



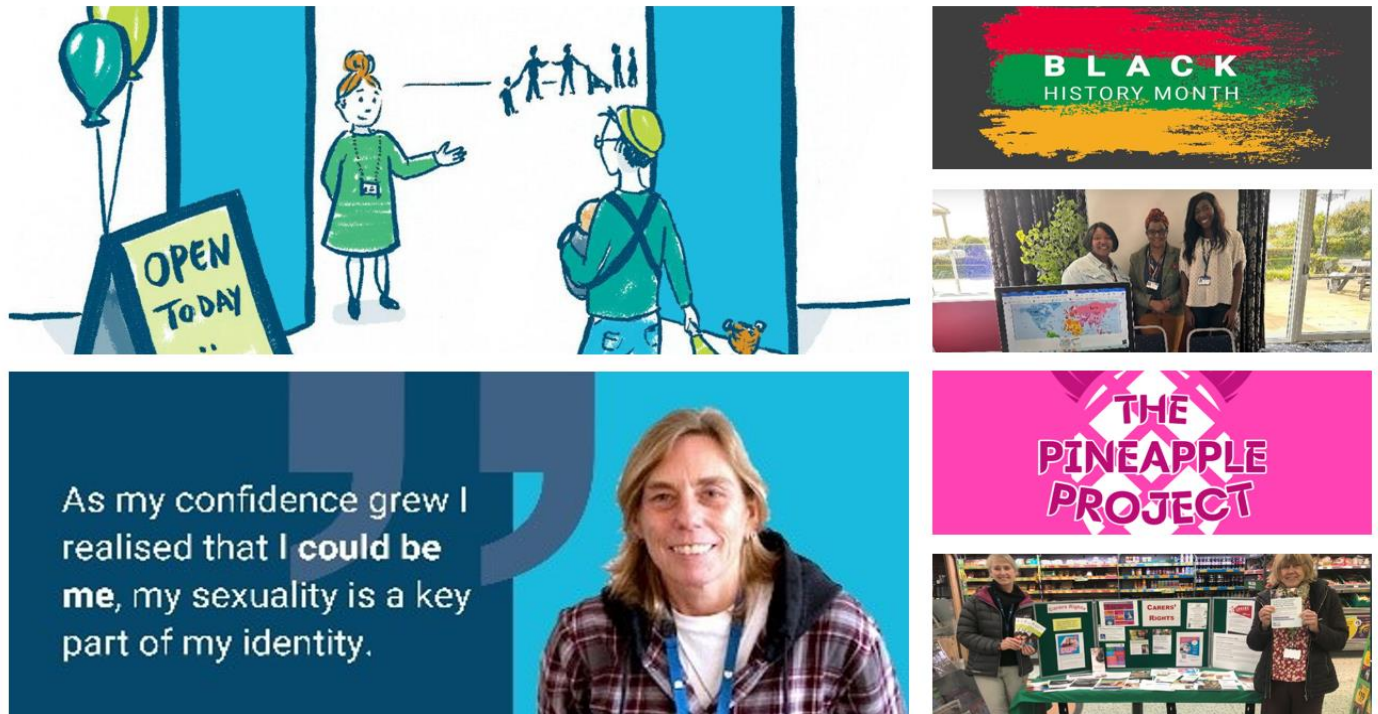
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy & Action Plan 2024-2027



Contents

1. Welcome	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion	5
4. How this strategy was developed	7
5. Diverse Dorset	8
5.1 Dorset Council area	8
5.2 Dorset Council workforce	10
6. How do we currently deliver?	12
6.1 Governance	12
6.2 Current EDI activity	13
6.3 Accreditations, charter marks, strategic commitments and frameworks	13
7. Our equality, diversity and inclusion objectives	14
8. Action plan	14
Appendix 1: Definitions adopted for Dorset local protected characteristics	18
Appendix 2: Accreditations, charter marks, strategic commitments and frameworks	20

Figure 1: EDI activity within and outside Dorset Council



1. Welcome

Dorset Council has an important role to play in helping reduce inequalities in the county and safeguarding the rights of people protected by the Equality Act 2010.

As a public body and local organisation, we recognise that the council has a special responsibility to show leadership through our actions and words on equality, diversity and inclusion.

Tackling inequality, challenging discrimination, promoting inclusion and celebrating diversity helps to achieve this vision for Dorset. We are committed to leading by example, working with others, investing in communities, and listening and acting when people tell us how we can deliver better services.

We invite you to read our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027. This document sets out our approach, objectives and actions for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion over the next four years, building on the valuable work done to date.

By placing fairness at the centre of what we do, promoting equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity and community cohesion, we can help to build a fairer future for all.

If you would like document in an alternative format, please call 01305 221000 or email customerservices@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Cllr Ryan Holloway, Cabinet Member for Corporate Development and Transformation
Cllr Ryan Hope, Cabinet Member for Customer, Culture and Community Engagement
Aidan Dunn, Executive Director of Corporate Development and Chair of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Board

2. Introduction

Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy describes our plans over the next four years to deliver better outcomes for those living and working in Dorset. The intention of this strategy and supporting action plan is to make a positive difference to our residents, workforce and visitors.

Dorset Council has a legal duty to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- promote good relations between different groups of people

These provisions are found in the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Act also introduced the term 'protected characteristics' to refer to specific aspects of a person's identity that cannot be used as a reason to discriminate against. These are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- marriage and civil partnership
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

We are following the definitions for each protected characteristic provided by the Equality Human Rights Commission, case law and guidance provided by central government and the NHS. It is important to note that carers are also protected through association with any of the above nine protected characteristics.¹

We recognise there are some additional characteristics that impact people in Dorset and their ability to access services and/or participate in public life, and we also consider these when making decisions and refer to these as 'local protected characteristics'. These include:

- armed forces
- carers
- care experience (individuals who have been in care)
- gender identity
- lone parent
- rural isolation

¹ [Protected characteristics | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/protected-characteristics)

- socio-economic status

Appendix 1 provides a definition we have adopted for each local characteristic. Our definitions are based on the 2021 census and other relevant information provided by the Equality Human Rights Commission, case law, guidance provided by the central government and best practices.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the council is required to:

- publish relevant information demonstrating its compliance with the Equality Duty, which we do at the end of March each year
- set specific, measurable equality objectives which need to be reviewed every four years.

However, the drive behind this strategy is not just to meet a legal requirement. We recognise that there is continuing and persistent inequality in society and, as a council, we have an influential community leadership role in challenging that inequality. It will also help us ensure that what we do is always for the benefit of Dorset's residents by:

- delivering high quality responsive services and improving customer care
- delivering facilities and services which are fair, equal and free from discrimination
- being more efficient – providing value for money with improved and targeted services and savings.

To ensure that our workplace and our services are meeting the needs of everyone, we have a responsibility to listen and respond better. As one of the county's largest employers, we also have a responsibility to lead by example. This document outlines the principles and objectives that will guide us on our journey.

3. Our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion

The Dorset Council Plan 2022-2024 sets out our vision to “make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit”. The development of a new equality, diversity and inclusion strategy is key to achieving this vision. This strategy makes an essential contribution to the achievement of all five priorities set out in the Council Plan:

- driving economic prosperity
- creating stronger, healthier communities
- creating sustainable development and housing
- protecting our natural environment, climate and ecology
- becoming a more responsive, customer focused council

In particular, the purpose of this strategy is to support achievement of the council's vision by focusing on the priorities of 'stronger, healthier communities' and a diverse and engaged workforce to enable us to become 'a more responsive, customer focused council'.

As a council, we believe in the value of diversity in our workforce by:

- making diversity an important part of the recruiting process, which broadens our talent pool of prospective employees
- understanding different perspectives can inspire creativity and drive innovation when delivering services to our residents
- having diverse teams can increase problem solving capacity, be more productive and perform better.

The change we want to see

In developing this strategy, we talked to our colleagues and partners within Dorset to gather their views on the top priorities for equality, diversity and inclusion at the council. As a result of this activity, we have identified five high level outcomes which underpin this strategy. They are summarised below as the change we want to see over the four years of the strategy.

1. Equality, diversity and inclusion is everyone's business

Decisions are made using the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion. Elected members and employees assess the impact of decisions on our residents and colleagues and will adapt services and projects as needed to mitigate any negative impact.

2. Services and facilities are accessible to all

Dorset Council's facilities and services, whether for residents or employees, will be adapted to meet the needs of our diverse communities. We will aim to update and adapt these through co-design with our employees, customers, residents and partners to ensure they meet everyone's needs.

3. We will strengthen our relationships with communities

We will work together with our communities, building relationships based on trust and respect, coming to the table as equal partners.

We will use different methods of engagement, tailored to the needs of our diverse communities. We will have ongoing and regular conversations where we listen and act upon feedback.

4. We celebrate and support our diverse workforce

We will celebrate the benefits that a diverse workforce brings and will actively work to be as diverse as we can by creating a workplace where barriers are removed, with an inclusive culture where colleagues feel well supported.

5. The council celebrates the diversity of Dorset

Where the council leads the way with equality initiatives, or has a good news story to tell, the council will act as an advocate for everyone in Dorset.

We recognise that we have a long way still to go on our EDI journey, and culture change takes many years to achieve. We must acknowledge that the council is working under considerable constraints – for instance, the ongoing financial pressures. Whilst recognising this, it is acknowledged that undertaking council work through an EDI lens will benefit all, whether you are an employee, resident or visiting the Dorset Council area. This strategy sets out our clear direction of travel and our commitment to deliver the change required for our residents and our employees.

4. How this strategy was developed

This strategy and action plan was developed through engagement with employees and stakeholders, including colleagues from the voluntary and community sector. Throughout 2022, 2023, and 2024, we met with representatives from our EDI Reference Group, employee networks, recognised trade unions, and senior officers.

We asked questions about our key actions, rationale and success measures for this work. Drafts of this strategy were shared with these partners and their feedback was used to shape the final version to produce a genuinely co-designed strategy. This work was undertaken to embed EDI into all council activities.

We have also used the Local Government Association's Equality Framework as a tool to assess our progress on EDI to date and to help shape our future direction of work.

To support the development of our new EDI Strategy and Action plan, we have drawn on key council strategies, including those outlining our work with the voluntary and community sector, young people, the provision of library services and how we lead, manage and support the development of our employees. Where appropriate, relevant tasks have been incorporated into the action plan.

Dorset Council is committed to embedding inclusive practices, culture and behaviours to contribute towards making Dorset a great place to live, work and visit. This approach enables employees to engage fully in their work and helps our communities thrive. The need to ensure everyone is treated equitably, with dignity and respect, is at the heart of everything we do.

5. Diverse Dorset

To support us in making informed decisions, it is important that we understand who our residents and our employees are. Population and workforce data tell us that the needs of our customers, visitors and employees are continually changing; therefore, we need to anticipate and respond to current and future requirements.

5.1 Dorset Council area²

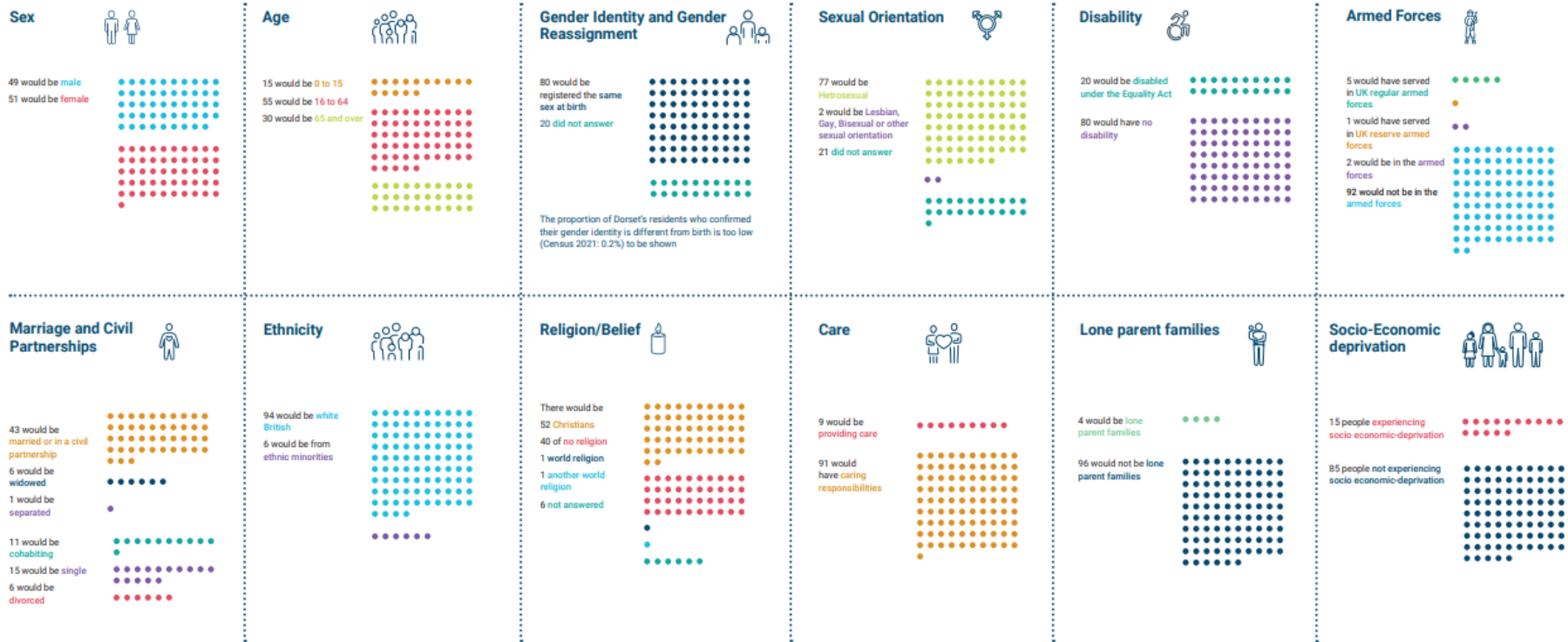
We use census information to understand who may access our services or work for us. Figure 2 (Dorset as a village of 100 residents) provides insight into who lives in the Dorset Council area.

The council has recently adopted care experience as a local protected characteristic, and at the end of May 2024, we had 298 active care leavers. The 2019 Indices of Deprivation shows that 46% of the population lives in rurally isolated areas. The data provided in Figure 2 tells us that the council must consider the needs of different communities when developing policies for future employees or services for our residents.

² There is no pregnancy or maternity data provided in this section because it is not provided by the 2021 census or suitable information being available.

Figure 2: Demographic profile of the Dorset Council area

If Dorset was a village of 100 people...



Protected characteristics are aspects of a person's identity that make up who they are. The presented characteristics are based on the Equality Act 2010 as well as the local protected characteristics Dorset Council has adopted. Data for this infographic has been taken from the 2021 census.



5.2 Dorset Council workforce

Our workforce demographic data, which we publish annually,³ tells us that in 2024.

- Most of our employees are from the United Kingdom
- The age group with the highest proportion in our workforce is aged between 50-59
- The proportion of employees sharing information concerning their ethnicity and disability has been very small since 2020
- most council employees identify as female
- the proportion of employees who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other has increased since 2020

Our workforce does not reflect the communities we serve in relation to disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation. However, it should be noted that there are some big gaps in the available data. This could be because employees do not understand why the council wants this information and choose not to provide it because they do not feel confident enough to share or know they can. Further work is needed to improve the quality of data on the profile of our workforce.

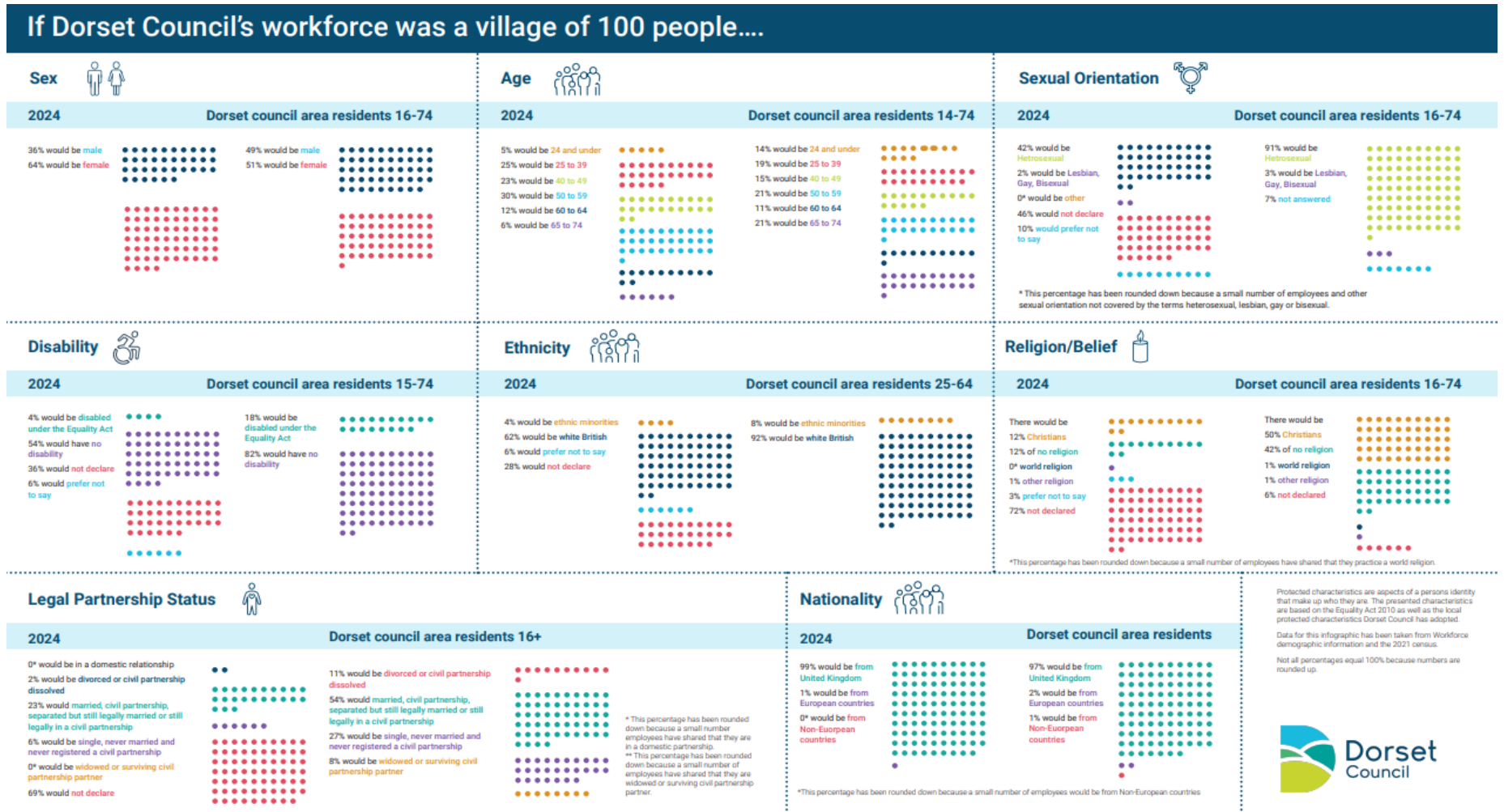
As a council, we must publish information on our gender pay gap⁴ every year. Our Gender Pay gap as of 31 March 2023 identified that the mean hourly pay gap of 0.24% is negligible and well below the average for public and private sector organisations.

Whilst the 2021 census has published information concerning gender identity, we are unable to make any comparisons concerning gender identity as we currently do not ask our workforce this question.

³ [Equality, diversity and inclusion: Our workforce data - Dorset Council](#)

⁴ [Gender pay gap reporting - Dorset Council](#)

Figure 3: Demographic profile of Dorset Council workforce



6. How do we currently deliver on EDI?

6.1 Governance

EDI work is being undertaken in several ways across the council, and this part of the strategy provides an overview of the activity. With the council providing over 450 services to 380,000 residents, it is vital we have clear governance structures to oversee all EDI work. The EDI Strategic Board aims to review and embed EDI activity within Dorset Council and the delivery of its services when working with partners and stakeholders. Membership of the Board is drawn from senior officers and trade unions. A member of the Senior Leadership Team leads the board.

Figure 4: EDI governance at Dorset Council 2022 to date

Group	what does it do?
Portfolio holder for Corporate Development and Transformation	The elected member holds the EDI responsibility for the council.
People and Health Overview/Scrutiny Committees	Responsible for overseeing the Council's statutory functions in relation to EDI.
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	Ensures the strategic direction set by our councillors is followed. They make high-level decisions that have an impact on more than one area of the council. Key decisions made by individual directorates are also shared with SLT. The group meets weekly.
Senior Sponsor	Represents the voice and advocate for the Employee Network they are sponsoring within and outside Dorset Council.
EDI Strategic Board	Has strategic oversight of EDI within Dorset Council and all its external work.
EDI Operational Group	Oversees the operational EDI work within Dorset Council and the wider community.
Breaking Down Barriers Group	The purpose of this network is to provide structure for engagement and a platform for discussion and cooperation on themes or projects that contribute to improving accessibility for the residents of Dorset and the employees of Dorset Council.
EDI Reference Group	The role of the group, which comprises external organisations, is to act as a critical friend to the council and assist in delivering the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action plan.
Network Leads Group	Provides an opportunity for Network Leads to discuss items of relevance with employees of specific relevance to the Employee Networks.

Group	What does it do?
Specific task and finish groups to progress specific pieces of work	Undertakes specific time-limited pieces of EDI work.

6.2 Current EDI activity

Dorset Council's first EDI Strategy and Action plan was published in 2021. It identified 35 actions. We have completed 14 actions and partially progressed 18 actions. A small number of actions (3) have not been progressed. We are proud of the achievements to date but realise there is more work to do, which is outlined in this refreshed strategy and action plan. An overview of activity⁵ is published annually as part of our Public Sector Equality Duty requirements.

6.3 Accreditations, charter marks, strategic commitments and frameworks

As a council, we have committed to several accreditations, charter marks, and strategic commitments:

- To promote the council as an inclusive employer
- To inform the development of inclusive policies, services and support for all who live, work and visit the Dorset Council area
- To reflect and understand the needs of the different communities we serve as a council
- To provide effective mechanisms to help us deliver on the Public Sector Equality and Armed Forces Covenant Duties

Appendix 4 provides a rationale for why we have signed each one. Resourcing requirements will be met via the EDI budget.

Figure 5: EDI Accreditations at Dorset Council



⁵ [Equality, diversity and inclusion: Our workforce data - Dorset Council](#)

7. Our equality, diversity and inclusion objectives

We have refreshed the council's equality objectives, which support the council's wider vision, based on feedback from colleagues and partners. These updated objectives are to:

- understand and foster good relations with and within our communities
- demonstrate our leadership, partnership and organisational commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion
- develop and deliver inclusive and responsive services
- develop and support a diverse and engaged workforce

These objectives align neatly with the Equality Framework for Local Government. As part of this framework, there are three levels of attainment: 'developing', 'achieving' and 'excellent'. The focus of our work up to 2027 is on fully meeting the 'developing' and 'achieving' criteria in all areas. This approach continues to build on our current achievements and provides a clear focus to inform future priorities. After 2027, we want to achieve the 'excellent' category in all the identified areas.

8. Action plan

We have developed an action plan to help us meet the four themes of the local government equality framework, aiming to make Dorset a great place to live, work and visit. It is broken down under the key priorities to be achieved within each financial year. Some priorities will be running throughout the period as they are key to providing the evidence base to inform activity and show impact. We recognise that there might be change, whether locally, nationally or internationally; if this occurs, the EDI Strategic Board will decide whether or not existing priorities need to be added or changed. Success in achieving our priorities is based on the expectation that officers will be held accountable and that the work is part of normal business activities.

An action plan has been developed by seeking feedback from identified internal stakeholders (Senior Leadership Team, EDI Strategic Board, EDI Operational Group, employee networks, trade unions), the community and voluntary sector and members of the Integrated Care Board.

Figure 7 provides a breakdown of the considered priorities. The detailed action plan is held internally by members of the EDI Strategic Board. If you want to see a copy of this action plan, please email EDI@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk.

Figure 6: Feedback from Dorset Council Officer feedback on EDI activity

“When I first joined Dorset Council five years ago, I felt like I didn’t fit in. when I checked the intranet and couldn’t find anything for Black workers like me. Although there’s been some progress, it’s been slow. One big win for me and my colleagues is seeing the Black History Month flag raised, something I’d never seen before. I’ve been part of efforts to make the hiring process better for everyone. The Council introduced courses like the Black Talent Leadership and Beyond Difference Leadership programme, thanks to the support of our Learning and Development team. Our EDI officer has been a great help, and we now work closely with our communications department to share information.”

Florence Matimba, Chair of Ethnic Minority Employee Network

“This group is highly engaged and always suggests considerations we may have overlooked. They also seem to be flexible to engage in different ways. They have shown interest in coming in person to access our libraries and help us find ways to make the spaces more inclusive. They also don't just make assumptions on behalf of the networks they represent. They proactively look for ways to get involved and challenge us to engage with them directly.”

Officer feedback on the impact of the EDI Reference Group

Figure 7: Dorset Council top level priorities 2024-2025

Dorset Council EDI top level priorities
Top-level priorities 2024-2025
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• embed care experience as a local protected characteristic across all business activities at Dorset Council.• deliver an organisational approach to translation, interpretation and alternative formats• complete the Wellbeing Service review• publish a Dorset Council Transgender inclusion policy for future and current employees• ensure EDI is a core element of transformation work• ensure Dorset Council workplaces are accessible and inclusive for all• share the learning from the 'Dorset Leading for Inclusion' Change Agents Programme with officers and members to shape future organisational activity• aim for 100% completion of EDI mandatory training for all officers and members• encourage applicants, employees and members to share demographic data at key points throughout the year. This will help the council address any gaps, identify future priorities, and foster a culture of respect and belonging.

Figure 8: EDI activity within and outside Dorset Council



Appendix 1: Definitions adopted for Dorset local protected characteristics

It is important to provide a definition for each of our local characteristics. The council draws on these definitions to measure our activity in relation to each characteristic which are based on the 2021 Census, NHS and central government.

Figure 9: Dorset Council local characteristic definitions

Local characteristic	Definition
Armed Forces Veteran ⁶	People who have previously served in the UK armed forces. This includes those who have served for at least one day in armed forces, either regular or reserves, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.
Carers ⁷	An unpaid carer may look after, give help or support to anyone who has long-term physical or mental ill-health conditions, illness or problems related to old age. This does not include any activities as part of paid employment. This help can be within or outside of the carer's household.
Care experience	An organisational definition has not been agreed upon. It is a priority for 2024.
Gender Identity ⁸	Refers to a person's sense of their own gender, whether male, female or another category such as non-binary. This may or may not be the same as their sex registered at birth. We are aware that the quality of this data has been questioned and will continue to follow guidance provided by the Office for National Statistics. ⁹
Lone parent family ¹⁰	A family with a single male or female parent living with either dependent or non-dependent children. Note: The definition of a lone parent does not make any distinction between situations where a child has regular contact and/or partly resides with their other parent and a child who solely resides with and is cared for by one parent. Only the parent living with their children is included in the estimated number of lone-parent families and households

⁶ [UK armed forces veterans, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁷ [NHS commissioning » Who is considered a carer? \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk)

⁸ [Gender identity, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁹ [Quality of Census 2021 gender identity data - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

¹⁰ [Families and households in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

Local characteristic	Definition
Rural isolation ¹¹	People who live in areas of the county that have been highlighted nationally as being a significant geographical distance to a range of important local services.
Socio-economic status ¹²	<p>A household is considered to be deprived if it meets two of the following dimensions or more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: A household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student. • Employment: A household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability. • Health: A household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any person in the household has general health that is bad or very bad or is identified as disabled. People who have assessed their day-to-day activities as limited by long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses are considered disabled. This definition of a disabled person meets the harmonised standard for measuring disability and is in line with the Equality Act (2010). • Housing: A household is classified as deprived in the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

¹¹ [English Indices of Deprivation 2019: technical report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk)

¹² [Household deprivation variable: Census 2021 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

Appendix 2: Accreditations, charter marks, strategic commitments and frameworks

Local and national protected characteristic	Accreditations, charter marks and strategic commitments	Why have we signed this commitment?
All protected characteristics	Equality Framework for Local Government	We are drawing on the framework because it helps councils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliver accessible, inclusive and responsive services to customers and residents in their communities including those from under-represented groups. • employ a workforce that reflects the diversity of the area they are serving. • provide equality of opportunity for all staff. • meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and support any aspirations to exceed these.
Age	Age-friendly Employer pledge	47.2% of our workforce is from the age group 50-74. As a council, we want to recognise the value of our workforce.
Armed Forces	Armed Forces Covenant	The 2021 census identified that 14.2% (45,768) of our residents are veterans. Through our covenant work, we want to ensure that the services we offer recognise the needs of our veterans and their families.
Disability	Disability Confident	As one of the largest employers in Dorset, we believe it is appropriate to take a leading role in recruiting, retaining and supporting the career development of disabled people.
Race	Social Care, Workforce Race Equality Standard	Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard identifies issues and measures improvements in the workforce with respect to the experiences of people from ethnic minorities. Our goal is to promote Dorset Council as an anti-racist organisation.
Mental health	Mindful Employer ¹³	We are committed to supporting the mental health of all our employees. Membership of this charter supports our work in this area.

Local and national protected characteristic	Accreditations, charter marks and strategic commitments	Why have we signed this commitment?
Religion and Belief	International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism	Central government required councils to adopt this definition.

As a member of the Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB), we have signed the South West Leading for Inclusion Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to:

- create a culture where our people feel valued, heard, and able to be their best selves at work
- develop our leaders to be compassionate and inclusive in all they do
- recruit, develop, and retain a more diverse workforce to ensure equitable representation with an initial focus on disabilities, race and ethnicity, and LGBTQ+
- improve staff experience across all protected characteristics to ensure the South West NHS (with a specific focus on the Dorset Integrated Care System) is the best place to work