



**Leicestershire
County Council**

Draft

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND

INCLUSION STRATEGY

2024-2028

Executive Summary

Leicestershire County Council has a strong and positive 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. This Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-28 provides a framework to support all policy, plans and action to fulfil this commitment over the next four years.

The primary purpose of this strategy is to reaffirm and strengthen the Council's commitment to creating an environment where every individual, regardless of their background, experiences fairness, dignity, respect, and equality of opportunity. Promoting EDI is a fundamental principle that enhances the well-being of communities and aims to develop a more vibrant, innovative, and harmonious Leicestershire.

The strategy outlines clear and actionable objectives, aligning with legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) and addressing the specific needs of Leicestershire communities and employees of the Council. The EDI Strategy is a key policy for the Council and as such it provides a guiding framework for all policies, plans and services. This strategy will shape the Council's approach and priorities and will be implemented across all levels and departments.

The EDI Strategy is a key enabler supporting the council's core values of positivity, trust and respect, openness, transparency, and flexibility. The strategy is also integral to the council's overall vision as set out in the Strategic plan 2024-28 and Outcomes Framework.

The strategy sets out the national, local, and legal context, describes the key aims and objectives, and sets out provisional action plans. The draft strategy will be subject to consultation with internal and external communities of interest.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of this strategy are:

1. Reaffirming commitment to EDI: strengthen and underscore the Council's commitment to EDI, and to foster an organisational culture that is inclusive and equitable.
2. Legal compliance and obligations: ensure compliance with legislation, and fulfil obligations outlined in the Act.

3. **Recognising and celebrating success: identify and celebrate achievements:** Proactively identify, acknowledge, and celebrate advancements in promoting EDI within the Council, recognising achievements, both significant and incremental.
4. **Setting strategic priorities: defining goals and work areas to guide Council initiatives and actions over 2024-28.** Ensure a comprehensive and structured approach towards fostering equality and inclusivity.

The objectives of this strategy are:

1. **Cultivate a robust workforce culture:** foster a resilient and adaptable work environment that values diversity and inclusion at every level
2. **Exemplify strong leadership:** encourage and show robust political and managerial leadership that champions equality and diversity, setting the tone for the entire organisation to follow suit.
3. **Achieve equity in service delivery:** set up and implement policies and practices that ensure equity in service delivery, focusing on cutting disparities and fostering an inclusive approach in supplying services to all residents.
4. **Embed EDI in communication:** develop and execute a comprehensive communication strategy that ingrains the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion. Ensure these values permeate all internal and external communications.
5. **Develop a culturally aware and representative workforce:** create a workforce representative of the diverse communities served, emphasising cultural awareness and sensitivity. Ensure inclusivity in recruitment, training, and professional development.
6. **Empower communities:** empower local communities to actively engage and raise issues related to equality and diversity, setting up a framework that encourages dialogue and collaboration for positive change.
7. **Promote evidence-driven decision making** promote a culture of evidence and data-driven decision-making, using comprehensive data sets to inform strategies, check progress, and identify areas for improvement in promoting equality.
8. **Adopt an outcome-focused approach:** direct efforts towards achieving tangible outcomes, measuring success by the positive impact on EDI within the community and the organisation.

Pillars and Key Initiatives

The Strategy is formed of seven key pillars which form the foundation and framework for specific activity.

1. Visible Leadership and Commitment

This action ensures that EDI is integral to officer and member development and embedding EDI into all services:

- *Clear EDI Vision & Strategy*: an articulated vision and strategy for EDI provide the guiding principles that align with Council's overall organisational goals.
- *EDI Integral in Member & Leadership Development*: integrating EDI principles into leadership development ensures that the Council's leaders embody the values we champion.
- *Departmental Targets*: setting up specific and measurable targets within each department creates a roadmap for progress and accountability
- *Harnessing Collective Efforts on EDI*: promoting a collaborative approach ensures that EDI is not the responsibility of a few, but a shared commitment across the organisation.
- *Equality Impact Assessments for All Service Changes*: ensuring that EDI considerations are an integral part of service changes shows a commitment to preventing unintentional discrimination.

2. Workforce and Culture

This action underscores the importance of a workforce that reflects the diversity of Leicestershire's communities, requiring intentional efforts in recruitment, development, and retention. It is also about creating a workforce culture which embraces and values diversity and seeks to eliminate bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

- *Inclusive HR Policies & Practices*: policies and practices must evolve to keep pace with societal changes, embodying inclusivity, and fairness.
- *Developmental programmes*: approaches such as mentoring, coaching and reverse mentoring will be used to encourage and enable professional development and breaking of "glass ceilings."
- *Learning & Development Plan*: a robust plan ensures that employees have access to continuous learning opportunities that promote EDI awareness and skills.
- *Big Conversations*: creating spaces for open dialogues promotes understanding, addresses concerns, and cultivates an inclusive culture.
- *Positive Action Development Programme*: implementing positive actions ensures targeted initiatives to address under-representation and promote diversity.

- *Visual EDI Images Across the Organisation*: incorporating visual representations of EDI values throughout the physical and digital workplace reinforces a culture of inclusivity.

3. Evidence and data based

This action will improve data capture mechanisms and ensures correct and comprehensive information on the demographics of the Council's workforce, service users and communities

- *Ethnicity & Gender Pay Gap Reporting*: regular reporting on pay gaps provides transparency and accountability in addressing disparities.
- *Equal Pay Audit*: conducting audits ensures fairness in compensation and identifies and rectifies any unjust discrepancies.
- *Workforce Profile*: continuously monitoring the composition of the Council's workforce helps gauge progress and areas for improvement.
- *Monitoring Equal Rights Cases*: a vigilant approach to monitoring Equal Rights cases ensures prompt action in addressing issues related to discrimination.
- *Mandatory EDI Training Completion Rates*: making EDI training mandatory reinforces the importance of continuous education and awareness.
- *Staff Survey Feedback*: regular feedback through surveys helps gauge employee experiences, identify concerns, and measure the effectiveness of EDI initiatives.
- *Recruitment Data*: scrutinising recruitment data helps assess the success of diversity initiatives and informs adjustments, as necessary.
- *Service Data*: equality monitoring of take up of services
- *Consultation Data*: equality monitoring of participation in public consultations.

4. Strong Community Engagement:

LCC's commitment to external community engagement serves as a cornerstone in building bridges and fostering inclusivity.

- *Build Strong Relationships with groups of and for people with protected characteristics*: nurturing robust ties with diverse community groups ensures that the Council's strategy is informed by the unique needs and perspectives of various communities.
- *Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group*: active support for and from this group enables a constructive critical community voice to be heard to challenge the Council on its policies and activities from an EDI perspective.
- *Promote & Celebrate Contribution of Diverse Groups to Leicestershire*: recognising and celebrating the diverse contributions of various groups enhances community cohesion and fosters a sense of belonging.

- *LCC Participation in Community Events*: active involvement in community events demonstrates the Council's commitment to understanding, respecting, and celebrating the cultural richness of Leicestershire.

5. Positive Commercial Arrangements: the Council's commitment to positive commercial arrangements extends the influence of the EDI Strategy into the business sector

- *Ensure Suppliers Have EDI Commitments*: requiring EDI commitments from suppliers promotes a broader culture of inclusion throughout the supply chain.
- *Encourage Local Businesses to Adopt EDI Good Practice*: the EDI strategy seeks to influence local businesses, encouraging them to adopt EDI best practices and contribute to a more inclusive local economy.
- *Public Sector Partnerships*: collaborating with other public sector partners extends the Council's collective impact, fostering a united front in advancing EDI initiatives.

6. Accessible and Fair Service: the Council prioritises accessible and fair services as a fundamental element of the EDI strategy.

- *Accessibility Assessments*: conducting regular assessments of public facilities, websites, and communication channels to identify and eliminate barriers, ensuring universal access for all residents.
- *Inclusive Communication Practices*: developing and adhering to inclusive communication practices, including the use of multiple languages, accessible formats, and communication aids, to ensure information reaches and serves diverse community members.
- *Flexible Service Delivery Models*: exploring and implementing flexible service delivery models, such as online services, mobile outreach, and extended service hours, to cater to varying schedules and preferences and enhance accessibility for everyone.
- *Interpretation & Translation Services*: ensuring access and fair service for those where there is a communication barrier. This includes people who use British Sign Language as well as other languages.

7. Accreditations: Accreditations signify the Council's commitment to external standards and benchmarks, guiding continuous improvement. While already holding accreditations, the next stage is to pursue higher levels and continuous improvement.

- *Stonewall Workplace Equality Index*: acknowledging the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusion, the Council's commitment is shown through

participation in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. The Council has been a top 100 employer for several years and will aim to keep that ranking.

- *Attain Level 3 Disability Confident (Currently Level 2)*: the Council's journey involves progressing to higher levels of Disability Confident status, demonstrating commitment to creating a disability-friendly workplace.
- *Race at Work Charter*: the Council's participation in the Race at Work Charter signifies the Council's commitment to race equality in the workplace.
- *British Sign Language Charter*: the Council's adherence to the British Sign Language Charter demonstrates commitment to accessibility for the Deaf community.
- *Menopause Friendly Accreditation*: acknowledging the importance of being a Menopause Friendly employer, the Council's commitment is shown through its intent to seek accreditation in 2024 and beyond.

Legal Framework

The Council works within a robust legal framework designed to safeguard and champion EDI. Central to this framework are the Equality Act (the Act) 2010, and the Human Rights Act 1998, which collectively set out the rights and protections afforded to individuals and groups.

Public Sector Equality Duty: As a public body, the Act imposes a Public Sector Equality Duty on the Council, mandating "due regard" to the imperative of ending discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and other prohibited conduct. It further obliges the Council to have due regard to advance equality of opportunity and cultivate positive relations among individuals with and without protected characteristics.

In practical terms, this duty requires a comprehensive evaluation of how the Council's functions, policies, and services impact diverse groups. The overarching goal is to mitigate or eradicate disadvantages stemming from protected characteristics, promoting greater public life participation for those facing disproportionate barriers. Beyond service provision, the duty extends to the Council's role as an employer, ensuring fair treatment for both staff and those involved in work-related activities.

Equality Impact Assessments: The Council uses a robust Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) approach to assess the potential impact of any changes in policy or practice on those with protected characteristics. Each EIA is owed by the responsible service manager and includes an action plan to mitigate against any potential negative impact.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act

These are age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, and sexual orientation.

The Council is also aware of other groups and communities which may experience discrimination or disadvantages in receiving services for work for the authority. These are care leavers, carers, gypsy and traveller communities, ex-armed forces, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, deprived communities. (Please refer to Appendix 1 for definitions and explanations).

Human Rights Act 1998: The Human Rights Act 1998 sets up a framework for fundamental rights and freedoms applicable to all individuals. These rights protect individuals from the power of the state and thus are of key significance to local government. In the context of the Council, this applies in areas such as social care, child protection and education, but is considered by all functions.

National and International Context

National and international developments can shape and influence the work of the Council and its strategic approach to EDI. The Black Lives Matter movement, founded in the USA in the aftermath of the murder by police officers of George Floyd, created momentum to re-examine issues of institutional racism within all public bodies. The Council embraced this opportunity to re-examine its own approach and made an explicit commitment to work to becoming an anti-racist organisation – going beyond the need to meet statutory requirements.

The Covid pandemic affected everyone with older people and disabled people, especially those residing in care homes. There is also evidence that minority ethnic communities were more adversely impacted. There has been a lasting change in ways of working, also influenced by the availability of modern technology for remote working. The move towards digitalisation of communications and contact has potential to improve access through 24/7 availability, speed, and ease of use. However, there is also the risk of leaving behind those who do not have the access to the appropriate technology or lack the skills to use it.

The Commission for Race and Ethnic Disparity report (2021) argued that issues of participation, family life, trust between institutions and communities, were as important as overt racism in overcoming barriers to genuine inclusivity and fairness. The national agenda was also shaped by the Baroness Casey review into the standards of behaviour and internal culture of the Metropolitan Police in 2023. This report, commissioned following the murder of Sarah Everard, found systematic evidence of homophobia, misogyny, and racism. It was a lesson for all public bodies to remain vigilant on these issues.

There have also been Government announcements and high-profile legal cases relating to gender identity, women's rights, and freedom of expression. This is a complex and evolving area where different rights and values may come into conflict. The Council remains committed to recognising the right to express one's own gender identity, whilst protecting the safety of women and the right to freedom of expression.

Finally, the Council has responded to international conflicts, such as the ongoing situation in Ukraine, and the Council has been pleased to support over 1000 Ukrainians to settle in the County through the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

Local Context

The Council operates in a dynamic and diverse context, situated in the heart of England. The county embraces a rich mix of cultures and ethnicities, with a notable representation from Asian, Black, and various other communities. The demographic landscape reflects a mixture of traditions and experiences, contributing to the cultural vibrancy of the region.

Demographic Insights

1. *Population Trends*: steady growth influenced by migration, birth rates, and an aging population, emphasising the need for age-inclusive services.
2. *Socioeconomic Factors*: economic prosperity with pockets of deprivation, especially in areas like Loughborough and Coalville, requiring targeted interventions.
3. *Education and Employment*: diverse educational landscape and a varied economic scenario with strengths in manufacturing, services, and emerging sectors.
4. *Healthcare and Well-being*: emphasis on healthcare services to address disparities and enhance overall well-being.
5. *Housing and Infrastructure*: focus on quality, sustainable homes, and infrastructure development to support the growing population.

Census 2021

Key facts from the Leicestershire Census 2021 highlight the county's demographic composition, including age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disability.

Key Facts	Leicestershire %		England %
Age 65 and over	148,080	20.8	18.4

Non-White	88,937	12.5	19.0
Minority Ethnicity*	116,570	16.4	26.5
Religion other than Christianity	60,005	8.4	11.0
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Other	14,293	2.4	3.2
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth	1,894	0.3	0.5
Disabled under the Equality Act definition	118,062	16.6	17.3
Resident in the UK less than 5 years	13,229	1.9	4.2

*The "Minority Ethnicity" definition includes Irish, Gypsy or Traveller, Roma, and other White no-British ethnic groups

Community Perception

According to the Leicestershire Community Insight Survey (July to September 2023), 92.9% of residents agree that Leicestershire is a place where people of diverse backgrounds get along well, with 81.8% agreeing that the council treats all types of people fairly.

Workforce Profile (July 2023)

The Council has broadly representative workforce profile, with over-representation of women. Declaration rates for all protected characteristics have decreased due to a new workforce management system but are expected to improve in the next year.

Category	Percentage of staff	Trend
Declaring ethnicity	69.7%	Downwards
Black Asian and Multi-Ethnic	14.1%	Stable
Black Asian and Multi-ethnic at grade 13 and above	13.3%	Downwards
Black Asian and Multi-Ethnic at grade 15 and above	12.5%	Upwards
Declaring disability status	62.2%	Downwards
Disabled	4.6%	Stable
Disabled at grade 13 and above	4.7%	Stable
Women	74.4%	Stable
Women at grade 13 and above	66.4%	Upwards
Women at grade 15 and above	68%	Upwards
Declaring sexual orientation	52.1%	Downwards
Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual	2.4%	Stable

Strengths and Achievements

The Council embarks on its four-year strategy to 2028 from position of strength and confidence. This stems from past achievements. Some of those recent achievements are set out below.

- *Meeting national standards and accreditations.* The Council adheres to the commitments within the Race at Work Charter, Disability Confident, Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, Menopause Friendly, and British Sign Language Charter.
- *Cultural shift and Collaboration.* A genuine commitment from Members and Senior Officers, engagement with staff support networks, ownership across the organisations and initiatives such as “The Big Conversation” to foster discussion and engagement.
- *Learning and development.* A wide-ranging programme of learning on EDI and development opportunities for staff.
- *Addressing hate crime.* Established systems to encourage the reporting of hate crimes and incidents against staff and ensuring that appropriate action is taken.
- *Community Engagement and Heritage Projects -* Collaborative initiatives with specific community groups to celebrate cultural heritage - Heritage projects tailored to minority communities and new arrivals to acknowledge and preserve diverse histories
- *Positive Employee Perception.* 93% of staff expressed confidence in the Council’s commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the EDI Strategy for the Council is a commitment to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and equitable community. Grounded in proactive communication, engagement initiatives, and a commitment to continuous improvement, the strategy aims to provide an environment where every individual in Leicestershire thrives.



Appendix 1 Glossary

Term	Definition
Equality	Ensuring that all individuals have fair and equal opportunities, rights, and treatment, irrespective of their characteristics, such as race, gender, age, disability, or any other protected attribute.
Diversity	Embracing and celebrating the differences among individuals, recognising, and valuing varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to create an inclusive and enriched environment
Inclusion	Fostering a culture and environment where every individual feels respected, valued, and able to fully take part, contributing their unique perspectives and talents without fear of discrimination or exclusion.
EIA	An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events, and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation.
Age	Refers to a person's age, with protection against discrimination based on age
Disability	Protection against discrimination due to a substantial and long-term effect on one's ability to carry out day-to-day activities
Sex	Protection against discrimination based on sex
Gender Reassignment	Protection for individuals undergoing or considering a change in their gender identity
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Protection against discrimination based on marital status.
Race	Protection against discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or nationality.
Religion or Belief	Protection against discrimination based on religious beliefs or the absence thereof
Pregnancy and Maternity	Protection against discrimination related to pregnancy and maternity.
Sexual Orientation	Protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.
Carers	Individuals providing unpaid care

Gypsy and Traveller Community	A distinct ethnic group with nomadic lifestyles
Asylum Seekers, Refugees & Migrants	Individuals seeking refuge due to persecution or conflict
Care Leavers	Individuals who have been in care as children.