

Cheshire West and Chester Council

Workforce Diversity Report April 2023 – our first Be You report

Be You is the Council's commitment to all colleagues that equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are important to us all. EDI or Be You isn't just about policy and procedure or being tokenistic, it's about creating an environment where every individual can 'bring their whole selves' to work, with no fear, anxiety or issue and that in doing so they can be the best they can be, in all that they do. Essentially you can 'Be You' linked to our THRIVE values, in particular 'respect'.

The Equality Act 2010 requires Public Bodies to publish data to show how they are meeting the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty – which includes workforce profile and other information. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- 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.

Having due regard to the aims of the general equality duty requires the Council to have an adequate evidence base for its decision-making. Collecting and using equality information should enable it to develop a sound evidence base and to understand the impact of its proposals and decisions on people with protected characteristics.

This report is the first to include data both from the Council's HR system (Unit 4) and also equality data gathered via an all-colleague Be You survey, which was open to all Council employees for completion during the summer and into autumn 2023. The aim of the survey was to provide a safe space for Council employees to disclose equality data, and they could choose whether to provide their name.

Analysis by protected characteristic

Analysis has taken place of the workforce make-up based on various protected groups i.e. percentage of the workforce by ethnicity, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion/belief and disability; with a view to understanding if the Council's workforce truly reflects the community it serves.

Due to self-declaration and a history of not proactively seeking employee diversity data, there is a significant amount of missing / undeclared equality data on the payroll system which makes it hard to draw conclusions about any anomalies – they may be evidence of conscious or unconscious bias; alternatively there may not be enough data on which to draw a meaningful conclusion. The inclusion of data from the Be You survey attempts to address this by providing a further source of declared data.

For the first time, therefore, data is taken both from declared data held on the Council's payroll system, and also from data declared in the first Council Be You survey, open during summer and autumn 2023. Data on the borough's population is provided for comparison, using data from the 2021 census.

Gender

The Council's workforce remains predominantly female at 73% - a slight increase on 2022's figure which was 70.5%. This is probably accounted for by the addition to the workforce of the Vivo Care Choices staff since the 2022 report was compiled.

The data above comes from the payroll system which in line with HMRC rules only holds data on gender in a binary way i.e. male or female. The Be You survey allowed participants to describe their gender in their own way. The overall male / female split was very similar to the known payroll data (73.7% described their gender as female, 23.6% as male) however in addition 0.7% of respondents described their gender as 'non-binary' and a further 0.9% stated that they preferred not to declare gender. This is a closer alignment to the 2021 census where 0.3% of the borough's population declared a non-binary gender. Further surveys will refine this data over time.

The Be You survey specifically asked participants to state if they consider themselves to be Trans. 0.1% of participants responded Yes, with the vast majority responding No and 0.9% stated they preferred not to say. The low rate of prefer not to say responses here is encouraging in terms of indicating the willingness of Council staff to disclose this data.

Ethnicity

In 2022 according to the payroll data, 1.2% of Council colleagues actively selected not to disclose their ethnicity, with ethnicity unknown for a further 19.6% - a total of 20.8%. In 2023 slightly fewer preferred not to disclose (1.0%) however Unknown ethnicity has increased to over 33% - probably a consequence of the recruitment data issue described above. The number of employees declaring ethnicity other than white in 2023 has increased to 1.8%, from 0.9% in 2022.

In the 2021 census, 95.3% of CW&C residents reported an ethnicity within the high-level "White" category, a decrease from 97.4% in 2011. Therefore the number of employees self-declaring as other than white would need to more than double to be truly representative of the population. However it's likely that the self-declared figure does underestimate the true proportion of staff belonging to non-white ethnic groups, even if by a small amount. Plans to improve data collection as discussed below within the Recommendations should address this issue.

The Be You survey data also provides an insight into the ethnicity make-up of the Council. Again participants were allowed to self-describe, by grouping responses the following high-level results are shown:

Ethnicity	% of workforce (Be You survey 2023)
Asian	0.3%
Black	0.3%
Jewish	0.1%
Mixed	2.8%
White	94.2%
Prefer Not to Say / unknown / not clear	2.3%

The Be You survey data shows that the high proportion of Unknown ethnicity in the payroll data can probably mostly be attributed to white ethnicities; however the overall population of ethnicities other than white is slightly closer to the borough population data returned in the 2021 census (8.8%).

The above data has focussed on a simple distinction between white / black / Asian / mixed ethnicity, due to the relatively low numbers declaring as ethnicities other than white. It is acknowledged that it is good

practice to carry out more detailed analysis down to specific ethnic groups to avoid over-generalisations. With more complete data, this should be possible in future.

Religion and belief

Of particular note here is that a relatively high proportion have chosen not to disclose their religion, compared to those who chose not to declare ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The reason for this is unclear and would be useful to explore as the Council progresses with actions to encourage disclosure of EDI characteristics. Along with a high proportion of Unknown data, this makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

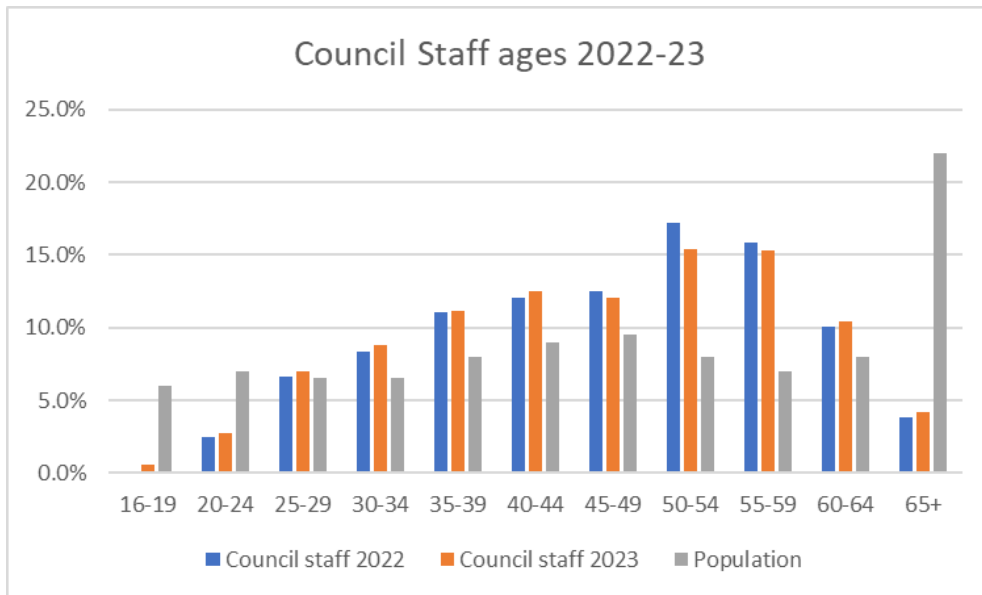
Based on the payroll data, 0.8% declared a non-Christian religion, whilst according to the latest statistics from the 2021 census, 7.7% of the borough's population reported a religion other than Christianity or None, again implying that religions other than Christianity are under-reported. However at 19.2% Christianity is probably also under-reported, given that in the 2021 census 54.5% of the borough's population declared their religion as Christianity.

The Be You survey data also provides an insight into the religious make-up of the Council. Again participants were allowed to self-describe but by grouping responses together the following high-level results are shown:

Religion	% of workforce (Be You survey 2023)
Buddhist	0.1%
Christian (all denominations)	48.8%
Humanist	0.1%
Muslim	0.1%
No Religion/Atheist/Agnostic	42.1%
Sikh	0.1%
Spiritual	4.0%
Vegan belief	0.1%
Prefer Not to Say / unknown / not clear	4.4%

Age

The workforce profile remains older in comparison to the community. Though it should of course be remembered that by definition a working population won't include anyone under 16 and fewer at the higher and lower age ranges, which means there will be proportionally more in the age groups in between. Interestingly, whilst the Council staff population at the very highest ages ranges has increased slightly, it's decreased in both the 50-54 and 55-59 age groups. The change in workforce population due to the transfer of Vivo Care Choices staff may account for this shift.



Sexual orientation

Payroll data shows 0.9% of employees declared themselves to be gay or bisexual, compared to 0.7% in 2022 and national estimates of around 6%. A question on sexual orientation was asked for the first time in the 2021 census in which 2.8% of the borough’s population declared themselves gay or bi-sexual.

As above, this is likely to be significantly under-reported within the Council staff population, as the sexual orientation of well over half the workforce is unknown. The Be You data again gives a clearer picture of sexual orientation – 7.5% declare gay or bi / bi-curious, with a further 2.4% declaring asexual or pansexual.

Sexual orientation	% of workforce (Be You survey 2023)
Bi / Bi-curious	2.8%
Gay	4.7%
Other (pansexual / asexual)	2.4%
Straight	84.6%
Prefer Not to Say / unknown / not clear	5.5%

Disability

National estimates are that around 20% of the population could be considered Disabled under the definition in the Equality Act, and in local terms in the 2021 census 17.9% of residents declared a disability or health condition that would probably meet the Equality Act definition. The definition of disability is again based on self-declaration and has always been under-reported among Council employees based on the national / local figures.

However the Be You survey data revealed a wealth of important information on staff disability or other conditions that could affect their performance or attendance. 20.5% of respondents said they believe they are disabled under the Equality Act definition, with 4.8% declaring they prefer not to say – that’s a higher rate preferring not to declare than for e.g. ethnicity or sexual orientation so may indicate a wider issue over people’s confidence to declare.

Participants who answered that they believe they have a disability meeting the conditions of the Equality Act were asked to select the nature of the disability, or had the option of self-describing. The results are summarised below:

Nature of disability	% of participants declaring a disability (Be You survey 2023)	% of all participants (Be You survey 2023)
Vision	3.6%	1.2%
Hearing	6.0%	2.0%
Mobility	17.5%	5.9%
Learning / remembering	9.6%	3.2%
Mental health condition (e.g. depression or anxiety)	20.3%	6.8%
Stamina or breathing difficulty (e.g. asthma or heart conditions)	9.6%	3.2%
Social or behavioural conditions (e.g. Autism or ADHD)	7.6%	2.5%
PTS	3.6%	1.2%
Self-described – examples included: Arthritis; Cancer; Crohn's Disease; Chronic pain; Diabetes; Epilepsy; Fibromyalgia; Long Covid; Multiple Sclerosis	22.3%	7.5%

It can be seen that the largest single category is mental health conditions, closely followed by mobility issues; both of which are reinforced by employee absence data.

Caring responsibilities

An opportunity was also taken to use the Be You survey to ask participants about their responsibilities as carers. In summary:

- 57.8% of respondents are married or in a civil partnership
- 24.8% are the primary carer of a child or children, with 4.7% the primary carer of a disabled child / children
- 8.6% are the primary carer of an elderly or disabled adult
- 10.7% describe themselves as a secondary carer

These categories can of course overlap.

It's therefore clear that a significant proportion of the Council's workforce are balancing work with caring responsibilities.

In line with the aspiration to be an employer of choice and improve all aspects of the colleague experience journey, this shows how important managerial and organisational support is for people who have disabilities and / or caring responsibilities; and is really valuable information for informing the Council's strategy and activities around wellbeing.

Next steps

The Council has signed up to membership of Inclusive Employers, the leading membership organisation for employers who are committed to creating truly inclusive workplaces. Membership includes access to training resources and consultancy support, as well as the right to display an Inclusive Employers

accreditation. HR plan to work with Inclusive Employers to set out a plan for increasing participation in declaring equality information, as well as making improvements to our learning offer for staff and managers, and reviewing relevant policies and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and aligned to best practice.

A number of equality network groups have existed within the Council for some time and there has been a recent exercise to review those groups, their activities and membership. Network groups exist for a number of different protected characteristics including LGBT colleagues and allies, colleagues with disabilities and a group to encourage racial and cultural inclusion and diversity. The support of the equality network groups will be crucial in explaining to the wider workforce why we need to have a better understanding of the diversity of our workforce, and how we can use that understanding to make sure everyone who works for the Council can feel a sense of belonging.

The actions below aim to address three key areas identified as requiring some improvement: data and disclosure, supporting wellbeing aligned to disability and carers, and improving diversity at senior levels.

Data and disclosure

There are still significant gaps in the Council's knowledge of the diversity make-up of its workforce. 2023 saw the first Council-wide Be You survey to encourage disclosure either on a named or anonymous basis. A 21% completion rate was a solid start and a foundation to build upon. It is intended to run a follow-up survey during 2024 and annually, with the aim of improving participation and also eventually to use survey responses to populate equality data on the payroll system, which will support reporting in other areas (e.g. the ability to report on intersectionality, or get specific data on absence, leavers, recruitment etc aligned to equality factors.)

Wellbeing

The Council recognises that its employees face significant pressures in and out of work. Working practices need to be constantly reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose and achieve the stated aims of becoming an employer of choice and attracting and retaining the best talent.

A review of the approach to colleague wellbeing which has already commenced as part of the refreshed People Strategy will be continued, and will include:

- Developing the Council's network of Wellbeing Champions to ensure they have the skills and resources they need;
- Creating a suite of wellbeing resources that employees can access, and maintaining the offer;
- Ensuring wellbeing is incorporated into leadership development programmes to equip managers with the skills they need to support colleagues;
- Developing clear metrics to measure the impact of specific interventions and the overall wellbeing of the Council's workforce

Improving workforce diversity especially at senior levels

Some aspects of diversity, especially at senior levels, have changed little since monitoring began. Work on the new Careers Site has included highlighting case studies from several different groups with the aim of promoting Cheshire West and Chester Council as an inclusive workplace where all employees can be themselves and thrive.

Further action will be undertaken with regard to recruitment, promotion and inclusivity for under-represented groups. This can be addressed with the support of Inclusive Employers, including the production of a full action plan with identified measures of success. The aim is to move overall diversity of Council employees closer to the diversity profile of the borough, as measured in the 2021 census; and in particular to increase representation at senior levels of people from non-white ethnicities.