

South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
2025-2028

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Our Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership is committed to delivering services in a way that's inclusive and fair, and with a workforce who reflect our local population, and which treats everyone fairly.

This new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out how we achieve this. It also sets out how we'll demonstrate our commitment to inclusion, why we want to do so, and how with a clear action plan that translates into action.

We're proud of the communities who make up Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland. At South Holland District Council, where we act as landlord for over 3,700 tenants. We recognise the additional role we play in supporting our tenants and the specific duties placed on us as a registered provider. This includes understanding the needs of our tenants and sharing information with them that is appropriate to their requirements. We want to support residents across all three council areas to live well, recognising the challenges they might face and helping mitigate them. Not everyone has the same starting point. Some people face additional barriers to overcome to access services or go about their daily lives. This could be getting older, having a physical or mental disability, or not speaking English as a first language. There are many reasons why it's important for us to consider inclusion in our approach. This strategy refreshes our commitment to do that.

We want to be bold and ambitious in our Sub-Regional Strategy, doing more for local communities by working together. This includes recognising the diverse needs of our communities, working together to deliver services in a way that meets local need and taking steps to bring our communities together. The objectives in this strategy complement our sub-regional priorities of healthy lives, safe and resilient communities, environment and growth and prosperity. This strategy also supports the objectives set out in our Customer Experience Strategy and our Workforce Strategy.

Developing this strategy

We have consulted widely in developing this strategy. This included consultation with our workforce at all levels within the Partnership, who have experience in delivering a range of services for residents across our area. We have consulted with councillors representing communities across Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland, gaining insights into issues affecting local residents. We have also consulted with residents through group workshops with council tenants in South Holland and Ageing Well Ambassadors. We have had input from partners working with different communities and individuals to address some of the barriers to accessing services, including Lincs Digital, Citizens Advice and Shine Lincolnshire. We are grateful for all those who took the time to feed into this process.

This strategy builds on best practice set out in the LGA Equality Framework, which recognises and supports councils to meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Context and Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 provides the legal framework for this strategy. It protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society and places a duty on public bodies to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including:
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life, or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies including councils to:

- Consider how people can be affected by different decisions
- Publish relevant, proportionate information showing how we are complying with the duty
 - Including Gender Pay Gap information (for workforces of 250 or more) and workforce profiles
- Set at least one equality objective every four years

The Equality Act identifies nine 'protected characteristics' and makes it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the basis of any of these characteristics. The nine protected characteristics are:

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

The Equality Act defines a disability as:

“a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to carry out normal daily activities”.

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership recognises that there are characteristics beyond the nine legally recognised which can also create barriers to access for individuals. These include, but are not limited to:

- Socioeconomic status
- Care experience/ care leaver
- Literacy or education level
- Digital literacy
- Armed forces service
- Whether you provide care to another person

What is the Gender Pay Gap?

The gender pay gap is a measure of workplace disadvantage, expressed by comparing the average (median) hour rates of pay received by men and women.

It is different to Equal Pay, which is a legal requirement. By law, men and women must receive equal pay for:

- The same or broadly similar work;
- Work rated as equivalent under a job evaluation scheme; or
- Work of equal value.

Organisations with more than 250 employees are legally required to publish data relating to their Gender Pay Gap annually. This duty is placed on each council within the partnership. Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland Councils will continue to publish their Gender Pay Gap reports as sovereign councils.

Our Equality Objectives

As part of the Public Sector Equality Duty, we are publishing our Equality Objectives. These are:

- Our communities: understand the needs of our communities and bring local people together
- Our leadership: create a diverse and inclusive leadership team (both Councillors and Officers) and embed inclusion in our decision making
- Our services: ensure council services meet the diverse needs of our residents and make it easy for local residents to access council services and facilities
- Our workforce: be an inclusive and fair employer with a diverse workforce at all levels

South and East Lincolnshire and its citizens: some key facts

The three local authority areas of Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland cover 1019 square miles (45% of the administrative county of Lincolnshire) and with 306,000 people represent 40% of its population.

While each council area has its own profile, there are common themes. Among this area is a sparse pattern of settlements and two main economic sectors: tourism and food manufacturing. Both industries are highly seasonal. This, has led to significant pockets of deprivation in the area; particularly prevalent on the East Lindsey coast. The rurality of the area and the lack of public transport leads some people and communities to be physically disconnected from others.

The average age in the sub-region is significantly higher than the national average, particularly in East Lindsey, where there is also much higher prevalence of physical disability than average. The profile of the area remains predominantly white British, with a significant population from new and established communities, predominantly from Eastern European countries, particularly in the Boston area.

Boston

Boston Borough has a population of 70,800, of whom around 46,000 live within Boston town itself. It is the main service centre in Lincolnshire and the second largest settlement in the region, after Lincoln.

Wages in Boston are amongst the lowest in Great Britain, at more than £100 per week lower than the national average (£582 vs £683). This figure is even lower amongst women (£487 vs £629).

In addition to economic hardship, Boston has experienced challenges with political disengagement, with historically low voter turnout and limited civic participation in some communities. These issues are compounded by language barriers and a lack of trust in institutions, which can further marginalise residents from democratic processes. Addressing these barriers is essential to fostering inclusive civic engagement and ensuring all voices are heard in local decision-making.

Boston Borough has a higher proportion of people claiming out of work benefits than the national average, at 4.3%, compared to 3.7%. Boston has the lowest score in England for educational attainment in the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation. The greatest educational challenge relates to adult rather than school age skills deficits.

Boston has become home to a settled population of successful migrant workers and almost half (44.7%) of live births in the area are to non-UK born mothers. 20.9% of Boston residents do not consider their national identity to be British, and 13.9% households do not speak English.

20.4% Over 65	17.6% Disabled	20.9% Non-UK Identity
19.5% no access to a vehicle	13.4% have no English speakers in the household	59.1% deprived in one of more dimension*

East Lindsey

East Lindsey is the largest District Council by geographical area in the country. This creates challenges for transport and access to rural towns and villages. It has a population of 142,900, making it the second largest in Lincolnshire. Some communities are at risk of economic and social deprivation or 'un-met needs'. East Lindsey is currently ranked 30th most deprived out of 318 of local authority in England in the national for Indices of Multiple Deprivation. East Lindsey has poor health outcomes, with some of the highest levels of disease prevalence on almost every indicator in Lincolnshire.

With an average age of 52, compared to the national average age of 42, the population of East Lindsey is significantly higher than in other areas. Over a third of local residents are retired. It also has a higher-than-average number of local residents living with a disability.

Key stats

30.5% Over 65	22.2% Disabled	2% Non-UK identity
17.6% no access to a vehicle	Less than 1% have no English speakers in the household	61.2% deprived in one or more dimension*

South Holland

South Holland has a population of 98,000 and is of modest geographical size by Lincolnshire standards but remains rural and remote.

Although it is not in the lowest local authority areas by Indices of Multiple Deprivation, salaries are considerably lower per week than the national average (£636 vs £683), and particularly low for women (£546 vs £628). 56% of local people are deprived in at least one category.

The average age in South Holland is above the national average, at 46 compared to 42 and it has a higher-than-average percentage of people who are retired.

South Holland District Council is the only one of the three councils in the partnership to also act as a landlord, with over 3700 council properties. Over 50% of South Holland's tenants have a disability, and the average age of a tenant is 63 years old.

23.9% Over 65	17.6% Disabled	11.6% Non-UK identity
12.9% no access to a vehicle	7.1% have no English speakers in the household	56% deprived in one or more dimension*

***Note on Deprivation**

The 2021 Census classified household deprivation against four possible indicators: education, employment, health and housing. The definitions used are:

Education: a household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education and no one aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.

Employment: a household is classified as deprived in the employment dimension if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability.

Health: a household is classified as deprived in the health dimension if any person in the household has general health that is bad or very bad or is identified as disabled.

Housing: a household is classified as deprived in the housing dimension if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Delivering our Objectives

This section sets out each of our Equality Objectives and our priorities to deliver them. Actions to support these can be found in the plan accompanying this strategy (appendix 2).

1. Our communities: understand the needs of our communities and bring local people together

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership serves a range of communities and residents across a vast geographical area. Across these communities are individuals with a range of needs, priorities and challenges. We are committed to breaking down barriers that might prevent people from accessing services or engaging in their local community. To do that, we must understand what these might be.

Across our towns and villages local people get on well with each other. Many give up their time to be part of community groups and initiatives. But there is more we can do across generations, backgrounds and cultures. We are committed to supporting initiatives that promote community cohesion across our sub-region.

Priorities:

- A better understanding of community needs, including:
 - o Community profiles, easily accessible across the councils and our partners
 - o Benchmarking data on community cohesion, asking residents “do people from different backgrounds get on well together?”
 - o Support initiatives that promote civic engagement and democratic participation, particularly in areas with historically low voter turnout or political disengagement
 - o Work with community leaders and organisations to build trust and increase participation in local governance
- A greater sense of community and increased community cohesion
 - o Celebrating the work of volunteers and supporting community initiatives that bring people together
 - o Councils actively participating in local events which celebrate diversity
 - o Initiatives that support people from different backgrounds to come together and understand one another

2. Our leadership: create a diverse and inclusive leadership team (Councillors and Officers) and embed inclusion in our decision making

Developing a greater diverse leadership team, both Councillors and Officers, can help improve equality outcomes that draw on their different perspectives, experiences and backgrounds. It sets the tone for the organisation we want to be: one where diversity and inclusion are everyone’s responsibility and are considered in every decision we make. It helps lead conversations with our partners as we strive to be more inclusive organisations.

It's our duty under the Equality Act to consider how different people are affected by decisions we make. To do this effectively, we will implement a new Equality Impact Assessment process, drawing on best practice in the sector. We will ensure that Members and Officers know when and how to produce and evaluate these assessments and take steps to mitigate the impacts they identify.

Priorities:

- A leadership team that sets the tone of a diverse, fair and inclusive organisation
 - Talent management programmes which support progression of those from underrepresented groups across the Partnership
 - Work with Councillors to increase the diversity of those who stand for council, and consider best practice around increasing diversity among the Executive
 - Embed a new Equality Impact Assessment tool into decision making, with clear expectations and training and support for decision makers on how to interpret and consider them
- 3. Our services: ensure council services meet the diverse needs of our residents and make it easy for local residents to access council services and facilities**

Our first priority sets out our commitment to better understanding local need. Once we understand it better, we must take steps to ensure our services meet the needs identified. This includes making it easy for residents to access what they need – whether that's information online or physical access to council facilities.

For many people, accessing services and information online is efficient and straightforward, but for others it's a significant challenge. We want to set the standard for inclusive and accessible services locally, developing and implementing best practice which we will share with partners. We are committed to ensuring that community groups are able to participate in decision making through consultation and engagement.

Priorities:

- Ensure residents access and understand information provided by the council, including writing in plain English and providing translation where needed
 - To consider improved physical accessibility across our buildings and whether access to our outdoor spaces, parks and beaches needs improving.
 - Increased understanding of digital inclusion and inclusivity in how online services and information are presented
 - Ensure that meaningful consultation with a diverse range of people informs decisions made by the council and the services we deliver
- 4. Our workforce: be an inclusive and fair employer with a diverse workforce at all levels**

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership has a committed and talented workforce who work hard to deliver local services that matter. But we want to be an even better place

to work, where people from all backgrounds and with all protected characteristics feel comfortable, supported and included. We expect those who deliver services on our behalf, including any contractor or supplier, to meet our standards and expectations with regards to equality, diversity and inclusion.

As a recognised Disability Confident and Age Friendly Employer, we already take steps to make our workplace an inclusive place for those with a disability and for older employees. But we know there's more that we can do. We want to support and encourage our staff to come together around their shared experiences and ensure that we consult with these groups about decisions that affect our workforce.

Priorities:

- Improve the data available in the workforce profile through increased focus on providing the information requested, helping colleagues to understand why this matters
- Recruitment practices which attract a diverse pool of talent, including diverse recruitment panels
- Encouraging a culture where inclusion is openly discussed, and discrimination is challenged
- Improved training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for both members and officers
- Support staff groups that bring people together around protected characteristics/ shared experiences and involve them in relevant policy development

Governance and Next Steps

Alongside this strategy, we have developed a high-level action plan. This will serve as our roadmap to delivering the objectives in this strategy and embedding inclusion across our organisation. The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership recognises that for our commitment to inclusion to be meaningful, it must be embedded within our organisation. It must be at the centre of our policies and decisions, not an add on. This plan will take steps to embed inclusion in our organisation and to improve the way we address issues of inequality when and where they occur.

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership's Officer Equalities Board will oversee delivery of these actions. The Lead officer will feedback from the Equalities Board to the Portfolio Holder.

While the lead member, officers and the Board will take a key role in delivering our action plan, the Partnership expects all Councillors and Officers to play their part in achieving our equality objectives. This includes fostering an inclusive place to work, considering inclusion in decision making and challenging inappropriate language or behaviour should it occur.

The South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership will provide regular updates to Portfolio Holders and Leadership Team.

Appendix 1- Census Data

Census data

The table below sets out the profile of residents in Boston, East Lindsey and South Holland against each protected characteristic, according to the 2021 census. It provides a national average for reference (England and Wales).

These figures rely on the accuracy of the data reported, which asked people to self-identify against these criteria. Being in line with the national average does not diminish the need to address barriers faced due to any protected characteristic.

There was no question relating to gender reassignment or pregnancy/ maternity in the 2021 census.

Protected characteristic	Boston	East Lindsey	South Holland	National Average	Commentary
Age	Median age-42 15 or under 18.3% 16-64 61.2% 65+ 20.4%	Median age-52 15 or under 14.7% 16-64 54.9% 65+ 30.5%	Median age-46 15 or under 17% 16-64 59.2% 65+ 23.9%	Median age-40 15 or under 17.4% 16-64 64.1% 65+ 18.6%	Average age is above the national average
Sex	50.8% Female 49.2% Male	51.1% Female 48.9% Male	50.8% Female 49.2% Male	51% Female 49% Male	In line with national average
Sexual orientation	88.4% Straight 2.17% LGB 9.87% DNA	89.87% Straight 2.22% LGB 7.9% DNA	89.27% Straight 1.98% LGB 8.75% DNA	89.4% Straight 3.2% LGB 7.5% DNA	In line with national average
Race	94.7% White 2% Asian 0.7% Black 1.4% Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group 1.2% Other	97.8% White 0.8% Asian 0.2% Black 1% Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group 0.2% Other	96.3% White 1.2% Asian 0.5% Black 1.3% Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group 0.6% Other	81.7% White 9.3% Asian 2.5% Black 3% Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group 1.6% Other	Population is less diverse than national average
Religion	31.3% No religion 59.8% Christian 1.4% Muslim All others below 1% 6.5% DNA	38.8% No religion 53.9% Christian All others below 1% 6% DNA	33% No religion 58.9% Christian 1.4% Muslim All others below 1% 6.5% DNA	37.2% No religion 46.2% Christian 6.5% Muslim All others below 1% 6% DNA	Religious v non-religious is roughly in line, but with a lower representation of people who are from other religions
Disability	17.6% disabled	22.2% disabled	17.6% disabled	17.7% disabled	East Lindsey has higher level of disability

Marriage/ Civil Partnership	44.7% married or in a civil partnership	50.4% married or in a civil partnership	49.2% married or in a civil partnership	46.9% married or in a civil partnership	Overall similar to national average
Employment status (not a protected characteristic)	57.2% in employment 23.7% retired	45.8% in employment 35% retired	56.3% in employment 27.4% retired	57.2% in employment 21.6% retired	Higher than average number of retired people
Household deprivation	59.1% deprived in one or more dimensions	61.2% deprived in one or more dimensions	56% deprived in one or more dimensions	51.7% deprived in one or more dimensions	Higher than average deprivation
Health	5.7% in bad or very bad health	6.8% in bad or very bad health	5.2% in bad or very bad health	5.3% in bad or very bad health	Above average bad health in Boston and East Lindsey
Access to a vehicle	19.5% no access to vehicle	16.7% no access to vehicle	12.9% no access to vehicle	12.7% no access to vehicle	Below average access to a vehicle

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