

Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2024-27

Progress Report (October 2025)



Achieving our ambitions

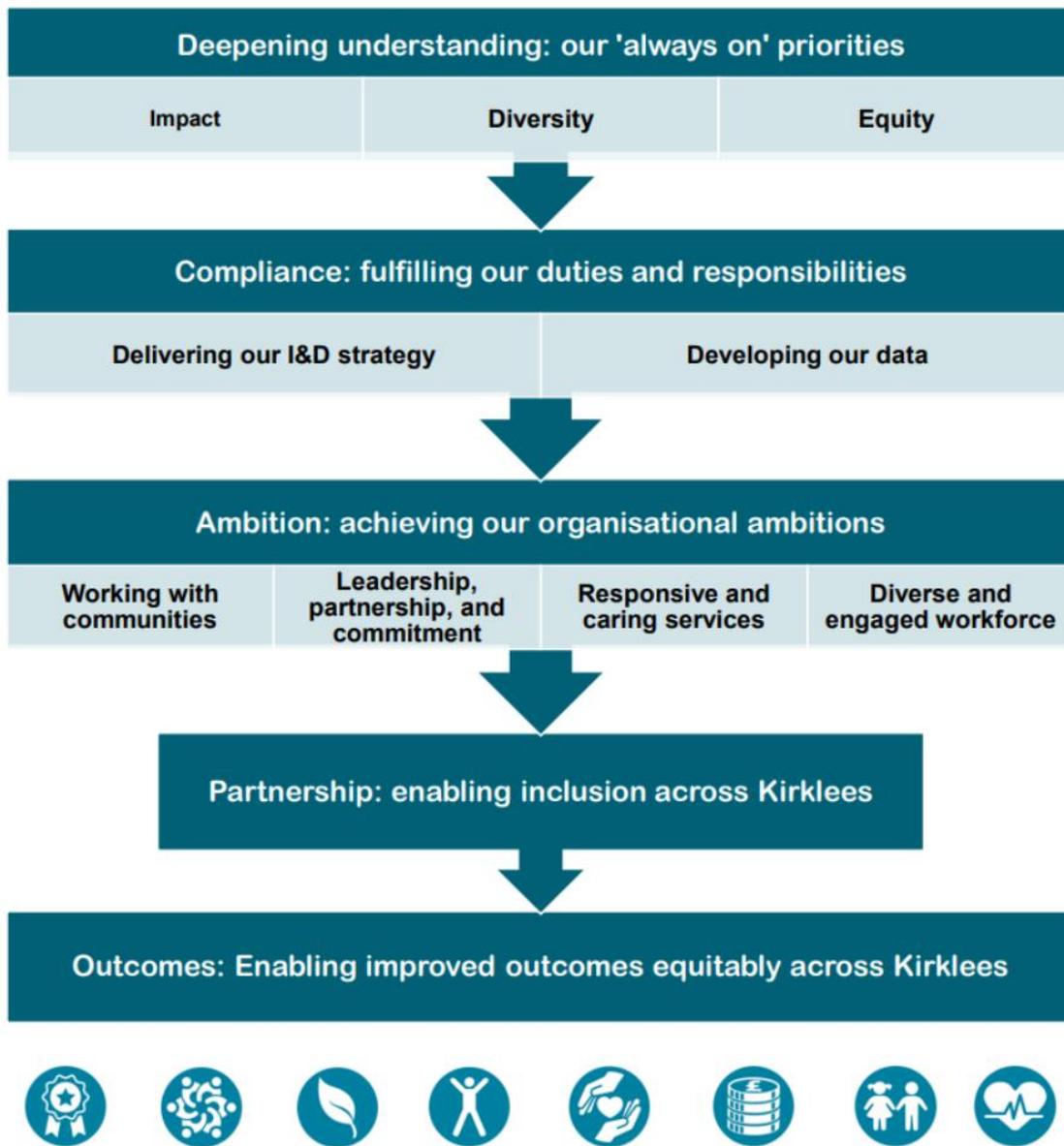


Introduction

In September 2024, Cabinet approved our Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2024-27 (Appendix 2).

Our role and responsibilities in relation to inclusion and diversity have three elements:

- **Compliance** – Our legal requirements and compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty
- **Ambition** – How we achieve our own organisational ambitions as an employer and key local anchor
- **Partnership** — How we can enable inclusion across the district



The progress update in this report covers activity in the first year of the strategy, from September 2024 until September 2025.

This progress report cannot cover the wealth of activity which takes place across our services and programmes; with inclusion as one of our core values, we expect this to feed into everything we do and how we serve our communities. Achievements reported upon in this report relate to the four themes of our three-year priority objectives outlined in the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. These are:

1. Understanding and working with our communities
2. Leadership, partnership, and organisational commitment
3. Responsive services and customer care
4. Diverse and engaged workforce

Understanding and working with our communities

Over 150 people from the public, private, and community sectors in Kirklees are part of the Tackling Poverty Partnership, which convenes regularly to address inequalities and poverty. Recent discussions have focused on food poverty, digital exclusion, and age-friendly societies.

Quarterly meetings with faith leaders, regular Interfaith Forums, and regular local place meetings are helping to inform council services about the diverse and unique strengths and challenges of faith sector organisations across Kirklees. In November we celebrated the work of these organisations in our communities through Interfaith Week. The week included a range of community events that promote understanding, respect, and friendship across different faiths and beliefs. Activities include a Friendship Walk in Huddersfield, Remembrance services in Huddersfield and Dewsbury, a Roses for Peace event, and a Nurturing Respect and Tolerance open meeting. Schools were also involved through online interfaith learning and visits to local places of worship. The week encouraged dialogue, reflection, and inclusive participation from all communities.

In October we supported National Hate Crime Awareness Week with a series of community engagement events across the district. Staff from the Safer Kirklees team hosted information stalls at local markets and bus stations to raise awareness about hate crimes, how to report them, and the support available to victims and witnesses. The initiative aimed to foster unity, encourage reporting, and ensure residents feel safe and supported.

In November, we marked Islamophobia Awareness Month 2024 with the theme *Seeds of Change*, encouraging small actions that can lead to meaningful progress in tackling Islamophobia. Activities included poetry events in Batley and Dewsbury, awareness training on antisemitism and Islamophobia, themed book displays in libraries, and community engagement through the Community Plus team. Resources were available online, and support for reporting hate crimes was promoted through local events and partnerships with Safer Kirklees and West Yorkshire Police.

In January, we commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day 2025, marking 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and 30 years since the genocide in Bosnia. The council supported local charity 6 Million+ in creating temporary art installations and providing educational resources through libraries. Town halls were lit in remembrance, and events included an evening of reflection at Holocaust Centre

North and an interactive exhibition, *Through Our Eyes*, showcasing stories of young refugees and survivors who settled in northern England. The initiative aimed to promote remembrance, education, and community reflection.

In December, we launched a series of Access Guides in partnership with AccessAble to improve accessibility across the district. These guides provide detailed information on access arrangements, welfare facilities, and parking for parks, civic buildings, leisure centres, and travel routes, helping people plan visits and maintain independence. The initiative also includes the development of Design Principles to inform future infrastructure projects. Additionally, the council has installed Changing Places Toilets at several key locations to support dignity and inclusion. This work reflects a broader commitment to creating inclusive, accessible communities for all residents.

Also in December, Kirklees Council's REAL Employment service received prestigious accreditation from the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE), recognising its commitment to helping adults with learning disabilities and autism find meaningful work. The service follows the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF), offering personalised support to match individuals' skills and interests with suitable job opportunities. With over 30 years of experience, the team provides one-to-one assistance to promote financial independence and inclusion.

We have been working throughout the year on enhancing our offer for care-experienced people, including broadening our commitments to support work experience and ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers.

Changes have been approved to our Integrated Impact Assessment process to improve compliance and quality. These will be updated in the Autumn and learning sessions will take place to support officers incorporating their community understanding into decision-making.

Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

We have created additional self-assessment material for the Inclusive Communities Framework (ICF) and produced a summary version of the ICF to help organisations use it across all their teams. This will be shared across council services through the Autumn.

On preventing homelessness and rough sleeping, we have enhanced our partnership working and strengthened our early intervention resources. This has included working closely with private sector landlords, supported housing providers and housing associations to increase the number of suitable homes available for those in acute housing need, developing a tenancy rescue pilot, and expanding options for leasing accommodation.

Construction has begun on a new purpose-built special school in Deighton, Huddersfield, which will become the new home of Joseph Norton Academy. The move from its current site in Scissett is driven by the need for modern facilities and increased capacity to support children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Designed with input from pupils and families, the new school will expand capacity from 63 to 132 places, introduce Key Stage 1 and 5 provision, and offer improved transport access. This development is part of Kirklees Council's broader commitment to enhancing SEND services and inclusive education across the district.

In May, young people aged 18–25 with learning disabilities and/or autism in Kirklees were offered a valuable opportunity to gain work experience through Project SEARCH internships at Dewsbury District Hospital. This nationally recognised, year-long programme combines real-world placements across hospital departments with tailored classroom learning to build confidence, independence, and employability skills. Interns receive support from job coaches, tutors, and mentors, and roles are matched to their interests and abilities.

Responsive services and customer care

Our Customer and Access Board continues to champion a customer-focused culture, with a particular emphasis on accessibility. Recent campaigns have highlighted the importance of colour contrast, Easy Read guidance, and screen reader compatibility, ensuring our services are accessible to all. A recent review of our Integrated Impact Assessments reflected the focus on customers and improving their experience of interacting with the council. Work on strengthening a customer-focused culture will continue as part of the Customer and Access Board. This will include considerations about the diversity of our customers and the different ways they interact with us.

To mark National Inclusion Week, we spotlighted colour contrast as a key aspect of digital accessibility. Poor contrast can make content difficult to read for people with visual impairments, Colour Vision Deficiency, older adults, and users of assistive technology. The campaign provided guidance on improving readability in documents and web content, including using Microsoft's Accessibility Checker and online contrast tools. Accessibility begins with how information is presented, and improving colour contrast is a simple yet impactful step toward inclusivity.

Plans have been approved for a new purpose-built Woodley School and College in Almondbury, designed to support autistic pupils aged 5 to 19. The school will relocate from its current multi-building site at Dog Kennel Bank to a modern facility on Fernside Avenue, expanding capacity to around 180 places. This move aims to provide a more inclusive and tailored learning environment, enabling more local children to access specialist education. The development is part of Kirklees Council's broader strategy to enhance SEND provision, including rebuilding Joseph Norton Academy and increasing SEND places across the district.

We have run a series of campaigns to promote digital accessibility, highlighting simple yet impactful changes that make online content more inclusive.

We have run a monthly Accessibility Awareness Campaign, which spotlights different aspects of accessibility to encourage inclusive communication across businesses, charities, and public services. In June we launched new Easy Read guidance to help anyone working in Kirklees improve accessibility for people with learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, or low literacy levels. The guidance provides practical tips for creating clear, understandable content using plain language, simple layouts, and supportive images. The Easy Read focus aims to ensure everyone in the community can access essential information and services. In July, the focus was on screen readers, encouraging the use of clear headings, plain English, meaningful links, and effective alt text to support users with visual impairments. In September, the spotlight shifted to colour contrast, emphasizing how poor contrast can hinder readability for many users, including older adults and those with Colour Vision Deficiency. These initiatives are part of a broader effort to raise awareness and improve accessibility across all council communications.

In June, Kirklees Council's Early Years SEND team has been honoured with an invitation to the House of Lords in recognition of their outstanding work supporting children under five with special educational needs and disabilities. In partnership with national charity Dingley's Promise, the team has helped 36 local childcare settings achieve the Promise Mark of Achievement, reflecting strong inclusive practices. The initiative includes expert training for professionals and aims to create inclusive environments, giving families more choice and support. This recognition places Kirklees among the top areas nationally for inclusive childcare and aligns with the council's broader SEND transformation plans, including major investments in specialist school facilities and inclusive education.

In the summer, Cabinet agreed to fund a suitable environment for 18 new places for children with complex communication and interaction needs. This will be at New Mill Infants School and New Mill Junior School and provide the right conditions for an 'Additionally Resourced Provision' (ARP) – an environment giving specialist support. A final decision on creating the ARP at New Mill will be made by the national Department for Education.

Diverse and engaged workforce

In April, we launched Our Council, a culture refresh initiative with a set of seven principles designed to help teams with discussions on how we can build on our organisational strengths. As part of this, we recommitted to our values of kindness, inclusion, and pride through one of the principles.

We have been celebrating our workforce and embedding learning opportunities through events such as National Inclusion Week. A Kirklees Digital Accessibility Group hosts regular meetings of council services and partners working to improve skills and awareness of online accessibility across both the council workforce and within the community, sharing resources, advice and guidance both on the staff intranet and on the Kirklees Together website.

We have developed a Principles and Guidance document for employee networks, helping them to link annual plans to organisational objectives and ensure our staff groups can thrive.

We recently concluded Our Conversation, a refreshed and improved approach to our workforce survey. We aimed to increase participation rates on previous surveys, collect meaningful feedback, and set a baseline to shape the next stages of Our Council. This was a significant success, with participation rates at over 39% compared to 24% with our last survey in 2023. Over 1,600 responses came from frontline colleagues, making up 53% of total responses. Initial results from the survey have shown us that themes around job satisfaction, values and culture, and wellbeing are some of the most positively rated themes of this year's survey. Employees also told us that they wanted improved recognition and benefits, improved development opportunities, and to feel more informed at work.

We're now building on Our Conversation through employee voice focus groups, which will help us understand the survey results through the eyes of our workforce. This will include looking at diverse employee experience and how we can ensure staff of all demographics thrive. The results of Our Conversation and the voice groups will then inform a clear action plan, demonstrating clearly that Our Council listens and responds to its workforce.

We have rolled out ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers and our guaranteed interview pledge.

In June, we celebrated the graduation of young people with learning disabilities or autism from the DFN Project SEARCH programme at Kirklees College's Huddersfield Centre. This year-long internship, delivered in partnership with Kirklees Council, Kirklees College, and REAL Employment, offered hands-on experience with local employers including the NHS, Oxfam, and Cedar Court Hotel. Graduates developed valuable life and employment skills, with many progressing into jobs or volunteering roles. Council leaders, college staff, and families attended the event, commending the interns' determination and growth. For those still seeking employment, ongoing support is provided by our REAL Employment service.