

Our Equality and Diversity Strategy: 2026-2030

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1. Setting the context

Hyndburn lies right at the heart of Pennine Lancashire and consists of 14 towns and villages. The Borough covers 73 square kilometres and in 2021 had a population of 82,234, showing a small increase of 1.9% since 2011.

Hyndburn has the smallest land area of the 14 authorities in the broader Lancashire area. In common with some of the other districts in East Lancashire, there are significant issues with regard to the quality and price of housing, net population migration, health, job creation and areas of severe deprivation.

We are working hard to address these issues and our Vision is “Driving growth and prosperity in Hyndburn”. Our Corporate Strategy sets out how we will address this.

This policy aims to:

- highlight the different kinds of equalities issues;
- consider community cohesion, integration and social inclusion, community engagement and participation;
- show how we need to consider a wide variety of factors to understand the concerns and barriers facing our communities;
- set out our corporate approach to equalities; and
- set key actions for the lifetime of this strategy.

Equality and diversity underpins our overall council strategies, policies and procedures and our corporate values, which are:

- **Teamwork** - We promote a friendly and supportive working environment. We will work together across teams, services and with partners to achieve the objectives of the Council and the best outcomes for our customers.
- **Customer focus** - We will make best use of our resources to support the delivery of excellent services to our customers. We will treat each customer as a valued individual and show sensitivity to their needs and differences.
- **Integrity** - We will always try to do the right thing. We will act and communicate honestly and openly, honour our commitments and be accountable for our actions.
- **Positive attitude** - We will be proactive and optimistic in finding solutions to challenges, open to improved ways of working and to updating our knowledge and skills to meet these changes.

The Equality Act 2010 sets out distinct strands, known as “protected characteristics”. These are age, disability, ethnicity, gender (including gender identity), religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership. These issues are often inter-related and it can be the combination of these factors that leads to social exclusion.

2. The Public Sector Equality Duty

As a Public Sector organisation, the Council has certain duties under the Equality Act 2010. We must have due regard for these when going about our business. These are:

- eliminating conduct that is prohibited by the Act;
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims or arms of the general equality duty. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics;
- taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people; and
- encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

3. The Protected Characteristics

3.1 Disability

When carrying out our functions, we will try to:

- promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities;
- encourage participation by people with disabilities in public life;
- promote equality of opportunity between people with or without disabilities;
- eliminate disability-related harassment;
- eliminate unlawful discrimination; and
- take steps to meet the needs of people with disabilities, even if this requires treatment that is more favourable.

This applies to all of our functions and activities including employment, service delivery, budget setting, procurement and regulatory functions.

It is important to consider what we mean by the term “disability”. The Equality Act 2010 says that person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and this impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. This could include, for example, problems with mobility, manual dexterity, physical co-ordination, continence, ability to lift, carry or move everyday objects, speech, hearing or eyesight, memory or ability to learn and understand, ability to concentrate, or where a person’s perception of risk or physical danger is impaired. This is not an exhaustive list, but it provides a guide. The 2021 Census showed that 20.8% of Hyndburn residents (17,127 people) are disabled under the Equality Act, with their day-to-day activities limited by a long-term health problem or disability. This represents an increase of 4,482 people since 2011. A further 6.0% of residents have a long-term physical or mental health condition but are not disabled under the Equality Act as their day-to-day activities are not limited. The 2021 Census question changed to align more closely with the Equality Act 2010 and included mental health conditions explicitly, which may account for some of the increase.

Around 3.3% of Hyndburn residents provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week to those with health conditions or disabilities, an increase from 3.1% in 2011.

We recognise the growing understanding of neurodiversity and neurodivergence, which encompasses conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurological differences. Neurodivergent people may experience and interact with the world differently, and we are committed to making reasonable adjustments to ensure our services, communications and working environments are accessible. This includes considering sensory needs, providing information in different formats, allowing flexible communication methods, and ensuring our staff understand and can respond appropriately to the needs of neurodivergent customers and colleagues.

3.2 Gender Equality

We will try to:

- promote equality of opportunity between people of different gender identities, including people undergoing gender re-assignment;
- eliminate sex discrimination; and

- have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment against men, women and people undergoing gender re-assignment, in the fields of employment, vocational training and in the provision of goods and services; and
- challenge any discriminatory attitudes or practices that exist.

Gender Reassignment includes anyone who is proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of process) to reassign their sex. The Equality and Human Rights Commission notes that the preferred umbrella term is “trans” which encompasses different forms of gender identity, such as people who identify as non-binary. We understand and respect that there can be differences between assigned sex and gender identity and expression and we value all of our staff and customers, including individuals who identify outside of the gender binary.

The 2021 Census was the first to include questions on gender identity and sexual orientation for those aged 16 and over. In Hyndburn, 93.6% of residents reported that their gender identity was the same as their sex registered at birth, while 0.5% reported a different gender identity. These questions were voluntary and 6.0% of residents chose not to answer. The Council will ensure that its policies and services take account of any updated guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission regarding gender identity and service provision.

We report on our gender pay gap in line with legal requirements. We will take any actions we decide are appropriate if the pay gap information highlights any concerns.

3.3 Race Equality

In the Equality Act, race can mean someone’s colour, or their nationality (including citizenship). It can also mean their ethnic or national origins, which may not be the same as their current nationality. For example, a person may have Chinese national origins and be living in Britain with a British passport.

Race also covers ethnic and racial groups. This means a group of people who all share the same protected characteristic of ethnicity or race.

Public authorities must promote race equality and ensure that employment and services (including services provided through other organisations on their behalf) are fair and accessible for everyone.

Both institutional and individual racism “can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantages ethnic minority people.” We recognise that institutional racism can exist, and that no organisation is immune.

Hyndburn has a significant ethnic minority population. In 2021, 82.7% of residents identified as White (including White British, Irish, Gypsy/Traveller and other White backgrounds) and 17.3% identified with ethnic minority backgrounds, an increase from 12.3% in 2011. The largest ethnic minority group is Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh at 15.1% of the population (up from 11.2% in 2011), with Pakistani heritage remaining the largest single ethnic minority group in Hyndburn. We have a large Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and have 15 sites within Hyndburn.

In 2021, 9.0% of Hyndburn residents were born outside the UK, a small increase from 7.2% in 2011. Most residents who migrated to Hyndburn from outside the UK have been resident for 10 years or more, reflecting the established nature of our diverse communities.

The 2021 Census shows that Hyndburn's top five main languages are English, Panjabi, Polish, Urdu and Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya).

We are proud of our excellent record of working with partners across Lancashire on resettlement and integration, helping families settle into our communities and build new lives. We celebrate the history of community cohesion within our Borough.

3.4 Religion and belief

This characteristic covers any religion or any religious or philosophical belief, including a lack of religion or belief

Faith groups have a positive impact on our local communities. They bring opportunities to create face-to-face dialogue, which supports a greater understanding of shared values, appreciation of distinctiveness and for side-by-side collaborative social action.

The religious make up of Hyndburn in 2021 reflected national trends with a decline in Christianity and growth in other religions and non-religious identities. In 2021: 51.0% identified as Christian (down from 66.4% in 2011); 28.4% reported no religion (up from 16.7%); 14.7% identified as Muslim (up from 10.3%); with smaller numbers identifying as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and other religions. Around 5.2% of residents chose not to answer this voluntary question.

3.5 Specific Definitions adopted by the Council

Antisemitism

The Council has adopted the International Holocaust Memorial Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism and its examples¹. The definition states: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

3.6 Age

The law regarding age discrimination covers organisations providing goods, facilities and services and carrying out public services as well as in the employment sector.

Older people, particularly in rural areas, can face social isolation and can feel cut off from the wider community. Young people can often feel socially excluded and marginalised within their communities. We try to engage with people of all ages to empower them to participate in their local communities.

In 2021, Hyndburn had 16,604 young people aged 0-15, representing 20% of the population (slightly down from 20.4% in 2011). The working-age population (16-64) was 50,626 people (62%), while

¹ https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press_release_document_antisemitism.pdf

those aged 65 and over numbered 15,006 (18%), representing substantial growth in the older population from 12,809 in 2011. This aging population trend is expected to continue, with increasing demand for age-appropriate services and support for older residents.

3.7 Sexual orientation

The Equality Act 2010 says that people must not be discriminated against because:

- they are heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual; or
- someone thinks they have a particular sexual orientation (this is known as discrimination by perception); or
- they are connected to someone who has a particular sexual orientation (this is known as discrimination by association)

In the Equality Act, sexual orientation includes how people choose to express their sexual orientation, such as through their appearance or the places they visit.

Homophobia is the irrational hatred, intolerance, and fear of lesbian, gay and bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) people. These negative feelings fuel the myths, stereotypes, and discrimination that are harmful and can lead to violence against LGBTQ people.

The 2021 Census was the first to include a voluntary question on sexual orientation for those aged 16 and over. In Hyndburn, 90.4% of respondents identified as straight or heterosexual, while 2.4% identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or another sexual orientation. 7.2% of residents chose not to answer this voluntary question. The Council recognises that LGBTQ+ people may face specific barriers to accessing services and opportunities, and we will continue to work to ensure our services are inclusive and welcoming to all.

3.8 Marriage and Civil Partnership

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 extended marriage to same-sex couples, and the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019 extended civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples, reflecting the diversity of family structures in modern Britain.

3.9 Pregnancy and maternity

There are specific provisions of the Equality Act relating to employment rights for women who are pregnant or have recently given birth. Pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination can also occur outside of the workplace if a woman is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth (within the past 26 weeks) and, in particular, because she is breastfeeding.

3.10 Socio-economic inequality

Whilst not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, the Council considers socio-economic inequality as an important issue and for a long time this has been key to how the Council sets its priorities. Inequality is not just about gender, race, disability, or the other protected characteristics. It is also about social class – family background or place of birth. By socio-economic disadvantage we mean the state of being disadvantaged in life. This applies in terms of getting on, getting educated, getting a job. It is influenced by one or more of a range of external factors. Poverty is one such factor, but it can also be about the complex interplay of factors such as health, housing, education,

domestic abuse and family background, and the resulting lack of ambitions and expectations, that so often combine to keep people in poverty, and limit their chances of upward social mobility.

Hyndburn continues to face socio-economic challenges. In 2021, 22.8% of residents aged 16+ had no formal qualifications (down from 28.0% in 2011). 25.2% of residents hold Level 4 qualifications or above (degree level), an increase from 18.9% in 2011. Economic activity rates show 57.7% of working-age residents are economically active. Cost-of-living pressures have intensified pressures on households, particularly those on low incomes or benefits, and the Council recognises the intersections between socio-economic disadvantage and protected characteristics.

4. Human Rights Issues

Human Rights are about our basic needs as human beings - the core rights we are all entitled to so that we can develop our potential and live our lives with fairness, dignity and respect. The Council has legal duties as a public authority to act compatibly with UK law in the Human Rights Act, along with the related duties in relation to equality and anti-discrimination laws.

Human Rights should be looked at when planning, reporting, policy, day-to-day decision-making and practice. Many of the important aspects of the rights are as follows;

- the right to life;
- the right not to be tortured or treated in an inhuman or degrading way;
- the right to be free from slavery or forced labour;
- the right to liberty and security;
- the right to a fair trial;
- the right to no punishment without law;
- the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence;
- the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- the right to freedom of expression;
- the right to freedom of assembly and association;
- the right to marry and found a family;
- the right not to be discriminated against in relation to the enjoyment of any rights contained in the European Convention;
- the right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions;
- the right to education; and
- the right to free elections.

5. Hate Crimes and Incidents

A hate incident is any incident which the victim, or anyone else, thinks is based on someone's prejudice towards them because of their race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability; or motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender. Hate incidents cause alarm, distress or harassment.

Not all hate incidents will amount to criminal offences, but those that do become hate crimes.

The Council's Hate Crime and Incident Procedure outlines how the Council will respond to report of hate crimes or incidents.

6. Our commitment to equality and diversity

This policy is part of our continuing approach to address equality and diversity in Hyndburn. We will continue to mainstream our approach to equality and diversity into our service planning and delivery activities. We recognise and value the diversity of our communities in our work.

Not only do we aim to carry out all of our legislative duties but we also want to go beyond what is required of us. We will also work towards our equality objectives so that we can actively promote equality for all of our residents and address any issues that exist. We recognise our community leadership role and use this to work towards a cohesive community in which inequality is tackled and equality promoted.

Diversity is about recognising and embracing differences. People are not the same and by recognising this, we look at the specific needs of individuals and social groups. This strategy is about treating people fairly and recognising their differences. This works at three levels:

- community relations - how we engage with and understand the needs of our communities;
- service delivery – taking into account differences by providing a choice of services and responding to a range of needs; and
- internally - how we apply our HR policies and our attitudes and differences in the work place.

This policy applies to both our internal and external operations. It covers all aspects of our work and applies to officers, councillors, partner organisations, contractors and anyone we are working with. It states our position as an organisation and our high-level commitment to recognising and promoting equality and diversity.

7. How we will deliver our equality objectives

This section sets out our approach to incorporating equality and diversity as part of our work in order to meet our equality objectives. This builds on our legal requirements and embraces the protected characteristics.

7.1 Customer First Analyses

An equality impact assessment is a way of assessing and consulting on the effect a policy, project or service is likely to have on different groups of people. Within the Council, we call this process Customer First Analysis. Our approach is deliberately simple to carry out and understand. Our focus is on making this a useful part of the decision-making process which does not feel unnecessarily bureaucratic for those involved.

We screen all reports when they go to Cabinet, Council or other decision-making groups as appropriate. This means that we consider the implications of the policy, project or service in relation to our priorities and promises and the impact they will have on our communities. This is a time where the impact of services is looked at including issues such as:

- Do we have adequate information about the impact of our services?
- What consultation have we conducted to ensure they are meeting residents' needs?
- Have there been any complaints or other feedback, that we can learn from?
- How can we ensure our services are not having an adverse impact or resulting in any discrimination?
- How can we develop the policy, project or service so that it will help us to deliver our equality duties?
- Can we learn from good practice in other organisations?

7.2 Responsibility for Equalities

We believe that all elected members and staff have responsibility for delivering fair services to all and we ensure that equality issues are considered in our decision-making and policy development.

We have a Cabinet Member with responsibility for equality within the Health and Communities portfolio and a nominated senior manager who leads this work, currently the Head of Policy and Organisational Development.

7.3 Reporting procedures

The Council has a Hate Crime and Incident Procedure for reporting and responding to hate crimes and incidents. This aims to ensure that all such episodes are reported and are dealt with promptly, appropriately and effectively and to aid the evaluation, review and development of best practice. Our Grievance, Whistleblowing and Complaints procedures allow staff, elected members and customers to raise concerns.

7.4 Employment and training

Equality and diversity is embedded within all of our employee-related matters. Our recruitment and selection procedures aim to ensure that anyone involved in the recruitment and selection of employees to the Council is following good management practice and legal obligations. We ensure

there is fair and equal pay through a job evaluation scheme and we regularly report on and examine our workforce profile information.

Monitoring takes place as part of our overall recruitment processes. This involves monitoring information and statistics regarding the profile of applicants entering into the recruitment process. We are committed to developing our employees and providing equal access to training and development opportunities. By developing our people this has a positive impact on our services and performance. We ask for monitoring information in our employee surveys.

Training is a key part of our approach to diversity. This aims to address diversity issues and raise awareness. All of our diversity training incorporates links to our equality objectives and details set out in this policy.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, which came into force in October 2024, requires the Council to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of our employees, including harassment by third parties such as customers or contractors. Our policies and training reflect these enhanced duties.

As well as with our own staff it is important that we also consider diversity issues in relation to our partners and key contractors. All staff who are involved in procurement and contracting related activity are required to consider diversity issues. Similarly, all partners, contractors and consultants are required to comply in all respects with our policies, contract procedure rules and financial regulations where appropriate.

8. Monitoring our services

Monitoring plays an important role in our equality and diversity work.

Legislation requires us to monitor services in relation to race, gender and disability. This legislation does not set out the specific ways in which we must monitor services but it requires us to ensure that no discrimination exists within the services we provide and that we must ensure equal access to our services. To establish this we need to be able to know more about the customers that are using our services to ensure there are no barriers to access. Sometimes monitoring can seem to be an intrusive process for customers and colleagues so we need to make it clear to them why we are asking personal questions.

We will use impact assessments to establish gaps in information we have about our customers and we will build on existing monitoring systems we have in place and our developing customer insight tools. This will include identifying high-risk areas where additional monitoring is required.

9. Our Equality and Diversity Actions

The following actions will support us to meet our equality duty. Further actions may be identified during the life of this strategy.

- a) Continue to carry out and publish Customer First Analyses to support relevant decisions.
- b) Produce and publish our annual workforce monitoring report and consider actions to achieve a more representative workforce.
- c) Report on our gender pay gap each year and take any action identified as a result of this.
- d) Consider equality and diversity-related training needs each year when planning learning and development activities.
- e) Continuing to evaluate jobs against an approved scheme to maintain integrity of pay.
- f) Promote flexible working opportunities as available to all employees, regardless of gender.
- g) Collect monitoring information when appropriate for access to services and responses to consultation processes.
- h) Ensure our Hate Crime and Safeguarding Policies are kept up to date and understood by our staff and elected members, and that we engage with partners to address issues and raise awareness.
- i) Ensure that staff understand how they can address unacceptable behaviour at work, for example through our Dignity at Work Policy.
- j) Review and where possible improve how we support staff who have been the subject of discriminatory conduct from customers and ensure we are doing all we can to minimise the risks of this occurring.
- k) Maintain our “White Ribbon” accreditation to signify our commitment to tackling domestic abuse.
- l) Ensure that meeting venues and services are accessible and adjustments made to support individual needs.
- m) Support Hate Crime Awareness week and other relevant campaigns.
- n) Ensure that we meet our responsibilities, alongside working with partners, to support refugees and asylum seekers.
- o) Train staff to support customers with diverse needs, especially those who deal directly with customers.
- p) Use loop system at meetings and provide sign language interpreters or large print copies of paperwork when requested.
- q) Monitor and respond to updated guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on service provision and protected characteristics, particularly regarding single-sex spaces, gender identity, and reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

- r) Ensure that major regeneration projects have equality considerations embedded from design through to delivery.
- s) Address digital exclusion by ensuring that residents without internet access or digital skills can still access council services and information, recognizing that digital exclusion often intersects with age, disability, and socio-economic disadvantage.
- t) Monitor the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on residents with protected characteristics and work with partners to ensure support reaches those who need it most.
- u) Provide material relevant to consultation & engagement in different forms (including holding events, making printed/graphic material web accessible, personal contact by phone, email or visit on request, etc.).