

## Equality Diversity & Inclusion – Workforce Update

Date: 03 March 2025

Report of: Director of Strategy & Resources

Report to: Strategy & Resources Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

### Brief Summary

This is a largely retrospective update of the progress made in workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) over the past year, which also recognises the further work to be done. It is requested by the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board on an annual basis and is a welcome opportunity to take stock. The board has a long-standing and valued focus on how the Council's approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace makes meaningful difference and delivers good outcomes for staff and the public. This report summarises our workforce EDI delivery plan in 2024-25, with EDI being a regular feature of our communications and engagement framework with officers through all available channels as part of the continuous drive for a more inclusive workplace culture. It is important to note that the new Chief Executive has already met the Staff Network chairs as a group and is meeting them individually.

The paper sets out an update from Human Resources on the organisation's progress of its EDI plan and approach which is set within the core themes that Scrutiny will be aware of: **Training for Staff and Managers, Progression, Speaking Up and Zero Tolerance, Data and Monitoring and Recruitment and Welcome**. The paper forms part of a suite of reports, including a separate summary from the organisation's Freedom To Speak Up Guardian and submissions from the Council's seven staff network, who provide evidence of their lived experiences as the voice of staff (at Appendix 1).

Whilst significant progress is being made, it's an ongoing challenge to embed consistency across our large and complex organisation so that the lived experience of all colleagues is positive. The wider geopolitical context impacts on our communities and in turn our workforce, presenting an additional dynamic with us respectful of the impact that has on colleagues and recognising it is not something always within the council's control. We will continue to push our work to have a more inclusive culture, whilst also refreshing our approach in 2025/26 to achieve improved outcomes across the core themes whilst supporting our staff networks with clarity of approach, role and purpose.

Our EDI plan is guided by a strong strategic approach of the city-wide [EDI vision](#), which sets out a clear and unambiguous obligation to our key role as an inclusive employer. The overarching driver for change is the [Best City Ambition](#) which is the city's purposeful commitment to tackling poverty and reducing inequalities. The organisational plan of "[Being our Best](#)", is how we deliver this change as a council, with the [People Strategy 2020-2025](#) providing the necessary framework to support managers and colleagues to be their best.

## Recommendations

- a) Scrutiny Board is asked to note and comment on progress made in 2024/25 on the workforce EDI plan and identify any future scrutiny actions that arise from discussions.
- b) Note that work is underway to refresh the EDI plan in 2025/26 to align it to necessary updates of strategies such as the People & Culture strategy and changes in the organisation more broadly.

### 1.0 What is this report about?

This report presents Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board with an update on the work that has been done over the past 12 months on the delivery of outcomes on workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). In so doing, the report also looks towards the medium term, on the opportunity to continually refresh and further improve the workforce EDI approach to deliver an inclusive culture across all parts of the organisation. This will enable the organisation to continue to take forward progress to date, building on the achievements and learning of the past year by listening and responding to feedback and ensuring priorities and our approach remains fit for purpose during a period of further organisational change taking place in a wider social context heavily influence by global issues.

### 2.0 Overview of progress and next steps on 5 EDI Pillars



Our 5 EDI pillars (short descriptions used here for ease) act as a foundation on which our approach to EDI to create a more inclusive and representative workforce which reflects our diverse city and culture.

We have made progress in 2024/25 across the five themes of our EDI plan. On **Training for Staff and Managers** through the introduction of core training on Reasonable Adjustments, establishment of the Positive Action Framework, new training on Inclusive Recruitment and Selection as well as EDI training available to all staff (not just managers as we had previously), **Progression** through our aspiring leaders programme; on **Data and Monitoring** through our EDI dashboards so that leaders can evidence decision-making on EDI that impact across our 5 EDI pillars and work towards creating a more representative workforce, as well as a new campaign to encourage our workforce to share their EDI data with the introduction of the new self-service system; on **Speaking Up and Zero Tolerance** through a refreshed Council statement on anti-discrimination and expected behaviours, continuing exploration of early dispute resolution options, and response to the listening up opportunities signposted by the Freedom to Speak up Guardian; on **Recruitment and Welcome** through making diverse panels mandatory in the Council and improving our process to inclusive recruitment and selection.

However, we also know from feedback through our staff survey, staff networks, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and our communications and engagement framework more broadly, that not all our colleagues have lived experience that feels like an inclusive culture. Our continuous improvement approach focusing on these priorities and delivering them in line with the values and behaviours, will help us work towards an inclusive culture, but this takes time. We are committed to this and through our 5 EDI pillars, we are strengthening and reviewing our approach in 2025 as well as the impact we can have on tackling inequality and disadvantage

in the organisation. This will be achieved through a number of projects which are outlined in this report. This is not without its challenges. We are a large, complex organisation and a key challenge is recognising the reach and diversity of our services, where no one size fits all. So, one approach might be effective in one service but less so in another, depending on the nature of the service and its demographic make-up, historical journey and workplace culture. Moreover, we are working and communicating better with each of the Directorate Equality Boards to join up the 5 EDI pillars with each of the directorates' EDI board priorities. This combined, with our continued commitment to our staff networks which are a vital listening ear to the organisation, will support us to strengthen our approach to EDI in 2025. Time and resources are always an issue for us to respond to emerging challenges, particularly arising out of local and national agendas.

### 3.0 Training

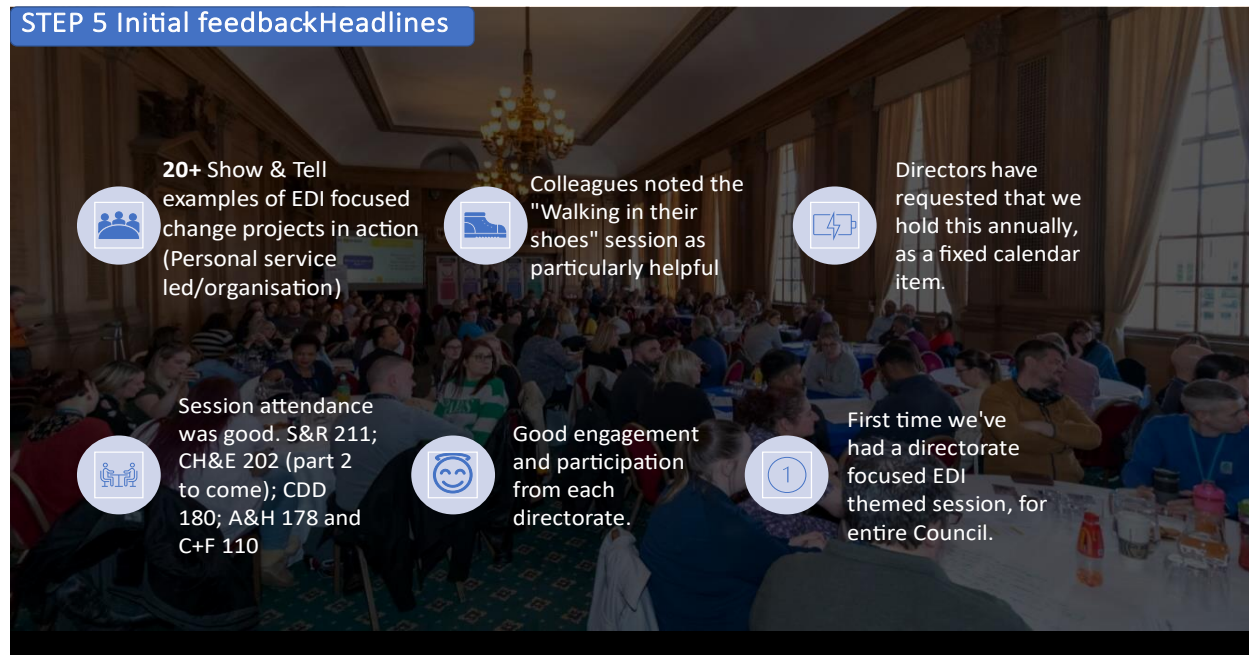
3.1 We expanded our provision of value based Be Your Best EDI training in 2024/25, adding to the success of our mandatory training for appraising managers. Scrutiny Board had welcomed our focus on appraising managers when we launched our 5-step programme. It also discussed the need to consider the provision of training for all staff. We have been able to extend provision to all staff on EDI training and in late 2024 we were able to develop a training product –“**Let’s talk EDI**” that everyone can now access, which we have started delivering. Every LCC staff colleague has access to EDI training and some will be directed to the training as a core need, based on recommendation by services or teams.

3.2 We have also introduced targeted mandatory training for managers on [Reasonable Adjustments](#) and for recruiting panels on inclusive recruitment and selection practices. The latter includes the increased use of interview questions being issued to candidates earlier, in recognition of the needs of neurodivergent applicants. This is helping us have a better recruitment experience overall, for both interviewees and interviewers. We have also maintained consistency and continuation of the mandatory Be Your Best [EDI Training for all Managers](#) so that newly appointed or promoted appraising managers receive the same required standard of training from our 5 step programme.



3.2 At the previous Scrutiny Board meeting of February 2024, delivery of the organisation’s Be Your Best on EDI 5-Step programme was near completion. Progress was shared with the Board of steps 1- 4, and Step 5, the last part of the programme was at its planning stage. This has now been completed successfully in May, June and July. For the first time in the Council, directorates delivered a focussed EDI specific session with their teams. They reflected on the

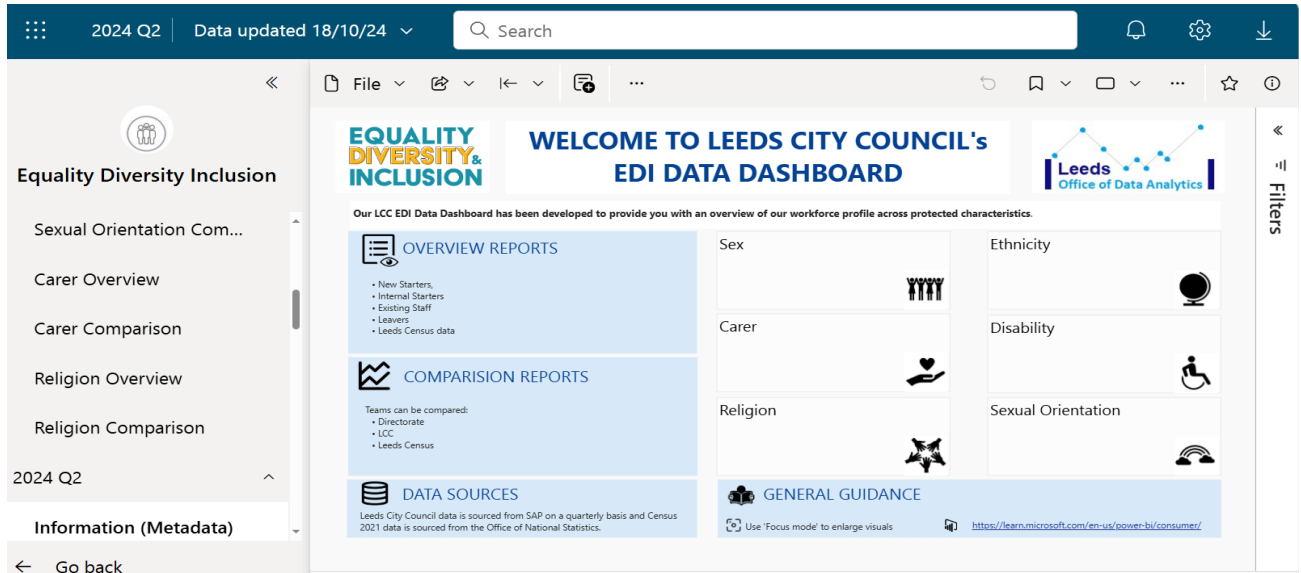
first 4 steps of the EDI programme, learning and sharing outcomes that had been achieved through a “show & tell” of good practice examples of a range of EDI impact projects. The sessions culminated in a call to action to continue to embed EDI in service provision. Each session was led by the relevant director and staff networks also shared their reflections as part of Step 5. Over **1,095** mostly appraising managers in total engaged in the Step 5 sessions.



## 4.0 PROGRESSION

- 4.1** Since the last report at Scrutiny Board, the Be Your Best aspiring leaders programme has been launched, providing 16 select colleagues with support, development training and leadership modules on inclusive leadership, making up the council’s bespoke 18-month programme. The aspiring leaders programme was open to colleagues with protected characteristics, is a year old and has led to a promotion and enabled some of the aspirants to apply for roles and be interviewed for them. There is six months left on the programme and monitoring of progress and key learning from this first cohort will be used in the development of potential future cohorts.
- 4.2** Colleagues have learned about inclusive leadership approaches through the benefit of nine “Leadership conversations” from leaders across a range of sectors, external and internal to the organisation. They have also had knowledge specific masterclasses from experts on personal development and scholars from University of Leeds, and from a learning and personal development consultant. Other masterclasses are planned on working at senior levels in a political environment, local government governance arrangements and other specialist subjects to enhance the learning. The aspirants are leading four key projects with senior project sponsors linked to pillars of our Best Council Ambition on Net Zero, Health & Wellbeing, Financial Challenge and strategic communications framework.
- 4.3** This year we are planning to expand the Aspiring Leaders programme to two cohorts (rather than just one) at different grade levels, to recognise the leadership potential at all levels within the organisation. Work is underway to ensure we are targeting the right grades. We will be guided by our workforce data to ensure the action we take addresses the under representation and disadvantage of protected groups in the Council.

## 5.0 DATA AND MONITORING



**5.1** The Leeds City Council EDI data dashboard is now available to all managers and leaders in the organisation. The dashboard is a key management tool to assist in the analysis of our workforce in terms of protected characteristics, which can be compared against team, service, directorate and Council levels as well at different grades. The dashboard also provides comparison to Leeds Census data, allowing us to understand gaps in representation which may highlight areas of potential disadvantage.

**5.2** Our dashboards will allow us to track how representative and diverse our workforce is. Our current workforce data, highlights this as follows:

- In terms of **sex**, 61% of our workforce is female (compared to 51% in Leeds) and 39% is male (compared to 48% in Leeds).
- In terms of **ethnicity**, 18% of our workforce is ethnically diverse (compared to 27% in Leeds).
- In terms of **disability**, 6% of our workforce is disabled (compared to 18% in Leeds).
- In terms of **sexual orientation**, 4% of our workforce is from the LGBT community (which is the same as in Leeds).
- In terms of **carers**, 9% of our workforce are carers (which is the same as in Leeds).
- In terms of **religion**, 40% of our workforce are religious (compared to 54% in Leeds).

**5.3** This year we are moving to a new self-service HR system, which has given us the opportunity to focus on a campaign to encourage our workforce to update their equality monitoring information. We are working with Staff Networks and frontline teams on how we can best communicate and encourage colleagues to participate.

## 6.0 ZERO TOLERANCE AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

**6.1** 2024/25 saw the challenge of national disturbances that impacted organisations and communities across the country, including Leeds. From the perspective of the workforce, the Council, with the support of the Race Equality Staff Network (RESN), held an important listening session with the Chief Executive to enable colleagues to come together and work through the impact of national events. The RESN held further additional safe space conversations and provided support to ethnically diverse colleagues who were feeling vulnerable, traumatised and worried as a result of the national and local disturbances.

- 6.2** In view of the situation the organisation reevaluated its [Zero Tolerance statement](#), making clear the position of the Council on discrimination, what it expects from colleagues and managers, and the consequences of not adhering to the issued guidance.
- 6.3** Work is currently ongoing to improve the early dispute resolution recommendations flowing out of the organisation's Grievance Practice Review. This is being prioritised in the current year 2025/26.
- 6.4** Within Leeds City Council we use our workforce Staff Survey as a means to measure employee satisfaction across our workforce. The last survey in 2023 highlighted that 87% of our workforce felt that their team support equality and prevent discrimination and that 78% of our workforce felt like they were treated fairly at work. We know that disabled people and carers have lower satisfaction scores. This year we have worked with our Disability and Wellbeing Network, the Carers Network and the Healthy Minds network, who have created a Disability, Carers and Mental Health Survey. The work we have started to promote positive action and reasonable adjustments shows our commitment to working with the networks to improve their lived experience in work and remove the barriers that some colleagues continue to face.

## **7.0 RECRUITMENT**

- 7.1** In view of our significant financial challenge we have had a freeze on active recruitment apart from externally funded and statutory/essential positions. However, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ambitions and value-based initiatives around recruitment have continued to be developed. This includes the introduction of inclusive recruitment and selection guidance and training for colleagues, the need for diverse selection panels, a re-emphasis of the importance of reasonable adjustments, support to neurodivergent applicants as well as ensuring our recruiting environment and process are inclusive to all.
- 7.2** With the introduction of making diverse panels mandatory, we are in the process of creating a pool of colleagues who will act as panel members within an inclusive recruitment and selection process.
- 7.3** We will be moving towards an anonymous shortlisting method in the second quarter of 2025 to remove barriers and the risks of bias in our recruitment and selection process.

## **8.0 CROSS CUTTING PROJECTS**

EDI has a broad scope which overlaps all our 5 EDI pillars. Therefore, the focus of the workforce EDI team does not easily fit exclusively into one area, like the work on positive action and reasonable adjustments. We are issuing regular communications through a variety of different channels to support this, as well as using our appraisal system to track progress and emphasising the importance of embedding EDI and our values in our appraisal system.

- 8.1** In Autumn 2024, we achieved a significant milestone, launching our positive action framework, supported by a manager's guide and animation to provide ease of understanding and use by managers.

Positive action describes the lawful steps which Leeds City Council can take, to remove the barriers which prevent opportunities and create disadvantage for individuals with one or more characteristics protected under the [Equality Act 2010](#).

## Positive Action is at the core of our values and strategies



We want all Leeds City Council managers to understand and use positive action in line with our Public Sector Equality Duty to remove the barriers which people with protected characteristics may face due to direct and indirect discrimination.

The approach helps to address disadvantage and under-representation in teams and is based on analysing organisational data to identify gaps, take action, and record outcomes. We intend to monitor progress to understand where we are making an impact. This important step supports the expectation for every manager to take the required actions to create a more representative workforce and design and deliver public services that are more inclusive.

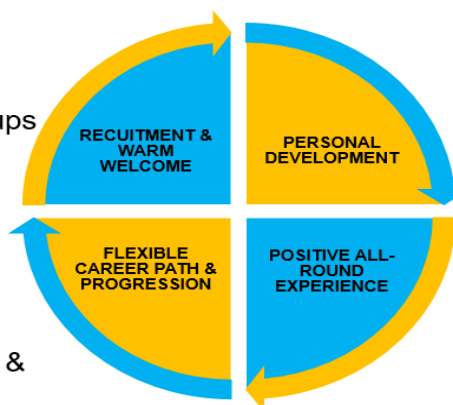
## Positive action in the employee life cycle

### Recruitment & warm welcome

- Inclusive job adverts targeting specific groups
- Tie breaker
- Open days

### Flexible career path & progression

- Shadowing, coaching & mentoring
- Training & internships



### Personal development

- Training & development courses
- Aspiring Leaders
- Staff Networks & allyship

### Positive all-round experience

- Workplace needs assessment
- No one-size-fits all
- Reverse mentoring
- Flexible & hybrid working
- Everywhere adjustments

**8.2** Reasonable adjustments are a good example of positive action in practice. Reasonable adjustments, like positive action, should be considered as a measure to support disabled people throughout the employee life cycle from job design, advertising and recruitment through to personal development, training and career progression. We are in the process of updating our reasonable adjustments guidance, taking into account feedback from our staff survey, Disabled Staff and Wellbeing network and Freedom To Speak Up Guardian. We have also introduced core training on [Reasonable Adjustments](#) for all managers to understand their public sector equality duty in relation to disabled people and working carers.

## **9. STAFF NETWORKS**

- 9.1** The organisation continues to benefit significantly from the work that our staff networks do. Representing the lived experience and voices of a selection of colleagues across the organisation, they provide check and challenge and feed into policy formation, organisational strategy and remain a good reference point for what it feels like to be an employee of LCC.
- 9.2** Appendix 1 provides an update from each of our seven staff networks, and gives an overview to scrutiny board, of their lived experience along with coverage of activity, successes and ongoing challenges from the perspective of those colleagues on each staff network group
- 9.3** There is ongoing work to refresh the operation of staff networks, update the corporate terms of reference and ensure the Council's approach remains fit for purpose as the organisation undergoes transformation. This includes ongoing work to create an additional and eighth staff network for Care Experienced colleagues, resulting from an approved action from Executive Board in 2024.
- 9.4** This latest update from the staff networks follows previous items, considered annually, by the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board. In 2023/24 the Board produced a scrutiny statement which was considered by Executive Board, setting out the Board's views on workforce EDI and on the valuable work of the staff networks. This is included as a link in the background documents section of the report.
- 9.5** Staff networks are an important sounding board for the work of the authority on Equality Diversity and Inclusion and offer valued support to colleagues from all backgrounds who work for the Council. The voices of our staff networks are also an opportunity to learn and improve how we work and support all our staff. It is valuable feedback, but it is important, whilst recognising and responding to this, to also note that many staff experience positive, fulfilling and progressive journeys as they work for the Council and contribute to our values and ambitions.

## **10. What impact will this proposal have?**

The EDI workforce plan is an important set of objectives and actions that enable Leeds City Council to respond to obligations under the Equality Act 2010, improve the representation of groups with protected characteristics at all levels and embed values and behaviours that enable fulfilment of the principles of Being Our Best and our commitment to our Best Council Plan.

## **11 How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?**

Health and Wellbeing                       Inclusive Growth                       Zero Carbon

The ongoing EDI activity supports the Council's organisational values and contributes to all staff feeling valued and being treated fairly in the workplace enabling them to Be Their Best at work. Creating a positive Be Your Best environment will enhance staff satisfaction, encourage progression and provide a culture through which the Best City Ambition can be delivered.

## **12 What consultation and engagement has taken place?**



Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

Consultation and engagement on EDI are part of our system processes. In delivering the organisation's EDI plan, we consult with the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team. Each director has a linked protected characteristic that they champion, and progress is reported through to CLT on a regular basis. Scrutiny Board receive annual update reports, Trade Union colleagues receive updates at corporate joint consultative committees, staff networks meet with Head of HR (EDI) in rotation and each of our directorates has an EDI Board as well as the Corporate EDI Forum. There are also elected member champions for each protected characteristic.

From a Scrutiny Board perspective EDI was identified as an area of interest for Board members as the work programme was developed early in the 2024/25 municipal year. The Council's EDI workstream has featured at this meeting on several occasions in recent years, including our annual EDI report that was presented at the Executive Board, and this item reflects the Board's ongoing interest in this area. Staff Networks have also been consulted in terms of attendance and contribution to this item and representatives from the networks attend scrutiny board for the annual review.

**13 What are the resource implications?**

There are no specific resource implications contained in this report given its nature as an update report.

**14 What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

This report has no specific risk management implications, given its nature as an update report. EDI risks are managed through the wider risk management framework that is reported to Executive Board each year.

**15 What are the legal implications?**

This report has no specific legal implications, our EDI work takes place within the context of relevant legislation.

**Options, timescales and measuring success**

**16 What other options were considered?**

None.

This is not a decision-making report and is provided as an information and update report to the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board, as such no other options were considered.

**17. How will success be measured?**

The Council's ongoing commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as set out in this report, has a wide range of specific priorities including delivery of EDI plan across the 5 thematic areas of Recruitment, Training, Progression, Zero Tolerance and Data Monitoring. Continued development and delivery against these workstreams will contribute significantly to the success of the Council's approach to EDI. We will measure success through our EDI KPIs and through ongoing development of how representative we are as an organisation through workforce EDI data.

## **18. What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

This report summarises the range of work that has taken place during 2024/25 to demonstrate how EDI has been taken forward. The update report to the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny Board does not have a deadline for implementation, as it captures outcomes on an ongoing workstream and is more retrospective. In line with the accountabilities set out in the overall EDI strategy, the Director of Strategy and Resources is responsible for leading the workforce aspects of EDI, although we are clear that EDI is the responsibility of everyone, and we have an expectation that all managers, in particular, will take a leadership role when it comes to embedding EDI.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Submissions from the staff Networks:
- Healthy Minds Staff Network
- Race Equality Staff Network (RESN)
- Women's Voice
- LGBT+ Staff Network
- Carers' Network
- DAWN Staff Network
- Career Advancement Network (CAN)

### **Background papers**

- [EDI Annual Report Appendix 7 150724 compressed.pdf](#) –Scrutiny Board Statement: Workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)