

Personnel Committee

16 November 2023



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Title	RBC Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Plan
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Kathryn Cook, Assistant Director HR&OD
Lead Councillor	Councillor Terry
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	1. That the proposed Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Plan, attached at Appendix A, are agreed.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Reading Borough Council (RBC) is actively working to develop its approach to inclusion and diversity and become a more inclusive employer. The Council has been working on its inclusion agenda for several years seeking advice and insight from its own workforce and from external specialists, working to understand where we need to improve and what our priorities should be. It is accepted that to make further progress we need to be clear about our ambition and how we will deliver it. The draft Inclusion and Diversity (I&D) Strategy at Appendix A sets that out.

1.2 Reading is a diverse and vibrant place with pockets of affluence and deprivation. We know that most of the people who work for us are local. More than half of our workforce (54%) live in the borough and a further 27% are from nearby RG postcodes (81% total).

1.3 We want Reading Borough Council to have a workforce that reflects and understands the communities it serves and to be seen as an employer of choice within our communities; one that values inclusion and diversity, and the different perspectives they bring. This paper sets out our proposals to achieve this within our workforce.

1.4 Language is important and never more so than in relation to inclusion and diversity where the use of divisive or sloppy language can have significant, sometimes unknown and unseen (except to the individual) ramifications.

1.5 A few key terms used in this paper are defined below:

- **Inclusion:** the extent we feel valued, included, and able to succeed. Inclusion is what we do as employers and colleagues.
- **Diversity:** a measure of the mix, differences, and variety in people or ideas. We aspire to reflect our community. Diversity is who we are.
- **Intersectionality:** It is important to understand the ‘intersectionality’ or interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender in creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination,

and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.

1.6 Throughout this Strategy we refer to Inclusion and Diversity. This is deliberate and reflects the strong feedback received from staff, leaders and managers as well as reflecting best practice. Our external specialists, Inclusive Employers, advised that achieving full inclusion is the important first goal, as when inclusion is delivered, diversity and equality will naturally follow.

1.7 This Strategy focuses on the inclusion and diversity of both our current and future workforce. However, it is clear that some groups' experience of discrimination demands additional focus. We have framed our work on racism through the lens of the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD)s definition:

"Whilst workplace inclusion is essential, racism needs to be expressly addressed, given the long-standing lack of progress on race equality in our society and workplaces. It needs to be named and consciously addressed alongside, and separate to, an overarching commitment to inclusion."

Hence, the Action Plan ensures early work is undertaken on embedding our anti racism ambition as well as our approach to the recruitment, support and development of disabled staff. Further work will then focus on the other protected characteristics (see definition in Policy context section below).

Appendices

Appendix A:

Draft Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Plan

Appendix B:

Comparison of our current workforce against the most recent census (2021), including information about 'prefer not to say' / 'do not want to declare' statistics.

Appendix C:

Outcomes from the Big Conversation on EDI

2. Policy Context

2.1 The Equality Act 2010 is the foundational legal framework to protect individuals' rights and advance equality of opportunity for all. This Act provides the primary legislative basis under which our Strategy operates. The Equalities Act 2010 outlines key legal responsibilities for employers including ensuring they do not unfairly discriminate in any aspect of work, do all they reasonably can to protect people from discrimination, and to look after the wellbeing of employees. The Act introduced the term "protected characteristics" to refer to groups that are protected under the Act. Protected characteristics are legally defined as:

Age	Race	Sex
Sexual orientation	Marriage/civil partnership	Disability
Gender reassignment	Religion or belief	Maternity and paternity

2.2 In addition to the duties required by legislation, Council agreed on 17th October 2023 that RBC should include Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic in its strategies and plans.

2.3 The *Public Sector Equality Duty* (created under the Equality Act 2010) came into force on 5 April 2011 and requires public bodies and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunities and foster good relations between different communities.

2.4 All our HR policies and processes are regularly reviewed with the above obligations in mind. There are several proposals in the draft Strategy and Action Plan that if it is agreed will need to be reflected in our HR Policies going forward.

2.5 However, it is important to note that the draft Strategy goes beyond 'just' our legal obligations. It aims to ensure that we go beyond policies and into something enshrined in how we do business and how we work with each other.

3. The Proposal

3.1 Work on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda has been underway since late 2020 following the motion passed at October's Council on Tackling Employment Inequality. This work was enhanced following the report by the consultants Business in the Community who were commissioned to review the Council's approach to EDI.

Tangible progress has been made particularly in terms of the equality and diversity agenda:

- There has been a steady increase in the ethnic diversity of RBC staff and the development of a more representative senior leadership team.
- We have made changes to our recruitment process to increase our 'reach' into different ethnic groups and to simplify the applications process.
- Staff briefings and communications on EDI have been strengthened and relevant e-learning for new managers has been introduced. This will be extended to all managers during the life of the plan.
- We report annually on our gender and ethnicity pay gaps and have been successful in driving these down year on year. The 2022 Council's gender pay gap (mean) was 0.13% and the ethnicity pay gap (mean) was 2.68%. The gender and ethnicity pay gap reports for 2023 are currently in production and will be shared with Personnel Committee on 16th November. Early indications are that the gaps have continued to close, albeit there are some outliers that will need to be better understood.
- Increasing managers understanding of the importance of the EDI agenda in recruitment has also been strengthened and all managers are now required to complete the Recruitment and Selection e-Learning course; this includes a module on unconscious bias and an explanation of the relevant legislation on discrimination.
- It is also now a requirement that whenever possible recruitment panels should be diverse and during interviews an assessment of candidates against Team Reading values is required.
- To reach a wider, more diverse talent pool, we have diversified our recruitment advertising, moving away from traditional 'Local Authority' advertising routes and focussing on social media and Google search. Our job descriptions and adverts use inclusive language and focus on Team Reading values and all our adverts now feature a strong inclusivity statement. The application process has also been simplified, moving away from lengthy application forms and mandatory supporting statements, which can be difficult for many, and advice and guidance is available on the recruitment page of our website.
- RBC is a signatory to the Race at Work Charter and to its seven aims:
 1. Appoint an executive sponsor for race.
 2. Capture ethnicity data and publicise progress.
 3. Commit at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying.

4. Make equality, diversity and inclusion the responsibility of all leaders and managers.
5. Take action that supports black, Asian, mixed race and other ethnically diverse employees' career progression.
6. Support race inclusion allies in the workplace.
7. Include black, Asian, mixed race and other ethnically led enterprise owners in supply chain.

Work has also been on-going on other aspects of EDI raised in Business in the Community's report, including on a zero tolerance to bullying and harassment, developing a positive workforce culture through the TEAM reading values and enhancing employee engagement.

Work to embed fully these activities needs, of course, to continue and to include all protected characteristics. The Council's ambition is to become an exemplar in inclusiveness.

3.2 Given progress has been made on some fronts, it is appropriate to now take stock and consider our longer-term aspirations for EDI. We need to move from focussing on the basics required by legislation to developing a compelling longer-term ambition for EDI within the Council.

3.3 The draft Strategy outlines our plans over the next three years to develop our inclusion and diversity work, enabling RBC to progress towards being a fully inclusive organisation. It is of key importance that everyone recognises that inclusion and diversity is everyone's responsibility – leaders, managers and staff. It is only through working together that this Strategy and Action Plan will be delivered. For this reason, although the Strategy acknowledges the importance of RBC investing in this agenda and providing leadership focus and drive to it, the fundamental requirement is for everyone who works for RBC to understand what the Strategy aims to achieve and their role in delivering it.

4. Current Diversity Position:

4.1 Whilst the focus of the draft Strategy goes beyond just focusing on protected characteristics, officers will continue to track data about our workforce in relation to protected characteristics as this provides not only a useful snapshot of how effective our approach is, but also allows comparisons to be made to the census for the Borough as a whole.

Currently:

- 61% of our workforce is female, compared to the borough's population of 50%
- 17.7% identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, compared to 32.9% of the borough's population - (Black, Asian or other Minority Ethnic is used here as it reflects the data set, we will avoid terms such as minority ethnic that categorise people into large groupings that do not reflect their heritage),
- 4% of our workforce say they have a disability, compared to 14% of the borough's population
- 4.6% of the workforce identifies as non-heterosexual compared to 5% in the census

4.2 The Council has an enduring issue with under declaration of protected characteristics by staff. For some protected characteristics the 'prefer not to say' / 'do not want to declare' categories can be as high as 34%.

4.3 Appendix B sets out a comparison of our current workforce against the most recent census (2021), including information about 'prefer not to say' / 'do not want to declare' statistics.

5. The Big Conversation – Staff Engagement

5.1 During June and July 2023, management engaged in a "Big Conversation" on EDI with staff. This included engaging with all staff through focus groups, Team Talk, team conversations, staff forums and individual comments. A separate workshop was held with trade union colleagues. Involvement in the Big Conversation was strong.

5.2 Feedback from staff about the priorities they felt we should focus on in relation to EDI included:

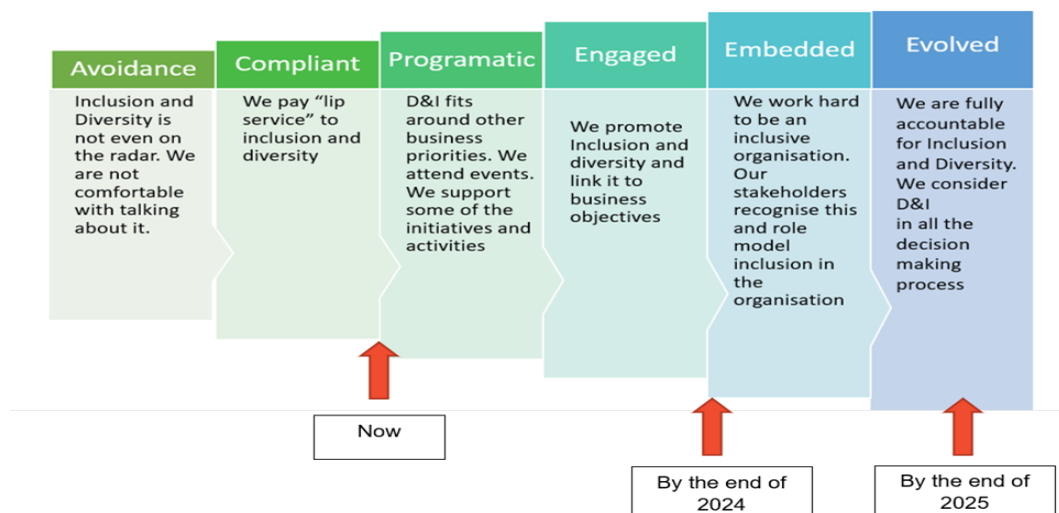
- Enhance the Training and development offer.
- Broaden our view of EDI to consider neurodiversity, mental health and other hidden disabilities.
- Ensure our supporting policies and procedures are consistently applied across the council.
- Ensuring a work environment that feels safe to challenge and able to speak out
- Getting the balance right, ensuring work in this area is not overstated to the detriment of a focus on service delivery.
- Recruit fairly through inclusive practices, keep good staff and develop them for progression, pay fairly and address nepotism.
- Demonstrate Leadership excellence. Leaders being visible, role modelling excellence, values and the required behaviours.

Appendix C summarises in more detail views collected from the Big Conversation.

5.3 In parallel to the Big Conversation, Inclusive Employers were commissioned to help us understand better where we are now and to help us scope our ambition and associated action plan. Their work was divided into three discrete but interconnected work packages:

- Stage 1: Desk based research including review of relevant policies, staff survey results 2022 & 2023 and previous EDI audit.
- Stage 2: Diversity data review including staff profiles by protected characteristics and employee lifecycle data. A list of data sources and activities in the development of the strategy is shown as appendix A.
- Stage 3: Interviews and co-creation sessions with Senior Leaders and employee groups to discuss key findings.

Inclusive Employers used the following maturity model to help us to understand our current situation.



5.4 Their analysis of our current position is that we are between “compliant” and “programmatic”. Whilst we might find this a little disappointing given all of the work that has taken place to date, it does underscore our belief that RBC still has some way to go to really deliver on

this agenda. The maturity model and Inclusive Employers associated 'check list' has helped us to structure our Action Plan, enabling us to progress towards 'evolved' potentially as soon as by the end of 2026.

6. WHAT IS OUR AMBITION FOR I&D?

6.1 The work to understand the views and opinions of our workforce; the demographic analysis and the actions suggested by the Inclusion Maturity model have been crafted into both an Action Plan and Ambition Statement for I&D. The Plan has also been informed by the anti-racism definition in paragraph 1.7 (above) so that all groups are able to flourish and act as advocates for the Council. Thereby enabling our workforce to better reflect the community we serve.

6.2 In reflecting on the importance of everyone who works for RBC actively embracing I&D, the wording of our ambition (below) has been specifically crafted to show that shared ownership. Staff groups (staff ambassadors, Staff Disability Forum, LGBTQ+, Women's Health group), Trade Unions and many of those involved in the original Inclusive Employers discovery work have had the opportunity to comment on and contribute to this ambition statement:

Our ambition: An inclusive culture where we can all do our best work and can thrive.

To achieve this ambition we will:

- Implement the Action Plan outlined in the Strategy to move us from being judged 'programmatic' to 'embedded' in the Inclusive Employers Inclusion maturity model by the end of 2026 and report on progress regularly to staff.
- Identify relevant external memberships that will help us to keep track of best practice eg the Business Disability Forum /Inclusive Employers .
- Create a governance structure to oversee progress.
- Value inclusion and diversity to support staff wellbeing and create a positive and supportive culture where people feel able to be themselves.
- Develop the skills, knowledge and talent of our people so that they fulfil their full potential and uphold our inclusive culture.
- Prioritise the creation of both an anti racist statement for the Council and a disabled 'charter' in the first year of the Action Plan – reviewing the need for proactive measures to support people with other protected characteristics during the life of the Plan

The full draft Strategy document is attached at Appendix A.

7. Options

7.1 There is of course an option to do nothing but meet the minimum requirements of legislation. However, we are more ambitious than this and our staff have clearly told us that they wish RBC and themselves to be equally ambitious. Options exist to look at enhancing or de-scoping the proposals made or to look to extend the timeline for delivery.

8.0 Contribution to Strategic Aims

8.1 The inclusion and diversity agenda has evolved significantly over the last 30 years – it continues to evolve, and we need to be in a position to respond not only to changes in legislation but also to changing societal expectations and norms.

8.2 Our staff are responsible for delivering high quality services to residents and it is important that every member of staff feels able to deliver their best work – feeling included and valued is an important facet of this. This is our first Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan, it builds on previous successes and actions and aim to build strong and enduring foundations for the future and is therefore an important part of the ‘Our Foundations’ theme within the Corporate Plan. It also aims to ensure RBC better reflects the residents of the Borough and, although focussed internally, contributes to the Corporate Plan themes of ‘Thriving Communities’ and ‘Inclusive Economy’.

9.. Environmental and Climate Implications

There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this paper – it addresses internal issues to do with our workforce.

10.Community Engagement

This report focuses on inclusion and diversity in relation to our staff. There has been an extensive period of involvement with staff groups and the workforce more generally (through the Big Conversation on EDI). The feedback from these discussions is set out in the body of the paper and the Strategy and Action Plan directly respond to the comments made.

11.Equality Implications

The Strategy and Action Plan are directly related to our responsibilities as an employer. It proposes actions to improve our current position – with the aim of putting inclusion and diversity at the heart of not only our people management practices and policies but also more generally in how we work with each other e.g. through reflecting its themes and priorities in our Team Reading values. Through close monitoring of our performance in relation to all aspects of the Strategy we will track progress in relation to all ‘protected characteristics’ as well as wider measures of inclusion and diversity.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to the decision given that the aim of the Strategy is to address issues relating to the equality and inclusion of everyone who works for RBC.

12.Other Relevant Considerations

This report proposes actions that will impact on existing HR&OD policies and processes. As the Strategy is delivered, policies and processes will be systematically worked through and agreed with the trades unions prior to being considered by Policy/Personnel Committee as relevant.

13..Legal Implications

None – this proposal is to meet and to overachieve the requirements in legislation.

14.Financial Implications

The proposals in this report will be met from a combination of existing budget and Transformation reserve funding.

16.Timetable for Implementation

The Strategy and Action Plan covers the period of January 2024 to December 2026. The Corporate Management Team will regularly track progress and updates will be provided to the Personnel Committee every 6 months.

17.Background Papers

17.1 There are none.

Comparison of our current workforce against the most recent census (2021), including information about 'prefer not to say' / 'do not want to declare' statistics.

Analysis of our current workforce

Workforce composition @Sept 23

Workforce size: 1730			
Declaration rates:	Not know n:	Do not want to declare:	
Consider disabled	28.3%	0%	
Marital status	5.3%	2.4%	
Ethnicity	6%	0%	
Sexual orientation	28.2%	5.9%	
Religion	26.6%	6.3%	
Religion			
Agnostic	3.9%	Jewish	0.2%
Atheist	5.1%	Muslim	2.3%
Buddhist	0.3%	Sikh	0.9%
Christian	26.8%	None	23.6%
Hindu	1.2%	Not know n/DNWS	32.9%

Ethnicity	
Asian or Asian British	6.9%
Black or Black British	7.2%
Mixed	3.4%
Not known	6.0%
Other Ethnic groups	0.2%
White	76.4%
Total	100%

Gender	
Female	60.8%
Male	39.2%

Consider Disabled?	
YES	4%
NO	67.7%
Not know n	28.3%

Marital Status	
Civil Partnership	0.8%
Married	43.2%
Partner	12.5%
Single	35.8%
Not know n/DNWS	7.7%

Age	
0-21	1.5%
22-30	11.6%
31-40	22.1%
41-50	25.5%
51-55	12.6%
55-65	24%
66+	2.6%

Sexual Orientation	
Bisexual	1.2%
Gay man	1.6%
Gay Woman/lesbian	0.9%
Heterosexual/ straight	61.3%
Other	0.9%
Not know n/DNWS	34.1%



Staff input to the Draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

On the 13 June 2023 the Chief Executive launched a Big Conversation to generate a council wide discussion about equality, diversity and inclusion and engage staff in the development of the Council's EDI Strategy.

The Big Conversation on EDI focussed on three questions:

- What do you think our EDI priorities should be?
- How do you want the Council to feel going forwards?
- How do you want your voice to be heard?

The conversation involved structured discussions through a wide range of channels, including direct email, team discussions, vlogs and online survey forms.

The Big Conversation formally concluded on 28 July and the feedback from various channels has been collated with the headline results outlined in this report. A breakdown of the comments / suggestions by directorate has been shared as appropriate.

Involvement:

Involvement included individual forms and comments, team sessions, comments in posting boxes, workshops (including with the trades unions, staff groups, at Team Talk and an all-staff event in DACHS) as well as responses to the VLOGs and comments made directly to the HR&OD team. It is difficult to establish the total number of respondents as it's not clear how many people were involved in all of the various team events – however in total to date there have been just under 100 separate summaries logged – these range from individual comments to team responses for very large teams e.g. DACHS as a whole.

Key Outcomes:

A thematic analysis was carried out on all of the responses received – this analysis looked at all comments and suggestions received in respect of the three questions that were posed for this Big Conversation, grouping wherever possible. The key EDI themes are consistent across the Directorates, where there are specific issues raised, they mostly relate to frontline services (see paragraph below).

The priorities identified were:

Training and Development:

Raising awareness of EDI, developing high quality training and bringing in external speakers to enhance the training offer were widely discussed. There is a feeling that the current training could be improved by being broader in scope and using more external speakers to enhance the offer. Unconscious bias training was suggested by many, with class bias and the 'minority stress model' also suggested. The Senior Leadership Group has already undergone some training in EDI including the issue of 'Allyship'. Further training will be developed and roll out across the Council.

“ education for all in a supportive way to understand their responsibilities and what is acceptable and what is not”

“Increasing training on EDI issues for all staff - Mandatory once a year possibly or even having speakers in person or on teams would be better”

“Enhance the training that's open to staff in those roles informed by people with lived experience”

Neurodiversity and hidden disabilities:

Feedback indicates that staff want the council to take a broad view of EDI with more consideration of part time workers, consideration for neuro diversity, reasonable adjustments for mental health and a better understanding of hidden disabilities.

“focus on neurodiversity and staff welfare”

“Instead of just focussing on race, ethnicity or sexuality, more focus should be placed on other needs such as neurodiversity, menopause, hidden disabilities, part time workers etc”.

“Focus on hidden disabilities”

“Staff with disabilities, neurodivergence, mental health issues etc. This also includes those with undiagnosed or undisclosed neurodivergence because that process can take several years and many don't want to disclose their condition”

“Consider how to become more enabling and inclusive to those staff/customers who may have disabilities that are not obvious (neurodiverse, visual, mental health etc.).”

Representation:

There is some concern that our staff and our managerial layers do not reflect the diversity of our community.

“Gathering data on EDI-Where are we now? Where do we want to be and then logical priorities justified based on this information”

“diversity at senior level”

“be more diverse. the senior management team is not diverse”

“More diverse workforce to represent the population of Reading & provide better services”

“Getting a more representative workforce with regard to ethnicity should be the priority, at every level. It feels like we have a long way to go at this when looking at members, senior management and frontline staff”.

“more inclusive and the management team reflective of the council”

Consistent policies and procedures supporting EDI:

Comments indicate a requirement to have policies and procedures consistent with our aims and values and also to ensure they are consistently applied across the council.

“Policies that support managers and teams to prioritise equality, diversity and inclusion whilst also keep the customer at the heart of our service delivery”.

“Ensuring our policies on bullying and harassment are up to date with current legislation and current social climate”

“Policies to support staff need to be consistent across all teams and directorates rather than at managers' discretion (i.e. do all directorates have the same policy around flexible working?)”

“It would be useful if there was also consistency in culture / values - individual managers can have very different styles which can create different cultures between teams, with varying levels of support and inclusion”

Psychological safety:

Staff expressed a desire to work in a place that feels safe, safe to challenge, and speak out in a culture of safety.

“creating a safe culture, no reprisals”

“safe to challenge”

“be open to feedback and criticism”

Ability for people to use their voice without fear or repercussion”

*“openness to hear feedback and take action”
“Allow a variety of opinion”*

Getting the balance right:

The Big Conversation highlights strong support across the organisation to improve and enhance equality, diversity and inclusion but also to ensure that all viewpoints are taken into account. There is a sense that some staff are concerned that this agenda may be overstated to the detriment of a focus on service delivery. We need to get the balance right. There are a number of staff who feel that true equality and inclusion isn't gained by focussing on differences but on commonalities, that on occasion some agendas are promoted to the detriment of others and that sometimes actions are tokenistic and do not reflect the real issues.

“We are all born equal and die equal. Why do we need to make a song and dance about these issues. Highlighting them attracts the negativity that we see daily across the media.”

“Focus less on grand demonstrations and more on the attitudes of staff, managers and office/site chat. Not highlighting difference”

“In terms of diversity I feel the council is looking at it wrong and we should be more business orientated, diversity should not be about race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, age etc it should be about having a mix of people that are ideas people, starters, finishers, doers etc as that is how a team becomes more productive and reaches higher goals”.

“too much focus on what makes people different could be destructive to a sense of unity. The priority should be ensuring that EDI is celebrated while keeping the focus on unity, not division.”

“By championing diversity we have to be careful that we don't highlight differences and in fact cause division and increased marginalisation”.

“ Treat people as people, don't over complicate it.”

Recruitment and career development:

Recruitment, retention and career development were highlighted as areas to be prioritised within the EDI strategy. Recruiting fairly through inclusive practices, keeping good staff, developing in house, paying fairly, addressing the perception of nepotism and addressing pay differentials were all considered to be key to enhancing inclusion and fairness. A high staff churn (especially of managers) is costly and adversely affects staff wellbeing.

Offer a better package to attract skills and professionals to the council / staff incentives for recruiting

“recruitment practices that mirror what is actually done in the job - ie don't make people do presentations if they are not required in the role”

“Recruitment process – the information provided to recruiting managers enables conscious and unconscious bias”

“Keeping good staff”.

“A major issue of inclusion was pay, collectively it's disheartening when you see jobs being advertised for more than being paid, when it's the same or even less”.

“To make sure you are giving correct support to those who work in HR where hiring is concerned”

“Those in more traditionally female oriented roles at RBC are in general not on a level par with male dominated jobs of a similar skill set”.

Senior leadership excellence:

Comments were made about the importance of leaders being visible, particularly to those in frontline positions. Some teams also discussed the importance of senior managers role modelling excellence, values and the required behaviours.

“Senior Leaders to truly believe in creating a diverse and inclusive organisation and model their behaviour accordingly to help change the culture and lead by example”

“Leaders should lead by good example and be visible and approachable”

“Senior Management should be seen to be present in the teams they manage more frequently - so that staff feel they have the ability for their voice to be heard at a more senior level”

“Senior managers to get out and about and talk to people face to face on the front line - rather than rely on managers providing feedback”

“senior managers to role model excellence”

“More contact between senior managers and teams”

Front Line staff:

People working in front line roles had a slightly more specific ‘take’ on what they would value:

- more senior leader visibility.
- more tailored recruitment solutions.
- less ‘Civic’ focussed thinking.
- more staff recognition and
- acknowledgement that staff can face discriminatory practices from the public.

How do people want the future Council to feel?

There was a lot of commonality around how staff want the future council to feel, the table below highlights the words most used to describe the future council staff want:

Colourful	customer-focussed	non-judgmental
diverse (culture, ideas, politics)	friendly	open-to-criticism
inclusive	happy	representative
transparent	healthier	respectful
accepting	joined-up	safe
confident	liberating	secure
honest and open	listening	smarter
approachable	modern	unified
colourful	non- pressured	wealthier
compassionate	non-hierarchical	welcoming
connected	can be ourselves	properly resourced
not woke	appreciative	forward -thinking

How people want to be heard?

There is a strong sentiment that some staff do not feel able to make their voice heard for fear of negative consequences. There is a feeling that surveys and polls need to be anonymous to enable people to feel safe participating. Comments have been made that as well as not completing filtering questions some do not complete them honestly to ensure anonymity. This could be problematic if filtering data is to be used in any way other than as a general pulse of the organisation.

There is support for staff groups and networks as opportunities for people to meet and share ideas but with caveats that this needs to be managed carefully to create unity not division and represent staff views not just marginal views. There is also support for staff representatives and people outside the line management chain who could be ‘listeners’, supporting staff.

Staff appreciate being asked their opinion but feel strongly that the council needs to listen to what they say, reflect back and keep people informed of what is happening as a result of the ‘staff voice’.

It was felt important that mechanisms for listening to staff that are already in place such as appraisals and 1-1s are managed to ensure they happen regularly and that follow up actions take place.

The Big Conversation as an engagement tool:

The process has been well received especially the opportunities to talk and discuss a subject rather than just completing forms and surveys.

"This is a good start".

"Initially the team thought the idea of including this in the team meeting was 'tick boxy' and maybe would take 5-10 mins. We spent 90 minutes (and could have taken longer) discussing our thoughts and feelings - it was a really helpful 'kick-off' conversation.

Thanks for the toolkit - it was helpful as a guide and to inform the structure of our discussion."

"I do not feel unheard. This helps".

"I just wanted to say thank you for creating this opportunity for staff to share their ideas on how RBC can be a better place for everyone".



Reading Borough Council

Draft Inclusion and Diversity Strategy January 2024- December 2026

Our ambition: An inclusive culture where we can all do our best work and can thrive.

To achieve this ambition we will:

- Create a structured I & D Action Plan that moves us from being judged 'programmatic' to 'embedded' in the Inclusive Employers Inclusion maturity model by the end of 2026 and report on progress regularly to staff.
- Identify relevant external memberships that will help us to keep track of best practice e.g., the Business Disability Forum /Inclusive Employers
- Create a governance structure to oversee progress.
- Value inclusion and diversity to support staff wellbeing and create a positive and supportive culture where people feel able to be themselves.
- Develop the skills, knowledge and talent of our people so that they fulfil their full potential and uphold our inclusive culture.
- Prioritise the creation of both an anti-racist statement for the Council and a disabled 'charter' in the first year of the plan – reviewing the need for proactive measures to support people with other protected characteristics during the life of the plan.

We will focus on the following areas over the next three years:

To support our ambitions, we will...

Review and develop our ambition statement through consideration of the unique lived experiences of different sectors of society:

- As a first step we will think carefully about what it means for RBC to be an antiracist organisation. Taking input from staff, stakeholders and members and from external best practice we will develop a clear and ambitious plan to deliver it.
- We will develop a similar approach to disability in its widest sense (including neuro-diversity and mental health), developing strategies to better support this significantly under-represented group in our workforce.
- During the life of the Action Plan we will regularly review progress in relation to all protected characteristics, developing enabling ambition statements as required.

Develop our approach to Inclusive Recruitment:

- Promote diversifying shortlisting and interviewing.

- Create standardised I&D questions to weave into the recruitment process across all jobs (in interview and/or application)
- Promote flexible working options at advert and appointment.
- Ensure external agencies understand our I&D ambitions e.g., when sourcing candidates
- Review our approach to interviews and assessment centres e.g., to enable neuro diverse applicants to perform at their best.
- Use work experience and apprenticeships to support our ambition.

We will improve on our Disability Confident offering:

- Upskill internal HR/Recruitment Team to promote and encourage Inclusive recruitment practices.
- With members of the Staff Disability Forum ensure we focus on the internal experiences of disabled colleagues making sure they have resources and support to succeed in their role
- Provide support to candidates who say they are disabled.
- We will diversify where we promote our available jobs to reach all communities locally.

We will develop a programme of support for all staff seeking career progression.

- Review feedback from the big Conversation and other sources, and engage with focus groups to understand better what current support is of value and what needs to be developed.
- Review our current Leadership Development programme pilot with this feedback in mind.
- Develop further variety in the ways the Council supports career progression including developing success plans.

To understand if the above actions are working, we will:

- Continue to monitor representation across the whole workforce across numerous identities to identify any inconsistencies/ areas for focus.
- Continue to monitor feedback from candidates about the application and interview processes – identifying ways in which we can improve.
- Monitor turnover across the whole workforce and particular identities (including disabled) to identify any specific areas of concern.
- Staff survey scores from disabled colleagues to ‘match’ those of non-disabled colleagues

We want Inclusion and diversity to be at the forefront of all our colleagues minds from the work they deliver, management, and team interactions

To support our ambitions, we will...

Launch this Strategy and Action Plan across the workforce so everyone understands the importance and the part they play.

- We'll run a staff sessions to explain the Strategy, Action Plan, and language/terminology used.
- To bring all Inclusion & Diversity work together, we'll make an I&D brand to bring unity to the work delivered over the next 2 years and beyond
- We'll update colleagues quarterly on progress.

Develop a robust structure and support for current and upcoming staff networks to build community, trust and diversify feedback

- Set our networks up for success by giving them terms of reference, network running guidance (including on membership and meeting structures) and develop a clear communications pathway from networks to the CEO so that concerns and comments can be raised.
- Consider introducing 'protected time' for involvement in staff networks and groups.

People Managers will undergo a series of continuous learning

- Senior leadership to take part in a series of training e.g., Inclusive Leadership to understand a variety of identities to role model inclusive decision making
- Roll out allyship training.
- A reverse mentoring programme will be launched to support understanding and unity across all colleagues (starting with protected characteristics)

To understand if our actions above are working, we will:

- Expect a 5% increase (minimum), currently 77%, in colleagues agreeing "The Council is an inclusive organisation where everyone is respected and valued" on the next engagement survey about the importance of I&D by the end of 2025.
- Deliver a 50% increase in number of colleagues who are part of a staff network by year 2
- By the 2025 staff survey we will expect a 5% (minimum) , currently 57% , increase in colleagues trusting senior leadership (question: "Leadership by the Senior Leaders is positive and supportive)

We want all colleagues to have an inclusive and fair experience whilst at work which helps them thrive.

To support our ambitions, we will...

Review all the Council's HR policies to support and include a broad spectrum of identities and experiences to build a healthy workplace

- We will revise all policies with the wider lens of Inclusion and intersectionality beyond protected characteristics (including socio and economic status)
- We'll introduce gender neutral language throughout all policies
- We will work with our networks to make sure a wide range of voices review policies.
- We'll communicate all edited and existing policies so all council employees can access them and identify 'easy read' options

Review the Team Reading values to identify where we need to reflect I&D

- Our current values and supporting descriptions will be reviewed and adapted to ensure a clear statement on inclusion and diversity is included to reflect the importance of everyone's role in achieving our ambition "we want an inclusive culture where we can do our best work and can thrive".

Run an organisational-wide data review across the employee lifecycle to gather data to help us make inclusive and informed decisions.

- We will update all data questions to encompass all identities and backgrounds to help us make better decisions for our people. We will do this by collecting consistent data from job application, on boarding, engagement surveys and exit interviews)
- We will launch a data collection exercise across the Council to improve our understanding of our people.

Set line managers up for success to best support their colleagues.

- Upskill line managers to have meaningful conversations on areas of inclusion and diversity to help them understand the needs of their colleagues. This will enable them to discuss and support team members with reasonable adjustments and/or creating the conditions for them to thrive and do their best work in line with our Inclusion and Diversity ambitions.

To understand if the above actions are working, we will:

- Deliver a 10% decrease in 'prefer not to say' /not stated across all identities for new joiners and existing staff by the end of 2025
- Ensure all core HR policies – including the I&D strategy - are produced in 'easy read' format
- Team Reading values are updated and integrated into the start of the 24/25 performance annual appraisal year.

We want to celebrate diversity in our workforce and empower our colleagues to speak up when they see or experience exclusion.

To support our ambitions, we will...

Design an annual plan of Diversity dates and identities to celebrate through communications, events and training:

- Working with our staff groups we will focus on key diversity dates throughout the year to celebrate and raise awareness, making sure they diversify across a variety of identities (sexuality, disability, faith and more)

We will run a cohesive Allyship Training Programme to encourage unity, connection, and solidarity across all identities – so we can all make a positive culture.

- This training programme will encourage and empower colleagues to be active allies.
- It will explore topics of inclusion, diversity and being an active ally.

To understand if our actions are working, we will:

- Expect that 20% (345 as at 30/9/23 headcount) of colleagues engage with I&D training/ comms and engagement events and comms by end of year 1
- All line managers undergo the allyship training programme by the end of years 1, 2, 3

Delivering the Strategy

To implement this Strategy and to ensure its delivery, strong governance will be essential. The following governance and support arrangements will be established:

- A short-term steering group -will be set up to have oversight of the strategy and delivery plan– led by the Chief Executive
- Each Directorate will be supported to consider their own action-planning based on the strategy – including via the next service planning round-
- Progress-will be monitored and reported through Team Reading Delivery Team & Board and Corporate Management Team and to Personnel Committee
- A communications and engagement plan will be developed to accompany the strategy and for this to be updated at review points.

CONCLUSION

I&D is not only a 'good thing' in which to invest, but also an organisational imperative. This Strategy and Action Plan provide RBC with a blueprint for how to become more inclusive and diverse and over a concentrated timespan of two years. We will review the Strategy in late 2025. There will always be more that we can do.

Appendices: Action Plan

Year 1

Launch the Strategy and Action Plan

- Run all-staff sessions (virtual and in-person) to explain the Strategy and Action Plan and the language/terminology used.
- Develop a brand (image/logo/slogan) as part of the strategy and Action Plan that can be utilised for all future inclusion work.
- Develop targets/measures alongside the Strategy (examples, recruitment, retainment, satisfaction, leadership (identities), data collection, pay gaps)
- Upskill HR&OD to feel articulate and confident with language, identities, Public Sector Equality Duty Act, and terminology. Include Networks quarterly or where relevant (i.e., policy review)

Review and develop our ambition statement through consideration of the unique lived experiences of different sectors of society:

- As a first step we will think carefully about what it means for RBC to be an antiracist organisation. Taking input from staff, stakeholders and members and from external best practice we will develop a clear, and ambitions and plan to deliver it.
- We will develop a similar approach to disability in its widest sense (including neuro-diversity and mental health), developing strategies to better support this significantly under-represented group in our workforce.
- During the life of the Action Plan we will regularly review progress in relation to all protected characteristics, developing enabling ambition statements as required

E-Learning

- Launch the new I&D e-learning on neurodiversity and inclusion, disability and inclusion, unconscious bias and anti racism (align to existing EDI e-learning packages)

Review Team Reading values.

- Ensure I&D is reflected appropriately in our Team Reading values, aligning this to our performance appraisal processes

Staff Networks

Develop and launch networks to create a community of support. Establish:

- Terms of reference
- Guidance about how staff networks should operate, governance and reporting mechanisms including how to raise concerns and comments.
- Training for all Network Chairs
- Guidance for managers in terms of how network Chairs contributions should be recognised within appraisals and staff attendance supported.
- Introduce active listening sessions for senior managers to inform development of both the Action Plan and HR policies and procedures.

Inclusive Leadership training

- Develop and deliver Inclusive leadership training for Senior Leadership Team (CMT and CEO, Directors, and Assistant Directors). Content to cover I&D 'basics' so everyone has the same foundations; specific topics where leaders feel they have weaknesses in their knowledge.
- Review feedback from the big Conversation and other sources, and engage with focus groups to understand better what current support is of value and what needs to be developed.
- Review our current Leadership Development programme with this feedback in mind.

Support progression:

- Develop tailored progression workshops and support to enable mobility including to senior leadership roles

Allyship Training

- Build I&D into management training so that line managers are able to have meaningful conversations on areas of inclusion and diversity
- Run a programme of training that introduces allyship, discusses intersectionality and highlights identities/ communities that need ally support. Content to encourage and empower colleagues to be active allies and to explore topics of inclusion, diversity and being an active ally

Recruitment

- Target improved representation across whole workforce including leadership and management
- Identify any further positive action to reduce ethnicity and gender pay gaps.
- Upskill colleagues who recruit on topics covering bias in recruitment, relevant laws, reasonable adjustments, and positive action.
- Design an Inclusive Recruitment Guide to promote diversifying shortlisting and interviewing panels; create standardised I&D questions to weave into the recruitment process; promote flexible working options at advert and appointment

Disability Confident

- Upskill hiring managers to ensure they foster a recruitment process to welcome disabled candidates from the job advert to the interview.
- Upskill managers on Reasonable Adjustments and Access to work to encourage and support disabled colleagues including Neurodiversity (external and internal)

Policy review

- Revise policies with the broad lens of Inclusion and intersectionality and consider opportunities to move beyond protected characteristics (eg socio and economic status)
- Where appropriate introduce gender neutral language throughout all (especially menopause, parental/adoption)
- Utilise staff networks as a critical friend.

- Develop 'easy to read' versions of key policies covering key information and contacts for further inquiry

Year 2

Celebrate and embrace difference:

- Roll-out a programme that celebrates difference – linking to the diversity calendar The Diversity and Inclusion Calendar 2023 | Inclusive Employers - diversity events/days to bring people together and help increase cultural understanding and create social inclusion
- Introduce a series of 'lunch & learns' to help demystify myths and common misconceptions and increase understanding on lived experiences.
- Utilise existing networks to support this.

Data review

- Ensure all sources of identity data (and all questions/answers) are inclusive and consistent including:
- Applying for roles, onboarding, exit interview, engagement survey, retention, sickness etc (or make your data system can be used across all stages)
- Regularly review this data and build in additional actions to this plan as required.
- Share data and insights with staff groups.
- We will launch a data collection exercise across the Council to improve our understanding of our people

Support progression:

Continue to deliver tailored progression workshops and support to enable mobility including to senior leadership roles

Allyship Training

- Continue programme of training that introduces allyship, discusses intersectionality and highlights identities/ communities that need ally support. Content to encourage and empower colleagues to be active allies and to explore topics of inclusion, diversity and being an active ally.

Policy review

- Continue review of policies with the broad lens of Inclusion and intersectionality and consider opportunities to move beyond protected characteristics (e.g. socio and economic status)
- Where appropriate introduce gender neutral language throughout all (especially menopause, parental/adoption)
- Utilise staff networks as a critical friend.
- Develop 'easy to read' versions of key policies covering key information and contacts for further inquiry

Year 3

Develop and Roll out a series of I&D workshops e.g.

- Understanding Neurodiversity and hidden disabilities
- How to have an Active Bystander
- Using inclusive language
-

Support progression:

Continue to deliver tailored progression workshops and support to enable mobility including to senior leadership roles

Launch a reverse mentoring programme

- Pilot a reverse mentoring scheme with SLG volunteers with a view to extending once successful.

Allyship Training

- Continue programme of training that introduces allyship, discusses intersectionality and highlights identities/ communities that need ally support. Content to encourage and empower colleagues to be active allies and to explore topics of inclusion, diversity and being an active ally

Policy review

- Continue review of policies with the broad lens of Inclusion and intersectionality and consider opportunities to move beyond protected characteristics (eg socio and economic status)
- Where appropriate introduce gender neutral language throughout all (especially menopause, parental/adoption)
- Utilise staff networks as a critical friend
- Develop 'easy to read' versions of key policies covering key information and contacts for further inquiry

Review:

- progress made on IE maturity model and identify next steps based on Year 1 & 2 actions
- Progress made towards delivering our ambition – both for inclusivity and in relation to different protected characteristics