



Equality & Diversity
in Local Councils



THE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY

2024 - 2027







FOREWORD

THIS STRATEGY SETS OUT OUR VISION FOR TACKLING INEQUALITIES, FOSTERING GOOD RELATIONS ACROSS OUR COMMUNITIES AND RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTIONS THAT PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS MAKE TO LIFE ACROSS NORTHERN IRELAND.

Our action plan sets out how we will deliver these ambitions. It demonstrates the efforts we will undertake to build an inclusive culture within our workforce and has a positive impact on the communities we serve. It shows how we will shape our services which actively address inequality and exclusion, and proactively promotes building good relations.

We recognise that we can only deliver this Strategy by working together with all our stakeholders. That is why we have developed this Strategy in consultation with our partners, including the Diversity Ambassadors. We are committed to working with our partners to enhance equality and fairness.

This updated Strategy and Action Plan is the next step on our journey to creating an inclusive local government sector, which works for all. We will achieve our vision through strong leadership and ownership of this Strategy and accountability for it at all levels.

Chair, Local Government Equality and Diversity Group

BACKGROUND

The Equality and Diversity Group was established to prioritise and influence equality, good relations and diversity initiatives across local government. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy sets out the direction and focus for Councils in Northern Ireland. It was first launched in 2011 and has been refreshed every three to four years.

This revised Strategy builds on what we have learnt. It also takes account of internal and external changes and constraints, including those caused by the global pandemic in 2020, and outlines our EDI priorities leading to 2027.

The refresh has been informed by consultation with partners. Findings have been considered and addressed. The outcome includes a continued focus on supporting and assisting Councils to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion as a Civic Leader, an Employer, and Service Provider.





OUR APPROACH

Set out below is the moral, legal and business case for EDI, our objectives and the tools for their delivery, and responsibilities for implementation. Together they reflect a strategic, joined up and flexible approach to EDI for local government.

The United Nations World Social Report (2020) identified that 'socio-economic disadvantage and inequality plays a significant role in systemic discrimination and in holding people back and is often given limited attention.' In this Strategy we commit to addressing this and developing a plan to do so rather than just acknowledging it. This will support greater inclusion across our workforce and wider opportunities for access and engagement across our service delivery where it is possible to do so.

MORAL CASE

We believe that it is important to value everyone and to be empathetic, fair and respectful and inclusive. This holds for Elected Members, staff, contractors, or contributors to our work, irrespective of background, characteristics or attributes.

Investing in and being committed to EDI is the right thing to do from many perspectives, including the strong alignment with human rights and social justice but particularly because of local government's vision as a civic leader.

LEGAL CASE

Local government has a number of legal obligations relating to equality, diversity and inclusion¹. Whilst it is our statutory responsibility to meet these duties, we believe it is important to go beyond them and challenge ourselves to constantly improve.

We are committed to supporting Councils to meet their legal obligations including Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and other relevant legislation, codes of practice and guidance which are important reference points and steer our approach. We will encourage local government to go further in order to fulfil our vision of a diverse and inclusive local government sector.

BUSINESS CASE

Mainstreaming EDI principles and practices is important for service delivery, how we work and for our organisational culture. It supports us to:

- *Deliver effective good relations.*
- *Maintain a strong local government brand.*
- *Maximise and retain valued skills, knowledge and expertise.*
- *Have committed and motivated staff who feel fairly treated, respected and included. This results in greater job satisfaction, better employment relations, fewer grievances and enables individuals to fully focus on utilising their skills and talents in the workplace.*
- *Continue to nurture creativity, innovation and flexibility and spot new opportunities to work with others, as well as new inclusive approaches and sources of support which facilitate meaningful participation and other benefits.*
- *Remain relevant and dynamic and achieve impact and sustainability. This will come from engaging with the Diversity Ambassadors addressing perspectives, needs, abilities, and opportunities.*
- *Effectively manage risk by considering the potential impact of policies, practices, programmes, activities, events, and service delivery on different groups. This allows us to promote good relations and to mitigate against potential discrimination.*

¹ Local Councils in Northern Ireland, in their roles as **employers** and as **service providers** are obliged to comply with a number of laws that seek to promote equality of opportunity by banning unlawful discrimination and harassment. The laws are:

- *Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970*
- *Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976*
- *Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*
- *Race Relations (NI) Order 1997*
- *Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003*
- *Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006*
- *Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006*



OUR OBJECTIVES

Three key objectives underpin our EDI Strategy. They are set out below, the Action Plan (attached as Appendix 1) details the specific tools and actions that will determine the next phase of our work up to 2027.

1. AN INCLUSIVE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Our goal is to ensure that Councils are supported to have inclusive organisational cultures which commit to treating everyone with dignity; make decisions drawing on different perspectives, experiences and evidence-based decision making, involve, listen to and seek to learn from a wide range of people and strive to nurture a sense of belonging and ensure everyone can meaningfully participate.

2. DEVELOPING CAPABILITY AND LEADERS

Leaders exist in different roles and particularly, but not exclusively, in senior positions. They are crucial in driving progress, achieving fairness, promoting inclusion, ensuring anti-racism, anti-sectarianism and enhancing working culture, reputation and impact.

Our objective has an emphasis on nurturing and developing engagement, role models, and leadership capability in EDI. The result will be a local government sector with more confident, competent and committed leaders, particularly at senior levels, including Elected Members.

3. MEASURING PERFORMANCE, IMPACT AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Tracking the progress of our Strategy is crucial. Increasingly we want to take an evidence informed approach so that resources and priorities are focused where they are most needed, risk is managed, and good practice is widely shared.

RESOURCING AND COSTS

The EDI Strategy will be fully owned by local government, SOLACE led, Equality and Diversity Group and managed by the Local Government Staff Commission (the Commission). The Equality and Diversity Group will review the Strategy Objectives and the Commission will allocate the financial and staff resources required to implement them.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The membership of the Equality and Diversity Group will continue to provide direction and support to local government on progress towards mainstreaming EDI.

The Group will continue to share responsibility and require accountability, particularly from those with influence and authority, including NILGA, SOLACE, PPMA, trade unions and stakeholders. Their support for this Strategy and commitment to it through their behaviours, attitudes and effective use of resources will make a critical difference.

The Diversity Ambassadors also have a crucial role to ensure that all good relations work and activities mainstreams EDI consistently to help bring about the inclusive culture local government aspires to.

Next review November 2025.



APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

ACTION PLAN 2024 - 2027

AIM	FOCUS	TOOLS AND SUPPORT
Objective: An inclusive organisational culture		
Addressing under representation and improve inclusion of ethnic staff and disabled people in our workforce, particularly, but not only at leadership levels.	<p>Improve data capture and recording to establish the baseline and monitor performance.</p> <p>Improve attraction and recruitment processes, especially from underrepresented groups.</p> <p>Support Councils to invest in their current workforce and provide specific opportunities for development and progression.</p>	<p>Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2023 Equality Baseline and Impact Study.</p> <p>Initiate a pilot Action Plan for Recruitment and Selection for Councils under the auspices of the Talent Management Strategy.</p> <p>Continue to implement the regional Talent Management Strategy, including BOOST II Mentoring Programme.</p>
Supporting Councils to nurture an organisational culture where Members and staff feel respected and comfortable being themselves, free from discrimination. This includes but is not limited to racism in its different forms, exclusion, offensive behaviour, harassment or bullying, need to address sectarianism and work towards creating a harmonious working environment.	<p>Develop model policies and guidance for Councils.</p> <p>Support Councils to align EDI internally and how EDI is reflected and addressed in the delivery of services.</p> <p>Ensure health and wellbeing initiatives are promoted and facilitated across local government.</p> <p>Continue to broaden our relationship with LGBTQIA+ organisations and use their knowledge and experience to shape our work.</p>	<p>There will be expanded opportunities to participate and contribute to the Statutory Duty Network, and Talent Management Group.</p> <p>Learning and development interventions, including mentoring and awareness sessions.</p> <p>Specific EDI training for Diversity Ambassadors.</p> <p>New approaches to inform and achieve informal conflict resolution and support a constructive giving and receiving feedback culture, at all levels including mediation, and fostering a culture of continuous learning.</p>



AIM	FOCUS	TOOLS AND SUPPORT
Objective: Developing capability and leaders		
Providing support to Councils increase accountability so that leaders at all levels are both supported in and measured against their contribution to EDI.	<p>Work in partnership with NILGA to include an EDI category in the Local Government Awards.</p> <p>Initiate a programme to better define good relations that is relevant to local government.</p> <p>Work in partnership with the Money and Pensions Service to introduce the Themes within the UK Strategy for Financial Wellbeing.</p>	<p>Continue to work in liaison with NILGA to contribute to the Elected Member Development Charter and the regional Member Development Programme.</p> <p>Liaise with relevant stakeholders to define good relations.</p> <p>Diversity Ambassadors designated, supported and resourced for all local government organisations.</p>
Promoting and sharing internal and external facing international EDI work and learning with Councils	Deliver a programme of best practice events and information sessions for Diversity Ambassadors to learn from each other and subject matter experts.	EDI learning and development activities for leaders, to raise awareness and promote behaviour change, including unconscious bias, anti-racism, anti-sectarianism effective people management.
Greater attention to EDI deliverables and personal development objectives, so they are SMART, stretching and ensure accountability for change, to strengthen and ultimately achieve inclusion and a sense of belonging.	Use data to identify areas of disparity and implement action to address any disparity.	<p>A co-design approach with Councils to provide guidance to support and strengthen EDI performance deliverables and development objectives to measure progress.</p> <p>Develop interventions that support accountability to help track this area and achieve EDI strategic objectives.</p> <p>Relaunch the Section 75 Leadership in Local Councils Guidance.</p>

AIM	FOCUS	TOOLS AND SUPPORT
Objective: Measuring performance, impact and legal compliance		
Ensuring the local government Equality and Diversity Group measure their performance towards their vision, progress against objectives and the extent and quality of the contribution and distinct impact we aim to make through EDI.	Be transparent in our policies and processes by communicating what we are doing.	Develop a comprehensive EDI data dashboard that is tracked and disseminated, including through a performance review process to review performance, interrogate data and insights and ensure that the Group is meeting and/or exceeding EDI objectives.
Ensuring we support Councils to comply with legal obligations and where possible and appropriate go beyond the legal minimum.	<p>EDI related risks will be anticipated and well managed.</p> <p>Introduce measures to enable Councils to go beyond statutory requirements to measure, monitor and share equality and diversity data to drive diversity plans and demonstrate the impact of their work on EDI.</p> <p>Support Councils to address and reduce the gender pay gap.</p>	<p>Support the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Framework which details each Council's:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statement of intent</i> • <i>Compliance with equality and good relations and diversity obligations.</i> <p>A few examples of how to support the implementation of the Equality and Diversity Framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nominated Diversity Ambassadors both Members and officers in individual Councils</i> • <i>Embed EDI into Recruitment and Selection training</i> • <i>Partner with external EDI Organisations to gain insight and develop best practice</i> • <i>Recognise and celebrate Diversity.</i> <p>Develop a programme in partnership with the Equality Commission to support Councils to implement the 'Every Customer Counts' initiative.</p> <p>Develop a reporting mechanism to effectively measure the Gender Pay Gap.</p>



