Surrey County Council

LGBTQ+ review – Executive Summary

Introduction

Business in the Community's (BITC) Inclusion Advisory Services team guides employers to ensure they are compliant with UK Equality legislation as well as supporting them in creating inclusive workplace cultures, going beyond statutory requirements for diversity, equality, and inclusion (EDI). The Equality Act 2010 is the UK's primary anti-discrimination law applicable in the workplace, covering nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. This is reinforced by the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

BITC are aware that all employers are at different stages of their journey to become more inclusive places to work. Action in this area creates a need to address organisational cultures, and culture changes take time. To this end, BITC tailors its advice and recommendations to have the most significant impact right now whilst always keeping the long-term ambition in mind.

Surrey County Council (SCC) commissioned BITC to review essential information and evidence and provide recommendations on priorities and areas for development to inform Surrey County Council's approach to LGBTQ+ Inclusion. BITC understands that Surrey County Council is at an early stage of this journey, so the engagement was designed to kick-start a longer-term focus on Equality, Inclusion and Diversity.

The phased plan worked to engage colleagues across the organisation on its commitment to the topic and to understand the current work being done by the organisation, including exploring perceptions of Surrey County Council as an LGBTQ+ inclusive employer. The project also investigated existing insights and data infrastructure to understand the employee makeup and advise on improvements.

Our outlined priorities and practical suggestions will inform your strategy and action plan.

Sector Pre Word

Councils have vast opportunities for impact through their diversity and inclusion strategies, policies and actions. Not only can they influence their internal ways of working to help diversity and inclusion thrive through their employees, but they also have a role in improving equitable outcomes in their communities and broader society.

Councils have a unique understanding of their communities and the challenges and barriers they experience; this will differ per council. Using the data councils have available to them, along with the knowledge gained through community workers and stakeholder relationships, boards can run their functions and services in such a way that is not only conducive to diversity and inclusion but can challenge and reduce historical LGBTQ+ inequalities. Likewise, for influencing public perception and gaining support for social equity.

The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network
BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY
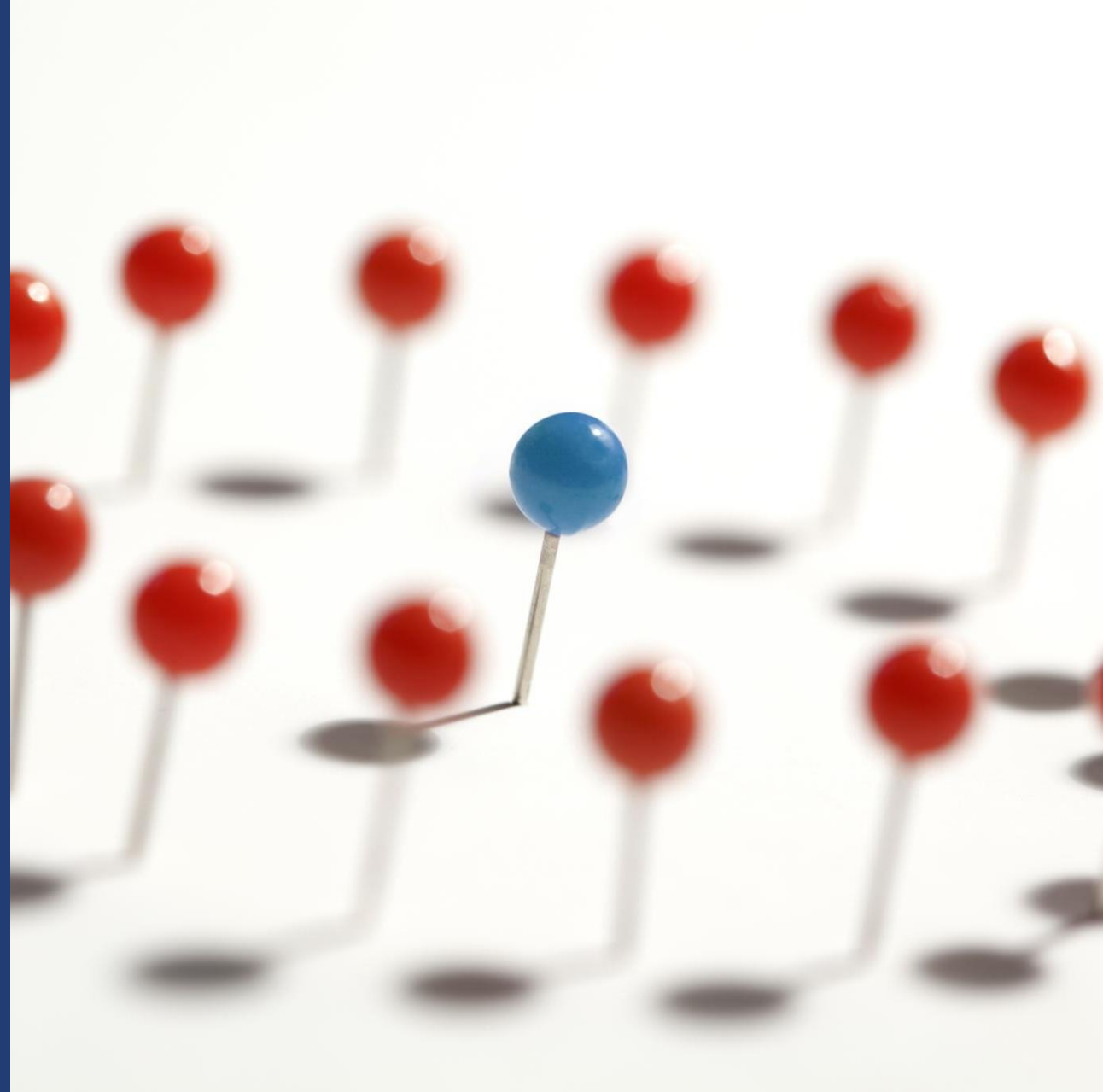
Purpose of the report

Methodology

In line with best practices for diversity and inclusion research and to create a holistic picture of LGBTQ+ inclusion at Surrey County Council, the EDI review takes a mixed methodology approach.

The research requires a deep-dive data collection exercise to determine the EDI landscape at Surrey County Council. This is performed using an analysis of pulse survey data, listening circle data, policies, strategies, action plans, and procedures supplied by Surrey County Council across five key themes:

- EDI leadership, strategy and infrastructure
- Representation and data collection
- Employee communications and engagement
- Inclusive culture and behaviours
- Training, education and awareness

This report presents the findings of the LGBTQ+ review carried out in 2023 by BITC for the Surrey County Council in its role as an employer to provide high-quality services.

How we'll meet our commitment

Focusing on equality, diversity, and inclusion is vitally important to improve the experiences of residents and staff and ensure no one in the county is left behind. We also have a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010. We aim to eliminate discrimination, increase equality of opportunity and foster good relations across people from all groups protected by law*. – Surrey County Council Website

The key objectives of the review are to:

- Review relevant workforce data and pertinent policy documents.
- Uncover LGBTQ+ employee perceptions and experiences about EDI at Surrey County Council.
- Provide findings and recommendations for the next steps and considerations for driving LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Executive Summary

The objectives for this review were to investigate existing data infrastructure to understand employee make-up, understand the current work around EDI within the organisation, and capture perceptions of Surrey County Council as an inclusive employer for LGBTQ+ colleagues.

BITC found that Surrey County Council's Strategy and Action Plan follows best practice and is leading in most components, efforts should be focused on the execution of the strategy and developing internal capacity within the organisation to deliver it.

Data being collected about LGBTQ+ representation and the employees experiences at Surrey County Council is limited. Efforts should be focused on allowing further identification of sexuality and gender identity. Even if the data is too small to analyse, the option should be made available.

The review of the employee policies found that Surrey County Council's policies are compliant, however, issues were identified in consistency across policies and a lack of recorded impact for the effectiveness of the policies. Training and communications should be implemented to ensure that employees and more specifically managers are implementing policies effectively.

Training and development is currently in its infancy, a training action plan needs to be implemented to streamline training outputs and evaluate training uptake and effectiveness. There is an appetite to make some training mandatory and further investments are needed at senior leadership and middle management level.

The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

What is Going Well at Surrey County Council

1 The EDI Strategy and Action plan is well developed.

2 Many components of the recruitment process are inclusive and attract a diverse range of applicants.

3 Trans+ Equity Guidance document and Policy have now been implemented.

4 Policies promote a culture of respect and dignity in the workplace.

5 There is a great appreciation for the LGBTQ+ SCC Network.

6 Overall, LGBTQ+ employees feel happy at work and their well-being is considered by their managers.

Key Challenges at Surrey County Council

1 LGBTQ+ microaggressions and stereotypes are prevalent.

2 Conflict between identities and beliefs within the LGBTQ+ community and the wider organisation.

3 Data to understand representation and employee experience is limited.

4 Leadership representation, endorsement and role modelling.

5 Policies are not being implemented appropriately.

6 Lack of training for leaders, managers and all employees to embed an inclusive culture.

01/02/2024

Key Findings

Strategy and action plan

- Public commitment needs reinforcement to enable stakeholders to feel a stronger connection to the People Strategy and EDI Action Plan.

- The strategy is vulnerable to siloed working without seamless integration across initiatives.

- Intangible impact measures could lead to an inability to demonstrate progress.

Representation and Demographic Data

- We could not complete an in-depth analysis of the data provided for the 'LGBTQ+ Colleague Experience' review in the same way as was done for the 'Ethnicity Colleague Experience' due to the limitations of the data.

- Those who identify as 'Bisexual' disproportionately submitted that they are subject to unacceptable behaviour.

- LGBTQ+ colleagues disagreed more with the statement: 'I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in SCC' when compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

Recruitment

- There is truly little data on minoritised genders outside of the binary. Without further detail, it is difficult to understand how recruitments processes impact Trans+ applicants.

"a disproportionate number of middle class middle aged white blokes in my service are managers. I find that this results in recruitment and promotion of similar candidates"

"The senior management team is not serious about D&I as they only pay lip service."

"I am not 'Other', nor I am a '+'. The language is not inclusive."

"The leadership team should, with hands-on hearts, take responsibility to change the culture rather than employees taking the lead."

"Know of people who didn't apply for jobs because they couldn't put they were non-binary on their application form."

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY
The Prince's Responsible Business Network

Key Findings

Inclusion Policies

- There were a lack of microaggression, bullying and discrimination examples specific to the LGBTQ+ community.

- A lack of explanation on how managers should be implementing policies and how they should discuss EDI and identity with individuals in their team.

- Confusion on how to use policies, how to report incidences, and how to access mediation.

Learning And Development

- Feedback indicated that employees feel line managers are not equipped, enabled and invested enough to deal with diversity and inclusion. Experiences varied dramatically.

- Training is not mandatory; therefore, there are parts of the employee population yet to be trained on diversity and inclusion topics.

- Awareness and Education provided by the network is ad hoc and not fully supported by the organisation.

Culture and Behaviours

- Experiences of microaggressions and stereotyping towards LGBTQ+ employees.

- Concerns were raised about gender-critical views manifesting in non-inclusive ways and not being adequately addressed, leading to a sense of futility in reporting.

"I worry that older LGBTQ+ people are going back in the closet in Surrey as our care provision is not inclusive."

"Better training for managers on all intersectional identities. Clear lack of understanding for LGBTQ+ for a lot of middle managers."

"Have previously experienced a co-worker ignoring my preferred pronouns, and constantly referring to me using the wrong set of pronouns and gendered words, despite me informing them multiple times."

"I had some grievances, but the manager involved in dealing with the grievances has no knowledge about the policy."

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

The Prince's Responsible Business Network

Key Recommendations

Key recommendations across all themes

- **Address LGBTQ+ Phobia and Microaggressions:** Strengthen anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies within the organisation. Ensure a clear commitment from leadership to address LGBTQ+ discrimination within the organisation.

- **Improve Inclusivity in Recruitment Practices:** Review and revise internal recruitment practices to ensure fairness, transparency, and the elimination of biases.

- **Enhance Communication and Reporting Processes:** Better communicate policies and processes in place, highlighting the mediation service available.

- **Increase Representation in Leadership:** Develop and implement strategies inclusive of targets to increase diversity at all levels of leadership within Surrey County Council.

- **Data Collection:** 'Surrey County Council Data Set' and the Pulse Survey particularly, should have an option to collect data about sexuality and gender identity outside the binary. In the first instance, this information would be helpful for the understanding of LGBTQ+ colleagues' pay and progression within Surrey County Council. In addition, it would be beneficial to understand the experience of Trans+ colleagues from pulse survey data.

- **Continuous Education and Awareness:** Implement a training programme with ongoing education sessions to raise awareness about several diversity and inclusion identities and topics. Ensure that some of the training is mandatory, particularly for managers, and some of the training is necessary, potentially run by the networks or external speakers.

- **Wellbeing Considerations:** Conduct a 'Workwell Assessment' Workwell Self-Assessment Tool - Business in the Community (bitc.org.uk) with the support of BITC's Wellbeing Advisory Services to gain a holistic view of your organisational approach towards wellbeing and how it supports inclusion, with a particular focus on the experiences of your LGBTQ+ colleagues.

- **Decision Making:** Ensure that all employees follow the EQIA process. Make the SLT accountable to understand how decisions may affect certain groups.

Next Steps

The Prince's
Responsible
Business Network

Overview & Next Steps

A culture of trust and transparency will enable SCC's LGBTQ+ colleagues to feel more confident using policies. Continuous feedback will help maintain the relevance of SCC's documents. Effective communication, transparency, and a proactive approach to EDI will also improve the experiences of SCC's LGBTQ+ colleagues. Seek feedback on an ongoing basis and engage with the SCC staff networks to make the necessary adjustments and improvements over time. Remember, an inclusive workplace is an ongoing effort that requires continuous learning and adaptation. When SCC creates a training plan, it should be embedded in the SCC EDI strategy. That will ultimately increase organisational effectiveness and capacity.

By implementing these recommendations, Surrey County Council can enhance inclusion for LGBTQ+ colleagues, thus demonstrating the council's commitment to diversity and supporting a positive and respectful work environment for everyone.

Further Considerations:

- What does success look like to SCC in the short-term, mid-term and long-term?

- How will the findings of the LGBTQ+ review be used to determine an action plan?

- How will the findings of the ethnically diverse colleague review be used in addition to this data?

- Who will be accountable for driving the actions that arise in the planning?

- How will other stakeholders be engaged to drive culture change at SCC?