Solihull Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027

Opportunities for all

Contents

Foreword

Councillor Ian Courts, Leader of Solihull Council

I am delighted to introduce the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy - 'Opportunities for all'. This strategy is aimed at all people who live, work, study or visit Solihull, and provides an overview of the Council's work focusing on equality, diversity and inclusion.

> **"I believe EDI is more than a duty - it is an opportunity and should be celebrated for the benefits it brings. By making Solihull a place where everyone can thrive, we unlock a wealth of talents, skills, and ideas from everyone. This is good for people, good for business, and good for us all."**

EDI is a fundamental aspect of our core business to improve the quality of life and life chances for everyone. By actively promoting EDI we can create a more resilient, harmonious, and thriving community as outlined in the diagram on the next page.

We will continue to take steps to get this right by recognising the diverse needs of our residents, valuing the talent of our staff and partners we work with, and raising standards as a large service provider, employer, and community leader. We pride ourselves on being a Council that is small enough to care, but big enough to make a difference.

The business case for EDI is well-rehearsed – being inclusive, welcoming and open to differences encourages active participation from all and engenders the sharing of the Council's vision and values. Our employees are more likely to perform well if they feel motivated and valued in an inclusive working environment, and such an approach will help us to recruit and retain the best talent.

People are more likely to have confidence in the Council and trust us to provide good quality services if everyone feels they are treated with dignity and respect. Good equality practices lead to the Council providing services that people want and need, making best use of resources. Examples of race and gender crimes, such as the deaths of George Floyd and Sarah Everard, have shone a light on structural racism, sexism and inequality. The Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted stark inequalities between communities and raised fundamental questions about how we address and take action on equality, diversity and inclusion.

These events have created impetus for a renewed and vigorous emphasis on stronger, more resilient, and inclusive communities and have prompted us to further explore our ability and ambition to improve equality of opportunity for all our residents and staff. To do this well, we need to continually examine our services and policies to ensure that they are accessible and that outcomes for those that currently experience the worst outcomes are improved.

We want to deliver trust and confidence so that Solihull is recognised as a place where everyone feels valued and respected. The business benefits of the Council encouraging and delivering work on EDI, will make us more successful as a fair and diverse organisation.

It will help us to meet the needs of a diverse and cohesive community, motivate and retain an engaged, diverse workforce and increase creativity and innovation. The diagram below sets out the community and business benefits of delivering EDI.

Equality / **Diversity** / **Inclusion**

Economic growth
By tapping into a diverse talent pool, local businesses can benefit from a range of skills, perspectives, and ideas, attracting more businesses, entrepreneurs, and investment to the area.

Attract/ retain talent
An inclusive community is more likely to attract and retain a diverse range of talents, and a diverse workforce can contribute to innovation and competitiveness

Health, care and wellbeing
Inclusive policies and accessible health and care services and programs that consider the diverse needs of the population contribute to better overall health outcomes.

Educational opportunities
A more diverse and inclusive curriculum helps students develop a broader understanding of different cultures and perspectives, preparing them to live and work more effectively in the future.

Crime reduction
By addressing socio-economic disparities and fostering a sense of community, the Council can help ensure residents are less likely to engage in criminal activities

Tourism and cultural exchange
Events and initiatives celebrating different cultures and identities can make the community more vibrant and appealing to visitors and promote cultural exchange.

Community / Community / Cohesion / Engagement

Improved Quality of life

Introduction

Solihull continues to become more diverse and this means that to continue to best serve our communities, we need to understand these changes. Our population is slightly older than the England average. 21% of our residents are aged 65 years and over compared with 18% for England. 27% of the local population is aged 16-39 years compared with 31% in England. There is a marked difference in age structure within the borough, with the population of north Solihull being much younger than elsewhere in Solihull.

76% of the Solihull population have no long term physical or mental health conditions. Around 10% have long-term conditions that limit their day-to-day activities. More than 7% of people with disabilities say that their daily activities are limited a lot.

Ethnic minorities now account for 18% of the population, similar to the national average of 19% but less than the West Midlands average of 23%. Diversity is highest amongst young people where 28% of the school population is from an ethnic minority group.

Solihull Council works closely with public sector partners, businesses, the voluntary sector and communities to improve the lives of the people we serve. Our residents are at the heart of everything we do and we always put them first.

The Council, like other public bodies, must publish data information about **equality** every year and equality objectives every four years. Our approach builds on the work undertaken to identify priorities through assessments, surveys and consultation exercises to inform the way we work. It is from this information that our EDI Roadmap and this strategy have been developed.

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out the Council's equality and diversity journey and how we integrate EDI practice into everything we do. We have a clear programme of work summarised through the EDI Roadmap, presented on page 11. In turn, this work supports the delivery of our **Council Plan** and the **Solihull Health Inequalities Strategy.**

The Council previously published a Statement of Intent on the Council's website, setting out key commitments to EDI. This EDI strategy incorporates and builds on those initial commitments.

The Council also has an established EDI Workforce Strategy with an action plan to ensure that, as an employer, we build on our work creating an open, diverse workforce with an inclusive place to work. This strategy will be incorporated into the Council's new People Strategy which is being developed.

Mandatory three-year equality training is provided to staff to ensure they are made aware of their responsibilities and rights under Equality Legislation. Equalities training is also provided to elected members.

We are guided by the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (BSol ICB) pledges which include the Race Code and the Birmingham and Lewisham African and Caribbean Health Inequalities Review (BLACHIR) report, and the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Race Equality Taskforce recommendations (2023). Where possible and appropriate, these have been incorporated into the Council's EDI Strategy and plans.

The language of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Everyone should be treated fairly in all activities and decisions made by the Council, including how we engage and keep in touch with our communities. It also includes workplace considerations such as recruitment, training, promotion, etc.

Focusing on eliminating discrimination creates equal opportunities in the community and workplace by developing strong working relationships between different people.

These approaches are underpinned by the Equality Act 2010. Beyond legal compliance, organisations have a moral, social and business responsibility to treat all people fairly. This positive culture creates productivity and a sense of value and belonging for all people.

In society, we all have unconscious biases. These biases need to be recognised and acknowledged before they can be effectively avoided. We take continuous steps to make sure our communications are free of discriminatory language even if the comment or language used was unintentional.

This is because we are aware that this risks people feeling vulnerable or discriminated against and where we have found this to be wrong, we work to change and inform attitudes.

The words equality, diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. We define these as:

- **Equality** is not about treating everyone the same, but about making sure that people have equal access to opportunities and this is demonstrable advancement of fairness and justice knowing that we may not all start from the same position. It is against the law in the Equality Act 2010 to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic. The nine protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

- **Diversity** is what makes us different. It is about recognising and valuing differences between people to create cultures and practices that lead to more ways of improving inclusion and belonging.

- **Inclusion and belonging:** Recognising equality and diversity is a process that leads to everyone feeling included and where people are proud to be part of a bigger group where barriers to opportunities are removed. People feel they belong when they are seen and valued for who they are, and this helps them and people around them to thrive.

Equality   Diversity   Inclusion

Our approach

Like many other councils across the country, we have a range of communities to serve and a range of challenges. We are committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in respect of our role as:

- A service provider - providing a range of facilities and services which meet the differing needs of local people.

- A large employer - ensuring fair recruitment, having a representative workforce, and providing a working environment that is safe, accessible, and free from harassment and discrimination.

- A large community and locality leader - through our democratically elected members, we work with communities and partners in the statutory, voluntary, and private sectors and businesses to improve the quality of life for the people of Solihull.

We are committed to creating an inclusive borough where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential regardless of their circumstances, so that no one is, or feels, excluded. We believe that delivering on this commitment requires that we:

- Use our community leadership role, influence, and powers to create better lives, safe places and a community that welcomes and celebrates the diversity of the borough.

- Connect with, and develop our understanding of, the people we serve so that we can better support them.

- Acknowledge the diversity of opinions and lived experiences within the borough.

- Listen to people's views so that services can be effectively designed, commissioned, and delivered to meet needs.

- Recognise that we need to do things differently to narrow existing inequalities.

- Create time and space to talk, share views and promote best practice.

This strategy supports the commitments and delivery of our Council Plan towards our vision for Solihull: **'where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer, and more prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all'.**

In addition, the Solihull Health Inequalities Strategy sets out our plans to reduce health inequalities across our borough so that everyone has an equal chance to lead a healthy life.

We are taking action to prevent ill-health, improve physical and mental health and enable people to live healthy, happy lives and build strong social connections. Our joint work with local communities, the voluntary sector and statutory partners including the NHS, police and education helps us to do this.

The support we provide for children and families continues to be the Council's top priority for improvement. We place children and young people at the heart of all we do to enable them to achieve their potential and lead fulfilling lives.

We are proactive in meeting the needs of groups of people who face significant barriers that impact their lives. An example of this was a Council motion passed in July 2023. This motion agreed to treat care experienced people (people who are in or have been in care) like a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, when delivering the public functions we provide and the communities we serve.

This motion arose from a recommendation in the **Independent Review of Children's Social Care** report to government, to include care experienced people as an additional protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010 so that this group would have the same legal protection against discrimination as the other listed protected characteristics in the Act.

The Council's equality objectives

In line with the Equality Act 2010, we are required to publish one or more equality objectives at least every four years. Objectives set out how we will remove and reduce disadvantages suffered by people because of their protected characteristic(s) and create new opportunities to help address and reduce inequalities.

The current objectives following a recent review by the Council are:

1. Protect the fairness, dignity and respect of individuals.

2. Promote Solihull as a sustainable and inclusive place to live, work, study and visit.

3. To be a diverse and inclusive organisation.

These three equality objectives are headlined in our EDI Roadmap on the next page. The development of the roadmap was informed by a number of sessions with senior leaders on the journey of EDI work that we need to do in the Council to advance equality.

We meet the aims of the public sector equality duty and our objectives by publishing annual equality information on the Council's website. We intend to build and maintain a strong evidence base by collecting and analysing data and information on the impact of our work on relevant protected characteristics. All the above objectives are supported by short, medium and long-term goals which are detailed in the Council's Roadmap on pages 21-28. We will monitor our performance towards these objectives regularly.

Ongoing commitment

To achieve our strategy, we need to have an ongoing commitment and focus so we can continue to build a diverse and inclusive organisation and set the high standards we expect of ourselves. This includes how we engage with and deliver services for our residents and businesses, and how we treat our workforce. We will strive to:

- Narrow existing inequalities and differences in life chances for our residents and our employees, whether that be at work, in health, housing or education. To do this we may need to support some people differently, as we focus our resources and efforts on those who are experiencing the worst outcomes currently, or those with the most urgent and pressing need.

- Value and recognise people's diverse skills and abilities, which means taking differences into account in everything that we do. For our staff, diversity is an opportunity to bring together and develop a unique mix of individuals and skills that reflect our communities and help us serve them better.

- Work together to create a safe, open, accessible and inclusive borough and workplace - where everybody thrives and feels valued, and the lived experience of our residents and staff is positive.

Outcomes	1. Solihull Council is recognised as a forward-thinking organisation that values an inclusive culture where fairness and diversity is valued 2. Solihull borough enjoys a strong reputation as an inclusive place in which to live, work, study and visit 3. Local residents and visitors are satisfied with services and their experiences 4. Senior leaders feel more equipped to lead and drive an impactful and ambitious EDI agenda 5. Solihull Council makes the best use of talent and views of diverse staff and external partners to deliver the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda.			
Long Term Objectives →	**PROTECT THE FAIRNESS, DIGNITY AND RESPECT OF INDIVIDUALS**	**PROMOTE SOLIHULL AS A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, STUDY AND VISIT**	**A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION**	
Medium Term Goals by 2025/2027 →	**COMMISSION FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE TRANSFORMATION** • Deliver improved value and outcomes • Design the services for the future • Tailor support according to the needs of individuals to ensure resources are used effectively	**PROMOTE SOLIHULL AS A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, STUDY OR VISIT** • Enable borough-wide conversations on the future of the borough • Explore people's lived sense of place • Provide affordable and accessible housing • Improve health and wellbeing • Reduce social deprivation and inequalities • Use external communication platforms and social media to demonstrate our commitment to EDI	**PROMOTE THE COUNCIL'S ROLE AS A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER** • Grow current and future talent • Nurture greater workforce diversity and representation, especially at most senior levels • Audit and improve systems and processes for greater equality and diversity (eg. recruitment, appraisals) • Develop EDI as a corporate competency	**PROMOTE SOLIHULL'S CULTURE AND VALUES OF FAIRNESS AND INCLUSION** • Deliver an effective and diverse leadership role • Implement corporate objectives and priorities • Work with partners who supply or provide services on the Council's behalf • Work with partners such as the West Midlands Race Equality Taskforce, community groups and networks
Short Term Goals 2024/2025 →	**STRONG AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** • Review the impact of current engagement strategies and approaches • Use the latest Census data 2021 to help inform us on the diverse and changing nature of communities in the borough	**IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR COMMUNITIES LIVING IN THE BOROUGH** • Make the best use of the Council's powers and influence to drive inclusion and approaches • Determine the gaps in understanding about communities in the borough • Use government initiatives, strategies, policies and frameworks	**SHAPE AN INCLUSIVE COUNCIL CULTURE** • A safe and inclusive culture where everyone is able to thrive, have a strong sense of belonging, wellbeing and can bring the true sense of themselves to the job. • Implement an EDI workforce strategy to ensure the Council has a representative and diverse mix of skills and talent at all levels • Everyone feels confident in calling out inappropriate conduct and behaviours • People are encouraged to learn from their mistakes	**EDI STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN** • Communicate the Council's commitment and journey to advance EDI in the borough • Acknowledge what we are doing well • Revise the Council's Equality objectives • Create a Solihull 'bank' of images and stories of 'real people' • Create spaces for 'courageous conversations' • Promote the use of the Inclusive Language Guide • Develop key EDI data sets to measure and evaluate progress
Challenges and Opportunities →	**STRONG AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** The borough is going through significant demographic changes with newcomers from Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. At the same time, people are increasingly choosing to self-define who they are. This raises questions about the extent to which the Council has a sound understanding of who makes up its communities, what their needs are and how best to respond to the changing demography.	**TACKLING INEQUALITIES** The perception of the borough as a wealthy, leafy place, belies the fact of social deprivation and inequalites in some parts of the borough. We need to understand what more we need to do to reduce inequalities that may affect localities in the borough differently.	**IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR COMMUNITIES LIVING IN THE BOROUGH** We fully recognise the need to have a diverse and inclusive workforce that allows more perspectives to be considered in the Council's role as a service provider, community leader and large employer. This includes considerations on the wider West Midlands region, from where people come to work, study or visit the borough and the added value of having a diverse representation of leaders in the Council.	**LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING** There is a lack of shared agreement about what we mean by equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and what success looks like. The new EDI Roadmap, coupled with the vigorous drive from senior leaders, provides us with the opportunity to set the tone and culture of fairness and inclusion.

EDI Roadmap

Solihull Council values

We are committed to creating an organisation that reflects the community and society we serve. Equality, diversity and inclusion is intrinsically linked to our Council's values.

Solihull Council's values:

- **Ambitious:** Striving for more and believing in better by working together to get things done and meet new challenges and needs. We are open minded, innovative and recognise that the past can shape our future and working with others will help us to achieve our vision.

- **Open:** Valuing everyone as individuals and welcoming their thoughts and ideas about how we can best serve our residents and local businesses to maintain Solihull's reputation as a great place to live. We promote a culture of mutual respect and recognise that our differences make us stronger as we listen and learn from each other.

- **Honest:** Acting with integrity and recognising that we can always do better. We admit when things go wrong, learn from our mistakes and listen and act when people tell us how we can do better.

- **Keep our promises:** Delivering our commitments in the best possible way and communicating clearly. We aim to get things done right first time to create value and minimise the cost to the taxpayer.

The values are then supported by the way we will embed equality, diversity, and inclusion across the Council to:

- **Articulate our EDI commitment:** Ensuring that everyone at the Council and our partners know the importance of EDI in everything we do, taking action across all directorates to deliver this EDI Strategy.

- **Equip staff:** Everyone will have access to well-designed training, support and resources so that all staff have the confidence and competence to deliver the ambitions set out in this strategy and deliver on the expectation to demonstrate personal responsibility to take an inclusive approach.

- **Evaluate and assess:** Fair Treatment Assessments and other tools and assessments will be used to ensure that decision-making processes, practice and systems are supportive to the delivery of positive and demonstrable outcomes for residents and employees. We will listen to local people and staff to deliver service improvements and improved outcomes.

Delivering our EDI strategy will meet our ambition to create a transformed, modern and reflective organisation which progresses our ambition that **every person who lives, works, studies and visits the borough should be treated with dignity and respect, be valued and have an equal opportunity in life.**
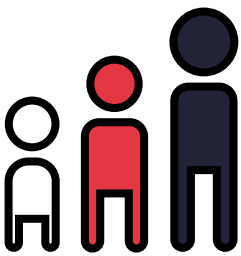
Knowing our communities

What does our EDI information tell us

Understanding how our demographics and communities are changing is essential to the delivery of the Council's objectives and goals in the EDI Roadmap.
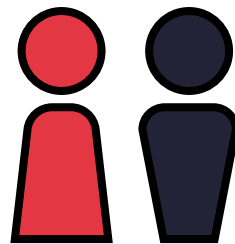
Below are some highlights on data:
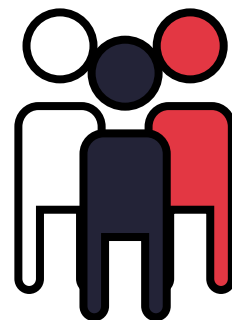
Total population: 216,240

Age:
0-15 years = 19.3%
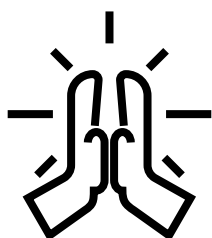16-64 years = 59.6%
65 years+ = 21.1%

Sex:
Male 48.5%
Female 51.5%

Disability:
17% had their day to day activities limited

Ethnicity:
18% ethnic minority backgrounds

82% white

Religion:
Christian 53%
No religion 35%
Muslim 5.3%
Hindu 2.8%

Based on the 2021 Census, Solihull had a total population of 216,240. This has increased by nearly 10,000 people from the last census 10 years ago in 2011 where the population was 206,674.

Age: The overall population growth of 11% projected for Solihull in the 20 years 2018-2038 masks considerable age group variations. Most notably the number of older people aged 65+ is expected to increase by far more than younger ages. Borough intelligence has shown inequalities between localities. For example, for those residents living in the least deprived 20% areas in Solihull, they can expect to live 10 years longer than those living within the 20% most deprived areas.

Disability: 17% of the population in Solihull have indicated that their day-to-day activities are limited to some extent by a long-term health condition or disability. 83% of the Solihull population described their health as good or very good and just 5% said that their general health was bad or very bad. This is in line with the England average.

Ethnicity: Solihull continues to become more ethnically diverse with net migration from neighbouring Birmingham being a significant influence. People from ethnic minority backgrounds accounted for 18% of the Solihull population in 2021, compared with 12% in 2011. The highest increase from an ethnic minorities groups came from Asian backgrounds, from 6.6% to 11%.

Gender identity: Data on gender identity is not routinely captured. A person's innate sense of their own gender may not correspond to their sex assigned at birth. The Gender Identity and Research Society has estimated that nationally 1% of the population may be gender variant to some degree, with 0.2% of the population likely to seek medical treatment, at some stage, to present in the opposite gender.

Religion: 53% of Solihull residents answering the Census question described themselves as Christian, a fall from 70% in 2011. Those with no religion increased from 23% to 35%.

Sexual Orientation: The size of the Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual population in Solihull is uncertain due to a lack of local data. The ONS and Public Health England estimate that 2%-2.5% of UK adults identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. This suggests a Solihull adult LGB population of between 4,000 and 5,000 people.

More Solihull data can be found here.

Our vision for equality is to build a strong, inclusive and fair borough addressing inequalities through our work on service delivery, investing in our communities and ensuring that the Council's workforce reflects the communities we serve.

To build on the Council's understanding of the diverse communities we serve and their needs, we undertake regular assessments and service reviews aligned to key outcome areas of the Council Plan and our work. We want to build the Council's data and intelligence in order to shape the places in which people live, work, study or visit and create a greater sense of belonging for people to feel secure and connected to interact with people.

This includes reviewing the extent of engagement with residents so that they have a voice in influencing the things that matter to them. Where findings tell us that there is a lack of equality of opportunity that exists based on the goals and outcomes in the EDI Roadmap, we will look at ways to address them. It is important that people have the opportunity to thrive and flourish regardless of their protected characteristics and background, and that we understand how peoples' characteristics shape their experiences and identities so that we do not consider one protected characteristic in isolation.

Achievements to date

The Council's annual **report** 'Fairness, Inclusion and Equality – About our Services' (2024) provides many examples of the EDI related achievements of the Council. The examples used below provide a selection of highlights from 2023 to 2024 and are grouped into three themes:

1. **Understanding the changing nature of the borough through data:**

- We have used national and local data, through the Council's Solihull Observatory, to identify national, regional and local trends. We review and update information about the make-up of our communities, making use of the 2021 Census and other data sources. In 2023, we published the Story of Solihull, a high-level overview of Solihull's population and plan to complete profiles for each of Solihull's 17 wards.

- The Council has identified a corporate risk which sets out the actions needed to adapt and change services to meet demands.

- A programme of annual needs assessments is coordinated through the Solihull Insight and Intelligence Group. These ensure that we analyse the data that we and others collect to better understand the needs of vulnerable groups.

- The Council's Information Governance Team supports services in gathering, sharing and using information to understand our population while also meeting data protection requirements.

- Our Fair Treatment Assessments (FTAs) are seen as the key mechanism to build the data on demographics, how it changes over time, and the actions to tailor service delivery to changing demands.

2. **Understanding the borough through engaging with communities:**

- The Solihull Place Survey gathers the opinions of residents every two years. It provides a cross-cutting overview of our local communities and a reference point for the equality and diversity work undertaken by individual service areas. The Place Survey emphasises the extent to which strong communities promote the wellbeing of residents, specifically asking about community belonging, social isolation, participation in civic life and community safety.

- The Council's Communities Team works with active citizens and groups around the borough and also engages with Parish Councils and the Faiths Forum. All of these provide a conduit to seeking the views of residents and stakeholders.

- Our digital engagement **platform** is well-established and provides a variety of digital tools to use for engagement purposes. The platform is being rolled out across the Council and promoted to residents.

- A strategy for active participation of children and young people and a variety of methods of involving and listening to young people in need of care and support are in place, with further development planned.

- Co-production with children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and parents / carers is a requirement of the Children & Families Act. How we do this is set out in our **Local Offer.**

- Our **Get Involved** Strategy sets out a clear involvement and co-production approach relating to people who are supported by adult social care .

- We relaunched our website in 2020 with extensive improvements to our accessibility level, which enabled us to meet compliance with the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018. We included the Recite Me accessibility and translation toolbar that offers users a range of accessibility and translation tools, including a screen reader that reads the web content aloud in multiple languages. We completed a full manual website accessibility audit in November 2021 and implemented our accessibility statement which details how we will be improving our accessibility to full AA compliance with the industry standard referred to as WCAG 2.1.

3. **Promote inclusion and celebrate equality and diversity by engaging with local communities:**

- In July 2023, the Council made a formal decision to treat children looked after and those leaving our care, referred to as 'care experienced' as a protected characteristic in the same way that we give due regard to those groups covered under the Equality Act 2010. Particular attention is given to our responsibilities as a corporate parent.

- In our role as a large employer, we have implemented the EDI Workforce Strategy and we have employee networks relating to disability, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+. In October, we were reaccredited by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) with the Disability Confident Employer status after an internal self-assessment.

- We have implemented a **Learning Disability Supported Employment Scheme** and we marked **Learning Disability Week** by inspiring businesses to support residents with further needs into work.

- We are progressing the work to establish Family Hubs across the borough to give the best start in life to children aged up to 19 years and 25 years for children with disabilities. The Family Hubs will enable parents and carers to get a range of services from one place, including health, social care, money and debt advice, well-being and social activities. Ten focus groups were attended by 68 adults and 30 children and young people to help shape our Family Hub offer.

- Throughout 2023 we celebrated many events and progressed many activities with our communities, partners and employees. The Council makes a digital calendar available to staff every year which sets out major cultural, religious and diversity-related events. Equalities Champions and EDI leads encourage Council teams to use the calendar to plan relevant activities. Where appropriate, our library service produces dedicated reading lists to mark events. A few examples of events and activities are:

  » As part of Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System, we are improving the opportunities for people with learning disabilities and neurodiverse conditions and their carers to influence the vision for creating the healthiest places to live and work, drive equity in life chances and healthy outcomes for all.

  » Embracing the principles of equity by celebrating International Women's Day and Women's History Month. The theme of 'End the Digital Divide' for women and girls was marked by showcasing the hit comedy tour **'Ladies of Laughter'** and encouraging children to create Mother's Day portraits.

  » Supporting the connection of diverse faith communities through the Solihull Faith Action Project to develop a common agenda for greater collaboration across communities. Additionally, to mark Interfaith Week in partnership with Solihull Faiths Forum, people from 16 different religions and beliefs came together to support the 'Planting our Future' campaign by planting flowers and seeds in the local area.

» **The Apprenticeship Show** successfully publicises work opportunities for young people. Sectors showcasing work opportunities included construction, technology, finance, hospitality and healthcare. At the first show in October 2023, over 2,000 people interacted with representatives from Virgin Media, O2, Make UK, the Council and NHS who gave information about the benefits of working with them and potential pathways to their workplaces.

» **Celebrating Black History Month** in October 2023, and paying homage to Black women who have shaped history and inspired change. The month-long 'Windrush 75' exhibition, organised by the Solihull and Birmingham Caribbean Family History Group, also acknowledged the contribution of the Windrush generation and the wider Caribbean community to British society. The Black British Ballet performance at the Council's Core Theatre was based on the experience of a Windrush family reciting the story of a young soldier in the second World War and his journey to the UK.

» Remembering the vital role and the invaluable contribution of unpaid and paid carers and families who assist people with disabilities or who are vulnerable. Events included the annual Carers Charity Walk and information sessions on the importance of caring for carers.

» During Refugee Week, **The Together in Solihull** project set up a range of collaborative events to celebrate partnership working between the Council and other organisations to support newly arrived communities to the borough and for them to be participating fully into society. The programme included workshops at four schools where children joined in dance, music and visual arts. Our communities and staff experienced Ukrainian folk music, Hong Kong opera, Bhangra dance, a Hong Kong photography exhibition and a collection of artwork including a Migration Blanket created by asylum seekers and refugees from Hong Kong.

Employee data

Our employees are our most important asset. We want to build a workforce that is fully representative of the communities we serve so that we can realise the business benefits that this will bring in terms of increased innovation, improved team dynamics and a better understanding of issues that affect all citizens.

We produce an annual report setting out the key information with respect to our employees called **'Fairness, Inclusion and Equality: About Our Employees'** which is publicly available. This provides a range of general information about the Council's workforce. A few examples from March 2024 include:

- 19% of our workforce are from ethnic minority groups

- 73% of our workforce are women

- 6% of our workforce have a disability

- 3% are LGBTQ+

We want to make sure we foster a sense of belonging and a positive EDI culture throughout the organisation where no one feels left behind, feels like an outsider or of less value. Our goal is for all staff to feel they can bring their 'whole self' to work and perform at their best. This approach recognises and values diversity and it makes business sense too. Organisations that recognise the value of a diverse workforce and are inclusive have the widest possible pool of talent and competitive advantages. It can also reduce recruitment costs, sickness absence, underperformance, grievances, employment tribunals, and lost and wasted talent.

We are building on the existing EDI Workforce Strategy and developing a People Strategy which will further strengthen our plans for attracting, retaining, and growing the talent we need in the Council, now and the future.

The EDI Roadmap - Challenges and opportunities ahead

This EDI Roadmap sets out the key components of our strategy. This includes the three equality objectives, the challenges and opportunities we have identified and a set of goals covering key areas of work we will need to deliver against to achieve our ambitions. The equality objectives and key challenges and opportunities are set out below:

Equality objectives	Protect the fairness, dignity and respect of individuals	Promote Solihull as a sustainable and inclusive place to live, work, study and visit	A diverse and inclusive organisation	
Key challenges and opportunities	**Strong and effective community engagement** The borough is going through significant changes with newcomers from Hong Kong, Afghanistan and Ukraine. At the same time, people are increasingly choosing to self-define who they are. This raises questions about the extent to which the Council has a sound understanding of who makes up its communities, what their needs are and how best to respond to the changing demography.	**Tackling inequalities** The perception of the borough as a wealthy, leafy place, belies the fact that social deprivation and inequalities exist in some parts of the borough. We need to understand what more we need to do to reduce inequalities that may affect localities in the borough differently.	**Improve the quality of life for communities living in the borough** We fully recognise the need to have a diverse and inclusive workforce that allows more perspectives to be considered in the Council's role as a service provider, community leader and large employer. This includes considerations on the wider West Midlands region, from where people come to work, study or visit the borough and the added value of having a diverse representation of leaders in the Council.	**Language and understanding** There is a lack of shared agreement about what we mean by equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and what success looks like. The new EDI Roadmap, coupled with the vigorous drive from senior leaders, provides us with the opportunity to set the tone and culture of fairness and inclusion.

The Council's goals in the EDI Roadmap

This section presents the high-level goals and actions that we will monitor from the EDI Roadmap on a quarterly basis. We recognise that there will be many other plans and activities also in progress regarding EDI and this is evidenced in the 'achievements to date' section in this strategy.

The delivery and impact of this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be monitored through a corporate group. The public reporting requirements we already have in place mean that progress will be transparent, such as the requirement to publicly report progress against the Council's equality objectives.

The goals and actions may be updated from time-to-time throughout the period of the strategy, to reflect feedback, learning and new insights as we progress.

Short term goals listed in the roadmap for 2024/25

We are already progressing the 2024/25 work and examples of the actions being undertaken are outlined below.

Goal 1 - Strong and effective community engagement

We are doing this by reviewing the impact of current engagement strategies and using the latest Census data 2021 to help inform us on the diverse and changing nature of our communities in the borough.

We are already progressing this work and the actions we are taking include:

- The Engagement Network will meet bimonthly to share information regarding upcoming engagement activities and act as a sounding board for any issues around engagement members may be encountering.

- Rolling out the use of the 'Your Voice Solihull' engagement platform across the Council. This will provide a clear visual branding that people recognise for engagement. We will review impact regularly and refine as needed.

- Looking at opportunities to automate surveys and feedback more easily utilising tools in the 'Your Voice Solihull' engagement platform.

- Implementing the findings from the 'data use assessment' to collect, measure and improve the sources of data we use and analyse to inform service improvements and the profile of the community living in the borough.

- Continuing to support improving the quality and completeness of data recorded in our core data systems. For example, the Corporate Information Management Team produce regular lists of cases where equality data is missing in the Liquid Logic adult and children's social care systems, so those gaps can be addressed.

Goal 2 - Improve the quality of life for communities living in the borough

We are doing this by:

- Making the best use of the Council's powers and influence to drive approaches to inclusion.

- Determining the gaps in understanding about communities in the borough.

- Using government initiatives, strategies, policies and frameworks.

The actions we will take include:

- Working with health and other partners through the well-established Solihull Place Committee. This is a key forum for place-based leadership for the borough in terms of shaping and maintaining a set of key health and wellbeing priorities that represent the most important areas of focus for the borough.

- Continuing to produce a monthly cost of living scorecard to understand the national and local impact of the cost of living challenges and to identify which population groups and parts of the borough are the most likely to be affected in the short, medium and long term.

- As new Council strategies are developed, ensure that they take account of our stated EDI ambitions as set out in this strategy.

- From the newly established Solihull Outcomes Framework, an inequalities dashboard is under development, looking at in-borough variation against a key set of indicators. Additionally, a system-wide group is breaking down indicators in the Integrated Care System (ICS) outcomes framework by geography and ethnicity wherever possible which will support the EDI agenda.

Goal 3 - Shape an inclusive Council culture

We will do this by:

- Having a safe and inclusive culture where everyone is able to thrive, have a strong sense of belonging, wellbeing and can bring the true sense of themselves to the job.

- Implementing an EDI Workforce Strategy (soon to be incorporated into the planned People Strategy) to ensure the Council has a representative and diverse mix of skills and talent at all levels.

- Ensuring that everyone feels confident in calling out inappropriate conduct and behaviours.

- People are encouraged to learn from their mistakes.

The actions we will take include:

- Effectively implementing and reporting on the EDI Workforce Strategy that will be absorbed into the People Strategy later this year.

- Challenging discrimination and unacceptable behaviour. People must feel able to raise concerns or call out discriminatory practices with confidence knowing they will be taken seriously and acted upon properly, fairly and appropriately. The Council's new EDI Strategy and People Strategy will support this action.

- Applying relevant policies consistently such as the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement and Resolution Policy.

- Through delivering this strategy, alongside the actions in each directorate plan, working together to strengthen our workplace culture so that it represents dignity, respect and inclusion.

Goal 4 - Have in place an EDI strategy and action plan

We will do this by:

- Communicating the Council's commitment and journey to advance EDI in the borough.

- Acknowledging what we are doing well.

- Revising the Council's equality objectives.

- Creating a Solihull 'bank' of images and stories of 'real people'.

- Creating spaces for 'courageous conversations'.

- Promoting the use of the Inclusive Language Guide.

- Developing key EDI data sets to measure and evaluate progress.

The actions we will take include:

- Developing and publishing this EDI Strategy to complement the Council's EDI Roadmap so that everyone can understand what the Council is doing with regard to equality, diversity and inclusion.

- Once the new EDI Strategy is agreed, publishing the newly revised Council equality objectives.

- Celebrating successes and learning from mistakes in creating a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

- Undertaking consultation internally and externally on an Inclusive Language Guide and when finalised promote its use and access.

- Working with the Council's employee networks and feedback from staff surveys in creating courageous conversations and learning from lived experiences. Put simply, this means learning from the experiences of others and taking account of this learning to develop and improve our services.

- Using data analysis from the new extension of the Council's incident reporting tool which now includes recording of work-related hate crime, to identify further actions the Council needs to consider to maintain staff safety.

Medium term goals through 2025 to 2027

Goal 1 - Commission for effective service transformation

We will do this by:

- Delivering improved value and outcomes.

- Designing services for the future.

- Tailoring support according to the needs of individuals to ensure resources are used effectively.

The actions we will take include:

- Increasing the use and governance of Fair Treatment Assessments (FTAs) which are a key mechanism in building the data on demographics, noting how they change over time, and identifying the actions to tailor service delivery to changing demands.

- Where EDI data is gathered, we will focus on a select number of services to monitor response rates and opportunities to identify any gaps for the purpose of improving our service offer(s) and/or accessibility.

- Delivering a programme of annual needs assessments coordinated through the Solihull Insight and Intelligence Group. These ensure that we analyse the data that we and others collect to better understand the needs of vulnerable groups, which we can then use to develop and improve our service offers. The schedule of annual needs assessments has been drawn up for the year ahead and will be presented to Council senior leaders.

Goal 2 - Promote Solihull as a sustainable and inclusive place to live, work, study or visit.

We will do this by:

- Enabling borough-wide conversations on the future of the borough.

- Exploring people's lived sense of place.

- Providing affordable and accessible housing.

- Improving health and wellbeing.

- Reducing social deprivation and inequalities.

- Using external communication platforms and social media to demonstrate our commitment to EDI.

The actions we will take include:

- Development of a new Council Plan for implementation from 2025, after consultation and engagement.

- Utilising ongoing survey results to gain people's perspectives about living in Solihull and the services they receive and use this information both to monitor the impact of our actions and to plan further improvements. Some surveys are specific to areas of delivery and detailed actions will be co-ordinated within directorate plans.

- Delivering outcomes in the **Solihull Housing Strategy 2023-2032.**

- With partners, delivering priorities in the **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** and its priorities and the Health Inequalities Strategy. The refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy will go out to consultation during the summer of 2024. The Health Inequalities Strategy is being implemented as a cross-Council strategy with health partners also involved.

- Supporting special schools and alternative provision to promote careers and learning pathways.

- We will continue to use existing communication channels such as the Council's website, to profile events and activities the Council is leading or involved with, similar to those outlined in the 'achievements to date' section in this strategy. We will also consider new tools and options for communication.

Goal 3 - Promote the Council's role as a diverse and inclusive employer

We will do this by:

- Growing current and future talent.

- Nurturing greater workforce diversity and representation, especially at senior levels.

- Auditing and improving systems and processes for greater equality and diversity (e.g. recruitment, appraisals).

- Developing EDI as a corporate competency.

The actions we will take include:

- Attending local or regional events such as Solihull Apprenticeship Show where thousands of young people, parents and carers are invited to speak with a wide range of exhibitors. It is a requirement for exhibitors to consider EDI when planning to attend the show. The show demonstrates the depth and breadth of apprenticeship opportunities (e.g. degree level apprenticeships) and challenges stereotypes.

- Introducing equality objectives for senior leaders and all staff by 2025/26 (recognising that some areas of the Council have this in place, and we will build on this).

- Reviewing the EDI related training offer for staff and managers.

- Taking into consideration external frameworks such as the NHS workforce diversity measure and Unison's Anti Racism Charter etc to inform the Council's continuous improvement on workplace diversity.

Goal 4 - Promote Solihull's culture and values of fairness and inclusion

We will do this by:

- Delivering an effective and diverse leadership role.

- Implementing corporate objectives and priorities.

- Working with partners who supply or provide services on the Council's behalf.

- Working with partners such as the West Midlands Race Equality Taskforce, community groups and networks.

The actions we will take include:

- Senior leaders will champion EDI to ensure the ambitions of this Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy are seen as everyone's business. This will include listening and responding to feedback from staff networks and co-ordinating and supporting the work of directorate EDI Champions.

- The new People Strategy will incorporate actions which pave the way for more diverse leadership at the top levels of the organisation. This includes accessible support and development offers available to managers who wish to advance, to help them progress to senior leadership roles.

- Promoting EDI by achieving the priorities set out in the Council Plan. This includes making sure our evidence is robust and enables the understanding of the different needs and experiences of groups covered under the Equality Act and other groups such as care experienced children, carers etc.

- We will measure progress against the Council's equality objectives and delivery plan of this new strategy, thorough performance monitoring, and we will be transparent about our progress by publishing information in our annual reports.

- We will use the existing arrangements with partners who supply or provide services on the Council's behalf, both through joint-working and through formal processes such as Council tenders, to ensure the ambitions set out in this strategy are also reflected in the services provided on the Council's behalf.

- We will continue to work with our partners to identify and learn from published EDI reports here and elsewhere, which will enable us to further refine and improve our approach to EDI. For example, any further reports from the West Midlands Combined Authority Race Equality Taskforce.

- We have reviewed the EDI partnership recommendations and pledges from the West Midlands Combined Authority, the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board and the Birmingham and Lewisham African and Caribbean Health Inequalities Review (BLACHIR) report and developed a consolidated set of themes. This includes actions on leadership, strategy, data, practice, training/education/building cultural intelligence, support for communities and community engagement.

General EDI considerations

Data collection

Data collection is a process of gathering and measuring information from multiple sources to gain insights, for example, on how services are used, satisfaction rates or how we identify groups of people who do not access our services. We are committed to collecting, with appropriate permissions, equality data to provide intelligence about people who we support, employees, and residents to better understand the needs of those who use our services, the people we employ and the money we spend. We have more work to do in explaining the reasons to staff and residents why data collection and monitoring is important, our systems of collection and how we use and share monitoring information.

Fair Treatment Assessments (FTA)

An equality analysis is a way of making sure that the equality considerations and impact are embedded into our decision-making processes and that equality is considered when we are developing key policies and services.

One tool to help us do this is a Fair Treatment Assessment (FTA), which is more commonly known nationally as an Equality Impact Assessment. The tools are used to show that due regard has been given to identify any potential or actual impact (negative and positive) that our policies and services have on different groups of people. FTAs also provide a systematic approach to identifying and recording gaps and actions needed.

The purpose of the FTA:

- Makes us focus on the needs, experience and circumstances of everyone who will be affected by the decisions the Council makes.

- Directs us to seek alternative ways of achieving our aims and avoiding inequality.

- Enhances our credibility with the people we support, to have greater confidence in our performance.

- Improves our policy making procedures and services.

Demographic changes, new arrivals and 'hard to reach' or 'seldom heard' communities

Public Health England's profile of migrant health data in the West Midlands (2017) showed that Solihull has 5% of its population as non-UK born using data from 2011. The borough continues to become more diverse, in part due to inward migration.

We welcome many groups of new arrivals; asylum seekers and refugees from many countries who first began to arrive in the 1990s, with economic migrants arriving primarily from Eastern Europe and Somalia in the 2000s. More recently, we have a new community of arrivals in the borough from places such as Hong Kong.

There has been a degree of unpredictability in the number of people seeking asylum in Solihull. However we do know that the numbers have increased due to the resettlement of Syrian and Hong Kong refugees for example. A significant proportion of migrants become long term Solihull residents. All these factors mean that it is important that we are flexible in our approach to delivering services and can respond to the fluctuating diversity of the population of Solihull.

Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19)

National emerging data has found that Covid-19 does not affect all population groups equally. The Public Health England (PHE) **report** 'Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19' (published in June 2020) found that the largest disparity was by age. Among people already diagnosed with Covid-19, people who were 80 or older were seventy times more likely to die than those under 40. Risk of dying among those diagnosed with Covid-19 was also higher in males than females; higher in those living in the more deprived areas than those living in the least deprived; and higher in those in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups than in White ethnic groups. These inequalities largely replicate existing inequalities in mortality rates in previous years, except for BAME groups, as mortality was previously higher in White ethnic groups.

The analysis takes into account age, sex, deprivation, region and ethnicity, but not the existence of comorbidities (the simultaneous presence of two or more medical conditions in a person), which are strongly associated with the risk of death from Covid-19 and are likely to explain some of the differences.

Data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and the Public Health England (PHE) analysis confirmed the strong association between economic disadvantage and Covid-19 diagnoses, incidence and severe disease. Economic disadvantage is also strongly associated with the prevalence of smoking, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and their cardiometabolic complications (heart attacks, stroke, circulatory diseases, diabetes, fatty liver disease etc), which all increase the risk of disease severity.

Hate crime

We are committed in our approach to reduce and prevent hate crime and tackling all forms of intolerance and hate, bringing together the policing, the justice system, voluntary sector, communities and other statutory services. We aim to engage all stakeholders who may encounter 'prejudice' including young people, offenders, communities, bystanders, organisations and agencies, equipping them to be active agents against hate crime. Our approach is centred on reinforcing and celebrating the borough's values of 'Solihull Together' while at the same time taking a zero-tolerance approach to hate crime when it does happen. Tackling hate crime is now one of the priorities of the Safer Solihull Partnership.

Appendix 1

Legislative context

The table below sets outs the equality duties placed on Solihull Council as a public sector body, as prescribed under the Equality Act 2010, along with examples of other primary legislation relating to equality.

Legislation	General duty	Protected characteristics	Due regard	Specific duties of the Act for public bodies	Examples of public sector (including Council's) requirements
The Equality Act	The Act applies to everyone in the UK and states that we should: 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.	• Age • Disability • Religion and belief • 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 • Sex • Sexual orientation	We are required to have 'due regard' (to consider, through an equality analysis), how different people covered under the Act may be affected by the functions or activities carried out by public bodies, such as how decisions are made, policy, practice, procedures, service changes, new services.	• Publish annually, relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Act. This includes workforce and services information • Publish one or more specific and measurable equality objective(s) at least every four years to meet the Act. • Annual gender pay gap reporting	• How we recruit and treat staff and job applicants • How we buy in or use services from third parties on the Council's behalf • Working in a non-discriminatory way, giving respect and dignity for others in the workplace, delivering services or serving the community.

The Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act 1998 protects the fundamental freedoms of everyone in the UK. It aims to ensure that public authorities, such as Solihull 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.

Modern Day Slavery Act 2015

Legislation requires us to prepare and publish on our website a slavery and human trafficking statement each financial year and to tackle slavery wherever we find it. We recognise the responsibility to understand any potential modern slavery risks related to our services, and to explore what steps we can take to ensure there is no slavery or human trafficking in our business or supply chains.

If you require this document in another format, please email: equalities@solihull.gov.uk where your request will be considered.