was praised for its work with refugees, its efforts to bring equality into decision making, and specific initiatives like employability workshops and anti-bullying work in schools. Participants also highlighted the Council's relationship with the Mosque and with the Disability Equity Partnership.

Events like Grampian Pride were attributed to the Council, along with the rainbow stairs in St Nicholas Square, the Scottish Government's hate crime awareness campaign, and GREC's equality work. A number of comments also focused on initiatives not directly linked to equality outcomes, like development of sports clubs and green spaces in regeneration areas, which are also likely to benefit people in marginalised communities.

Indicative examples of positive comments:

Our rights are protected.

I think Council doing very good job trying to reach out to as many ethnic minorities as possible and providing opportunities to be engaged. I think sometimes the lack of information, or not enough advertisement on the events and activities can get unnoticed and people miss out on news and possibilities available. But overall if I look hard enough I almost always can find someone to help me.

Aberdeen and Scotland as a whole is a place where you are judged by the nature of your character and people don't care much about religion, sexual preferences or ethnic identity. We should be proud of who we are.

Mixed Comments

Mixed comments highlighted progress the Council has made, for example in supporting interfaith and public engagement activities, but with caveats: certain groups excluded from this progress, or certain parts of society where less progress has been made. In many mixed

comments, there was a somewhat resigned sense that inequality 'will always be with us.'

Indicative examples of mixed comments:

Public engagement events by ACC were good idea. Providing materials translated in different languages also helped. Still lots of work can be done to reduce inequality.

The council has removed barriers but they still exist in areas in Aberdeen. Especially in nightlife.

Aberdeen is a city of two halves. Some lovely areas and some undesirable areas. Will always be difficult to reduce inequalities.

Negative Comments

With an undercurrent of anger and frustration, negative themes included a focus on 'tick box' exercises, consultation efforts not leading to meaningful action, lack of representation in managerial and leadership positions within the Council, lack of consideration in planning decisions, staff lack of awareness or capacity to deal with diverse needs, cuts and long delays to services and funding, and poor communication from the Council and/or Councillors.

Participants shared stories of being mistreated at a housing office, difficulties in accessing English classes, rejections for ACC jobs with no reasons given, thwarted attempts to get involved with the local community, and being refused support until 'everything falls apart.'

And as some participants above were not aware of inequalities in Aberdeen, others noted that they did not see any evidence of the Council's efforts to promote equality. Participants also complained about racism and disability in the private sector and broader society, highlighting that residents often hold local authorities responsible for issues outwith their control. In these comments, the subtext seems to be that if the Council took equality issues seriously, they should provide stronger leadership on them.

Similarly, there was criticism of the Council's Covid-19 response, its closure of crèche facilities, its drugs policies, the failings of specific departments, (alleged) corruption, and (alleged) preferential treatment of certain companies. While these comments did not relate directly to Equality Outcomes, it is telling that these are the issues people think of when they consider whether and how the Council promotes equality.

Indicative examples of negative comments:

To this day people with disabilities are looked down on and treated like we are just in the way.

You tell us how [the Council] think they have [achieved their Equality Outcomes] and we will respond. Question is designed to make council look good as people are not aware of what they claim to have done.

Development of civic space that ignored the needs of several vulnerable/disabled groups despite the failures in design being advised in advance of project start.

Aberdeen City Council itself a racist institution in way they handle our job applications and school complains and more.

Lot of words, tick box exercises but not much action. Council should actively engage with minorities, bring them to forefront and take actions not words.

Suggestions

Nine participants made suggestions for how ACC can improve its delivery of equality goals. Alongside vague tips like 'more connections with communities' and 'more engagement with ethnic minorities,' these included several specific ideas:

Ads on the buses about tackling homophobia and racism were great, something that could be implemented more broadly around the city similar to other cities who have big adverts about inclusivity, respect etc on poster boards.

Promote and engage with Disability Equity Partnership.

It'd be really nice if the schools with Muslim students mention when it's the Holy month of Ramadan and the Eid. This is as important as Christmas or Easter. You can cooperate with the mosque and organise a youth programme, lots of activities, make them feel included and an important part of the community.

I don't really know my Councillors where I live. I only hear about them when it is time for elections. I think there should be flyers in people's houses to inform us of our Councillors and how we can get in touch with them. I also don't think that the Councillors in Aberdeen are reflective of the cosmopolitan nature of the city itself. [...] I would prefer to know what my Councillors are doing in my local area and what they have achieved in terms of equality.

Delivering positive all year round messaging across the city would help educate and dispel anti-trans untruths which are becoming more and more prevalent in the media.

Employment

Nearly two-thirds of all participants were employed: 37% (61) full-time, 19% (32) part-time, 5% (8) self-employed, and 2.5% (4) furloughed due to Covid-19. Additionally, 15% (25) were retired, 11% (18) were students, 4% (7) were carers or homemakers, 10% (16) were unemployed, and 3% (5) were unable to work due to disability.**

Among working-age participants, the employment rate was 71%, including 79% of men, 67% of women, 68% of ethnic minorities, 77% of LGBT+, and 54% of disabled.

** Several fell into two categories, including 8 students who worked part-time and a carer who worked full-time.

Participants were employed at a slightly lower rate than Aberdeen's population as a whole. According to 2018-19 labour force statistics,⁶ 78% of Aberdeen's working-age residents were employed, 4% were unemployed, 4% were students, 5% were looking after family or home, 5% were long-term sick, and 2% had retired early.

The same statistics show that Aberdeen's employment rate for men was 81% and 76% for women. It was 79% for 'white' residents, born in the UK or elsewhere, 69%, for ethnic minority residents, and 54% for disabled residents.

Experiences in the Workplace

Nearly two-thirds of participants (103) felt that their protected characteristics restricted their access to the kinds of employment they wanted, including more than half of disabled (26) and ethnic minority (38) participants, and more than two-thirds of trans/non-binary participants (5). Age was a concern for participants from all age groups, but especially women in their 50s (18) and men in their 60s (7).

Just over a third of participants (63) felt that they had been treated differently or unfairly in the workplace, or their needs were not met, because of specific characteristics. As above, the highest proportion was among ethnic minority (41%)^{††} and disabled (34%) participants, along with 19% of LGBT+ participants.

17 participants felt they had been treated differently because of their age, including women under 30 (4) and over 60 (3), and a mix of men and women in their 30s (2), 40s (3) and 50s (5). 12 participants felt they had been treated differently because of their gender, including eight women and four men.

^{††} 35 participants indicated they had been treated differently in the workplace due to their ethnicity, of whom 30 were ethnic minorities.

Many of these patterns echo existing research.
Add more here about existing research.

Comments

84 comments were submitted in this section, most of which were negative (60). Eight comments were positive, six were mixed, and ten were ambiguous or unclear.

Negative Comments

Among negative comments, key themes included institutional hierarchies, subtle and overt forms of racism, sexism and disablism, malicious workplace gossip, 'invisible' disabilities affecting interview performance, and overseas qualifications and experience being devalued. Participants discussed the stereotypes used to judge their work, and the frustration and loss of confidence from frequent rejections and setbacks. They also mentioned the informal networks

Some participants gave examples of being overlooked for jobs, excluded from informal networks, or given less favourable hours because of their characteristics. Others described broader patterns of discrimination. For example:

A woman with scarf [is] looked at as a woman without a brain. Our men suffer too. The jobs are for Scots with minimal education requirement and us failing with high qualification and more experience. The system pushes the Muslims to a small corner where [it is] too difficult to survive unless going for self-employment, to work in a takeaway or taxi driver and forget your education. We are here as servants.

If I had been a British citizen I would be working by now based on my qualifications as a medical doctor. But [the] home office has been slow with visa processing, [making] me waste years of experience and training.

Employers look at 2 CV's, one from a disabled person and the other from someone without a disability. Both have the same qualifications but they will always look more favourably on the person without a disability.

Often as a young female I am spoken down to or condescended to by other staff members who feel they have more authority.

As non-European, it requires double the effort to achieve the same objective due to institutional barriers.

I have been subject to subtle different treatment due to being a woman and I currently feel a bit anxious about finding a new job in my 50s.

Positive and Mixed Comments

Eleven participants indicated that they had not experienced discrimination at work, at least in their current jobs, including participants who were disabled, ethnic minorities, or LGBT+.

Many of these comments were mixed, showing awareness of the problem for others. For example:

I work in the public sector and that's fine, I don't feel confident the private sector would be as welcoming to a trans woman.

[In my field] it feels like the usual factors for discrimination don't quite apply. [...] And if I were in any other field of employment, I very much feel that my age and my sex would be factors, as they have been in the past.

Eight participants (all European Scottish or British) stated or implied that workplace discrimination does not exist, or described a kind of 'reverse discrimination' (see Appendix D for more on this type of response). For example:

My chances of finding another job are based on my abilities and nothing else.

As a public sector worker there is positive discrimination towards having a certain percentage of females in promoted posts. In my opinion this has sometimes seen a position being filled by the person who is not the strongest. This limits promotion opportunities for males.

As more and more companies are looking to show they are being diverse, I feel that a non white Scot would be employed before a white Scot regardless of who's better for the job.

Something here about research showing the extent of workplace discrimination, and that 'reverse discrimination' is not a major issue.

Future Prospects

Among participants, no demographic group was positive about their prospects for employment, should they need to find a new job. Less than half were confident that they could get a new job if they wanted to, including less than a quarter of disabled participants and less than a third of ethnic minority participants.

While the current mood of economic uncertainty surely does not help, an awareness of discrimination likely plays a key role. For example:

Because jobs and opportunities are scarce preference will not be given to someone of my profile. [*female, ethnic minority*] It is harder to compete in the job market.

At present, even people who have no health problems are finding it difficult to find alternative employment if they become redundant [...] Anyone who isn't cheap to take on or who employers feel might be less reliable because of health concerns is at a disadvantage.

When it comes to looking for another job, there is the lingering fear that my interviewer may hold the same prejudices [as former colleagues] against ethnic minorities.

^{††} There were two participants who felt excluded because they belonged to majority groups. One was a heterosexual Christian who felt uncomfortable with LGBT+ events. The other, who had a developmental disability but otherwise majority

Cultural Activities

Almost all participants (160) had taken part in at least one of the listed cultural activities. The most popular was the cinema, with 78% of all participants and at least three-quarters of each demographic group, followed by museums or galleries (75%), live performances (69%) and open-air events (61%).

The least popular activity was attending a sporting event as a spectator, where only a third of participants had taken part, including around a quarter of disabled, older, ethnic minority and LGB+ participants. Unsurprisingly, the main difference was along gender lines: among participants as a whole, 61% of men had attended a sporting event, versus 32% of women. The figure was 41% vs. 21% for ethnic minorities, while for white British/Scottish participants, it was 41% for both genders. For disabled participants, the proportion was slightly larger for women (32%) than men (26%).

At least two-thirds of most groups had attended live performance events (e.g. theatre, music, dance, comedy, circus, etc), with the exception of ethnic minority participants, where the figure was just under half. Similarly, a slightly lower proportion of ethnic minority participants had attended open-air events like parades, local galas, Nuart or Spectra (53% vs. 61% overall).

Sense of Exclusion

Around a quarter of participants (23%) felt they had been excluded from cultural activities because of protected characteristics,^{††} and they were generally part of minority groups. Among those who felt they had been excluded because of ethnicity (15), six were African, Caribbean or Black, and this represented half of participants from this background. Two

characteristics, had ticked all the boxes except disability and transgender identity. In a comment, they explained that they disliked activities relating to 'categories.'

others were Asian, two were Eastern European, one was Latin American and one had a mixed background. Two felt excluded because they were from England.

Among those who felt excluded because of disabilities (13), ten had physical disabilities, four had mental health issues, and three had developmental disabilities (this includes four people with combinations). For religion (5), two were Muslim and one was a Jew. For gender identity (2) and sexual orientation (4), three were LGB+, two were trans and one was non-binary. For those who felt excluded because of age, three were over 60; the others in their 20s, 40s and 50s.

Other Reasons for Not Taking Part

Apart from not being interested (20%), the main other reasons for not taking part were lack of time (21%), the activities' expense (19%), discomfort with going alone (16%), and inconvenient location or lack of transport (16%). Significantly, around half of disabled participants noted expense and transport as key issues.

These themes were continued in the comments, specifically noting unreliable or frequently-changing bus timetables; expensive buses, taxis, parking and event tickets; venues being a long distance from transport links or car parks; and a lack of seating or wheelchair-friendly areas within venues. Lack of subtitles for films was also mentioned, along with generally poor levels of advertising events ('there is a lot going on but you've got to know where to look').

Alongside practical issues, several participants felt uncomfortable in certain venues, especially at night, or at cultural activities in general. For example:

I do not always feel safe as a woman at live music events and would never attend these alone. Some venues are very male dominated and sexual assault happens far too frequently. Bouncers usually don't care very much.

Not feel welcome, not good vibes especially during Brexit climate.

Cultural expectations can be a barrier, as well. Two ethnic minority participants discussed problems with 'family-friendly,' entertainment, complaining about elements that many white Scottish families would take for granted (daytime alcohol consumption, pantomime humour with sexual innuendo, etc).

More broadly, both LGBT+ and ethnic minority participants noted a lack of appealing or inclusive cultural activities. At the same time, three white Scottish participants felt they could not participate in activities 'targeted towards' minority groups, or that were 'not aimed at me.' Others preferred to frame the issue in terms of choice:

I don't feel excluded from anything – I choose whether to go or not based on my own abilities, preferences and finances.

All events I attended were open to all.

If I'm excluded, it would be because I didn't wish to take part.

Negative Experiences

Most groups felt they had largely positive experiences with the cultural activities they did take part in (81% overall), though more than a quarter of disabled and trans or non-binary participants felt there were issues. Indicative comments from those reporting issues or negative experiences:

A lot of art activities are 99% white, think I was only at one that had one other POC. Would like to not be the only one in the room sometimes.

Clearly racism is increasing. There is no other reason [for a negative experience] except my appearance that shows my religion.

I wasn't actively excluded, I just felt concerned for my safety. In the past few years I've been spat at a couple of times so I was a little bit nervous.

Sport and Fitness

Around two-thirds of participants reported taking part in collective sport or fitness activity, including at least half of each demographic group. Overall, the most popular activity was exercising at a gym, sports centre or swimming pool, which 48% of all participants reported doing (including only a quarter of older participants). It was the most popular activity for ethnic minority (47%) and trans/non-binary participants (57%).

Almost a third of participants (31%) reported attending fitness classes (yoga, dance, chair-based exercise, etc), and this was the most popular category among disabled participants (44%).

Finally, a quarter of participants had taken part in a group activity like football, running/walking club, golf or walking football. This was the least popular category among disabled participants (20%) but the most popular among older (44%) participants and both men (52%) and women (55%).

Sense of Exclusion

Just over a fifth (21%) of participants felt they were excluded from sport and fitness activities^{§§} because of protected characteristics,^{***} including more than a third (36%) of disabled participants, all but two of whom had physical disabilities, and half of trans/non-binary participants. Among the ten

^{§§} 35 in total, including 8 who felt excluded from both cultural and sport/fitness activities.

^{***} Two participants complained that social class or income were not included on the list of characteristics. One wrote, 'financial disadvantage can be greater amongst BAME people and these structural inequalities may be deeper than the more obvious answers listed.'

^{†††} One participant was keen to avoid the sense of grievance implied by the word 'excluded' here. In comments, they clarified that they did not feel 'excluded by others,' but were unable to take part in certain activities because of a health condition. Three other participants wrote similar comments in

participants who felt excluded because of their age, four were over 60, four were in their 50s, and one each were in their 30s and 40s (no further details provided in comments).

Additionally, five participants felt excluded because of their ethnicity (all ethnic minorities), four because of their religion (all Muslim), two because of gender (both female) and one because of sexual orientation. Indicative comments:^{†††}

The swimming facility for women once per month was after 6pm. This is second class treatment as the water and pool is dirty by that time, thus I never go there.

Unable to lip read in classes where instructors turn the lights down.

Tried to find an accessible local swimming pool. Ended up having to go to Bucksburn pool. But the disabled changing room was diabolical which put us off going back.

There is very little information [...] to reassure a trans person who wishes to use sporting facilities, especially when it comes to changing areas.^{†††} Having to email or ask is embarrassing and also means you have to continually 'out' yourself in order to ask some basic questions.

Being a wheelchair user makes sport difficult.

this section, but had not ticked any boxes for exclusion.

^{†††} This can be a difficult area, as policies can have differing effects on different groups. For example, some women and religious minorities may feel uncomfortable in a mixed changing room, while this would be the best option for trans and non-binary people. One solution might be following the example of Aberdeen Sports Village Aquatic Centre: it provides a large mixed changing area comprising private cubicles for individuals and families, private shower cubicles, gender-specific toilets, and private areas for people with complex disabilities and their carers.

Other Reasons for Not Taking Part

Around a third of participants (35%) were not interested in sport, or preferred to exercise alone. Expense (26%), lack of time (17%), and discomfort with going alone (21%) were the other main reasons.

Some groups were more uncomfortable than others going alone to sport and fitness activities, including 71% of trans participants, 38% of LGB+ participants, and 30% of disabled participants. In comments, they explained differing reasons for their discomfort:

Felt silly as physically less able than the younger attendees.

Uncomfortable wearing scarf and going to gym indoor with men.

It's kind of odd when you know you are not welcome or don't fit in based on race or nationality.

More practical considerations included the timing and availability of classes, location of facilities, consistency of timetables, content of classes, and lack of advertising. For example:

Sometimes activities clash with school time or with other kids activities, kids are not always welcome to the activities I would like to attend.

I would like more older age focused and appropriate classes – but not patronising chair based exercises!

There are not the activities I would like to participate in at convenient times. [...] If they do exist how do you find out?

The class I enjoyed became permanently full during term time and so I could no longer participate.

There is only one swimming class in Aberdeen where the instructor knows sign language and there is an age limit that excludes me.

Negative Experiences

Participants' experience with sport and fitness was mostly positive (77%). Four participants indicated they had negative experiences, and 19 had positive experiences, with some issues. Of these 23, 17 were female, nine were ethnic minorities, nine were disabled, six were religious minorities, five were LGB+, four were trans/non-binary, and two were aged 60+. Indicative comments:

Could not keep up with the younger age bracket at the class.

Casually transphobic attitudes.

[Sessions at] the swimming pool at ASV seemed to change regularly [sometimes] set up for swimming breadths which I can manage, but other times it was 50m length lane swimming, and that was beyond my ability. The programme on the website did not seem to be clear to me.

Some racist comments at the gym, have not kept me away.

Civic Participation

The vast majority of participants (85%) had taken part in some form of civic activity, most commonly voting in an election (76%). Alongside voting, almost two-thirds (65%) had engaged in another civic activity: half had signed a petition or taken part in a consultation, 38% had written or spoken to elected representatives, 17% had been involved with a trade union, political party, or campaign group, and 10% had been involved in their local Community Council.

Older (60+), LGB+ and disabled participants had the highest levels of voting (93%, 85% and 80%, respectively), and these groups took part in other civic activities at average or higher rates. Ethnic minority participants had lower rates of both voting (60%) and other forms of civic activity (53%).

Sense of Exclusion

19% of participants felt they had been excluded from civic activities because of protected characteristics.^{§§§}

Of the 17 participants who felt excluded because of their ethnicity or nationality, seven were from central or eastern Europe, three were Latin American, two were Asian, and one each were Arab and African, Caribbean or Black. Additionally, two felt excluded because they were from England, and another from the USA.^{****}

Among the eight participants who felt excluded because of their age, four were aged 60+, two were in their 20s, and one each in their 40s and 50s. Additionally, eight participants felt excluded because of a disability (of whom seven were disabled), and three female participants felt excluded because of their gender. Of the three who felt excluded because of religion, two were Muslim, and one was Christian. The latter wrote, 'Faith is important to me and often I hear God's name and that of Jesus used for evil purposes.'

Notably, none of the LGBT+ participants felt excluded because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In comments, some participants explained that they did not feel excluded as such, but rather ignored because of specific characteristics. For example:

People hear my accent [...] and dismiss because of that.

I wrote to my previous MP [...] and was completely brushed off. I feel that if I was

older and a man he would have taken me more seriously.

I've been to talk with [my local MP] and it was just a waste of time [...] He ignored everything [I said], because I am black I am ignorant. For this reason I try to avoid all of them.

Probably if I were a young lady with curves the MPs can [help] very quick, but because I am an older foreign lady they treat me like I am rude.

In a very practical example of exclusion, eight participants mentioned that they were not allowed to vote,⁺⁺⁺⁺ and this discouraged several from getting involved in other forms of civic activity. Language issues were also mentioned. Additionally, two participants were hesitant to get involved because of insecurity around their status:

It's hard to join a trades union if you don't even have full worker's rights and sometimes it can be scary to be active politically when you feel your right to be here is somehow fragile.

Don't have the right to vote or claim benefits. I'm afraid my status here is in danger if I get politically involved.

At the same time, a more general sense of futility presented a subtler barrier. As one participant wrote, 'what is the point?' Others wrote:

Didn't feel I was treated differently for any of the above. More that I, and everybody else who took part, were ignored.

^{§§§} 32 in total, including 15 who felt excluded from both cultural and civic activities, 11 from sport/fitness and civic activities, and 8 who felt excluded from all three.

^{****} One participant had ticked all the boxes except 'transgender identity' here, with the comment: 'Not aimed at me. A white, middle aged british born, christian, able bodied, straight male.' This person put the same comment throughout the survey, but

this was the only section where they indicated they felt excluded because of specific characteristics. In other sections, they ticked 'none of these.'

⁺⁺⁺⁺ Six additional participants did not have British, EU or Commonwealth nationality, so would be unable to vote in any elections. 38 participants would have been unable to vote in the last General Election.

Answers are given but nothing changes and representatives are more interested in their own concerns rather than representing the voters.

MSPs do not listen, instead fobbing people off with platitudes.

Other Reasons for Not Taking Part

Beyond a sense of exclusion (explicit or implicit), the top reason for not engaging with (more) civic activities was lack of knowledge. 20% of participants said they did not know how to get involved, including a third of ethnic minority participants and almost a quarter (23%) of female participants. This was followed up in comments:

I think that most civic participation is for people over 30 and there is not enough information for young people to understand how to take part.

The political system is not easy to understand for a foreigner.

I would love to be more engaged however I simply did not know how [...] I think this is something that should be explained to people as they stay in the city.

17% of participants were simply not interested in further civic activities, 14% did not have time, and 7% felt uncomfortable going to events alone. These figures were higher for disabled participants (40%, 26% and 16%, respectively), and comments highlighted the kinds of access issues covered in other sections.

Negative Experiences

The majority of participants (68%) had positive experiences with civic activity, and this was also reflected in comments. 22% had mostly positive experiences with some issues, and 10% had negative experiences. In the latter two groups, 70% were female, 40% were ethnic minorities, and 37% were disabled.

The kinds of negative experiences described in comments were mostly general and similar to those above, with some also giving specific examples:

Fanatical Aberdeen Football supporters aggression towards me because I did not wish the new stadium to be built.

When I put myself forward to be a candidate in a local election my trans identity was discussed by the selection committee. I can't get anyone to let me know what was said but something was.

I've had an unknown person ask me about "where I'm really from" and upon finding out Eastern Europe patting his pockets 'as a joke' (checking for his wallet and phone as if he was worried I'd stolen them).

I think some of the discourse around Scottish independence is toxic. [...] I might have lost friends because of this.

Digital Participation

Nearly all participants (91%) had accessed one or more of Aberdeen City Council's online services. Three-quarters had checked the Council website for information, and 60% had used ACC online services to pay Council Tax, rent, parking fines, etc. A third used online library services; 28% used the Council website to report problems; 19% to access help with advice or benefits; and 13% to sign a child up for school.

LGBT+ participants had the highest level of digital participation across all activities except school registration, which was used by 22% of ethnic minority participants. Library services were more popular among women (39%) than men (26%), while the reverse was the case for reporting problems (24% and 37%, respectively). Ethnic minority participants had the lowest rate of reporting problems online (14%) but an average level of accessing help (19%).

The group least likely to use digital services was participants over age 60 – though 85% still used at least one online service, and the figure was 80% for participants over age 70. Across both groups, two thirds checked information online, for example, half made online payments, and a third used online library services and a quarter used the website to report problems). However, as the survey was online, this is unlikely to be a representative sample.

Exclusion and Negative Experiences

Only five participants felt they were excluded from digital services: one each for age (70+) and ethnicity (the person's main language was not English), and three for developmental disabilities. One commented, 'difficult to get my needs understood over internet.'

Most participants who used ACC digital services had a positive experience (71%). For 18%, there were some issues, and 11% reported negative experiences. However, almost two-thirds^{****} of comments were complaints. Many participants struggled to find relevant information on the ACC website, and described it as 'clunky,' 'poorly designed,' and 'a nightmare.' One wrote, 'the payment system looks like it's a scam website.' Several also expressed concerns about the accessibility of online services for those without internet access or IT skills.

Beyond general comments like these, many gave specific examples like receiving no response to a complaint, a payment not working, or waiting 'ages' for repairs to be carried out. Other examples included:

I keep requesting a new password for rent payment account, but am never sent one. So I cannot view my online account. Website is

not laid out well and often lacks the information I am seeking.

The search facility is worse than useless as it throws up all sorts of minutes of meetings when all you wanted to do was apply for the garden waste to be collected.

It is not always easy to find the information I require, and if it CAN be found, it does not always explain how to go about doing things (for example, finding support).

I fully support pedestrianisation in the city centre, but recently it has been difficult to find out which roads are accessible to cars and which aren't. Planning a route through town using information on the website has been hard.

You have to sign in and I can't remember details I entered.

The website requires you to sign up to a third party organisation to use parts of it. I have no idea who they are.

The online service is limited and I can't find the information I am looking for. I signed up to a waiting list for an allotment and could not sign up again to try to change my preferences. Also we had issues with bin collection and I could not find out what was the matter.

Other Reasons for Not Using Digital Services

Despite the comments above, only 10% of participants indicated that confusion or frustration with the ACC website had prevented them accessing online services. A much larger proportion (30%) said they did not need to use the Council's online services, and this figure was broadly similar across all demographic groups. 13% of participants preferred to speak to someone (in person or

wrote, 'Libraries are a dream. All my family are very happy with this service. Also with school breakfast club.'

^{****} Out of 31 comments in this section, six were positive, 19 were negative and eight were neutral (for example, 'I use online services when I need them'). Praise included calling the online services 'excellent' and 'very helpful.' One participant

by telephone), including 22% of participants age 60+.

As noted above, participation in this survey indicates a reasonable level of IT and English language skill, along with internet access. While we have not claimed to provide a representative sample on any of the issues discussed here, this is perhaps even more relevant to highlight in relation to digital participation.

Discussion?

Prejudice and Hate Crime

Between 2017-2020, 43% of participants (71) had experienced prejudice or hate crime, and 8% (14) were unsure if they had. More than half the incidents (45) were related to ethnicity, with 13-19% related to disability (16), gender (15), religion (13), sexual orientation (11) or age (11).^{§§§§} Overall, this reflects broader trends in prejudice and hate crime across Scotland.⁷

Notably, five of the six trans participants had experienced prejudice or hate crime relating to their gender identity, along with half (51%) of ethnic minority participants,^{****} 38% of LGB+ participants, 36% of religious minorities, 26% of disabled participants, and 13% of women.⁺⁺⁺⁺

Incident Types

In line with research on prejudice and hate crime,⁸ two-thirds of incidents involved verbal abuse, and half involved inappropriate 'jokes.' 15 participants were subjected to threats or

^{§§§§} Of the 11 participants who experienced age-related incidents, six were in their 50s, three in their 60s, one in their 30s, and one was over 70.

^{****} Of the 45 participants who experienced ethnicity-related incidents, 37 were ethnic minorities, one was European from an Anglophone country (targeted because of their foreign accent), and seven were European/British. Of the latter group, two indicated that they were targeted because of their English accents, and

threatening behaviour, ten were targeted online or on social media, eight were refused a service, two were targets of graffiti or vandalism, and five were physically assaulted. Thirteen participants added other types of incidents, including being spat at, robbed, intimidated, ignored, accused of lying, and being subjected to subtle forms of prejudice. For example:

Glares for daring to exist while trans. People refusing to sit near me. Just minor shit that adds up to make you feel bad.

As well as outright 'you don't belong' comments, you should factor in microaggressions. Small, frequent interactions that other you.

Reporting

Also in line with wider trends,⁹ only around a quarter (26%) of incidents were reported (22 in total). Around a third of these (8 incidents) were reported to police, with the rest being reported to charities or Council staff (5 each), employers (4), medical workers (3), or management at the site where the incident took place (3).

Three participants were satisfied with the response they received when reporting incidents, with one commenting 'police were excellent.' These seemed to be the exception, however. The rest of the comments (7) described responses including being 'undermined' and discouraged, or cases being taken on but not solved. For example:

three said they were the target of 'reverse discrimination' (see Appendix D).

⁺⁺⁺⁺ Of the 16 participants who experienced disability-related incidents, 13 were disabled. Of the 15 who experienced gender-related incidents, 14 were women. Of the 13 who experienced religion-related incidents, nine belonged to religious minorities. Of the 11 who experienced sexual orientation-related incidents, ten were LGB+. Of the six who experienced transgender-related incidents, five were trans.

One robbery incident reported to police [several years ago]. Nothing happened so far. Police couldn't find the robbers.

Upon going to the police we were told it is unlikely the [perpetrators] would be found.

I am not satisfied about the result, we keep reporting and mentioning what we are facing and for some time the problem may stop but it is like painkiller and not sorted from the roots. Later we face another problem and so on

Reasons for Not Reporting

The responses above highlight why so many prejudice incidents and hate crimes go unreported. In addition to the 61 participants above who did not report any incidents, another 13 did not report all the incidents they went through – totalling 88% of those who had experienced prejudice or hate crime.

Overall, reasons were similar across all demographic groups. For more than half (54%), the incident 'didn't seem worth reporting,' and around 40% (each) felt they would not be taken seriously, or did not want to 'make a fuss.' These three reasons covered 83% of responses.

20% of participants did not know how to report an incident, around a quarter were afraid of retribution, and 9% were uncomfortable speaking to police. For some, reporting was too complicated or difficult (17%), they did not have time (10%), or there were language issues (5%).

The main theme in the comments here (10) was that reporting multiple incidents would be impractical or demoralising – even if they were taken seriously. For example:

My experience of other 3 previously reported incidents was not good so thought no point of reporting it.

When small things happen so frequently you just accept it. Plus, racial gaslighting where

white people tell you you're too sensitive, it's not racism, if you don't like it leave etc.

Kids are stressed seeing us facing all these discriminations. It's not fair for them to see police always in our house as we face nearly daily issues.

Several participants also noted issues of power, where the perpetrator was in a more senior position in the organisation, or institutional culture frowned upon 'troublemakers.' Research shows that in this kind of situation, there is enormous pressure to 'keep your head down' and accept prejudice or bullying, rather than risking a fragile social position.¹⁰

Comments in other parts of the survey – and indeed, many items on the news – indicate that mistreatment from people in powerful positions is an ongoing issue.

Improving Reporting Rates

18 participants made suggestions of things that would have helped them report incidents – or explained why reporting still would not be useful. Practical suggestions included guidance on how to report incidents and what should be reported, better support from managers to report incidents, 'simpler and quicker' procedures, and the possibility of reporting incidents anonymously. Some basic suggestions, like ensuring the 101 non-emergency number is always answered, or that police officers receive additional training, show that small changes would make a big difference.

Other changes might take more effort – like convincing people that 'something will be done about' prejudice incidents and hate crimes, or demonstrating impartiality in handling incidents.

Research shows that even when incidents are reported, only around 20%^{****} are referred to the courts, with even fewer being convicted.¹¹

Accountability was key theme, and several participants suggested that data on complaints and responses should be made publicly available, along with what an organisation is doing to proactively combat discrimination. Similarly, two participants suggested expanding the channels for reporting incidents, to avoid conflicts of interest if the problem comes from the person or organisation handling complaints.

Futility

Among some participants, there was a strong sense that prejudice is so entrenched that reporting can seem pointless. For example:

“A man on the stairs glared at me.” “A woman refused to sit at the table next to me.” Like, yeah, it’s definitely trans-related, but none of their behaviour was illegal or actionable, it’s just low-level microaggressions grinding away at you all the time.

Police do not take claims of sexual harassment seriously, verbal or physical, so I don’t think there is anything to gain by reporting incidents.

I feel nothing could have helped because it’s more of protocol British first before any foreigners even when your needs are more important and necessary.

Backlash

One participant highlighted a pattern that often plays out when someone in a target group tries to discuss prejudice with someone in a non-target group. The hostility they describe is expressed writ large in backlash movements like ‘All Lives Matter,’ ‘Straight

Pride,’ etc, and affect even those in a position to help victims of prejudice.¹²

What would help? A better societal attitude and if white people were willing to actually listen, instead of getting defensive (especially if you’re commenting on a situation that doesn’t directly affect them – they’ll act like it’s a personal attack and make you feel like you’re the wrong one for experiencing racism).

Support After Incidents

Regardless of whether they reported incidents, most participants spoke with family or friends afterwards (59%), or dealt with the experience on their own (64%). A few also received support from a community group (5%), an online community (5%), a charity (3%) or a professional like a GP, counsellor or social worker (9%). Two participants (in separate incidents) were so affected that they felt forced to move away.

When asked whether they felt the support they received was successful, or whether there was anything else that might have helped, 40 participants wrote comments, of which 13 were broadly positive.

The Limits of Emotional Support

In other comments, there was a clear distinction between emotional support to deal with the impact of an incident, and practical or institutional support that would solve the underlying issue (which would also contribute to the healing process). Participants were often critical about the limits of emotional support. For example:

It was good to talk to friends about it, sharing the experience did help but that would have no impact on stopping it from happening again.

^{****} This figure is for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, because Scotland does not release figures on the proportion of reported hate crimes referred to the courts. According to the Procurator Fiscal,

between 80-85% of charges in Scotland result in court proceedings; of these, 83% of perpetrators in these cases admit wrongdoing or are found guilty by a judge.

Speaking with my family and friends was just a coping mechanism, but the people at work remain the same, for the most part.

I have discussed my problem with some of my friends and relatives and they tried to help me and make me calm but it is limited. We need extra support with an organisation that looks after our problem and considers our situation and [gives the] right advice.

Along these lines, some participants seemed resigned to the prejudice they faced. For example:

I have to just carry on with the consequences.

The low level abuse I get is mostly because I am slow and get in the way. There has never been anything serious so there is little point in making a song and dance about it.

We all have to go through it and it fucking sucks.

Culture Change

On the other hand, some participants highlighted that their personal experiences were part of wider cultural attitudes, which would need to be addressed in order to deal with the causes of prejudice. For example:

There is still a general hostility and lack of understanding [...] towards people with long term illness or disability. They are seen as lazy or scroungers. Need a cultural change.

An effort is needed to educate people, specifically men, on the effects of their words and actions towards women.

My community faces the same and just tells you to ignore racism and move on in your life. But how if your neighbours, your street, kids school... all racist?

Society needs to change to avoid incidents in the future.

Poverty

The section called 'home life' focused on markers of poverty, similar to questions used by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group.¹³ 44% of participants (74) had at least one of the indicators of poverty or overcrowding, or were unsure; more than half of these (39) had two or more indicators.

All but three participants with poverty indicators were either female (47), ethnic minorities (40), disabled (23), LGBT+ (14), or aged 60+ (8). Three-quarters (56) had two or more protected characteristics (e.g. LGBT+ women or disabled ethnic minorities), and half (38) were in work: 21 full-time, 15 part-time, and 2 self-employed.

Unsurprisingly for an online survey, nearly all participants (96%) could access the internet at home. Among the four who could not, three were ethnic minorities and two were disabled.

Most participants (91% each) also felt that there was enough space for all members of their households, and felt safe at home.

Among the 13 participants who felt their homes were overcrowded, or were unsure, eight were female, six were disabled, six were ethnic minorities, three were aged over 60, and two were LGBT+. Among the 13 who did not feel safe in their homes, or were unsure, all were either female (10), disabled (8), ethnic minorities (7), LGBT+ (3), or aged 60+ (2).

Note about how these measures compare with existing research.

Housing Issues

For 14% of participants, a household member had suffered a health problem because of housing-related issues (14), or were unsure (9). This included 18% of disabled (9), LGBT+ (6) and ethnic minority (13) participants, and 15% of female participants (16).

23% of participants felt their homes were sometimes too damp or too cold (36), or were unsure (3). This included 35% LGBT+ participants (12), 29% of ethnic minority participants (13), 22% of disabled participants (11), 19% of female participants (21), and 15% of participants aged 60+ (4). 80% of participants in this group (29) had two or more protected characteristics.

Research on housing issues among marginalised groups.

Poverty and Food Poverty

Nearly a third of participants (29%) said that they sometimes struggled to pay their bills (39), or were unsure (10). This included 40% of ethnic minority participants (29), 32% of LGBT+ participants (11), 31% of female participants (34) and 26% of disabled participants (13).

13% of participants said they sometimes ate less than they should because there was not enough money for food (17), or were unsure (5). This included 21% of LGBT+ participants (7), 17% of ethnic minority participants (13), 13% of female participants (14), and 12% of disabled participants (6).

More than two-thirds of participants who indicated food poverty (15), and almost two-thirds of those who indicated financial pressures (32) had two or more protected characteristics (e.g. disabled women or older ethnic minorities). Of the 51 participants with one or both indicators, more than half were in employment: 15 full-time, and 12 part-time.

Research on poverty and food poverty among marginalised groups.

Support

Of the participants with at least one of the indicators of poverty or overcrowding, only 15 had sought support, mostly from family or friends (11). Six participants sought support from medical professionals, four each from charities, religious groups or community groups, and three from Aberdeen City Council services. Eight participants wrote comments about the support they received. One

discussed still being afraid to sleep at night, but the other seven were positive. For example:

Inability to work due to [visa delay] caused a lot of problems for me and my husband not being able to support [our] children. We were evicted from the damp home [where] we were living. But thanks to Aberdeen children's social service for coming to our rescue with getting temporary accommodation and charities like Home Start who helped with food and toiletries.

Most Important Issues

There was broad consensus among participants that the key issues were employment (56%), poverty (48%), prejudice/discrimination (39%), community safety (36%), and housing (35%), and of course these issues are deeply intertwined.

Demographic groups differed slightly in the relative weight they gave to each issue. 71% of ethnic minority participants highlighted employment, which was the highest proportion of any group for a single issue, and also the top issue for both women (54%), men (57%), and older participants (59%). For disabled and LGB+ participants, the top issue was poverty (52% and 58%, respectively), and for trans/non-binary participants, it was prejudice/discrimination (57%).

Access to cultural activities, sport and fitness, and civic participation were all considered less important, ranked in the top three by 11-12% of participants. Other issues mentioned in comments included disabled parking (especially in the city centre), disabled and other forms of access, social isolation, education, climate change, making information accessible for people with limited English, and a 'general clean of the city.'

Ideas for Improvement

61 participants commented with ideas for how to improve things in Aberdeen (with an additional 11 responses like 'no,' 'maybe,' and 'too many to list here'), and 31 of these wrote additional text for the 'any other comments' question. Rather than making suggestions, some participants elaborated on their reasons for choosing their top three issues. For example:

Employment. With jobs people can rent a flat or house and avoid poverty.

Proper civic participation would increase positive responses to all issues.

Tackle the poverty gap and other areas will improve.

Improved housing and a feeling of security reduces demands on health and social care.

And while a few participants took this as an opportunity to complain about the Council or make political points, most made genuine suggestions.

General Comments

Several participants highlighted the importance of community engagement, but there were few ideas about how best to improve this. However, practical suggestions for other issues included:

More diverse staff in hierarchical structures.

Plain English for information and even translated leaflets for the essential matters.

There should be more funding for overcoming language barriers and diverse inclusion.

English courses must be provided as an obligation for everyone [to access].

Some participants focused on Councillors and Council staff more broadly, highlighting the need for better communication,

responsiveness and accountability. For example:

City Council and elected members [should] be more accessible to the public, more approachable, with listening ears.

Elected representatives should actively seek to know the issues bothering their constituents.

Better, more specific responses to queries and more timeous responses.

Employment

The clearest theme on employment was the need to fund training, job placement and paid internship schemes, especially for people from marginalised groups, and to encourage or incentivise employers to hire people from those groups. Participants also wanted to see better support for people experiencing problems at work, including discrimination, occupational health issues, etc.

Another key theme was the importance of helping ethnic minorities find suitable employment. And while unemployment is likely to continue to rise due Covid-19 and other issues, a few participants made suggestions for job creation:

Employ more people to repair existing council residential properties (and do them properly!).

Support people with business ideas.

Revive industry, make it and transportation run on alternative energy for when the petrol runs out. Revive agriculture.

Poverty

As with community engagement above, many comments were very general here. For example:

Increase employment opportunities to help with poverty and related issues. Aberdeen is

an oil/energy capital - this should be evident in there being less poverty overall.

However, some participants made practical suggestions for reducing poverty:

Universal basic income, or at least better benefits. My benefits only cover rent.

Get more community growing groups to take over pieces of land that are overgrown/unused. By growing fruit and veg this would help overcome some food poverty, help with wellbeing, bring communities together and teach children how to grow and cook.

Minimum wage should increase in Aberdeen as it is a very expensive city and to buy a house very difficult. A lot of young people stuck in renting properties and cannot save on to deposit. Rent expenses are very high too.

Prejudice and Discrimination

Education was a key theme, both in schools and more widely, and several participants suggested campaigns to educate the public. For example:

Consistent campaigns and messaging, education and engage with LGBT+ communities and support groups to bring the LGBT+ conversation into everyday places.

Lots of positive information about how diversity helps our communities. Sharing of personal stories to help people understand why people are in poverty/homeless/how discrimination harms them etc.

Posters, billboards that are integrated into daily life to help challenge peoples subconscious perceptions.

Promote the value of older people as still having skills and value. Life and work need not stop at 60.

Offer training to tackle casual/everyday racism which is too accepted everywhere or not even acknowledged.

Integration and Support

Beyond education, several participants suggested a more proactive approach to integration:

Create more spaces of socialization for people with diverse background, not only charities.

Get keen older folk into schools and workplaces.

Differing groups in communities need to be brought together.

Communicate with local citizens how they can be involved as part of community councils - it would be good to see young folk engaged in this, and people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Please engage [with] individuals from minorities to make plans and actions, let them feel part of the solution.

Participants also highlighted ways to support specific groups. The need for more disable parking in the city centre was mentioned several times, along with the need for better language support. Other comments included:

I would like to see more support from the council for LGBT+ groups that really make a difference and not just a coffee corner. I would like to see an LGBT+ choir, mixed social dance classes, a council social page or magazine promoting LGBT+ activities, groups and centres.

The combined knowledge and experience of [DEP] members is not always put to best use by ACC. We often give advice and suggestions for improvement, but sadly, it's not always listened to or put into practice.

Many minority community activities depend too much on volunteers who are themselves struggling. Community groups need support

to bring Council services to the attention of their communities.

Structural Issues

And as with comments on prejudice and hate crime above, several participants pointed out that social problems cannot be addressed without dealing with underlying structural and institutional issues. For example:

If you are really interested in fighting racism, you must find ways to counter or change systemic racist laws, specially related to visas, police register, etc.

I think the recent publicity from the 'Black Lives Matter' Campaign has been really useful in helping me understand the nature of privilege and how we can address that more radically. I would like to see the council engage with the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign and use some of their ideas and publicity to more strongly challenge discrimination in our society.

Community Safety

Several participants advocated more patrols and a greater emphasis on local policing to improve community safety. Others suggested alternative approaches:

When mental health is being taken care of through people having access to basic care and support this will curb crime and community will be more safe as well.

More activities for children and teenagers to get them off the streets

Police [should have] better community relationships with young people.

Police lack BAME staff and thus they don't understand what we go through. Maybe particular police hiring program from BAME not the normal route as difficult for BAME to satisfy 100% requirement due to English as second language. Police and Judicial system must include advisers from BAME to help

with understanding our culture. Not just say you are here and must obey by the law and culture here. This will not solve the problem. You need to listen to us and discuss with us then we come to common ground.

Housing

Several comments mentioned the need for more council housing, accessible housing, and 'genuinely affordable housing.' However, one participant wrote:

The city council has houses available but too much bureaucracy to get one, instead [they] prefer [flats] to be empty.

Others were more concerned about maintenance or management issues:

Council too slow from reporting leaks to fixing and clerk works doesn't show sometimes.

Checking the quality of houses (protect from damp).

Takes too long for improvements between areas, some had windows ten years ago.

I wish the council would be more responsible with our houses.

Please update the ACC housing portal, especially the housing application forms, they are really shockingly bad.

Other Areas

In addition to the topics covered above, several participants wrote comments or made suggestions worth mentioning here:

There is no early intervention work across the city. Services are stretched to breaking and 'we' are dealing with crisis management only - the threshold for intervention is too high to be effective as an early intervention.

It would be nice to see more actions from the council during the pandemic. Literally all the help to individuals you are promoting on your website are 3rd sector projects and actions. It's amazing that so many people in Aberdeen are willing to volunteer and help

their community, but it would be even nicer to see our local government taking action instead of focusing all their effort to save some businesses.

Please improve the training of nursing and care staff to be able to recognise illness in residents in care homes and empower them to take appropriate action. Improve the medical supervision of residents in care homes.

Gypsy/Traveller Community Survey

National Information

The Scottish Government has acknowledged that more action must be taken to improve outcomes for Gypsy/Traveller groups.¹⁴ In reviewing progress against its 2013 report into Gypsy/Traveller accommodation, the Convener of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee voiced concerns that little or no progress had been made either in site provision or quality of facilities.¹⁵

Questions Discussed with Housing Officers

Status of upgrading facilities at Clinterty:
Clinterty is to be upgraded to meet Scottish Government site standards. Refurbishment to commence October 2020.

Plans for other site provision in the City:

See full text at 7.1.6 of the LHS – Only through the Local Development Plan.

The Local Development Plan 2017 has identified sites as part of the 25% affordable housing contribution offering opportunities to the north, west and south of the city. Grandhome, Newhills, and Loirston are considered most appropriate for on-site provision of smaller transit sites with a net area of approximately 0.5 hectares providing six pitches on each site. Provision at the remaining locations will take the form of a commuted sum (equivalent to 15 affordable units) as set out in the Local Development Plan Supplementary Guidance. There is a full

process of consultation undertaken prior to publication.

£1.3 million has been set aside, the option being considered is to demolish the existing chalets and to extend the site so that the plots are larger to meet fire regulations, a new playpark will be built along with improved drainage and a car parking area. Plans are currently being revised and may need to be adapted due to costs.

Questions Discussed with G/T Community Members

(total participants: 7)

Upgrading

- 1) *Are you aware of ACC plans for **upgrades** in services within the current site? Yes (7)*
- 2) *Have you seen any **progress** in services in current site? No (7)*
- 3) *What more do you think that ACC needs to do to ensure **quality standards** are met?*

Work was supposed to start last year and feel that it is taking too long but will make a difference when done.

New Provisions

- 1) *Are you aware of ACC plans for **new site provision**? Yes (2) No (5)*
- 2) *Have you seen any **progress** in new site provision? No (7) Advised that they were not aware of any new sites.*
- 3) *What more do you think ACC needs to do to ensure provision of new site is adequate and satisfactory? Site is ok but needs upgraded and facilities for kids.*

Education (4 families with children)

*Do you think that you and your family's **education needs** are currently being met? Yes (4)*

Can you give us examples of what you appreciated most? Local school is good with dealing with Traveller children. Prior to COVID there were groups in the community centre

that helped with kids' homework and helped them with different activities.

What more can the Council do to support you?

Feel that we have good support on the site from the different people that come to the centre and we call Amanda if she is not on site and we need help with anything.

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Aberdeen City Council Equality Outcomes

Summary of focus groups

Report prepared by GREC

The following is a summary of each of the focus groups (and phone interviews with older people) that were held during October and November. These were organised through a combination of existing groups, meetings and partnerships, as well as more general sessions that were publicised through email lists and social media. Given the challenges of delivering community engagement during lockdown, an extensive range of groups and communities have been involved in the process. Although each conversation was different, some of the common themes were: calls for the council to communicate better the work it's doing on equalities, including the equality outcomes (and the activities that go along with actions); greater visibility and inclusion (the council actively reaching out to groups and communities); and increased work around education and equality, particularly in schools.

There were 15 participants in the focus group with the **African community**, which was organised in partnership with the African Council. In terms of the community's experience of COVID-19 and lockdown, participants felt that many Africans had been disproportionately impacted given the closure of places of worship during much of the period, and the strong connection that many Africans in Aberdeen have with churches and mosques. Several participants spoke about how people's weeks are often strongly tied with events at the church, and one compared it to the role of the pub in the life of a typical Scottish person. The feedback from the group was that they were impressed with the NHS response to the pandemic, but in comparison they had heard very little from the City Council, e.g. no letters through the door with advice. Several participants also felt that the Council should have been more proactive during the lockdown, e.g. by reaching out to religious leaders with messages of support and sign-posting to support services that could have been circulated.

In terms of the existing equality outcome that was most relevant to the community (Aberdeen as a city of sanctuary...) the consensus of the group was that there was very little knowledge within the community of the existing equality outcomes, and so it was not possible to comment on whether progress had been made. In relation to the 2021-25 outcomes it was suggested that more effort goes into communicating these priorities, being clear about what work is going to be done alongside them, and regularly returning to the community with updates. A theme which featured highly in relation to the Equality Outcomes but also more broadly was a desire to see a shift in the relationship with the City Council, to have more frequent and more meaningful engagement from the council, and for

there to be opportunities to hold the Council to account (e.g. on the new Equality Outcomes).

A further key issue raised through the African community focus group was the lack of representation of Africans in senior positions, including in the council leadership. One participant seemed to capture the sentiment well: they spoke of being held up as a positive example because they're African and an employee of X, but that this isn't enough, people need to be able to progress within organisations and reach the top. The issue of representation in other settings was also raised, e.g. in the context of developing new strategies and plans. The point was strongly made that one size does not fit all, and without African people involved in decision making bodies, much of what is designed will not meet the needs of Africans. Several participants touched on the example of mental health in this context: they noted that this was a significant issue in the community (particularly given the isolation caused by COVID-19) and that many people would struggle to speak about it openly or seek help. There were differing perspectives of Black Lives Matter and the discussions it had prompted about institutional and systemic racism. There was agreement that there was on-going discrimination in relation to employment, but not agreement on whether this discrimination was personal, institutional or systemic.

The focus group with the **Muslim community** was organised in partnership with the Spital Mosque and Islamic Centre, who in turn invited representatives of other Aberdeen mosques. There were 7 participants during the session, including 2 imams and representatives of groups such as Aberdeen Muslim Women's Association. Participants spoke positively about the supportive nature of the local communities that they were living in during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there wasn't a strong sense of the community being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and lockdown, multiple participants touched on the closure of mosques and the various ways that this had impacted on the community. Now that there are more opportunities to attend the mosque there remain additional barriers, usually for women, as childcare options have significantly diminished. Another negative impact on Muslim women has been the closure of women-only swimming sessions at the Beach Leisure Centre, which was a well-used facility.

In terms of the relevant existing equality outcomes (Aberdeen as a city of sanctuary), one participant spoke about the specific City of Sanctuary initiative (rather than the broader outcome) but said that he wasn't aware of recent activity on this. The consensus in the group was that at an individual level Aberdeen is a very welcoming and friendly place to live. In this regard, several participants compared Aberdeen favourably to other towns and cities they'd previously lived in. However, when prompted to reflect on Islamophobia as an issue in Aberdeen, the consensus was that it was a significant problem, with the distinction being that although Muslims at an individual level tend to be treated with respect in the City, Muslims as a group are viewed negatively, aligned with stereotypes portrayed in the media, often relating to terrorism. In terms of addressing this issue and the focus of future equalities work/outcomes, the group emphasised the importance of education and engagement in schools. Several participants felt that other religions (other than ACC/GREC Equalities Survey, Preliminary Report

Christianity) should be given more recognition within schools. Although sometimes other religions are briefly taught, Christianity is usually embedded via weekly assemblies and the marking of regular festivities. It was suggested that Muslim festivals like Eid could be given more attention across City schools.

Another issue relating to schools was also seen as important by most of the group. Many Muslim children end up eating cold and/or vegetarian food at schools because there is no provision of halal meat. It was noted that had been raised previously without resolution.

There were 6 participants at the **EU Nationals** focus group, with Polish, Czech, Spanish and Italian nationalities represented. In terms of the impact of COVID-19 participants felt that EU nationals had been disproportionately impacted, given that most had come to Aberdeen for work, and many were now struggling in terms of employment and finances. The lack of face to face support available was also felt to be a factor, as those without good English proficiency were less likely to access the support on the phone. There was also feedback that there was less awareness or understanding of the support available, e.g. Universal Credit, and it was also felt that some communities may feel support from a food bank is not socially acceptable. Examples were shared of people who are now taking more risk due to being taken off furlough and then being given fewer hours. In relation to support provided by the council, responses were generally negative, with feedback including that more information should be translated, particularly where there are high numbers of other nationalities, and others said it was very difficult to make contact with anyone at the council during the pandemic.

In terms of the relevant Equality Outcome (Aberdeen as a city of sanctuary), participants felt there had been no or little progress in this area in the past 4 years. Feedback included a sense that promoting integration needed to be given a higher priority, and another participant felt that council services are not friendly or welcoming. In terms of moving forward with this priority it was felt important that more innovative and creative approaches were tried, and that there should be space for the collective voice of minorities to be heard.

Brexit was clearly a significant concern for participants, though one participant felt it had been largely overshadowed by COVID-19. Participants mentioned uncertainty about what the future holds, and several participants mentioned challenges or concerns about the process of achieving UK citizenship. There were also concerns raised that the whole process was leading to more animosity towards EU nationals, including increased levels of prejudice and discrimination. There were mixed responses about how safe and welcome people feel in Aberdeen, with some positive responses, and some detailing various document checks and others challenges accessing health services. In terms of moving forward participants suggested an increased focus on bringing people of different community & cultures together, increased understanding of diversity with a view to promoting positive community relations.

The focus group with members of the **Trans community** included 11 participants, and was organised in partnership with 4 Pillars. The feedback relating to unequal impact of COVID-19 tended to focus on health services, however participants suggested the council could have done more in terms of keeping libraries open for internet access (to tackle digital exclusion and prevent further inequality for unemployed people).

In terms of the Council's existing, relevant equality outcomes (Aberdeen as city of sanctuary and LGBT+ friendly) participants felt that the council hadn't done enough, and that although there had been positive changes in society over the period, it wasn't down to the council. Two examples were prominent throughout the discussions: the council should be more supportive of Pride (e.g. by not charging the community for it) including a Trans Pride event, and that the council should support the development of gender-neutral toilets (in council spaces and more broadly), rather than making it harder. On the former point, participants expressed that Pride was an excellent initiative in terms of breaking down barriers between communities, and therefore the Council should be more supportive.

In relation to the more general questions of inclusion and safety within the City, there was a mixed picture. Although there were a few positive responses, most participants highlighted where they had negative experiences. Examples included facing prejudice or hostility in gyms, changing rooms and public parks, as well as difficulties with form filling when there is no appropriate box to tick. The distinction between those who can "pass" and those who were frequently identified as Trans was made by several participants, which leads to a difference in experiences. There were particular challenges faced by those facing multiple, inter-sectional barriers, with the example of being disabled and Trans mentioned.

In terms of other suggestions moving forward, participants highlighted the need for more visibility of LGBT+ people within Council materials, and also more of a voice of LGBT+ people in relevant Council spaces. In relation to hate crime, there was a suggestion to make the highlighting of this more centre-stage, and this should include promotion of Third Party Reporting sites. In addition, there were many relevant points made in relation to health services, and these will be shared with relevant partners at NHS Grampian and Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership.

There were 12 participants at the **LGBT+** focus group. In terms of COVID-19 there was a sense that community support and engagement had become much harder, therefore having a negative impact on mental health. In terms of what more the council could have done, there was mention of increased communication and transparency, including on particular issues like bike lanes and changes to traffic systems.

Several participants noted the development of gender neutral toilets as being important and something that has not been good enough in the City so far. This was felt to be an important next step in terms of inclusion. Participants noted that COVID-19 and lockdown had had a negative impact in this regard, with more hatred and prejudice online.

Opinions were mixed on how welcoming and safe Aberdeen is as a city for LGBT+ people. Pride was noted as having had a positive impact in terms of the City feeling more inclusive.

In terms of progress against the relevant equality outcomes (Aberdeen as city of sanctuary and LGBT+ friendly) there was a feeling that the Council is not visible enough in terms of delivering this work. A range of participants also noted the lack of investment in LGBT+ charities, notably 4 Pillars, and this was therefore seen by some as a lack of support for LGBT+ communities. As in the Trans focus group, it was suggested that Aberdeen City Council should offer financial support for Pride, or waive the fees.

There were 5 participants at the **Jewish community** focus group, which took place before a committee meeting of the Aberdeen Synagogue and Jewish Community Centre. Participants felt that COVID-19 had a particular impact on the community in that communal worship is a particularly important part of Judaism. Attendees also spoke about the small size of the Jewish community, which is spread out across the North East of Scotland, and one participant noted that it has been difficult to maintain a sense of community. This has meant it's been hard for the community to support one another, e.g. in terms of food parcels or preventing loneliness; they have been reliant on online platforms.

In general participants felt that Aberdeen had been a welcoming and safe space for Jewish people. However, most participants' views had to varying degrees been negatively impacted by a political campaign which had targeted a business run by an Israeli-Jewish businessman in Aberdeen. This continues to have an impact for some of the community, and has altered perceptions around whether the authorities in the area understand anti-Semitism and are willing to tackle it.

Participants didn't say a lot about progress with the Council's most relevant current outcome (Aberdeen as a city of sanctuary) though one participant noted that Aberdeen is not a city of sanctuary or, if it is, it is only for those people who are not Israeli. Several individuals commented on the importance of education in schools for promoting inclusion and a society that understands and respects diversity.

In terms of priorities for the council moving forward, those in attendance touched on trying to make Aberdeen a more inclusive and welcoming city, for example in terms of having good schools, good jobs and pedestrianized city centre areas, with COVID-19 having shown that change over a short period of time can happen. There was also a suggestion to learn from more or similarly diverse cities, like Leicester, to see the approach to integration and inclusion that is taken there. A further specific suggestion was for the council to do more to bring diverse groups together outdoors to enjoy and learn about nature.

Due to challenges with setting up a focus group, 5 **older people (over 60)** from Aberdeen Voice of Experience were phoned individually and asked the focus group questions. Generally, the response was that COVID-19 has not had a disproportionate impact on people
ACC/GREC Equalities Survey, Preliminary Report

over 60 as all communities regardless of age have been negatively affected in some way. However, the lack of socialising through face-to-face methods was noted, with some feelings of isolation. With the additional social distancing measures introduced on Union Street, some older people felt this has made Aberdeen city centre very inaccessible. Mostly, those asked agreed the council have done an adequate job in responding to the COVID-19 crisis. However, some participants mentioned they feel there has not been enough discipline and caution in pubs throughout the city.

The majority of those interviewed felt very welcome and included in Aberdeen, stating they have connections with many community groups and churches. Most mentioned having connections with people in their area and that Aberdeen is generally a welcoming city. The participants all appeared to feel safe in and around Aberdeen, with only one participant mentioning she feels less safe at night due to there being no street lights where she lives.

In terms of the most relevant existing outcome for 2017-21 (older people have their voices heard) there were very mixed responses with some participants feeling they, along with other community members, have their voices and opinions heard by the council. However, others felt they are not listened to. Nevertheless, it was felt this should remain as a priority as residents and communities should be listened to more, with a particular emphasis on supporting older people.

Some participants feel there needs to be more support for homeless people, with foodbanks being more accessible. There was also a general feeling that Aberdeen City Centre, specifically Union Street, needs to be more accessible. Additionally, points were made around money being spent on unnecessary projects instead of issues that matter such as housing, employment and poverty.

The focus group with **young people** was delivered as part of a meeting of Aberdeen City Council; there were 8 participants. Participants noted some of the specific ways that young people had been impacted by COVID-19, including the closure of many school clubs which are an important part of many pupils' school life. Others noted the educational attainment gap and how that has been negatively impacted by lockdowns and the lack of access, particularly for those living in more deprived areas and more likely to have poorer internet. Participants noted the detrimental mental health impact of COVID-19, with many young people feeling anxious and/or isolated. One participant noted the particular challenges experienced by young disabled people. Several participants spoke in positive terms about the council's response.

In terms of the most relevant of the current Equality Outcomes (young people have their voices heard), participants were positive about how they have been included, both in the context of COVID-19 and previously. Participants, perhaps unsurprisingly, felt that the Youth Council was a good platform for engaging with young people, and that it could be a conduit for wider engagement. People spoke about challenges in engaging via schools, and how it can be difficult to attract involvement without people seeing something tangible that they will get out of that involvement.

The focus group with **women** was run with 4 members of the lead group of Aberdeen Women's Alliance. As well as speaking about the negative impacts COVID-19 had on everyone, some particular impacts on women were noted: an increase in domestic abuse; increased financial pressures, e.g. to work more hours, due to partners losing jobs; increasingly vulnerable due to being less likely to be able to work from home, and more likely to be carers for others, including outside their own home. In terms of the council's response, the work around domestic abuse and awareness was highlighted as positive, as well as the psychological support available. On the other hand participants felt that communications and leadership from the council hadn't been strong enough. The messaging to communities has not been clear enough, and the long-term animosity between the City Council and the Scottish Government led to a feeling of distrust about what was being said or delivered. Participants suggested that an improvement would be putting out communications to the whole City, for example a short newsletter with relevant updates and information on how to access support. There were also suggestions about making more use of online platforms like Zoom, to allow access to customer services as well as councillors.

Those in attendance felt that the Black Lives Matter had been generally positive in shining a light on racism and discrimination, starting conversations, and hopefully getting beyond a point where it's possible to say "racism isn't an issue here". All participants shared first or second hand examples of experiences of racism in the city, including attitudes widely held within workplaces, as well as seeing explicitly racist graffiti at a bus stop during lockdown. In terms of safety, some participants noted that Aberdeen doesn't always feel like a safe space, with some areas being poorly lit, and therefore not ones that people would use after 6pm.

There were mixed opinions relating to the Council's current, most relevant equality outcome ("a culture in which women's lives, opportunities and confidence are improved"), with most of the examples around service provision and change relating to NHS Grampian. Individuals noted that although there has been some progress on addressing the gender pay gap, more work is still required, and concerns that COVID-19 will make things worse. Participants felt that this priority should remain a priority.

The equality issues that participants felt should be prioritised over the coming years included: better access to training and education; a zero tolerance approach to discrimination and making equality explicit across the council's functions; more safe spaces for women and families to socialise, where alcohol isn't served; safety improvements in terms of fixing street lights and improving grit provision. Those present felt that council needed to do more to be perceived as fair throughout everything it does, not one rule for some etc. This included mention of a lack of political leadership, and also the perceptions around licensing and bars during the COVID-19 crisis.

A group discussion with four members of the **Disability Equity Partnership (DEP)** took place on the 23rd of December 2020 and the following issues were identified:

- 1- People would like more (face to face) communication from Aberdeen City Council to make sure they understand the plans and strategies to make more meaningful consultation.
- 2- While some people stated that accessing ACC services became difficult due to digitalisation of services, other view was that they felt more included, since digitalisation permitted access to services from the comfort of their own homes.

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- 3- One of the main impacts of COVID-19 on people is mental health issues due to increased loneliness and isolation
 - 4- Some members were concerned that consultation and engagement with DEP during COVID-19 was reduced due to change in ways of communication and lockdown measures.
 - 5- Other issues covered are: physical access, safety due to street lighting, barriers created by street furniture, and lack of accessible toilet in the City.

Another discussion with **BSL users** in December 2020 included the following issues:

- 1- Impact of COVID-19 on deaf community include, 'feelings of anxiety, confusion and isolation'. Members linked that to lack of information in BSL language and many times there are a lot of false information in English and BSL. The older generation is greatly affected as they do not have access to internet and they do not see their usual friend as often. They do not see their usual friend as often creating isolation for them. The only access they have is just the Daily Briefing on BBC Scotland channel with a signing language interpreter, also BDA do provide summarised information through Facebook on a weekly basis (a few months ago they used to do this on weekdays)
- 2- Members also expressed difficulty accessing information in the ACC website. People suggested: "would recommend to have clear identify BSL logo on the home page so it can be easily clicked to access to BSL page. There is "Select language" dropdown box on top of the page but "BSL" is not there. Also can you put BSL videos on Facebook to put on the council's website so the videos can be viewed again at a later date when a deaf person wants to see the video again."
1. Another one suggested: "It would be needed to have BSL videos about council's services especially through COVID-19 times like applying for "Self-Isolating grant" (which I think is council's responsible?) and also applying for Emergency Funding, etc."
- 3- Members reiterated the importance of a more efficient engagement with D/deaf people especially during COVID-19 period decision and on themes like: alcohol licensing, trading licensing, change of road layouts, changes on Union Street, the Rosemount and the cycle lanes at the beach. "many cyclists ride very fast. On Union Street the cyclists cycle everywhere and fast. I myself had many near-misses." said one participant.