EDI

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
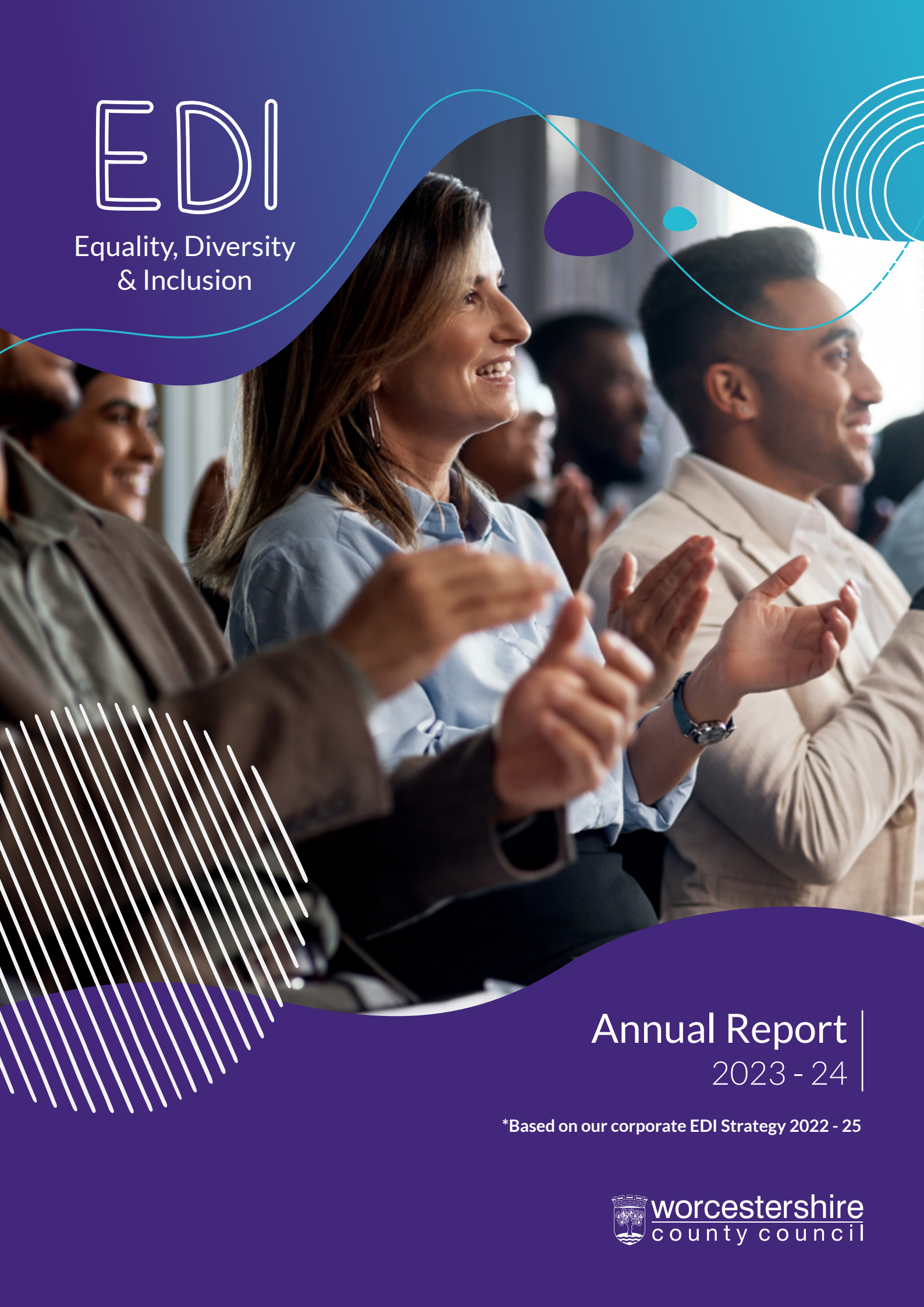
Annual Report

2023 - 24

*Based on our corporate EDI Strategy 2022 - 25

worcestershire
county council

Contents

Introduction

As part of our duties under The Equality Act (2010), Worcestershire County Council is required to produce and publish an annual report outlining the progress that we have made against our objectives which are set out in our EDI Strategy 2022-25.

This report sets out a summary of the work undertaken in the second year of delivery against our objectives and outcomes, an update on work to meet each objective and finally, our workforce equality data, which is also a publishing requirement under The Equality Act (2010).

During the year, progress against our objectives is monitored quarterly by our Strategic Diversity Leadership Group. This group is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership includes Assistant Directors from: Human Resources, Digital and Communication; Adults and Communities; Children's Services; Economy and Infrastructure; and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

At Worcestershire County Council (WCC), we believe that everyone deserves a voice. The current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy is the benchmark for our ongoing work and priorities. Our EDI Strategy has been successfully embedded across the organisation, and had some powerful impacts since its launch in September 2022.

With significant changes to the restructuring of the council and impact on our workforce, several external factors including moving colleagues and operations from County Hall, as well as some key programmes of work and initiatives driven by the strategy, we agreed to extend our current strategy to September 2025. This decision allows us to continue our commitment to the objectives in place, carry on with the important work being delivered in our Directorate Equality Groups, and importantly, gives us an opportunity to change our approach for the development of our next strategy.

We expect to engage, consult and co-produce further work. We have learnt a great deal about how we can improve and build on our strategy and will combine that with input from stakeholders. This supports our goals of better inclusion and better outcomes for our colleagues and community in Worcestershire. This approach to the new EDI Strategy development ensures we produce a meaningful plan that is aligned with our other strategic works, and ready for September 2025.

The EDI Strategy does not sit alone, but complements and supports other relevant work streams such as our Workforce Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, SEND Strategy and plans, and a wide range of other projects.

We are working hard to create an environment where everyone feels included and valued. We celebrate diversity, continue to challenge discrimination and hold ourselves accountable for making positive change.

Through our EDI work and council values, and with close links and collaborative work through our linked strategies, we are creating and driving a culture of inclusion and respect.

A council decision by our Chief Officer Group in 2023 agreed to refocus and prioritise the efforts of this work, by carefully reviewing and assessing the needs to be compliant, accountable, and progress the work at pace in line with other local authorities.

It was agreed that the council provide base budget funding for a role to lead and enhance the EDI work, ensuring consistent expertise and resource to a position of EDI Lead. This positive step has meant we can increase, improve and scrutinise our work from a regulatory, strategic and operational point of view, allowing our aspirations for better inclusion county wide, and a collaborative approach across the council.

We are working hard to create an environment where everyone feels included and valued. We celebrate diversity, continue to challenge discrimination and hold ourselves accountable for making positive change. Through our EDI work and council values, and with close links and collaborative work through our Workforce Strategy, we are creating and driving a culture of inclusion and respect.

"We are committed to delivering our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and embedding equality into everything we do."

We are proud to share this annual report detailing some of our commitments and examples of the work we are doing to break down barriers and promote inclusion across the county.

The Public Sector Equality Duty is set out within The Equality Act 2010. Details and links to further information can be found in the Supporting Documents section of this report.

"There is no standard legal definition of 'due regard', although various court cases have clarified the general duty and what 'due regard' means.

Advancing equal opportunities means:

• Removing or reduce the disadvantage that people with protected characteristics face

• Taking steps to meet the specific needs of people with protected characteristics

• Encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate fully in all activities, especially when they are underrepresented

The General Duties outlined state public authorities have 'due regard' to the need to:

• Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any ither conduct prohibited within The Equality Act 2010

• Advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who don't

• Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't

"Fostering good relations means you are taking action to reduce prejudice and increase understanding between different groups of people".

The nine protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, race, sex, and sexual orientation.

We acknowledge that whilst we have a strong foundation of work embedded across the first two years of the strategy, this forms the basis of continually ongoing work to reach our objectives, and challenges continue to arise. Those challenges are met with enthusiasm, passion, commitment and resource to fully and effectively implement the changes we want to see.

Joint statement from our Assistant Director for HR, Digital and Communications, and EDI Lead:

❝ We have continued our work towards improvements in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) during the past year. Through the reporting period of September 2023 to September 2024, the council has seen widespread change and transformation, along with a challenging political climate and budget constraints. Our staff and communities face challenges such as the cost of living, cultural and social tensions, managing wellbeing, access to equitable provision of services, and of course, significant global events impacting local communities and families.

This report highlights the work from September 2023 to September 2024, and we have made some important changes during this time. We have had successes, good news stories and positive impacts we can measure, and we have also been met with challenges. Our aim remains the priority of EDI and working with people to actively listen to and understand gaps in both provision, equity, accessibility and areas where we can enhance the programmes and frameworks we have put in place.

Due to transformation work and the council changes, we decided to extend our current strategy until September 2025. This allows us to review and assess the work effectively, and realign our framework, making sure the next phase of strategic EDI work is fit for the future and fair.

Our training, recruitment, data collection, processes and collaboration have seen positive action taken, employee relations strengthened, and service users engaged in a variety of methods, allowing us to work and encourage participation in ways that are accessible for those we support or provide services to.

Our commitment is clear, and we are ambitious about reaching our goals and objectives published in our strategy. The focus on not only meeting our statutory duties, and complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, but making progress that is meaningful and felt by colleagues and citizens across the county. ❞

> " We are working hard to create an environment where everyone feels included and valued. "

Aerial photo of Wildwood, Image supplied by GJS Dillon

Who is Worcestershire?

The below information data sets are the results of the county of Worcestershire, from the ONS Census 2021. The findings and additional, sub-category detail can be found online via our website, or government websites. Our Public Health team have shared the data online and this can be viewed in a number of ways, including ward profile demographic detail.

Age

Age Category	0-17	18-24	25-44	45-64	65-74	75-84	85 plus
Total Age	117,938	41,423	140,763	165,515	73,144	47,133	17,759
% of Worcestershire	19.5%	6.9%	23.3%	27.4%	12.1%	7.8%	2.9%

**Worcestershire Age Compared to West Midlands and England Age Breakdown**
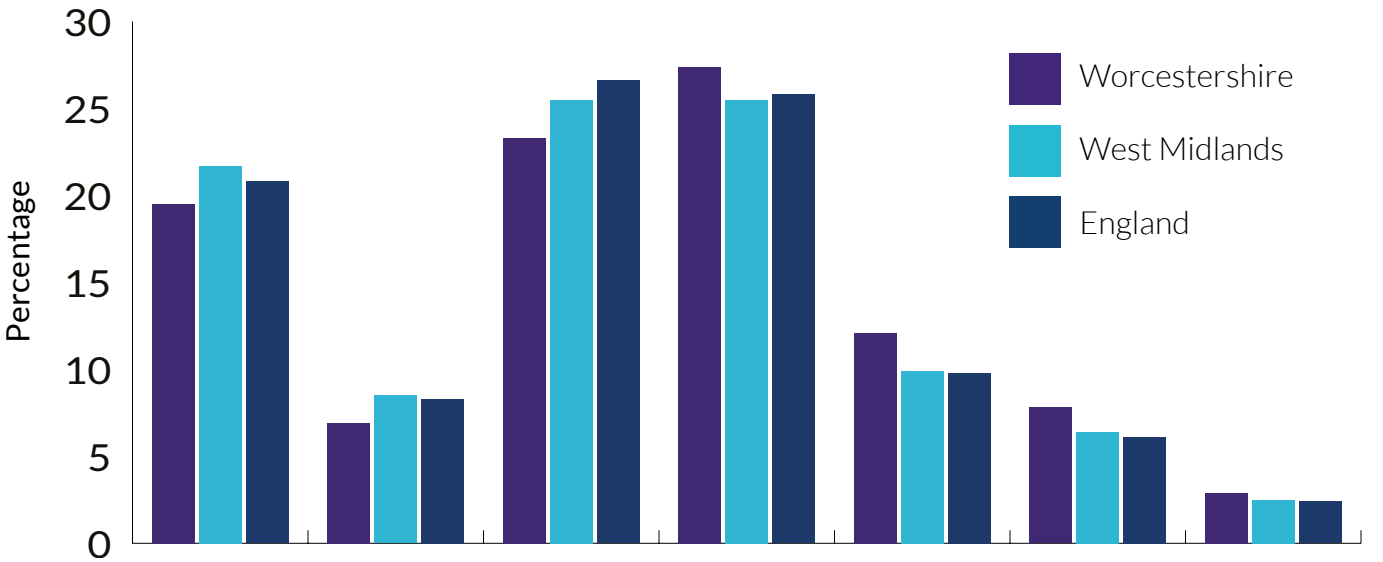
Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: **Bangladeshi**	0.3%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: **Chinese**	0.3%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: **Indian**	0.9%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: **Pakistani**	1.1%
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: **Other Asian**	0.5%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: **African**	0.3%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: **Caribbean**	0.3%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: **Other Black**	0.1%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: **White and Asian**	0.6%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: **White and Black African**	0.2%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: **White and Black Caribbean**	0.7%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: **Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups**	0.4%
White: **English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British**	88.7%
White: **Irish**	0.6%
White: **Gypsy or Irish Traveller**	0.3%
White: **Roma**	0.1%
White: **Other White**	4.2%
Other ethnic group: **Arab**	0.1%
Other ethnic group: **Any other ethnic group**	0.5%

Disability

Disability	Percentage
Not disabled under the Equality Act: No long term physical or mental health conditions	74.3%
Not disabled under the Equality Act: Has long term physical or mental health condition but day-to-day activities are not limited	7.8%
Disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a little	10.8%
Disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a lot	7.2%
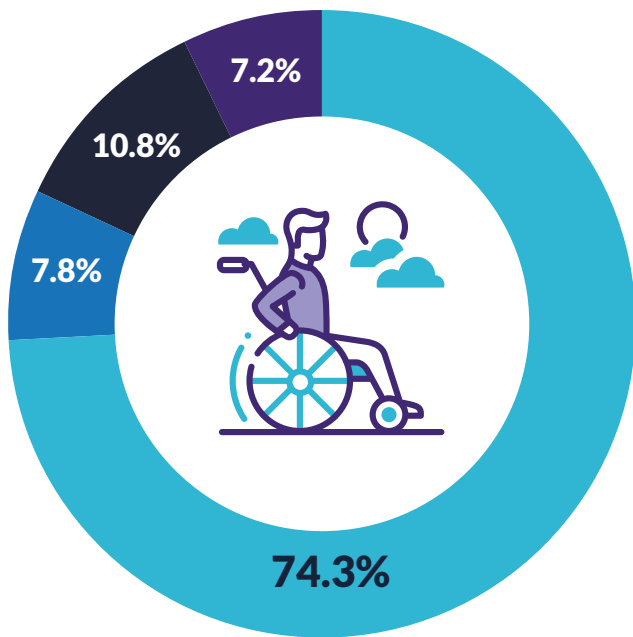
Disability profile in Worcestershire
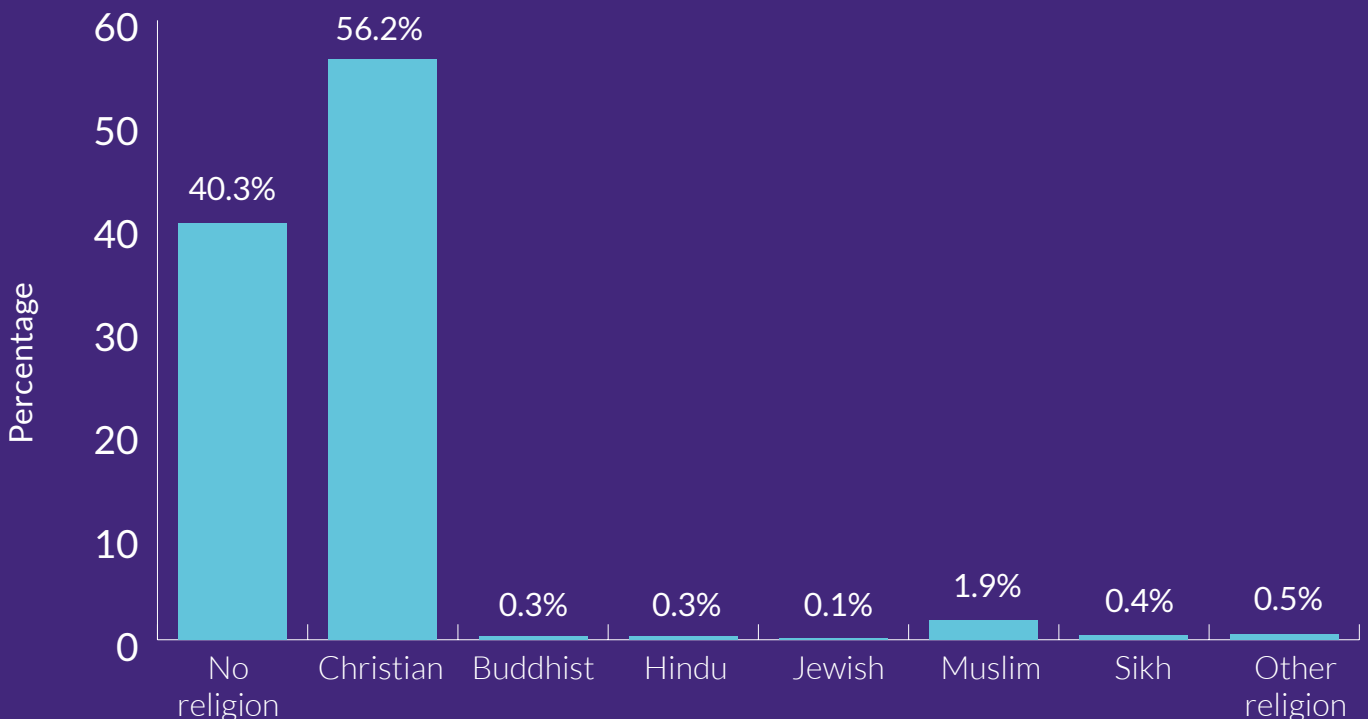
- Not disabled under the Equality Act: No long term physical or mental health conditions
- Not disabled under the Equality Act: Has long term physical or mental health condition but day-to-day activities are not limited
- Disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a little
- Disabled under the Equality Act: Day-to-day activities limited a lot

7.2%
10.8%
7.8%
74.3%

Religion and Belief

40.3% 56.2% 0.3% 0.3% 0.1% 1.9% 0.4% 0.5%

No religion | Christian | Buddhist | Hindu | Jewish | Muslim | Sikh | Other religion

Percentage

Sex profile in Worcestershire

■ Male

■ Female

Sex	Percentage
Male	51%
Female	49%

Gender Identity

| Gender Identity	Percentage
Gender identity the same as sex registered at birth	94.4%
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth but no specific identity given	0.1%
Trans woman	0.1%
Trans man	0.1%
All other gender identities	0.1%
Not Answered	5.2%

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Marriage and Civil Partnership	Percentage
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	32.5%
Married: **Opposite sex**	48%
Married: **Same sex**	0.2%
In a registered civil partnership: **Opposite sex**	0.1%
In a registered civil partnership: **Same sex**	0.1%
Separated, but still married	2.1%
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	0%
Divorced	10%
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	0%
Widowed	6.9%
Survivng partner from civil partnership	0%

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Percentage
Straight or Heterosexual	91.0%
Gay or Lesbian	1.2%
Bisexual	1.0%
All other sexual orientations	0.2%
Not answered	6.6%

0.2%

1.0%

1.2%

6.6%

91.0%
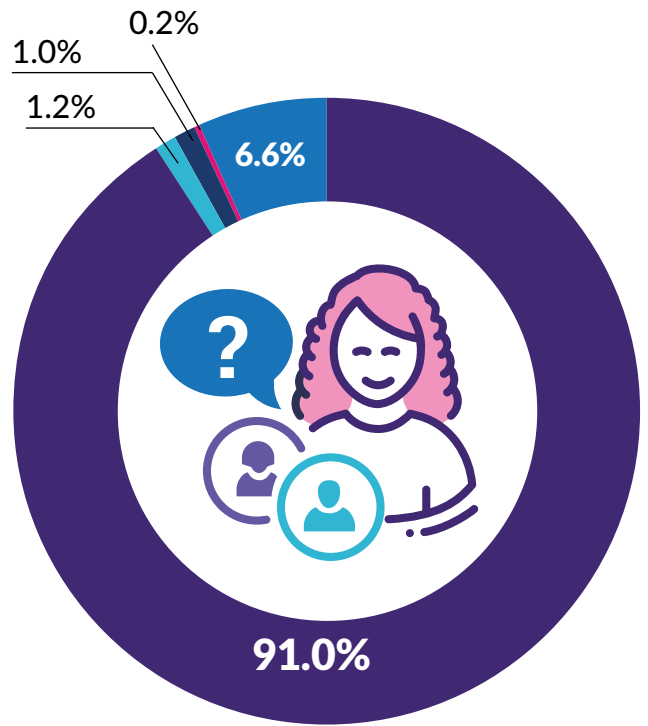
Data captured within the census gives a nationally recognised overview of those who responded to its survey in Worcestershire. However, we cannot state that it is fully representative as the response rate for the census completion or return was not 100%. It is considered by the Office for National Statistics and centralised government, that this data listed is reflective and useful for a range of purposes and offers the best available insight into the demographic makeup of the area, and the UK in general terms.

Equality Objectives

- Engaging and encouraging participation between the communities we serve and Council services and staff.

- Support training, development and employment initiatives; countywide.

- Colleagues contribute, collaborate and drive inclusion forward.

Equality Objective 1:
Build a resilient, empowered and engaged community that thrives in all of Worcestershire.

Developing our Worcestershire community underpins everything we do at the Council, and our EDI work is no different. We have developed learning and employment opportunities for our residents, ranging from adult learning services, accessible apprenticeships, career advice and additional training.

This complements our activities to support and empower our county, through library programmes, carer support, and our councillors' use of funds. Finally, a key pillar of our engagement with Worcestershire is how we communicate with our residents, and we have continued to develop our methods and content this year.

Learning Services have progressed this year in their support of vulnerable communities in need of accessible, local learning opportunities. The service has expanded their course offering to better meet the interests of young female residents. Compared to a 91.4% male student body in 2021-2022, the service now supports a more balanced representation of 48.4% male and 51.6% female students.

The service has continued to offer closely tailored support to marginalised groups in Worcestershire, and has seen successful case studies with transgender, disabled and refugee students.

Careers Worcestershire, who support individuals aged 16-24, provided 708 young people with targeted career advice and support. They found that 19% of their participants identified as having a disability, and 55% were from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, showing that they are effectively engaging underrepresented groups in the county.

Throughout the county, the INclusive Worcestershire programme supports employers to meet the needs of individuals with health conditions looking to re-enter the workforce. The new INclusive Worcestershire Leaders scheme has engaged 35 businesses to help raise awareness, improve inclusion practices, and bridge the gap between levels of the Disability Confident Employers scheme, making the county a better place to work for disabled people and others with long-term conditions.

Employers achieve leadership by demonstrating their commitment to workplace inclusion, such as by having an EDI Lead, EDI Strategy, job carving and enabling reasonable adjustments at all levels for staff and interviewees. Inclusive employers are included on an interactive map, hosted on the Skills 4 Worcestershire careers website, to enable residents to benefit from the scheme directly.

Alongside our existing Accessible Apprenticeships, we launched a new Supported Internship programme in September 2023.

Seven students completed supported internships in a variety of roles at Worcestershire Royal Hospital. This programme, coordinated with Project Search, targets support for young people with an EHCP, and broadens their opportunities as they transition into work. The council provides ongoing job coaching and teaching to develop employable skills and behaviours for participants, as well as practical support with new tasks and relationships. This initiative will continue as a year-long Supported Internship programme in 2024, and has already led to permanent positions for some participants.

The Council also involved Worcestershire organisations in our Worcestershire Care Leavers Covenant (WCLC) at the end of September 2023. The WCLC initiative is part of the national Care Leavers Covenant programme, which aims to empower and support care leavers aged 16 to 25 in the county. Care leavers often face significant challenges compared to their peers, being likely to struggle more with finding meaningful employment, independent living, emotional confidence, and financial and domestic management skills. The Covenant now offers over 2,000 opportunities for Care Leavers to access training, employment, and holistic support.

To further support the wellbeing of Worcestershire, the Council partly or fully funded Orange Button training for many volunteers through the reporting period. Through our offer of funded Suicide Prevention Training, we contributed to the development of the programme, which trains people to support those having suicidal thoughts. The scheme launched in 2022, and in July 2024, we hit a milestone 650 Orange Button wearers across Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and the scheme continues to welcome new participants.

Support for male carers was identified as an area to develop this year, and in February we launched Men Care Too Walk and Talk. After research and engagement with our local carer community, we created the group for any male parent or carer to join others on a monthly basis to chat and share experiences.

A new Complaints Handling Code was developed in the Economy and Infrastructure directorate, which is due to launch in 2025.

The Code places new importance on capturing when complaints have relevant equality information, and addressing them with those additional considerations in mind.

Business Support colleagues will also help with monitoring when equality and inclusion factors into the directorate's work. This will support our teams in equitably addressing issues where they arise.

In September 2023, Cabinet approved our new Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This launched an ambitious programme of work that combines the voices of our parent carers, young people and professionals. It guides the work of our Children's Services until 2026 and prioritises:

- timely and effective identification and assessment of SEND

- sufficient and effective SEND provision

- awareness and understanding of SEND within local communities

- improved outcomes for young people with SEND as a result of effective planning, preparation for adulthood and better coordination of service delivery to ensure positive transitions as they progress through their education

- positive outcomes for children and young people (CYP) with autism and the support required to enable this is in place

- actively promoting emotional health and wellbeing for CYP with SEND and their families, and effective targeted and specialist support for those CYP at risk of, or experiencing difficulties

The new strategy provides a route for us to ensure we are giving the best support to our young residents.

SEND

Information, Advice and Support Service

Herefordshire & Worcestershire

Throughout the year, our libraries continued to develop partnerships with local services to reach under-represented audiences. Working across the county's libraries, we delivered services, activities and projects to reach target groups and provide holistic support to our communities. We supported:

- **adults with low literacy or who may not access traditional classroom learning**, with the Read Around Redditch programme, improving reading skills and life chances

- **an Arts and Culture programme** in Woodrow that targeted socially isolated families and gave them access to events in community venues

- **monthly drop-in sessions at Redditch Library for people experiencing sight loss**, building their social connections, confidence and knowledge, in partnership with the district and Sight Concern

- **Brunch Club at the Hive for children aged 3 to 11** who receive Free School Meals, promoted with the help of Action for Children

- **a Cyber Security course at St John's Library**, to support digital skills and employability for people with additional needs

- **several baby weigh and development clinics in Stourport**, aimed at young parents who may be handling financial changes or stressors

Communicating with residents in an inclusive way is key to how we relay important information.

We engage regularly via social media, as well as through other channels, and know that in order for people to feel a sense of belonging and involvement in their community, it is important to advocate for diversity and equitable inclusion.

Through a range of activities, the communications team meet and engage with our diverse communities across the county, attending Resident Roadshows. Our Resident Roadshows are available at multiple locations, as well as hosting information online, to provide multiple points of access. At these events our councillors, colleagues and residents can discuss relevant services, topics or issues.

The **Public Health team** have celebrated community work through the '**Celebrating Community Stories' Project 2023-2024**. The campaign highlighted organisations across the county that help residents stay healthy, active and creative. This helped raise awareness and offered information on groups such as the Keep On Moving multi-sports club for adults with disabilities, community-based day centre Jack's Place, Jigsaw Inclusive Dance Group run by Dancefest, and many more.

Our Communications Team continue to advocate for visible representation and inclusion, as well as prioritise accessibility at our events, ensuring that we can engage our community in a range of ways. During the reporting period, we shared information internally for staff and/or externally on various platforms, about:

- Pride events throughout the county
- Black History Month
- neurodiversity awareness
- Ramadan, Easter, Parinirvana Day, Imbolc, Eid, Diwali, Hanukkah, and other dates of religious significance
- HIV Awareness
- multicultural events in the community
- mental health and the Orange Button scheme

For example, a new funding grant available in this reporting period was the Stay Connected Community Grant. In December, this **£50,000** funding package launched to empower local organisations to help tackle loneliness and social isolation. Alongside our existing work around connection, including the Stay Connected Pledge and the Healthy Worcestershire programme, this grant aims to prevent loneliness by strengthening local communities, and ultimately improve people's lives. The scheme has impacted dozens of initiatives including learning clubs, community gardens and art installations.

The Public Health team have worked throughout the year with local residents and services in need of funding for community and wellbeing activities. Recipients of funding support this year include the Chadsgrove School special school, to provide wellbeing clubs and play schemes such as pottery workshops and art supplies, and the Winyates Multicultural Festival, which showcased and celebrated the diverse community of Redditch.

We also publish and make information available for local, national and community funding opportunities. On our website and through our Councillors, we provide information and access to funds for a range of projects, supporting and encouraging participation of individuals and community groups across the county.

Equality Objective 2:
Prioritise and embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at all levels

- Implementing a governance structure for EDI
- Colleagues at senior levels are visible in driving inclusion and challenging behaviours

In the EDI Strategy's second year, clear frameworks for EDI work are in place council-wide. The model of EDI at the council is through three distinctive groups, each designed to embed EDI across the council. These are:

Strategic Diversity Leadership Group, which consists of the Chief Executive Officer and senior colleagues responsible for decision making regarding EDI works, programmes, initiatives and communications planning. Corporate decisions and accountability for compliance and reporting are managed here, with senior leaders being the key figureheads for driving best practice and knowledge throughout their relevant directorates.

Directorate Equality Groups (DEG) meet regularly to plan, measure and take action on the objectives in the strategy, as well as promote plans, ideas and discuss challenges arising from the work. They are chaired by senior leaders who attend the Strategic Diversity Leadership Group, leading on operational activity and projects to support inclusion. They are attended by Equality Champions who represent the EDI perspective in their daily work.

Changes to the directorate areas have impacted the way that these DEG meetings are structured as well as ensuring new key colleagues attend, following any restructure of staff.

Part of the work of a Directorate Equality Group is to engage with wider EDI plans, delivering information, through facilitating sessions, ensuring regular attendance occurs at meetings, and cascading messages to ensure they reach all levels.

The Directorate Equality Groups use emails, newsletters and team meetings to share information about our EDI work, including projects and initiatives, both internal and external, events and resources.

The open platform at the meetings enhances dialogue and provides a safe space for challenge or highlighting issues affecting staff or service users. This conversational and listening approach, balanced with objective action planning, enables transparency and proactive inclusion.

We aim to keep everyone across WCC and WCF informed about the work we are doing, and communicate this through regular workforce updates, the Chief Execs staff briefings, and sharing informally on our intranet pages, including a dedicated site for EDI, our EDI Hub.

We also continued to provide catch-up bulletins for harder-to-reach employees, such as those who are frontline workers, those without regular access to technology or information, those whose first language is not English. These bulletins bring together key new stories into one place and are cascaded by managers to ensure all WCC colleagues are reached.

We consider colleagues needs across the Council and aim to communicate using various methods, continuing to utilise our SCULPT methodology for digital accessibility when building written communications.

Internal communications developed this year to highlight events and expand the knowledge of WCC staff. New articles were written to mark events including Dharma Day, Pride Month, and Deaf Awareness Week.

At the directorate level, external speakers and learning sessions were arranged to highlight key dates such as Eid, Diwali, Black History Month, and ADHD Awareness Month.

During 2024, the colleague **'Your Voice'** survey provided feedback on how our staff feel about the Council and our work. Open through May and June 2024, the survey offers a way that everyone working for the Council can voice their opinions and be heard.

This has an indirect impact on our EDI goals, as it contributes to the creation of a safe environment and actively encourages perspectives from all colleagues. The survey found that 84% of WCC employees feel able to make suggestions to improve services, showing a strong commitment and good environment for staff to make a difference.

Alongside this cultural view, the survey asked specifically about inclusion.

An overall **89%** of respondents answered that they strongly to slightly agreed that WCC is an inclusive employer.

This highly positive outcome shows that our EDI progress is felt across the organisation, and is consistent with the result of the 2023 survey.

This was felt particularly strongly in the Chief Executive's Unit, where **95%** of respondents in the directorate strongly to slightly agreed. The Economy and Infrastructure directorate gave a lower **74%** agreement, which is still a positive reflection of our work, but shows a continuing discrepancy in colleague experience that we will work to improve.

To support colleagues whose voices are seldom heard at the authority, or those who are in the minority of our workforce, and to drive further platforms and routes to decision making and collaboration, we continued to build our staff networks.

In Autumn 2023, we launched our Disability Staff Network, shortly before the reporting period.

Since then, the network has developed alongside our existing LGBTQ+ Staff Network. Both networks have broadened their scope and determined the impact they aim to make at WCC.

Highlights of network activity include both networks appointing a Chair and Deputy Chairs, contributing to centralised EDI communications, and creating mutual support networks for issues specific to each community.

Our plans to platform marginalised voices and aid better inclusion will continue with the launch of several other groups in the next year.
These groups are supported and encouraged from our senior leadership, and time and energy is displayed from all involved. Embedding and engaging the wider workforce with the networks is another goal we will work towards in the next year.

Within the **Adults and Communities directorate**, specific plans were put in place to make the council's EDI work relevant to different levels. Improvements were made to individualise support plans of service users to recognise their specific needs and normalise a person-centred approach, such as ensuring Kosher meal requirements were specified for day service users. Supplier selection has also been influenced by inclusivity aims, with coproduction becoming more common with underrepresented groups having a say. 'Speak Out' sessions were held to encourage marginalised voiced to contribute to larger discussions in the directorate, giving employees at all levels the opportunity to play a part in realising the EDI Strategy.

The Children's directorate continued with its programme of EDI events, bringing together colleagues from a variety of levels and roles to learn about and discuss a range of EDI topics. Children's Services colleagues also continued to proactively share resources through website posts, podcasts and videos. With the reintegration of Children's Services into the Council, the directorate also began to look ahead to increase collaboration with other Council teams and enhance its EDI work.

Our **Economy and Infrastructure directorate** undertook a project to roll out EDI workshops in each service area. The topics covered were tailored to be specific and relevant to the service. The first workshops have been held in teams, and the directorate's Equality Champions will continue to work on delivering them into the next year. Alongside this, Economy and Infrastructure have raised the expectation that EDI be part of team meetings on a regular basis, and have seen the majority of teams reach this standard through the reporting period.

- Removing barriers within our recruitment process
- Attract skilled diverse talent to WCC and WCF
- Proactive future proofing and development opportunities for groups historically excluded, or who had barriers to leadership roles

At WCC, we are ambitious and proactive when it comes to employment opportunities that meet the needs of the council, balanced with the skills and potential of the county. We are passionate about apprenticeships, colleague development and creating a workplace that empowers colleagues to achieve success.

We offer paid internships, work experience, and closely partner with local businesses to ensure we can share opportunities, job roles, and progression routes for people we support. We continue to share information through written communication, social media, and in-person and online events. We focus on offering career opportunities and development, engaging with schools and school leavers, higher education facilities and wider community networking platforms.

Equality Objective 3:
Ensure fair, positive, and proactive measures are taken to attract and retain diverse talent and skills, and development planning is in place for future leaders

Last year's review into recruitment at the council led to continuing work to provide information about inclusion at onboarding, signposting to EDI work and staff networks in early stages of employment, and continual links to our EDI Hub. We ensure that job descriptions are updated to reflect our EDI goals, and we widened the approach to advertising positions.

The next phase of this project was to use an anonymised and new version of our applicant tracker system, which ensures we are removing bias from the process of recruitment.

Throughout the reporting period, we further developed our EDI Hub, to provide broader resources and guidance to our colleagues, accessible at any time.

Alongside these methods to recruit and onboard a diverse workforce, we aim to retain them. A key step towards a better working environment at the Council was the launch of our Employee Assistance Programme. This programme provides a confidential 24-hour helpline for our employees, where they can speak to a wellbeing professional about any personal or work factors impacting them. The programme offers free counselling pathways, legal and medical information, bereavement support, and self-help resources. It forms part of our overall wellbeing framework, key to our Workforce Strategy, that has particular impact on our disabled colleagues.

Developing our future leaders has a dual impact, both in providing opportunities for diverse colleagues to progress, and laying the groundwork for them to flourish under their own managers. In our Adults and Communities directorate, enhanced EDI training has been mandatory for managers to better fit the needs and roles of colleagues working with residents in our county.

Our mentoring and coaching programme has continued, providing opportunities for colleagues to develop themselves and their work lives, particularly focusing on soft skills such as self-confidence, decision-making, resilience, stress management, and developing work relationships and partnerships.

This provides WCC staff with another route to career development, open to all. This offers particular benefit to marginalised colleagues, who are likely to experience inequalities in career progression.

In 2024, the Council progressed in its support of colleagues with an Armed Forces background. We were awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold by the Ministry of Defence for enhancements to our commitment to employees with Armed Forces connections, both current and future. To achieve this, we proved that:

In addition to these requirements, job applicants to the Council who come from a military background are offered a guaranteed interview, if they meet the job specification. We are proud to support and welcome those experienced with the Armed Forces, whose transferable skills and experiences make them highly valued colleagues.

- we had signed the Armed Forces Covenant, achieved ERS Silver and proactively showed forces-friendly credentials in our recruiting and selection processes
- we offer 10 extra days paid leave for reservists to carry out their military commitments, and flexible leave to adult cadet volunteers and to spouses and partners of those serving in the Armed Forces
- we actively ensure that our workforce is aware of these positive policies
- we are an ambassador of the Covenant to other organisations and employers
- we support our local Cadet Forces

Retaining and developing diverse staff requires a holistic approach beyond structured opportunities. We have undertaken a variety of projects to improve the work environment for our staff. For example, Adults and Communities audited meeting rooms to ensure they are autism friendly. However, a challenge to our workplace was the move of offices from County Hall.

County Hall had served as an accessible headquarters for Worcestershire County Council since 1998. Council employees who were previously centralised are now spread across district offices and hybrid working arrangements, adding to the challenge of building a supporting work environment for all. This has particularly impacted some colleagues with disabilities, for whom the new offices are not suitable. Work is ongoing to mitigate these effects and keep our workforce connected.

Retaining talented colleagues is beneficial to everyone; the individual employed, the skills and expertise of the area of work they bring to the council, the local economy, and the local community. In the next phase of our strategic delivery, we are aiming to improve our working environment, maintain our participation in the Armed Forces Covenant and our existing Disability Confident and Race at Work Charter participation, and develop further processes and resources to support our staff.

Economy & Infrastructure have developed their own informal learning sessions that colleagues can attend to workshop ideas, listen to case studies and improve their own work environment. This has allowed open and respectful dialogue for teams involved and has been beneficial in tackling barriers in relationship building and a supportive work environment.

Equality Objective 4: Collaborate effectively and empower our employees to be accountable for our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion approach across Council

- Building confidence & skills in our colleagues leading on EDI work (Equality Champions)
- Encouraging regular updates of colleagues' personal data (in line with current GDPR, privacy policy and Data Protection)
- Communications promote inclusion and belonging; our diverse current and potential workforce are valued, respected, and celebrated

The majority of what we do as a local authority requires us to be collaborative. We seldom work on a project with a singular department, and teamwork is essential to ensuring we can effectively deliver relevant and inclusive services to residents and clients. We know that creativity, innovation and equality, diversity and inclusion go hand in hand when it comes to supporting colleagues and residents, alike.

The work we have completed and committed to since launching the EDI Strategy is supported at every level and is lead and driven through many proactive teams and passionate individuals. We have policies that back up our commitments, we have a set of policies that establishes our purpose and processes for those who face discrimination, and we aim to consistently address inequality at given opportunities.

Training, awareness and collaboration continue to be key in ensuring our workforce understand and are knowledgeable in their support of all those we serve through our work, those we work alongside and those colleagues and teams we directly impact.

Learning sessions, through both informal and formal training, have been delivered and have covered such topics as LGBTQ+ inclusion, Anti-Racism practices, neurodiversity awareness, Ramadan and Islam awareness, and various other conversational and coaching sessions have been beneficial to our EDI goals.

Feedback from attendees have been positive with core elements of staff and service user interactions being enhanced with deeper empathy and compassion. Learning about the our service users, community and staff has been instrumental in driving cultural change in ensuring we can be individually accountable for our knowledge and learning, as well as promoting a corporate approach to EDI.

This reporting period saw the implementation and appointment of a Digital Accessibility Lead. This important and necessary step will aim to address gaps in online and digital access for the county and will be key in identifying and delivering projects that ensure our products and services are accessible to a range of users, with specific consideration for disabled users.

We have continued or started to be involved and actively collaborating with a range of stakeholders, organisations, local community groups and individuals in Worcestershire. This will improve further over the next phase of the strategy, as we develop the next EDI Strategy for the Council to begin in 2025.

Through our local connections, forums we are involved in, partnerships and public services, we aim to engage a variety of people in the Worcestershire community. Through this process, the development of the next strategy will be relevant, timely and tailored to the needs of the county and the people we serve.

We have a **Worcestershire Learning Disability Partnership Board** who support a 'People's Parliament' to ensure inclusion and platforming of voices across the county. We also have a range of representatives on the ICS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Autism Partnership Boards who work closely with various teams across the authority.

In July, we announced the launch of the new Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy, which was co-produced closely with the partnership board. The new strategy prioritises:

- improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society
- improving autistic children and young people's access into education, and supporting positive transitions into adulthood
- supporting more autistic people into employment
- tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- building the right support in the community
- improving support in criminal and youth justice systems
- keeping safe

The strategy will guide stakeholders across the county to overcome the existing barriers faced by autistic people and their carers, while also promoting all that autistic people have to offer. Priority Leads for each of the priorities are now working with partners to create action plans and put the strategy into practice.

The Learning Disability Partnership Board has met several times across the reporting period and has been attended by delegates from the Council, alongside local stakeholders such as SpeakEasy, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, and many more. The Board has tackled issues related to transport, employment and healthcare. The Board has seen significant progress towards several of its Learning Disability Strategy goals. Resource signposting has improved with videos created focused on housing options. The Board also has restarted its employment group to link with local employers directly and advocated for increased uptake of Health Action Plans.

The Council also worked with local disabled voices and coproduced the redesign of our Local Offer website, which brings together information about Special Educational provision in Worcestershire.

The website relaunched in a more user-friendly and accessible form in November 2023.

Representatives from the Council joined with other organisations to support the d/Deaf working group partnership, and the Council led a group of 'experts by experience' from the d/Deaf community to build communication and improve healthcare accessibility.

They worked to share knowledge of statutory providers and BSL provision, tackling the existing inequalities in access and health outcomes. The project received recognition by being selected as a finalist at the 2024 Local Government Chronicle Awards.

Senior managers and coproduction leads from WCC are instrumental in our cooperative approach to EDI in external forums and groups, with attendance at regular meetings for West Midlands Association of Directors for Adult Social Services (ADASS), West Midlands Local Authority Equality Network, Worcestershire

Integrated Care Equality groups and sub-committees, and we offer continued support for new members of groups in providing expert advice and guidance.

The Council now has a standardised Equality Monitoring Form, which aligns to the 2021 Census data to provide useful data analysis. This form is usable by staff who have an interest in the demographics of their stakeholders, governed by our legal and data protection teams.

Under our Public Sector Equality Duty, we need to consistently monitor the impact of our actions and ensure we capture underrepresented voices in our work that impacts residents of our county.

The form provides a compliant and constructive way for the Council to gather that information and enhance our EDI work. The form now sits in our Consultation Toolkit, which is accessible by all staff to guide best practice when consulting on Council work.

This year also saw the launch of our **Dignity at Work Policy**. This policy was developed from feedback from our workforce that they did not feel adequately protected from discriminatory behaviour at work and did not have a clear process, should they be subjected to or witness discrimination. The policy aims to ensure that every employee of WCC is protected from and held accountable for discriminatory conduct. It sets out a process for reporting, mediation and resolution for any discriminatory incident that may happen when a member of staff is in work or at a work-related event.

In conjunction with other policies, it creates a fair and consistent way of dealing with mistreatment that all staff can access.

> This policy explicitly lays upon the Council a collective responsibility to prevent, reduce, and intervene in discriminatory behaviours and incidents.

The impact of the policy has been felt throughout the organisation, with members of each directorate having input into its development. It has been well-received as a sign of progress within WCC, and a campaign is planned for 2025 that will raise awareness of the policy and make it fully embedded in our teams. The policy should have a reactive effect in supporting staff with discrimination, but also a preventative effect by creating a workplace that promotes positive and respectful behaviour, in a safe and comfortable work environment, to which all staff are expected to contribute.

Our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion eLearning is part of our Mandatory Learning Courses. This eLearning was developed to ensure we can create a positive impact, not just at work, but within our communities, and provides employees with the skills and confidence to not only comply with legal requirements but to be allies and help make the workplace a more supportive and inclusive environment.

In addition to this, employees also have access to our Unconscious Bias and Unconscious Bias for Managers eLearning, and additional eLearning on the Armed Forces Covenant, neurodiversity and neurodivergence, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. A coproduced Ramadan Awareness and Learning session was also delivered in March to educate and prepare staff to support their colleagues who participated in Ramadan this year.

Alongside this learning, our Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) trainings continue to be held throughout the year, with continual promotion improving uptake across the organisation. This has brought more colleagues to understand their involvement in the Council's statutory equality duties, and is increasing accountability in all departments. The Equality team continually provide feedback and support with the EIA process to colleagues and external partners, so new policies, processes, functions and services are developed with EDI in mind.

Equality Monitoring and Capturing Data

Gender Pay Gap Report 2023 - 2024

A Gender Pay Gap (GPG) is the difference between the average earnings of men and women, expressed relative to men's earnings, for example, 'women earn 15% less than men'. It is an indicator of the differences in opportunity and choices of men and women within the workplace. It is not a measure of equal pay i.e., whether men and women receive equal pay for equal work.

Our 2023-2024 Gender Pay Gap Report showed that women at WCC earn 91p for every £1 that men earn.

Compared to the 2022-2023 report, the mean has decreased from **10.12%** to **8.40% (£1.46)** and the median from **9.74%** to **8.85% (£1.35)**.

Quartiles show almost identical splits to previous years. This means that the Gender Pay Gap has decreased evenly across all levels.

Our full Gender Pay Gap Report is available on our website. Although pay is not yet equal, our figures compare favourably against the ONS benchmarking data, and **our pay gap is lower than the national gender pay gap of 13.2% (mean) and 14.3% (median)**.

The data we report on and the figures for our gender pay gap are based on Worcestershire County Council employees only and exclude schools.

We are making improvements in areas we know are effective in reducing the pay gap, such as reviewing recruitment processes, our people policies, ensuring transparency in pay processes, developing our wellbeing approach and providing leadership development, all of which support the objectives of our Workforce Strategy.

You can read the full report here for Worcestershire County Council: **gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/ EmployerReport/zKucQ7oe/2023**
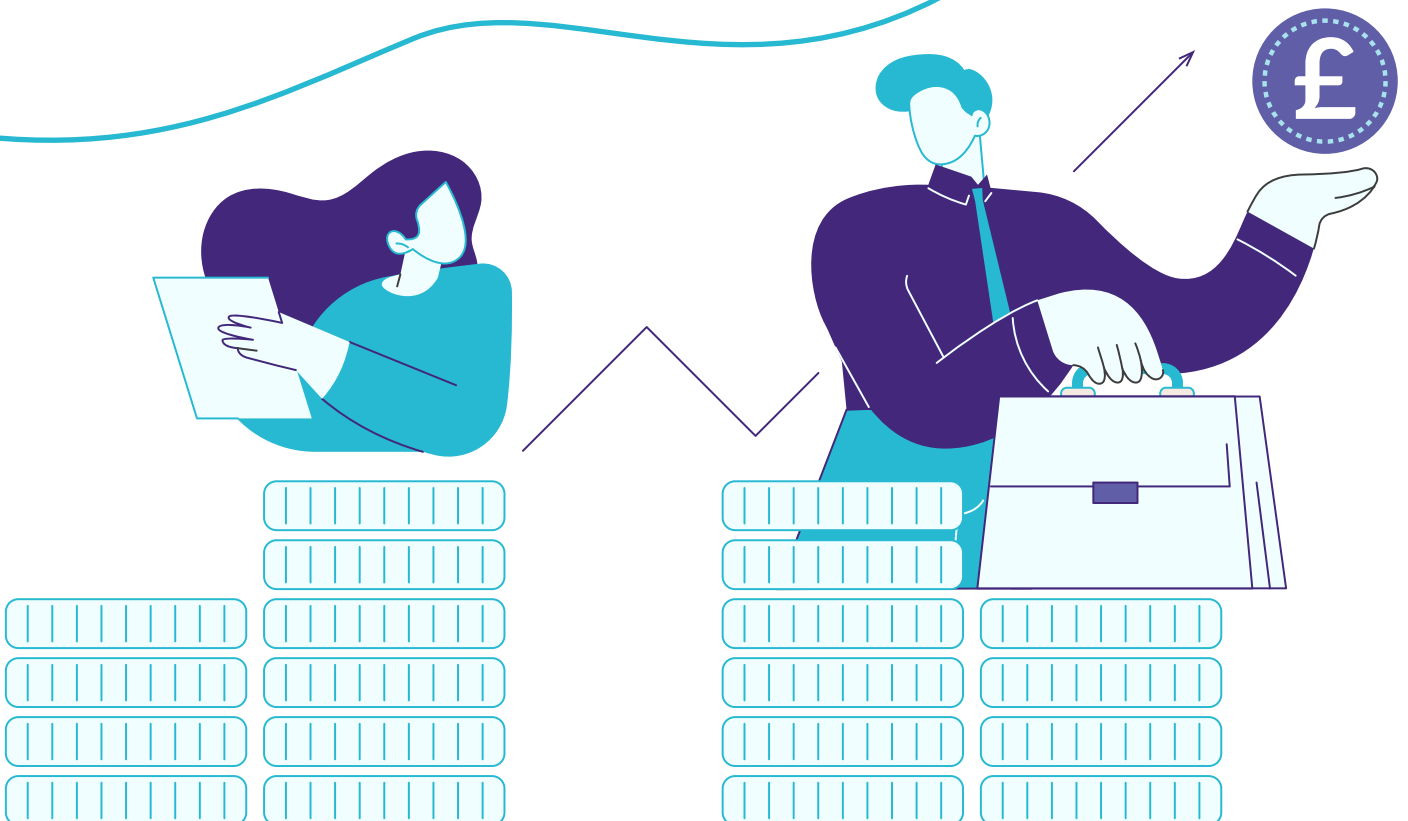
Workforce Data

As captured in August 2024, we had 3,609 WCC colleagues, and 4,510 colleagues in schools. This data is taken from our HR system and includes all employees across Economy and Infrastructure, Adults and Communities, Chief Executive's Unit and Children's Services, previously Worcestershire Children First, which was recently brought back into the council.

We updated the categories and options on our demographic data page for this reporting period. The questions asked on our HR system now align with the 2021 Census questions, which allows us to have a clearer understanding of how our workforce relates to the demographics of Worcestershire.

## Throughout the year, we have been running a positive data capture campaign to promote the new form.

Across the Council, we consistently raised the data campaign in communications, both written and verbal. It was a topic at Directorate Equality Group meetings and supported from senior leadership. We continued to highlight the form to new starters and prompt colleagues to update their data through the year, to build a stronger picture of our workforce.

We know that our current Workforce Data is limited. 72% of our workforce has not yet given any information when looking at the protected characteristics detailed below. The data capture campaign will continue as an ongoing effort to improve the completion rate. This will allow us to compare and analyse data with increasing effectiveness.

We have a 100% capture rate for age. This is due to our recruitment and HR management system capturing this aspect of identity as standard procedure when processing identity checks for people undertaking to work with us. There are a number of identity elements and verifications required from a legal perspective when starting a job role, or when we undertake to employ a person, such as providing evidence of eligibility to work for us, or eligibility status for employment in the UK.

When considering we have 100% completion capture for age category data, and when removing this singular demographic statistic, we have zero demographic data information for 2,120 (58.9%) colleagues across the directorates of Economy & Infrastructure, Adults & Communities, Children's Services, and the Chief Executive's Unit. For schools this equates to 3,733 colleagues or 82.8%.

Data sets shown below from our system capture exclude those responses left 'blank'. An option to 'prefer not to say' is available across non-statutory questions and is shown in each relevant category. 'NA' refers to no category data held.
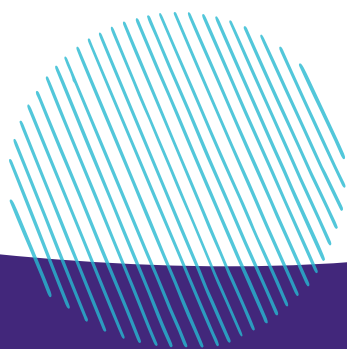
Below is a breakdown of the percentage completion for each of the areas.

Question topic	Percentage Completion (WCC/WCF)	Percentage Completion (Schools)
Age	100%	100%
Disability	15.5%	<1%
Gender reassignment	15.9%	<1%
Marriage/civil	37.4%	16.2%
Race	17.5%	1.8%
Religion/belief	20.7%	2%
Sex	16%	1.1%
Sexual orientation	17.9%	1.6%
Caring responsibility	15.9%	<1%
Care leaver	15.4%	<1%
Armed Forces - self	15.7%	<1%
Armed Forces - family/spouse	15.4%	<1%

Age

We have exact ages collected, and for reporting purposes and consistent comparable data sets, we have mapped age into brackets as shown below. The data for 17 year olds and under is not captured for WCC. The census displays additional categories for age, such as 75-84 year olds, and 85+ year olds which we do not separately capture in our age group figures.

| Age bracket	WCC Percentage	Schools Percentage
17 and under	Not captured	<1%
18 - 24	3.2%	5.8%
25 - 34	14.2%	18.3%
35 - 44	21.7%	26.3%
45 - 54	27%	27%
55 - 64	26.3%	18.5%
65 - 74	6.5%	3.5%
75+	0.8%	<1%
75 - 84 (ONS)	Not captured	Not captured
85+ (ONS)	Not captured	Not captured

Disability

For disability, our question is '**Do you have any physical/mental health conditions lasting 12 months or more?**' This question and our categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Disability	WCC Percentage	Schools Percentage
No	10%	<1%
Yes	4%	<1%
Prefer not to say	1.4%	<1%

Marriage and civil partnership

For marriage and civil partnership, our question and categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Marital status	WCC/WCF Percentage	Schools Percentage
Divorced	3.8%	<1%
Formerly in a civil partnership that is now legally dissolved	<1%%	N/A
In a registered civil partnership	<1%	N/A
Married	27.4%	18.5%
Never married and never registered in a civil partnership/single	3.7%	<1%
Prefer not to say	1.4%	<1%
Separated	<1%	<1%
Widowed/surviving partner from a registered civil partnership	<1%	N/A
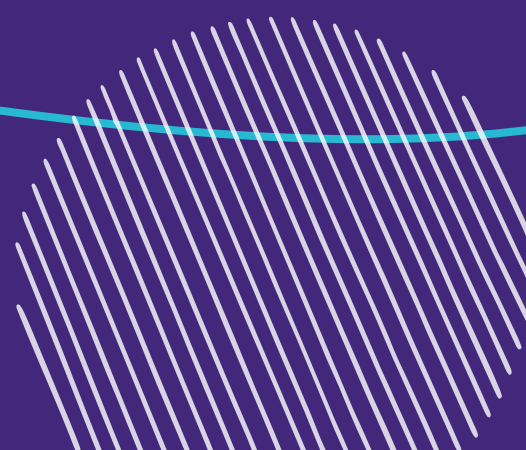
Race

For race, our prompt is **'Ethnic origin'**. Our categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Race	WCC 628 input	Schools 79 input
Asian other	<1%	5%
Asian/Asian Welsh/Asian British Bangladeshi	<1%	N/A
Asian/Asian Welsh/Asian British Indian	<1%	N/A
Asian/Asian Welsh/Asian British Pakistani	<1%	N/A
Black other	<1%	<1%
Black/Black Welsh/Black British African	<1%	N/A
Black/Black Welsh/Black British Carribean	<1%	N/A
Mixed or multiple ethnicity other	<1%	N/A
Mixed or multiple ethnicity other White and Asian	<1%	N/A
Mixed or multiple ethnicity other Black and Carribean	<1%	N/A
Other ethnicity/ethnic group	<1%	N/A
White Irish	1.8%	8.9%
White other	8.9%	26.6%
White/White English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish, British	81.8%	58.2%

Religion

For religion and/or belief, our question and categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Religion and/or belief	WCC Percentage	Schools Percentage
Buddhist	<1%	N/A
Christian	7.2%	<1%
Hindu	<1%	N/A
Muslim	<1%	<1%
Sikh	<1%	N/A
No religion	11.4%	1.4%
Other not listed	<1%	<1%
Prefer not to say	<1%	<1%

Sex

For sex, our question is '**What is your sex?**' Our categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Sex identifier	WCC Percentage	Schools Percentage
Female	12.7%	1%
Male	3.24%	<1%
Blank	84%	98%

WCC Data Analysis:

100% of our workforce have their biological sex added to the system automatically when they start, and therefore this is reflected in a positive capture detail. This category follows the Equality Act 2010 and the data questions of the Census 2021, so this category needs to reflect binary 'sex'.

Sexual Orientation

For sexual orientation, our wording and categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Sexual Orientation	WCC/WCF Percentage	Schools Percentage
Bisexual	4.4%	10%
Gay or lesbian	2.5%	<1%
Identify another way	1.9%	N/A
Heterosexual / Straight	11.7%	21.4%
Prefer not to say	80%	67.1%

For gender reassignment, our question is '**Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?**' This question and our categories are based on the census data question from 2021, in order to provide a baseline of data for the organisation. From 2024, we will ask and capture comparative data for the county to the workforce.

Gender Reassignment	WCC/WCF Percentage	Schools Percentage
No	<1%	<1%
Yes	15.3%	1%
Prefer not to say	<1%	N/A

Summary

The table below sets out a summary of key achievements during this reporting period against each of our Strategic Equality Objectives and outcomes. Further details on activities can be found in the relevant sections of the report.

Objective	Key Progress and Achievements
Build a resilient, empowered and engaged community that thrives in all of Worcestershire	• Increasing actions to support career and skill opportunities for the community • WCC shares and highlights dates of awareness, celebration, and significance across a range of topics at multiple levels
Prioritise and embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at all levels	• Framework to capture and measure progress and areas of improvement and led by the Strategic Diversity Leadership Group • Tailored EDI work beginning in some directorates at the council
Ensure fair, positive, and proactive measures are taken to attract and retain diverse talent and skills, and development planning is in place for future leaders	• Positive action continues in recruitment, mentoring and coaching processes • Launch of an Employee Assistance Programme to provide wellbeing help, accessible to all employees • Gold level achieved in the Armed Forces Covenant
Collaborate effectively in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion scheme of work and plans across the Council	• Dignity at Work policy launched to protect colleagues who may face discriminatory behaviour • Next EDI Strategy development underway with co-production a priority

The next step in our EDI work is to develop a new strategy for 2025. The next strategy will update our objectives to reflect the progress we have made, and the significant work we have yet to achieve. We have not reached our goals yet and have much more to do to bring our ambitious plans to fruition.

We look forward to building on the positive work, and correcting issues we identify along the way, to ensure we empower our communities, workforce and stakeholders to take positive action, prioritise EDI and lead by example to improve outcomes across Worcestershire.

Supporting Documents

- Worcestershire County Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy:
  Equality and Diversity Policy (PDF)

- Worcestershire County Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy:
  Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 to 2025 (PDF)

- **Our Plan for Worcestershire | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Funds and bids | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Councillors' Divisional Fund Scheme | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Slavery and Human Trafficking statement (PDF)**

- **Gender Pay Gap Report 2023 (PDF)**

- **Census 2021 | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Census - Office for National Statistics**

- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Learning Disabilities Strategy | Worcestershire County Council**

- **All Age Autism Strategy | Worcestershire County Council**

- **Sensory impairment and physical disabilities | Worcestershire County Council**

- **The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) | EHRC**

- **Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for public authorities - GOV.UK**

- **Race at Work Charter - Business in the Community**

- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System**

- **Inclusive Employment Support - Worcestershire Growth Hub**

- **INclusive Worcestershire Archives - Worcestershire LEP**

- **Worcestershire Employers Interactive Map**

- **Playlist of Community Stories by Worcestershire County Council (YouTube)**