

# **Westmorland and Furness statement on equity, diversity and inclusion.**

Version 1.1

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## Foreword

We are extremely pleased to introduce this statement on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) on behalf of Westmorland and Furness Council, including our first set of equality objectives and progress report under the Equality Act 2010.

When the council was established in 2023, we immediately set out in our Council Plan how tackling inequalities and discrimination, and being inclusive, are key priorities for us. In support of this, we invested in an initial phase of work to develop an organisation-wide approach to EDI, focusing specifically on inequalities experienced by people with the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act, as well as additional groups the council has agreed it will bring within scope of our EDI work.

As an ambitious council, our aim is to deliver best practice in how we consider EDI in all that the council does, whether in relation to individual customers, communities or our own workforce and councillors. This statement, our objectives and linked action plan, set out how we will build the foundations for this as we continue to bring together the systems and processes of four legacy councils and develop a new approach for Westmorland and Furness Council.

Our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion will be permanent. Although the council's objectives and work will necessarily develop over time, we will build in attention to equity, diversity and inclusion in everything we do to support our customers, communities, workforce and councillors.

Sam Plum  
Chief Executive

Councillor Virginia Taylor  
Cabinet Member for Sustainable Communities and Localities

## Summary

This statement sets out Westmorland and Furness Council's position on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across our area and within the council. It includes our organisational equality objectives and a summary of our supporting action plan.

In the years to come, we will report annually on the progress the council has made on EDI and complying with the Equality Act 2010. We will also update this statement and our objectives at least every four years; or earlier when it is appropriate to do so.

We use the following definitions, and include the groups and themes listed below, within the scope of our EDI approach:

Equity - means that, in some circumstances, people need to be treated differently in order to provide meaningful equality of opportunity (the Equality Act refers to equality but uses a definition that is similar to our use of equity, that is treating people according to their needs in order to provide equality of opportunity. We are using the term equity, in line with our three sustainability principles of equity, economy and the environment).

Diversity - recognising, and celebrating, that people have different characteristics, backgrounds, attributes, cultures and experience.

Inclusion - actively ensuring that everyone is included, welcomed, represented and reflected, in our services, council and community.

### Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage/civil partnership
- Maternity/pregnancy
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

### Additional themes identified by W&F

- Armed forces families
- People who are care experienced (having experience of the care system)
- Rurality
- Socio-economic inequality

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We recognise that there are other groups in Westmorland and Furness who are also vulnerable and / or experience barriers to enjoying the same opportunities as others, and will strive to address this in our work, too.

Our simple ambition is to reduce inequalities and discrimination within Westmorland and Furness. We want to be a council that understands and takes account of the varying needs and experiences of the different groups among our community, working hard to ensure all our residents, staff and members are included, supported and celebrated for who they are.

## Why are we focusing on EDI?

There are many reasons why we want to prioritise EDI, above and beyond the fact we have a legal responsibility to implement the public sector equality duty set out in the Equality Act 2010.

### Because it's the right thing to do

We have already set out in our council priorities how we want to tackle inequalities across Westmorland and Furness and help everyone to achieve their full potential. In common with other places, the gaps between health, education, employment and other outcomes for people with diverse origins and backgrounds in our area are too wide. We believe we have a moral duty to ensure that all our residents, no matter where they live or what their background, experience the same opportunities and are treated respectfully and with dignity and care.

#### Inequality laid bare

[Public health data](#) shows that:

- on average, men and women in the most deprived areas of Westmorland and Furness can expect to live 16 and 13.8 years less than those in the least deprived areas
- the relative percentages of children receiving free school meals who achieve a good level of development by the end of reception, compared to those not in receipt of free school meals, are stark: 30.8%/64.2% in Furness, 34.3%/66.7% in Eden and 45.4%/69.7% in South Lakeland, against national figures of 49.1%/71.5%
- nationally, [labour market figures](#) show an almost thirty percent differential (53.6% / 82.5%) in the proportion of disabled people who are employed compared to those who are not disabled

### To deliver better services

A deep understanding of our citizens and communities is crucial to the council delivering the best possible services it can. Only this knowledge will help us tailor services to people's needs and ensure we provide residents with support that helps them thrive. At a time when all councils are under huge financial pressure, and when residents have high expectations of our services, understanding the customers and communities we serve will help target our limited resources as effectively as possible.

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## Our community leadership role

As an area, Westmorland and Furness may not visibly appear to be as diverse as other parts of the country, but not all diversity is visible, and all communities are becoming more diverse over time. This makes it even more important that the council shows leadership in emphasising the importance of understanding and celebrating equity, diversity and inclusion, while also taking a broad approach that reflects the communities in our area.

## Our area

Westmorland & Furness covers an area of 3,760 square km. [Population data from the 2021 census](#) shows a population of 226,550 (split between Barrow (67,400), Eden (54,700) and South Lakeland (104,450) localities); an average population density of 60 people per square km (compared to a national average of 395 people per square km).

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	1.0%,
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	0.3%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8%
White	97.6%
Other ethnic group	0.3%

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Day to day activities not limited (not disabled)	82.8%
Day to day activities limited of which broken down below:	17.2%
Day to day activities limited a little	10.2%
Day to day activities limited a lot	7.0%

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Christian	55.5%
No religion	37%
Not answered	6%



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<b>Religion Breakdown</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Christian	55.5%
Buddhist	1.0%
Other religion	0.4%
Muslim	0.4%
Hindu	0.1%
Jewish	0.5%
Sikh	0.0%

**Language:**

98% English first language

<b>Age</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Under 15	14%
15 to 64	60%
65 and over	26%

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Females	114,869	51%
Males	111,723	49%

**Sexual orientation:**

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Area	Population	Heterosexual	Gay or Lesbian	Bisexual	All other Sexual Orientations	Not Answered
England & Wales	48,566,400	89.4%	1.5%	1.3%	0.3%	7.5%
Barrow	55,800	91.1%	1.2%	1.0%	0.3%	6.4%
Eden	46,600	91.0%	1.0%	0.8%	0.2%	7.0%
South Lakeland	89,700	90.8%	1.1%	0.9%	0.2%	7.0%

**Gender Identity:**

Area	Population	Gender ID (same as sex registered at birth)	Gender ID (different sex registered at birth)	Trans Women	Trans Men	All other gender IDs	Not Answered
England & Wales	48,566,400	93.5%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	6.0%
Barrow	55,800	94.8%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	4.9%
Eden	46,600	94.4%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	5.3%
South Lakeland	89,700	94.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	5.2%

Married or registered civil partnership	Percentage of population
Married or in a registered civil partnership	49.0%
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	31.9%
Separated, but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership	1.8%
Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	6.6%

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<b>Married or registered civil partnership</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Widowed or surviving civil partnership partner	8.1%
Married or civil partnership couple	30.6%
Lone parent family	8.3%

<b>Living arrangements</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
Living in a couple	62.3%
Not living in a couple	37.3%

<b>UK Armed Forces</b>	<b>Percentage of population</b>
No (0) people in the household previously served in UK armed forces	91.8%
1 person in the household previously served in UK armed forces	7.8%

## Socio-economic inequality

The 2019 Indices of Deprivation (IoD) published by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) classified 12 of Westmorland and Furness's 144 Lower Super Output Areas (LSAOs) as being within the 10% most deprived of areas in England. These communities were all located within Barrow-in-Furness. Inversely, Westmorland and Furness had 7 LSAOs that were classified as being in the 10% least deprived of LSAOs nationally: these LSAOs were located in South Lakeland (6 LSAOs) and Barrow-in-Furness (1 LSAO).

## Rurality

Westmorland & Furness Council is England's most sparsely populated local authority area. 55% live in a rural area.

- 60 people per km<sup>2</sup>

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- 25 people per km<sup>2</sup> in Eden
- 864 people per km<sup>2</sup> in Barrow-in-Furness
- 68 people per km<sup>2</sup> in South Lakeland

## How it is changing

Our projected population increase to 2028 (1.1%) is smaller than the national average (+5%), with projected decreases in the 0-15 and 16-64 age groups (-5.5% and -3.5%) but an increase in the 65+ age group which is well above national average (rising to 29.4% of the population, compared to the 20.7% England average).

While child poverty data is several years in arrears, Free School Meal applications and eligibility figures give a more up to date picture of child poverty rates at a local level and demonstrate a significant increase in children on free school meals – suggesting that future child poverty figures will be much higher than previously expected. In Westmorland and Furness the figures increased from 8.5% to 14.2% between 2018 and 2022.

There has been an increase in ethnic minorities resident in Westmorland and Furness since the 2011 census, with more languages spoken, linked to global migration (specifically the Syrian Refugee, Afghan Resettlement and Homes for Ukraine Schemes, as well as local placements through Home Office Contingency Hotels).

Projections show significantly increasing rates of a range of disabilities amongst people aged over 65 in Westmorland and Furness between 2020-2040, compared with falls in the equivalent rates amongst people aged 18-64.

Over the next 5-10 years the numbers of people self-identifying as LGBTQ+ will increase, especially among younger age groups.

## Our council and our commitment to EDI

Although each area is different and has its own distinct communities, our work on EDI is framed by national issues and trends. It is now four years since the initial height of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic shone a new light on the health and other inequalities that disproportionately impact some members of our communities and how this left some people far more vulnerable to the pandemic than others. The pandemic was followed immediately by the ongoing cost of living crisis, which has again hit certain and more vulnerable communities harder than others.

The pandemic and cost of living crisis have exacerbated existing inequalities across the country. While there may be different views on whether or not these inequalities are illustrative of systemic and institutional disadvantage or prejudice, as outlined above it is unarguable that statistics show significant differences in how children born in different places will fare in life.

Alongside this, some parts of our community may experience a more challenging day to day existence due to discrimination and prejudice they face linked to who they are. [Figures from the Evidence for Equality National Survey \(EVENS\)](#) indicate that over a quarter of survey respondents had been verbally abused or insulted because of their ethnicity, colour, race or religion, while nearly a third reported racial discrimination in education and employment and a fifth while looking for housing. Most shockingly, almost one in six respondents had experienced a racially motivated physical assault, with that figure rising to more than a third among those identifying as Gypsy/Traveller, Roma or Other Black.

[Figures from Cumbria Constabulary published by the Home Office](#) show that there were 901 hate crime incidents recorded in 2022/23; 531 relating to race, 174 to sexual orientation, 150 to disability, and 37 to religion and transgender respectively.

Within the workplace, [research by Savanta indicates that 22 percent of people in the UK had experienced discrimination in the workplace](#), with much higher rates for some groups (for example, 33 percent of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and 41 percent of people with an Asian background).

This is not right, and it is why tackling inequalities and discrimination, being inclusive, and increasing diversity, are all themes that are central to the council's vision and values and run throughout the council plan.

The council has already undertaken or started work focusing on specific inequalities; for example, our local Marmot review, focusing on health inequalities, and our Team Barrow work with the government and others targeting specific issues in the Barrow locality. We have also set out clear ambitions to empower and build wealth in our communities, through

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the development of our community power approach, and our aspirations around social value and community wealth building.

The task now is to make a reality of these ambitions and ensure we have a demonstrable impact for our communities and in our own organisation. To do this, from the very start of our work we will need to think about EDI in terms of our individual customers and service users; our communities; and also the council itself - our workforce and elected councillors, who are crucial to implementing this approach. We must ensure EDI is a critical factor at the heart of how we think about issues, design services, support communities and develop our workforce. Our staff and councillors should understand, embrace, and represent, the diversity of our area and beyond.

## The challenge

As a new council formally established in April 2023, we recognise that we have lots to do to develop and strengthen our work on EDI, drawing on the best bits of practice from our legacy councils and the good work already happening in our area.

It is important to be honest and upfront that this work can be challenging. On a practical level, reversing often entrenched and structural inequalities is not a quick process, but takes time and investment. This is also an area where there are often sensitivities about perceived competing interests between different groups within communities, where views and societal norms change over time and where there can be concern and discomfort about these and other changes.

As a new organisation, Westmorland and Furness Council faces additional challenges linked to the fact that we are still working through the process of bringing together four separate organisations into one, and there are many competing agendas demanding staff time. The need to unify our IT systems and organisational procedures, update our data and refresh relationships with partners as the new Westmorland and Furness Council will all shape our early work on this issue, but we also believe that this is an important opportunity to firmly embed an EDI focused approach within the new organisation.

For this reason, as a council that seeks to be ambitious in all that we do, we recognise that we need to balance that ambition with a pragmatic approach. We want to be recognised as a council that tackles discrimination head on; an organisation that is anti-racist and combats prejudice affecting people with other protected characteristics, too. But to be able to do so effectively, we believe we need to focus firstly on putting in place solid foundations that enable us to meet our obligations under the public sector equality duty; to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people and communities. EDI will be an ongoing focus for us, so it's important that we get the basics right at the outset in order to further develop our work in the years to come.

At this stage in the life of the council, we are purposely setting out this initial statement, a set of equality objectives and an action plan that will shape our work over the next two years, rather setting objectives for the next four years (the time period for equalities objectives required under the public sector equality duty) or seeking to develop a comprehensive strategy. We believe that taking this approach now will leave us better positioned to revisit our plans and work with external partners to further develop our approach in 2026 once the necessary supporting processes have been implemented.

## Our objectives and summary action plan

We have used the Local Government Association's Equality Framework for Local Government to understand and map out the work we need to undertake to strengthen our approach to EDI. Our EDI action plan is informed by the four modules below, and pulls together existing planned work and new activity into a single workstream that will help us progress through the framework:

- understanding and working with our communities.
- leadership and political commitment
- responsive services and customer care
- diverse and engaged workforce

Our organisational equality objectives for the initial period 2024-2026, and linked action plan workstreams and selected activities, are as follows.

### Equality objective 1

Establish and embed structures and processes that help to ensure an EDI focused approach at all levels of the organisation

Workstream 1: Establish and embed structures and processes that help to ensure an EDI focused approach at all levels of the organisation.

Action	Timetable
Agree Corporate Management Team EDI champion	Spring 2024
Launch a new cross-organisational EDI network to shape the corporate approach to EDI.	Summer 2024
Ensure all directorates establish equality working groups and develop action plans setting out how they will progress work on EDI as a shared directorate endeavour.	Autumn 2024
Implement and oversee workstream to increase the number and quality of equality impact assessments undertaken by staff.	Spring 2025



## Equality objective 2

Enhance our understanding of our customers and communities, and provide services that reflect the needs of, and are accessible to all

Workstream 2: Improve customer data collection and analysis across the organisation and develop a suite of data tools to support EDI work.

Action	Timetable
Ensure all directorates have undertaken a mapping exercise to assess any data gaps and identified steps to address this as part of EDI action planning.	Winter 2024
Develop staff and customer guidance on EDI data collection	Winter 2024

Workstream 3: Ensure council communications and engagement approaches reinforce and support EDI focus across W&F.

Action	Timetable
Publish public statement on the council's approach to EDI	Spring 2024
Update council communications and engagement strategy setting out how council will engage, incorporating guidance on ensuring representative input from different groups	Spring 2025

Workstream 4: Ensure external partner input into the ongoing development of W&F EDI workstream.

Action	Timetable
Map existing external engagement on EDI issues	Autumn 2024
Engage with external partners and communities to develop a phase 2 EDI workstream approach beyond Spring 2026	Autumn 2025-Spring 2026

Workstream 5: Strengthen cross-council approaches to understanding, engaging with and representing our communities.

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Action	Timetable
Support the development of the Community Power initiative to ensure groups within scope of EDI work are central to this	Ongoing

Workstream 6: Ensure our services take account of the needs and experiences of all members of our community and are accessible to all.

Action	Timetable
Promote a consistent organisational approach the use of translation and interpretation services through the development of corporate guidance and communications	Summer 2024
Develop a cross organisational approach to how W&F seeks the lived experience of its services users and communities and builds this into service development processes	Winter 2025
Ensure corporate EDI objectives are fully reflected in corporate service planning process for 2025/6 onwards	Autumn 2024-Spring 2025
Develop and approve proposals for a programme of capital works to improve accessibility of the council estate	Spring 2025

### Equality objective 3

Strengthen knowledge of our workforce and their experiences in the organisation in order to enable a diverse workforce in which everyone can progress

Workstream 7: Review and improve council EDI data and monitoring to understand workforce trends and gaps.

Action	Timetable
Undertake data collection exercise to establish gaps in workforce EDI data and work with TUs and staff network to develop approach to staff data collection	Spring 2025

Workstream 8. Review approach to recruitment to embed EDI into process.

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Action	Timetable
Undertake research to review EDI best practice in recruitment and develop training in EDI recruitment	Spring 2025

Workstream 9. Design and launch staff and member support offer on EDI.

Action	Timetable
Redesign and promote EDI training / support offer for staff in consultation with staff networks /others	Winter 2024
Develop member toolkit on EDI, including local data, W&F guidance, signposting to useful resources	Spring 2024

Workstream 10. Ensure that all W&F HROD policies and processes reflect EDI issues.

Action	Timetable
Develop and approve a policy on reasonable adjustments, with input from staff working groups.	Autumn 2024

## Our progress in complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty

### Our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duty (PSED)

[As a public authority, the council is bound by the general duty under the Equality Act 2010,](#) which requires us to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic
- foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic

We are also under specific duties that require us to:

- set one or more equality objectives at least every four years
- provide information on the organisation's compliance with the general duty every year
- publish specified information on the organisation's gender pay gap data every year

### Equality objectives

The equality objectives set out in the previous section of this document are the first equality objectives set by Westmorland and Furness Council (the Council) since it came into being on 1 April 2023, and will be in place for at least a period of two years, until April 2026. In future years, our annual reporting on compliance with the PSED will include an analysis of our progress against our equality objectives.

### Our compliance with the general duty

As a new organisation which only came formally into existence on 1 April 2023, the Council recognised early on that we have work to do to ensure that the PSED is consistently applied across the full breadth of our services and procedures. At a time of many competing priorities, this work has been prioritised at a corporate level, with capacity from a seconded post specifically targeted towards developing the EDI approach set out in this statement. The work completed has included undertaking a benchmark assessment for the Council

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against the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government to help understand our strengths and the relative weaknesses where we need to focus.

It is inevitable in any organisation that has recently brought together four separate organisations, there will be differences in legacy data, systems, policies and processes, and that a period of stabilisation and coordination required; and this is the current position in Westmorland and Furness. Our legacy councils were compliant with the PSED and had undertaken varying bits of good work on equalities: our challenge is to bring this together in a way that makes sense for Westmorland and Furness Council, and to take the opportunity to fully embed an effective approach early in the life of the organisation.

Prior to vesting day, officers across the legacy councils worked together to develop a equality impact assessment template for the new councils to use to assess the equalities implications of decisions, policies and services; additionally, an overview of population information for the two councils was also developed to support policy and decision makers in their work, based primarily on data sources from the 2021 census.

In Westmorland and Furness Council, the equality impact assessment has been signed off and is included in meeting decision reports and being used regularly; the population overview has been published on our intranet and website, as part of a suite of wider information on equalities. Training is being commissioned to support a cohort of staff across the organisation to work with staff to help improve the quality of equality impact assessments, as well as for members, to assist them in scrutinising the assessments. Looking ahead to 2024/5, as part of our EDI action plan we will take a more proactive approach to monitoring the number and quality of equality impact assessments, and ensuring these remain an ongoing process, in order that our future annual reporting under the PSED can include a more detailed analysis of this aspect of our compliance.

Alongside training on equality impact assessments, we are also focusing on developing our wider support offer for staff and councillors. In 2023/24, we held a session for members with the Cumbria Race Equity Training Network.

A further area of focus of our EDI action plan is to strengthen the data the council holds about its citizens and service users, in order that we are better able to identify trends, patterns and equality of outcomes among different users of our services. We know that the EDI related data held is more comprehensive in some services than in others, and we will be focusing as a priority on ensuring that firstly, there is consistency about the data that is collected, and secondly, that it is used effectively to inform service planning. Our service planning process for 2024/5 requested information from services on their EDI focused activity and assessments; however, the agreement of our equality objectives and launch of our EDI action plan create expectations of how our services will focus on EDI and will enable us to more closely align the work of services with our overall ambitions for EDI.

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Focusing internally on our workforce rather than our customers and wider communities, there are also data challenges, with workforce data split across four legacy council HR systems and gaps in the data held on some of the legacy systems. Addressing this, to ensure a more complete EDI understanding of our staff and therefore of our workforce trends, and how these compare to our local population, is a key priority of the HROD elements of our action plan.

Based on the data that we have currently, in February 2024, the council had a head count of 3,235 staff, equivalent to just under 2,587 full time employees. The council hopes to be in a position to provide a more detailed breakdown of its workforce in 2025.

The council supports a number of staff networks for different groups within our workforce: the Race Equality Network, the Rainbow Alliance, Shine (disability), the Menopause Network and Carers Network.

## Gender pay gap reporting

Councils with more than 250 employees are required to report on their gender pay gap on the 'snapshot date' of 31 March in any given year, by 30 March the following year.

Although our first snapshot date is 31 March 2024, and the reporting deadline therefore 30 March 2025, the council hopes to report significantly in advance of this date. However, there are additional issues for the council in undertaking this task; having been formed from four legacy councils, the council's workforce data is still split across four separate legacy systems, with a single HR system not due to be in place until Spring 2025. This makes it significantly more challenging to collate the data required, although the council is committed to ensuring it is provided as soon as possible. Our legacy council gender pay gap data remains available on our website.