

Consultation Report – Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Gateshead Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy ("the policy") describes our vision and commitments to our residents to deliver better outcomes and help everyone to thrive in Gateshead.
- 1.2. We have consulted on the draft policy and the results of the consultation will feed into a refreshed policy, which will be considered by Cabinet in March 2024 and recommended to Council for approval.
- 1.3. This report sets out the findings from the consultation.

2. How We Engaged

- 2.1. During the consultation process we used the following methods to reach as many people as possible:
 - Public online survey on Gateshead Council's consultation portal – anyone with an interest in the policy was invited to respond to the consultation on the portal, and 205 people completed the survey. We shared information about the consultation in the following ways:
 - Emails to over 40 key partners and EDI groups across Gateshead
 - Publicised via 2 x social media posts on facebook and twitter
 - Publicised via 2 x email newsletters – Gateshead Now to over 33,000 subscribers
 - Email alerts to 2000 viewpoint online members, the council's online residents panel
 - Meetings with partners, including Gateshead Unison branch committee, Housing EDI group, Public Health Making Every Contact Count group
 - Staff were invited to complete the consultation survey via the internal newsletter. We also attended the Employee Equality Network and Group Management Teams.
 - Councillors were invited to attend a members seminar in February and received a councillor briefing when the consultation launched.

3. Public Consultation

- 3.1. The public consultation on our online survey opened on 15 January and closed on 18 February 2024.
- 3.2. 205 respondents accessed the consultation survey, the findings are summarised below.

Respondent Profile

3.3 Analysis of the respondent profile in Table 1 shows that demographics are broadly aligned with what we know about the population of Gateshead ([Census 2021](#), ONS) and in our [Gateshead Equality Profile](#), although of those, people with disabilities and care-givers are over-represented and young people are under-represented.

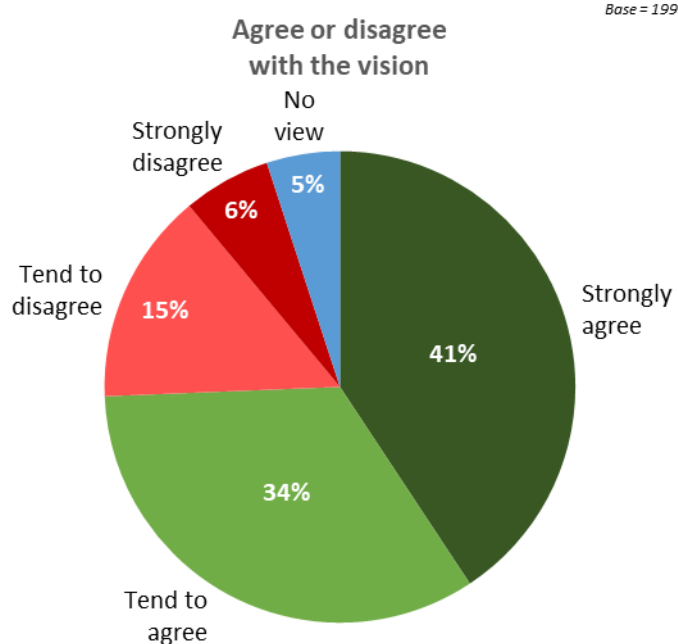
Table 1 – Summary of Respondent profile

45% Female 47% Male 8% prefer not to say	132 Responses from Gateshead postcodes	87% identified as White 1.5% mixed ethnicity 2% Asian 0% Black 1.5% other 8% prefer not to say
42% had a long-term health condition and/or disability 49% did not	82% identified as heterosexual/straight 5% as gay, lesbian or bisexual 11% prefer not to say	
0% aged under 25 11% 25-44 years 49% aged 45-64 years 30% aged 65 or over 10% prefer not to say	93% said that their gender identity was the same as their sex 1% said they were non-binary	29% look after or support other people with long term health conditions or due to old age
9 organisation responses	78% were Gateshead residents 16% were service users 25% were council staff 4% represented an organisation 1% were councillors	44% Christian 39% No Religion 1.5% Jewish 1% Muslim 1% Buddhist 1% Hindu 1% other religion 11.5% prefer not to say

NB. % may not add up to 100% as respondents could prefer not to say. Not all respondents shared their personal data with us as questions were voluntary.

4. Our Vision

4.1. Consultees were asked if they agreed with the vision set out in the policy. 199 respondents answered the question, with 75% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed vision

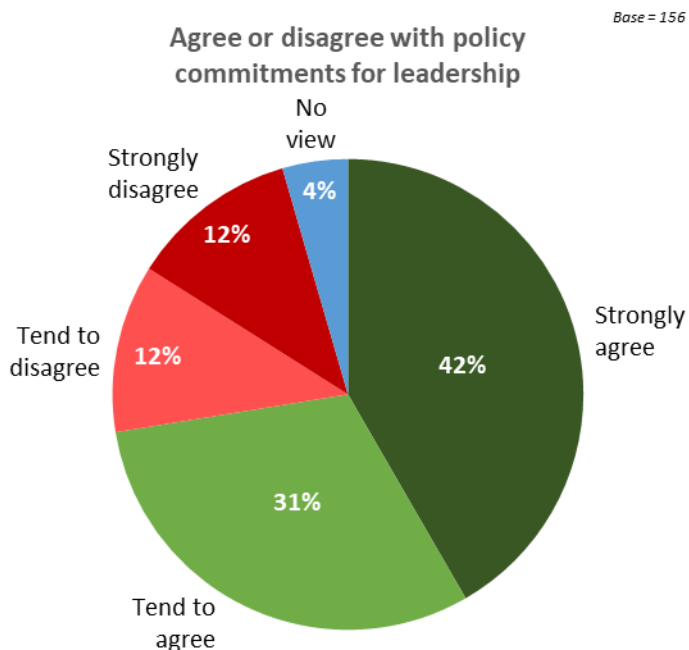


5. Policy Commitments

5.1. Consultees were asked if they agreed with the commitments set out in the policy. Each theme within the policy received strong support for the commitments proposed.

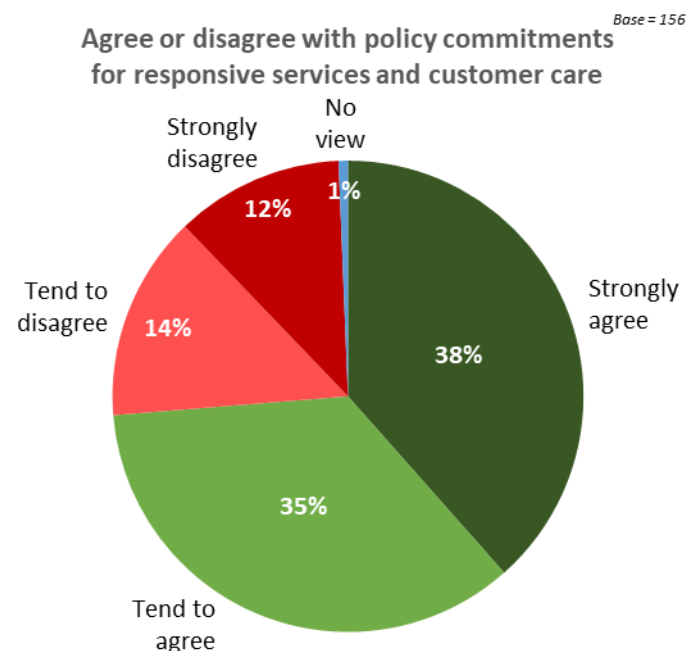
5.2. Leadership, partnership and organisational

155 respondents answered the question, with 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed Leadership policy commitments.



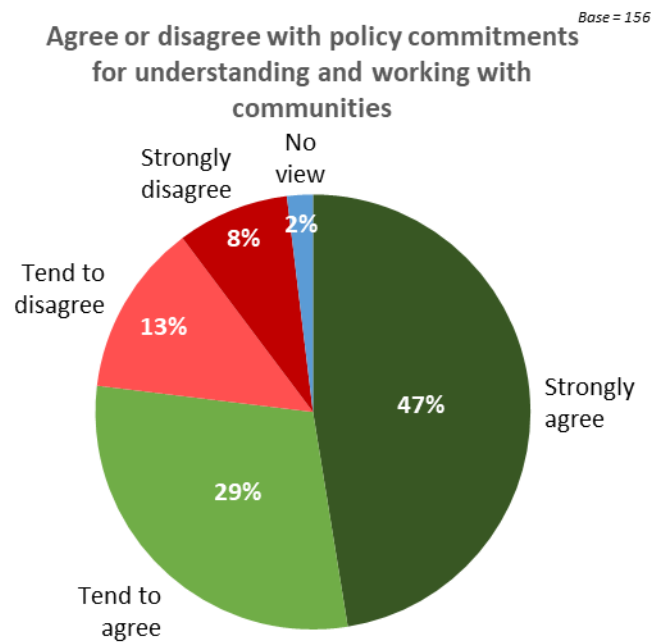
5.3. Responsive services and customer care

156 respondents answered the question, with 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed Services policy commitments.



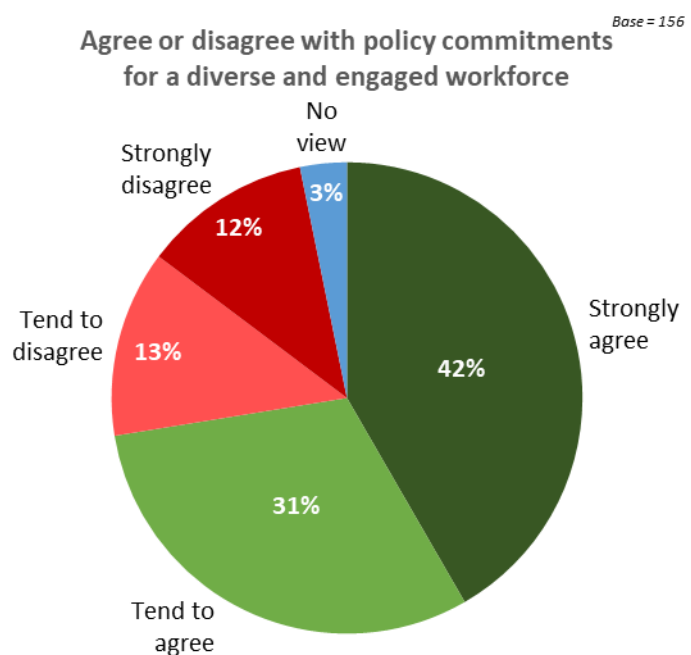
5.4. Understanding and working with our communities

156 respondents answered the question, with 76% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed Communities policy commitments.



5.5. Diverse and engaged workforce

156 respondents answered the question, with 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposed Workforce policy commitments.



5.6. Respondents were asked to provide any additional comments or suggestions on the commitments. 83 respondents provided one or more comments in relation to their views on the commitments.

5.7. Themes emerging from the feedback on the policy commitments included;

- Negative comments made about not understanding or agreeing with the need for an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy or concerns that council resources would be allocated to this agenda at the expense of greater priorities to residents;

- Positive support for the vision and the policy, with comments supporting that this is something the council should be leading on and delivering across all services;
- Workforce – concerns raised that there could be a focus on positive action / positive discrimination which could prevent the best person being employed; as well as support for improved workforce diversity and respect and support for employees as individuals;
- Leadership – support for the commitment to challenge negative behaviours, recognition that more needs to be done to demonstrate EDI in leadership at all levels;
- Questions raised about how the policy will be delivered and progress reported on. What will success look like?
- Communities - Support for a focus on inclusion across all communities and groups. Desire to see real co-production and co-design in our service design and delivery to engage with service users with lived experience.
- Services – comments on accessibility and making this real for a range of residents who need support to access council services; physical or language barriers or additional support to overcome issues faced.

6. Next Steps

6.1. The feedback from the consultation has been analysed and a set of proposals to amend and improve the policy developed. This is outlined in Table 2: **“You Said, We Did”**.

6.2. The proposed policy document will be considered by Cabinet in March 2024.

Table 2: You Said... We Did – Summary of Proposed Changes to the draft Corporate EDI Policy following consultation

Section	You Said...	Response	We Did...
<i>Our vision for equality, diversity and inclusion</i>	<p>The majority of respondents (75%) agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed vision.</p> <p>Respondents who did not agree with the vision made in the strategy largely did so because they thought the strategy was unnecessary and/or there were more important issues for the Council.</p> <p>There were also concerns that some of the Council's actions appeared to contradict the stated commitment (e.g. closing leisure facilities).</p> <p>Positive comments were made about the council's vision and ambition to improve EDI for Gateshead residents, service users and employees</p> <p>Some comments related to ability to deliver the strategy and clarity on how this work would be taken forward.</p>	<p>The policy vision for equality, diversity and inclusion will remain unchanged.</p> <p>We strongly believe that Gateshead Council has a leadership role to challenge inequality and promote equality of opportunity in all of our services and in our decision-making. This policy and our stated vision is our commitment to this.</p> <p>Decisions made by the Council will be assessed for their impact on different groups and communities in Gateshead. Given the challenging financial climate, it will not always be possible to eliminate all negative impact, but we will ensure that these are understood and mitigating actions are taken where necessary.</p>	<p>We will amend the Equality and Diversity webpages on www.gateshead.gov.uk to expand on the <i>Responsibility for Implementation</i> section of the policy to include further detail on;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how the council will work to develop an action plan to deliver the policy commitments; and • how EDI performance and achievements will be assessed and reported. <p>We will include hyperlinks in the published EDI policy document online so that you can navigate to the webpages for further information on delivery and performance reporting.</p>
<i>Diversity in Gateshead</i>	<p>Only comment received in relation to data was keeping the definition of sex as a protected characteristic and reporting gender identity separately to sex.</p>	<p>We have used the Census question wording (ONS) when reporting sex and gender identity for Gateshead population data.</p>	<p>No changes proposed to our published population or workforce data</p>

Section	You Said...	Response	We Did...
<p><i>Leadership Commitments</i></p>	<p>There was strong agreement with the policy commitments.</p> <p>However, a number of comments indicated areas where objectives could be strengthened, and these are set out below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A few comments did not understand the reference to Integrated impact assessments (IIAs) <p>There were some negative comments made stating that Equality should not be a shared priority or responsibility. Either because the respondents disagreed with the need for a policy or thought this should be self evident across all ways of working with no need for an explicit commitment.</p> <p>Small number of objections to use of equitable language.</p>	<p>No change to the commitments were proposed.</p> <p>We strongly believe it is important to raise the profile of EDI across all council services with our leadership committing to making EDI a responsibility for all council employees when delivering services to support our residents.</p> <p>We know for some customers and residents we need to do more to support them to overcome barriers they face to accessing council services. This is in line with our strategic approach Thrive and we will commit to working equitably to those who need it.</p>	<p>We will amend the Equality and Diversity webpages on www.gateshead.gov.uk</p> <p>These will be updated to include information on how we embed equalities considerations in our council decision-making processes, using Integrated Impact Assessments.</p>

Section	You Said...	Response	We Did...
<i>Services commitments</i>	<p>Fewer comments were made about the commitments for Responsive services and customer care than across other themes.</p> <p>Comments centred on issues relating to access and inclusion for service users. Generally supportive of the commitments relating to these but more concerned that commitments translate into action and consistency in service delivery.</p>	<p>No changes to the objective were proposed.</p>	<p>The Equality and Diversity annual report as part of our performance reporting will include information on what the council is doing to improve accessibility and inclusivity for our service users.</p>
<i>Communities commitments</i>	<p>Comments were mainly supportive of the commitments.</p> <p>Some respondents requested that diverse community groups and their leaders are proactively included in decision-making and partnerships going forward.</p> <p>Requests that co-design and co-production work is meaningful and truly collaborative.</p>	<p>EDI commitments on communities will be taken into account by the council's leadership as reviews of partnerships and service design, development and delivery take place.</p> <p>No changes to the policy commitments for communities are proposed.</p>	

Section	You Said...	Response	We Did...
<i>Workforce commitments</i>	<p>There were a mix of comments received, some favourable to the commitments and the difference this could make to employees.</p> <p>Comments agreed that training and development for employees would be needed to put this into practice.</p> <p>Some respondents noted there are a large number of Workforce commitments and was this too many to tackle at once.</p> <p>Some comments were negative about the need for increasing workforce diversity or made assumptions that this would lead to positive action / positive discrimination which could impact on prospective or existing employees.</p>	<p>Whilst no changes to commitments are proposed at this point, the HR&WD service will work with council's leadership to develop an action plan to deliver the Workforce EDI strategy.</p>	<p>Workforce EDI Strategy is going to be considered by Cabinet in March 2024.</p>
<i>Other comments</i>	<p>Comments showed that respondents wanted to see more detail about how the policy would be delivered through actions and funding, and some were sceptical of the Council's ability to deliver.</p>	<p>The policy will be delivered by a supporting work programme with all council services committing to undertake activity appropriate to their service users and workforce.</p> <p>Progress against the commitments will be published in our Equality and Diversity annual report.</p>	<p>We will amend the Equality and Diversity webpages on www.gateshead.gov.uk to expand on the <i>Responsibility for Implementation</i> section of the policy to include further detail on work programme, delivery and progress against the policy commitments.</p>

Section	You Said...	Response	We Did...
Throughout document	Resources were raised as a concern – either about the Council’s ability to find the funding to do this work properly, or conversely that this could take funding away from other more important priorities and everyday service delivery.	<p>This policy will apply to all council services and employees. Commitments will be delivered using existing resources. There is no additional resource ask.</p> <p>This may mean the commitments take longer to be delivered, but EDI is a long-term undertaking and work will be prioritised to use existing capacity.</p>	No action needed