# Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Update
## 28 November 2024

# Report of Organisational Development Manager

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**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide and update to the Committee on the status of the development of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

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This report is public.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the update on the development of the EDI Strategy is considered by the Committee and feedback is provided.**

### 1.0    Background

1.1    We are in the process of creating an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan to support the commitments set out in the Council Plan and People Plan, to ensure that we live by Our Values, and to deliver our purpose to work in partnership with our communities, creating a district where people can flourish.

1.2    The intention of the work is to first ensure that Lancaster City Council is an inclusive place to work, followed by a review at a later stage of how our equality duties are delivered at an organisational level for the benefit of our communities and to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (the requirement placed on public authorities to have due regard to equality considerations when exercising their functions, such as making decisions).

### 2.0    Work to date

2.1    In line with the People Plan, we are first considering whether the workplace is inclusive.  This is to ensure that we have the people with the skills and qualities that we need to deliver our ambitions.  Where employees feel supported and respected, they are more likely to want to work for us and to remain employed by us.  Where people feel that their uniqueness is valued, they are more engaged in their work, which enhances job satisfaction, morale, wellbeing, and ultimately, they are equipped to meaningfully contribute to our aims and ambitions in the Council Plan.  Not only this, but diverse teams with diverse perspectives contribute to our ability to continue to innovate in the face of the challenges and change that we are respond to on an ongoing basis.

2.2    We have engaged with an organisation, Inclusive Employers, who have experience

in working with a range of organisations (including councils), helping them to understand and embed inclusive practices, to:

- undertake a data and insight gathering exercise to establish the current picture of inclusion and diversity;
- produce a report outlining findings and recommendations;
- co-create an inclusion and diversity strategy for delivery over the next 3-5 years;
- produce an action plan with prioritised, actionable objectives and areas of work.

The initial data and insight gathering exercise has been completed, along with the production of an interim report.

## 3.0    Main findings from the report

3.1    Lancaster City Council's positive intent and true commitment to building an inclusive culture where all colleagues can thrive is commendable.

3.2    There are pockets of great work and depth of knowledge, but this is not yet distributed and embedded, resulting in some people being impacted disproportionately.

3.3    There are several staff networks with high levels of engagement and participation who are very active in peer support and raising awareness (eg Women's Network, Enabling Network, etc).

3.4    The chairs of these networks have valuable insight and can see problems and barriers in place, but they are not yet positioned and equipped to effect true inclusion maturity – an immediate area for attention.

3.5    Network members feel that they are not always to fully participate in the networks due to workloads and manager support, or how to truly influence and embed inclusion.

3.6    EDI data that is collected is inconsistent, which makes it difficult to understand and differentiate diverse groups' experiences.  Data needs to be focussed on the 7 main protected characteristics.

3.7    The impact of line managers determines whether colleagues feel that they have the support and resources needed to do their jobs well: some are very flexible, offer development opportunities and try to address to barriers faced, whilst others are not flexible, or do not allow time for attending staff networks or development.

3.8    There is a disparity between desk/office-based workers and community based roles, for example in relation to flexible and hybrid working, and communication and engagement channels being digitally enabled.

3.9    Digital inclusion and communication are an issue as regular communication mechanisms are mostly digital.  This means that there is a higher likelihood of employee voice not being heard from some areas, and for key messages and development opportunities not to be picked up.

3.10    Accessibility – there are physical access barriers to certain people with visible or hidden disabilities, including spaces being inaccessible and the IT infrastructure being difficult to obtain support.

3.11    There therefore needs to be a focus on cultural shift to embed inclusion on a day-to-day basis at a systemic level, but the positive news is that there is an already committed leadership and people team, along with a wide range of advocates across the organisation.

3.12    The recommendations are therefore to create a clearer structure and formalised guidance for inclusion which will prioritise:
- Engaging a much wider group of colleagues with the inclusion journey.
- Equipping leaders, line managers and employee network members with the understanding and skills to make a difference.
- Empowering colleagues in the cumulative impact they have.

**4.0    Next steps**

4.1    The next stage of the work will involve bringing groups of colleagues together to co-create the strategy and action plan based on the themes identified in the interim report.  Workshops will be facilitated by Inclusive Employers in November.

4.2    All evidence based suggestions and ideas to address the main themes identified will be considered, up to and including positive action (where employers can take action that involves treating one group that shares a protected characteristic more favourably than other, where this is a proportionate way to enable or encourage members of that group to overcome or minimise a disadvantage, have their different needs met, participate in a particular activity).

**5.0    Policy**

5.1    Our Equality and Diversity Policy is being reviewed as part of our ongoing HR policy review.  It is different from the strategy being described in this update as the policy provides the framework for ensuring compliance with the law, while the strategy will set out our commitment to inclusion, our vision and priorities, as well as an action plan to deliver them.

**6.0    Conclusion**

7.1    We recommend that this update is accepted and feedback is invited.

| **CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT** **(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):** n/a |
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| **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS** There are no legal implications arising from this update, however the strategy overall will improve our commitment to abiding by the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. |
| **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS** |

None.

**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces:**

Colleagues are being asked to participate in the development of the strategy and action plan from across the council during their usual work time.

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**
The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**
The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments to add.

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