

Leicester City Council

Corporate Equality and
Diversity Strategy
2024-2028



Foreword

We are pleased to introduce Leicester City Council's new Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy for the period 2024-28. This new strategy demonstrates our continued commitment to tackling inequality and promoting diversity and within this document, we outline our clear vision for an inclusive Council.

Leicester is a city with a rich and unique diversity. It is a city where a wide variety of people from different backgrounds live and work together. As a service provider and as an employer, it is crucial that we understand, respect, and embrace this diversity and recognise it continues to change.

Through this Strategy, we want to make equality more visible so that, whether working for us or with us or as a person using our services, people are always treated fairly and with respect and dignity. We want to give everybody the opportunity to contribute to, and share in, a good quality of life for all.

Legislation places a public duty on Leicester City Council with which we must comply, but we strive to go beyond our duty to ensure that our practice in diversity and equality is embedded in everything we do. In recent years, the country was gripped by Coronavirus, and this brought about many new challenges for partners across the city. Unrest in parts of the city and confrontation between certain communities have highlighted that we must not be complacent.

We must also recognise that racism and hate crime are still an ugly part of our society. Against a background of tough economic times and a changing demography we need to be even more aware of the diverse needs of communities and how we can support them.

This Strategy has also been produced against continuing pressures on local authority finances as well as other, and significant, external uncertainties. Despite the challenges that we face collectively and as individuals, we believe that our Equality Strategy and the actions that will be developed under it to meet our equality objectives will have real benefits for the people of our city.

Our Equality Action Plan sets out clearly how we plan to achieve these aims by working collaboratively across the organisation, as well as showing how we will monitor our progress. We have made a commitment to reporting on our progress regularly, to ensure that there is accountability for the actions that we have said we will take forward.

We went through a considerable engagement process and would like to thank everyone who engaged with us to help us to develop the Strategy and Action Plan. We engaged with several groups across the VCSE sector, particularly those representing protected characteristics and held events for councillors to get their feedback and opinion on how we move forward. This was paramount to ensure that our strategy was well informed by key stakeholders and began a process of sustained engagement on equality matters. We continue to look forward to working together to make further progress in embedding equality and diversity into the work of Leicester City Council, for the benefit of citizens, service users, communities, visitors to Leicester and staff alike.

We are confident that this strategy sets out how we aim to achieve real and lasting progress for diverse groups and individuals alongside everyone else in Leicester over the next few years. We also stress that this represents only a small portion of the work we will do day-to-day on this agenda and that many other strategies and policies across the Council will also aid us to achieve our objectives.

We remain committed to making everyone's lives better and for everyone to have a safer, fairer, and more inclusive environment and we look forward to progressing this over the lifetime of the strategy.

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

Introduction

Leicester City Council is committed to support the most vulnerable people in Leicester and this includes tackling inequalities and ensuring fairness. This builds on the record of Leicester City Council's previous work to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations across a whole range of protected characteristics, as well as for other disadvantaged or vulnerable groups.

Whilst significant progress has been made to date, we must not become complacent in our ambition to further advance equality of opportunity for the people of Leicester and therefore, this strategy sets out our approach for the next four years.

The purpose of this strategy and the supporting action plan is not to capture everything that the Council does to address inequality, for example in addressing the cost-of-living crisis, child poverty, differences in educational attainment or health outcomes, etc. The ways in which the Council works to address inequalities are reflected in the relevant individual strategies, plans and policies that are in place across the organisation and in much of the council's day-to-day service delivery. These specific strategies, plans and policies will themselves have assessed and identified the equality implications and desired equality outcomes that they wish to achieve, as part of the council's Equality Impact Assessment process.

The aim of this strategy and supporting action plan is to embed and strengthen good equalities practice across the organisation and to support services to robustly assess the impacts of any changes. Also, to identify and put into place actions which will either reduce or eliminate any negative impacts on people arising from their age, disability, race, ethnic or national origin, sex, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status.

We want to ensure that Leicester is a great place to live and work and make certain that we demonstrate equality to our citizens, to people using our services and to our employees. Leicester is proud of its diversity, and it is our aim that it is a happier and fairer place to live and work.

We are committed to promoting equality in respect of:

- **As a service provider** – providing a range of facilities and services which meet the differing needs of local people.
- **As an employer** – ensuring fair recruitment, having a representative workforce, and providing a working environment that is safe, accessible and free from harassment and discrimination.
- **As community leaders** – through our democratically elected Members, working with communities and partners in the statutory, voluntary and private sectors to improve quality of life for the people of Leicester and creating a welcoming environment.

What do we mean by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?

Equality is based on the idea of fairness and providing equality of opportunity, whilst recognising that everyone is different and may have differing needs.

Diversity is about the ways in which people differ. These differences should be recognised, celebrated, and treated as a natural part of society.

Inclusion is about being valued, respected and supported and giving all people the right to be appreciated and valued.

Recognising equality, diversity and inclusion and embedding them into what we do and how we do it underpins our strategy.

Our legal responsibilities

The Equality Act 2010 (Service Provision)

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Equality Duty) requires the council, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The protected characteristics covered by the Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- Religion and belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

The general duty supports good decision-making by requiring public bodies to consider how different people will be affected by their functions, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all and which meet different people's needs.

The public sector equality duty is made up of the general equality duty above and is supported by specific duties.

The specific duties require public bodies:

- to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- to set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives it thinks it should achieve to meet Section 149 (the general aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty)

The Equality Act 2010 (Employment)

Leicester City Council also has legal responsibilities as an employer. Our legal responsibilities, as set out in statutory codes of practice, help us to make sure that people with the protected characteristics set out in the Act are not discriminated against in employment, when seeking employment, or when engaged in occupations or activities related to work.

There are also some provisions in the Act relating to equal pay between men and women. These provisions aim to ensure equality in pay and other contractual terms for women and men doing equal work.

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Human Rights Act 1998 protects the fundamental freedoms of everyone in the United Kingdom. It acts to ensure that public authorities, such as Leicester City Council, treat everyone with dignity, respect and fairness. It also protects people's right to express their thoughts and ideas openly and to peacefully protest if they disagree with government policies or actions.

Everyone who works for a public authority must act in a way that is compatible with the Act. By providing services in a way that is consistent with the Act, Leicester City Council not only meets its duties, but can make a positive difference to people's lives.

Our Equality and Diversity Strategy aims to ensure the organisation is able to meet all the above legal requirements that are placed upon us, in terms of our practice and approach.

The current picture

Leicester's population at the 2021 census was 368,581. The following are some of the statistics from the census in relation to equalities:

Age

- Leicester is a young city with a median age of 33 compared to 40 for England.
- Leicester has a large 20–24-year-old population due to students attending the city's two universities.
- 21% of Leicester residents are aged 15 and under, with 11.8% over 65 years of age.

Disability

- 57,148 (15.5%) Leicester residents reported a long-term health condition which limits their day-to-day activities. These people would be defined as disabled under the Equality Act (2010).
- A further 17,029 (4.6%) Leicester residents reported having a long term physical or mental health condition, but day-to-day activities are not limited.

Gender/Gender Reassignment

- 2,910 Leicester residents have a different gender to the sex they were assigned at birth. This represents 1.1% of the city's 16+ population.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

- 43.4% of Leicester residents (16+) are married or in a registered civil partnership.

Race

- 43.4% of Leicester's population is Asian, of whom the majority are of Indian (34.3%) heritage, 3.4% are of Pakistani heritage, 1.9% Bangladeshi heritage, 0.7% Chinese heritage and 3.1% Other Asian.
- 33.2% of Leicester's population are White British.
- Leicester also has 6.8% Eastern European (Polish, Romanian), 5.8% Black African (Somali, Nigerian), and 1.2% Caribbean populations.
- 3.9% of Leicester's population are of various mixed or multiple ethnic groups.
- 41% of Leicester residents were born outside of the United Kingdom.

Religion and Belief

- Christianity is the largest religion in Leicester with 24.7% of residents identifying as Christians. Islam (23.5%) is the second largest religion in the city, followed by Hinduism (17.9%). The city is also home to one of England's largest Sikh (4.5%) communities.
- 23% of Leicester residents stated they have no religion.

Sex

- 50.6% of Leicester residents are female and 49.4% male.

Sexual Orientation

- 86% of Leicester residents (16+) identify as heterosexual, 2.9% as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 0.5% with another orientation. This equates to 10,014 Leicester residents who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or another non-heterosexual sexual orientation.

The above describes how the city looks based on the 2021 census but we must also recognise that the population is always changing with inward migration and growth an ongoing feature. Our city is extremely diverse, and this is something that we have always celebrated as a city and will continue to do. As a council it also emphasises the importance of understanding the changing diverse nature and needs of our communities and taking account of those in the services we provide.

Across the country people are facing considerable financial pressures, and this has impacted large parts of the population. The Council is also continuing to face substantial budget cuts which will have significant impacts on the services we provide.

Budget cuts because of the financial pressures from the reduction in funding are likely to have significant equality implications and this will continue to be a priority area to ensure we are meeting our public sector equality duty.

Equality and Diversity Charter

Our **Equality and Diversity Charter** outlines the commitments that Leicester City Council has made to achieve the general aims of advancing equality of opportunity, eliminating discrimination and to developing positive community relationships. It sets out what residents can expect from us in our day-to-day practice. Our day-to-day contact with people using our services, local residents and visitors to the city will determine how well we as a city and as a council understand, respect and respond to their diversity. Our Charter states:

- We are proud of, and celebrate, our city's diversity.
- We recognise that people have differing needs.
- When allocating resources, we will be clear on how we have prioritised individual and community needs.
- We will treat people with respect.
- We will provide accessible information on our services, community activities and events we support.
- We will aim to deliver services that are accessible and culturally appropriate to those using them.
- When making important decisions about local public services we will engage with local residents and communities.
- We will work with our employees to ensure that equality is embedded in the workplace.
- We have developed this equality and diversity strategy which reflects this commitment.

How the strategy has been developed

This strategy has been developed by engaging with a range of people including our own staff, Councillors and VCSE organisations in the city. We've heard from these key stakeholders and then used these findings to set out our pledges and actions for the future. We plan to continue this engagement and fully recognise that this is crucial to ensure we do the best for our staff, residents and communities.

We've also looked back at the previous strategy and considered what worked well, any areas of learning and any actions that need to be revisited and reframed. In addition to this, we used data from the 2021 census, some of which have been described earlier, as well as workforce data to help inform us.

Feedback and information from other strategies from across the Council have also been considered to ensure that this strategy compliments the rest of the work we do.

We have held numerous sessions at various points with staff, which include discussing the strategy as a whole and some targeted sessions based on specific characteristics. The draft aims have also been taken to management teams across the Council for their input and understanding to help any actions we may consider implementing. These sessions have helped to understand what our staff would like the organisation to consider in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion.

There has also been face to face and virtual sessions where VCSE organisations and Councillors were invited to give their thoughts and feedback on the strategy.

As well as this, we have given importance to anecdotal evidence from informal conversations with staff either via training sessions or queries, which often present a more candid and honest feeling about how a person might feel and therefore giving a more complete picture.

All these methods of engagement have helped shape and frame our intentions and aims and will continue to be methods of communication we use as we look to implement the aims over the next four years.

Our approach

Our strategy will continue to enable us to meet the legal requirements placed upon us and embed the commitments we have made in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. In doing so, we will work to increase our understanding of the changing demography and diverse nature and needs of Leicester's communities through data and engagement.

In many areas we can evidence strong and improving practice in relation to equalities, but we can and must continue to go further and this strategy will seek to do that through an approach where we are open and honest in engaging and listening.

Staff and people using our services have informed us that it is important to recognise that there are many characteristics that define them as a person, and that when they add up, they may be treated even more unfairly. It is not enough to just consider one characteristic alone.

We know that a person may face disadvantage or discrimination due to a characteristic such as their age, gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, etc. However, if you add all those characteristics up, you may be fighting the discrimination to all of them at the same time, creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. This is known as intersectionality. An example might be if women are known to be disadvantaged, but if you are a Black woman, you are even more likely to face discrimination and add to that even still that you are a lesbian black woman, then the discrimination continues to add up for all those characteristics. Understanding intersectionality is something we will keep as a thread in all the work we do to have greater depth in our actions to succeed in our equality ambitions.

The following are a series of aims that we will look to achieve during the timeframe of this strategy:

1. Creating an inclusive environment and celebrating equality and diversity

As our understanding of diversity has broadened, the language we use must also move on and must be more inclusive of the diversity of people we are engaging with. Using 'catch all' terms with regards to people's race (such as BAME) and our LGBTQIA+ communities can be extremely unhelpful as it assumes all these people have the same needs, which is often untrue.

The way in which we use language can also make people feel they are not included or represented. We will work with our staff to ensure that we use more inclusive language that is representative and accurately reflects who we are engaging our services with.

The Women talking, City Listening project also highlighted the need for support, awareness, and publicity to support women and make them feel safe in the workplace and in the city.

We have also been told that by having our buildings and communications be more representative of our communities and showing inclusivity would make people more comfortable and feel safe, both for employees and people using our services. Having pictures that depict people from a range of backgrounds and having things such as Pride rainbows in support of our LGBTQIA+ communities on display may automatically make staff and people using our services feel more included and supported.

Staff have also stated the need to ensure they are safeguarded against discrimination from people using services, with a need to have adequate policies in place as support. This was also a recommendation in the Women Talking, City Listening Project to implement a zero-tolerance approach.

Desired Outcomes

- Build a corporate programme of racial literacy to tackle racism.
- Guidance in place to support staff on use of inclusive language in their colleague and resident communications.
- Consideration and steps taken on how our buildings can be more inclusive.
- Produce a Corporate Zero Tolerance Policy against bullying, discrimination, and harassment.

We will measure this by:

- Implementation of a corporate programme of racial literacy to tackle racism.
 - Staff have an understanding and show consideration of inclusive language in communications with colleagues and residents.
 - Customers and staff reporting our buildings feel more inclusive.
 - Implementation of a Corporate Zero Tolerance Policy against bullying, discrimination, and harassment.
2. Lived experience and data driving improvements/decision making and raising awareness.

We want to create a more open and honest environment to allow people a safe space to talk about their diversity and to have this lived experience inform and drive improvements. Community engagement work done on race inequality, has identified that including the very people that are impacted and affected by inequality to talk about their experience and be part of informing the improvement process helps to contextualise data and lead to more tangible actions.

Engagement sessions with staff found that being able to showcase our diversity and raise awareness of equality issues helps people to build their understanding of the importance of diversity and promote inclusion.

There are also areas of good practice which showcase support for equality, diversity and inclusion across the council and promoting this work more and the benefits derived from prioritising equalities as part of work in our service areas will lead to better outcomes for all people.

The council has commissioned Scope to consider our practices and processes around disability and we want to build on this work to embed knowledge and understanding to be more inclusive of disability across the council.

There has also been work done to understand how our frontline services work with people with additional access needs and how we as a council cater to their needs to find a consistent approach and share learning.

Desired Outcomes

- More informed decision making which takes account of a diverse range of views and perspectives from people within our communities that might be impacted.
- Staff feel supported to express diverse views and perspectives which are taken account of in decision making.
- A consistent approach is implemented across the council for people with additional access needs so that people accessing services will have the same positive experience.
- Staff are confident and equipped to provide good quality services for people with a disability.
- Greater organisational awareness and understanding of intersectionality which helps to reduce the possibility of inequality.

We will measure this by:

- A robust method of data collection and dissemination is in place.
- Increased engagement with the community that informs decision making.
- Greater numbers of staff reporting that they are positively engaged in change in the annual Healthy Workplace Survey.
- Greater number of engagement events aligned to key awareness days for protected characteristics with staff and communities.
- Reduction of staff reporting they feel unsupported based on their characteristics in the annual Healthy Workplace Survey.
- Staff engagement in awareness events that are aimed at understanding intersectional communities.
- Communities with additional accessible needs reporting that they feel supported with their needs being understood.

3. Diverse and Representative workforce

We have an increasingly diverse population in the city, but this diversity is not mirrored across all levels of our workforce. Having a diverse workforce is important to make sure that we represent the people that we serve. The council also benefits from being able to draw upon a range of different approaches and points of view. We would like to focus on making sure that there are people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds in senior leadership positions within the Council and in other areas where they may be under-representation.

It has been recognised that we are particularly lacking diversity with regards to race in senior positions. It is important to understand why this is and develop actions to encourage applications from diverse racial backgrounds and allow internal candidates the experience and confidence to work in senior positions.

Desired Outcomes

- A workforce that is reflective of the community it serves
- Greater diversity in senior leadership positions in the council
- Effective plans in place to allow people from diverse backgrounds in positions below management to build experience to have a fair chance of getting more senior posts.
- Develop a coaching offer for staff based on their characteristics utilising external coaches to support internal ambitions.
- Improved use of data across the organisation to better understand at a more detailed level who is impacted and how they are impacted.

We will measure this by:

- Greater number of staff from diverse backgrounds moving into roles where there is an underrepresentation.
- Greater numbers of staff reporting that there are opportunities to grow in the annual Healthy Workplace Survey.
- A coaching offer for staff in place.

4. Complying with our legal duties including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

Whilst all areas of our work will lead to ensuring we are compliant with our legal duties, there are very specific areas for us to focus on to ensure that we as a council are meeting the requirements of the PSED and the Equality Act. We must also ensure we are compliant with and give regard to the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Armed Forces Covenant Duty.

Desired Outcomes

- An effective and well embedded approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) across the organisation and, which form a core part of the decision-making process around service change and the impacts on people who share a protected characteristic.
- Good understanding of the PSED at all levels of the organisation with staff who are skilled and competent to complete EIAs to a high standard.

We will measure this by:

- Staff have attended training sessions and are confident in completing good quality EIAs.
- Robust and well considered EIAs are developed from the outset of any decision-making process and appended to decision reports.
- EIAs and reports have data that is broken down to understand the intersectional impact.

Embedding the strategy

The priority areas identified above will be supported by an Action Plan which contains actions with a 'Lead Officer' who is accountable for implementing the action and providing progress updates.

The action plan will help us to make progress in our priority areas and to embed the principles of the Strategy across the organisation. An annual report will be provided to the Executive and Scrutiny which will detail progress against the previous years' action plan and with an updated action plan with new areas for work and specific actions identified for the forthcoming year.

Governance

The City Mayor and the Executive provide the strategic direction for the council's equality and diversity policies and practices. The Assistant City Mayor for Communities, Adult Learning and Jobs & Skills has a specific responsibility to ensure that equality is championed and embedded in all the work of the council.

The Corporate Management Team maintains a corporate overview of the implementation of the council's equality and diversity policies and approves operational proposals for new equality and diversity practice.

The Overview Select Committee regularly reviews actions undertaken by the council in meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty.

All decision-making reports contain an equalities implications section to highlight issues for consideration by those making the decisions and by those reading about the decisions being made.