

Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2025-26



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Purpose of the report - our duties and responsibilities

Chorley Council as a public authority is subject to the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

It must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

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

The general duty requires public authorities to understand the impact of their policies and practices on people with protected characteristics.

The nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

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

As a council, we are committed to supporting equality, diversity and inclusion. We aim to develop a greater understanding of our communities so that we can deliver more inclusive services for our residents. Our commitment is more than just a legal duty, it ensures that we take an equitable approach, promoting fair treatment and equal access opportunities for all individuals as well as creating an environment where everyone feels valued, integrated and able to participate fully in society. It involves developing our workforce to be champions of equality and working together to reduce inequalities.

In this report, we have focused on the key areas of work we have undertaken and next steps which will help us to meet our equality objectives 2025 – 2029.

About Chorley and the council

Chorley has a history of championing equality through various strategies and projects aimed at fostering inclusive and equitable communities. In recent times there have been some changes in the demographics of Chorley, including a 9.9% increase in the population from 107,155 to 117,732 between 2011 and 2021, according to Census data, which represented the second-largest percentage increase in the North West during that period. Comparative data is not available for all protected characteristics as some were not captured within the census prior to Census 2021.

Key headlines for protected characteristic groups from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2021 include:

Protected characteristic groups

- **Age** – The age profile in Chorley has changed since 2011 with an older population and a smaller working age and younger population compared to regional and national averages.

Age group	Census 2011	Census 2021	% change
Under 25	28.5%	26.5%	-2%
25 – 34	11.6%	12.1%	+0.5%
35 – 49	22.9%	19.7%	-3.2%
50 – 64	20.3%	21.2%	+0.9%
65 and above	16.8%	20.5%	+3.7%

- The median age increased by two years, from 41 to 43 years of age.
- The proportion of residents aged 50 to 64 years rose by 0.9%.
- The proportion of residents aged between 35 and 49 years fell by 3.2%.
- **Disability** - In 2021, 21,811 Chorley residents reported having a disability under the Equalities Act, representing 18.5% of residents, which is below both regional and national averages.
 - The three most common disabilities based on Personal Independence Payment data are psychiatric disorders, musculoskeletal disease and neurological disease.
- **Gender identity** - Chorley has a slightly lower proportion of people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth compared to regional and national averages.
 - A total of 305 residents aged 16 and over identify as a different gender to the sex they were registered at birth, accounting for 0.3% of residents.

- **Marriage and civil partnership** – Generally there are less people getting married, although compared to regional and national averages there is a slightly higher proportion of married people in Chorley.

Legal partnership status	Census 2011	Census 2021	% change
Single	30.2%	33.4%	+3.2%
Married or in a registered civil partnership	50.4%	47.8%	-2.6%
Separated	2.5%	2.2%	-0.3%
Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	9.2%	10.4%	+1.2%
Widowed or surviving civil partnership partner	6.9%	6.2%	-0.7%

- 47.8% of residents were married and 0.1% were registered as being in a civil partnership.
- There were 5,144 lone parent families living in a single-family household which represented 10.3% of total households, which was below the proportion for the North West and England.
- **Pregnancy and maternity** – Based on ONS figures, total live births decreased by 12.4% locally between 2017 and 2022 despite an increase in population.
- The maternity rate (per 1,000 women aged 15-44) has steadily decreased during the same period.
- **Race** – Chorley continues to be generally less racially diverse compared to regional and national figures. However, from 2011 to 2021, there was a slight increase across most ethnic groups except 'White'.

Ethnic group	Census 2011	Census 2021	% change
Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh	1.6%	1.9%	-0.3%
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African	0.4%	0.6%	-0.2%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.9%	1.5%	+0.6%
White	96.9%	95.6%	-1.3%
Other ethnic group	0.2%	0.4%	+0.2%

- The largest proportional ethnic group in Chorley is 'White', accounting for 95.6% of residents.

- The Chorley East ward had the highest proportion of residents identifying as 'Asian, Asian British' in the borough with 7.7%.
- **Religion or belief** – Chorley is generally less religious than it used to be, whilst there has been a decrease in those identifying as a Christian and a slight increase in people identifying as a Muslim.

Religion or belief	Census 2011	Census 2021	% change
No religion	17.2%	30.9%	+13.7%
Christian	75.3%	61.5%	-13.8%
Buddhist	0.3%	0.2%	-0.1
Hindu	0.2%	0.3%	+0.1%
Jewish	0%	0.1%	+0.1%
Muslim	1.1%	1.4%	+0.3%
Sikh	0%	0.1%	+0.1%
Other religion	0.3%	0.5%	+0.2%
Not answered	5.6%	5.1%	-0.5%

- 30.9% of Chorley residents reported as having no religion.
- Christianity was the most followed religion in Chorley with 61.5% of residents.
- **Sex** – In 2021, Chorley had a larger proportion of female residents (50.2%) than male residents (48.8%).
- **Sexual orientation** – Chorley had a slightly lower proportion of LGBTQI+ residents compared to national and regional averages.
- 88,330 residents in Chorley aged 16 and over identified as being 'straight or heterosexual', which equated to 91.7% of the population.
- **Socio-economic status** – According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), 10.2% of the population were income-deprived in Chorley which ranked as slightly less deprived than the average local authority in England.
- Chorley ranked as more deprived in the IMD domain for barriers to housing and services and less deprived in the IMD domain for health and disability.
- Three wards were among the lowest 10% in terms of national deprivation.

Our Equality Objectives 2025 – 2029

Our Equality Objectives, in addition to fulfilling our statutory duty, serve to actively demonstrate our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The Equality Framework for Local Government has been used to support the council in setting clear equality objectives, measuring progress and demonstrating compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

These objectives are aligned with our corporate strategy priorities, ensuring that equality, inclusion, and equity are integrated into all aspects of council activities.

Our Equality Objectives for 2025 - 2029 are as follows:

1. **Fostering and developing positive cultures and understanding** – ensure our staff are able to deliver services fairly and can model behaviours that help to create an inclusive work environment.
2. **Building an inclusive workforce** – to help attract, recruit and retain the best people for the job, we will develop an open, collaborative and inclusive culture where the principles of fairness and wellbeing are promoted.
3. **Ensure adequate access to services for all** – to make sure we support each and every resident in the right way we will regularly review how we deliver our services and make changes where needed.
4. **Support people in the community who are most in need** – we will focus on ensuring that the needs of the whole community are being addressed now and, in the future.
5. **Involve our communities** – we will work to involve local people and engage openly with our residents and service users, seeking to capture all points of view to make better informed decisions.

Progress update

In January 2025, we launched a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, along with refreshed equality objectives and an accompanying action plan. The strategy aims to build strong foundations for our commitment to equality and diversity, enhance our understanding of the communities we serve, and develop our workforce to champion equality to ultimately deliver more inclusive services for our residents.

Progress against our action plan will be monitored as part of quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and annual reports to Executive Cabinet.

This report aims to highlight some of our key achievements regarding equality, diversity and inclusion over the past 12 months.

- **Objective 1: Fostering and developing positive cultures and understanding –** ensure our staff are able to deliver services fairly and can model behaviours that help to create an inclusive work environment.

The Equality Champions Network, which is shared with South Ribble Borough Council, has been relaunched to support the delivery of equality objectives and to promote a diverse, supportive and inclusive workplace culture. As part of the refresh, members received Equality Champions training delivered by Equality and Diversity UK in February 2025. As of April 2025, there were 21 active Equality Champions which is significantly above the current target of 10.

As part of our commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace, we have introduced initiatives that encourage staff to celebrate and learn from the diversity within our organisation. In February 2025, a member of staff delivered a staff talk on Ramadan, sharing its cultural and religious significance while offering guidance on how colleagues can be mindful of those observing Ramadan in the workplace. In May 2025, we hosted The Deaf Village for an in-person Deaf Awareness session, which provided valuable insights into the different ways deaf individuals communicate and offered practical strategies for creating more inclusive and accessible interactions.

The council considers social value as part of the procurement process when we procure or commission new services to understand additional benefits for our residents and communities. Social Value is the additional economic, social and environmental benefits that can be created when the council purchases from an outside organisation, above and beyond the value of the services purchased. Social value is based on the relative importance that people place on their wellbeing and quality of life. For example, suppliers can demonstrate this through promoting local skills and employment and supporting growth of businesses within the region. In February 2025, the Social Value Portal hosted in person training aimed at giving officers a better understanding of how we as an organisation can ensure social value is considered through procurement so we can maximise the benefit for the communities that we serve.

- **Objective 2: Building an inclusive workforce** – to help attract, recruit and retain the best people for the job, we will develop an open, collaborative and inclusive culture where the principles of fairness and wellbeing are promoted.

Good progress has been made to help attract, recruit and retain the best people at Chorley Council. For example, as part of the iNetwork Innovation award-winning recruitment project, we implemented a new ePloy recruitment system alongside a forward-facing microsite. The system has enabled the automation of processes to allow the recruitment team to focus on other areas such as CV searching and hiring manager development such as using inclusive practices. The new system also uses blind shortlisting to avoid unconscious bias and will support fairness in the recruitment process, whilst the collection and analysis of additional equality monitoring data will increase our understanding and help to identify any patterns to inform future decision making. Additionally, the project has involved improvements to onboarding processes such as IT and systems access which will aid accessibility and the improvement of the applicant journey.

Another recent step we have taken to becoming an inclusive council is becoming a sponsored employer for UK skilled worker visa sponsorship to recruit talent globally and meet skills shortages. Also, we are currently signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant enabling us to be a 'forces friendly' council and are a Disability Confident Employer which offers all disabled candidates an interview when they satisfy the essential job criteria. This demonstrates our commitment to fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce, which we would like to be representative of the communities we serve. This work is completed alongside mandatory annual gender pay gap reporting and workforce profile data. Moving forwards, we will use our recruitment system to collect equality data on new employees whilst continuing to gather information from existing staff. However, we acknowledge that disclosure limitations present challenges to building a complete workforce profile.

- **Objective 3: Ensure adequate access to services for all** – to make sure we support each and every resident in the right way we will regularly review how we deliver our services and make changes where needed.

Equality and inclusivity have been considered when developing the council's refreshed website in June 2024. Features include the ability to use translation services, change colour contrast level and font through the Recite Me accessibility tool, navigate the website using a keyboard or speech recognition software and the ability to use a screen reader. Also, we provide information in different formats, including easy read and braille, as well as offering a text service for people who are deaf, hearing impaired or have a speech impediment. The council website ranks 44 of 125 councils on the Silktide Index, with an accessibility score of 98%. In March 2025, the new online MyCouncil customer portal was launched to provide improved functionality and an enhanced customer experience, whilst being fully compliant with accessibility standards.

Accessibility and inclusivity are key considerations within the council's events programme, ensuring that all members of the community can participate and enjoy local events. For example, blind participants were supported with guides to take part in the Chorley 10K, while mobility scooter hire and prioritised Blue Badge parking were made available at the Chorley Flower Show. At the Chorley Christmas Light Switch On, a large screen was positioned further from the main stage to improve visibility and audibility for a wider audience. Additionally, the Winter Wonderland event featured wheelchair-accessible facilities and designated quiet hours to accommodate visitors with sensory sensitivities.

Impact assessments are completed early in the development of new or revised projects, policies, and strategies to ensure that any potential effects on residents are considered. We assess these impacts with a focus on equality, taking into account all protected characteristics. In addition, we consider the specific needs of residents living in rural communities to help ensure fair and equitable access to services for all. For example, we administer a rural business grant scheme through the Rural England Prosperity Fund which aims to increase productivity, create and safeguard jobs in rural areas.

- **Objective 4: Support people in the community who are most in need** – we will focus on ensuring that the needs of the whole community are being addressed now and, in the future.

We have launched a new data sharing platform that brings together data from partners from education, social housing, health and policing. The platform brings together local data sources to provide place-based insights to help us make more informed decisions. The platform will provide us with access to a more comprehensive and localised view than is currently available from any individual source of data which will allow us to gain valuable insights about our people and places to enable effective data-driven decision making.

Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable and marginalised people in society. Chorley Council's Resettlement Team supports refugees and asylum seekers across various resettlement, asylum and visa routes. For example, the Large Resettlement Grants Fund supports community projects that address barriers such as integration, education and wellbeing. The Homes for Ukraine and the Asylum Dispersal Programme have also played a vital role in fostering community cohesion by helping individuals and families with safeguarding, housing, education and cultural integration. The team also continues to work alongside partners through the Lancashire Refugee and Asylum Strategic Partnership and North West Regional Strategic Migration Partnership to improve the quality of resettlement support offered to our communities.

The council provides funding to Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise through the commissioning model. From 1 June 2023 to 28 February 2025, there have been a total of 70,504 clients or beneficiaries to the support across a wide demographic, with a strong emphasis on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Beneficiaries include families with young children, older adults, individuals experiencing homelessness, women affected by domestic abuse and residents facing mental health challenges or financial

hardship. For example, Home-Start Central Lancashire has provided practical and emotional support to nearly 10,000 families with young children facing challenges such as isolation, domestic abuse and financial hardship. Chorley Buddies has delivered vital food support to over 25,000 residents through Good Food Clubs, helping low-income households manage during the cost-of-living crisis.

Chorley Council offers a social prescribing service, which was nominated in the 2025 MJ Achievement Awards in the 'Transforming Lives' category. The service provides free, personalised support to residents embedded within early intervention and community support services. In recent times the service has been further enhanced to offer focused support to families and early years. This has resulted in the improved wellbeing of residents and aligns with the NHS 10 Year Health Plan to focus on preventative services and provides an innovative solution to the increasing pressures on health and social care.

- **Objective 5: Involve our communities** – we will work to involve local people and engage openly with our residents and service users, seeking to capture all points of view to make better informed decisions.

We consult and engage with residents through consultations and surveys, feedback and forums, to involve our communities in the design and implementation of services so that they will work for everyone in our borough. Our most recent residents survey from 2023/24 highlighted that 82% of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live, which were higher than the figures in the national LGA survey.

Neighbourhood working delivery has been developed through neighbourhood teams, allowing residents to help develop priorities specific to their area. Neighbourhood area meetings, which are conducted twice-yearly, provide residents with the opportunity to submit proposals to fulfil 'Neighbourhood Priority Projects' in their communities. This empowers neighbourhoods to take ownership of the projects delivered in their locality.

The council also continues to collaborate with partners across public, private and voluntary sectors through the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership to ensure that we deliver more co-ordinated services that meet the needs of our residents. In June 2025, Chorley Council launched the Chorley Together initiative, which strengthens the local voluntary, community and faith sector. The programme offers training, funding and networking opportunities to help organisations better support vulnerable residents and build inclusive, connected communities.

Next steps

An equality action plan has been completed for 2025/26 that clearly articulates how the council will ensure it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty and achieves its equality objectives. Progress against the action plan and performance measures will be monitored as part of quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team and annual reports to Executive Cabinet.

To monitor our progress, we are in the process of setting up a dedicated EDI Board comprising senior leaders, officers working on equality, diversity and inclusion and elected Members with an interest and expertise in equality, diversity and inclusion. The EDI Board will monitor the implementation of the strategy and bring forward new ideas on how to promote and support equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will introduce an Equality Forum, which will be created with relevant partners, professional organisations and other interested groups, to help the council ensure its services and facilities are inclusive as well as championing best practice on equality, diversity and inclusion across the borough.

A further review will be undertaken in 2026 with feedback from SMT and the EDI Board to inform the priorities for the 2026/27 action plan.

Case studies

Case study 1: Social Prescribing – Empowering district councils to transform public services

Overview

Chorley Council has demonstrated the huge impact district councils can have when we extended their core functions to support health and social care. We developed social prescribing functions embedded within early intervention and community support services, enhancing their effectiveness. Our local presence and networks enabled us to provide comprehensive and place-based support. Working with health partners, we felt that a proactive social prescribing function, embedded within the wider Communities directorate, was an innovative solution to the increasing pressures on health and social care.

The service was developed with a mix of funding sources including core council funding, grant funding and other areas delivered as a service commissioned by Primary Care Networks. This partnership approach with health colleagues ensured a seamless experience for service users referred via their GP.

Impact

The impact on the people in our borough was huge. From young people who have regained access to training and employment to older people experiencing extreme loneliness who have been supported to access and then volunteer with community groups, this service touches all parts of the community. Users have reported improved wellbeing, which is supported by ONS preferred personal wellbeing indicators. The service has also helped reduce social isolation, boost local volunteering and connect residents with organisations that support employment and financial management.

Case study 2: Place-based intelligence: unifying partnership data to gain collective insights

Overview

The Chorley and South Ribble Partnership focuses on building strong communities and positive outcomes for residents through collaborative work across local organisations. The partnership embraces joint working across the local public, private and third sectors, with members including district and county councils, Citizens Advice, Primary Care Networks, NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, Progress Housing, Runshaw College, the Police, the Fire Service. By uniting such a broad spectrum of organisations, all sharing a geographical footprint, and agreeing on common goals to address widening inequalities, and enhance service access, the partnership was well-positioned to tackle the critical need for improved knowledge sharing.

Following successful data and intelligence sharing on specific issues, the benefits of data sharing at scale were evident. However, inconsistencies in data formats, geography levels, and privacy and permissions concerns presented barriers. It was agreed that a secure and shared platform was needed to allow each partner to contribute their intelligence at an agreed level and compatible format, realising significant benefits for informed decision-making locally both for individual members and at a system level as a collective whole.

Impact

The platform has already shown positive early use cases. A UKSPF funded home energy efficiency scheme defined and targeted its cohort using partner data such as CAB Energy Debt Contacts, DWP Universal Credit claimants, and DLUHC's EPC performance certificates. By bringing together this previously fragmented data the platform was able to ensure that the project targeted residents with the financial need for support who also live in properties with the potential for efficiency improvements, ultimately enabling support for over 500 residents. Similarly, data from the local PCN on fit notes has informed the council's understanding of elevated levels of economic inactivity, and a project to understand local elevated suicide rates has used partner data to target community conversations in areas with high debt prevalence and unemployment.

The Place-Based Intelligence Platform has successfully overcome data sharing barriers, enhancing local decision-making and service accessibility. It introduces a new model of meeting priority needs by providing local leaders and decision-makers with actionable insights, allowing for more targeted community initiatives. This tool dismantles traditional obstacles like siloed data, fostering a unified view of local needs. As a result, we've seen improvements in the targeting of local interventions. The collaborative effort of partner organisations contributes to an effective way to better define and drive forward on shared goals. Further to this, as the platform evolves and demonstrates its value, more partners will likely join, further improving the platforms reach and impact.