
Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy & Action Plan 2024-28

Council – 5th September 2024

Lead Member: Councillor Mustafa Malik
Assistant City Mayor Communities, Adult Learning,
Jobs and Skills

Lead Director: Andrew Shilliam,
Director of Corporate Services

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report authors: Kalvaran Sandhu, Equalities Manager
- Author contact details: kalvaran.sandhu@leicester.gov.uk ext. 0116 454 6344
- Report version number: 1

1 Summary

- 1.1 The report updates on the final draft of the corporate Equality Strategy and the accompanying action plan to support its delivery. The strategy will be adopted for the next four years and the action plan will be updated annually.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Council agree:
- a) The Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy 2024-24
 - b) The draft Equality Action Plan 2024-25
 - c) The approach to remove discrimination for care experienced people

3 Background

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 replaced all previous equalities legislation and focuses on the right not to be discriminated against based on what is referred to as a 'protected characteristic'.
- 3.2 The protected characteristics are age, race, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and gender reassignment.
- 3.3 The council has additional responsibilities under the Equality Act; the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which states that a public authority must have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups of people.
- 3.4 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, the council also has a specific duty to publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty at least annually and to set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years.
- 3.5 The Equality Strategy is due to be refreshed this year and, as part of this work, renewed equality objectives will be set as part of an Equality Action Plan. By reporting on our progress against a corporate Equality Action Plan we will also be able to demonstrate our compliance with the duty.

- 3.6** The current strategy, which we have extended up until now due to the covid pandemic, would have ran out in 2022. The aims of this strategy are to:
- Design, commission and deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of people and communities in Leicester
 - Raise awareness of equalities issues and tackle prejudices, both internally and externally
 - Attract, recruit, retain and progress a diverse range of employees in a culture which celebrates diversity and inclusion
 - Provide a working environment where employees are treated with fairness, dignity and respect
- 3.7** These aims have some similarity to the ones that have been developed in the new strategy and this is with the recognition that we want to continue some of the good work we have done previously. However, the new aims are more direct about the direction we wish to take and build on these.
- 3.8** There were many actions that were completed in the previous strategy, including:
- EIA training was regularly rolled out each year to hundreds of employees to ensure equalities implications are embedded into the decision-making process.
 - The EIA training was shortened to make it more accessible to employees so to achieve greater numbers of people attending and not having to take too much time out of their workday but get the essential information they need.
 - The EIA template has been changed and adapted following feedback and to include the Armed Forces Covenant.
 - Equalities sessions were held in targeted areas where requests were made to explain our equalities responsibilities.
 - A reverse mentoring programme was initiated and has been running each year on characteristics of race, sexual orientation, and disability.
 - The Management Information dashboard was modified to include data on team characteristics, so managers can better understand the profiles of their teams and those working for them.
 - Numerous events and sessions to raise awareness have been held over the lifetime of the strategy.
- 3.9** As mentioned, the covid pandemic disrupted the delivery of Council services and occurred when the delivery of the current strategy was underway. Because of this, the way we delivered services at the time changed, which required us to consider the equalities implications of these changes. This included completing an EIA on the New Ways of Working to help determine the equality impacts of changing the way we work. We also change the way people accessed services and the equality impacts of this were assessed and monitored during this time.

3.10 Areas where further development was still needed, such as increasing the diversity of the workforce, better awareness raising, and support for staff facing discrimination, have all been added to the new strategy and action plan to ensure that we consider new ways to achieve those aims.

4 Approach to developing the Strategy

4.1 Our workforce was involved in the strategy refresh, which is especially important because their day-to-day actions shape the extent to which we are able to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty. If we are striving, as an organisation, to address equality and diversity during a continued period of change (the city's changing demography as well as the decreased availability of resources for service provision), it will be the actions of our workforce in their day-to-day practice, which will be essential to helping us achieve those outcomes.

4.2 In addition to this, to successfully embed the principles of the Strategy across the organisation, our SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely) actions need to lead to tangible and positive outcomes.

4.3 An action plan which supports the strategy and is in keeping with the commitments outlined in the Equality and Diversity Charter, has been developed based on evidence such as demographic information, workforce profile, staff feedback and community feedback. The charter, which is described in the strategy, was agreed in 2018 and reaffirms the Council's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

4.4 Staff were invited to attend one of four equality focus group sessions, and which focused specifically on disability, LGBTQIA+ communities, race, and women. Other informal conversations with staff either via training sessions or face to face/email conversation have also informed the findings.

4.5 Whilst there were specific issues raised for each characteristic, the following themes came up during this engagement:

- LCC could do better to be more inclusive for staff.
- Many believed that a cumulative impact of more than one of their characteristics was important as it led to multi-layered reasons for a lack of progression (intersectionality).
- Not enough conversation around equality happens.
- The feeling of a lack of diversity in senior management may mean a lack of understanding of issues they faced.
- Need more support around language and training on equalities.
- Mentoring and pathways based on your characteristics should be considered to support underrepresentation and prevent discrimination for people not being allowed adequate experience.
- Our buildings and the organisation more generally do not feel inclusive.
- Should celebrate good things where they exist and celebrate difference rather than seeing it as a 'problem'.

- Derogatory and discriminatory comments from members of the public should not be tolerated, staff are often expected to 'ignore and move on'. Cultural awareness/celebration should become a part of engagement strategies.
- Having a safe space in the city for LGBTQIA+ people is important for people to feel safe and that they belong.
- Use of pronouns and gender inclusive language is important to be more inclusive.
- Succession planning should be done for all roles.
- Mixed recruitment panels are not just tokenistic but are about how someone feels when they are interviewed feeling more at ease when there is someone that might look like them.
- Reasonable adjustments for employees need to be implemented quicker, understanding the impact on the employee.
- List or map of gender-neutral toilets in LCC buildings as it is important for non-binary people who are excluded.
- Women are good leaders and need to redefine the qualities of a leader to not be male dominated terminology e.g., emotional and empathetic are important traits.
- It is a big inspiration having a woman as COO and this should be celebrated.

4.6 VCSE groups representing some of the key equality characteristics and councillors were invited to two face to face sessions at City Hall and a further virtual session to explain the aims of the strategy and ask for any feedback on the aims and propose any actions they'd like to see.

4.7 There was mostly support for the aims of the strategy, with no one disagreeing or suggesting changes. The following additional comments were made:

- When the VCSE organisations are asked to participate the council should go into the community, which gives a sense of respect to the organisations and appreciates their lived experience on their terms.
- When moving services online, the equality implications need to be considered for people either with language issues or those that may be digitally excluded to ensure we don't leave them out.
- The council's recruitment process can be quite long and onerous and potentially doesn't cater for the diversity of the city.
- The council's equality vision statement needs to be clear and something everyone can sign up to and understand.
- There needs to be accountability to this strategy and action plan to ensure the targets are met.
- It would be helpful to see the action plan to make suggestions on how to achieve the aims.

4.8 There have also been two staff sessions in May to explain the aims and intended actions and again there was mostly support for the aims set out in the strategy and mostly people were interested.

5 Support for Care Experienced People

5.1 From our engagement we have recognised the need to further consider care experienced people and the equalities implications to them as a group of people. Whilst we recognise that we can't change the law and legally consider care experience as a protected characteristic, however, we would like to recognise that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.

5.2 We are defining care experienced based on leaving care legislation and this is 'someone who was looked after by children's services for a period of 13 weeks after the age of 14', but without any limit on age, recognising older people may still be impacted from care experience into later life.

5.3 As such the Council notes that:

- Care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives;
- Despite the resilience of many care experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account;
- Care experienced people often face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system;
- Care experienced people may encounter inconsistent support in different geographical areas;
- As corporate parents, members have a collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us as an authority.

5.4 Therefore we resolve that the Council:

- Recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination;
- Recognises that councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making through co-production and collaboration;
- Commits that future decisions, services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience, alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic.
- Writes to the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities – Bridget Phillipson MP to ask for Care experienced to be formally adopted as a protected characteristic.

6 Draft Equality Strategy 2024 – 2028

- 6.1** The Strategy has been developed to reflect the feedback received from staff and to reflect current trends and issues, including the current financial context, the equalities impact of covid-19, the census data, learning from issues in the east of the city and based on the engagement work done on race equality.
- 6.2** The proposed Equality Strategy is also attached as at Appendix A. It sets out our approach for the next four years and covers;
- Scope of the Strategy
 - Our commitment to equality and diversity
 - Our legal responsibilities
 - The current context and the challenges that we face as a city
 - Our approach to embedding the principles of the strategy across the organisation and how the strategy will be monitored
 - Governance arrangements
- 6.3** The 4 key aims of the strategy have been listed as follows:
- Creating an inclusive environment and celebrating equality and diversity
 - Lived experience and data driving improvements/decision making and raising awareness
 - Diverse and representative workforce
 - Complying with our legal duties including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)
- 6.4** Initially, 'greater acknowledgement of intersectionality' was included as an aim, but after feedback from the engagement sessions it was felt that this should be embedded amongst the other four aims as it is important for it to be considered as part of each aim.

7 Draft Equality Action Plan

- 7.1** The action plan sets out desired outcomes for each of the 4 aims and how we might be able to achieve them. It must be acknowledged that although the action plan is for a year, and then will be revisited, some of the actions may take longer than a year to achieve.
- 7.2** The previous iterations of the action plan were widely considered to be 'too corporate' with many of the actions being for either the Equalities Team or HR/OD to pick up. Whilst these areas will help enable the work on equalities, in order to achieve true cultural change, there needs to be specific actions taken in service areas and hence why there has been a separate service action plan developed for Directors and Heads of Service to manage key actions in their areas.

8 Next Steps

- 8.1** The strategy will go to Full Council in September.
- 8.2** Work has already begun on elements of the Action Plan, and it will continue to be developed over the course of the strategy.
- 8.3** The strategy will be launched and we will share our ambitions with staff and partners and work towards making the intended outcomes a reality.

9 Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

9.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Rohit Rughani, Principal Accountant, Ext 37 4003

9.2 Legal implications

The legal and statutory implications are addressed within the body of this report. The renewal of the Equality Objectives is a statutory obligation and must be implemented otherwise the Authority will not be in compliance with its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Mannah Begum, Principal Lawyer, Commercial and Contracts, Ext 1423

9.3 Equalities implications

The entire report is based on equality implications for the Council.

Kalvaran Sandhu, Equalities Manager, Ext 6344

9.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report. Any impacts that do occur from implementing the action plan could be managed through measures such as encouraging low carbon travel, using buildings and materials efficiently and following sustainable procurement guidance, as applicable.

Aidan Davis, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2284

10 Background information and other papers:

None

11 Summary of appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Equality Strategy

Appendix B – Draft Equality Action Plan

12 Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

13 Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No