

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Change and Delivery) Introduced by the Executive Member (Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships)	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Thursday, 30 January 2025

Spotlight Report: Equality Strategy

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

- To provide updates on the Equality Strategy, equality objectives, detail how the Council complies with its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, including its Public Sector Equality Duty, and plans to take this agenda forward in the future.

Recommendations

- It is recommended the Committee consider the Council's work regarding equality, diversity and inclusion and provide any comments and feedback.

Reasons for recommendations

- This is a spotlight report focusing on the Council's Equality Strategy and work relating to equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation.

Other options considered and rejected

- No other options were considered because comments and feedback received will help inform additional next steps relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Executive summary

- The report details the refreshed equality objectives, Equality Strategy, examples of work to support equality, diversity and inclusion within the Council and plans to support the agenda in the future. The report has been separated into sections based on the Local Government Association's Equality Framework for Local Government improvement modules which were used to self-assess and develop the Equality Strategy and Equality Action Plan.

Corporate priorities

6. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Housing where residents can live well	A green and sustainable borough
An enterprising economy with vibrant local centres in urban and rural areas	Healthy, safe and engaged communities

Background to the report

7. The Equality Strategy and equality objectives were last set in 2020 and required refreshing. The Council has a duty to refresh its equality objectives every four years. The new objectives for 2025-2029 went to Executive Cabinet for approval on 23 January 2025 following consultation with senior leaders and Councillor Hasina Khan (Chair of the Equality and Diversity Panel).

8. The Equality Strategy has been developed in order to build strong foundations of our commitment to equality and diversity, understand more about our communities and develop our workforce to champion equality with the aim of delivering more inclusive services for our residents.

9. The five equality objectives for 2025 – 2029 are outlined in the table below:

Duty	Equality Objective
Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostering and developing positive cultures and understanding – ensure our staff are able to deliver services fairly and can model behaviours that help to create an inclusive work environment.
Advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building an inclusive workforce – to help attract, recruit and retain the best people for the job, we will develop an open, collaborative and inclusive culture where the principles of fairness and wellbeing are promoted.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure adequate access to services for all – to make sure we support each and every resident in the right way we will regularly review how we deliver our services and make changes where needed.
Foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support people in the community who are most in need – we will focus on ensuring that the needs of the whole community are being addressed now and, in the future.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve our communities – we will work to involve local people and engage openly with our residents and service users, seeking to capture all points of view to make better informed decisions.

10. The Equality Act 2010 states that public authorities must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. The duty aims to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out activities.

11. A 2025/26 Equality Action Plan has also been developed to provide structure that clearly articulates how we will ensure we meet our Public Sector Equality Duty. Progress against the action plan indicators will be monitored as part of quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and annual reports to Executive Cabinet.
12. To ensure the Council is fulfilling its legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 in the future we will also complete an annual Public Sector Equality Duty report to provide evidence as to how the Council has complied with the Equality Act 2010 and its specific duties.
13. Updates on equality, diversity and inclusion work currently being undertaken and future plans to fulfil our legal duty have been separated into the improvement modules in the Local Government Association's Equality Framework for Local Government. The framework helps local councils to meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and was used to self-assess and develop the Equality Strategy and Equality Action Plan. The four improvement modules are:
 - Understanding and Working with your Communities
 - Leadership and Organisational Commitment
 - Responsive Services and Customer Care
 - Diverse and Engaged Workforce

Understanding and Working with your Communities

14. We have recently developed a data sharing platform with partners which will be used to gain valuable insights about our people and places so that we can allocate resources and deliver targeted initiatives to those that will benefit most. Borough profiles have also been created to provide a deeper understanding of the demographics and protected characteristics groups within Chorley.
15. We consult and engage with residents through surveys, such as the 2023/24 Residents Survey, feedback and forums, to involve our communities in the design and implementation of services so that they will work for everyone in our borough.
16. As part of the Chorley and South Ribble Community Safety Partnership we work collaboratively with a range of partners allowing for better communication, sharing skills, knowledge and project opportunities to work on key priorities which include vulnerability and exploitation, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.
17. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been utilised to invest in equality projects aimed at reducing inequalities and strengthening community cohesion and integration. For example, a dementia booklet was developed to help anyone living with, or caring for someone living with, dementia to access support, find activities or therapies and continue to live life well. A visual story telling course was completed working with a professional photographer where Ukrainian guests had the chance to share their individual journeys through pictures and a food club focusing on accessible food for the Asian community. Other community projects have been agreed to utilise all UKSPF equalities funding before the deadline of 31 March 2025.
18. Refugees and asylum seekers are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. The Council's Resettlement team supports refugees and asylum seekers across the following resettlement, asylum or visa routes:
 - UK Resettlement Scheme – Helps provide support to families to start their new life in the UK and includes tenancy, mental health and employment support.

- Afghan Relocations Assistance Policy and Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme – The Resettlement team supports with casework when required, mainly with safeguarding issues that arise.
 - Homes for Ukraine Scheme – Offer sponsor support and grant funding to local Ukrainian community groups.
 - Asylum Dispersal - General support for anyone who needs it such as finding volunteering opportunities, school places, food vouchers/food bank referrals, English language provision and cultural awareness sessions.
19. The current Large Resettlement Grants Fund scheme is designed for projects that focus on supporting the resettlement community and will enhance the lives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Chorley.
 20. The team works alongside Lancashire County Council, North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership and the Home Office to look at ways to improve the quality of the resettlement scheme offer provided to our resettlement communities.
 21. Quarterly meetings take place with community groups, Lancashire County Council, North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership, Police and English for speakers of other languages providers to get give scheme updates and discuss any concerns. The team also works alongside schools and community groups to support them to become inclusive and accessible for refugees and asylum seekers.

Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

22. Impact assessments are currently completed at an early stage when developing new policies, projects, or services to ensure we assess any potential impact, including any impact on protected characteristics groups. Further work will be undertaken to review the impact assessment template and the adoption of additional protected characteristics to recognise other groups that are known to experience disadvantage.
23. We work with other partners to support residents in our community, such as the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership to share intelligence, respond to new opportunities and challenges and maximise the use of resources to get the best outcomes for our residents.
24. The Council also has an Equality and Diversity Panel, made up of members, which acts as a consultation and advisory group on work relating to equalities within the organisation. This Panel will be reconvened this year following new appointments.
25. A dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Board will be introduced to monitor the implementation of the strategy and bring forward new ideas on how to promote and support equality, diversity and inclusion. The board will consist of senior leaders, officers working on equality, diversity and inclusion and Elected Members with an interest and expertise in equality, diversity and inclusion. We will also consider involvement and representation from partners and relevant groups where this would add value and support the council in taking action.
26. In January 2025, the Senior Leadership Team completed an equality, diversity and inclusion development day. Sessions within the day helped increase the awareness of the new Equality Strategy, understand the benefits of the Equality Strategy and supported the completion of a mapping exercise by sharing how services are or are planning to contribute to the delivery of the Equality Action Plan.

Responsive Services and Customer Care

27. Equality and inclusivity have been considered when developing the Council's new website, including the ability to translate text to different languages, zoom into webpages to aid reading, navigate the website using a keyboard or speech recognition software and use most of the website using a screen reader. New corporate brand guidelines have also been developed to ensure communication with residents across the organisation is consistent and accessible.
28. The Council now considers social value as part of the procurement process when we procure or commission new services to understand potential additional benefits for our residents and communities.
29. In Astley Hall, text is written in an accessible, concise and consistent format. Clear fonts are used with no use of italics, shadows or outlines. Colours are high contrast and backgrounds are clear in order to be more visually accessible. Braille guides are available on request and the feasibility of guided tours of the hall with a sign language interpreter are being considered. In some rooms, text is read out by actors so that partially sighted visitors can also engage.
30. The ground floor to the Hall is accessible to wheelchair users and videos are made available online and on the ground floor for those who cannot access the upper floors, whilst text panels are positioned to be accessible for wheelchair users. For education workshops with schools, adjustments are made for any requirements.
31. All Council-run events have access to disabled toilets where possible. Other examples of accessibility and inclusivity within the Council's events programme include blind participants being able to take part with a guide in the Chorley 10K, mobility scooter hire availability and blue badge parking prioritisation at Chorley Flower Show, a large screen being located further away so people can see and hear more easily at the Chorley Christmas Light Switch On and wheelchair user access and quiet hours at the Winter Wonderland.

Diverse and Engaged Workforce

32. To help promote a diverse workforce, we have implemented a new Eploy recruitment system and website (<https://jobs.chorleysouthribble.gov.uk/>) to enhance customer experience and help recruit the best talent. The recruitment website meets accessibility standards and uses blind shortlisting during the application process to reduce unconscious bias. We are currently a sponsored employer for UK visa sponsorship, are signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant enabling us to be a 'forces friendly' Council and are a disability confident employer which offers all disabled people an interview who satisfy the essential job criteria.
33. The recruitment system will support the collection and analysis of additional equality monitoring information, including those who have applied for roles with protected characteristics. This will increase our understanding and help to identify any patterns or trends to inform next steps. The system allows tracking of diverse panels based on sex which can be used to promote the use of diverse panels in the future.
34. All staff are obligated to complete the mandatory training modules for 'Equality in the Workplace' and 'Customer Access Charter' which relate to equality, diversity and inclusion. The current completion rate for 'Equality in the Workplace' is 87% and

'Customer Access Charter' is 78%, which is marginally below our target of 90%. We will incorporate equality, diversity and inclusion into our future rewards and recognition, including within our annual staff awards by incorporating it into event nominations as part of the 'Working Together' value.

35. The staff Equality Champions Network has been relaunched to support the organisation in the delivery of its equality objectives and promote a diverse, supportive and inclusive workplace culture. As part of the refresh, Equality Champions training has been arranged with an external provider for February 2025.

Next Steps

36. An Equality Action Plan (Appendix 2) has been completed for 2025/26 that clearly articulates how the Council will ensure it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty and achieves its equality objectives. Progress against the action plan indicators will be monitored as part of quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and annual reports to Executive Cabinet.
37. An annual Public Sector Equality Duty report will also be completed to provide evidence as to how the Council has complied with the Equality Act 2010 and its specific duties which includes reporting gender pay gap data annually.

Climate change and air quality

38. The work noted in this report does not have an impact on the Council's carbon emissions and the wider climate emergency and sustainability targets of the Council.

Equality and diversity

39. An impact assessment was completed to assess any potential impact the new equality objectives and Equality Strategy may have on protected characteristics groups under the Equality Act 2010 and ensure we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty as a public authority.

Risk

40. The risk to delivery is capacity across the organisation to complete the activities outlined in the Equality Action Plan. However, progress against action plan will be monitored as part of quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and annual reports to Executive Cabinet.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

41. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

42. No comments.

Background documents

The Local Government Association's Equality Framework for Local Government was used to inform the development of the Equality Strategy:

[Equality Framework for Local Government | Local Government Association](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Strategy

Appendix 2 – Equality Action Plan

Appendix 3 – Impact Assessment

Report Author:	Email:	Telephone:	Date:
Kieran Leonard (Policy Officer)	Kieran.Leonard@chorley.gov.uk	01257 515151	03/01/2025