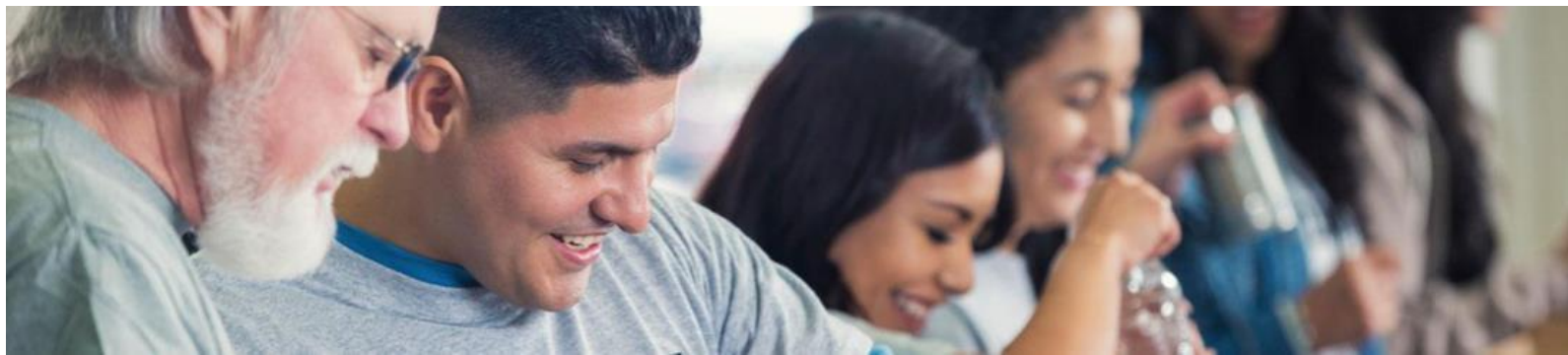


Equalities at South Norfolk Council



**Public Sector Equality Duty Annual Report
2024/25**

1.Purpose

The purpose of this annual report is to provide evidence as to how South Norfolk Council has complied with the Equality Act 2010 and its specific duties. The council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity through its service provision, as an employer and when working in partnership.

2.The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 gave a formal requirement to all Local Authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). That is, in the exercising of our functions, South Norfolk Council must have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
3. Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

There are nine protected characteristics contained within the Act;

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy & maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage & civil partnership (only relevant to Aim 1 - eliminating discrimination)

To ensure transparency of this duty, the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 requires public authorities to publish information to demonstrate their compliance with the general equality duty. This report should pay particular reference to employees and people affected by the policies and practices of the Council, who share one or more of the above protected characteristics. In addition to treating people fairly, justly and with respect, our duty is to find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded, promote inclusion and celebrate diversity.

The Act requires local authorities to provide a service which is equally accessible to all their customers and a workforce which promotes diversity and equality. The benefits of a diverse workforce go beyond political correctness. Bringing in people with different

backgrounds and perspectives can lead to better decision-making, greater innovation, higher engagement in the workplace, and can bring fresh ideas. It may also improve an organisation's reputation and make it easier to attract top talent. Companies that embrace diversity and inclusion report higher engagement, lower turnover, and increased income.

Equality considerations should be at the centre of policy formation and not merely a tick box exercise. Decision-makers should be aware of their obligations in order to comply with the Act, ensuring that mechanisms are in place so that relevant equality impacts can be taken into consideration along with other factors when they come to make their decision. There is a requirement for due regard to be given to removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics and sometimes this might entail treating a disadvantaged group more favourably than others. However, there will be times that, after consideration, decisions may be made which do not meet all equality issues and, in these cases, there should be a well-documented trail to demonstrate that issues have been raised and given due regard to ensure that compliance with the Act has been achieved.

This report demonstrates just some of the ways in which South Norfolk Council have complied with their Public Sector Equality Duty during 2024/25.

3. Our district

The Census 2021 provides a profile of the residents who live in our district. Over time, this profile has changed and demonstrates a further increase in the diversity of the population during a decade of rapid change and unprecedented challenges:

South Norfolk

- **Population** - Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of South Norfolk increased by 14.5%, from just over 124,000 in 2011 to around 141,900 in 2021.
- **Age** - The number of people aged 65 to 74 years rose by around 3,700 (an increase of 26.5%), while the number of residents between 16 and 19 years fell by just over 350 (6.5% decrease). South Norfolk has a higher average age than the East of England as a whole in 2021 (41 years) and a higher average age than England (40 years).
- **Disability** - 6.2% of South Norfolk residents were identified as being disabled. This figure decreased from 7.0% in 2011.
- **Gender Identity** – 94.96% of people aged 16 and over in South Norfolk have a gender identity the same as their sex registered at birth. 0.4% have a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth. The remaining did not answer this question.
- **Ethnicity** - 1.8% of residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, up from 1.0% in 2011. 95.4% of people in South Norfolk identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with

97.6% in 2011), while 1.5% identified their ethnic group within the "Mixed or Multiple" category (compared with 1.0% the previous decade). The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" category increased from 0.3% in 2011 to 0.8% in 2021.

- **Religion** - In 2021, 44.4% of South Norfolk residents reported having "No religion", up from 28.7% in 2011. In 2021, 47.4% of people in South Norfolk described themselves as Christian (down from 62.3%), while 6.2% did not state their religion (down from 7.7% the decade before).
- **Country of birth** - Around 129,100 South Norfolk residents said they were born in England. This represented 90.9% of the local population. The figure has risen from just under 115,200 in 2011, which at the time represented 92.9% of South Norfolk's population.
- **Sexual orientation** – In 2021, 91% of residents identified as straight or heterosexual, 1.2% identified as gay or lesbian, 1% identified as bisexual and 0.1% identified as pansexual or asexual. 6.6% did not answer.
- **Marriage** - In 2021, just over one in two people (51.7%) said they were married or in a registered civil partnership. South Norfolk has the second highest divorce or dissolved civil partnerships in the East of England.

4. Our Equality Objectives

We think setting equality objectives is an important way for us to show our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. The Equality Objectives which covered the period of 2024/25 are set out below:

1. Provide accessible and inclusive services for all our customers
2. Ensure our staff have the skills, knowledge and awareness to be able to deliver services fairly and challenge unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviours
3. Actively engage with those service users who have one, or more of the protected characteristics
4. Be inclusive employers, identifying any underrepresented groups in the workforce

5. Progress update 2024/25

1. Provide accessible and inclusive services for all our customers

The following section provides evidence to some of our achievements and progress against this objective:

Customer Experience Programme – Improving access to our services

As part of the Customer Experience Programme of work, a business case was agreed by Council in 23/24 which sets out the vision, investment and benefits to implementing a Customer Experience Platform which will contribute to increased customer experience and satisfaction, as well as supporting the Medium Term Financial Plan. The new system will enable the organisation to work differently, to better service our customers. As part of the new way of working, it also enables our customers to be able to access our services via a channel of their choice and does not seek to close down any channel currently open to our customers.

By changing the way we work and better improving our digital channels, we will be able to offer more flexibility for our customers when accessing our services. Alongside this, greater use of our digital channels by those who can and want to use them, will inevitably free up our other channels such as our phone lines, face to face contact etc, for those customers who cannot or wish not to use our digital channels. In particular, this will positively benefit our customers who have more complex needs by providing them with a greater ability to speak to a member of staff in a timely manner. We want to enhance our service offering by improving our digital channels and ensuring that all digital processes are designed to be fully accessible and do not introduce any discrimination in who can use these.

In 2024/25, this project has continued and is now in the implementation phase.

Improving digital accessibility

We strive to ensure our staff are aware and embed the principles of accessibility in their work. We continue to publicise to staff the range of accessibility tools and information we have put together to ensure our content is accessible to all (for example – guides on how to make PDFs and documents accessible, how to check online content against WCAG and guidance on how to embed accessibility into procurement of goods and contracts). Our Digital Customer Experience and Accessibility Officer advises on WCAG compliance as a minimum across all digital systems and specifications for new systems.

We also provide mandatory training to all our staff on digital accessibility and in November 2023, we updated this training to take into account the new requirements of WCAG 2.2 to AA standards. We also now apply this to procurements and it is within our contracts with suppliers. We continue to audit accessibility of all digital tools that are procured and conduct spot checks to ensure that digital content remains accessible.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA)

The Council provides many different services for South Norfolk residents – from housing to planning and from community work to the care of people using the services of the help hub. Indirect discrimination can occur when a policy or procedure is put in place which applies to everybody but puts those who have a protected characteristic at a disadvantage. Therefore, when we plan and develop policies, projects and services, or propose changes to services, we consider it essential that due regard is given to whether there are any potential negative impacts upon individuals and/or groups of people with protected characteristics. Risk and Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken by officers and their findings are documented and reported to enable decision-makers to take any issues into account as part of the decision-making process.

2. Ensure our staff have the skills, knowledge and awareness to be able to deliver services fairly and challenge unfair treatment or inappropriate behaviours

The following section provides evidence to some of our achievements and progress against this objective:

Raising awareness – Safeguarding

We continue to raise the awareness of safeguarding issues with our staff.

Throughout the year, we provide regular information to our staff via our Intranet pages. All staff are required to undertake regular safeguarding awareness training, with Domestic Abuse awareness training to be rolled out to all officers shortly.

Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSO's) meet quarterly across the Council to share knowledge and receive updates on safeguarding matters. We now operate strategic and operational safeguarding boards.

Equality and Translation Service

We are a member of the INTRAN Partnership which provides access to interpreting and translation services, ensuring we are able to communicate with our residents and customers in the best possible way. On a regular basis, we share with staff the approach to accessing these services and encourage teams to use them where appropriate to do so.

Staff and Member training

We are currently piloting training focused on neurodiversity, with plans for a broader rollout aimed at raising awareness and fostering openness and transparency across the organisation. This initiative will support staff in their work with customers and ensure our recruitment practices are inclusive - helping us attract diverse talent and provide equitable access to opportunities. In addition, the Council has sourced and made available mandatory online training modules via Skill Gate, our Digital Learning platform. These

include: *'The Importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion'*, *'Modern Day Slavery'*, and *'Unconscious Bias'*. These courses are designed to ensure all staff and elected members understand their responsibilities under the Equality Act and are equipped to promote a fair and inclusive workplace.

3. Actively engage with those service users who have one, or more of the protected characteristics

The following section provides evidence to some of our achievements and progress against this objective:

Supporting vulnerable residents through our Help Hub

During the last year, the Council, via the Help Hub, have worked hard to maintain effective collaboration between partners to ensure that those who are most vulnerable, and likely to be victimised, have the benefit of a multiagency partnership to share information and support.

Isolation, abuse, and lack of confidence can affect people with protected characteristics and can often be barriers to fulfilling potential and seeking assistance to overcome discrimination and harassment. The help hub's strength is helping people to help themselves, as well as working closely with partners to ensure information and support is shared and coordinated.

Bringing our Help Hub to the Community

In 2024, we launched our Community Engagement Van which is a mobile space that is used to visit towns and parishes across our districts, to provide support and advice to our residents. The van will be parked in convenient and accessible locations, where residents can come along to talk to a member of the Help Hub team. No appointment are necessary, and any support needs can be discussed. These may include, but are not limited to:

- money and debt worries
- benefits
- parenting, relationships and domestic abuse
- health and wellbeing
- bereavement support
- employment
- housing or home improvements

The Van is a critical part to ensuring our services are accessible and that anyone can access support or help in a way which is most convenient to them.



Community Connectors

Our Community Connectors work hard to ensure that residents with any of the protected characteristics can enjoy the same quality of life as those who do not. They work with other partners to ensure that residents receive the support and assistance most suitable for their needs. This decreases the stress for the resident as they do not need to go back and forth between different organisations in order to deal with their separate issues.

4. Be inclusive employers, identifying any underrepresented groups in the workforce

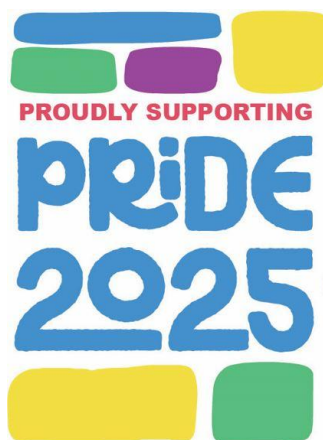
The following section provides evidence to some of our achievements and progress against this objective:

Shining a Light on Diversity and Inclusion

At the One Team, we are passionate about celebrating the richness that Diversity and Inclusion can bring to both our communities and our workplace. We are committed to creating an environment where everyone feels supported, valued, and well-informed.

The Council has advertised and promoted many varied events to the One Team, via broadcast messages, emails and on Connect, encouraging staff to get involved with activities which promote and raise the awareness of equalities issues. Below are some examples of some of the events we have offered:

- **Pride month** - as part of our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse working environment, we held a full week of engaging activities in honour of Pride Week.



- **International Women's Day** – we celebrated IWD, embracing the theme of 'a time for reflection'. At the One Team, we are dedicated to empowering women, ensuring that opportunities for growth, leadership, and success are accessible to everyone and the right support is in place for all to achieve their goals. We celebrated by welcoming guest speakers, putting on healthy mindset fitness classes and promoting a fantastic webinar with our partners Inclusive Employers on the topic of Accelerating Action.



- **Diversity Week** – we celebrated diversity week during October 2024, recognising it is important to us to celebrate all that diversity has to offer communities and the workplace and to ensure that everyone feels supported and well informed. We held a series of activities during the week including a very special talk with the Chair of Norfolk Black History Month.

Mental Health Awareness and Support

A person is considered to have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities and can include depressive and anxiety-

related impairments. One in four people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England, whilst one in six people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England.

The Council is committed to creating an environment where employees can be at their best and have committed to providing mental health support. This has been achieved through investment in Mental Health First Aiders, providing advice and guidance to managers to encourage wellbeing conversations and or/ sign posting staff to where further help could be accessed. The Council offers a 24/7 Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) telephone support service and offers additional support to individuals based on their specific needs.

Managers are encouraged to have regular wellbeing conversations with staff, with support and guidance provided to enable these conversations to take place. Menopause support Champions are in place across the Council to help staff with knowledge sharing and coping mechanisms for anyone requiring menopause related support.

During September 2024, we proudly shone a light on mental wellbeing during Mental Health Week. During this week, we held a series of sessions including the Pop up Barber Shop and talks on Mental Health Self Management. We also launched the Just Talk network, a peer support initiative tackling any worry, stress, or issue big or small. The network is being grown in 2025, with training being provided to frontline services such as in our leisure centers to ensure that both customers and staff can benefit.

Disability Confident Scheme

The Council has been awarded the Disability Confident standard. The Council committed to working with the Job Centre and the Department of Work and Pensions to support and promote people who identify as disabled in the workplace. This commitment includes:

- ensuring our recruitment processes are free from discrimination and available through a range of channels;
- making job advertisements accessible which includes providing information in accessible formats, if required;
- offering interviews to those candidates who have a disability and meet the essential criteria for the role, as detailed in the job description; and
- making reasonable adjustments as required.

To read more about our aims under the scheme, please view the following link: [Disability Confident scheme](#).

Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award

We recognise the value serving personnel, reservists, veterans and military families bring to our organisation and are proud to have been awarded the Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme in 2021.

During 2024/25, we supported Armed Forces Day and continued to seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant, of which we are a signatory, and are an armed forces-friendly organisation through our commitment to:

- to support the employment of service leavers, where the essential criteria is met, through our Guaranteed Interview Scheme
- striving to support the employment of Service spouses and partners;
- endeavouring to offer a degree of flexibility in granting leave for Service spouses and partners before, during and after a partner's deployment through our Annual Leave Policy
- seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, by giving them up to ten days leave for training and accommodating any mobilisation where possible
- seeking to understand more about our employees who are reservists, veterans, spouses or dependents.

Staff Consultation Forum and UNISON Representation

The Council operate a Staff Consultation Forum where employees can bring their views to the attention of management. The Staff Negotiation Forum is comprised of staff with representatives from UNISON and the management team. Membership of the group is diverse, and its representation encompasses staff who possess a variety of the nine protected characteristics, which ensures all staff are represented.

Bullying and Harassment

The Council is committed to creating a work environment free from bullying and harassment, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. In this vein the Council does not tolerate discrimination, harassment or victimisation within its premises, by anyone associated or employed by the Council, or by anyone pursuing prospective employment of the Council.

Grievance

The Council grievance policy allows for all employees to have the right to raise a problem, complaint, or concern in relation to any workplace matter. The Council will investigate and provide a fair, timely and transparent outcome for any instances of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, and these types of complaints are taken extremely seriously. The policy ensures clarity and equality for both employees and managers and requires that any special measures, along with reasonable adjustments, will be considered to ensure equality of access to the process for staff who possess one or more of the protected characteristics, as detailed in the Act.

Conduct

The Council is committed to promoting equality and fairness amongst members of staff. In addition, employees must treat all members of the local community, councillors, suppliers, customers and residents with due regard to fairness, trust and integrity, creating a positive working environment in which to operate. The Council ensures that understanding is promoted, with education on key areas a priority in preventing prejudice and forming positive relations between individuals and groups.

Transgender Policy

We are strongly committed to equal opportunity, eliminating discrimination, promoting good relations, and valuing diversity through fair treatment in all aspects of the Council activities. The Transgender Policy aims to ensure that everyone is treated with equal dignity, fairness and respect, regardless of their gender identity. Our aim is to ensure the safety, comfort and integration of transgender or gender non- conforming employees whilst promoting equal opportunities. As part of the Councils overall commitment to equality of opportunity, we are fully committed to promoting a supportive and harmonious working and service provision environment where every employee and member of the community is treated with respect and dignity. Our aim is to create an environment in which all employees and members of the public feel equally valued and welcome in accordance with the Gender Recognition act (2004).

New and expectant mothers

In order to ensure the health and wellbeing of new and expectant mothers, the Council ensures that risk assessments are undertaken, in partnership with the pregnant employee, to assess and manage risks and identify suitable modifications and alterations to work activities and patterns. Government guidance is followed, and risks are assessed appropriately, in line with this guidance.