



Closing our gender pay gap

March 2026



Introduction

We remain committed to understanding and addressing the underlying causes of our gender pay gap and to ensuring that Lancashire County Council continues to be a fair, inclusive and supportive place to work. We recognise that the existence of a gap reflects structural issues within our workforce profile and patterns of employment and may highlight barriers to access or progression that require our focused attention.

From a People Strategy perspective, we are closely monitoring the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 2025, which represents the most substantial overhaul of UK employment law in a generation. The reforms, introduced in phases over the next two years, span a wide range of policy areas including family-related rights and flexible working and will require updates to our existing policies and procedures. The Act will introduce mandatory gender pay gap action plans from spring 2027 to show the steps employers are taking to reduce their gender pay gap and also to support employees experiencing menopause. We will ensure that the action plans we produce for publication align with the government guidance once this is issued in April 2026.

In parallel with preparing for the ERA 2025, the council is undertaking a review of its hybrid working arrangements to inform the development of a new hybrid working framework. As a large and complex organisation delivering a broad range of services, it is essential that our approach continues to balance employee flexibility, service needs, organisational benefits and effective leadership. It is anticipated that the framework will be agreed, and implementation will commence, in spring 2026.

We have also continued to strengthen our focus on fairness, equality and inclusion through the launch of a Cabinet-approved Fairness, Equality and Inclusion Workforce Framework earlier this year. This brings together corporate priorities and statutory obligations into a single, unified approach and sets out a clear vision: to be recognised as an employer of choice, where fairness, equality of opportunity and inclusion are woven into everything the council does and where every individual feels a genuine sense of belonging. The framework also includes a delivery plan for 2026/27 that details specific actions and timelines for delivery.

This document outlines the key factors influencing our gender pay gap and sets out the actions we will take over the next 12 months to help reduce these disparities.

Gender pay gap headlines

The gender pay gap reflects the difference in average earnings between men and women across the organisation. It is influenced by the roles in which employees work, working patterns (part-time versus full-time) and other factors, such as access to progression.

For the 2025 reporting year:

- Our mean gender pay gap is 9.6%.

- Our median gender pay gap is 12.3%.
(Both represent improvements on the previous year.)

Our data consistently shows a higher proportion of female employees in lower-paid occupational groups, particularly cleaning, caring and catering roles. These roles sit predominantly within the lower two pay quartiles and continue to influence the overall gap. In contrast, male employees are more highly represented in technical and operational roles (e.g. highways maintenance), which often sit in the middle quartiles and attract higher pay.

These structural patterns – not unequal pay for equal work – are the main drivers of our gender pay gap.

Pay and grading structure

Since our 2010 equal pay review, we have maintained a robust and transparent pay and grading structure (the Lancashire Pay Spine). All roles are evaluated using validated job evaluation schemes that assess the demands, responsibilities and skills required for each post. This ensures that pay is determined fairly and consistently.

Grading decisions are revisited when roles are substantially changed, such as through service restructures or the introduction of new functions. We also apply nationally agreed pay scales for teaching and education roles, and people employed under youth and community worker and Soulbury Committee determined terms and conditions.

We remain confident that:

- our pay structures do not discriminate on the grounds of sex; and
- any pay differentials are objectively justified and linked to job requirements.

Starters and leavers data

Understanding the shape of our incoming and outgoing workforce helps us identify where progression, retention and access to opportunities may differ by sex.

Key findings for 2024/25 include:

- Foundation Living Wage level (our minimum level of pay):
 - More female leavers (499) than starters (485), suggesting some turnover challenges in predominantly female work areas.
 - Slightly more male starters (71) than leavers (68).
- Grade 3 roles (the next level of our pay spine):
 - Equal numbers of female starters and leavers.
 - More male starters (81) than leavers (60).

- Roles at this grade are primarily part-time and female-dominated, particularly in residential care and schools catering.

This data indicates that the gender representation within lower-graded roles remains relatively static, but turnover patterns differ between sexes, which may influence longer-term workforce composition.

Exit questionnaire insights

We reviewed anonymised responses from 194 exit questionnaires submitted during 2024/25.

Key insights include:

- 56% of respondents were female; 23% were male; 21% preferred not to disclose.
- 30% of female respondents did not feel they had the opportunity for promotion to progress their careers, with the greatest number of responses coming from those undertaking roles at Grades 4 to 8 on our pay spine (the middle pay quartiles).
- 17% of female respondents felt they did not have the opportunity to access and attend career development training, with the greatest number of responses coming from those undertaking roles at Grades 4 to 8 on the pay spine (the middle pay quartiles).

These findings highlight clear themes around progression and development for female employees, especially in middle-quartile grades, which are influential in shaping the gender pay gap.

Staff survey findings

Our staff survey provides valuable insight into our employee experience, engagement and perceptions of fairness.

Relevant findings from the 2025 survey include:

- 64% of female respondents agreed they had opportunities for career progression (compared with 62% of men).
- 87% of female respondents felt able to access flexible working solutions when needed (compared with 88% of men).

While these results show relatively positive perceptions overall, the contrast with exit questionnaire feedback suggests a potential gap between the opportunities available in principle and how accessible they feel in practice, particularly for employees in lower-graded or part-time roles.

External data comparisons

Benchmarking our data against wider labour market statistics provides additional context.

Based on the Office of National Statistics 2025 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings:

- The mean gender pay gap for Lancashire workplaces is 14.4%.
- The median gap is 16.1%.

Both are higher than our organisational figures (9.6% and 12.3%), indicating that while our internal gap remains a challenge, it is comparatively lower than the wider Lancashire labour market.

Action plan

Our action plan for the next 12 months is set out below.

Action plan 2026/27

Objective	Actions	Measures of success	Responsible Area	Target Date
Improve understanding of workforce motivations and barriers to progression.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct three engagement activities (survey, focus groups, network discussions) to understand female employees' working patterns, motivations and obstacles to progression. Explore whether part time working is driven by preference, caring responsibilities, inflexibility of roles or perceived limits to progression. Analyse findings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce preferences understood and actions targeted to support findings. 	Various teams across People Services, with wider input/support.	March 2027
Launch and embed new employee networks (early careers and working carers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formally launch early careers and working carers networks. Integrate both within the developing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved engagement and sense of belonging. Improved communication of and access to 	Various teams across People Services, with wider input/support.	May 2026 (launch) / March 2027 (review)



	engagement framework.	development opportunities.		
Strengthen staff voice through a council wide engagement framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and implement a unified framework that includes all staff engagement groups, including the employee networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Framework approved and implemented. Improved tracking of engagement through staff voice on which to target action. 	Various teams across People Services, with wider input/support.	March 2027
Improve recruitment pipelines into under-represented roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review recruitment data for gender patterns in technical/operational roles. Develop a key targeted activity/approach to diversify applicant pools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data review completed. Targeted attraction activity delivered. 	Strategic Resourcing team, within People Services.	March 2027

