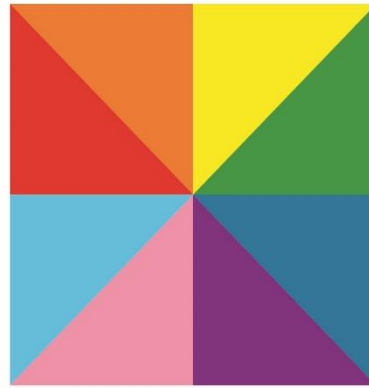


LEEDS CITY COUNCIL
LGBT+
STAFF
NETWORK



THE PRIDE OF LCC

Authors: Kat Denvir (LGBT+ Staff Network Chair), and Benn Cain (LGBT+ Staff Network Vice-chair)

Introduction and context

1. This paper begins with some “scene setting” for organisational context as of writing this paper in November 2022. With information taken from data from SAP as of October 2022, we have 542 colleagues registered/declared as LGBT+ in the Council this breaks down as 159 bi staff, 152 gay staff, 128 lesbian staff, 61 who use a different term and 42 trans/non-binary staff. This is not entirely definitive data due to large amounts of staff not declaring their sexual orientation or gender identity through their SAP profile.
2. Taken this data a bit wider and comparing it against our staff numbers of 14,114 in October 2022, proportionally this means the organisation has 3.8% LGBT+ staff. Whilst there is a lack of definitive statistics on how much of the population is LGBT+, the accepted average by the ONS is between 4% - 7% of the population being LGB and 1-2% of the population being T.
3. The data could be interpreted in a number of ways – that staff perhaps just aren’t interested or able to update their profiles (particularly true for front-line staff members who might not want to disclose to their managers to update their profiles). However, there is also a worrying interpretation that aligns with other concerns raised to the Staff Network over the last 3 years that the Chair has been in post that the organisation does not do enough for LGBT+ staff to make sure we feel safe and accepted never mind included in the organisation. This then either prevents them from bringing “their whole self to work” or that we are not inclusive enough as an organisation to attract talent from the LGBT+ community.

4. This also matches the national picture for LGBT+ people, with hate crime against LGB and particularly T people on an extreme rise¹²³⁴ and the ongoing politicisation of the identities and rights of trans people. In the workplace, 35% of LGBT+ staff have hidden their identity in the workplace and 62% of LGBT+ graduates go back in the closet when applying for jobs⁵⁶ and within schools 45% of LGBT+ young people (64% of trans young people) have experienced bullying because of their identity at school.⁷⁸
5. Culturally there is an anxiety in the LGBT+ community about the “sliding back” of rights which we are seeing internationally such as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill in Florida alongside over 240 anti-LGBT+ bills across the USA⁹ and the concerns for LGBT+ people in Qatar through the promotion of the World Cup¹⁰¹¹. These issues, alongside the tone of social media commentary and within national political conversations, the renegeing on promises about conversion therapy and the lack of progression on reforms to the Gender Recognition Act. With also a hesitation to “engage with the LGBT+ agenda” that has been felt in this organisation at times, this leads to a workforce and a city that is concerned with being respected and safeguarded.

Who is the LGBT+ Staff Network?

6. The Council has on the whole, had some form of staff network for LGB (and then including T) since 2008 with some windows of no formalised network. The network was relaunched in 2015, with the current Chair in post since June 2019. The Chair is able to use up to a day a week on network business (as it is for all Staff Network Chairs), with Steering Group members allowed up to 2 days a month.
7. Attached is **Appendix A**, our Terms of Reference, that covers not just the framework we work under as a network but also lays out the context of our intent as an organisation.
8. The functions of the LGBT+ Staff Network comprise of providing:
 - a. A LGBT+ equality function for the organisation, in the absence of a formalised internally focused Equality Team
 - b. Supporting all staff who identify as LGBT+ in the organisation through peer support, creating a safe space to raise issues and taking forward concerns organisationally where appropriate
 - c. The role of Critical Friend to the organisation when concerns have been raised by staff or citizens to us as a check and challenge measures for new policies, programmes or directives

¹ [Transgender Hate - Stop Hate UK](#)

² [Hate crimes reach record high as offences against transgender people double | The Independent](#)

³ [Anti-LGBTQ hate crime reports explode across UK, damning police figures confirm \(pinknews.co.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Hate crime report 2021 - Galop - Galop](#)

⁵ [The risks of coming out at work - BBC Worklife](#)

⁶ [LGBT in Britain - Work \(stonewall.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Just Like Us releases Growing up LGBT+ report on bullying, schools and mental health - Just Like Us](#)

⁸ [The experiences of LGBTQ+ children and young people \(stonewall.org.uk\)](#)

⁹ [Nearly 240 anti-LGBTQ bills filed in 2022 so far, most of them targeting trans people \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

¹⁰ [Qatar World Cup ambassador criticised for ‘harmful’ homosexuality comments | World Cup 2022 | The Guardian](#)

¹¹ [Qatar World Cup: 'Football is leaving behind its LGBT fans' - BBC News](#)

that impact LGBT+ staff or which have not adequately considered the needs of LGBT+ staff and citizens.

Where are the pinch points?

9. As mentioned above, the LGBT+ staff network is providing an equality function for the organisation in the remit of delivering training across the organisation, having to lead or drive inclusive practices including service delivery across the organisation or being the central point of contact for all LGBT+ matters in the Council (in conjunction with the Geoff Turnbull in the Equality Team).
10. This function we currently undertake because there is no formalised strategy for LGBT+ inclusion across the organisation, identified key contacts for this work and to continue to safeguard our LGBT+ staff and citizens.
11. Our ask is that, as has been delivered with the Race Action Plan, a similar Action Plan is developed, owned, and driven by the organisation itself instead of being developed and lead by the LGBT+ staff network. We need to be a senior key stakeholder in this work and responsible and accountable for some strands – but to better build inclusion and equality practices across the organisation, we know this needs to be owned by areas across the organisation, not just by the Staff Network and Human Resources.
12. The development of an organisationally owned Action Plan would also tackle a second key issue which is the lack of organisational engagement with LGBT+ events. There are some truly excellent, thoughtful, and impactful pieces of work on LGBT+ inclusion and learning that take place across the organisation and it would be a disservice to not acknowledge that. However, it is the view of the network that these are pieces of work lead off the back of passionate individuals, instead of being in the central DNA of our organisational culture.
13. The LGBT+ Staff Network recognises that we probably have the most visibility events over the calendar year (11 key events, with at least 3 events that we tie into such as Holocaust Memorial Day) which is unfeasible for the organisation to fully recognise alongside other key diversity events. However, over the past 3 years, the organisation of any events recognising these days or months has fallen on the shoulders of the LGBT+ staff network.
14. It is not the request of the network to not still be centrally involved in these visibility days and commemorations but rather to change the current model where the LGBT+ Staff Network is expected to lead delivery or suggest activities to the organisation. We want to move to a more collaborative model where resources are shared which also manages the current risk of events not being recognised – contributing to an atmosphere where LGBT+ staff do not feel recognised or celebrated.
15. Our challenge back to the organisation is that in order to make real meaningful progress, the organisation should give serious consideration to developing an internal Equality team with recruited staff to this position to redress the balance of this work on extremely willing and passionate but unpaid staff in the organisation. This also means there can be a central point where equality work can be measured and given the dedicated focus that the organisation recognises this work needs.

16. Some movement in this area would allow for addressing issues where the LGBT+ staff network has hit a “ceiling” when raising issues of importance to the network but been unable to drive traction in the organisation such as a single page pronoun guide taking 15 months to be signed off and increasing complaints raised to the network of poor behaviour not being challenged especially microaggressions because of a lack of understanding of impact. The network has also had challenges made to it by staff of inappropriate video content being recommended to staff and a feeling of “tokenism” in engagement for the purposes of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

The strengths of the network

17. Despite all the proceeding information, there is a lot of good news to report with many excellent aspects of the network that are worth celebrating.
18. We have an excellent LGBT+ member champion in Cllr Hannah Bithell who is earnest and passionate in this work. The network also has an appointed Senior Leader Champion in James Rogers (Director of Communities, Housing and Environment) who meets regularly with the LGBT+ Staff Network Chair and has provided thoughtful and measured support when issues have been brought to his attention.
19. In the last 9 month, it is also worth celebrating the exceptional work of John Ebo, Head of HR EDI projects, who meets regularly with the Chair and has been invaluable in working with the network to understand issues, drive forward solutions and also focus on a holistic level of ensuring EDI practices become part of the fabric within Leeds City Council.
20. The Network Chair also reverse mentors Tom Riordan on a monthly basis through a pilot project to expand the idea of reverse mentoring into the sphere of EDI matters, which has worked to garner open and honest conversations about challenges and solutions in the organisation.
21. Alongside a relatively newly formed Steering Group who are all passionate advocates in this arena, our network is comprised of resilient, dynamic, and enthusiastic people who are keen to better this organisation not just for LGBT+ staff but for all staff. This approach also underpins the intersectional model we use when developing our workstreams - our work focuses on LGBT+ as a starting point, but considering race, disability, economic background, caring responsibilities as also tied to all the work we do.

Final points and key asks

22. Our key asks of the Board tie closely to work already ongoing with other networks in the organisation:
 - a. Support in engaging in and upskilling the organisation on LGBT+ identities and considerations about the LGBT+ identities that directly impact the delivery of services. This will improve our standing with our citizens and further our vision of being a fully inclusive city.

- b. Support in engaging the organisation to develop a specific LGBT+ strategy and Action Plan that ties into the wider EDI strategic work and works in partnership with the Disability and Race Action Plans.
- c. Recognise the need for more corporate engagement on key LGBT+ visibility events throughout the year.
- d. Recognise and support our recommendations for identification of resources needed to ensure key LGBT+ visibility days are successful
- e. Provide support and relevant challenge in terms of the ongoing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion training programme to ensure that it is fit for purpose and designed with the voices of affected staff or those with lived experience to ensure it is appropriate.
- f. Provide recommendations about relevant training that might be needed across the organisation or within the Elected Member sphere
- g. Offer any recommendations and comments on **Appendices A** and **B** (testimonials of the LGBT+ Network from Network members).

Annex A

Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender + (LGBT+) Staff Network

Purpose, Structure and Terms of Reference

Purpose of Network

- To provide a supportive and inclusive arena where LGBT+ employees can meet to discuss key issues that affect the LGBT+ community and themselves as individuals.
- To act as an advisory forum for the council on equality issues, policies, and legislation.
- To support staff in tackling discrimination, poor practice or bullying or harassment either through advocacy, peer support or following formal mechanisms.
- To provide critical challenge to the council on matters arising of inequality or discrimination.
- To positively promote the LGBT+ community within the council and across the city.
- To provide a signposting service to other LGBT+ networks and organisations in the city and nationally.
- To work to educate all areas of the organisation of LGBT+ issues that affect staff, our community and the citizens of the city we serve
- The LGBT+ network is open to all staff within the organisation.
- The network does recognise other identities under the LGBT+ umbrella, but for simplicity and through agreed discussion with the network, will refer to network as LGBT+. These additional identities include but are not exclusive to:
 - Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Pansexual, Demisexual, Non-binary, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, Queer people of colour and/or Queer Trans people of colour, and anyone who identifies as non-cis (the gender they were given as a child).
 - As an inclusive group, the network is open to anyone who identifies in these columns, providing mutual respect and understanding.
 - Adding a '+' to the LGBT acronym is an acknowledgement that there are non-cisgender and non-straight identities which are not included in the acronym. This is a shorthand or umbrella term for all people who have non-normative gender identity or sexual orientation.

Structure of the LGBT+ network

The LGBT+ Network is open to any member of staff in the council, although primary focus of the network is the support, advocacy and empowerment of staff who identify as being part of the LGBT+ community.

The LGBT+ Network is open to any member of staff who identifies in the LGBT+ umbrella. The Network is also open to any member of staff who is an ally or interesting in being an ally to the LGBT+ community.

The LGBT+ network provides a supportive network to enable LGBT+ staff from across the council to participate and have a voice.

Open Forum meetings for the LGBT+ Staff Network are held bi-monthly and regular newsletters are sent out about Council events, inviting feedback on pieces of work as well as advertising wider engagement with other LGBT+ or community organisations in Leeds.

The LGBT+ Network is promoted widely across the council to publicise its activities and to encourage LGBT+ staff to take part. A range of accessible communications methods such as a confidential mailing list, a Network specific SharePoint page, social media accounts, the internal council InSite intranet page and various other methods of communication are used to reach as many staff as possible and enable staff to access information and support.

The LGBT+ Network is supported by a chair and a Steering Group. The Steering Group are representatives from across the organization, and their work will be supported via regular Steering Group meetings, updates provided to the bimonthly Open Forum meetings and via support from the wider network where additional resources are required.

The Network meets on a bi-monthly basis at the Open Forum meetings, and notes from these will be circulated via InSite and the Staff Network SharePoint page.

Members of the committee have specific responsibilities:

- ❖ To attend meetings regularly.
- ❖ To represent the views of LGBT+ staff within their services and share information.
- ❖ To report back to management teams on key issues arising from Open Forum meetings as and when required
- ❖ To report back to Corporate Leadership Team, Equality Boards and the Diversity Staff Forum on a regular basis
- ❖ To actively promote the LGBT+ Network across the council
- ❖ To respect confidentiality

- ❖ To advocate and provide support on LGBT+ issues across the organisation via key Visibility Dates, events, and training

Terms of Reference

- We will be a forum where Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans+ and all LGBT+ identifying staff can address issues that matter to them.
- We will challenge Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and all other types of harassment and discrimination, both inside and outside the workplace.
- We acknowledge that unconscious bias, the structures that underpin society (e.g. the “nuclear family” concept, white cis-heterosexuality being seen as the ideal/norm) and micro-aggressions can have a huge impact on staff wellbeing both in a personal and in a professional sense. We want to increase people’s awareness of these ideas and support them to challenge these concepts.
- We will encourage all colleagues throughout the council to participate in the work of the group. Advocating and including Allies in the network is an important aspect of opening up our base support and ensuring systemic and lasting cultural and organisational change.
- We will ensure members are aware of wider issues that affect them and their lives, including global and national issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the implications of Brexit on UK equality laws.
- We will ensure members of the network and the wider organisation are aware of the impact of intersectionality of identities that are a strength of our communities but also mean that they may experience multiple layers of discrimination as well if they are carers, LGBT+ parents, are disabled, are from marginalised communities or from lower income socio-economic backgrounds.
- We will publicise the work of the group and the issues concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Transgender employees to the wider workforce.
- We will obtain support for our work from councillors and senior management.
- We will develop and maintain links with other relevant agencies and staff groups.
- We will act as a voice for our members, providing input on the development of corporate and departmental services, policies and procedures, and providing feedback on their impact.
- We will act as a central point for sharing good practice on matters relating to Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Transgender and other marginalised identities staff throughout the council.
- Each January there will be a targeted focus on celebrating the work of the previous year, and a campaign to encourage increased engagement of the Open Forum.

- These Terms of Reference will be reviewed yearly.

Staff Network Priorities for 2022

- **A joint priority agreed with the other Staff Networks within Leeds City Council of tackling and addressing organisational burnout.**
 - Due to being in the public sector, the pressures upon our organisation through continued austerity, budget pressures, Covid-19 and the national impact of ongoing inequity, burnout has been felt by all staff and more keenly by those from communities like the LGBT+ community
 - A burnout paper to be written by the Staff Network chair with proposals for management to be agreed through leadership level.
 - Continued importance is placed on the network providing a safe space for staff through weekly wellbeing drop-in chats, open forums, and other communication mechanisms.
- **Continue to highlight the wide spectrum of identities within the LGBT+ community, with a particular focus on intersectional issues that affect people.**
 - Agree a calendar of key visibility days to highlight through the organisation by the end of January.
 - Write a post for each of those dates and aiming to highlight some LGBT+ figures that may not commonly be uplifted (particular those with intersectional identities)
 - Host 2 events as a network over the course of the year, talking about intersectionality and how they affect us as people and as employees.
- **Focus on allyship and the benefits it brings to us to be critically engaged as allies across multiple communities, for our own personal development, within our workspaces and serving the diverse communities of Leeds.**
 - Develop a proposal for an over-arching Allies model of training across the organisation by the second quarter.
 - Following the development of this proposal, develop a sub-piece of training (or multiple subsets of training) on how to be allies to the various areas of the LGBT+ community with specific actions people can take up.
 - Deliver the first piece of this training by the end of third quarter of the year.
- **Re-engagement with senior leadership to continue to build a fully inclusive organisation**
 - Propose attendance at each of this year's Open Forum events by at least one member of SLT/CLT.

- Work with HR to establish a formal mechanism for reverse mentorship with at least 2 senior leaders by the end of June.
- Agree with senior leadership a mechanism to highlight the events of the network and engagement opportunities across all directorates by the end of the first quarter.

Annex B: What our network members say about our network

I rarely interact with the group but it is great to know it is there. I am now the eldest in our team after my manager retired and am acutely aware that my colleagues are, on the whole, much younger. Whilst they talk about their growing children (a distant memory for me) and, mostly (almost exclusively) heterosexual it is so reassuring that there is an inclusive LCC group I can turn to if I want support and to be sociable. After my wife dying and covid isolation even the emails I receive from the group reinforce my validation as an older lesbian. and

I do appreciate your hard work and efforts to get the message out there, and for more people to come forward and talk so as to make a happy healthy safer working environment for all of Leeds City Council Staff.

Unfortunately I don't get to attend the meetings very often so don't really feel qualified to add anything. However, I can say that on the occasions I do join in, I have found the sessions invaluable as I have felt safe in knowing I can be open without being judged. It's great knowing there is a safe space at work where I can go if I am having any issues in the workplace and if necessary sometimes, even personally. Everyone is always welcoming and friendly and its great to hear other peoples opinions and perspectives on things we may have had issues with ourself.

I've always been a bit of a passive member of the network due to pressures of work and childcare making my available time quite limited. But any time I've had cause to raise anything, it's always been taken seriously and followed up appropriately – and it's always good to have someone else say 'nope, I don't think that's an overreaction, I'll raise it.' I have every confidence that my experience is repeated for Network members across the Council, and so as well as the group emails and Teams chats which are useful ways to know what is going on, I think it is all of these small direct interactions that show the value of the Network, and of having a collective presence on behalf of LGBTQ+ people – particularly in the current climate of increasing hostility.

The LGBT+ Staff Network has been a good forum for people from across the Council to come together to discuss important matters like History Month, Leeds Pride and the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index submission. But more importantly, it has been a good place for people to have a general chat about how things are going, which was very welcome during the pandemic and since then. It is an open space where people can air their views, have a chat with people outside of their immediate team or workplace and have a pause during their day. Kat and Benn do a great job ensuring everyone is welcome

A word of thanks for preparing and hosting the above meeting.

I found it very useful to be brought-up-to-speed with current developments, thinking, and practice in LGBT+ matters, especially as they relate to my role as a (casual) local government employee working very closely with members of the public at important [...] times in their lives.