

Employment Matters Committee

30 April 2026

Equalities Board Annual Review

Report from: Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer and Deputy Chair of the Equalities Board

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Summary

Over the past year, the Equalities Board (EB) has made significant strides in embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) across the organisation. This report summarises the key achievements in the last year and the priorities for the coming year.

1. Recommendation

1.1. The Committee is requested to review the achievements of the Equalities Board in 2025/26 set out in section 3 of the report and note the priorities for the Equalities Board in 2026/27 as set out in section 4 of the report.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. The EB reports annually to the Employee Matters Committee to:

2.1.1. ensure that EDI initiatives align with the Council's overall strategic goals;

2.1.2. hold the EB and senior leaders accountable for progress;

2.1.3. raise the profile of EDI work and ensure it receives the attention it deserves; and

2.1.4. provide an escalation path for guidance, approval, intervention or extra resources.

3. Background

3.1. The EB exists to:

- 3.1.1. support the Council in meeting its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010, promote inclusive practice, and advise on policy and service delivery through an EDI lens;
- 3.1.2. play a key role in shaping and sustaining an inclusive organisational culture by helping embed values, behaviours, and practices that reflect equity and respect across all levels;
- 3.1.3. support initiatives that challenge bias, discrimination, and exclusion and help embed EDI into day-to-day practices; and
- 3.1.4. create space for staff voices, especially those from underrepresented or marginalised groups, to be heard and acted upon, and encourage a culture of psychological safety, where people feel confident to speak up about inequality or exclusion.

3.2. The EB strengthens the Council's resilience by fostering an inclusive culture that adapts to change and supports employee well-being. This is not only the right thing to do - but it also makes good business sense. Diverse, engaged teams drive innovation, reduce turnover costs, and enhance our reputation as an employer of choice.

3.3. EB members act as EDI champions, modelling inclusive behaviours and encouraging others to do the same. Having members of the Corporate Management Team as part of the Equalities Board helps set the tone from the top, influencing how inclusion is prioritised.

4. Key Achievements

4.1. The EB has increased staff engagement and voice through:

- 4.1.1. supporting the growth in the number of staff forums and the rise in membership; providing staff with safe spaces to share ideas and concerns. (Forums now include Disabled Workers and Carers Network, LGBTQIA+ forum, Black & Global Majority Support Group, Sex Equality Forum, Neurodiversity Forum);
- 4.1.2. increasing representation of more staff communities by having chairs of staff forums on the EB. This ensures their members' voices are heard at the highest level and that decisions reflect real experiences and needs empowering staff groups and giving them real influence, turning feedback into action and policy change;
- 4.1.3. improving cultural understanding and impact through raised awareness due to communications campaigns and events (e.g. Black History Month, Pride, Transgender Awareness, Diwali & Bandhi Chhor,

International Men's Day). Celebrating diversity days and inclusion initiatives improve wellbeing, morale and belonging; and

- 4.1.4. creating an inclusive and respectful staff focus group so staff feel comfortable sharing concerns about workplace and community tension. Also to hear direct from staff in relation to staff survey results. Insights and feedback will be turned into practical steps to reduce tension.
- 4.2. The EB has played a vital role in shaping policy and practice across the Council through:
 - 4.2.1. translating the legal implications of the UK Supreme Court ruling on biological sex into practical guidance and understanding of how to apply the law while upholding dignity and inclusion for all protected groups;
 - 4.2.2. maintaining oversight of Freedom of Information (FOI) responses about the UK Supreme Court ruling to ensure that all responses, decisions, and actions follow the same standards and legal requirements;
 - 4.2.3. developing a learning and development workshop for EB members to build knowledge and confidence to challenge bias and provide advice, improve decision making and strengthen governance for better compliance with regulations, policies and inclusive practice;
 - 4.2.4. obtaining Corporate Management Team agreement to the principle that staff forum chairs should be allowed paid dedicated time to carry out their responsibilities, like the agreed time provided for union leaders, to work on the development and organisation of their forums. This gives fairness and consistency by aligning with existing practice for union leaders, ensuring equal treatment for staff representatives, and creates clear boundaries to prevent misuse and ensure time is used for forum-related duties only and supports engagement by giving chairs the capacity to lead forums effectively without impacting core job responsibilities; and
 - 4.2.5. obtaining Corporate Management Team agreement to the allocation of a budget of £2,000 for each forum established during 2025/26 and providing a central pot of £2000 for forums emerging in 2026/27. This supports inclusion by ensuring that forums have resources to operate effectively from the start and sets a clear standard for funding across all forums. Examples of how the budget has been spent include: supportive badges and lanyards to raise awareness and convey support; items for awareness raising events such as posters; and banners.

5. Future Priorities

5.1. Future priorities of the EB include:

- 5.1.1. turning the insights and feedback of the staff focus group on community and workplace tension into practical steps to reduce tension and improve staff wellbeing.
- 5.1.2. responding to the Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice on the UK Supreme Court on biological sex which, once approved by Parliament, has statutory status. Non-compliance can lead to legal challenges, enforcement action, or reputational damage.
- 5.1.3. developing governance criteria and operational parameters for staff equality forums to distinguish them from other groups. To include rules around budget eligibility and annual progress reports to EMC alongside the EB progress report.
- 5.1.4. reviewing and updating the existing EDI Strategy and Action Plan to check alignment with legal changes and identify gaps in compliance.
- 5.1.5. developing a corporate EDI calendar to be a practical tool that brings structure and visibility to EDI by highlighting key cultural celebration and awareness days. Linking to corporate values and behaviours showing that inclusion is part of the organisation's core strategy.
- 5.1.6. improving EDI data collection and declaration rates to better understand the workforce, spot trends, risks and where improvements are needed.
- 5.1.7. building on the momentum of the existing EDI awareness and engagement campaigns to keep the conversations alive and reinforce the same core messages which helps embed EDI values into culture. More engagement leading to improved retention through employees feeling heard, valued, and involved and contributing to being an employer of choice.
- 5.1.8. reviewing staff survey results and content so that it meets the needs of all protected characteristics and can be used to measure the success of the EB.

6. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Legal and Compliance Risks.	Discrimination claims: without oversight, policies and practices may unintentionally breach equality laws (e.g., Equality Act 2010 in the UK).	The EB regularly reviews policies and practices.	CII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	Regulatory penalties: failure to meet statutory obligations on equality reporting or accessibility can lead to fines or sanctions.		
Reputational Risks.	<p>Public perception: lack of visible commitment to equality can damage brand reputation and trust among customers, partners, and the community.</p> <p>Conversely, the perception that EDI is a waste of money.</p> <p>Negative media coverage: issues like pay gaps or lack of diversity can attract criticism and harm employer branding.</p>	<p>The EB regularly engage with communities and highlight awareness events and success stories.</p> <p>Resilient and innovative workforce leading to reduced costs and improved service delivery.</p> <p>Improved reputation and retention through being an employer of choice.</p>	CII
Workforce Risks.	<p>Lower employee engagement: employees may feel undervalued or excluded, leading to poor morale.</p> <p>Talent attraction and retention: Diverse candidates may avoid organisations that lack clear equality governance.</p> <p>Increased turnover costs: losing staff due to perceived inequity can be expensive.</p>	<p>Data driven decisions to identify gaps.</p> <p>Drive accountability through monitoring and reporting findings.</p> <p>Promote inclusion and belonging.</p>	BII
Strategic Risks.	<p>Missed innovation opportunities: diverse teams drive creativity and problem-solving; lack of focus on equality can stifle this.</p> <p>Poor decision-making: leadership may overlook risks or fail to represent stakeholder needs.</p>	<p>EB governance and oversight to ensure compliance with equalities legislation and internal policies.</p> <p>EB champion employee community groups and create</p>	BIII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
		safe channels to raise concerns.	
Cultural Risks.	<p>Unconscious bias: without structured oversight, bias in recruitment, promotion, and pay decisions can persist.</p> <p>Toxic work environment: lack of accountability can lead to harassment or discrimination going unchecked.</p>	<p>Promote inclusive leadership training for managers.</p> <p>Safe reporting channels for discrimination or bias.</p> <p>Celebrate cultural and diversity events to foster belonging.</p>	BII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct finance implications arising from the recommendations of this report, the activity of the Equalities Board is funded from the existing revenue budget.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. This year's progress demonstrates a continued commitment to advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion across all areas. While significant strides have been made - such as improved representation, enhanced accessibility, and strengthened policies - there is still work to do to ensure that equality is embedded in every aspect of our culture and operations. Moving forward, we will focus on sustaining momentum through active engagement with staff and stakeholders. By maintaining accountability and fostering an inclusive environment, we aim to create a workplace where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to thrive.

Lead officer contact.

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Appendices

None

Background Documents

None