



Northumberland
County Council



Equality Strategy 2021

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alternative format or language, please contact
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Foreword

Equality, diversity and inclusion matter greatly to us as a Council, in the provision of our services and in our role as an employer and local leader. Our belief is that in order to deliver our values of respect, residents first, excellence and quality and keeping our communities safe and well, we need to demonstrate that we are truly inclusive and equitable in our approach.

This strategy builds upon the work we have already done to date to develop our culture of inclusion and represents the next stage of this work in respect of equality and diversity, moving beyond compliance to demonstrating a clear commitment to putting equality at the heart of everything we do.

We want this strategy and its associated plans to be a real, live and organic process that will be inclusive and developmental, responding to local needs and involving local communities in its development and delivery. We will continue to involve as many stakeholders as possible in new and innovative ways to ensure we have the highest possible levels of engagement to deliver the best outcomes for our residents. We look forward to working with all our partners and stakeholders to make Northumberland County Council visible as a national leader for equality, diversity and inclusion.



Daljit Lally
Chief Executive

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Our belief is that in order to deliver our values of respect, residents first, excellence and quality and keeping our communities safe and well, we need to demonstrate that we are truly inclusive and equitable in our approach.

Summary

Our vision is to make Northumberland a great place to live, where you can access the things you enjoy, and have opportunities to learn and thrive. We are doing this by:

- Ensuring our services are customer focused
- Supporting communities and staff to embrace change and innovation
- Involving communities and staff in decisions which affect them
- Supporting communities to feel safe and valued
- Creating a healthy and positive working environment

Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion helps to improve public services for all. We want Northumberland to be a place where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds can take part in community life. Our aim is to make equality, diversity and inclusion part of the way the Council works, placing it at the heart of everything we do.

We need to apply the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion in our decision making, in how we recruit and support our workforce and to the services we commission and deliver to our local residents. We will work with partners across the public, private and voluntary sector, with local organisations who are supporting individuals and communities, and with organisations who are providing services on behalf of the Council.

Through our Equality Strategy, we set out how we will apply these principles and meet our Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duties. The strategy also provides a framework which sets out our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and how we will measure our performance. This will give the Council a solid foundation for current and future work and makes clear our commitment to tackling inequality.

The strategy is structured around our equality objectives. We will be consulting on new draft objectives in 2021 that will guide our work for the next four years. Once these objectives are agreed, we will develop actions to help us monitor our progress in tackling inequality and in achieving our vision.

Our draft equality objectives are based on four themes:

1. Build knowledge and awareness
2. Listen, involve and respond
3. Improve diversity and inclusion
4. Inspire

We are proposing four objectives that build on these themes, which are to:

1. Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities
2. Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively
3. Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff
4. Demonstrate a positive culture with strong leadership and organisational commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the Council and with partners

We will consult as widely as possible on these objectives. When the final objectives are agreed, each service area will develop an action plan setting out what they are going to do to implement these objectives. They will also be asked to report on progress with achieving these actions on a regular basis.



Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion helps to improve public services for all



The Local Context

Northumberland County Council is the northernmost county in England covering an area of 5,013km² with a population of 320,300 with 46% living in the urban South East of the county.

The population is largely white British with 1.9% recorded as being from a BAME background. 21% of the population has a limiting long-term illness or disability and there is a high % of the population over the age of 50, particularly in the north of the county.

There is no specific measure in place locally for recording sexual orientation or gender identity other than cisgender male or female but the most recent national data indicates that approximately 2.3% of the country record a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. The North East has the lowest recorded proportion of all the English regions at 1.8%.

There were 61 civil partnerships or same sex marriages registered in the county in 2017 with 2,243 marriages or civil partnerships for heterosexual couples.

70% of the population record they have a religious belief with 98.4% recording themselves as being Christian and 0.5% recording themselves as Muslim, 0.2% as Hindu, 0.08% Jewish, 0.3% Buddhist, 0.2% Sikh and 0.5% another religion.

The Council is one of the largest employers in the county, employing 4,329 employees. Our staff records indicate that 44.98% of the workforce are male and 55.02% female with 12.78% being under 30 years old and 29.81% over 55 years old.

Over 50% of staff have recorded additional demographic information and of these; 90.08% record a sexual orientation as heterosexual and 1.62% record their sexual orientation as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.

We employ 1.13% staff from a BAME background with 96.62% recording themselves as White British and 1.89% of employees have recorded themselves as having a disability.

The Council is working to improve the recording of equality monitoring data.

Northumberland County Council has supported the establishment of 7 staff network groups initially in partnership with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust but recently established as independent networks. The groups were formed in response to feedback from staff through our staff survey. These groups are run by staff and are open for all employees to attend. They make a significant contribution to our organisational culture, policy and practice.

The groups are:

- LGBT+
- BAME (Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic)
- Enable (Disability staff group)
- ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder)
- Menopause
- Carers
- Mental Health & Wellbeing

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The Council has also developed a significant programme of health and wellbeing initiatives to ensure staff are supported to deliver the best for our population



These groups act as a support network for our staff and contribute advice and guidance to the organisation on policy and practice as well as supporting campaigns and equality and diversity initiatives supported by the Council including Northumberland Pride, North East MELA, Disability month, Black History Month, International Women's Day and International Men's Day.

The Council has also developed a significant programme of health and wellbeing initiatives to ensure staff are supported to deliver the best for our population.

These initiatives are supported by a cohort of Health and Wellbeing champions, recruited from our staff who promote key health and wellbeing messages based on identified public health priorities and local needs.

Northumberland County Council has achieved top 100 status in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, ranking as the second highest placed Local Authority in 2019. Children and Young People's Services in Northumberland were one of 5 in the country to achieve the gold standard in the first year of the Stonewall CYPS Champions scheme.

Our LGBT+ network group won the Regional Network Group of the Year award in 2020. We have Disability Confident status, and we are working towards being Disability Confident Leaders.



Our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Northumberland County Council is committed to creating a culture where equality, diversity and inclusion are integral to everything we do.

We understand that every single person we deal with, whether service users, their families and carers, staff members or volunteers have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. We seek to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between all people, regardless of age, disability, race, ethnic or national origin, sex, gender reassignment, gender identity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity or marital or civil partnership status.

Our aim is to ensure that people can fully participate in and benefit from the social, cultural, economic and environmental quality of life that Northumberland offers to its residents.

Inclusive design

Inclusive design is about making places that everyone can use. The way places are designed affects our ability to move, see, hear, communicate effectively, integrate in society and access services and opportunities.

Inclusive design aims to remove the barriers that create undue effort and separation. It enables everyone to participate equally, confidently and independently in everyday activities. As a Council, we recognise the importance of inclusive design and we will strive to use this approach in how we design and develop our services.

We are committed to promoting equality in respect of the Council's various roles as:

- A service provider – providing services and facilities that meet the diverse range of needs of local people
- An employer – being fair in the recruitment, promotion, training and development of our staff; having a representative workforce that reflects the communities we serve; providing a work environment that is safe, accessible and free from harassment and discrimination and that celebrates and values diversity
- Community leaders – through our democratically Elected Members, working with communities and partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors to improve the quality of life for the people of Northumberland
- Leaders in making Northumberland physically accessible to disabled residents and visitors

In order to help us to achieve the delivery of our vision and goals, we have developed our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020 - 2025 along with associated objectives and action plans.

Northumberland's population is becoming more diverse and we recognise that people's life experiences differ, depending on their personal circumstances. We need to make sure the way we meet individual and community needs is fair, equitable and targets our resources at those most in need and who may be least able to have their needs met in other ways.

Along with other local authorities, the Council faces a range of challenges including cultural and financial challenges. As a consequence, the way services are delivered is likely to need to change over time to meet these challenges.

Through this period of challenge, we remain committed to ensuring that equality and diversity issues are always at the forefront of our thinking when managing this process of change.

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision and it shows how Northumberland County Council aims to meet its Equality Act 2010 duties including our Public Sector Equality Duties.



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***We aim for an inclusive approach
which promotes shared values
and outcomes across the county***

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion vision

Northumberland County Council's corporate plan aims to make us a Local Authority that works for everyone in Northumberland.

We strive to be an accessible and inclusive organisation and will:

- Foster a culture that values diversity and inclusion
- Become more accessible
- Embed equality, diversity and inclusion in our decision making
- Operate with fairness, integrity and respect for colleagues, and the people and organisations we work with and for
- Develop and support our workforce to enable them to achieve their full potential and be fully themselves at work
- Help staff and managers feel confident about taking personal responsibility for action on equality, diversity and inclusion in their work
- Recruit, develop and retain a diverse workforce

Shared values and outcomes

We aim for an inclusive approach which promotes shared values and outcomes across the county. This inclusive approach is based on promoting:

- A feeling of belonging to the county
- Shared outcomes: people in need taking up public services and maximising the opportunities they provide; recognising that some people in the county may have more pressing needs and require additional attention
- Support for integration and cohesion: getting on well together with people from different backgrounds in different settings (county centres, local neighbourhoods, businesses, workplaces, schools, places of worship - wherever people come together)

Reducing socio-economic inequality

To address the causes of socio-economic inequality in the county, the Council will address financial inclusion issues through a social inclusion strategy and development of practical actions.

The provision of the Council's services to local residents can directly contribute to equality outcomes being achieved for those in receipt of those services. The Equality and Human Rights Commission defines equality outcomes as practical improvements for people who may experience discrimination and disadvantage.

Our values

In every aspect of this strategy, we will seek to embed our corporate values. We aim to be an accessible and inclusive organisation that recognises the value of diversity. Our core values are:

- Residents first
- Excellence and quality
- Respect
- Keeping our communities safe and well

Our Objectives to Date

Our equality objectives for 2016-20 were:

1. To ensure that our services are accessible for all customers, we will improve collection of data about their experiences to help us improve our services for everyone in Northumberland.
2. To improve access to, and the experience of, council services for disabled people and in particular, older disabled people, to help bring their life opportunities more closely into line with those of other groups in the community.
3. To promote and foster an accessible and inclusive culture and working environment for all our staff
4. To work with communities to prevent hate incidents and crimes and to encourage reporting

We published our equality objectives in 2012 and then reviewed them in 2016 to ensure they were still relevant. As part of that review, we engaged and consulted with as many different people and groups as possible to agree which objectives we should prioritise.

We are reviewing these objectives in 2021 and will identify new objectives to take us forward to 2025.



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Equality, diversity and inclusion matter greatly to us as a Council, in the provision of our services and in our role as an employer and local leader

Our Equality Objectives 2021 - 2025

Northumberland County Council is asking for your views on our new draft equality objectives. These objectives will guide our work for the next four years. When our objectives are agreed we will develop actions to help us monitor how we are doing. The objectives aim to help us to tackle inequality and achieve our vision to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Our draft objectives are to:

- Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities
- Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively
- Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to help us embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff
- Create a positive culture with strong leadership and, a commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners

1. Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the needs of our communities

Across the Council we have many services and teams that collect information and data about our communities. We meet and talk to many different people, organisations and groups.

The challenge for us is how we can gather information that is accurate and gives us information about who is using our services. We need to find out what we can do to improve people's experience. We want to find out if some groups are not using services. We also want to know if there are any differences in the experience of different groups of people and to understand the reasons for this.

We want to improve the information we collect about the protected characteristics of both our staff and service users. We also need to get better at analysing and using this data to help improve the decisions we make.

We are looking at our digital strategy to see how we can improve access to our online services, improve the information we collect and use this to improve services.

Potential actions we could take to support this objective may include:

- Working with teams and directorates to identify gaps in data collation and monitoring
- Developing an improved corporate customer database and encourage the collection of monitoring data for employees
- All services will collect information about the experiences of their service users
- Monitoring compliments, complaints and comments to identify any equality issues or differences in the experience of people with protected characteristics
- Analyse and report on differences in the experience of protected groups to senior management so actions can be identified to address these





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There are many good examples of the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, both within and outside of the organisation

2. Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively

We have several ways to engage and consult with the public. However, we do not always consistently collect monitoring data to show that all protected groups and different communities have been given a voice.

Actions we could take to address this could include:

- Consultation and engagement activities will collect equality information, where this is appropriate
- An Equality assessment of consultation activities will be carried out. This will make sure the needs of different protected groups have been considered and consultations are accessible for different groups
- Making sure that information that is shared with the public is accessible to our communities and is available in different formats and can be accessed in different ways
- Making sure that the views of different sections of the community are reported and can be considered

3. Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in how we deliver services and support our staff

Actions we could take include:

- Making sure we recruit a diverse workforce that reflects the communities we serve. Looking at our recruitment processes and identifying actions to improve the diversity of our workforce
- Undertaking a staff census to make sure that information about our staff is accurate and identify any gaps in the diversity of our workforce. We will identify actions to address this
- Auditing the skills and training needs of our staff for equality, diversity and inclusion
- Improving workforce data that is shared with Heads of Service to include data on protected characteristics
- Developing directorate action plans to respond the staff survey and develop actions to promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Working with staff groups to identify key policy changes or initiatives which could better support our staff

4. Create a positive culture with a strong leadership and commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the Council and amongst partners.

There are many good examples of the Council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, both within and outside of the organisation. More work is needed to further promote inclusive leadership and support our workforce.

Actions to support this could include:

- Developing a network of Champions that promote and drive forward continual improvement in equality and diversity
- Developing a communications and media plan to ensure there is proactive promotion of equality and diversity across the Council's activities
- Offering training and support to staff, councillors and members on the Public Sector Equality Duty and best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion
- Introducing questions on equality, diversity and inclusion into recruitment exercises and in evaluating performance
- Undertaking a baseline assessment of the Council's performance on equality, diversity and inclusion

Our Governance Framework

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet provides the strategic direction for Northumberland County Council's equality and diversity policies and practices.

The portfolio holder for equality and diversity has a specific brief to ensure that equality is embedded in the work of the Council, and to champion the work of the Council's employee equality groups.

The Council has appointed a Lead Senior Equality Diversity and Inclusion Manager to oversee Equality and Diversity programmes in the Council along with a Senior Staff Inclusion Manager, a Policy Officer and a small team of equality, diversity and inclusion staff to support development and implementation of Council's programmes.

The Senior Management Team manages the implementation of the Council's equality and diversity policies and practices and monitors progress against our Equality Action Plan linked to the Council's objectives.

The Equality Lead will advise the Senior Management Team and lead on implementation of the Equality Strategy.

A new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, replacing our previous Equality Diversity and Human Rights Group will be established to provide strategic oversight of equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights throughout the organisation.

It will provide clear leadership for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and be responsible for embedding the vision into the way we work and our culture.

The Steering Group will review and monitor actions taken by the Council to achieve its equality objectives and strategy. The Equality Lead will support the steering group in achieving and publicising our equality objectives to our stakeholders.

Equality Action Task and Finish Working Groups with representation from all Council sectors, will be established to support the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group in making the organisation a diverse and inclusive workplace.

This will help to embed equality practice into everyday business. They will harness employee and service user insights and ideas and incorporate them into our policies and working practices.

The groups will help to ensure that communication about equality, diversity and inclusion is effective, appropriate and raises awareness about this strategy's objectives and progress against the objectives.

They will also help to generate broad involvement in the development of activities utilising the lived experience of our staff and elected members to help us deliver on our objectives.

The Staff Network Groups will be invited to actively contribute to the development of the strategy and the work of the organisation in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.





Monitoring

Each service area will be responsible for identifying their own priorities and developing action plans to support the implementation of the Council's Equality Objectives and Strategic Plan. Progress on achieving actions will be incorporated into the Council's performance management system and progress will be reported on a quarterly basis.



The Equality Action Working Groups will provide updates to the Equality and Diversity Lead and to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group, who will monitor progress against each of the strategic objectives and actions.

Organisational Framework

Leadership and monitoring progress	Chief Executive and Leader of the Council Portfolio Holder for Equality and Diversity Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group Equality and Diversity Lead
Accountability, ensuring legislative requirements are met, supporting implementation, promoting EDI.	Senior Managers and Heads of Service. Equality and Diversity Lead
Development and Implementation	Equality Action Groups
Supporting and Challenging	Staff Network Groups
Supporting development of an Equal, Diverse and Inclusive Culture	Stakeholders, partners and all managers and staff





Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 focuses on the right of people to not be discriminated against because of who they are or what makes them different from other people. These factors are called protected characteristics, and the Equality Act lists the nine protected characteristics:

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

The Council has duties under the Equality Act as an employer, service provider and public body. There are several statutory Codes of Practice and guidance on equality matters the Council needs to consider.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Council, as a public body, has additional responsibilities under the Equality Act. These are included in a Public Sector Equality Duty that requires us to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Foster good community relations

As a public body we also have specific duties, requiring us to:

- Publish equality information to demonstrate our compliance with the general equality duty, at least annually, and;
- Prepare and publish one or more objectives to meet the aims of the general duty, at least every four years

We meet our Public Sector Equality Duty through the legal duties above and by considering the equality impacts of our decisions. We pay 'due regard' to the consideration of equality impacts when decisions directly affect members of the public, residents, employees or service users.

We may record equality impacts in an assessment or through other means. By linking equality objectives to performance management systems, we aim to monitor progress on our equality objectives and generate Equality Information Reports. To help us meet our duties, we need to ensure that:

- We make services accessible, provide information in alternative formats and make reasonable adjustments for service users, disabled staff and job applicants
- Discrimination or harassment of any member of staff or service user is not tolerated, and that appropriate action is taken when this occurs
- We promote good relations between different communities and tackle discrimination by working with partner organisations to challenge it
- We gather and publish appropriate data



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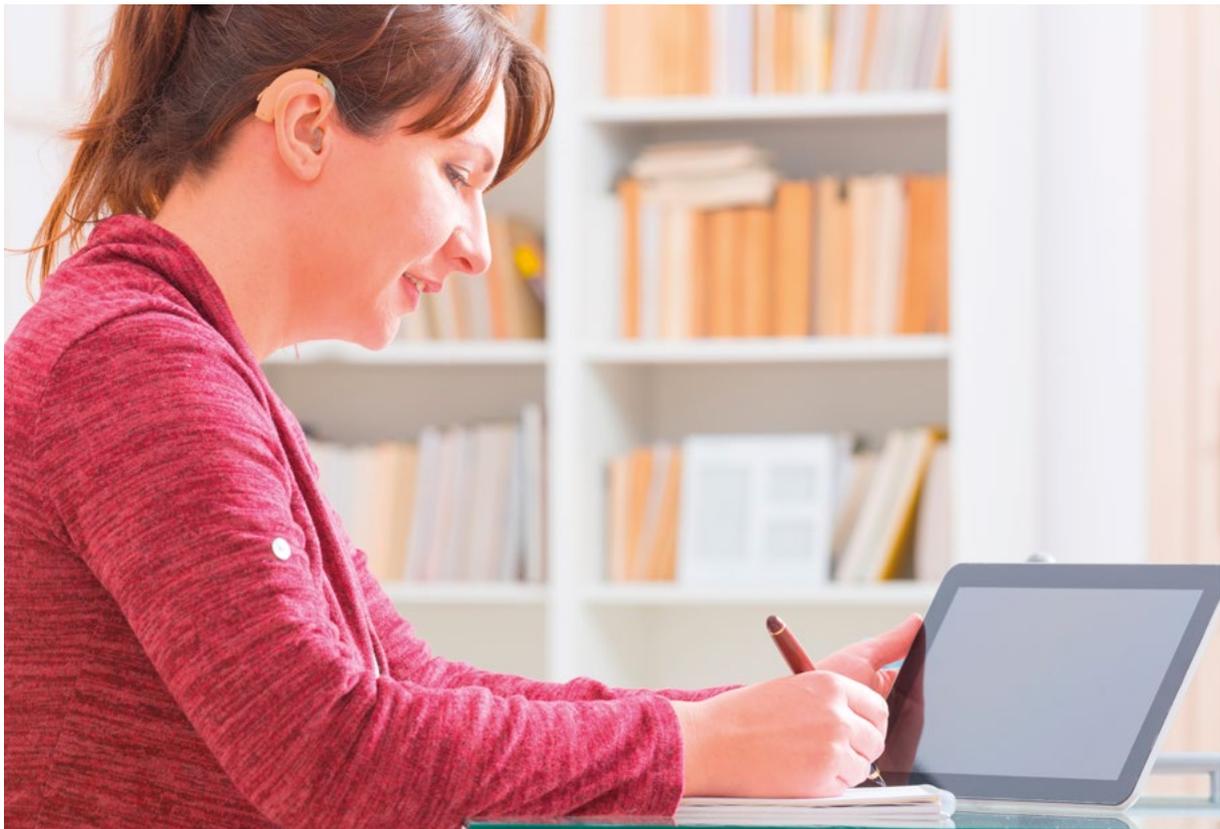
**We will treat all people with respect
– as service users, employees, and
as members of local communities**

Equality Policies

Our Equality Policy sets out our commitment to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are considered in all decision making and policy development.

Our commitments for day-to-day practice

- We will treat all people with respect – as service users, employees, and as members of local communities
- We will make our services accessible, appropriate and ensure they reflect the needs of those using them
- We will engage with residents and communities, through service user forums, local and ward meetings, community gatherings, and consult on their views to ensure we take inequalities into account
- We will engage with specific groups who may experience additional barriers to accessing services to understand their concerns. e.g. older people, young people, BAME, LGBT+ or disabled people
- We will recruit and retain a diverse workforce and offer support to all staff to develop their skills and be themselves in the workplace, to help them provide efficient and effective services



Appendix 1 Key Terms

Equality

Equality aims to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to succeed, and it prevents individuals from being discriminated against or treated differently due to certain personal or physical characteristics or a combination of characteristics.

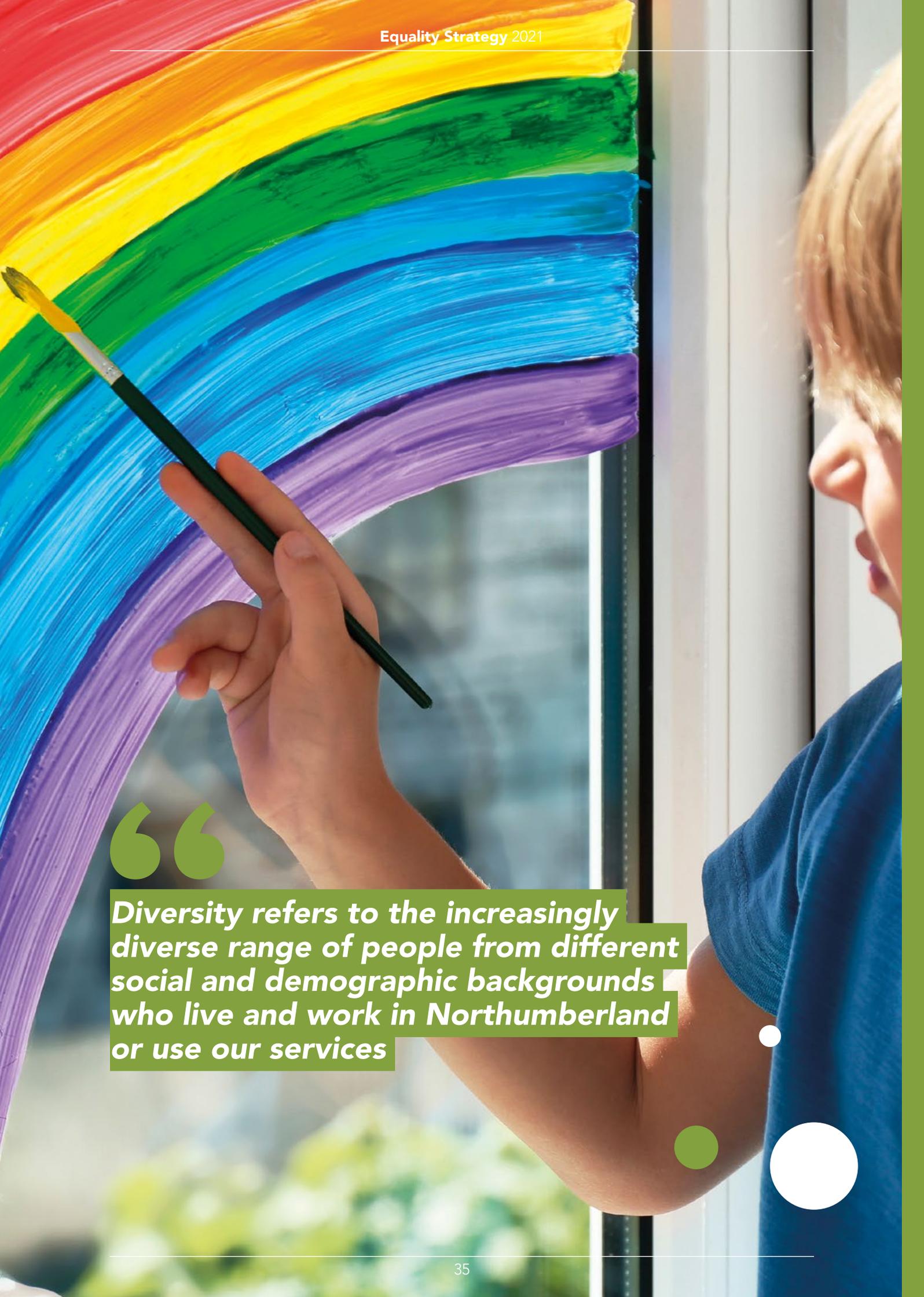
Diversity

Diversity refers to the increasingly diverse range of people from different social and demographic backgrounds who live and work in Northumberland or use our services. This might include age, education, race or ethnic group, sexual orientation, sex or gender identity and other aspects of a personal identity. Some people will experience multiple discrimination where aspects of their identity intersect, and they will therefore experience greater likelihood of being discriminated against. Diversity is about appreciating differences between individuals, and in context with the workplace ensuring that each of these varying attributes and characteristics are valued. We will ensure that the business case for equality and diversity is understood at all levels of the organisation.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a universal human right. The aim of inclusion is to change the way things are done to create equal access and opportunities, to tackle discrimination and intolerance and remove barriers to access. It affects all aspects of public life.





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