

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028





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Foreword

I am pleased to present the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28 for Leicestershire County Council.

Leicestershire County Council has a proud record of work in this area. The last Residents' Survey in Autumn 2023 found that 93% of people agree that Leicestershire is a place where people of diverse backgrounds get on well. 82% agree that the Council treats all types of people fairly. In the latest workforce survey, 92.5% agreed that the Council is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Council has made a commitment to become an anti-racist organisation, it has become a Menopause Friendly employer, and was rated as a top 100 employer for LGBTQ+ employment equality. We are Disability Confident – Level 2 and have signed the British Sign Language Charter.

The strategy for 2024-28 builds on these successes, and provides a structure based on seven pillars:

- Visible leadership and commitment
- Workforce and culture
- Evidence and data
- Community engagement
- Positive commercial arrangements
- Accessible and fair services
- Accreditations

We recognise that this is a continuous journey. The strategy will be delivered through an action plan, with regular reporting and review.

The past four years have demonstrated how national and sometimes international events can impact on community cohesion. The Council remains committed to the vision of Leicestershire as a safe and welcoming place for all communities, that our services will be fair and accessible, and that all staff will be treated with dignity and respect.

Thank you for taking the time to read this strategy. I look forward to working with communities, Members of the Council and staff to make this a reality.

Pam Posnett



Cllr Pam Posnett

Cabinet lead member
for Community and
Staff Relations

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 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.

Aims of the strategy

The aims of this strategy are:

- **Reaffirming commitment to EDI:** Strengthen and underscore the Council's commitment to EDI and to foster an organisational culture that is inclusive and equitable.
- **Legal compliance and obligations:** Guarantee compliance with relevant legislation and fulfil obligations outlined in the Act governing EDI practices.
- **Recognising and celebrating achievements:** Proactively identify, acknowledge, and celebrate advancements in promoting EDI within the Council, recognising both significant milestones and incremental progress.
- **Setting strategic priorities:** Define clear goals and focus areas to guide Council initiatives and actions from 2024 to 2028, ensuring a comprehensive and structured approach towards fostering equality and inclusivity.

Strengths and achievements

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

What have we done?





Meeting national standards and accreditations

We have consistently been a top 100 organisation in the Stonewall Workforce Equalities Index. There are new policies and guidance on Trans and non-binary equality and an active staff network which supports staff and challenges the authority to do better. People are now choosing to work for Leicestershire because of our visible and tangible progress. The Council also adheres to the commitments within the Race at Work Charter, Disability Confident, Menopause Friendly and British Sign Language Charter.

- “The policies at the County Council are very clear and supportive. Since I started, I’ve felt safe to be open about my sexual orientation”.

Cultural shift and collaboration

We enjoy 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.

- “Amazing. As a new worker, it has inspired me to be brave and achieve my dreams and progress in my profession.”
- “It was very hard to hear, and I haven’t even experienced such awful treatment. Thank you for creating a safe space to discuss personal/ community issues.”

Learning and development

We have an annual EDI training plan consisting of mandatory core training, specialist courses, and positive action development for men, women, carers, disabled, LGBTQ+, and ethnic minority staff. These powerful programmes often have a lasting impact.

- “Loved the Springboard Course. It was a fantastic opportunity to be surrounded by knowledgeable and supportive women. Each has their own story to tell. Thank you – you have changed my life.”

Addressing hate crime

Established systems encourage the reporting of hate crimes and incidents against staff and ensuring that appropriate action is taken. We have a “zero-tolerance” approach to bullying and harassment in the workplace.

- “Five years ago, when I experienced verbal abuse from a service user, my manager told me to ignore it. But when I had a similar experience last month, my manager asked how I felt about it, and supported me in challenging the user and building a relationship based on respect. I feel so much more valued for who I am.”

Community engagement and heritage projects

We have collaborative initiatives with specific community groups to celebrate cultural heritage. Heritage projects are tailored to minority communities and new arrivals to acknowledge and preserve diverse histories.

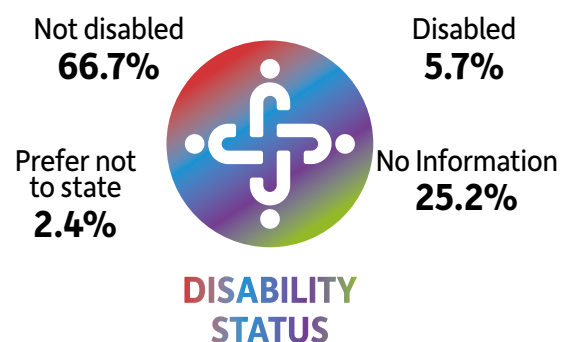
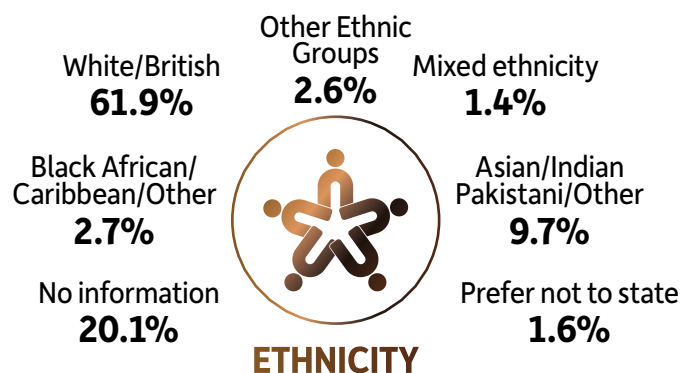
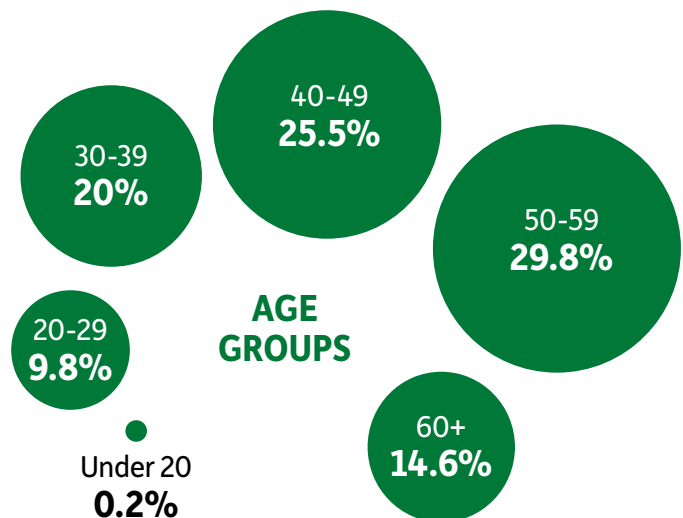
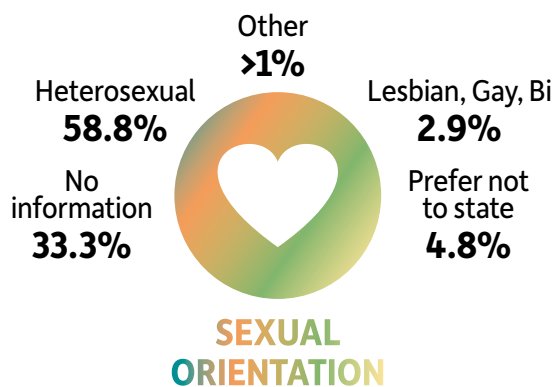
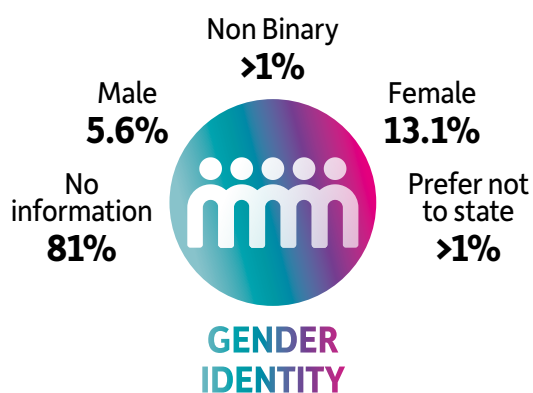
Positive employee perception

We are a values led organisation. We take pride in fostering and building a safe environment where colleagues come to work to have belonging and purpose.



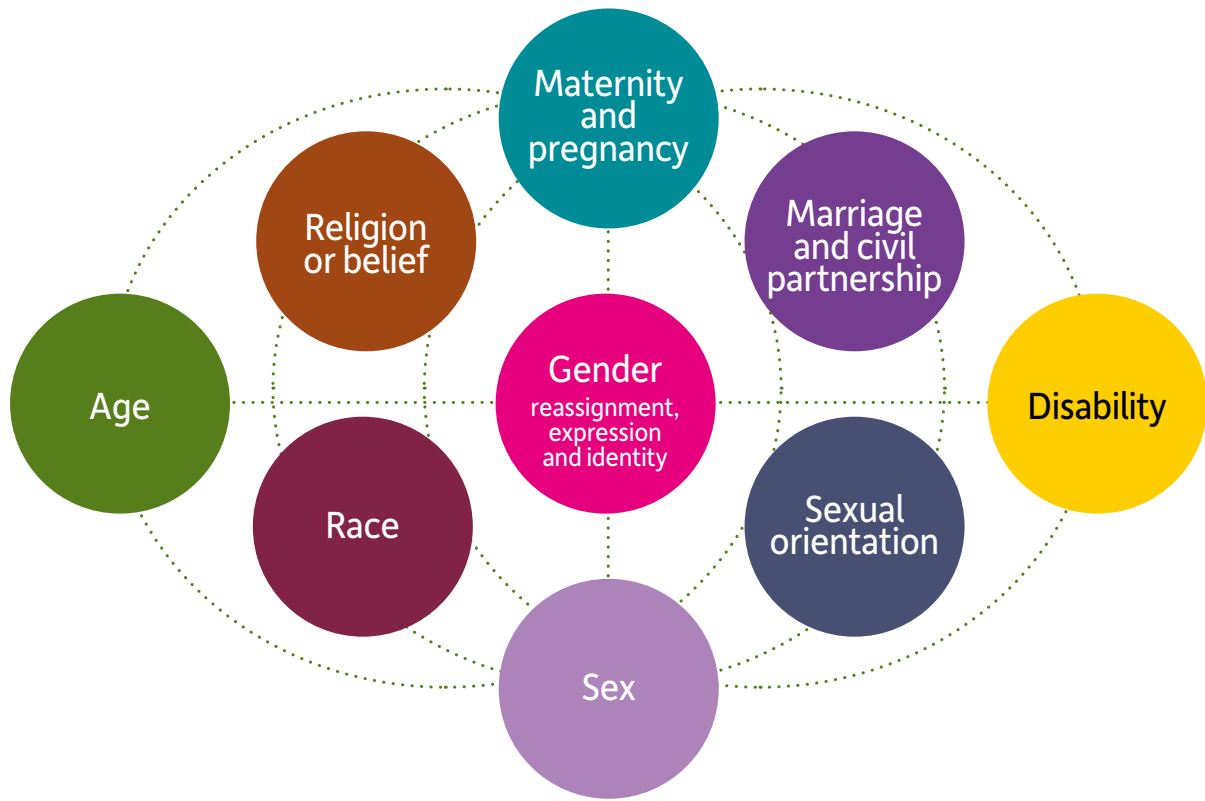
Workforce profile (July 2023)

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



Protected characteristics under the Equality Act

The image below shows the protected characteristics in terms of the Equality Act.



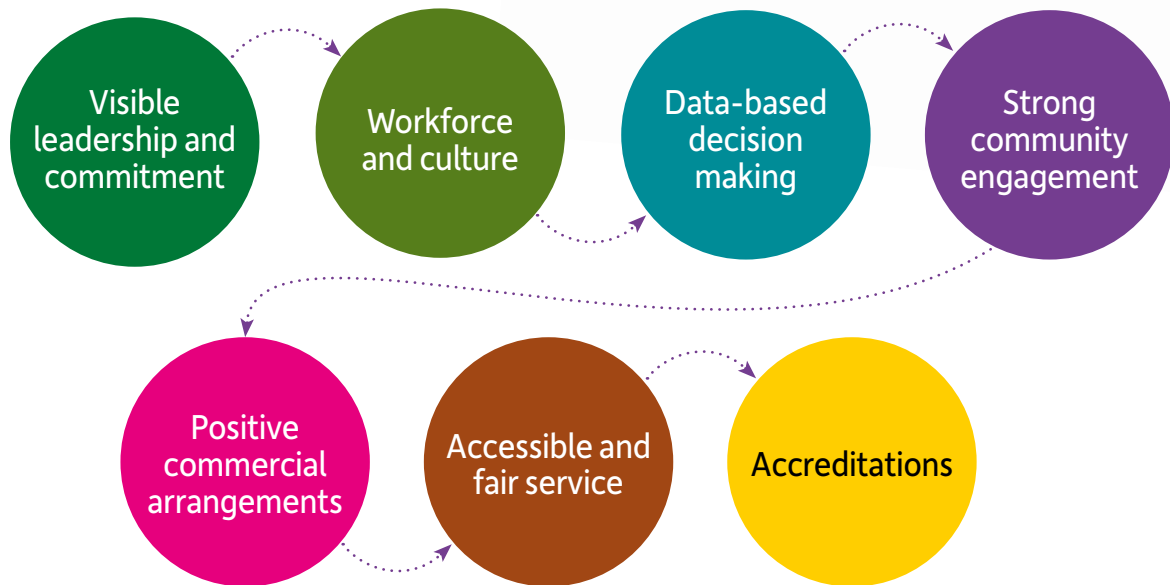
The Council has also decided to treat people with lived care experience as though they had a protected characteristic. This is in recognition of the disadvantage and discrimination young care leavers can face when seeking to gain employment or access services. The Council will now consider the impact of any policy or service changes on those with lived care experience.

The Council is also aware of other groups and communities which may experience discrimination or disadvantages in receiving services or work for the authority. These include:

- carers
- gypsy and traveller communities
- ex-armed forces
- asylum seekers
- refugees and migrants
- deprived communities.

Pillars and key initiatives

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



Visible leadership and commitment

This action ensures that Members of the Council and senior officers demonstrate visible and robust leadership and decision making on equality, diversity and inclusion matters.

- **Clear EDI Vision & Strategy:** an articulated vision and strategy for EDI provide the guiding principles that align with Council's overall organisational goals.
- **Lead Member:** The Council has a Lead Member for communities and equality who champions EDI issues.
- **Directors Leadership and Commitment:** directors lead on specific EDI issues or task groups
- **Member development and leadership:** All Members of the Council commit to personal development and leadership on EDI.
- **Departmental Targets:** setting up specific and measurable targets within each department creates a roadmap for progress and accountability.
- **Governance Framework:** The Council maintains a robust governance framework for EDI, including Corporate Equalities Board, Departmental Equalities Group and specific task forces.
- **Equality Impact Assessments:** all key decisions of the Council are informed by clear equality impact assessments.
- **EDI Annual Reports:** the Council to produce an annual report of its work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- **EDI Budget:** the Council maintains a small budget for specific EDI work and initiatives.

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 that promote understanding, addresses concerns, and cultivates an inclusive culture.
- **Hate Incidents:** policies and procedures to respond robustly and fairly to allegations of discrimination, bullying and harassment in the workplace.
- **Network Groups:** fostering and supporting network groups within the organisation creates a secure space for employees to freely express their thoughts and opinions without the fear of criticism. These groups also serve as valuable platforms for sharing innovative ideas and discovering new career opportunities.





Evidence and data based

This initiative will enhance data capture mechanisms, ensuring accurate 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 tri-annual audits ensures fairness in compensation and identifies and rectifies any unjust discrepancies.
- **Workforce Profile:** continuously monitor and analyse the workforce composition to identify under-representation.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** ensure a proportionate approach to the collection and analysis of personal and sensitive data is reflected in the Council's policy and practice.
- **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.

Community engagement

A commitment to external community engagement serves as a cornerstone in building relationships and fostering inclusivity.

- **Build Honest 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.
- **Participation in Community Events:** active involvement in community events demonstrates the Council's commitment to understanding, respecting, and celebrating the cultural richness of Leicestershire.
- **Building New Relationships with Seldom Heard Communities:** initiating connections with seldom heard communities expands the Council's reach and ensures that their voices are included in decision-making processes.
- **Establishing a Collaborated and Linked Community Engagement Process across departments:** creating a coordinated and linked community engagement process promotes cohesion, planning, and ensures that engagement efforts across departments align with overarching goals and strategies.

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.



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.

Accreditations

Accreditations signify the Council's commitment to external standards and benchmarks, guiding continuous improvement. Rather than mere checkboxes, they serve as yardsticks against national and international standards, challenging the Council to continually enhance its performance. As accreditations prompt validation and analysis, they spur ongoing improvement efforts, ensuring that the Council remains accountable and responsive to evolving standards and expectations. It is important that accreditation and external validation is not seen as an end itself. The Council will continue to review the value and benefits of external accreditation.

- **Disability Confident:** 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.

National and international context

National and international developments have shaped and influenced 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. Other incidents of hate crime, including the murder of trans girl Brianna Ghey and the recent riots of August 2024, demonstrate the need to continually work to promote community cohesion.

The Covid pandemic affected everyone with older people and disabled people, especially those residing in care homes particularly affected. 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

- Population Trends: steady growth influenced by migration, birth rates and an aging population, emphasising the need for age-inclusive services.
- Socioeconomic Factors: economic prosperity with pockets of deprivation, especially in areas like Loughborough and Coalville, requiring targeted interventions.
- Education and Employment: diverse educational landscape and a varied economic scenario with strengths in manufacturing, services and emerging sectors.
- Healthcare and Well-being: emphasis on healthcare services to address disparities and enhance overall well-being.
- 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	Numbers	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	25.5
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	1,864	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 Gypsy or Traveller, Roma and other White non-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.

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.



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.

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.

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 done by the responsible service manager and includes an action plan to mitigate against any potential negative impact.

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.

Action plan

Pillar	Action	Department/ Person Responsible	Timelines	Actions to be done	Anticipated Output
Visible Leadership and Commitment	Clear EDI Vision & Strategy	Policy Team	Q1 2024 - Q2 2024	Develop and publish the EDI vision and strategy	Clear direction and alignment with Council's objectives and values
	Directors & Managers Leadership and Commitment	Directors & Managers of Each Department	Ongoing	Embed EDI principles in the day to day management activities and foster an environment that promotes equity, fairness and transparency.	Enhanced departmental focus on EDI issues.
	Departmental Targets	DEGs	Q3 2024 - Q4 2024	Develop specific, measurable targets for each department.	Roadmap for progress and accountability.
	Member development and leadership	Member Services	Ongoing	Provide developmental and learning opportunities for Members.	Enhanced Member understanding and leadership
	Equality Impact Assessments	Managers for specific projects Policy Team	Ongoing	Conduct impact assessments for all key Council decisions.	Informed decision-making that considers EDI implications.
	EDI Annual Reports	Policy Team DEGs Group Networks	Q4 2024 – Q4 2025	Compile and publish an annual report on EDI activities.	Transparency and accountability in EDI efforts.
Workforce and Culture	Inclusive HR Policies & Practices	People Services	Ongoing	Review and update HR Policies as part of the Policy Review Program	Policies that reflect inclusivity and fairness.
	Developmental Programmes	People Services	Q2 2024 - Q1 2025	Implement mentoring, coaching and reverse mentoring programs.	Professional development and breaking of “glass ceilings.”
	Learning & Development Plan	L&D	Q1 2024 - Q2 2024	Develop and update a comprehensive EDI learning and development plan.	Continuous learning opportunities for EDI awareness and skills.
	Big Conversations	Policy Team	Ongoing	Facilitate open dialogue sessions across the organisation.	Enhanced understanding and inclusive culture.
	Network Groups	Policy Team People Services DEGs Chairs Directors	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Support and foster employee network groups.	Secure spaces for employee expression and innovation.

Pillar	Action	Department/ Person Responsible	Timelines	Actions to be done	Anticipated Output
Evidence and Data Based	Ethnicity & Gender Pay Gap Reporting	People Services	Annually	Conduct and publish ethnicity and gender pay gap reports.	Transparency and accountability in addressing pay disparities.
	Equal Pay Audit	People Services	Tri-annually	Perform an equal pay audit and address discrepancies.	Fair compensation practices.
	Data Collection and Analysis	BI Team	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Enhance mechanisms for data collection and analysis.	Accurate, relevant and comprehensive workforce and service user demographics.
	Staff Survey Feedback	BI Team People Services	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Conduct regular employee surveys to gather feedback.	Insights into employee experiences and EDI initiative effectiveness.
	Staff Training	L&D	Ongoing	Conduct trainings for staff collecting and analysing data	Ensure only relevant and accurate data is collected, analysed, stored and used for the intended purpose.
Honest Community Engagement	Build Honest Relationships with Groups of and for People with Protected Characteristics	Community engagement teams Consultation and engagement team Policy Team All Departments	Ongoing	Foster relationships with diverse community groups.	Informed and inclusive EDI strategy, policies and decisions.
	Participation in Community Events	All Departments	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Actively participate in community events.	Demonstrated commitment to community engagement and cultural understanding.
	Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group	Chief Executive's Department	Ongoing	Enable the Group to provide expert and community insight into the Council's plans and policies	
	Building New Relationships with Seldom Heard Communities	All departments	Ongoing	Initiate connections with seldom heard communities.	Inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes.

Pillar	Action	Department/ Person Responsible	Timelines	Actions to be done	Anticipated Output
Positive Commercial Arrangements	Ensure Suppliers Have EDI Commitments	Procurement & Commissioning Teams	Q2 2024 - Q4 2024	Develop a set of EDI criteria and commitments that stakeholders must meet as prerequisites for working with the Council, ensuring alignment with organisational EDI goals.	Broader culture of inclusion in the supply chain.
	Standardised agreements/ contracts	Legal Team	Q4 2024	Develop standardised agreements/contracts outlining stakeholder's commitments to EDI principles and practices, to be signed before engaging in partnerships or collaborations.	To ensure uniform and consistent approach.
	Encourage Local Businesses to Adopt EDI Good Practice	Business Support and Development Team	Q3 2024 - Q2 2025	Promote EDI best practices among local businesses.	More inclusive local economy.
	Support and guidance to SMEs	Business Support and Development Team	Ongoing	Provide support and guidance for SMEs to help them understand and implement EDI best practices effectively.	More inclusive local economy.
Accessible and Fair Service	Accessibility Assessments	IT People Services Reasonable Adjustments Team Health and Safety Customer Services Team	Ongoing	Conduct regular accessibility assessments including Council's digital platforms, recruitment portal and buildings.	Address barriers faced by residents and staff with disabilities or language barriers.
	Inclusive Communication Practices	Communications Department	Q2 2024 - Q4 2024	Develop and implement inclusive communication practices	Address barriers faced by residents and staff
	Flexible Service Delivery Models	Customer Services Team	Q3 2024 - Q2 2025	Implement flexible service delivery models, increase opportunities for face to face interactions and reduce call waiting times	Enhanced accessibility for all residents.
	Interpretation & Translation Services		Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Ensure availability of interpretation and translation services.	Fair access to services for non-English speakers and BSL users.

Pillar	Action	Department/ Person Responsible	Timelines	Actions to be done	Anticipated Output
	Attain Level 3 Disability Confident	Policy Team People Services	Q3 2024	Implement steps to achieve Level 3 Disability Confident status.	Demonstrated commitment to a disability-friendly workplace.
	Race at Work Charter	Policy Team People Services	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Ensure compliance with Race at Work Charter commitments.	Recognition of commitment to race equality in the workplace.
	Menopause Friendly Accreditation	People Services	Q1 2024 - Q4 2025	Maintain Menopause Friendly Accreditation.	Supportive work environment for menopausal employees.
Lived Care Experience	Adopt as a protected characteristic	Policy Team People Services	Ongoing	Consider the impact of policies on individuals with lived care experience, edit the Equality Impact Assessment online form and EIA guidance document to include care leavers.	Equitable policies that address the needs of care leavers.

