



City of
Stoke-on-Trent



Stoke-on-Trent City Council Equality and Diversity Strategy 2022 – 2025

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Foreword

Vibrancy and diversity are two of Stoke-on-Trent's greatest assets. A city founded on creative endeavour should value and celebrate the multitude of voices, ideas and identities that shape its culture. Similarly, if the City Council is to be truly effective then it must ensure that it can recruit, retain and develop talented individuals, regardless of their background, age, race, sex, sexual orientation, beliefs, disability or marital status. That means creating a culture which is truly inclusive, where all staff feel valued, listened to, supported and able to do their work to the best of their abilities at all times. And we must ensure that our decisions and policies nurture and empower communities across our city and do not inadvertently disadvantage groups and individuals that we want to help to thrive.

When we developed the Stronger Together strategic vision for our council and the wider city, we put respect at the heart of our key values. That's because respect is fundamentally important to our working culture within the City Council, as well as our vital work with partners, residents, communities and businesses. Equality demands that we always show respect for others, even if we may not agree with them or share common traits. Encouraging and protecting diversity means respecting and celebrating our differences, as well as the qualities which unite us as a workforce and as a city. We have to ensure that we demonstrate these values in everything that we do.

I was delighted when Stoke-on-Trent was named as the UK's kindest city at the end of 2020, but I was not surprised. I believe that kindness, empathy and tolerance are in our city's DNA, and are part of the reason that we are so good at coming together to solve difficult problems and to protect and support the most vulnerable. After all, this is the city that helped to spearhead the abolition of slavery, thanks to Josiah Wedgwood, and which stood shoulder to shoulder with the victims of Nazi brutality in Lidice during the Second World War. But I also believe that we can never be complacent – it is only a few years since the values of respect and tolerance triumphed over political extremism in our city. We succeeded in driving the abhorrent politics of division and prejudice from our council chamber, but we must continue to challenge discrimination in all its forms so that intolerance cannot fester anywhere in our city again.

Promoting equality is also about tackling inequality. Our Stronger Together vision is about working with partners and residents to improve outcomes and life chances for everyone in our city, and particularly the most vulnerable members of society. Our commitment to securing equality of opportunity lies at the heart of everything that we are working towards as an organisation. This strategy will enable us to focus on becoming a truly inclusive, diverse and rewarding employer to our hardworking staff and to champion the values of respect and tolerance in all of our day-to-day work and decision-making.

Cllr Abi Brown – Leader of the City Council

Introduction

The Stronger Together strategic vision sets out a blueprint to improve outcomes for all people who live in Stoke-on-Trent, regardless of their background, sex, religion, physical ability, sexuality or age. The priorities underpinning Stronger Together include commitments to 'Enable our residents to fulfil their potential', 'Work with our communities to make them healthier, safer and more sustainable', and to 'Support vulnerable people in our communities to live their lives well'. These policy commitments are rooted in fairness and a desire to eradicate inequalities which have made life harder for too many individuals and communities for too long.

This Equality and Diversity Strategy aims to demonstrate how the spirit and commitment of Stronger Together is working to support and enable people and communities from different backgrounds to live productive, fulfilling lives in Stoke-on-Trent. It shows how the City Council is working to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes for all and protect people from the threat of harassment, discrimination and harm. As a leading provider and commissioner of services in the city, the council has a clear duty to ensure that its policies and interventions are well-designed, proportionate, fairly implemented and do not result in discrimination, exclusion or harm to any communities, groups or individuals.

As one of Stoke-on-Trent's biggest employers, the City Council also has a duty to embed the highest standards of fairness and equality within all of its workplaces and to lead by example in championing them to other employers in the city. This strategy spells out what these standards mean, why they matter and how we will demonstrate our commitment to protecting and improving equality and diversity over the next three years.

We have also committed to undertake annual performance reviews against the objectives set out in this strategy to ensure that these are being delivered and that our approach is having a positive impact on our workforce and our work with communities throughout Stoke-on-Trent.

Valuing diversity and championing equality

The City Council's diverse and talented workforce is its greatest asset and most valuable resource. The skills, knowledge and experience of our c.5,000 employees are essential to delivering our ambitions and vision for our organisation and Stoke-on-Trent. We want to be an employer that people are proud to work for, and where our staff are supported, developed and rewarded in an inclusive way that helps them to excel and to deliver the high-quality services that our residents need.

Having a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture are essential ingredients for delivering sustained organisational success. We are determined to work to ensure that our organisation reflects the diverse mix of age, ethnicity and ability that exist in Stoke-on-Trent, and we will take a lead in ensuring that our recruitment procedures and the job roles that we offer are truly inclusive. We believe that working for Stoke-on-Trent City Council should be characterised by inclusivity and empowerment and a culture that is welcoming to all who would like to join our exceptional #TeamStoke. A culture where everyone feels supported, their voices are heard and they all have equal prospects of progress based only on merit.

One of our equality objectives for the next four years is to improve access to employment for groups which experience barriers to work, and as a large local employer we are determined to lead by example and ensure that our own jobs are accessible to everyone in a fair and open way.

Our Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy

The City Council has developed a strategy to ensure that its workforce has the skills, values and capabilities to be able to deliver excellent services to customers in an agile and responsive way. The aim of the strategy is to ensure the council is an employer people are proud to work for, and where they are supported, developed and rewarded in an inclusive way that helps them to deliver the services that Stoke-on-Trent's residents need.

Key objective: Attracting and retaining talented people

We need to ensure we are attracting the right people with the right skills, knowledge and values to fill our roles. Our objective will be to attract and recruit high calibre candidates who are committed and passionate about working with us and for the city's residents, promoting the council as an exciting team to be part of. Our city is a diverse mix of age, ethnicity and ability and we need to take a lead in ensuring our procedures and roles are inclusive for all when recruiting employees. A diverse workforce and an inclusive culture are essential ingredients for sustained organisational success. #TeamStoke should be one of inclusivity, empowerment and welcoming to all who would like to join our exceptional team and deliver outcomes for the amazing residents we serve every day.

Key objective: Developing an inclusive workforce where all can belong and thrive.

We are determined to develop a diverse and inclusive workforce that is more representative of the fantastic city that we serve, where everyone feels supported, their voices are heard and they all have equal prospects of progress based only on merit. One of our equality objectives is to improve access to employment for groups

which experience barriers to work and as a large local employer we will lead by example and ensure our jobs are accessible to everyone in a fair and open way.

Improving the equality and diversity of our workforce

Over the next three years, the City Council is committed to taking a number of important steps to ensure that it becomes a more equal and diverse employer, and that the organisation fosters a workplace culture that is welcoming, tolerant, supportive and fair. Key actions that we will take include:

- Setting clear targets for increasing the number of people of diverse ethnic minority employed in our workforce and managing actively towards those targets, using tested approaches from other organisations and sectors.
- Engaging with all of our workforce to understand barriers to progress and then actively addressing them.
- Engaging with different communities in our city on a consistent basis to build trust that the council is an organisation which is good to work for.
- Communicating clearly and consistently that we are an organisation that will not tolerate discrimination or prejudice of any sort, and backing this up with consistent actions.
- Recognising groups that may have particular support needs to fulfil their potential at work and making appropriate provision, e.g. carers, people with disabilities, and embracing neurodiversity and access to mental health support.
- Developing proposals to improve our support for staff with disabilities.
- Developing, implementing and reviewing a robust and responsive recruitment procedure to attract the best candidates from all backgrounds for all level of job roles.
- Securing regular feedback so we know what is and isn't working for our workforce to ensure we retain good workers.

Transformation

The City Council has embarked on a process of transformation to ensure that it is able to meet the future needs of our residents and communities, achieve the best possible value for money and respond effectively to new challenges and opportunities.

Key factors which are driving the City Council's Transformation programme include:

- The need to change the way that we provide some local services in order to respond to changes in demand.
- Changing behaviours within society.
- Financial pressures.
- The need to integrate key services more closely to achieve better quality and improved outcomes.

Exploring opportunities to deliver more council services through online channels will be a key theme of the council's transformation programme, along with the adoption of methods of service delivery which will better address the needs of customers.

The Transformation programme will enable the City Council to:

- Provide modern, efficient and accessible services that put residents and customers in control of how and when they interact with us.
- Adapt to the rapidly changing environment and social behaviour.
- Adopt a 'digital first' approach where appropriate.
- Provide locality-based services where they are needed.
- Take a restorative practice approach to customer service.
- Develop a flexible, agile and empowered workforce.
- Make best use of our assets.
- Ensure value for money for residents and taxpayers.

Changing the way in which some services are delivered is likely to have some impacts on the staff who deliver those services and on the people throughout the city who rely on them. It is therefore vitally important that the principles of equality and diversity are applied to ensure that transformation results in positive improvements and that the changes do not widen existing inequalities or inflict disadvantage, injustice or harm on any groups or individuals who are recognised within the Equality Act, 2010.

All transformation projects will be subject to detailed consultation and challenge to ensure that they not only uphold basic standards of fairness, but that the principles of equality and diversity are built into them from the outset. The transformation programme will exemplify the City Council's commitment to these core values and ensure that they play a vital role in shaping the future of local services in Stoke-on-Trent.

Public Sector Equality Duty

As a public body we are bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty contained within the Equality Act 2010. This duty, which has been in force since April 2011, requires that:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;**
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;**
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.**

The Equality Act also stipulates that public authorities must publish a set of equality objectives at least once every four years, as well as information which demonstrates their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

For the purposes of the Equality Act, protected characteristics are:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion or belief;
- Sex;
- Sexual orientation.

Under the Equality Act, discrimination occurs where someone is treated unfairly because of who they are. Discrimination can cause or exacerbate barriers which can prevent or restrict access to employment, education, or essential services or opportunities. Within the workplace, discrimination can mean that employees with one or more protected characteristics feel they are treated differently to colleagues who do not have the same characteristics. Outside the workplace, policies or service delivery changes can result in discrimination where they cause people or groups with protected characteristics to feel excluded, penalised or not treated equally.

The Equality Act protects people from discrimination:

- in the workplace;
- when using public services, such as healthcare or education;
- when using organisations that provide services and goods;
- when using transport;
- when joining a club or association;
- when contacting public bodies (e.g. a council or a government department).

Recent changes to the Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 introduced three additional duties for public authorities:

- To publish equality information (particularly about employees who share protected characteristics, or people with protected characteristics who are affected by an organisation's policies and practices).
- To publish equality objectives.
- To publish gender pay gap information.

These specific public sector equality duties are intended to enable public authorities to demonstrate compliance with the general public sector equality duty. Equality and gender pay gap information must be updated and published at least once every 12 months. Equality objectives are required to be published at least once every four years.

This Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out how the City Council will fulfil its obligations as an employer, as a leading provider and commissioner of services to communities and individuals within Stoke-on-Trent, and within the context of place leadership as an influential and high-profile organisation involved in shaping and implementing citywide policy approaches.

Our equality and diversity commitments

Race equality

Improving race equality at the City Council is one of the organisation's more important priorities. We recognise that we have more work to do in this area and have taken steps to create a more inclusive workplace culture in which the voices of people of diverse ethnic minority are heard and they can play an active role in shaping our workforce policies and culture.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
<p>We have established a new Improving Race Equality Working Group, chaired by the City Director.</p> <p>Membership includes the Council Leader, as well as a representative cross-section of employees from all areas and levels of the organisation.</p> <p>Appropriate and dedicated project support is being developed to support the Working Group, to support improvement and evaluation activities and deliver the Council's aims and vision.</p>	<p>The working group will review council policies, procedures and ways of working with a view to improving recruitment and retention, disciplinary processes and workforce and member development in relation to race equality. It will establish the City Council's direction for making improvements to race equality, set clear objectives that can be monitored in line with the Stronger Together Strategic Plan. Part of the working group's remit will involve promoting its work and raising awareness of race equality issues.</p>
<p>Developed a basket of performance measures and to enable the City Council to understand and highlight specific issues in relation to race equality within the organisation.</p>	<p>Increase the City Council's people of diverse ethnic minority headcount and recruitment rates year on year to improve alignment with the city's working age ethnicity composition, including senior management roles.</p>
<p>Agreed a meaningful plan including a set of targeted actions to reduce discrepancies between people of diverse ethnic minority and white employees within the City Council's workforce within the next five years.</p>	<p>Ensure that people of diverse ethnic minority are no more likely than white employees to leave the City Council or be involved in disciplinary, grievance or capability disputes.</p>
<p>Developed a reporting mechanism to provide regular performance updates on race equality-related workforce issues.</p>	<p>Increase the number of management and leadership learning and development opportunities attended by staff who are people of diverse ethnic minority.</p>
<p>Undertaken work to develop new race equality standards across our Adult Social Care and Children and Family Services directorates to ensure that all residents who come into contact with our services receive the same care and respect, regardless of their ethnicity.</p>	<p>Embed these standards throughout our services and review performance against them to ensure that we are meeting our race equality obligations to our residents.</p>

LGBTQIA+

Alongside race equality, LGBTQIA+ is the second area which the City Council is taking forward as an equality and diversity priority. We want to ensure that we are providing a workplace where individuals can feel comfortable enough to bring their whole selves to work each day, rather than concealing elements of their personality from colleagues or managers due to fear of discrimination or harassment. Sex, gender reassignment and sexual orientation are all protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty. This duty requires public authorities to consciously consider the needs and rights of LGBTQIA+ colleagues and members of the public who use our services.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
The City Council has carried out workforce consultations to try to determine how many employees regard themselves as LGBTQIA+ in order to better understand their needs and improve employee engagement in relation to equality and diversity issues.	Establish a LGBTQIA+ employee network within the organisation to help raise awareness of workforce issues, improve understanding and scrutinise policies, processes and decisions to help identify areas for improvement and embed new ways of working throughout the organisation.
Detailed plans have been developed for the establishment of a LGBTQIA+ employee network to help create a more inclusive and welcoming working culture for LGBTQIA+ staff.	Consult with LGBTQIA+ staff on a range of workforce-related issues through the employee network.
	Transform the experience of LGBTQIA+ employees through the provision of peer-to-peer support, improved awareness throughout the wider workforce and the ability to shape workforce policies and processes.

Disability

The City Council is committed to becoming a disability confident employer and encouraging local partners and stakeholders to commit to achieving this vital goal. One of the equalities objectives for the Council and the wider city is to improve access to employment for groups which experience barriers to work. It will be important to ensure that staff with disabilities can talk about their experiences and be heard, so that we can better meet their needs. For this reason, we are looking to establish a dedicated forum which will work in a similar way to the existing Race Equality Group and LGBTQIA+ employee network.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
Appointed a lead assistant director who will be responsible for driving progress around disability-related equality issues.	We are exploring the possibility of creating a group or network to represent the interests, views and concerns of disabled employees.
Worked with registered charity Landau on how we can better meet the workplace needs of employees and job candidates with physical and learning disabilities.	The City Council will build on its disability confident employer work to achieve level three accreditation in this area through its partnership with Landau.
The City Council has signed up to Landau's 'We See You' workplace pledge, which is aimed at improving workplace diversity and inclusion in relation to people with disabilities.	The City Council will adopt a 'talent first, not disability' attitude to recruitment and retention and the wider workplace culture to create equal employment opportunities.
The City Council is a level two disability confident employer, supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and providing relevant training to staff and managers.	We will strive to encourage other local employers to adopt similar approaches in their recruitment and treatment of disabled employees.
The Living My Best Life strategy will offer people in Stoke-on-Trent who have a learning disability equal access to training and employment opportunities.	We will deliver the strategy to support more people with learning disabilities to secure rewarding and sustainable employment and access to quality housing and transport.
The City Council has developed the Inclusion Strategy for Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (2021-2024).	Implementing the strategy will ensure services are inclusive and will provide children with additional needs the same opportunities as those without need.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
<p>The Joint Enterprise Team (JET) currently works with Adult Social Care services to offer a supported employment service to vulnerable adults. Individuals who express an interest in meaningful employment are supported to learn and gain new skills which will put them in a better position to apply for and secure suitable roles.</p>	<p>A key development area for Adult Social Care services over the next three years is to increase the number of employment opportunities available to people with a learning disability, mental health and other disadvantaged groups. The remodelling of our day opportunities strategy looks to build on existing provision and develop greater partnership work – both in terms of expansion to include additional departments of the City Council, as well as our work with external partners to identify suitable placements to promote equality and diversity in the workforce. We hope to secure funding from the DWP during 2022/23 to enable us to further develop and expand our supported employment model so that we can enable more individuals with disabilities to fulfil their ambition of finding and securing meaningful paid employment in the city.</p>
<p>Learning Disability day opportunity services support adults with various activities to prepare disadvantaged groups for work through various volunteering opportunities, training and skills development to maximise independence and build confidence.</p>	
<p>Mental Health day opportunities promote independent living and increase employment skills for people with functional Mental Health difficulties. The Growthpoint project uses an allotments site to provide training in developing nursery skills, landscape gardening and allotment management. Graduates from the Open College certified scheme secure paid employment as gardeners, with revenue provided by the sale of allotment produce.</p>	

Age

The City Council is already working across a number of areas to make the organisation and the city more age-friendly and to improve the lives of older people. While much of this work has been aimed at tackling health inequalities and outcomes within the local population, we are equally determined to apply the same focus and determination to becoming a more age-friendly employer, eradicating discrimination and ensuring that the Council benefits from the collective experience and knowledge that older workers bring to a multitude of essential roles.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
<p>In 2014 the City Council successfully enrolled Stoke-on-Trent into the World Health Organisation's global network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities.</p> <p>In 2018 the City Council officially signed up to the Age Friendly Charter which pledges to value and respect older people and recognise the diverse roles that older people have in the city and all that they bring to Stoke-on-Trent.</p>	<p>We will work closely with our partners to implement the citywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which will address persistent inequalities affecting older people living in Stoke-on-Trent. The strategy includes the theme 'Age Well', comprising the priorities 'Living well into old age' and 'Providing the best end of life care'. The strategy aims to ensure that older people have a voice in the design and delivery of services related to ageing, and that they receive appropriate personalised care according to their needs and circumstances. We will support residents to stay healthy for as long as possible, live well and have fulfilling lives into old age.</p>
<p>The City Council has carried out a review of its retirement policy to provide greater flexibility to staff.</p>	<p>Implementing the new policy will mean that workers who wish to take advantage of flexible retirement no longer have to reduce their working week by 40 per cent, and can opt for a 20 per cent reduction instead.</p>
<p>The City Council has established the Stoke-on-Trent Age-Friendly Board in partnership with Staffordshire Housing to bring together community volunteers and support organisations to help improve the lives of older people living in the city and make Stoke-on-Trent a wonderful place for older people to live.</p>	

Disadvantage

Improving life chances for people in Stoke-on-Trent is one of the City Council's key priorities, and a central pillar of our Levelling Up ambitions for the city. This means providing equality of opportunity to everyone, regardless of their background or upbringing, and helping to equip people with the skills and abilities to capitalise on opportunities. As a major employer, it's vital that we play our full part in honouring this commitment by going out of our way to create additional, meaningful opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enable them to thrive and fulfil their potential.

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
Developed the Room to Grow strategy to ensure that children and young people are able to live happy, safe and healthy lives and fulfil their potential, regardless of their circumstances or background.	We will work together across all council services to help improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people in the city, and for looked after children and care leavers in particular.
Developed the Community Cohesion Strategy (2020-24) to create stronger, more cohesive communities where everyone can play their part in making the city a safe, prosperous and welcoming place.	We will challenge racism, prejudice and inequality wherever we see it outside of our own organisation and support others to do the same in order to help make Stoke-on-Trent a fairer, more equal city for everyone.
The Improving Education Strategy aims to reduce disparities in educational attainment between groups from different social and economic backgrounds.	We will work to improve schools' performance and ensure that our education system prepares all children and young people to become confident and responsible adult citizens.
The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021-24) will address inequalities which affect health and wellbeing outcomes for people from different areas and backgrounds, including households living in poverty and people with disabilities.	We will work with partners to implement the strategy and monitor the effectiveness of health and wellbeing initiatives in terms of their ability to improve health outcomes for residents of all ages and backgrounds.
The City Council has developed a 'Levelling Up' prospectus to address persistent gaps to other parts of the UK in education, skills, economic growth, infrastructure investment, productivity and health outcomes.	We will work with partners and Central Government to implement the projects and proposals set out in the prospectus, address inequalities and close the existing gaps to the rest of the UK.

Other Equality and Diversity Issues

What we have already done	What we will do before 2025
A new Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy has been developed to ensure that the City Council is seen as an employer of choice through the work we do and the benefits we offer all of our current and prospective employees.	Work with staff, managers and elected members to implement the strategy and deliver on our commitments in relation to equality and diversity and ensuring that the City Council is a truly inclusive employer.
The City Council has developed and published a refreshed set of Equality Objectives for the period 2021-2025.	We will work in partnership with residents, communities and employers throughout Stoke-on-Trent to achieve our Equality Objectives.
An online Equality Hub has been developed within the City Council intranet site to provide staff with relevant contacts and information on a range of equality and diversity topics.	Maintain and update the Equality Hub to ensure that it remains relevant and is an effective resource for improving awareness of equality and diversity issues within the City Council.
Created a number of additional training courses focusing on equality and diversity, including a new induction course on respect and inclusion.	Review, update and expand the training on offer to our staff, managers and elected members to ensure that it is relevant and consistent.
Undertaken a review of equality impact assessments and how they are used within the City Council.	Use equality impact assessments to ensure that new policies and key decisions do not adversely affect groups or individuals who have protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act.
Committed to reviewing and improving our approach to neurodiversity within the workplace to prevent discrimination and ensure that neurodivergent staff are adequately supported to do their jobs well.	Develop a neurodiversity policy and associated action plan for the organisation.
Commenced work to improve the inclusiveness, awareness and support that we can offer as an employer to workers from different faith groups.	Develop a calendar-based approach to recognising important faith-related events and offering appropriate acknowledgement and support (e.g. health advice to Muslim staff who are fasting during Ramadan).



City of
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