



## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024**

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## **Foreword**

Dorset Council is relatively young – it was created in 2019 and I am proud to have been the member champion for equality, diversity and inclusion during that time. Since 2019 we have worked hard on various aspects of equality and inclusion – including the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, the Syrian Resettlement Programme and new training packages. We did an extensive assessment into the impact of COVID-19 on Dorset’s vulnerable communities earlier this year, and that has informed the strategy and its action plan. However, it is obvious from talking to employees and partner organisations that some of the values we adopted as a new council have yet to be fully demonstrated; there is more that we can and must do.

What came across most strongly from initial conversations – and the message was consistent from both employees and partners – was that while areas of good activity do exist, the new council lacks a coherent strategy and vision. The reorganisation of local government in Dorset was enormously complex and required a significant effort from everyone involved, but we now need to energise the conversation around equality, diversity and inclusion, sharpen our focus on what it means in terms of change, and show more determined leadership to deliver it.

Another theme to have emerged from the conversations was the importance of honesty and reflection. It is clear that we have missed some opportunities to show leadership as a new council. We should have spoken out more quickly following the death of George Floyd, and we should have worked with partners in doing so. The keenness of partners to work with us to deliver this strategy and action plan has been truly humbling, and the constructive and practical suggestions for additions to the action plan have been hugely helpful. As a county we are blessed with many brilliant voluntary and community organisations and active residents, and with your help, we can and will do better.

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all those organisations and individuals that contributed to developing the strategy and action plan. I commend it to all who read this and look forward to working together to deliver it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Wharf". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Cllr Peter Wharf**  
**Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**  
**November 2020**

# 1. Why do we need an equality, diversity and inclusion strategy?

As a public body, we have both a legal and moral duty to promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) amongst residents, service users and our own employees. As one of the biggest employers in Dorset, it is important that we lead by example and make the council the best employer it can be.

The council's vision is to make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit. As an organisation we are committed to EDI, valuing and recognising our differences, but we appreciate there is a lot more we should be doing.

We want to ensure we are clear about what EDI means. Our definitions are as follows:

**Equality** is about recognising that everyone is different, and that people's needs are met in different ways. It is not about 'treating everyone the same'. We define equality as being about fairness and ensuring that everyone has the best possible chance to succeed in life, whatever their background or identity.

**Diversity** is about understanding that everyone is unique, recognising, respecting and celebrating the added value that these differences bring.

**Inclusion** is where difference is seen as an essential feature of society and a benefit, and where perspectives and differences are shared, leading to better decisions. An inclusive working environment is one in which everyone feels valued, that their contribution matters, and they can perform to their full potential.

While we are committed to EDI as a point of principle, it is also reinforced and underpinned by a clear legal duty.

## Equality Act 2010

The EDI strategy will help ensure that Dorset Council meets (and hopefully exceeds) its legal equality duty. The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to take a proactive approach to equality and diversity. The Act sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

The act also includes the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) which sets both general and specific duties to which public bodies like us are legally bound. The general duty requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between all people
- foster good relations between people, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding

There are specific duties within the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). These duties require the council to:

- Publish relevant information demonstrating its compliance with the Equality Duty
- Set specific, measurable equality objectives

## 2. Diverse Dorset - what does the data tell us?

### Dorset's population

To support us in making informed decisions it is important that we understand the people we serve and their experiences.

Dorset Council has a population of 378,510, with a slightly larger population of females (51%) compared to males. Dorset is considered an attractive place for people to settle in their retirement – it has a large population of older people, 29% are aged 65 and above. Currently there are over 8,000 people in Dorset living with dementia, and the number is increasing. Younger people often move away from the area and it has a comparatively relatively low birth rate. The population continues to grow slowly, driven by people who are on average older, moving into the county plus increasing life expectancy. The greatest part of population growth is among over 65s. Dorset's 16-64 population is expected to see a decline of 5.5% over the next 25 years.

One in five of Dorset's population consider themselves as having a long-term health problem that that limits their daily lives a little or a lot. In Weymouth and Portland this accounts for 22% of residents, compared to North Dorset with 18%.

According to the 2011 Census, most of Dorset's population (95.6%) identify as White British and 4.4% identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME). The highest proportion of this population are classified as 'White Other' who make up approximately 41% of Dorset's Black, Asian and minority ethnic population. This classification includes people who identify as white but who do not have UK national identity.

Dorset has ten neighbourhoods that are within the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation. Nine of these are in Weymouth and Portland. The gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and least deprived areas is 6.3 years for males and 5.3 years for females. 46% of Dorset's population live in rural areas. This causes significant barriers to housing, transport and essential services.

### Dorset Council's employees

The information below reflects the make-up of Dorset Council's workforce as of November 2020 (excluding school employees). The information is analysed by equality group. Dorset Council employed 4485 people.

#### Age

Age	Workforce %
24 and under	4.9%
25-39	23.9%
40-49	23.8%
50-59	31.8%
60-64	9.9%

65+	5.6%
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### **Disability**

Only 2.7% of employees shared that they had a disability. 58.7% of our employees state that they do not. This fits with many organisations nationally who have similar declared rates of disability. 38.8% have not shared or would prefer not to say. We recognise as a council more work needs to be undertaken to encourage employees to share their data, so that we can see to what extent our workforce reflects the communities it serves.

### **Race and ethnicity**

68.3% of our employees shared their ethnicity. Analysis showed that 1.3% of our employees identified as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and 2.5% identified as White other. 28.2% did not declare.

### **Sex**

63.1% of the workforce are female and 36.9% are male.

Currently the council does not collect data on gender identity. We recognise that this needs to change and it has been included in our action plan.

### **Religion and belief**

Data relating to religion and belief was last analysed in May 2019. 16% of employees shared their religion or belief. 73% did not.

Religion and belief	Workforce %
Christian	15.1%
Buddhist	0.1%
Hindu	0.02%
Jewish	0.02%
Muslim	0.02%
Other	0.7%
No religion	11%
Prefer not to say	4.0%
Not declared	68.9%

### **Sexual orientation**

Data relating to sexual orientation was last analysed in May 2019. 38.1% of employees shared their sexual orientation with just under 1% identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB).

### 3. Where are we now as a council?

Dorset Council was created in 2019 and replaced six other local authorities. We recognise that the council's commitment to EDI takes different forms and is not yet consistent across all services.

A public consultation conducted in November 2020 showed that 29% of respondents felt the council currently did well in addressing equality, diversity and inclusion. 29% felt we did poorly. 42% felt we did reasonably. There is clearly a great deal to do. We will use this data as a benchmark and continue to ask the question at regular intervals to monitor whether we are improving.

In 2019 the council adopted the following values, behaviours and strategies, which apply to our employees and residents alike. What became clear during the consultation is that these are not yet fully embedded across all areas of activity as summarised below.

#### Values

- **We are an advocate for Dorset on a local, national and global stage:** This may be true for some services, but opportunities to promote Dorset as an EDI-friendly place on a national and global scale have been missed.
- **We work together with our communities and our partners to make things happen:** This aspiration is shared by partners in the voluntary and community sector and partners would like to work more closely together on EDI.
- **We put people first and design services around their needs now and in future:** There is insufficient evidence to confirm this.
- **We are open, accessible and accountable:** Residents, organisations and employees frequently struggle to access information. Not everyone has access to the internet, and some of the information available on the internet and intranet is not accessible.
- **We value people and build on their strengths:** Again, this is a worthy aspiration but feedback suggests that we don't always listen or respond, either internally with employees, or externally with organisations and partners.

#### Our Behaviours

In 2019 the council adopted a new behaviours framework, which was developed by employees.

In terms of EDI, it was clear that the behaviours that the council has adopted are particularly relevant:

**Responsibility:** We act with integrity. We are honest and we don't attribute blame when something goes wrong. We are all part of the solution.

**Respect:** We are aware of our impact on others. We treat people fairly and have high expectations of ourselves and others, and value differences in approaches and opinions. We instigate and lead through positive behaviour.

**Recognition:** We appreciate and value the contribution of individuals and teams for work well done. We lead by taking time to provide feedback and share lessons learnt and achievements to support the organisation's development. We celebrate commitment and success.

**Collaboration:** We work with colleagues, residents and partners to achieve the best possible outcomes. We feel confident to share ideas, we listen and respect other points of view and we strive to set this example to each other. We value the power in combining our personal qualities, skills and experience to achieve a shared goal.

### People Strategy

In 2019 the council also developed a People Strategy. The People Strategy sets out how Dorset Council will promote and proactively work towards enabling a diverse workforce across all levels of our organisation, acting as a role model for Dorset employers.

The People Strategy sets out our ambition to be an employer of choice, where we can do our jobs well and make a difference to the people of Dorset. We have worked with employees to understand what an employer of choice means to us, and this is what we have heard:

We want the council to be a place where we:

- Recognise that our colleagues are the organisation's greatest asset
- Find our work rewarding and can see the difference we make to the lives of Dorset residents
- Are supported to develop ourselves, enhance our skills and increase our knowledge
- Value diverse backgrounds, skills and personalities
- Respect everyone's rights and dignity
- Develop a positive working culture that is flexible, responsive and enhances the health and wellbeing of our employees
- Have access to the resources and support we need to do our work effectively
- Take responsibility for our work and the outcomes we deliver
- Listen to others' views and we recognise their contribution
- Work as one team to achieve our shared goals

Feedback from the consultation indicates that these remain the right aspirations, but progress needs to be made before people feel that they are embedded. This has also been shown in recent employee surveys which show that:

- 57% of respondents felt the organisation treats everyone with dignity and respect; and
- 59% of respondents felt the council treats people fairly with dignity and respect

There is a separate action plan for the People Strategy which aims to address this.

## Equality Objectives

Dorset Council has three equality objectives that underpin this strategy. These set out our long-term aims for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion when delivering services, supporting our communities and developing our work culture. These are:

- To foster good relations with and within the community
- To develop and support a diverse workforce
- To develop, commission and deliver inclusive and responsive services

These were adopted in January 2019 by the 'shadow' Dorset Council, and there has been little opportunity to review the objectives and develop an action plan. The introduction of this strategy and action plan will help in delivering actions in relation to our equality objectives, and understanding how they need to be updated in future.

## 4. Where do we want to be?

Dorset Council wants to continue developing a positive culture. We want Dorset to be a place where people want to live and work, with a positive and energetic approach to EDI. We want to respond rapidly with intent to local, national or global issues that impact on equality and diversity matters. We want to embed further equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do, to help make Dorset and Dorset Council a better place for everyone.

Feedback from the consultation suggested employees and partners want the council to be:

- More engaged and responsive – listening to and understanding people's experiences
- More responsive in how we communicate with everyone
- More committed to working with voluntary and community organisations
- Bolder in our commitment to anti-racism
- More explicit in our commitment to LGBTQ+
- More focussed on socio-economic deprivation
- More explicit in its actions

## 5. The action plan

We have developed an action plan to help deliver our equality strategy. It is based on a framework recommended by the Local Government Association<sup>1</sup> which consists of four themes: .

- Understanding and working with our communities
- Leadership and organisational commitment
- Responsive services and customer care

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<sup>1</sup> Called the Equality Framework for Local Government. The Local Government Association is an umbrella organisation that all local authorities can join.



- Diverse and engaged workforce

## 6. Performance measures and monitoring progress

We want to ensure that our equality, diversity and inclusion activities are measurable, so we know how we're doing and can be challenged if things don't improve. These measures will include:

- A regular employee survey (HIVE) looking at how well the council is delivering the strategy and action plan
- Dorset Council's score for the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index
- The percentage of employees who declare additional personal data
- The number of Diversity Champions and allies who support EDI within the council

We will also continue to ask partners how well we address equality, diversity and inclusion as a council to identify if we are making progress.

We know we can't assess our own performance, so we need others to help. We will do this by:

- Setting up an officers' working group
- Working with external community groups and other stakeholders to monitor progress with delivery of the plan
- Working with Trade Unions
- All employees to regularly monitor objectives, behaviours, wellbeing, peer feedback and workplace culture.



## Dorset Council Draft Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2022

This action plan is intended to deliver the council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, the plan will be developed to include specific actions and timescales and is a working document, which will be updated frequently.

The plan will also be reviewed in February 2022 and a year 2 plan will then be implemented, focusing on the achievements of 2021-22 and informed by feedback from employees, residents and the EDI Officer Working Group. The action plan has been developed around the following:

- Theme - we have grouped work into five themes, which are used in the [Equality Framework for Local Government \(EFLG\)](#) . We will use this framework to benchmark ourselves and as a tool to help us improve how we deliver services and be an employer of choice.
- Equality Objectives - The Equality Act 2010 requires us to have [equality objectives](#), these objectives are key areas we want to focus on.
- Dorset Council values and behaviours - as a new organisation in 2019 we defined our [principles and values](#) for our journey ahead.

Theme	Link to our Equality Objectives, our values	How will we achieve this?	Key actions for 2021-2022
Understanding and working with our communities	<p>Fostering good relations with and within our community</p> <p>We work together with our communities and our partners to make things happen</p> <p>We put people first and design services around their needs now and in the future</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build and maintain strong relationships with our communities, the community, voluntary and faith sector and partner agencies to improve our knowledge and enable us to work together to improve opportunities for all</li> <li>• Analyse and use equality and diversity data to monitor and plan services that meet the needs of our diverse communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce equality monitoring within Dorset Council to improve our evidence base and inform service planning</li> <li>• Create an annual calendar of key diversity dates which are supported by the council</li> <li>• Collaborate with partners and the community and voluntary sector on EDI issues e.g. Gypsy &amp; Traveller Liaison Group, Prejudice Free Dorset, Anti-Slavery Partnership, Children &amp; Young People</li> <li>• Continue to deliver the Dorset Syrian Resettlement Programme</li> </ul>

Theme	Link to our Equality Objectives, our values	How will we achieve this?	Key actions for 2021-2022
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster good relations and promote understanding between people from different communities across Dorset</li> <li>• Carry out consultations when we are proposing service changes</li> <li>• Provide public information in the most appropriate and accessible way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor complaints and compliments by protected characteristic to follow any inequality or discrimination</li> <li>• Continue to deliver the actions in the COVID-19 EqlA relating to vulnerable communities</li> <li>• Use Local Democracy Week to encourage people to understand more how local democracy works and work with Dorset Youth Parliament</li> <li>• Implement initiatives to ensure that Dorset Council is working towards being anti-racist</li> <li>• Develop research base looking specifically at Weymouth &amp; Portland</li> </ul>
Leadership and Organisational Commitment	<p>Developing and supporting a diverse workforce</p> <p>We are open, accessible and accountable</p> <p>We are an advocate for Dorset on a local,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equality objectives will be monitored and reviewed on an annual basis</li> <li>• Publish data annually to show how the council is meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty</li> <li>• Offer a suite of equality and diversity learning and development opportunities to all employees and councillors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a communication policy on incidents which are attracting public and media interest</li> <li>• Publish equality data annually: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ annual workforce report</li> <li>○ gender pay gap report</li> <li>○ EqlAs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Deliver the actions as set out in the People Strategy<sup>2</sup> including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Becoming an employer of choice</li> <li>○ Developing our people</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<sup>2</sup> The People Strategy is how we create a positive workplace culture, so employees feel valued and part one organisation.

Theme	Link to our Equality Objectives, our values	How will we achieve this?	Key actions for 2021-2022
	national and global stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a positive workplace culture for all</li> <li>• Share messages of celebration and communications about key diversity dates and events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Engaging our people</li> <li>○ Supporting our people</li> <li>○ Rewarding and recognising performance</li> <li>○ Creating a positive workplace culture</li> <li>• Review councillors' equality and diversity learning and development opportunities</li> <li>• Implement an annual programme of EDI awareness activities for employees which includes learning opportunities</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Responsive services and customer care	<p>Developing, commissioning and delivering inclusive and responsive services</p> <p>We use time and money wisely</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed equality and diversity within our policies and procedures</li> <li>• Embed equality and diversity within our commissioning and procurement processes</li> <li>• Ensure that equalities implications inform policy formulation and decision making from the start of the process</li> <li>• Offer appropriate translation and interpreting services</li> <li>• Ensure information on our Dorset Council website is accessible and conforms with the Accessibility Standards</li> <li>• Create awareness and promote ownership across the council of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review our approach to equality impact assessments</li> <li>• Deliver regular equality analysis training to ensure that we are giving due regard in decision making</li> <li>• Establish a monitoring process to capture social value from purchasing and commissioning activities</li> <li>• Review our HR policies and procedures to ensure gender neutral language is used</li> <li>• Implement translation, interpreting and alternative formats guidance</li> <li>• Raise awareness of the Accessibility Standards and providing accessibility training</li> </ul>

Theme	Link to our Equality Objectives, our values	How will we achieve this?	Key actions for 2021-2022
		the Equality & Diversity Strategy and action plan	
Diverse and Engaged workforce	<p>Developing and supporting a diverse workforce</p> <p>We value people and build on their strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and modernise our approaches to recruitment and retention to check for unconscious bias</li> <li>• Continue to participate in benchmarking schemes such as Disability Confident, Stonewall &amp; Mindful Employer</li> <li>• Encourage employees to share their diversity data</li> <li>• Undertake regular employee snapshots through our survey platform and other engagement methods</li> <li>• Ensure that gender pay gap data is collected and published annually</li> <li>• Use employee diversity and gender pay gap data to work towards improving how representative the workforce is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and monitor a workforce plan to help understand the profile of the organisation</li> <li>• Launch and develop our employee networks</li> <li>• Deliver regular equality &amp; diversity induction training to new employees</li> <li>• Review our equality and diversity learning and development opportunities and work with trade unions to develop new training</li> <li>• Implement a Mobile workforce group to look at how we improve communications with our workforce who do not have access to the intranet or a Dorset Council email address</li> <li>• Carry out a Hive survey on the work of the EDI strategy</li> <li>• Work with UNISON on the Gender Pay Gap Trailblazer</li> <li>• Develop a Disability Confident action plan and a become a Disability Confident Employer (level 2) by the end of 2021</li> <li>• Develop a LGBTQ+ action plan using Stonewall feedback and improve our ranking in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index for 2021</li> </ul>

Theme	Link to our Equality Objectives, our values	How will we achieve this?	Key actions for 2021-2022
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to be a member of Mindful Employer and share resources</li> <li>• Increase the number of employees sharing their diversity data year on year</li> <li>• Implement a sexual harassment policy</li> <li>• Develop policies and guidance on managing the menopause at work</li> <li>• Develop a Trans<sup>3</sup> policy and guidance for all employees who identify as trans</li> <li>• Establish a role models and allies programme and ensure it includes our mobile workforce</li> </ul>

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<sup>3</sup> Trans is an umbrella term to cover the whole range of non-binary and trans people