

**CABINET – 13 SEPTEMBER 2024****EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-2028****REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report presents the outcome of consultation on the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 and seeks the Cabinet's approval for submission of the final Strategy to full Council. The detailed findings from the consultation are set out in Appendix A. The final Strategy and Action Plan are attached as Appendix B.

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that
  - a) The outcome of consultation on the Council's draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 be noted;
  - b) The County Council at its meeting on 25 September 2024 be recommended to approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028 and associated Action Plan.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

3. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy provides a policy context for the Council's activity around equality, diversity and inclusion and sets out how it will meet its legislative duty.
4. The Strategy forms part of the Council's Policy Framework and therefore requires approval by the full Council.

**Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

5. The Scrutiny Commission considered the draft Strategy at its meeting on 13 March 2024 and its comments are set out in Part B of this report.
6. The County Council at its meeting on 25 September 2024 will receive a report presenting the final Strategy for approval.

### **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

7. The Council in July 2020 approved the Equality Strategy 2020-2024. The new Strategy builds on previous work and will run from 2024-2028.
8. 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.
9. The Strategy aligns with all five outcomes of the Council's Strategic Plan (2022-2026). There are specific links to the outcomes to build "Great Communities", "Improve Opportunities" and keep people "Safe and Well".
10. The Cabinet on 9 February 2024 approved a 12-week consultation exercise on the draft Strategy.
11. The Council at its meeting on 21 February 2024 agreed, inter alia, that it would henceforth treat care experience as a protected characteristic and in delivering its Public Sector Equality Duty it would work towards including people with care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives.
12. Due to the General Election this report, planned for June, was deferred to September.

### **Resource Implications**

13. The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be implemented using existing resources. This includes budgets for staff training and development, community engagement and membership of equalities networks.
14. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

15. None.

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

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## PART B

### Background

16. 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.
17. 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 has a specific duty to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty and set equality objectives.

18. 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.
19. 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. Following the consultation findings, an Action Plan has been developed to guide the Council in integrating EDI principles throughout its operations. The Action Plan outlines the specific responsibilities of each department or team to ensure that key pillars outlined in the Strategy are implemented effectively and to address any concerns raised during the consultations.
  - (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) **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

20. Consultation on the draft EDI Strategy took place from 9 February 2024 to 3 May 2024. The consultation programme consisted of four activity streams:
- A 'Have Your Say' consultation survey.
  - Face-to-face meetings with relevant community organisations, staff networks and trade unions.
  - Virtual meetings with relevant community organisations and internal staff teams.
  - A report to the Council's Scrutiny Commission.
21. All comments, observations and suggestions have been recorded, analysed and used to refine and strengthen the Strategy. About 250 participants participated in the Face-to-Face and virtual meetings. A total of 201 responses were received for the 'Have Your Say' survey. Of those who participated:
- 65% were female and 31% were male.
  - The highest proportion were aged 45-64 (61%).
  - 32% said they were parent or carer of a young person aged 17 or under and 17% said they were carer of a person aged 18 or over.
  - Just under a third (31%) said they had a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.
  - The majority identified as white (87%) and over a 10<sup>th</sup> (13%) identified with a Black or Minority Ethnic Group.
  - The largest population said they had no religion (49%), 38% said they followed Christian religion (all denominations), and 14 % said they followed another religion.
  - 82% said they were heterosexual, 6% indicated that they had used another term to describe their sexual orientation, 6% identified as Gay or Lesbian and 5% identified as Bi.
  - The overall results showed that 72% agreed with the Strategy, 13% disagreed, while 15% neither agreed nor disagreed.
22. A full report is included in Appendix A. Key changes include:
- Making the document more concise with a stronger focus on action.

- Inclusion of people with lived care experience as a protected characteristic.
- A greater emphasis on tackling harassment, bullying and discrimination in workplace and community settings.
- A stronger focus on accessible and fair services, community engagement and visible leadership from Members and senior officers.
- Less focus on influencing other organisations and seeking external accreditations or validation.
- Ensuring that the Strategy embraces equality, diversity and inclusion for everyone, and no-one feels excluded.

### **Comments of the Scrutiny Commission**

23. The Scrutiny Commission considered a report at its meeting on 13 March 2024. Members were pleased to see that 93% of the staff had provided positive feedback to the survey and agreed that the Council was committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. They emphasised that decisions must be made based on evidence and not perception. Staff were encouraged to report characteristics to better understand the Council's staff profile and to enable it to consider any potential trends around complaints, recruitment, and promotions. Members indicated that the Council's digital approach must not increase the barriers faced by residents accessing services or employment with the Council. Members also emphasised the need to capture hidden deprivation. The final Strategy and Action Plan have reflected the Scrutiny Commission's comments.

### **Equality Implications**

24. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (attached as Appendix C). The Strategy is intended to have a positive impact on equality for all protected characteristics. In line with the Council decision in February 2024, the Strategy also includes people with lived care experience as if they were a protected characteristic. During the consultation there was specific engagement with staff network groups and community groups representing ethnic minorities, disabled people and the LGBTQ+ community. The Strategy makes an explicit commitment to continue this engagement.

### **Human Rights Implications**

25. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Other Implications and Impact Assessments**

26. There are no specific health, crime and disorder or environmental implications of this Strategy. The Council has a commitment to promote community cohesion and the Strategy should help reduce the risk of crime and disorder.

**Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet on 9 February 2024 “Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7503>

Report to the Scrutiny Commission on 13 March 2024 “Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028” and minutes of that meeting

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7442>

**Appendices**

Appendix A - Consultation on the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Appendix B - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028

Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment