

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Workforce Strategy 2023 to 2025



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Introduction

Welcome to Essex County Council's (ECC) workforce Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023 – 2025. At ECC we want everyone to embrace their diversity and truly bring their authentic self to the workplace. We want all employees to feel valued, accepted and supported to succeed at work and reach their full potential.

The diversity of our people is intrinsic to both our Organisational Strategy and People Plan which has 'Our Strength Lies in Our Diversity' as a critical strategic theme and believe it is important to work towards a workforce that is reflective of our diverse communities and citizens of Essex.

We also want to create an inclusive culture where everyone has the chance to thrive by being themselves. A workforce that behaves and practices inclusive behaviour is a productive one and by having a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture, we will have a greater diversity of thought across the organisation, leading to more innovation and empathy with our service users. In developing our EDI Strategy, we have engaged with employees across the organisation as we recognise that working in collaboration with all areas of the council with a common focus on promoting a culture of inclusion is key to its success.



Gavin Jones, Chief Executive

Our strategy also draws on best practice from across sectors, research papers and insight from EDI thought leaders, alongside recommendations from CIPD and the Local Government Association

ECC has a large workforce with people from different backgrounds, experience, identities and needs. Therefore, our EDI strategy and subsequent action plans will help identify and address issues and challenges to create a culture which embraces and values inclusion and also supports the development of effective interventions and outcomes.

Since 2020 we have faced many new and unprecedented challenges with the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living pressures highlighting the inequalities experienced in some of our communities. We have had to take a deeper and more focused look at how we might work differently



Pam Parkes, Executive Director for People and Transformation

and how we can strengthen what we do to meet the future needs of our residents. We responded by seeking to understand how our employees felt in the workplace and commissioned an independent review, where both qualitative and quantitative evidence was gathered to inform us and give a holistic and honest view of ED & b I across our functions, highlighting where we are doing well and areas for improvement. Following the review, our Corporate Leadership Team and Cabinet agreed a set of 10 recommendations that we would take forward as a council and which forms the basis of our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.

For the benefits of diversity and inclusion to be felt we want an environment where differences of thought and outlook are not only respected but are expected and valued. We already have some EDI initiatives underway. In 2019, the Local

Government Equality Framework peer review rated us as Excellent, highlighting our partnership working. Our Questors programme is an example where we created an environment for staff to feel safe to talk. Our Staff Networks have grown both in the number of networks and their wider reach into the organisation, including regular listening forums with our Corporate Leadership Team. In 2022, we invested in Anti-racist Practice Leads for both our Childrens' and Adult Services functions. Through engagement with all levels of the function, they have introduced programmes such as reciprocal mentoring and carried out policy reviews of our internal functions.

At Essex County Council, we are committed to making Equality, Diversity and Inclusion a part of our core values for our employees and citizens. In 2022, we agreed our EDI policy statement and our EDI standards and this strategy will further support our ambitions.

Although we are in challenging times, it is important to recognise that diversity and inclusion can help us meet these challenges confidently and that our comprehensive approach will deliver measurable improvements to the experience of employees and residents over the next three years, contributing to our success as a local authority.



What is Equality, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?

Equality means equal rights and opportunities are afforded to all. The 2010 Equality Act in the UK protects those with protected characteristics from direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace.

Diversity refers to demographic differences of a group – often at team or organisational level. Often, diversity references protected characteristics in UK law: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Equity recognises that treating everyone equally has shortcomings, when the playing field is not level. An equity approach emphasises that everyone should not be treated the same, but according to their own needs.

Inclusion is often defined as the extent to which everyone at work, regardless of their background, identity or circumstance, feels valued, accepted and supported to succeed at work. **Inclusive services means working with individuals in the design and delivery of a service that meets our legal requirements and being a provider of services that are inclusive.**



Why have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy?

“Promoting and supporting diversity in the workplace is an important aspect of good people management - it’s about valuing everyone in the organisation as an individual. However, to reap the benefits of a diverse workforce it’s vital to have an inclusive environment where everyone feels able to participate and achieve their potential. While UK legislation – covering age, disability, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation among others – sets minimum standards, an effective inclusion and diversity strategy goes beyond legal compliance and seeks to add value to an organisation, contributing to employee wellbeing and engagement.”

CIPD, Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace, 2022



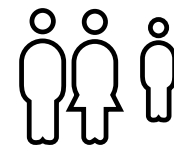
67% of millennial and generation z employees value diversity when considering employment opportunities

Cognitive diversity drives innovation by up to 20%



Racially diverse teams report a 35% increase in performance compared to their competitors

The CIPD UK Working Lives survey found that 22% of employees felt members of their team would reject others for being different





Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion journey

Equality Duty

We celebrate difference and work to ensure that no one is disadvantaged when accessing services, employment or public life in Essex. We continue to make progress towards ensuring that our workforce is more widely representative of the communities we serve. The 2022 census data has highlighted an increase in the diversity of our population. Further information can be found on our [Census 2021 - Ethnicity, Language, and Religion | Essex Open Data](#)

The [Equality Act 2010](#) sets out our duty. As part of our Public Sector Equality Duty, we also publish an annual workforce diversity report [Equality and Diversity Report 2020-2021 \(ctfassets.net\)](#)

Independent review

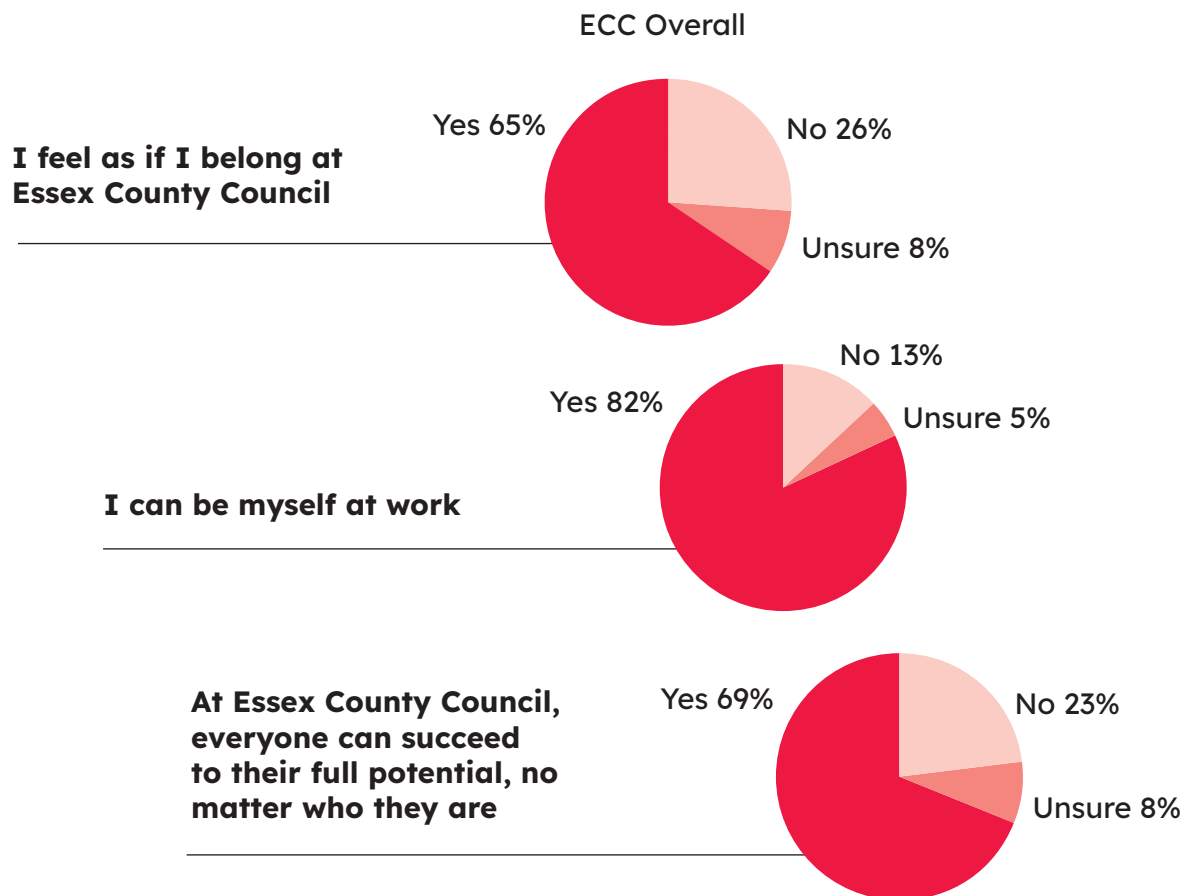
In 2020, ECC commissioned an independent review (by Involve) of our equality, diversity, and inclusion policies and practices. Involve rated us as Implementing, which is in the middle of their five point scale for diversity & inclusion. They found that while ECC was performing well in some areas, there was room for improvement and highlighted the below as immediate actions.

- ECC recruiting a dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion lead
- Targeted development programmes such as 'women in leadership' programme to bring about changing the gender split at the senior/executive level, mirroring the organisation as a whole
- Twice yearly conversation at executive level regarding the performance of our EDI Agenda
- That there will be local plans as part of our new people plan and embedded within our work on strategic workforce planning
- That our systems will be improved to capture richer data and that our employees will be encouraged to disclose diversity information so that we can support and plan more effectively.

Why Equality, Diversity and Inclusion matters at Essex County Council

In 2022, we carried out an organisational Your Voice survey and specifically asked how you feel ECC is doing to support staff to feel more included

Staff Survey Results



The overall results show a positive picture of how staff feel a sense of belonging and inclusion though feedback from some of our employees highlighted some areas for improvement;

“Better onboarding for new starters - setting behavioural expectations and fast-tracking embedding the sense of belonging.”

“Embed inclusivity into the culture of the Council to help the workforce to be more diverse, self-aware and knowledgeable and thus more able to meet the needs and challenges of the population it serves whilst giving staff valuable opportunities to learn and be their best.”

“Improve the accessibility for those who require it in the interview process.”

“Fair and equal treatment to all staff regardless of personal circumstances race, religion ethnicity and belief.”

“I have started to see changes taking place following Diversity & Inclusive Quest and I have been fortunate to be given a chance to take more responsibility as a Deputy Team Manager.”

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives

In May 2022, following the Involve review our Corporate Leadership Team agreed ten commitments for increasing diversity and inclusion in our workforce.

We are committed to being an employer that values difference and attracts, recruits and retains talented individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds. We will support and encourage our employees to be the best they can be at work and provide them with an employment deal that is fair and inclusive.



Equality Objective - workforce focused

- › Working towards making selection pools for senior roles more diverse in terms of gender, disability and ethnicity.
- › Actively promoting and encouraging people with disabilities to come forward and apply for roles at ECC.
- › Having inclusive recruitment training in place.
- › Reviewing our current level of learning and development offer around diversity and inclusion and its effectiveness – informed by employee networks and Diversity and Inclusion Lead.
- › Using the Ways of Working programme as a way of challenging how, when and where we work, opening up opportunities for more diverse talent.
- › Creating listening forums where senior leaders take part so that they can understand the experience of our workforce
- › Identifying specific roles where women or men are underrepresented compared to the population of Essex, and actively promote to, and encourage applications from, that group.
- › Developing a ‘women in leadership’ programme and moving the proportion of women in senior leadership
- › Ensuring that any talent programmes developed will include the ability to track participants and their career progression.
- › Consciously placing adverts and approaching agencies who reach and proactively support black and minority ethnic candidate communities, along with other underrepresented groups such as disabled candidates.

Moving from implementing to leading

Involve rated ECC as implementing. The below sets out areas for development to move to leading

The review highlighted that a key focus to moving into a leading organisation is a well-rounded approach to EDI, focusing beyond strands.

Leading organisations will have supportive leaders, robust data collection on intersectional approach and dedicated resources for EDI activity.



Areas highlighted for development

Increase in diversity in senior leadership

Formal training of interview panellists

Strategy and action planning approach to EDI

Tracking talent and leadership programmes

Data to support organisational approach

Delivery of policy to high standards

Our vision

The Essex County Council workforce is representative of the communities we serve. Enabling the right environment and behaviours so that individual and organisational equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded in everything we do.

Our areas of focus

In developing our strands, we consulted with key stakeholders including our staff networks and anti-racist practice leads, and reviewed recommendations including the Involve and Quest work and sought to review best practice approaches to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion from the Local Government Association that aligns with our vision and meets our Public Sector Equality Duties.

We will achieve our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion vision by focussing on three strategic strands:

- Improving Diversity
- Building an Inclusive Culture
- Ensuring Equality

Ensuring Equality

Updating policies and creating a framework which builds on best practice and allows a targeted approach to identified areas of focus

Improving Diversity

Using data and insight to inform our approach, measure progress and prompt interventions

Building an inclusive culture

Through training and development and by creating an open environment where colleagues are empowered and feel able to share their lived experiences

Strand 1: Improving Diversity

Using data and insight to inform our approach, measure progress and prompt interventions

We know that we can do better in terms of using the data we have to track progress, and we need to increase the self declaration rates amongst employees so that we can really understand the diversity of our workforce, what is and isn't working, and where we should focus our efforts.



What do we need to do?

Building employee confidence to disclose personal information and making systems and processes easier to ensure we have accurate and up to date employee information

Ensure we are treating all employees fairly

Have sufficient data to measure progress and to make sure what we are doing is having the expected and required impact

How will we achieve it?

Increase employee declarations on diversity

Expand pay gap reporting to include ethnicity and disability

Develop the capability to track progress of identified talent including the women in leadership programme and other targeted groups

Use insights from recruitment data to inform and improve our resourcing strategies and approaches

Auditing of our ECC buildings to make sure that we are Equality Act 2010 compliant, our buildings are accessible and reasonable adjustments are made

Ensuring Equality Impact Assessments are carried out in a timely way that uses workforce data to better inform decisions

Strand 2: Building an Inclusive Culture

Through training and development and by creating an open environment where colleagues are empowered and feel able to share their lived experience

We want employees to feel a sense of belonging in the organisation, where they can bring their authentic self to work. We want to continue to develop an organisational culture where difference is celebrated and used to design and deliver better services to our residents.

We want employees to be able to identify role models within the organisation and we encourage lived experiences and stories to be shared – if you can see it and you can feel it then you can be it.

What do we need to do?

- › Build manager capability so that employees feel supported and confident in bringing their whole selves to work
- › Improve the employee voice in developing a culture of inclusivity and belonging
- › Build trust that any reported instances of inequality, discrimination or lack of inclusion will be taken seriously

How will we achieve it?

- › Formal CQ and EQ training for leaders and managers
- › Better promotion of the employee networks through the employee lifecycle and provides an effective and supportive voice
- › Developing allyship programmes
- › Creating listening forums in each Function
- › Develop and display a visual diversity calendar to celebrate and recognise special days, events and festivals
- › Create Colleague Ambassadors
- › Ensure that expectations of all employees around diversity and inclusion are clear and reflected and embedded through our organisational behaviours
- › Ensure that all allegations of discriminatory behaviour are taken seriously, employees are supported and a zero tolerance approach to discriminatory behaviour is taken by 2023



Strand 3: Ensuring Equality

Updating policies and creating a framework which builds on best practice and allows a targeted approach to identified areas of focus

If we want to embed EDI then it has to be woven into everything we do so that we remove barriers and maximise opportunities. In order to improve the diversity of the organisation we have to start at the very beginning – making sure those from diverse backgrounds consider ECC as an employer of choice and opportunity.



What do we need to do?

Ensure our employment policies, practices, principles and culture support our EDI ambitions

Increase the proportion of women in senior roles and improve the diversity of officers at senior levels and grades across the organisation

Create diverse candidate fields in order to attract, develop and retain a diverse workforce

How will we achieve it?

Review how we work with Access to Work to improve accessibility and employee experience, making sure our communications and training material are accessible

Ensure the language we use in job adverts and role profiles are accessible and inclusive

Consciously place adverts where we will reach the greatest diversity of candidates

Implement inclusive recruitment training and ensure that every interview panel has at least one trained member by end of 2023

Require diverse candidate pools to be put forward by agencies where a need has been identified and ensure interviews are undertaken by diverse interview panels

Grow the reciprocal mentoring programme into sponsorship

Develop and deliver a 'Women in Leadership' programme

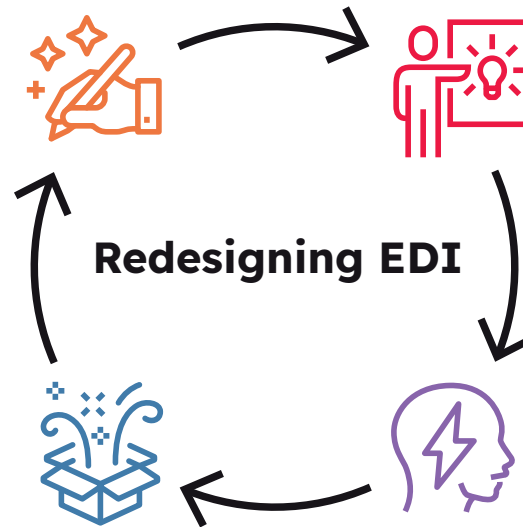
Identify underrepresented groups at ECC and actively promote roles and opportunities – with disability as a priority group

Our Approach - Making EDI a reality

To support delivery on our thematic areas its important that we co-create sustainable models for EDI improvement. The below sets out our methodology and approach.

Act and Create new ways of working, embedding new approaches into the practices and culture of ECC by engaging our people with change, supporting the pivotal role of managers and emphasising the role of leaders and their narratives.

Model and Test new ideas with our people, empowering them to own and drive change. Experiment to identify the ideas that are future-proofed, relevant, and fair – to deliver lasting impact.



Understand what matters to our staff – what’s happening, what’s working and what isn’t working across ECC. Understand the experience of our workforce across the employee lifecycle and what they want from work, the organisation, and leaders.

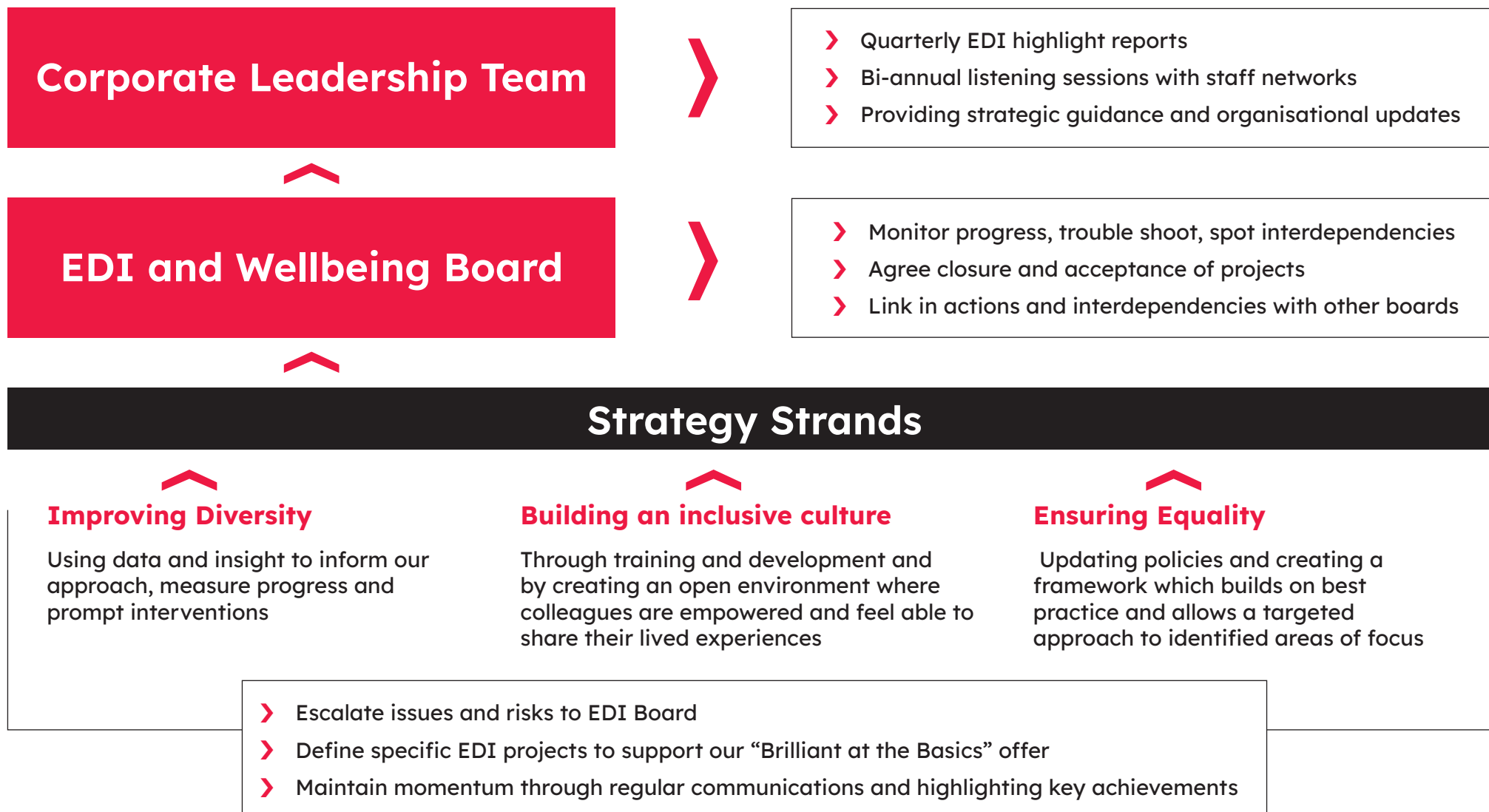
Reimagine the day-to-day experience of our workforce based on a foundation of rich understanding. Co-create new expectations, capabilities, and culture – sharing stories of those who are experimenting and succeeding with new approaches.

We will review each phase to understand progress against the delivery of our strategy aims. This strategic plan will be underpinned by business and service plans.

Our annual diversity workforce report that reports on our current diversity data will highlight progress, impact and alignment with wider organisation strategic aims as set out within the strategy.

Monitoring EDI progress 2023

Strategy and communications plan



EDI timeline

A detailed action plan will be co-produced and monitored through agreed governance structures

Year 1

Introduce and socialise strategy and approach, co-design working groups, develop and embed data capture and reporting structures, agree steps, further define prioritisation of actions

- Agree functional EDI action plans to support strategic themes
- Working groups initiated with business cases agreed to progress outcomes
- Continue communications on personal data, analyse feedback and target areas of low returns
- Review of our EDI online training offer, including prioritisation of accessible learning and further options developed on wider inclusive behaviours
- Diversity calendar agreed and published on the intranet
- EDI training for interviews in place
- Accessible building audits process identified and review of progress
- ATW options presented to functional leadership team
- EDI Leadership capability framework agreed including EQ & CQ training
- Annual reporting of strategy linked with the annual EDI workforce report
- An EDI hub on the intranet with signposting to relevant policies and educational material
- Colleague Ambassadors in place with agreed EDI support
- Inclusion of EDI section on our recruitment web pages
- Forward planning of Staff Network activity including intersectional events/programmes
- Tracking of participants of Women in Leadership Programme
- Agree prioritisation of policy
- Listening forums in each Function established and informing functional plans

Year 2

Monitor and embed DEI actions, develop further solutions to blockages, highlight successes.

- Expand pay gap reporting to include ethnicity and disability Allyship programmes in place
- Targeted communications campaign for increasing roles where we have underrepresentation
- Reverse mentoring pilot with options and recommendations for sponsorship programme
- Ensure that expectations of all employees around diversity and inclusion are clear and reflected and embedded through our organisational behaviours
- Ensure that all allegations of discriminatory behaviour are taken seriously, employees are supported and a zero tolerance approach to discriminatory behaviour is taken

Year 3

Review progress, capture emerging issues and close off completed actions

- Invite Involve for an external assessment on EDI progress
- Analyse suitability for external accreditations and awards for EDI
- Carry out a review of the strategic aims and make necessary adjustments

Appendix A – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standards and Commitment

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standards

1. As a public sector authority, we will robustly apply the principles of the Equality Act 2010 to: foster good relations, eliminate discrimination and provide equality of opportunity to all our employees.
2. We will equip all our staff with the necessary training to further our ambitions as an inclusive employer.
3. Recognise that we are a diverse county, and the diversity of our people is what makes Essex a great place to work and live.
4. Our EDI offer will be evidenced based, needs led, developed in collaboration with our workforce and we will robustly track our success and impact.
5. Our leaders and managers will champion Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and set the best examples for our people.
6. We will champion diversity for all our employees, and provide a fair and transparent system to our reporting and be open and honest at all times.

ECC's commitment to you

1. We will work to define and embed diverse and inclusive values and behaviours into our everyday working and culture of the organisation through effective policy implementation and learning.
2. We will treat people fairly and will act with integrity in understanding diverse views.
3. We will ensure that any initiatives are based on research evidence and identified needs within ECC. We will continually collaborate with employees, monitor and evaluate initiatives and strive for improvements.
4. We will support leaders and managers to develop strong relationships with their teams with a proactive approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion based on best practice.
5. We will robustly challenge behaviour that is non-inclusive and/or discriminatory and continue to strive to eliminate discrimination in all its guises.

Your commitment as a line manager

1. To be a champion for equality, diversity and inclusion and to provide you with the necessary tools for you learn and grow in the organisation. This includes taking time to read ECC Equality and diversity in employment policies and guidance.
2. To provide psychological safety where an individual can bring their authentic self in work and to provide a supportive environment that encourages employees to be proactive about celebrating their differences.
3. To take personal responsibility to educate and learn from staff members, staff networks and other recognised educational providers to further my understanding of inclusive behaviours and develop trusting working relationships with all members of staff.
4. To protect staff and proactively challenge non inclusive/discriminatory behaviour and know the council policies in how to report incidences.
5. To play your part in reaching our EDI aspirations and ambitions, applying the principles of the Equality Act 2010 and thinking beyond it in all areas of your working day.

Your commitment as an employee

1. To recognise the role your everyday behaviours, engagement and commitment plays in determining our diverse and inclusive culture
2. To be clear on our policies and practices which aim to support support equality, diversity and inclusion and how they impact you and engage with these in a positive and proactive way
3. To positively contribute to wider organisational strategies and plans related to diversity and inclusion and to engage with subject matter experts such as equality officers and staff networks to further my understanding
4. To help the council fulfil its legal duty under the Equality Act 2010, namely to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - advance equality between all people
 - foster good relations between communities, tackling prejudice and promoting understanding



This information is issued by:
Essex County Council
People and Transformation

Contact us:
faizal.hakim@essex.gov.uk
0345 743 0430

People and Transformation
Essex County Council
County Hall, Chelmsford
Essex, CM1 1QH



Essex_CC



facebook.com/essexcountycouncil

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formats, on request.

Published March 2023