



Meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty 2023-2024 – Annual Review of Progress



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Legal framework
3. County Durham and its population data
4. Our equality objectives 2024-2028
5. Progress against our equality objectives
6. How we have met the Public Sector Equality Duty in service delivery:
 - 6.1 Equality impact assessments
 - 6.2 Groups we engage and work in partnership with
 - 6.3 Inclusive consultation and use of feedback
 - 6.4 Council performance data
 - 6.5 CQC and Ofsted Inspections
 - 6.6 Employability services
 - 6.7 Poverty Strategy and Action Plan
 - 6.8 Changing Places Toilets Project
7. Workforce Equality Data
 - 7.1 Workforce equality profile data
 - 7.2 Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment
 - 7.3 Employee Networks
 - 7.4 Gender Pay Gap
 - 7.5 Recruitment, retention and apprenticeships
 - 7.6 Disability Confident Leader

Contact details

1. Introduction

Equality and inclusion are at the heart of Durham County Council's vision and core values. We recognise that inequality continues to affect different people and communities in different ways. We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supportive working environment for our employees and tackling the inequalities, prejudice and discrimination affecting the diverse communities which we serve.

This publication outlines Durham County Council's approach to delivering equality and inclusion in our services and as a large public sector employer. It outlines the legal framework for equality and provides an overview of the progress we are making against our equality objectives, how we ensure equality and inclusion in service provision and an analysis of our workforce equality data.

2. Legal framework

The Equality Act 2010 brought together a number of existing laws making it a more streamlined piece of legislation. It sets out the personal characteristics that are protected by the law and behaviour that is unlawful. The nine protected characteristics under the Act are:

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

As a local authority we are subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out in the Act to:

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

We are also covered by the specific duties contained in the Act which mean that we must:

- Publish information to demonstrate how we are complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, and
- Prepare and publish equality objectives (at least every four years).

This document is published in support of our specific duties and provides equality information in relation to the way we provide services, employ people and make decisions. Collecting, using and publishing our equality information helps us to identify and understand key equality issues for our organisation and demonstrate to the public how we are performing and what we are achieving in terms of equality and inclusion. Setting equality objectives which are specific and measurable helps us to better perform the public sector equality duty and focus attention on priority equality issues identified during public consultation that affect our communities and/or staff.

3. County Durham and its population data

522,100 people live in the County Durham (census 2021) which is the highest population of any council area in the North east. The resident population increased by 1.7% (8,800 people) between 2011 and 2021, compared to a 6.6% increase across England. Although Durham City and our large towns act as major centres, the county is largely rural. Durham Dales covers around one third of the county.

Here are some key facts about County Durham taken from Durham Insight which is a website providing information, data and research about the county.¹

- County Durham covers an area of 862 square miles
- A large county with some of the lowest population densities in the country: of 300 recognised settlements, only 23 have a population of 5,000 or more
- 234,800 households across the county
- 51.1 % of population are female, 48.9% male
- 21.3% are over 65 and 19% are under 17
- The proportion of children aged 0 to 15 remained relatively unchanged in this period at around 88,000. Across England this group increased by 4.6%
- However, the working age population (aged 16 to 64) fell to 322,600, a fall of 3.1% (10,300 fall). Across England this group increased by 3.7%
- The number of residents of retirement age (65 and over) increased by 20.6% (19,000 increase) and this group now represents around 1 in 5 residents in the county (21.3%)
- In 2001 only 1% of the county's population were from ethnicities other than 'white'. This increased to 1.8% in 2011 and again has increased to 3.2% in 2021 (compared to 9%, 14.6% and 19% respectively across England)
- 38th/151 deprivation rank
- 34.9% of children and young people in relative poverty

¹ [Durham Insight](#)

The following tables summarise Census 2021 diversity data for County Durham:

Table 1: Age (Census 2021)

Age Groups	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England Total	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Under 14	82,700	15.9	439,200	16.6	9,838,700	17.3
15-29	93,500	17.9	473,700	18	10,348,700	18.3
30-44	90,500	17.4	483,600	18.2	11,328,400	20
45-59	109,000	21	534,700	20.2	11,316,600	20
60-74	96,800	18.5	475,300	17.9	8,820,200	15.7
75-89	45,300	8.7	218,000	8.2	4,338,900	7.6
90+	4,300	0.8	22,500	0.8	498,200	0.9

Table 2: Disability (Census 2021)

Disability Status	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Disabled under the Equality Act: Day to day activity limited a lot	55,992	10.7	261,962	9.9	4,140,357	7.3
Disabled under the Equality Act: Day to day activities limited a little	63,798	12.2	305,342	11.5	5,634,153	10
Not disabled under the Equality Act	402,278	77.1	2,079,709	78.6	46,715,538	82.7

Table 3: Ethnicity, White residents (Census 2021)

White Residents	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
White	505,471	96.8	2,462,720	93	45,783,401	81
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	494,638	94.7	2,397,557	90.6	41,540,791	73.5
Irish	1,384	0.3	8,384	0.3	494,251	0.9
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	798	0.2	2,621	0.1	64,218	0.1
Roma	157	0	2,375	0.1	99,138	0.2
Other White	8,494	1.6	51,783	2	3,585,003	6.3

Table 4: Ethnicity, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents (Census 2021)

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Residents	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	300	0.1	16355	0.6	629,567	1.1
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	2,838	0.5	14,442	0.5	431,165	0.8
Asian/Asian British: Indian	2,148	0.4	22,021	0.8	1,843,248	3.3
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	730	0.1	27,290	1	1,570,285	2.8
Asian/Asian British: Other Asian	1,818	0.3	17,938	0.7	952,127	1.7
Black/African/Caribbean: African	1,202	0.2	22,066	0.8	1,468,474	2.6
Black/African/Caribbean: Caribbean	284	0.1	1,704	0.1	619,419	1.1
Black/African/Caribbean: Other Black	254	0	2,865	0.1	293,831	0.5
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1,962	0.4	12,490	0.5	474,190	0.8
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	914	0.2	6,527	0.2	241,528	0.4
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	906	0.2	5,650	0.2	499,310	0.9
Other ethnic group	2,073	0.4	26,342	1	122,9153	2.2
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	1,248	0.2	15,936	0.6	908,950	1.6

Table 5: Gender Identity (Census 2021: estimates for gender identity, no longer hold the accredited official statistics designation and are reclassified as official statistics in development²)

Gender Identity aged 16 and over	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender identity same as sex registered at birth	412,558	95.1	2,065,870	94.8	43,002,331	93.5
Gender identity different from sex registered at birth but no specific identity given	625	0.1	4,313	0.2	113,760	0.2
Gender identity trans man	352	0.1	1,963	0.1	46,513	0.1
Gender identity trans woman	305	0.1	1,743	0.1	45,684	0.1
All other gender identities	319	0.1	1,904	0.1	45,886	0.1
Not answered	19,800	4.6	103,166	4.7	2,752,783	6

Table 6: Sexual Orientation (Census 2021)

Sexual Orientation aged 16 and over	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Straight or heterosexual	396,553	91.4	1,983,445	91	41,114,478	89.4
Gay or Lesbian	6,142	1.4	34,016	1.6	709,704	1.5
Bisexual	5,154	1.2	25,954	1.2	591,690	1.3
Pansexual	664	0.2	3,836	0.2	107,852	0.2
Asexual	289	0.1	1,271	0.1	26,614	0.1

² [ONS letter to the OSR on Census 2021 gender identity estimates - Office for National Statistics](#)

Queer	82	0	308	0	9,963	0
All other sexual orientations	40	0	308	0	9,963	0
Not answered	25,035	5.8	129,694	6	3,432,728	7.5

Table 7: Religion (Census 2021)

Resident Population by Religion in County Durham	County Durham	County Durham	North East	North East	England	England
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Christian	285,167	54.6	1,343,948	50.8	26,167,899	46.3
Buddhist	1,290	0.2	7,026	0.3	262,433	0.5
Hindu	990	0.2	10,924	0.4	1,020,533	1.8
Jewish	286	0.1	4,389	0.2	269,283	0.5
Muslim	2,922	0.6	72,102	2.7	3,801,186	6.7
Sikh	839	0.2	7,206	0.3	520,092	0.9
Other religion	2,198	0.4	9,950	0.4	332,410	0.6
No religion	201,688	38.6	1,058,122	40	20,715,664	36.7
Not answered	26,687	5.1	133,345	5	3,400,548	6

4. Our Equality Objectives 2024-28

As part of our specific duties we must develop and deliver equality objectives at least every four years. These help us to concentrate attention on specific equality issues in order to deliver real improvement. Our objectives were initially identified through public consultation in 2019 with a wide range of stakeholders and partners for a shared vision for the county, also informed by analysis of countywide data sets³ and national policy. We have extended our objectives for a further four years, refreshing their focus based on current data to allow us to build on the progress made to date:

We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people

- As a Disability Confident Leader, we will improve recruitment and retention rates of disabled people within the council. The Disability Staff Network underpins our approach to inclusion and has ambitious plans including the implementation of a buddy system to provide tailored support for any employee with a disability who needs this. Our employability programmes, such as DurhamEnable work with jobseekers and local employers, to break down the barriers to paid

³ [Durham Insight](#)

work faced by people with disabilities, neurodiversities and long-term health conditions, further supports our leadership status.

- Underpinning evidence: County Durham has higher than average levels of disability and poor health compared to the rest of the country. 20.5% of the working age population in the county are disabled under the Equality Act definition (Census 21). Disabled people continue to face barriers in gaining and retaining employment and employers (in particular small employers) need support to ensure they have inclusive employment policies and practices in place.

We will build inclusive communities

- We will work with our communities to support their development and give them more control over the factors and decisions which affect their lives. As our communities have differing needs, strengths and potential, and we recognise one size does not fit all, we will target support towards those most in need and help to build capacity and resilience. By working more effectively with other organisations and interested parties such as parents, carers and service users, to collectively shape services and initiatives that matter, means we are doing things with communities rather than to them. This is known as our Approach to Wellbeing.
 - Underpinning evidence: Cost of living pressures and trends such as an ageing population and increasing levels of long-term health issues are creating greater pressures on council services. We are one of the least ethnically diverse populations in the country which can exacerbate issues such as safety and isolation for Black, Asian and minority ethnic people. There has been an increase in anti-social behaviour since 2022 and recorded hate crime has increased in terms of race, religion, disability and LGBT.

We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture

- We are committed to creating and sustaining a modern and supportive working environment for our employees and tackling inequalities, prejudice and discrimination. We aim to be an inclusive organisation, with improved staff engagement and effective staff networks.
 - Underpinning evidence: Our Workforce Strategy, approved by Cabinet on 15 May 2024, set out our approach towards the recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce in the face of increased competition for skilled workers, an ageing workforce with limited demographic spread and retention via positive and fulfilling experiences in the workplace. We believe it's important to employ a workforce which represents our local communities. Our objective to build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture supports the Workforce Strategy.

The objectives support the 2035 vision⁴ that County Durham is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive. The council plan reflects this vision and includes a fourth ambition to be an excellent council. Public consultation on a refreshed council plan (2024-28) sought feedback on the equality objectives refresh and agreement to continue with them until 2028. The Plan was approved at full council on 28 February 2024.⁵

5. Progress against our equality objectives

This section provides an overview of the progress we have made against our equality objectives during 2023-24 including our planned areas of focus and action going forward. More detailed data analysis on specific topics is included in sections six (service delivery), and seven (workforce equality data) of this report.

We will improve employment opportunities for disabled people

We achieved re-accreditation of our Disability Confident⁶ Leader status in November 2022. As a leader organisation we focus not only internally in improving the recruitment and retention of council employees with disabilities, but also externally in how we work with local businesses and through our approach to procurement.

Our key achievements 2023-24 include:

- Our employability services⁷ continue to engage with local employers to improve the level of inclusion and support provided to the working age population across the county and encourage more local employers to become Disability Confident signposting to DWP who provide the necessary support. DurhamEnable have supported several employers on their journey as a disability confident leader organisation and provided external validation.
- Growth continues of our disability and allies' staff network which provides additional support for disabled staff and acts as a reference group for policy development and service improvement. The network has launched a buddy system for new starters with a disability who need additional support to settle into their jobs and any support in applying for access to work funding.
- We have produced guidance to help employees and managers better understand neurodiversity and how we can be better work colleagues and managers to anyone with neurodiversity. A new e-learning module has been made available alongside a face to face training offer for any teams who have a more in-depth training requirement.
- Improved our information on the Council's Jobs and careers web page, including dedicated EDI and health and wellbeing sections. This includes

⁴ [County Durham Vision 2035 \(countydurhampartnership.co.uk\)](https://www.durham.gov.uk/council-and-politics/council-plan/council-plan-2024-28)

⁵ [Agenda for County Council on Wednesday 28 February 2024, 10.00 am - Durham County Council](https://www.durham.gov.uk/council-and-politics/council-plan/council-plan-2024-28)

⁶ <https://disabilityconfident.campaign.gov.uk/>

⁷ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/employability>

information on how we support people with a disability such as our network and the reasonable adjustment passport and understanding of neurodiversity.

- We work with partners on Preparing for Adulthood Action Plan to enhance outcomes in Employment, Education, Health and Well Being and Independence/Community Participation. This also involves the Preparing for Adulthood network (meets termly) and their termly newsletter ensures schools, key partners, post 16 providers and MCT are kept up to date with local and national developments and services while encouraging the sharing of good practice.
- DurhamEnable⁸ is now well established with a team of job coaches providing job support for residents with a disability and/or mental health condition. (Programme data for this and other employability programmes who work closely with local employers, is provided in the service delivery section below).
- Ongoing collaboration with DWP – hosted event on 23 May 2024 at the Work Place, Newton Aycliffe, where local employers could network, access DWP specialist advice and information on Access to Work and learn from other employer's journeys on the recruitment and retention of disabled people.
- Ongoing programme of disability awareness by marking key dates in the year as selected by the staff disability network e.g. International Day for People with a Disability, Autism awareness, sight and hearing loss, mental health etc.
- Staff self-updating their disability status has steadily increased over 2023/4. Data is now automatically ported over from the recruitment process for new starters (where provide and permission obtained) which removes the need to self-update. Improved data collection provides a richer data set allowing us to more accurately understand our disability employment rate.

Going forward, work is underway to develop manager and employee guidance on reasonable adjustments including training modules. Also, continuation of events and sourcing training opportunities for staff to improve disability awareness, in particular the use of local disability organisations who provide training. Our employability programmes will continue to work closely with local businesses to provide them with the support and tools to be inclusive employers to broaden opportunities for those people looking for work, especially those with a disability.

We will build inclusive communities

Our programme of events underpins positive community relations, whether equality focussed or wider events that optimise opportunities to advance equality.

We aim to be inclusive in all our events including cultural highlights such as Brass, Food Festivals and Lumiere. Key events promoting inclusion were:

- **Holocaust Memorial Day** is commemorated each year on 27 January. A combined community and schools' event was held in partnership with Durham Cathedral. Our guest speakers for 2024 were TV personality Rob Rinder MBE and Bernie Graham, who were both part of the award-winning TV programme

⁸ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/DurhamEnable>

'My Family, The Holocaust and Me'. The event also involved, local school Hermitage Academy and performance by Durham Music Service. The Lord Lieutenant attended the event, as well as representation from the Chairman of Durham County Council, Mayor of Durham as well as County Durham MPs and the Deputy Chief Constable. A free exhibition took place over the weekend and included, the 'Porrajmos' story, the plight of the Romani holocaust. Local historical resources were made available through the Durham County Record Office, which highlighted the role of the Durham Light Infantry within the liberation of Belsen. Also, artwork and poetry from local prisons, HMP Deerbolt YOI and HMP Frankland. Previous recordings to remember Holocaust Memorial Day remain available on the council's website⁹. Our approach continues to provide wider awareness raising of issues such as hate crime affecting protected groups.

- **International Women's Day**, on 8 March. Students from Belmont Community School, Parkside Academy and Wolsingham School were invited to County Hall to meet some of the women who work at the council in senior roles or traditionally male-dominated sectors.¹⁰ Cllr Hopgood said; "Today we wanted to show the young women of County Durham that they can achieve their ambitions and aim high no matter their gender. As the first ever woman political leader of Durham County Council, this is something that is very important to me and I wanted to use today as an opportunity to encourage the students to pursue their dreams." Several other events were held across the county including an event hosted by the Lord Lieutenant, Sue Snowden at Bishop Auckland Town Hall.¹¹
- **Durham Pride UK**¹² is an annual fixture in the county's cultural calendar. The most recent event took place on Sunday 26 May 2024. The council recognises the importance of Pride as an inclusive and celebratory event for our LGBT+ community and we provide ongoing support in terms of event planning, promotion and financial contribution, also support through political leadership and senior management. The event is actively supported by our LGBT+ and armed forces staff networks. Council cultural venues including theatres and libraries promoted Pride, with a Queer Diaries event held at The Gala which proved very successful in 2023, hence the return for 2024. The council's LGBT+ employee network provided valuable event support with marshalling and ticket scanning on the day. A variety of service provider stalls were present at the event including DurhamEnable, fostering and One Point as the event provides a key community engagement opportunity. Elected members and senior managers proudly walked the council's Durham Pride banner in the parade from Palace Green.
- Prevent awareness events have been carried out, both in person and virtually, to engage the community and voluntary sector across the county so they are aware of the risks and what signs to look out for that could indicate someone

⁹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/hmd>

¹⁰ [Pupils get inspiring advice from working women - Durham County Council](#)

¹¹ [International Women's Day at Bishop Auckland Town Hall - Durham County Council](#)

¹² [Durham Pride UK](#)

is susceptible to radicalisation and how to refer them through the Prevent safeguarding pathway.

- Members of the Youth Council were consulted on the new Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024-29. They were pleased hate crime has been highlighted as a priority, as this impacts the lives of many young people in County Durham. They are aware of the Hate Hurts campaigning material used to raise awareness and the importance of reporting Hate crime. The Hate Crime Action Group will be responsible for ensuring this activity takes place as part of their role in developing a delivery plan to combat this issue. The Strategy also highlights the work of Humankind in supporting LGBTQI+ people in the area with advice and support.

Going forward, our change in focus for this objective, means we will work more effectively with other organisations and interested parties such as parents, carers, and service users, to collectively shape services and initiatives that matter, for example through co-production. We will continue to deliver key events which support community cohesion and awareness raising.

We will build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture

During 2023-24 a number of key initiatives have been implemented to help us build an inclusive and welcoming employee culture.

Key achievements 2023-24 include:

- We now have several thriving networks: Disability and allies, LGBT+ and allies, Race, Menopause, Carers and Armed Forces networks. Areas of impact include review of staff training, awareness sessions for all senior managers, involvement of network chairs at all new starter induction sessions, recognition of specific dates including lgbt+ history month and International Day for Disabled Persons, and review and influence of key HR policy including recruitment and selection practice. Networks provide a valuable engagement mechanism to ensure the council fosters an inclusive workplace culture. Further information on our networks is provided in the workforce equality data section of this publication.
- Overhaul of recruitment and selection processes to ensure a more inclusive process and that we reach a wide range of candidates. Extended reach of vacancy adverts through the use of LinkedIn, Indeed and Facebook advertising. Use of recruitment fairs; promoting apprenticeship opportunities and providing information to prospective applicants which promote the range and diversity of opportunities available at the council.
- Introduction of MyView recruitment portal, which will make it easier for candidates and managers to track the application process
- Guidance has been produced to provide clear advice on how we support our trans employees and any employees proposing or undergoing transition or de-transition in the workplace. Trans awareness sessions have been delivered at manager updates, also, two additional sessions with HR teams.

- Following revised legislation in April 2024, Carers leave, flexible working rights and paternity leave policies have all been updated.
- We have a range of wellbeing support including specific targeted initiatives such as menopause awareness events and support, support for mental wellbeing, involvement in accreditation schemes such as White Ribbon (domestic abuse) and the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award.
- Our office accommodation strategy is progressing to provide more modern and accessible workspaces. We have worked closely with our disability staff network to ensure we provide inclusive and welcoming environments catering for various needs including disability, religion, and breastfeeding (for example).
- We have carried out gender pay gap (GPG) reporting since 2017 and details are published on the council's GPG web page¹³. For 2023 our calculations show that women's mean hourly rate is 0.72% lower than men and women's median hourly rate is 4.19% lower than men. This represents a slight deterioration in the mean but an improvement in the median rate as compared with the previous year. Compared to other councils and national data this is much lower than average gender pay gaps which is positive although we strive to make this zero. Further information is contained in the workforce section of this publication.

Going forward, our ongoing work with staff networks will help us to feed the 'voice of staff' into our progress as an inclusive employer. We will continue to progress solutions to issues highlighted through our networks including developing a more robust approach towards dealing with 3rd party harassment connected to protected characteristics (abuse/harassment/intimidation of staff from service users or public).

6. How we have met the public sector equality duty in service delivery

The following equality information provides a snapshot of how we have met the public sector equality duty in service delivery 2023/24.

All local authorities face financial pressures, our estimates for savings requirements to set a balanced budget over the next four years are provisionally over £60 million. This will be challenging as it is becoming more difficult to protect frontline services as savings in managerial and back-office efficiencies are becoming exhausted. We have made £262 million savings to date since 2010 and leaner workforce with 3,000 fewer employees.

6.1 Equality impact assessments

The council uses an evidence-based process of equality impact assessment (EIA) to ensure we analyse impact, across all protected characteristics, of policies and decisions, including our Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings proposals.

¹³ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/genderpaygap>

Assessments allow us to remove or minimise any negative impact, formulate mitigating actions and capture evidence of where we are advancing equality. They are a key part of our decision-making processes and are published where relevant, such as Cabinet reports. In 2022/23 an internal audit was conducted to evaluate the framework in place for the EIA process. Following the recommendations and outcomes of the audit, we have further strengthened our processes through developing an e-learning module on how to carry out an impact assessment, how they are used to inform decision making and the importance of attaching EIAs to relevant published reports.

Decisions requiring an equality impact assessment are published alongside relevant [committee](#) meeting reports such as [Cabinet](#).

6.2 Groups we engage and work in partnership with

Before making any significant changes to any of our services we carry out public consultation to help us to understand the impact on different groups of people. We want to provide people the opportunity to comment on how we can improve our services and influence the decisions we make. This is done through ongoing engagement and consultation via various channels and methods to ensure participation is inclusive. Channels include the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS), partnership working via the County Durham Partnership and thematic groups and networks such as Armed Forces Forum and North East Churches Acting Together. Specific council led engagement mechanisms include:

- **Area Action Partnerships:** We have 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) which cover the whole county and allow residents to set local priorities which are acted on through local projects. The AAPs are a useful mechanism to use as a key stakeholder when the council is carrying out wider consultation as they are broadly representative of the population and can also provide specific engagement with communities of interest including ethnic minorities.
- **Youth Council:** Our Youth Council is a group of young people aged from 11 to 18 years who live in County Durham. It allows young people to be involved in making and influencing important decisions about issues and services that affect them in order to make positive changes. It provides a collective voice that is listened to and acted upon by crucial decision makers. It is open to all young residents and provides ways for young people who do not want to be an active member of the Youth Council to still be involved in decision making.
- **Disability Partnership:** We facilitate a county wide disability partnership which is made up of individuals with a disability or who are disability allies and of representatives from local and national disability organisations. Representatives include: Blind Life in Durham, Durham City Access for All, Guide Dogs UK, and National Association of Laryngectomy Clubs. The partnership provides the opportunity for disabled people to raise any concerns on council services and partake in decision making such as providing

feedback on the council's budget consultation, proposed infrastructure developments and satisfaction with service provision.

- **Service specific engagement:** Services have set up various stakeholder groups to allow for continuing and focussed engagement such as a group for parents and carers of children and young people with autism and Making Changes Together in County Durham. The council's comments and complaints process also allows us to address issues raised to ensure we continue to provide services that are inclusive.

6.3 Inclusive consultation and use of feedback

Whenever it is appropriate to consult, Durham County Council wants to listen to the voices of local people, service users, partners, and other interested parties. This helps us ensure our services meet the needs of our communities. For details on how we consult with people, please see our [Consultation Statement](#).

Public consultations are designed to be as inclusive as possible and capture views from a wide range of stakeholders including service users, partners, and elected members. We use different ways to consult with people including online surveys, public meetings, focus groups and direct contact with organisations representing different interests.

When we plan a consultation, we try to make sure that there is more than one way to take part, for example, when we do online surveys, we provide paper copies for people who cannot use, or do not have access to, a computer. We may offer focus groups or actively engage with groups or partnerships with a specific subject interest.

An equality impact assessment is undertaken prior to consultation where relevant and is developed into a full assessment once the consultation results have been analysed. Consultations are structured in a way that results can be disaggregated via protected characteristic in order to analyse participation and help us to understand responses in relation to the protected groups. Going forward the equality analysis helps us to shape new service delivery models and/or policy development.

During 2023/4 we carried out many public consultations, including; housing, homelessness, parking charges, customer access points, early help strategy, also, policy reviews and/or services change proposals, including proposed budget savings. Current consultations are published on our [website](#).

The council has also adopted the [Approach to Wellbeing](#) as a means of putting people at the heart of everything we do and underpins our work to achieve the County Durham Vision. The [AHS Wellbeing Self-Assessment Framework](#) has been developed to support the introduction of the County Durham Approach to Wellbeing. It poses questions that can help to structure conversations and inform future decisions about how local work and activities can support the wellbeing of people living in communities.

This approach helps frame our overall equality analysis allowing us to ensure our services are inclusive and meet the needs of our communities. We believe that involving people in decision making is important and we aim to make it easy for everyone to engage, take part in our consultations and co-produce services.

6.4 Council performance data

Data within [Durham Insight](#) provides access to information, data and research based around key themes on what it is like to live in County Durham and the [County Durham Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessments \(JSNAA\)](#) provides a detailed overview of the current and future health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham. Both tools help to feed into and inform our strategic decision making.

As well as statistical population data, equality and inclusion are at the heart of Durham County Council's vision and core values and runs through everything we do. We work hard to provide the best services for people living in, working in, and visiting County Durham. We report our progress and highlight any gaps in quarterly monitoring reports¹⁴. Equality related highlights from 2023/4 include:

- **Culture:** We maintain an ongoing commitment to culture-led regeneration. Several targeted initiatives widen participation and inclusion:
 - Involvement of disabled people to improve access at our main cultural events
 - As part of the education programme for the festival, BRASS engaged with around 15,000 children and young people across 63 schools
 - 3,326 people attended the two-day Durham Book Festival in October 2023. The festival offered 35 events and more than 40 author with a diverse genre.
 - 176,000 visitors attended Lumiere, the County's biennial light art festival, in November 2023. This is 36,000 more than 2021 when Lumiere was last held. The programme was the biggest yet, featuring more than 40 light installations and extending beyond the city to Bishop Auckland. Many art installations were thought provoking and inclusive of minoritised groups. We worked with local disability groups to greatly improve accessibility at the event, including production of a more informative access guide. Pre-event tours were offered the evening prior to the official opening for disabled groups, particularly those with a sensory impairment. For most, this tailored approach, was the first time they had experienced Lumiere.

- **Education:** The proportion of Key Stage 2 children (11 year olds) achieving 'expected' standards in maths and reading at Key Stage 2 improved from 57% in 2022 to 59% in 2023 eliminating the gap with England. At the end of Key Stage 2, 73% of pupils met the expected standard in reading, which is in-line with national and a decrease of 0.5% on 2022. In 2023, 71% of pupils met the

¹⁴ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2427/Quarterly-reports>

expected standard in writing which is an increase of 1.5%. 72.1% of pupils met the expected standard in maths which is an increase of 1% since 2022.

- **Elective home education:** Children being home educated continues to rise locally, regionally and nationally. However, the proportion of children and young people electively home educated in County Durham remains low (fluctuating between 0.9% and 1.2%).
- **Transport:** The new bus station in Durham City opened to the public on 7 January 2024. It is a modern transport hub offering a welcome and safe space, promoting more sustainable travel, and attracting more people into the city. We worked closely with disability and access groups to ensure an inclusive environment. The improved facilities include a Changing Places toilet, improved information displays and upgraded seating in the waiting area. More space for buses to reverse and the exit on to North Road has improved visibility for pedestrians and buses.
- **Family hubs:** A wide-ranging programme of activity and support is being delivered in Family Hubs, and at other venues, with partners. Examples of delivery include:
 - 166 children and young people have taken part in the EWB programme (Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour), with courses including Chill Kids, Teen Zone, Safer Choices, and Staying Cool Teen. 125 completed a course with 105 reporting a positive outcome.
 - 72 people started Parenting Programmes such as Fearless, Stepping Stones, Strengthening Families, Triple P Teen, Incredible Years Baby, and Incredible Years. 51 completed a course with 47 reporting a positive outcome.
 - Universal programmes Baby and Me and Toddler and Me were attended by 475 and 254 parents, respectively.
 - 144 people attended Growing Healthy drop-in sessions.
 - 50 people attended infant feeding sessions.
 - Weekly Victim Survivor groups are hosted at Family Hubs in Stanley and Durham and run by Harbour. On average, four to five women attend each session.
 - In quarter three, 20 families were referred to the RYPP (Respect Young People's Programme). 45 families were engaged, and 13 families completed the programme. 13 families did not complete the programme, with some being offered wider support by Harbour.
- **Social value:** Along with our County Durham Pound partners we have been awarded the prestigious [Social](#) Value Award for the best public sector project in 2023. We are committed to using our collective spending power and partnerships to maximise social, economic, and environmental value throughout the county. This includes creating more jobs for local people, reducing the county's impact on the environment, and supporting meaningful

training and upskilling. Please see our social value in [procurement](#) 2023-25 policy statement and example project to learn more.

- **Domestic abuse:** Although fewer domestic abuse incidents were reported to the police in the 12 months ending December 2023, 11% more victims were referred to Harbour Support Services. 278 During quarter three of the 1,597 domestic abuse victims referred to Harbour Support Services, 74 of these were considered at a high risk and 239 had been referred to Harbour at least twice in the last 12 months. 279 On average, a victim experiences domestic abuse for four years before accessing help from Harbour.
- **Leisure transformation:** We are continuing with our leisure transformation programme to make our facilities more modern, appealing, and inclusive by offering 'something for everyone'. Specific health initiatives are in place to support the engagement and involvement of the most vulnerable and excluded. Abbey leisure centre has been recently transformed to include a Move hub, Abbey Adventure and virtual spinning studio in action.
- **Children's social care:** Equality, diversity, inclusion and anti-racist practice are a priority, we have delivered on our pledge to offer high quality anti-racist practice CPD to our case holding practitioners and managers. We commissioned six workshops in 2023/4 to provide spaces for practitioners, practice educators and leaders, to explore culturally sensitive practice. Additional learning resources were purchased for teams. We will expand on this with the development of a bespoke practice led role to focus on inclusion and anti-racist practice and strengthen links regionally and nationally. Our leadership academy programme for managers has a theme of neuro inclusion and we worked with colleagues at Sunderland university to offer workshops focussing on how managers can support neurodivergent colleagues well at work. We also delivered this workshop nationally as part of social work England week to share good practice. Next steps for this are to support the development of a neuro inclusive staff network in children's social care for our neurodivergent practitioners and sign up to the BASW neuro inclusive pledge.

The social graces and anti-racist practice are the golden thread throughout our practice framework 'How we practice in Durham'. This year contains a new specific section exploring difference, uniqueness, inclusion and social graces from a strengths-based trauma aware perspective and as ever the academic programme for our newly qualified social workers creates spaces where social workers can explore intersectionality and sensitive practice – for example poverty / gender / race.

6.5 CQC and Ofsted Inspections

Summaries of feedback from recent CQC and Ofsted inspections are set out below:

Ofsted – Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspection: The Ofsted inspection of the local area partnership for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services found many areas of effective practice. This included the early identification of need with several arrangements in place to provide support for families and schools to help recognise and meet SEND needs. Effective delivery of the healthy child programme with the 0-25 service delivering additional developmental checks to identify additional needs and offer support at the earliest opportunity. Children and young people with complex medical needs access continuous support through the complex care nursing team. Planning for post 18 support for those with complex SEND starts early.

As acknowledged in our self-assessment the inspection team also highlighted some areas for development, such as improved waiting times for neurodevelopment assessment and therapeutic support from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). This mirrors the national picture. Durham has allocated new investment and a detailed recovery plan to reduce waiting times.

The local area partnership are currently developing an improvement plan to address the following areas raised by the inspectors to:

- Intensify work to further improve EHC plan quality and assessment timelines. Plans should consistently and accurately reflect the needs of children and young people and all partners should contribute comprehensively with high quality information with plans that detail the child's voice, needs and aspirations
- Strengthen the work to further reduce the delays in accessing CAMHS and neurodevelopmental pathways
- Ensure that children and young people and their families can access easily identifiable needs-led services. Informed practitioners should direct families to services that provide support, guidance and intervention at the earliest opportunity
- Further strengthen the monitoring and impact of strategic plans and policies to ensure that support and resources are consistently targeted to the children and young people and families that need it most.

CQC – Adult Social Care Inspection¹⁵: The council has been scored as 'good' in a recent CQC inspection of adult social care. Data from 2022/23 shows that approximately 9,435 people were accessing long term support, and 2,240 were accessing short term support from the council. No two care packages are the same and vary significantly in their intensity, duration and cost. However, all service users have some form of disability and the majority accessing services are older (65+). The majority of care packages for the under 65's are for people with a learning disability.

Inspectors found that 'leaders and staff had a good understanding of the health and care needs of people living in the area and worked well with partners to agree plans

¹⁵ [County Durham: local authority assessment - Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk)

and priorities for people living across County Durham. This was also reflected in what we heard from people receiving services, as well as their carers’.

The assessment team found:

- Over 85% of CQC regulated care provision in the county was rated as good or outstanding
- A trusted assessor approach was in place in Durham to support the effective and timely assessment of people’s needs within care settings. This is where staff received additional training to enable them to carry out assessments
- Most carers felt the support they had received from the local authority had helped them with their own mental wellbeing. They were signposted to appropriate services for their needs and 88% of carers found information and advice helpful
- 95% of equipment aimed at supporting people’s independence, such as bathing aids were delivered on time, sometimes on the same day. Major installation of equipment, such as stairlifts, were in place within approximately two months. This was mainly due to manufacturing time rather than delays in the local authority
- The local authority had retained phone lines and customer services points to facilitate appropriate access for people who found the website difficult to navigate or who were unable to access it. Information was regularly provided in languages other than English
- There was minimal need for people to use services or support in places outside of their local area. When support was being accessed from outside of the area, this was usually due to personal choice or to be close to family
- People had access to interpreters and translation services where needed
- There were some delays in mental health provision, linked to mixed diagnosis of people or providers not being able to meet people’s needs. However, commissioners were working together with a local NHS trust to find placements for people.

The service is developing an improvement plan to address the following areas raised by inspectors:

- Not everyone in the county received the same quality of safeguarding support
- There were challenges in sourcing flexible respite services for people with a learning disability, and single person accommodation for people with mental health needs and people with a learning disability
- Specific needs for older people who were part of the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender community, for example, were not always considered in the way services were commissioned across the area. There was limited understanding evident during the assessment of the ways the different parts of people’s identity combined to affect their experiences and outcomes.
- Staff felt financial assessments took a long time and affected the timeliness of assessments. While this did not prevent services from being provided, it did cause anxiety and risked people incurring debts whilst waiting to understand what financial contributions they would receive.

6.6 Employability Services

We have several employability programmes which support people in finding and retaining employment. These programmes not only directly link to the council's vision of 'more and better jobs' but this approach also supports our equality objective to 'improve employment opportunities for disabled people', as one of the main barriers to employment is long term health conditions and poor mental health.

Durham Enable¹⁶ launched in February 2021 and works 1-to-1 with jobseekers and employers, to break down the barriers to paid work experienced by people with disabilities, neurodiversities, and long-term health conditions. They use a place and train model adhering to the five stages of supported employment: customer engagement, vocational profiling, employer engagement, job matching, in-work support and career development.

The model uses a partnership strategy to enable people with disabilities to achieve sustainable long-term employment and businesses to employ valuable workers. Increasingly, supported employment techniques are being used to support other disadvantaged groups such as young people leaving care, ex-offenders and people recovering from drug and alcohol misuse. This 5-stage model has at its heart the notion that anyone can be employed if they want paid employment and sufficient support is provided. The model is a flexible and continuous process, designed to meet all anticipated needs. The model is equally applicable to supporting job retention as they utilise schemes such as Access to Work to provide ongoing, time unlimited in-work support and career development.

DurhamEnable were assessed by the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) in October 2023, achieving Excellent accreditation and showing model fidelity. DurhamEnable scored 100% for its services, products and processes and have been deemed a market-leader in the North East for its Supported Employment practice. DurhamEnable were highly commended for its work with employers and ability to job match as high levels of people retain employment once achieving work.

As of 31 December 2023, the service has registered 811 participants, with 217 participants achieving a positive employment outcome. Employment sectors are varied and include retail, hospitality, digital services/development, care and professional and managerial positions.

Please see the [DurhamEnable](https://durhamenable.info/) website for our client stories. The following tables set out client data, broken down by protected characteristic where this data is available:

Table 8: DurhamEnable Participants

DurhamEnable Participants	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	533	65.7%

¹⁶ <https://durhamenable.info/>

Female	267	32.9%
Self-described/unknown	11	1.4%
Total participants	811	100
Age		
18-24 years	325	40.0%
25-38 years	271	33.4%
39-52 years	139	17.1%
53-66 years	76	9.4%
Ethnicity		
Minority ethnic	24	3%

Table 9: DurhamEnable Participant categories (contains duplicates)

DurhamEnable Participants	Number	Percentage
Mental Health Condition	463	57.1%
Autism	271	33.4%
Physical and/or sensory impairment	238	29.3%
Learning Disability	209	25.8%
Learning Difficulty	207	25.5%
Homeless or history of homelessness	50	6.2%
Ex-offender	37	4.6%
SEND	<10	

Table 10: Personal characteristic of those with successful employment outcomes (contains duplicates)

Personal characteristics of those with successful employment outcomes	Number	Percentage
Mental Health Condition	87	
Autism	72	
Physical and/or sensory impairment	53	
Learning Disability	48	
Learning Difficulty	43	
Homeless or history of homelessness	7	
Ex-offender	9	
SEND	5	

Employability Durham¹⁷ provides job support for individuals aged 25 years and over and for employers, including support in setting up a business. For 2023/4 the programme has registered 116 clients with disabilities, however not all clients who have a disability declare this, so this is likely to be an under-representation and we have supported 102 ethnic minority participants. The programme has supported 33 Ukrainian arrivals in the past year, also 33 new refugees through our UK Resettlement Programme. Please see our [Client Stories](#) to better understand the personal impact of employment support.

¹⁷ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/employability>

DurhamWorks¹⁸ supports young people aged 16-24 to get into education employment and training. The programme also supports school pupils in years 10 and 11 who have been identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This includes careers advice, 1-to-1 mentoring support, and various activities focused on transition support, improving motivation, and work-related learning and enterprise. The Workplaces Project helps young people in years 10 and 12 gain an insight into the world of work through visits to workplaces. They learn about specific employment sectors, the different job roles, as well as recruitment processes. Please see our [news](#) section to learn more on impact.

6.7 Poverty Strategy and Action Plan

Poverty is multi-faceted. It comes in many shapes and forms and varies both in terms of duration and severity. Poverty is not just about money, it relates to opportunity, participation, and access to services. Its impacts are felt at an individual, household, and community level. A recent update on the progress of the council's poverty action plan was received by [Cabinet](#) on 14 February 2024.

We continue to provide 'core' financial support mechanisms to low-income households, as well as supporting advice provision across the county. Support mechanisms include the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS), Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) scheme, and the Welfare Assistance Scheme (WAS) for those in crisis.

The council also provides additional investment and support to residents needing financial help, through the work of the Poverty Action Steering Group (PASG) working alongside partners. The plan is focussed around four key objectives:

- (a) Objective 1: use intelligence and data to target support to low-income households
- (b) Objective 2: reduce the financial pressures on people facing or in poverty
- (c) Objective 3: increase individual, household and community resilience to poverty
- (d) Objective 4: reduce barriers to accessing services for those experiencing financial insecurity

Poverty disproportionately impacts certain groups, in particular, families with children (working age and often a greater impact on women). Therefore, some of our focus targets these groups including the household support fund, 'fun and food' in County Durham, family hubs, employability support programmes and the single homelessness accommodation programme (greater impact for men).

6.8 Changing Places Toilets Project

There are now 19 Changing Places toilets across the county, including Durham Bus Station and The Story at Mount Oswald. These facilities provide sanitary accommodation for people with multiple and complex disabilities. Changing Places

¹⁸ <https://durhamworks.info/>

toilets are larger and in addition to standard accessible toilets with equipment such as hoists, privacy screens, adult-sized changing benches, peninsula toilets and space for carers.

We were successful in securing funding from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in partnership with Muscular Dystrophy UK which has supported five additional facilities at Locomotion (Shildon), Raby Castle (Staindrop), Dunes Café (Crimdon), Teesdale Leisure Centre (Barnard Castle) and Hardwick Park (Sedgefield). The new facilities greatly improve access and inclusion and enable everyone to get out and about and enjoy the day-to-day activities many of us take for granted. We will continue to identify gaps in provision and increase the number of changing places facilities across the county at every opportunity going forward.

A full list of council owned and managed toilet facilities, including changing places, can be found on the Council's [website](#). The national changing places website provides a map of all registered [facilities](#) across the country. A list of available registered facilities across the county is summarised in table 11 below:

Table 11: Changing Places Toilet Facilities across County Durham

Council owned and managed changing places facilities	Non-council owned and managed changing places facilities
Durham Bus Station	Beamish Museum
The Story, Durham	Durham University (Mathematical Sciences and Computer Science Building), Durham
Hardwick Park, Sedgefield	Durham University (Science block), Durham
Dunes Café, Crimdon	Haystax Inclusive Farm Experience, Knitsley
Chester-le-Street leisure centre	Locomotion, Shildon
Consett leisure centre	Morrisons, Seaham
Freemans Quay leisure centre, Durham	Raby Castle, Staindrop
Louisa Centre leisure centre, Stanley	Tesco, Bishop Auckland
Newton Aycliffe leisure centre	
Spennymoor leisure centre	
Teesdale leisure centre, Barnard Castle (not open to public yet)	

7. Workforce Equality Data

7.1 Workforce equality profile data

Durham County Council is a large employer with nearly 9,000 employees (excluding school-based staff). We are the largest council in the North East region and one of the largest unitary authorities in the country.

The following sections cover our employee data by headcount as of 31 March 2024 and HR policy analysis, including; gender pay gap, progress with our staff networks, employee wellbeing initiatives, analysis from the working well survey and achievement of disability confident leader status.

Employee diversity monitoring categories are aligned with Census categories and Equality Act definitions (e.g. definition of disability) to allow for comparative population analysis. We have complete data for age and sex, all other categories can be self-updated by employees via the MyView system, and all include a 'prefer not to say' category. We explain to staff how this information is used anonymously for statistical purposes only, such as update of this publication.

Overall number of employees and breakdown by sex

Table 12: Staff profile by sex

	Headcount	Percent
Female	5687	63.5%
Male	3269	36.5%
Total	8956	100%

Our workforce is consistently around two thirds female. Although the overall number of employees has plateaued since 2017 there had been a steady decline since 2011 from around 10,500 staff in total. This staff reduction reflects savings to meet financial planning requirements and potentially new and more flexible ways of working alongside improved technological service delivery solutions.

Age profile of employees

Table 13: Staff profile by age

Age range	Headcount	Percent
16-24	734	8.2%
25-44	3344	37.3%
45-64	4521	50.5%
65+	357	4.0%
Totals	8956	100%

Just over half (50.5%) of all staff are aged 45-64 years which is slightly down from the previous year. Over eight per cent of staff are aged 16-24 years, increased from

the previous year and up from only 2.2 per cent in 2017 which is encouraging. This is predominately a result of our successful apprenticeship programme although it needs to be noted that there is no age restriction in applying for an apprenticeship. There is a continuing upward trend of staff over the age of 65 years, the percentage has risen from around 2% throughout 2011-2016, to the current 4 per cent.

Ethnicity profile of employees

Although we do not have complete data sets for ethnicity, 68.8% of staff (6,161) have provided this information which is a steady increase of staff providing this information since we asked employees to self-update. A total of 189 employees are Black, Asian and minority ethnic, including other White, which represents around 3.1% of those who have provided this ethnicity data. This is an increase on the previous year (2.3%). However, this is lower than the county's overall Black, Asian and minority ethnic and other White population of 5.3%. We aim to increase the amount of data held for ethnicity and will continue to encourage staff to self-update their ethnic background information to allow us to provide improved analysis. We recognise that people need to feel included and supported to provide this information and we will continue to promote the race and equality staff network as one mechanism to advance the inclusion of staff from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background.

Disability profile of employees

4,231 employees have disclosed their disability status which equates to around 47.2% of the total workforce. Of those staff who have provided disability data, 278 state they have a disability which represents an employee disability rate of around 6.5% (3.1% of the total workforce). This is much lower than county wide data where 20.5% of working age population state they are disabled under the Equality Act definition (census 21). Although our profile data provides an indication of our employment rate for people with disabilities, due to under disclosure of this information, it may not be truly reflective of the wider workforce. For example, a third (3,052) of the workforce responded to the Working Well Survey in 2022 and of those respondents nearly 14% identified as being disabled, so we know there is some disparity with levels of self-updated information held on the MyView HR system.

To improve analysis going forward, sustained communications aim to encourage staff to provide their disability status by explaining the importance of this and providing reassurance as to how data is stored and utilised. We know that some people may not identify as disabled although they meet the Equality Act definition, and recognise that people need to feel included, supported and represented in the workplace in order to provide this information. Disability data is especially important as we know that as a county our population has relatively high levels of disability and as a large employer, we want to improve the employment rate of disabled people within our own organisation as a key area of focus for our equality objectives. Data is key to transparency and driving workplace disability inclusion.

Sexual orientation employee data

44.5 per cent of staff (3,982 individuals) have recorded their sexual orientation, a further 7.5% increase on the previous year, which is encouraging. LGB+ representation is slightly higher than population data at 3.11% (of those over 16 who answered the census question). Data held is broken down in the following table.

Table 14: Sexual orientation staff data breakdown

Sexual orientation	Headcount	Percent
Lesbian, gay, bisexual or self-described	149	3.9%
Heterosexual	3833	96.1%
Totals	3982	100%

We aim to encourage more staff to provide their diversity data including data on sexual orientation going forward.

Religion and belief

Over 43.7 per cent of staff (3,913 individuals) have recorded their religion or belief or if they have no religion or belief which is almost an 8% increase on the previous year which is encouraging. The staff profile is broadly comparable with census data, although there are slightly fewer identifying as Christian, however, census covers total population where older age groups are disproportionately more likely to be Christian compared with younger age groups. Data held is broken down in the following table.

Table 15: Religion or belief staff data breakdown

Religion or belief	Headcount	Percent
Agnostic	96	2.5%
Atheist	194	5.0%
Christian	2019	51.6%
Muslim	22	0.6%
Other religions or belief	61	1.4%
No religion or belief	1521	38.9%
Totals	3913	100%

We aim to encourage more staff to provide their diversity data including data on religion or belief going forward.

7.2 Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment

On 17 April 24, [Cabinet](#) signed our commitment towards Mind Mental Health at Work. The core standards are:

- produce, implement, and communicate a mental health at work plan;
- develop mental health awareness among employees;
- encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling;
- provide your employees with good working conditions;
- promote effective people management;
- routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing.

The council demonstrates its commitment through mandatory training for all managers and supportive workplace policies and practices. We frequently raise awareness of health and wellbeing issues and the support available to staff across various mediums including a dedicated intranet portal, the staff magazine Buzz, social media and via manager briefings. The portal provides information and advice across: physical health, nutrition, fitness, emotional wellbeing, stress, sleep and mental health, and support for a range of specific issues such as domestic abuse, bereavement and substance misuse. Wellbeing events take place throughout the year which include drop in health checks, mental health chats, menopause support, advice on finance and fuel efficiency and much more.

We have achieved White Ribbon Accreditation¹⁹ as part of 16 days of action to highlight the issues of domestic abuse. We now have 100 workplace champions in place to provide specific support for people experiencing domestic abuse and our Chief Executive is the DCC lead White Ribbon Male Ambassador. All employees have free 24/7 access to the Employee Assistance Programme delivered by Health Assured which provides a range of psychological support services.

‘Stamp It Out’ is a local charity that is commissioned by Durham County Council to deliver work to address mental health stigma and discrimination. As part of this work, it co-ordinates and oversees the Mind Mental Health at Work Commitment in County Durham and to date, 25 local organisations have become signatories.

¹⁹ [White Ribbon Organisations — White Ribbon UK](#)

Ongoing progress against core standards are monitored through the Better Health at Work group that is chaired by the Corporate Director of Adults and Health Services.

7.3 Employee Networks

We have a range of employee networks with over 500 members, including: lgbt+ and allies, disability and allies, race, carers and menopause networks. The networks are ideally placed to support staff and the council with a programme of activities and events that promote inclusion and foster good relations. Access to networks not only provide valuable peer support but also help to shape policy development and implementation.

Recent achievements include:

- Establishment of a regional network chairs group where our chairs can meet and collaborate with staff networks across other public sector employers across the region.
- Awareness raising activity for lgbt History Month, Disability awareness, Black History Month and Windrush, carers awareness week, mental health awareness, menopause events and support.
- Provided valuable feedback on HR policy, in particular neurodiversity guidance and recruitment and selection policy and process
- Launch of a Disability Buddy Scheme
- Reviewed the council's equality training offer including new and refreshed e-learning modules; deaf communications, neurodiversity, corporate induction and apprenticeship induction
- Produced information on the use of pronouns, for those wanting to support this on their email signatures and demonstrate allyship. This is now extended to the use of pronouns in Teams.
- Supported community events such as Durham Pride, Armed Forces Day and wellbeing events.
- The Disability staff network were actively involved in improving access:
 - Durham Bus Station: feedback on designs and site visit to ensure access issues (physical, audio, visual) were appropriately addressed
 - Council new buildings and refurbishments: consideration of access issues at Corten House which has led to improvements and exploration of further issues such as walking route / bus access
 - Lumiere: providing access feedback and attended a pre-launch event especially organized for people with disabilities
- Armed Forces [Covenant](#) reaccredited gold award was supported by our armed forces network

The Director of Resources is the leadership champion for our networks and provides the necessary support to advance progress and visibility of the networks at a leadership level at every opportunity. The director meets with the network chairs at least twice a year to discuss their agendas and current issues.

7.4 Gender pay gap (GPG) data

We have produced mandatory gender pay gap (GPG) reporting for seven years. Data is taken at the snapshot date of 31 March each year. Our annual reports can be found on the council's GPG website page²⁰. Pay gaps continue to be detrimental for women, as summarised in the table below.

Table 16: Gender pay gap mean and median data 2017-2023

Year	Mean % gap lower for women	Median % gap lower for women
2023	0.7	4.2
2022	0.1	5.7
2021	1.9	3.9
2020	2.6	4.9
2019	3.6	4.3
2018	1.9	4.8
2017	3.4	4.3

This year there is widening of the mean pay gap however the median pay gap has narrowed 1.5 percent compared to the previous year. It is evident that the median pay gap trend, which provides the most representative figure, is sticking around 4-5%. Our staff profile is 63.5% female and 36.5% male. The top 5% of earners in the council is 38.9% male meaning that men are proportionately more likely to be top earners compared with women, which is impacting the gender pay gap. Durham County Council is committed to using the findings of the gender pay gap to inform and shape its processes and workforce development plan and eliminate the gap.

In 2022 and 2023 a £1,925 pay award on all salary points was implemented for NJC 'Green Book' employees, back dated to be effective from 1 April for each year. Whilst the 2022 and 2023 pay offer applied the same monetary amount to each of the pay points, this proportionately increases the lower pay points by a higher percentage than those higher point jobs e.g. £1,925 pay increase on SCP 3 (previously £18,887 p.a.) equates to a 10.20% pay increase, with the same monetary pay increase on SCP 24 (previously £29,174 p.a.) equating to a 6.60% increase. This is positive for women where there is a slight overrepresentation (65.07%) in the lower pay quartiles compared with the overall workforce profile of 63.66% female.

²⁰ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/genderpaygap>

Some of the council's job roles can historically be quite gender specific. Roles such as those in front line health, social care and family and young people's services tend to be female dominated, for example, 85% of roles in 'Social Worker' teams (Children's Social Care) are occupied by female workers. In contrast, more manual and technical roles such as refuse collection, ICT and engineering are usually male dominated, for example, 97% of roles in the 'Refuse & Recycling' team, 91% of roles in the 'Clean and Green' team and 78% of roles of the ICT teams within 'Digital Services', are occupied by male workers. Historically, lower paid, part-time work (such as cleaners) has attracted more females. For example, catering/cleaning roles are 88% occupied by female workers. Improving the representation of both men and women in all job roles will improve diversity overall and may help close the gender pay gap, although this is dependent on the overall availability of skilled and qualified workers across different job roles. Whilst we ensure our recruitment procedures are fair and welcome applicants from diverse sections of the community, there are gender-based skill shortages in some career sectors. For example, fewer women with the necessary ICT and engineering skills, and, conversely, fewer qualified male social workers (for example) which is a challenge for all employers aiming to close gender pay gaps. Our activity to mark International Women's Day where senior women leaders at the council talked about their careers and personal background with girls from local schools helps us to inspire younger generations and perhaps influence academic and training choices at an early stage to help tackle gender stereotyping in terms of jobs and careers.

The council has a range of policies and working practices to promote and sustain work life balance including hybrid working and flexible working patterns. Policies are available to all employees however; analysis shows that higher proportions of female employees take advantage of such policies. For example, between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, we received 118 requests to change working hours for the reason of 'Family Leave Policy', with 90% submitted by female employees. Family friendly policies therefore assist the council in retaining a highly skilled female workforce and can help to close the gender pay gap.

National research into the topic of Menopause, suggests almost 900,000 women have left their employment due to menopause symptoms. By signing the Menopause Workplace Pledge as an employer, we are demonstrating our intentions to support women to remain in employment as long as possible through our supportive approach to wellbeing. In addition, the development of the Menopause staff network will continue into the coming months and years. This network will raise awareness within the workplace and amongst managers, as well as providing support, ensuring women can access help and advice.

7.5 Recruitment, selection and apprenticeships

To help us recruit a more diverse workforce, we have improved how we advertise jobs, with a stronger focus on values and characteristics as well as highlighting wider employment benefits through an increased social media presence, shining a light on what makes the council a fulfilling place to work, featuring council employees. The council's [jobs](#) and careers internet page has been updated to promote jobs and

careers including information on working for the council e.g. employee rewards and benefits, values and behaviours, equality diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, we have used video clips to depict job roles in a modern way, showcasing the varied work and skills needed. This aims to highlight the great work we do and attract people from underrepresented groups. Additional advertising platforms are being used to extend candidate reach such as recruitment advertising sites and social media which will help attract a diverse range of talent to the council.

Our apprenticeship programme is an integral part of the council's approach to address current and future skills needs for new and existing employees. Apprenticeships help us to attract and retain the very best talent and to benefit from a skilled, motivated, and flexible workforce. Our apprenticeship programme is inclusive and promoted widely through social media campaigns, career events, north east jobs portal and through schools and colleges to ensure we reach the widest candidate pool.

Our apprenticeship strategy identifies how we will use apprenticeships to attract new talent to the organisation as well as identifying opportunities for the development of our existing employees aligned to our strategic approach to workforce planning. Additionally, initiatives such as work experience and internships opportunities to do project work and gain work experience are in place to help attract a diverse range of candidates into the workplace. We are strengthening links with schools, colleges and universities to promote the range of opportunities available.

7.6 Disability Confident Leader

We have been a Disability Confident Leader organisation since November 2019 and re-accreditation of our leadership status in November 2022 was another important milestone in our journey as a disability inclusive organisation. Establishment of the disability and allies staff network was key to our re-accreditation. The network has gone from strength to strength, with now over 60 members, and is now integral to HR policy development and takes a lead role in raising awareness of disability with staff and in support of external campaigns. A buddy system has been introduced to provide personal and tailored support for our employees with a disability, in particular new staff.

Adopting hybrid working for office-based staff has led to the consolidation of office space leading to many workplace re-locations and moves which can pose barriers for staff with disabilities if not approached appropriately. Therefore, we carry out proactive and ongoing engagement with our disability staff network to ensure our workplace designs and/or the layout of working environments is accessible. This includes site visits when appropriate. Using this approach we have also developed improved manager's guidance on addressing reasonable adjustments during office moves, as for some staff, office relocation is the first time they disclose a disability. We have engaged with access consultants where appropriate to ensure our new buildings and re-configured workspaces are as accessible as possible and meet building regulation. We have listened and learned, making changes to office facilities

and environments where necessary, including: noise and lighting levels, quiet spaces and placement of office furniture.

As a leader organisation we can validate employer's Disability Confident self-evaluations who are applying for DWP accreditation. The corporate EDI team validated a neighbouring local authority to reach leadership level, then shared their learning from this process with the council's employability service, DurhamEnable, who are continuing this work. Providing validation support to local employers (who request this) helps to drive up inclusive employment practice across the county and regionally. The council continues to partner with DWP, for example, through co-hosting an event at the Work Place, Newton Aycliffe, where local employers could network, access DWP specialist advice and information on Access to Work and learn from other employer's journeys. The council provided two presentations at the event; on their corporate approach and underpinning policies to employing people with disabilities, also a presentation from Durham Enable on the support they offer.

Shifting the dial on disability inclusion means that more of our disabled staff feel confident and empowered. We recognise that their lived experience can help improve the accessibility of our services. Also, in-house expertise can be shared and utilised to support our staff e.g. awareness of potential adjustment solutions such as software/equipment, support agencies, support with applying for access to work, energy saving advice, upgrading home efficiency, benefit advice, support for carers, and home adaptation and equipment advice.

We know there are high levels of disability in the local population, and we need a workforce reflective of this. We also know many disabilities are hidden, some people may need no workplace adjustments, indeed the more inclusive we are in general is beneficial to all staff but perhaps it is the smallest thing, being valued, that makes a huge difference to someone with a disability. We view it as important to share personal experiences with our employees and prospective employees to help break down barriers, remove isolation and drive disability inclusion.

As part of the news release to celebrate our re-accreditation²¹ our staff network chair said "Since joining the council over 16 years ago, my experience has been very positive. Anything identified as a barrier to my work was adjusted. The support from Access to Work, a genuine crown jewel of the welfare state, is invaluable. I am delighted that we have renewed our Disability Confident accreditation and look forward to the network continuing to provide peer support, raise awareness and act as a voice for colleagues with disabilities and health conditions so that we can fulfil our potential in serving the people of County Durham."

Here is a quote from a new employee about the disability staff network: 'As a new employee I'd just like to thank the network for setting up these meetings. It's so refreshing to be able to discuss disability-related things in an open and non-judgemental way. I have been in similar groups at previous workplaces, but they

²¹ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/28892/We-are-proud-to-be-a-Disability-Confident-Leader->

were more paying lip service/ticking the EDI box, but I can tell that the council take it seriously and it's honestly lovely to see and it's nice to be able to discuss stuff with people who have gone through similar things.'

Contact Details

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