



SCRUTINY COMMISSION: 13 MARCH 2024

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-28

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Scrutiny Commission on the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-28 as part of the consultation on this Strategy which is appended to this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy is part of the Council's Policy Framework. This requires the strategy to be formally adopted by Council. The current strategy was approved in July 2020 and runs from 2020-24. The new strategy builds on previous work and will run from 2024-28.
3. The Council is required to produce an equality strategy to demonstrate how it is meeting its statutory duties regarding equality as set out in the Equalities Act 2010.
4. The strategy aligns with all five outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan (2022-26). There are specific links to the outcomes to build "Great Communities", "Improve Opportunities" and keep people "Safe and Well".

Background

5. The Council has a strong, enduring commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. This applies to its role as a provider of services to the public, as an employer of over 6000 staff and as an organisation of influence across the region. The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy provides a framework to support all policy, plans and action to fulfil this commitment.
6. Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council must meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. This requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:
 - (a) Eliminate discrimination
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity
 - (c) Foster good relations between different people when carrying out its activities.

The Council as a specific duty to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and set equality objectives.

7. The EDI Strategy builds on the achievements of the past four years. It also recognises and reflects on the changes in society, in services and in the Council's workforce.

Key achievements during 2020-2024

8. The Leicestershire Community Insight Survey of residents for July to September 2023 found that 92.9% of people agree that Leicestershire is a place where people of diverse backgrounds get on well. 81.8% of residents agree that the Council treats all types of people fairly.
9. The Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, consisting of community and subject matter experts, provides advice and challenge to officers when developing new policy or planning public consultations. The Group has developed into an effective mechanism to support and challenge departments with policy development, review, and service design.
10. The Council has signed the Race at Work Charter and made a commitment to become an anti-racist organisation. This has involved a range of initiatives to engage in discussions on issues of race, ethnicity and nationality, and the impact on services, staff, and communities.
11. The Council is ranked as the highest performing local authority in England for the Stonewall workforce equalities index for 2022/23. The Council has introduced new policy and practice guidance on trans and non-binary equality within the workplace and for those who use Council services.
12. The Council became a Menopause Friendly Employer and received two national awards for its training initiatives and support for colleagues leading on this issue.
13. The Council has introduced a new, simplified on-line Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process. This enabled officers to consider the potential equalities implications of any proposals and is a vital way of ensuring and demonstrating that the public sector equality duty has been met.
14. The Council has reviewed the approach and guidance to managers on making reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. This reflected views from disabled employees. A key element has been to identify an "IT Champion" for disabled staff who can help resolve difficulties swiftly and effectively.
15. The Council has curated heritage projects celebrating the contribution of South Asian people and Gypsy and Traveller communities to life in Leicestershire.

16. The Council has successfully welcomed over 1,150 Ukrainian guests to Leicestershire and curated an exhibition of their experiences of fleeing conflict to find safety in the county.
17. The Council has staff support groups who actively influence Council policy as well as providing vital support for those who might experience discrimination, bullying or harassment. 92.5% of staff in the 2023 staff survey agreed that the Council is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion.
18. The Council has successfully launched a series of Big Conversation sessions where staff can hear from service users and colleagues with lived experience. Topics have included: people who are deaf and hard of hearing, neurodiversity, violence against women and girls, antisemitism and hate crime. The Council was a finalist in the Local Government Chronicle Employer of the Year awards for the Big Conversation initiative.
19. The Council is considering adopting those with lived care experience as a “protected characteristic” so that they are afforded the same consideration as other disadvantaged groups.

Demographic and workforce changes

20. The Census 2021 revealed a significantly changing demographic profile for Leicestershire. Over one in five residents are now aged 65 or over. This figure is certain to increase. There are direct implications for services which support this cohort, as well as issues such as physical and sensory limitations which may accompany old age.
21. 16% of the population have a minority ethnic identity. This includes people from Europe as well as those with African, Caribbean, and South Asian heritage. This figure was 6% in 2011. There are potential implications for 536 interpretation and translation services, as well as a shift in the diversity of cultures that constitute the communities of Leicestershire.
22. 2.4% of the population identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. This was the first time this question was asked in the census.
23. 16.6% identified as disabled under the definition in the Equalities Act 2010.
24. The workforce profile in July 2023 revealed that 75% of staff were female, 14% had a Black, Asian, or Multi-ethnic identity, 5% declared a disability and 2.4% identified as lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual. The profile is broadly consistent at all levels of the organisation and there is an upwards trend for women and Black, Asian, and Multi-ethnic staff at senior levels.

The pillars of the EDI strategy

25. The Strategy is based around key pillars. These focus outwards, towards the role of the Council as a provider of services and community champion, and

inwards toward a workforce which is diverse and free from discrimination and prejudice.

- (a) **Visible leadership and commitment.** Embodied in this strategy and the leadership from Members and Senior Officers of the Council.
- (b) **Workforce and culture that values diversity.** A workforce that is representative of the community at all levels and culture and practice which welcomes diversity and roots out discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- (c) **Data and evidence driven.** Information on Leicestershire's communities, service users and staff is routinely collected, used to drive the implementation, and evidence the impact of this strategy.
- (d) **Honest community engagement.** Building relationships with community-based organisations and celebrating the diverse culture of Leicestershire.
- (e) **Constructive commercial arrangements.** Using the Council's commercial and strategic influence to encourage the adoption of best practice on equality, diversity, and inclusion by partner organisations.
- (f) **Delivering accessible and fair services.** Issues of access and fairness remain at the heart of all services and are considered as part of any service change.
- (g) **Accreditation and recognition.** External validation and recognition of the Council's commitment, work, and progress.

Consultation and Timetable for decision

- 26. The Cabinet at its meeting on 9th February approved a 12-week period of consultation on the draft EDI Strategy. The consultation will use a variety of methods from on-line surveys to virtual and face-to-face meetings. The objective of this initiative is twofold: to gather responses to the EDI Strategy and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the key issues confronting both communities and staff. Specific community organisations of and for people with protected characteristics will be encouraged to participate in the consultation. The Strategy will be made available in different formats on request and a summary version will be made available alongside the more detailed document.
- 27. The Scrutiny Commission is invited to comment on the draft Strategy as part of this consultation.
- 28. The Cabinet will receive a report on the findings of the consultation and the final Strategy for approval at its meeting in June. The comments of the

Commission will be report to the Cabinet at this meeting. The EDI strategy will require approval by full Council. This is planned for 3rd July 2024.

Resource Implications

29. The consultation will be managed through existing resources. It will be co-ordinated by the Chief Executive's Policy Team and will call upon all departments to engage with staff, service users and community groups.
30. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

31. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

32. An Equality Impact Assessment of the draft strategy and consultation approach has been undertaken. The strategy should enhance equality for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. The EIA will be revised following the consultation and submitted to Cabinet as an appendix to the final report. There are no specific human rights implications from this strategy.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

33. There are no specific health, crime and disorder or environmental impacts at this stage.

Background Papers

Report to the County Council on 8 July 2020 "Equalities Strategy 2020-2024 and Equality Action Plan 2020-2021" and minutes of that meeting
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6040>

Report to the Cabinet on 9th February 2024 "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024 – 2028" and minutes of that meeting
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7503&Ver=4>

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Appendix

Draft Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2024 - 2028