

Section 1 - Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Leicestershire County Council's Equality Strategy outlines how the organisation aims to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the delivery of its services, support to its communities and developing its workforce.

The strategy sets out the Council's aims and objectives, governance and performance management arrangements and is supported by an action plan with short, medium and long term commitments which will be reviewed annually.

The strategy has been developed in response to evidence from research and data as well as engagement with staff, workers groups, service users and partners.

At a time of increasing financial pressures on local government, Leicestershire County Council will deploy resources where the risk to equalities is at its highest and the extent of disadvantage could be the greatest e.g. in delivering services direct to the public.

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1.2 Background and approach

As a local authority we have both a legal and moral duty to demonstrate fairness and equality to our citizens, our service users and our employees. Leicestershire has a diverse population and we want to make sure that we provide a range of services and facilities that meet the varying needs of local people. As an employer we want to ensure that we have a fair recruitment process and that we provide a work environment that encourages equal opportunity for all and is free from discrimination.

In addition, there is a strong business case for investing in equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights. An organisation that is able to provide services to meet the diverse needs of its users should find that it carries out its core business more efficiently. A work force that has a supportive environment is more productive. Drawing on a broader range of talent better represents the communities that we serve and can lead to better informed decision making and policy development.

Effective equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights activity will in turn create economic benefits that will positively impact upon all residents of Leicestershire.

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1.3 Our legal obligations

1.3.1. The Equality Act 2010

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 or belief – this includes lack of 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; and to set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives it thinks it should achieve to meet section 149.

The Equality Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality under Public Sector Equality Duty involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people connected to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

1.3.2. Human Rights Act 1998

There are basic human rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998. As a Local Authority we strongly value these as everyone must have equal access to their human rights. Therefore, we will ensure that we consider opportunities to promote or protect any of the relevant human rights in our policies, practices, functions and procedures. We will also ensure that people are aware of human rights legislation and how they can use the law to help them address discrimination and unfairness.

An operation which gives proper consideration of human rights and key values, such as dignity and respect, is positive and can lead to more informed decisions. A human rights approach can be used as a valuable tool at a time of budget cuts, as the approach can help us make decisions that are rooted in consideration of vulnerable people.

The Act sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals in the UK have access to. They include:

- right to life
- freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment
- freedom from slavery and forced labour
- right to liberty and security
- right to a fair trial
- no punishment without law
- respect for your private and family life, home and correspondence
- freedom of thought, belief and religion
- freedom of expression
- freedom of assembly and association
- right to marry and start a family
- protection from discrimination in respect of these rights and freedoms
- right to peaceful enjoyment of your property
- right to education
- right to participate in free elections.

Section 2 - Our approach to Equity, Diversity, Community Cohesion & Human Rights

2.1 Our Vision

In defining the next stages of the council's development, and to set the scene for further transformation, a new vision has been agreed.

“Leading Leicestershire by working with our communities and partners for the benefit of everyone”

To support the council's vision, a number of strategic imperatives have also been agreed.

- Leading Leicestershire
- Support and protect the most vulnerable people & communities
- Make Leicestershire a better place
- Manage public sector resources effectively
- Have the organisational structures and behaviours to deliver this approach

This strategy outlines how we can meet these imperatives whilst having due regard to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and human rights and foster good relations between people from different backgrounds and circumstances.

“Leading Leicestershire by working with our communities and partners for the benefit of everyone”

2.2 The Leicestershire County Council's Equality Policy 2016 -2020

Leicestershire County Council is committed to promoting and advancing equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights as part of everything we do. The council seeks to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and advance equality of opportunity between people. The county council aims to:

- Develop and support a diverse workforce
- Develop, commission and deliver inclusive and responsive services
- Foster good relations with and within the community

In support of these aims Leicestershire County Council is committed to:

- A truly diverse workforce, as well as a working environment that is free from discrimination and that positively embraces difference and the added value that comes from diversity.
- Critical examination of the impacts which our policies and decision making may have on equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights
- Setting of objectives and targets to support these policy commitments and to deliver continual improvement in our performance
- Collecting, analysing and publishing equality information (including from engagement, where relevant)
- Engagement with staff, members, partners and communities on equalities

3.1 How will we deliver and monitor the change?

The Equality Strategy is supported by a detailed action plan that includes the Council's equality objectives and will be reviewed annually. The action plan will be developed in light of the most recently available equalities information and evidence of need. This includes information on Leicestershire's population, the workforce of the council and results from engagement with residents.

Equalities performance indicators and targets are set out in the action plan and responsibility for each action will be attributed to an individual or team, in order that progress is driven and monitored effectively.

The Equalities Board will monitor the delivery of the Strategy through regular updates on performance indicators and regular progress reports on the Equalities Action Plan.

An Annual Report on progress against the action plan will be presented to the Equalities Board by end of June and shared with the Council's Corporate Management Team and Cabinet.

Equalities information is included in the Council's Corporate Annual Performance Report which is presented to Corporate Management Team, Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and County Council.

Equality information will be published on the Council's website and the Annual Report on progress against the Action Plan will be made public by the end of July.

3.2 Governance and engagement

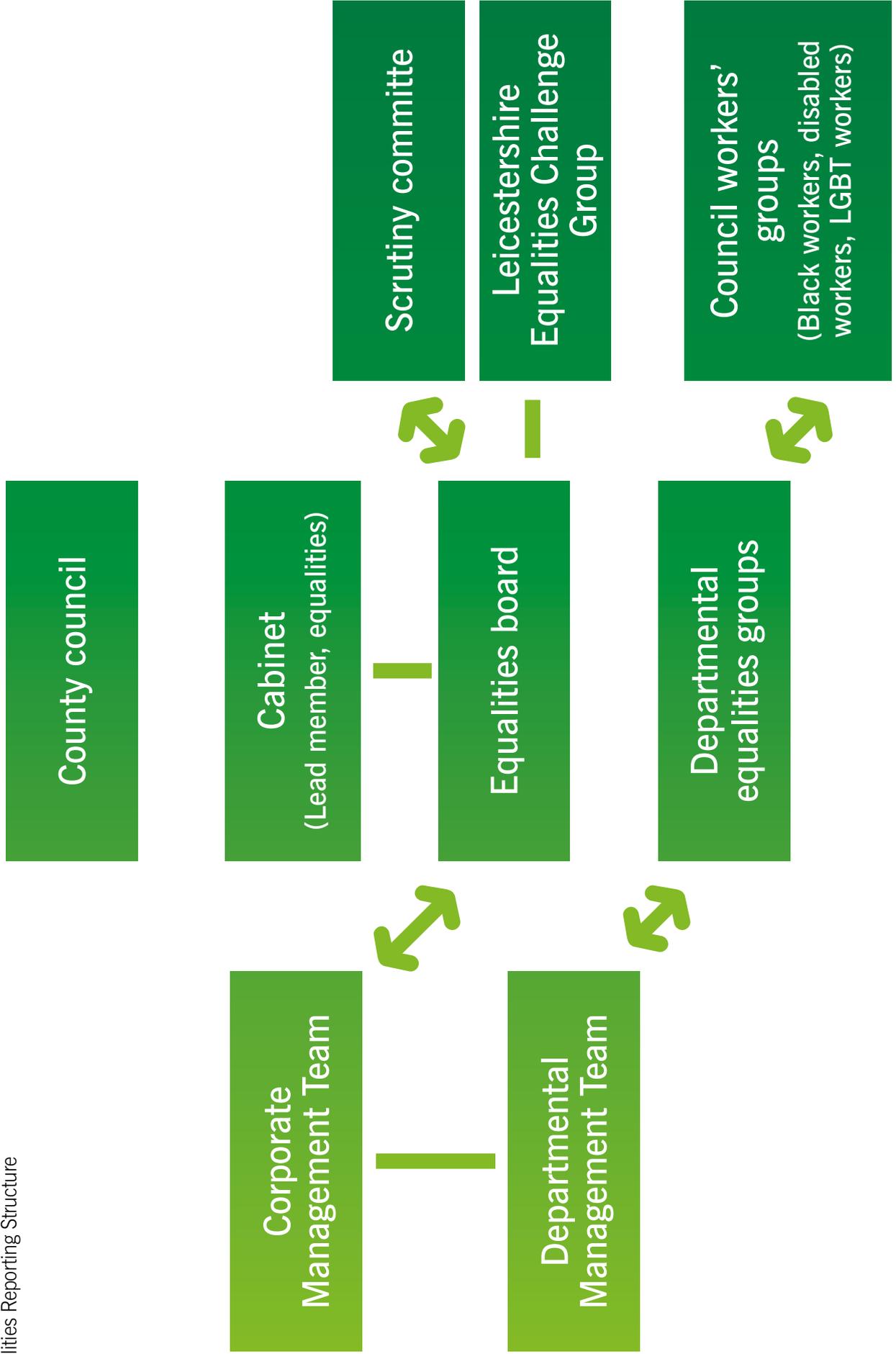
Figure 1 shows the structures for governance on equalities issues across the Council.

The roles and responsibilities of the individuals/groups are outlined below.

Group/Individual	Role	Responsibilities
Leicestershire County Council	Agree the major plans (Policy Framework) and any changes to them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the Council's Equality Strategy which is part of the Plan Framework
Cabinet	The Cabinet is responsible for most decisions, and for making recommendations to the council on the budget and the major plans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the Council's Equality Strategy for consideration by Council • Delegate responsibility for the Equalities Action Plan to the Equalities Board • Receive annual updates on progress against the Equality Action Plan
Lead member	Cabinet member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead responsibility for equalities at cabinet
Scrutiny committee	Scrutinise the council's work on equalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback to cabinet on the council's work on equalities
Corporate Management Team (Chief Exec & Directors of council departments)	Ultimately responsible for developing the Council's strategy for equalities to ensure that the Council is able to deliver its Equalities Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the council's Equality Strategy for consideration by cabinet • Receive annual updates on progress against the Equality action plan
Equality board	To bring together the workers groups, shared services and departments to lead operational equalities delivery and guide strategy development for the Council. Delegated responsibility for annual review of the council's Equality Strategy action plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the Council's Equality Strategy for consideration by Corporate Management Team • Approve the Equalities action plan annually • Receive reports on performance management and progress against the action plan • Agree the annual progress report
Council workers groups	Groups that provide mutual support, information and guidance for staff with protected characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference groups for consultation with staff with protected characteristics • Support on the delivery of the equality objectives • Voice at the Equalities board for staff
Departmental equalities group	Provide a link between the Equalities board and departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed work on the equality action plan into departments and business planning • Feedback from the equalities board to Departmental Management Teams
Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group	Bring together service users with protected characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To challenge and support the council's work on equalities.

Figure 1

Equalities Reporting Structure



Explanation of Terms

Equality

Equality does not mean treating everyone the same. In reality, it means treating everyone differently in order that all people are treated fairly and with respect. Equality of opportunity can be summarised in terms of equal access, equal treatment and outcomes that meet the needs of the individual.

Diversity

Diversity is about recognising and valuing differences in their broadest sense. This means understanding how people's differences and similarities can be mobilised for the benefit of the individual, an organisation and society as a whole.

Human rights

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that should be available to every person in the world. Human rights are based on core principles such as dignity, fairness, equality, respect and autonomy. They are relevant to day-to-day life and protect people's freedom to control their own lives, effectively take part in decisions made by public authorities which impact upon their rights and get fair and equal services from public authorities.

Community cohesion

A cohesive community can be described as one in which strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances. Effective and lasting community cohesion involves a common vision, values and a sense of belonging for all communities, where the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated, respected and positively valued.

