

TACKLING RACIAL INEQUALITY

Good Practice Case Studies

LB Harrow
A Ground-breaking Approach to Organisational Change

The borough of Harrow commissioned an Independent Race Review by Patrick Vernon OBE, to survey 700 staff members. The findings from this informed the Race Equality Action Plan, focussing on: the creation of safe spaces, Changing the Organisations Culture and Behaviour through Leadership, Training and Development, and recruitment and retention.



Problem we were seeking to address

Harrow is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse boroughs in the country, with individuals from all levels of society living alongside one another. At least 65% of Harrow's communities are from a Black, Asian, or Multi-ethnic background, alongside a growing Eastern European community. Harrow continues to make every effort to improve the life experiences and outcomes for all service users and communities, while promoting diversity equality and inclusion.

The council employs over 2,000 full and part time staff, with:

- 47% coming from Black, Asian and Multi-ethnic backgrounds
- 75% aged between 35-64
- 4.3% disclosed they have a disability
- Less than 1% identifying as LGBTQIA+

In late 2020, Harrow council worked cross-party to tackle race inequality by commissioning an Independent Race Review led by Professor Patrick Vernon OBE, which consisted of: focus groups, one-to-one sessions and a race survey which included the voices of around 700 staff members. The findings brought up a range of issues, including:

Partners involved

LB Harrow

Patrick Vernon OBE

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- Psychological safety
- Racism in the workplace
- Challenges with management behaviour
- Lack of career opportunities for Black, Asian, and Multi-Ethnic staff
- Impact of racism on health and wellbeing
- Race and sexism
- Institutional and Structural racism

This review highlighted several areas for improvement which helped examine gaps, bottlenecks, and glass ceilings in the council. The findings, coupled with our first ethnicity pay gap report, gave us insight into the organisation and assisted the council in developing a Race Equality Action Plan that is rooted in evidence and developed in collaboration with staff. The launch of the Action Plan in November 2020, set out the council's strategic vision to tackle race inequality and become an anti-racist organisation.

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The solution or actions/proposed solution or actions:

Harrow council's work on race equality has been underpinned by strategic principles that support our corporate work on equality, diversity and inclusion. These are:

- Evidence and insight
- Consultation and Partnership working
- Developing a strategic approach
- Communicating our approach
- Development of an Action Plan
- Implementation

We knew we had to start somewhere, which is why we began a phased approach on equality, diversity and inclusion tackling race inequality first. Our aim was to create safe spaces, create a culture of learning and ensure equal opportunities for all staff, irrespective of seniority.

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Our methodology included gathering both qualitative and quantitative data which included the voices of over 800 members of staff and helped us understand some of the challenges faced by Black, Asian, and Multi-ethnic staff in the workplace and the improvements they would like to see. This data has been critical in supporting the council to create objectives that are tangible and realistic.

In addition, our work involved ensuring the council's policies are inclusive and provide opportunities for marginalised groups, through offering a range of programmes to develop and empower staff.

As result, the council produced a Race Equality Action Plan which includes three overarching objectives:

- **Creation of Safe Spaces** – To create a culture of openness and inclusivity for Black, Asian, and Multi- ethnic staff, and to cultivate an environment of psychological safety for all staff within the organisation.
- **Changing the Organisations Culture and Behaviour through Leadership, Training and Development** – To increase diverse representation at all levels of the council's workforce by investing in a new Diversity Talent Programme and creating clearly defined pathways, to support the career development of Black, Asian, and Multi-Ethnic staff.
- **Recruitment and Retention** - To ensure transparency in the recruitment system and providing equal opportunities for Black, Asian, and Multi-ethnic staff. This includes reviewing our current recruitment practices to make sure all recruiting managers are equipped with the skills to undertake inclusive recruitment from application to appointment.

Background:

The global impact of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted the suffering of Black, Asian, and Multi-ethnic staff on a global scale across sectors. These events unremittingly drove the council's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion as the council considered its practices and organisational culture.

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The council's phased approach is rooted in evidence and insight to create a genuine model for change. We knew our success depended on the people who work here and created partnerships with staff where their lived experiences were key to our approach in an inclusive way. From virtual one-to-ones, Covid-safe face-to-face workshops and focus groups, we embarked on a journey to create a cross-party approach that is rooted in transparency and integrity.

Through nurturing safe spaces, we rebuilt trust between the council and its staff and improved cultural competency, which has led to a ripple effect across the organisation in the way we deliver our services to both our residents and customers.

Desired outcomes/delivered outcomes:

Although this is a journey, we are already seeing improved race outcomes in the recruitment and development of diverse talent including more diversity in leadership roles. As a result of our work, we launched a new programme of interventions and policies to promote a workforce that is inclusive and accessible for everyone. Key investments included,

- Implementing a Race Equality Action Plan to report key metrics and support the overarching strategic ambitions for EDI.
- Launching new mandatory EDI and anti-racism training for all staff to ensure that all staff feel equipped to lead on the race equality agenda.
- Working cross-departmentally to create staff networks, where all staff feel safe to share lived experiences and concerns.
- Signing the Race at Work Charter as an unequivocal commitment toward race equality provides a clear framework that holds the organisation to account.
- Publishing a Zero Tolerance Statement aimed at all staff and all stakeholders, that sets out our new approach to diversity and inclusion.
- Working closely with senior leaders to upskill and build capacity to have a consistent approach to the race equality agenda.

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Learning/evaluation:

In a short space of time, Harrow council has learned a great deal about the needs of our workforce and how to engage with underrepresented groups who faced racial inequality in the workforce. The council understands that race inequality will not be solved overnight. By undertaking a phased approach, the organisation has been successful in creating an inclusive working environment for staff who feel psychologically supported. Despite the challenges presented by the global pandemic, the council found creative ways to interact with staff through a range of means. Harrow council has continued to monitor and review the impact of the outcomes achieved through the Race Equality Action Plan so the organisation can remain aware, inclusive, and diverse.

Contact



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