



Race Equality, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI) Review London Borough of Havering

18th, 19th and 26th May

Feedback Report

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1. Executive Summary

London Borough of Havering (LBH) invited the LGA to undertake the Race Equality, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion (READI) Review.

The borough is in a good position for change. The Leader, Chief Executive and senior officers are committed to changing the reputation of the Borough and working towards being an anti-racist Borough. Senior officers recognise that there is significant work to be done to achieve this aim as demonstrated in the Council's self-assessment. The LGA review team have been asked to give recommendations to help the organisation progress towards this goal. This is an important start, as it is vital that both managerial and political leaders model the behaviours that are expected of themselves, other councillors and staff.

Councillors are aware that they have community leadership roles, but it appears that few understand their legal responsibilities with respect to equality. Middle managers also appear to be unaware of their responsibilities, or how to address particular issues that come up in their teams. This has led to a situation where people are reluctant to report racist incidents whilst others are reported anecdotally, but not then being dealt with effectively.

There are pockets of good practice across the council: a skilled and capable Communications Team, considerable knowledge about equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in both Adult and Children's Social Care, and examples of the council supporting community events, such as Romford Pride, an LGBTQ+ youth group. The fact that the council has invited peers in to conduct this review is also a positive indication of a council that is keen to reflect, be challenged and improve. However, this is not consistent across the organisation, and there are few mechanisms to share internal learning.

60% of the workforce live in the borough, and 20% of residents in the Borough are disabled or have a long-term illness or impairment. It would be reasonable to assume that the workforce has a significant proportion of disabled people, although there is a low level of disability declaration amongst the council workforce. A recent wellbeing survey highlighted disability inequality being overlooked.

The review team heard the terms "casual racism" and "casual sexism" frequently during the focus groups and meetings. These terms belittle the seriousness of racism and sexism and implies that the behaviour has been somewhat normalised. Racism and sexism are not acceptable, and are damaging not only to the individuals concerned, but to the culture and reputation of the organisation.

There are wider issues which affect how staff and communities experience EDI issues. The review team suggests developing a culture of learning, with a service-based approach and council-wide strategic medium- and long-term planning. This work needs to be clearly communicated internally and externally, with clear lines of responsibility, timeframes and demonstrable actions and tangible outcomes

Poor communication was at the heart of many of the problems that the review team encountered. However, the Communications Team was one of the council's strongest

assets, having a clear strategic oversight of the borough, and the council's role in supporting its residents.

The Council has identified evidence of discrimination, poor behaviours, and structural barriers, as well as highlighting a gap in specific data. The review team is clear that the council should not wait for more detailed data to become available but acknowledge the examples of people's lived experience that have been shared and address the organisational culture as quickly as possible.

London Borough of Havering feels like an organisation in transition to reset its EDI work going forward. It could use the post-Covid recovery as a way of improving its approach to service planning and strategic oversight, building equality, diversity and inclusion issues into this work to ensure that there are clear, well-publicised mechanisms to support its staff experiencing discrimination in any work situation (including while out in the community). This change in culture may take time to embed, but there are demonstrable actions that can be taken immediately to begin to address the issues.

2. Recommendations

The review team was asked to identify practical steps for the council to take to improve the current situation. The majority of the report is therefore about recommendations, grouped into Quick Wins, and Priority, Medium-term and Long-term actions. The 'priority' recommendations are set out below:

Priority actions

1. Clarify and communicate the next stage in the Council's EDI review work. We understand the internal READI review is to be followed up by an external review of race relations across the borough, but this is not clearly understood across the organisation.
2. Ensure councillors understand the implications of the changing demographics of the Borough, including member workshops or training sessions.
3. Share lived experiences with the leadership (senior officers and councillors) ensuring that this is done in a safe and supportive environment. These experiences will need to be acted upon
4. Use the self-assessment exercise as the first step in developing accessible service plans
5. Seek understanding from the staff forums as to how they see their role in the organisation and determine what the organisation wants from the staff forums.
6. Develop with the EDIC group a clear and immediate EDI action plan that is SMART with clear timelines (e.g., 12 months, 36 months, etc)
7. Establish a clear operational lead for EDI, with ownership and responsibility around delivery, ensuring that this appointment is well-known across the organisation. Ensure that the Member lead is also known and visible on this agenda.
8. Collect, analyse and publish workforce data on protected characteristics, including pay gap data

9. Work with the staff forums and communications teams to increase disclosure rates of race and disability in particular as well as across all protected characteristics
10. Improve understanding across the board of the complexity of the issues – EDI is not binary.
11. Run EDI training for staff and councillors, starting with Corporate Leadership Team and Commissioning and Procurement.
12. Political and managerial leaders to ensure that they are meeting their responsibilities as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty, for example to promote EDI through their actions, and role model appropriately
13. Behavioural expectations of staff, customers and councillors to be made explicit and reinforced with appropriate support and disciplinary mechanisms.
14. Review the effectiveness of the Personal Development Review (PDR) process across the organisation
15. Adopt a communications strategy emphasising a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of discrimination, covering behaviour of Members, officers and customers. Should this policy be breached, ensure that appropriate action is taken, including police involvement if necessary.

It is important to recognise that this report is not the end of the process. The LGA is keen to support LBH to develop its work in this area, and the reviewers are keen to stay in contact. However, the review team particularly recommend getting involved more in regional networks, so that LBH can make as much progress as possible quickly.

3. Summary of the READI review approach

The review team

The READI Review followed the LGA's Equality Peer Challenge approach. Reviewers (peers) were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the council. The team who delivered the READI review at London Borough of Havering (LBH) were:

- Councillor Kam Kaur, Warwickshire County Council
- Sam Johnson, Policy and Performance Manager, BCP Council
- Yvonne Okiyo, Equalities Manager, London Borough of Croydon
- Serena Simon, Programme Director, London Borough of Westminster
- Angela Kawa, Programme Manager, LGA
- Becca Singh, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

Scope and focus

The review team used the LGA's Equality Peer Challenge as its basic structure, which follows the themes of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). LBH

requested that Race Equality be an additional, specific focus. The themes for the READI Review were therefore:

1. Knowing and Understanding your Communities
2. Leadership and Organisational Commitment
3. Responsive Services and Customer Care
4. Diverse and Engaged Workforce
5. Race Equality

The READI review is not the mechanism to assess whether LBH is complying with its legal equality responsibilities. However, the team had serious concerns around how the council is interpreting the Public Sector Equality Duty, and how the council would be able to demonstrate that it is legally compliant if challenged.

The peer challenge and READI review process

Peer challenges and LGA reviews are improvement focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they heard and material they read.

Havering Council prepared for the READI review by conducting an in-depth self-assessment of its equality, diversity and inclusion challenges and needs. This involved 27 nominated leads, conducting 22 detailed service self-assessments, a detailed data analysis, including an in-depth EDI Staff Survey and a self-assessment report. This was modelled on the current LGA EFLG Assessment Framework, with an additional fifth strand on race equality and a series of Race Equality Workshops.

The review team prepared for the READI review by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days virtually onsite at LBH, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 150 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from around 25 meetings, research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 250 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending around seven weeks in LBH.

This report provides a summary of the review team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the team on 26th May 2021. In presenting feedback to the council, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the review is a snapshot in time, and the review team appreciates that some of the feedback set out in this report may be about things the council have already identified through its self-assessment and are already addressing and progressing. The review team has heard how some of the recommendations were acted on immediately after the review took place.

4. Feedback

Knowing and understanding communities

There is widespread understanding amongst officers about the changed and changing nature of LBH's demography, particularly across age, disability and race. The team heard repeated references to LBH as having one of the fastest changing demographics in the country. Although officers understand the changing demographics of the borough, they need to consider what action needs to be taken as a result. In particular, how to engage with younger people and disabled people.

When change happens, it is important for community leaders and politicians to demonstrate leadership on the inclusion of diverse communities. LBH is developing engagement options with the fire service. Partners are willing to work together – we spoke to Essex FRS, the Police, and NHS partners, as well as local voluntary and community sector organisations and London Fire Brigade.

LBH strengthened relations with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) during Covid, using the Hub strategy, local area co-ordinators and the involvement of communities. The review team encourage LBH to build on these positive relationships going forward.

The Community Cohesion and Engagement Forum appears to represent a diverse cross-section of communities and organisations, and those that the review team met spoke positively about engagement with LBH. The Forum focus group commented that the council is moving in the right direction to improve community cohesion. The group also requested regular cross-sector discussions, as this would likely improve community cohesion in the borough.

The Compact Forum and the Community Cohesion and Engagement Forum both welcomed more opportunities to engage with the council to help it improve. Improving the way LBH engages with the forums would help considerably: focussing on having more two-way conversations, rather than broadcasting information. For example, the review team heard that LBH does not always feedback the results and impact of consultations.

The Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) format includes both a health impact assessment and modern slavery, which is good practice. However, they are not consistently done or managed, and do not always consider all communities and groups. The perception from officers and community representatives is that they are seen as a tick-box exercise, rather than an integral part of planning.

The borough has good examples of supporting events which are good for community cohesion, for example the Commonwealth Day event, and support for Romford Pride.

Leadership and organisational commitment

LBH has an opportunity to lead the debate locally as a leader of place, perhaps through roadshows and cultural events in the communities. This has already started with the promotion of events such as 'Havering Changing'.

Senior officers at Senior Leadership Team (SLT) level have stated intentions on EDI, but the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) need clearer direction on their roles and responsibilities. Different levels of management need to take responsibility across the board, including EDI responsibilities relating to managing their staff. CLT will need their own service-level responsibility and commitment to help them ensure that they are managing services and staff appropriately. The team heard several examples of how not all managers are delivering their responsibilities around their duty of care to all staff and colleagues. This includes little acknowledgement that racism has occurred. Staff reported a “culture of no consequences” and inconsistencies in the use of Personal Development Reviews (PDRs), which could be a tool to address discriminatory behaviour.

There is a system for reporting incidents (for example racism), but little knowledge of or confidence in this system. There does not appear to be any informal process for reporting and recording incidents. The team recommend that LBH learn from other councils how they record, report and deal with similar incidents, and change their processes to include informal arrangements (for example, staff equality champions) as well as formal procedures.

Councillors do not appear to understand their role in relation to EDI, particularly with respect to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Several times the team heard politicians say, “we aren’t employees, so it doesn’t apply to us”. This is not the case. The PSED applies to the council, not to individuals, and all those representing the council need to comply with it as part of their work, either as a councillor, officer, or third party. This includes those who deliver services on behalf of the council or from whom they procure services i.e., consultants. The review team therefore recommend mandatory councillor training as soon as possible to ensure no councillor is inadvertently causing the council to not comply with the PSED.

The council has demonstrated the importance it puts on the EDI agenda by having a strategic officer with responsibility for EDI (this is part of the remit of the Chief Operating Officer), and strategic member responsibility within the Leader’s portfolio. However, not all staff or external stakeholders were aware who the strategic officer and Member lead are. In order to be fully transparent, there needs to be clearer public ownership of this agenda by members and officers.

There appears to be little strategic planning corporately which has a knock-on effect on EDI work. The review team asked to see several strategic documents to see how EDI was embedded in them. The review team would expect EDI considerations to be woven through documents such as the Workforce Strategy (this was under development), the Community Engagement Strategy, the Communications Strategy, the Transformation Strategy, Theme Plans and recruitment policies. However, these did not all exist, or were not widely known about, and where they did exist, there were few references to EDI.

Senior officers acknowledge that this work is at an embryonic stage. LBH could make the most of this position by learning from others, for example from the peers on the review team, and through the LGA, and other council networks.

Responsive Services and Customer Care

LBH has a clear commitment to deliver high quality services to residents. It can build on the relationships developed during the Covid-19 pandemic to achieve this, for example, the regeneration of leisure centres supporting people to be more active. Covid-19 response meetings were reported to be well-attended by partners including local voluntary and community sector organisations.

The council takes a Theme-based approach to strategic planning to encourage cross-department collaboration in service improvement. However, there are few written plans (none were available to the team), and limited strategic oversight or leadership of service planning across the council. Data on communities that does exist was not used to shape service delivery. There was little evidence that equality analysis, such as Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) were undertaken systematically, and even where there are good examples, such as the regeneration of the leisure centres, it is unclear how changes to provision were designed.

The PSED cannot be delegated, so it is important for LBH to be sure that any work that is commissioned or procured by a third party is compliant with its legal duties. The team heard that social value and EDI were not included in commissioning or procurement contracts. This lays LBH open to potential legal challenges about its legal obligations.

All councils are concerned with rebuilding their local economy post-Covid-19. LBH needs to be clear how its many diverse small businesses are being supported during the potentially challenging months ahead as the economy recovers from the multitude of lockdown measures.

Diverse and engaged workforce

There is an acknowledgement by senior officers and the Leader that there are issues to address internally, and a commitment to address them. These include potentially racist, sexist and homophobic incidents that have been discussed anecdotally, and lack of clarity on policies and processes. Appointing a consultant to start the process and advise on the next steps, commissioning the Wellbeing and Inclusion survey (which had a response rate of 38% and holding this READI review are all examples of delivering on that commitment.

Staff networks were established in early 2020, but it would be helpful to have more clarity around their purpose, identity and role. The Staff Networks would benefit from clear and bespoke Terms of Reference as their structures are opaque, although they do not all need to be run in the same way. The review team recommend providing clarity around how they fit into the governance and advisory processes. This would help to ensure their concerns are taken on board or addressed. The council needs to consider the value of the networks, and how they can be a positive force to assist the organisation to improve. It would also be useful to clarify the roles of the EDIC group and the Community Cohesion and Engagement Forum.

In focus groups for this review, the review team heard widespread negative views of LBH as an employer for equality. There are few support mechanisms for sharing lived experiences, and a lack of support for staff experiencing racist, sexist and homophobic

abuse from other staff or from customers. Examples were shared with us where an assault or abuse had taken place, but the police were not called, and customers were not challenged appropriately. Partly because of this type of inaction, there are a lot of demoralised Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff at LBH.

Disclosure rates for disability are reported to be very low. As a result, there is a risk of not addressing inequality for disabled people or making reasonable adjustments. There is reported to be a general lack of understanding of LBH's responsibilities around reasonable adjustments, at both the recruitment stage and in terms of the long-term management of disabled staff. The review team heard anecdotes that individuals tend to leave if they develop long-term conditions.

There is a perception that there are barriers to progression for different groups of staff. Staff report that they don't get feedback when they apply for a promotion and aren't successful. However, there are gaps in data on progression and development, so it is not possible to know for sure whether there are barriers or not. Where issues have been identified, there was no evidence of positive action initiatives to address them. It also appears that there is no talent management, or leadership programmes at LBH. This could be an opportunity for positive action for all under-represented groups of people. There is an apprenticeship scheme, but the details of it need to more clearly communicated.

Race Equality

Throughout the report, issues around race equality are addressed alongside other discrimination, but specific points are made below:

The review team heard from senior managers that there was a commitment to working towards being an anti-racist organisation. However, this was met with scepticism by some staff. If the organisation wants to work towards this, it needs to develop a clear plan on how it plans to achieve this, and visibly demonstrate actions to build on that commitment.

LBH is a signatory to the 'Race at Work' charter, but the team heard no-one talk about this. This could be made more prominent and linked up with the commitment to being an anti-racist organisation.

The much-repeated allegations of "casual racism" and "casual sexism" being widespread were disturbing, as were the examples of racism, sexism and discriminatory behaviour towards disabled people shared with the review team. There appears to be no consistent approach to dealing with this, and this matter should be addressed urgently.

Quick wins

The review team heard a lot of views that much work needed to be done to collect and analyse data. Whilst the review team agreed with this, they are of the view that there is a considerable amount that could be done in the meantime alongside working on improving data. These we have collated as a list of quick wins:

1. Councillors signing up to the Values and Behaviours of the borough, perhaps as part of the Code of Conduct
2. Establish a clear structure for the governance of EDI and communicate this widely
3. Set clear corporate Equality Objectives
4. Develop clear service specific equality objectives and embed these through the PDR process
5. Build on success of the council and the community working together during the Covid-19 response by learning from this and replicate the success factors
6. Ensure that Communications professionals and the staff forums are involved in shaping and driving the EDI agenda
7. Ensure the people strategy is developed in collaboration with staff forums and the wider workforce, with EDI embedded throughout as a 'golden thread'
8. Establish standardised EDI questions for recruitment
9. Ensure that all interview panels are as representative as possible (gender, ethnicity and disability etc)
10. More events to bring existing and new communities together, working with staff, forums and community organisations to create more effective cohesion
11. Ensure that Staff forums have support to be inclusive and well-run – in particular-time and resource to deliver corporate objectives
12. Work with the staff forum to establish effective informal and formal processes to report discriminatory practices (e.g., confidential hotline, safe spaces)
13. Review and refresh procurement pages
14. Encourage involvement with the regional EDI fora where good practice and ideas are shared
15. Provide corporate EDI training to all staff and councillors

Medium Term actions

1. Ensure EDI work includes looking at accessibility and discrimination in the round, e.g., socio-economic impact, neurodiversity
2. Develop the EIA process and train managers in its use and importance
3. Incorporate equality objectives within the PDR process
4. Utilise the LGA's NGDP graduate scheme which has a big drive on diversity – councils can specify some requirements
5. Ensure alignment between the People strategy and the Havering Way
6. Establish a clear staff development programme
7. Develop leadership and secondments opportunities internally and externally to address the lack of senior representation from staff with protected characteristics
8. Organisational values and behaviours need to be demonstrated, linked and monitored through the PDRs.

9. Capture all exit interview information and monitor protected characteristics of applicants to the council at all stages through to job offer and acceptance
10. Link in external expertise to work with councillors to better understand and engage with up-and-coming new communities
11. Establish a Member development programme
12. Set up a Social Value Framework for commissioning and procurement
13. Engage with partners, such as Havering Changing, voluntary groups and local communities to create personal stories as part of personal, organisational and community development
14. Consider how you can give residents more opportunities to give feedback, for example meetings/ events/ virtual opportunities
15. Learn from other organisations in this field – e.g., Croydon & Hackney, the London Leadership Programme, the LGA

Long Term actions

1. Ensure positive working relationships with all staff forums, and that they have equal and realistic operating procedures. Consider how they contribute to a positive culture at LBH and are helping the council to improve.
2. Explore how to unlock latent and overlooked talent in the organisation through positive action e.g.: talent management programme
3. Recognise that some of the outcomes are long-term and will take time. For example, changing the culture first so that people feel safe to share their experiences
4. Develop a culture of trust, responsibility, openness and understanding
5. Work with schools to explore and learn more about diversity e.g.: Black History Month work

5. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership of the council, will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions, formulating an action plan in response to this report.

As part of the review process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Kate Herbert, Principal Adviser for London, is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are: Kate.Herbert@local.gov.uk

In the meantime, we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the council throughout the review. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report.