Spotlight on Inclusion

Creating Belonging in Local Government

Inclusion Insights Report for the West Midlands
Regional Local Government Employers

WMEmployers

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Foreword

Jon Rouse CBE – City Director
Stoke on Trent City Council

A diverse workforce and an inclusive culture are essential ingredients for sustained organisational success. Easy to say but, as local government leaders and managers, do we really believe it, and if we do believe it, do we act on it as truth? That is the challenge laid down by this important insights report.

The reality is that none of us as local authorities are doing enough. Too often, our workforces, let alone our senior leadership teams, are not reflective of the populations we serve. There is still embedded institutional discrimination that leads to inequality of opportunity and increased likelihood of bullying and harassment for certain groups. Too many of our staff don't feel able to bring their whole selves, their complete identity into the workplace. They are missing out but our organisations are missing out too.

Staff talk to me about a conspiracy of silence, that people don't feel comfortable talking about the very real issues that some of those staff experience, both in the workplace and out in the community. For example, in a recent meeting of our Race Equality Group we started talking about the footballer, Anton Ferdinand's experience of challenging racism and found that staff of different ethnicities had been through equivalent experiences themselves.

If we don't develop genuinely inclusive cultures then we deprive our organisations of a wealth of talent. There will be amazing individuals in our communities who won't even apply for our jobs because of how they perceive us.
In Stoke-on-Trent we are trying to bring about change. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. we are starting to address our shortcomings with respect to race equality and diversity, and we will of course also work with other groups that we are not recognising and supporting as well as we should be. We are currently adopting and translating the NHS Workforce Race Equality Standard to guide our development and ensure accountability for progress. It is a programme that covers staff and Members.

That is why this report is so welcome to us. In the clarity of its analysis and the structure of the recommendations it holds a mirror up to us as leaders and as organisations, causing us to ask, are we doing enough, what more should we be doing? And as none of us across the West Midlands has all the answers, we can go on this journey together, sharing what works and what doesn't. And that process in its itself will give opportunity for inclusion in terms of the voices that we choose to amplify and who we invite to lead us forward as a sector.

I commend the report to you and commit myself to take its contents seriously. I hope you will too.

Jon Rouse CBE
City Director Stoke on
Trent City Council

Diverse voices leading a diverse Region

I started and drafted this foreword many times – which in itself is symptomatic of how challenging it is to talk about inclusion and the sensitivities around this. That is at the heart of what needs to change. The strength of feeling we have heard from colleagues across the Region has been incredibly strong and, in many instances, deeply personal. For many they do not see or feel enough action. We have sought to narrate that in a way which is not any less impactful, but offers clear focus for us, as 33 Councils to consider, unite behind and step-up to the challenge of redefining inclusion and setting the pace of change for our sector in our Region.

Inclusion in the Local Government sector has seen a step-change in recent years with leadership teams across the Region seeking to review their provision, and it has risen up the agenda in Councils both in terms of service delivery and their workforce. However, this report, and indeed the very reason why we commissioned this research is that change isn't happening quickly enough.

The Region's Local Government workforce does not reflect the community we serve – put simply we need diverse voices to lead a diverse Region. It is more visible in top-teams that we lack diverse senior leadership, but our analysis of the data available to us shows inequalities are evident in far wider areas. What is perhaps more telling is in the data that is not collected or shared, the lack of which can often be 'explained or justified' but in this day and age I would challenge whether its moral or ethical not to prioritise having a full and detailed view of the Region's 116,000 strong Local Government workforce. As senior leaders we need to hold ourselves to account and seek to understand fully if there is institutional disadvantage for underrepresented groups. This report doesn't categorically evidence that there is, but rather ominously, it doesn't disprove there isn't - and that doesn't feel a good place to be as a sector.

Inclusion is hard, it is a specialism and it's not a tick-box exercise. Too often we leave it to HR and junior members of staff when it needs to become a lived part of every leader's role at every level of the organisation – it needs to be the way we do things in Local Government. We have seen through the Covid 19 pandemic just how impressive our Local Government workforce is and how vast changes can be adopted and implemented in weeks. Just imagine what could be achieved if we applied the same pace and scale of change around inclusion and the recommendations in this report?

I don't have all the answers, but I will ask the difficult questions and I will personally challenge myself, West Midlands Employers, partners and employers in the Region to make lasting changes around inclusion and ask for the full support of all Councils in the West Midlands to work together as 33 independent employers, committed to working with us as their Regional Employers' Organisation. Inclusion can be our most powerful asset in post-Covid 19 recovery.

Rebecca Davis
Chief Executive WME

Reflections from our researchers

A few words from Elaine

There are some requests I would like to make of readers of this report; suspend what might be an immediate reaction of 'surely we've moved the issue of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion on after all this time' and challenge yourself not to move to a position of defence or challenge. There are very many examples over the last 60 years that have attempted to create meaningful debate and action around ED & I, legislative review that brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation, resulting in the Equality Act 2010 and recalibrating conversations about what it means to act equitably, value diversity and create cultures that are inclusive.

Having spent over 30 years as an Organisation Development practitioner and senior executive, I have worked hard to ensure that my own personal and professional practice is underpinned by my belief that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion matters. I have more effective relationships with my colleagues, my teams perform better, and the organisation is more effective in meeting its aspirations internally and externally; most importantly, staff feel valued and are prepared to increase their discretionary effort. Who would willingly work hard for an employer who doesn't care or value who they are?

The region's local government sector is at a crossroad and the findings in this report are stark, and at times may possibly make uncomfortable reading. There are two world events currently at play which remove or limit the option of this 'going away' because whoever you are, we are all impacted: some much more than others. The equality and healthcare spectres are out of the box and the gaps are there for all to see - and local government is no exception.

There is a real opportunity for the West Midlands region to genuinely move from the position of a slowly chugging train to one which picks up speed and treats and values all its passengers equally. The benefits will not only be felt by those employed in the sector but also the recipients, the community of the West Midlands Region. The charge and challenge to senior leaders is 'how could you not respond to the issues and challenges raised'?

This piece of research is a call to action for local government; those committed to addressing systemic discrimination and the delivery of inclusive public services. It is also a challenge to those who may feel that this is an area of focus that is overdone, over discussed, over researched. When we all get it right, research reports like this will and should be a thing of the past.

Elaine Clough
Associate, West Midlands Employers

A few words from Vicki

As an HR leader working across two largely rural district councils in south Worcestershire it might be tempting to argue that some of the issues highlighted in this report don't have the same degree of urgent relevance as they might for our regional metropolitan boroughs or more densely populated districts. However, that is to miss the point at many levels. Indeed, the focus groups which have been the core of this research demonstrate the breadth and depth of concern and attention we have failed to give to inclusion across the whole region. However, this report also provides an opportunity to galvanise us all to action. Few would argue against the need to do that, and it's clear to me that the right moment to act is now.

It has been a privilege to be involved in this piece of work. I know my position as a white, able-bodied, heterosexual woman is not representative of many of the voices we have heard and need to continue to listen to. I remain a humbled ally and look forward to working with WME and colleagues across the region to make the change that our collective current and future workforce is crying out for.

Vicki Lee
Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, Wychavon District Council

1. Executive Summary

1.1   Each year WME authorities agree workforce priorities for the region and in January of 2020 one of the workforce priorities agreed was on the theme of inclusion and diversity. The initial approach to this was set out in WME's Strategic Plan which can be seen here

1.2   This focus on equality, diversity and inclusion is one rooted in a desire to ensure wide and authentic representation across the Local Government Sector and across all forms of diversity, to support the strengthening of inclusive services to the wider community.

1.3   It was identified as a key workforce driver for the Region before global events shone an intense spotlight on the issues with both the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement, and then the Sars CoV 2 global pandemic highlighted wider health and social inequalities across Black, Asian Minority Ethnic, older and poorer sections of the community.

1.4   This report is the culmination of a number of strands of work, including desktop reviews of academic material, discussions with Chief Executives and leads for D & I and focus groups of employees from across the spectrum of diverse and underrepresented groups.

1.5   The approach used four key lines of enquiry (recruitment and selection, promotion and progression, training and development and engagement and inclusion) to probe and cross validate qualitative information gathered from 135 employees and over 20 focus groups were conducted and 13 individual interviews with Chief Executives sand Senior Leaders"sessions across all councils in the region.

1.6   This led to the development of a set of recommendations to shape the agenda for councils in the region. It recognises the good work already being done in councils, whilst recognising that the D & I agenda needs detailed and continual scrutiny to ensure it remains improving at a pace to match expectations of employees.

1.7   The recommendations focus on the D & I agenda being led by Chief Executives and senior leaders in the organisation, moving it away from being the sole remit of Equality specialists or Human Resources professionals, into the fabric of every council's approach. The role of WME is to support councils in providing options for common frameworks, development and training and as the facilitator for those councils who wish to join with others to have a shared approach.

1.8   Following the recommendations the report includes a detailed narrative from the employee focus groups under the four key lines of enquiry. This provides the context, observations and views of those who attended the groups, and who shared their experiences, both positive and negative, with the group facilitators.

1.9   The report also provides in an annex a number of data sets which detail how the councils are performing against national and regional comparators.

2. Background and Context to the report

2.1 West Midlands Employers is the Regional Employers' Organisation, owned by 32 of the 33 Councils in the West Midlands Region. We provide a range of services, advice, and support across the region to our public sector organisations to support them to manage their workforce. The WME Vision is to **"advocate, build and champion people centred organisations for a resilient and diverse public sector workforce that benefits everyone in the West Midlands"**.

2.2 Each year WME authorities agree workforce priorities for the region and in January of 2020 one of the workforce priorities agreed was on the theme of inclusion and diversity. The initial approach to this was set out in WME's Strategic Plan which can be seen **here**.

2.3 This focus on equality, diversity and inclusion is one rooted in a desire to ensure wide and authentic representation across the Local Government Sector and across all forms of diversity, to support the strengthening of inclusive services to the wider community.

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2.5 As a result of the shift to virtual working for all councils (to a greater or lesser degree), the work undertaken to compile the report was all undertaken virtually. As a result of this the dynamics and flow of the focus groups, particularly for those employees who are less accustomed to speaking on a virtual platform, may be impacted by the immediate environment. This may have inhibited some group members but may have provided a safer space for others depending upon their own approach.

2.6 The region is diverse by size, demographics, geography, and politics but WME believe that at its heart is the commitment to deliver excellent public services to the changing communities in a way that is inclusive, equitable and fair. Examination of what inclusive practice looks and feels like within the sector can only add value to the wider ambition of improving the experience for individuals and communities in the wider delivery of services..

3. Approach and methodology

3.1 The report is based on research from within Councils across the geographical spread and council type. This is to ensure the findings are fully representative of the range of responses from the variety of Metropolitan, Unitary, County and District Councils, the demographic differences across the region from city centre and urban to rural counties and diverse Districts, all with their own set of circumstances.

3.2 This research provides a reflective overview of diversity and inclusion across Councils in the Region based on real-time data gathered through focus groups. Groups which are representative of diverse groups within Councils in a way that pays attention to their experiences and backgrounds, even if it is unlike or different to the predominant culture. These views are weighed against a discussion on the wider context and views from HR and Equality and Diversity leads and one-to-one interviews with senior leaders and elected members, HR/OD Staff. Representatives from the following groups were invited and took part:

Senior Women Leaders	Operational/frontline staff
Staff from Underrepresented groups (Black, Asian Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+)	Staff under 30 years old
Older Workers / younger workers	Chief Executives
Staff with Disabilities	Directors of HR
Social Workers	Equality Leads
Equality and Diversity Leads	Elected Members
Chief Executives & Elected Members	

3.3 Given concerns about the sensitivities and any degree of nervousness around discussing diversity and inclusive practice the report does not identify individual authorities but draws out EDI themes through the focus groups and structured interviews. By taking a regional approach, the intention is to highlight where good practice exists or where more work is needed to drive and embed sustainable and evidenced practice within the sector.

3.4 The research team identified that a mixed methodological approach would provide the richest data both quantitively and qualitatively. The report has therefore drawn on data using Infinistats that triangulate key HR metrics, and explores available data on gender, race and disability.

3.5 The report also highlights where data has not been available as a specific recommendation.

3.6 The research adopted a "Key Lines of enquiry" approach using 4 touchpoints along the employee journey, as well as an overview as a "temperature check" of employees from underrepresented groups. These touchpoints were:-

- Recruitment and Selection/Retention,
- Promotion and Progression,
- Training and Development,
- Staff Engagement specifically on inclusion issues, and
- Wider engagement and the degree to which employees feel a sense of belonging to their organisation.

3.7 To fully understand the employee journey, it was important to frame it as key touch points where staff will engage consciously and unconsciously with issues of inclusion and equitable treatment. These were identified as points where the employer's approach to diversity and inclusion would have the most significant impact on the employee experience.

3.8 The focus group discussions sought to capture this through a series of semi-structured questions that would enable participants to speak to their owned experiences and included opportunities to discuss how they understood this within the context of working for their employer, and how this has driven their sense of belonging to their organisations, and whether organisational policy and practice supported or obstructed this.

3.9 The report authors recognise limitations in the report which, although not fundamental to the findings, are acknowledged and accepted.

Specifically these are:

- That the sample size was limited, and not every employee in every council was surveyed
- Those employees who did attend either self-selected or were requested to attend by their employing council. Therefore, the voices at the sessions were potentially those with a specific viewpoint or experience that they wished to share

Summary of research approach:

A desktop review of existing published data around inclusion in the sector as context and background for the report (appendix 2).

Engagement with staff through virtual focus groups to gather feedback on the issues faced by or experienced by staff, along 5 key lines of enquiry.

The capture examples of good practice as well as areas ripe for further development.

Focus groups were a mix of frontline staff, HR or OD practitioners, operational staff under 30 years old, staff from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, women, and staff with disabilities. Additionally, the research included sector specific groups from Adults and Childrens Social Care.

Anecdotally, whilst there was a request made to organisations; unless explicitly stated we are not aware of any staff who identified as gay, lesbian, transgender or bi-sexual.

One to one interview with senior leaders to gain a strategic perspective on how diversity and inclusion challenges were being narrated but also addressed in their organisations.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The report highlights some clear areas for improvement in relation to how the Local Government sector in the West Midlands can move forward the inclusion agenda and there are a series of recommendations for Councils.

Regional Level

4.2 To ensure there is a Region wide commitment and dialogue on inclusion through the establishment of a Regional Inclusion Board and Employee Voice Forum that has representation from key stakeholders across the Local Government sector and professions within it. The Board will have a clear remit to raise the profile of the D & I agenda across the region through a number of approaches:

- A Strategic Board, operating with terms of reference and a mandate from Councils to encourage and monitor the implementation of these recommendations. This will create, develop and promote the sense of "allyship" across the region - it should be clear that this is not seeking to create additional governance, but a sense of accountability, solidarity and leadership on inclusion across 33 Councils.
- Development and support of an Employee Voice Forum, reporting to the Strategic Board representing all aspects of inclusion and under-represented groups to offer specialist viewpoints and employee voice on key issues relating to the Region's Local Government workforce.
- Development of a select small number of key standard questions on diversity and inclusion to use in all surveys to identify a baseline level and track progress / improvement.

4.3 A commitment to monitoring, reviewing, and addressing any areas of disproportionality across the Local Government workforce. All Councils should commit to monitoring and reporting at a Regional level the following data sets:

- Number of employees not providing ethnicity data as part of data collection
- Baseline data for ethnicity, disability, gender
- Ethnicity, gender and disability data for disciplinary, grievance, performance management and redundancy
- Turnover of voluntary leavers by gender, ethnicity, disability
- Access and take-up of training and development by ethnicity, gender and disability

4.4 A commitment to the establishment of a regional senior leader development framework around inclusion, which will include access to specialist executive input, development opportunities, reverse mentoring to ensure a 'live toolkit' of options and support network is there for Senior Leaders to navigate current and emerging issues and themes.

Organisational Level

4.5 To conduct a review of the Council's current inclusion provision, using a clear inclusion standard developed for Councils in the West Midlands by Councils in the West Midlands inclusion specialists, that will set out a framework and methodology that will identify clear areas of strength and areas for improvement for the organisation which can shape or update the Council's Inclusion Strategy, establishing priorities and using external expertise to challenge and review this.

Which should include, but not limited to:

A commitment to ownership of the Diversity and Inclusion agenda by the Chief Executive, Senior Team and Leaders of each Council in order to visibly demonstrate to employees the profile and weight of the D & I agenda

4.6 A review of all Council people policies and processes to ensure that policies are not only fair and equitable but are modern and are driving the changes employers need. The outcomes need to be monitored and if they are not positively contributing to creating a diverse and inclusive organisation, they should be modernised and mitigate against conscious and unconscious bias in internal systems and processes.

The development and establishment of a quantitative and qualitive benchmarking standard on inclusion for the Local Government Sector in the Region, to set out 'what good looks like' for an Inclusive Council. The standard will enable Councils to self-assess and be peer assessed in the Region against this standard, to develop and embed consistency and provide challenge and development opportunities..

4.7 A review of all equality and diversity training, (including provision of unconscious bias training) to evidence how it is making an impact on workforce diversity and creating an inclusive workforce. This should include assessing whether online equality training is appropriate and where there is no clear impact identified, this should be reshaped and a full range of experiential and non-training interventions e.g., projects to tackle inequality should be considered.

4.8 Establishment of experiential approaches such as reverse mentoring, coaching and sponsorship to ensure the approach to inclusion is genuine and moves away from the "mechanistic" to the honest and authentic. Where feasible these can be provided across the Region.

4.9 Recruitment and selection processes should be reviewed and where necessary redesigned with stakeholders representing employees from underrepresented groups, with clearly defined positive action initiatives. There should be a commitment and clear statement from the sector that all recruitment and selection decision makers will include members of diverse representation for any supervisory and management role. All recruiters should have up to date inclusion training every 2 years as a minimum requirement, and where this cannot be accommodated Councils should use Stakeholder panels to broaden input into recruitment decisions.

4.10 Harassment, bullying and discrimination policies should be reviewed with key stakeholders from underrepresented groups, with the aim to ensuring the right outcomes are being delivered and staff are supported when making complaints and not victimised or seen as 'trouble-makers'. Councils should, in parallel to this, put in place bespoke support arrangements for individuals making complaints relating to inclusion and diversity to ensure staff feel supported and not victimised.

4.11 For investigations relating to race we would recommend Councils commit to the use of skilled investigators who have lived experiences of systemic discrimination and a detailed understanding of this alongside HR policies and processes.

4.12 Councils should introduce Inclusion Voice groups, representing the full spectrum of underrepresented groups, to facilitate more regular conversations around inclusion. They should have a legitimate and listened to voice in the organisation if policy and process around diversity and inclusion practice is to develop and be mainstreamed in the way the organisation does business.

In smaller neighbouring authorities where perhaps, the workforce is less visibly diverse this could be a collaboration or partnership group that engages around the changing nature of diversity at a sub-regional level.

4.13 Councils need to explore innovative ways in which elected members can be supported to develop a greater awareness of diversity and inclusion considerations within their portfolios in relation to service delivery and the workforce, and demonstrate leadership in the diversity and inclusion field.

4.14 There is a need to attract and develop diverse talent in the Region and 'grow our own'. Councils should consider individual, sub-Regional or Regional positive action leadership programmes for employees from protected characteristics. This should seek to initially prioritise Black, Asian Minority Ethnic and female employees and then widen this to other diverse groups where similar gaps are identified.

4.15 Disproportionality of disciplinary, grievance and performance management processes should be carefully monitored and reported. There should be a commitment from all Councils that all grievance and disciplinary panels include diverse representation, particularly in respect of ethnicity to be reflective of an employee going through a process.

Where this is not possible in smaller organisations, Regional or sub-Regional support should be established and accessible.

5. View from the Bridge - A detailed view from Chief Executives

5.1 A conversation that captures the current state of play around inclusion and diversity practice in local government was never going to be easy. The conversation has dramatically moved on in the last 10 months and world events require that the focus given to equality, diversity in other public bodies and sectors now needs to be replicated in local government. The challenge to the public sector is **"what is going to be done to begin the dismantling of systemic discrimination and embed authentic and long-lasting inclusive practice in local government?"**

5.2 The good news is things have not stood still and some but not all authorities in the region have grasped the enormity of the task and are beginning to make evidenced progression in the inclusion and diversity. The focus is not about more round table discussions, time-limited special projects, or short-term standalone interventions. The best approaches put D & I at the centre and give important currency to the day-to-day experience of workers in the region.

5.3 There is overall, a sector awareness of the need for a more coherent approach to inclusive succession planning and talent management. This needs to be further developed and supported through regular monitoring and critical evaluation for impact over an extended period, particularly from the perspective of impact on inclusive practice and representation in local government. This evaluation must be able to stand interrogation, be rigorous and information to which the sector is prepared to be held to account.

5.4 There are pockets of good inclusion and diversity practice in the sector; highlighted throughout this report through the range of development and training opportunities offered, development programmes on offer to support leadership development. Much of this good work however is muted, inconsistent or fragmented as local government continues to act in silos; compounded by their unitary, county, district, or metropolitan status. Confidence in this area can be grown by the sharing of the challenge but also a degree of comfort in not needing to have all the answers immediately.

5.5 Amongst the sectors most senior leaders there is a real and genuine appetite to further develop, processes, systems and practice around diversity and inclusion in local government. Some authorities are leading the way very publicly and so the opportunity for collaboration and learn as a sector is available and should be grasped. This is not about best in class and individualism but should be best in sector corporately. A preparedness to work with the varying levels of vulnerability amongst peers is a good place to start. "The attention we've given to supporting staff around Covid needs to be matched by the importance we place on Equality issues and I know that expectation needs to be modelled by me as the senior leader".

5.6 There are a number of examples of senior leadership explicitly leading the way in staff discussion forums that focus on systemic discrimination and seeking to establish a collaborative way forward with employees; not behind or in front but beside them as examples of authentic allyship. This should be and is applauded. The public gaze is very much on the public services and challenge from key stakeholders is a given, even from those parts of the community where organisations might perceive there is no **"inclusion or diversity axe to grind"**.

5.7 Examples of authentic allyship at this juncture of history around diversity and inclusion challenges, particularly considering the Black Lives Matter movement as a specific example, has been patchy, and varying in the degree of open arms with which it has been met by staff. Where it has been successful an important factor has been a genuine visibility and engagement from the senior leadership of the authority.

5.8 The primary message from leaders around inclusive practice is that this is a work in progress. There is a recognition that there is much to do around embedding diversity and inclusion in a way that goes beyond past conversations which several senior leaders identified as being piecemeal and ad hoc. **"I've been shocked at how underdeveloped ED & I practice is in the sector and this has huge implications…we need to act quickly in terms of ED & I commitment to our workforce. We need to look at the whole employee journey"**.

5.9 Some inclusion focused conversations are taking place, but more is needed; the ease with which these take place may well need to be a supported process where internal skill and know-how are not yet present consistently across the region.

5.10 Senior leaders should be leading the way (and are in a small number of instances.) Structured conversations where there is a clear link to the annual appraisal process to set leadership expectations at the most senior level in their authorities would augment this commitment.

5.11 This addition to the personal and professional expectations is specifically in relation to creating a culture of inclusion within directorates. This aspiration may well be supported by development interventions such as 360-degree feedback and reverse mentoring to assess and develop leadership impact on staff but needs further discussion and refinement amongst senior leaders.

5.12 In terms of examples of inclusive leadership this is mainly in the form of regular updates provided to staff, more so considering staff working remotely because of lockdown restrictions and ensuring a degree engagement is taking place. It is recognised that this is at a mechanistic level currently, with much more work to be done if it is to be moving beyond a tokenistic gesture by employees.

5.13 In a small number of instances, Chief Officers have been proactive and chosen to be at the forefront of facilitating employee forums where the impact of the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement has been the primary topic of conversation. This has not gone unappreciated and was referenced several times in the employee focus groups as excellent examples of senior leadership leading the way in relation to organisational inclusive practice. Looking ahead, it would not be implausible for organisations to consider the inclusion of questions around inclusion into their annual staff surveys. This is already being practiced in other parts of the wider public sector and as a regional member-based organisation, WME are well placed to begin the journey of benchmarking equality and inclusion practice for what is approximately 116,00 strong workforce.

5.14 Leaders were asked to articulate how they intend to deliver on the challenges they identified in relation to their inclusion agenda. The development of a more open workplace culture to discuss equality issues was often mentioned but will little detail about what such an intervention might look and feel like, and importantly who might lead it organisationally. For smaller authorities there was certainly a sense (not explicitly articulated) that additional external support would be welcome or, this first step could be one taken in partnership with another authority. **"We need to be brave and think about what we do with those managers and leaders who are not on the same page…we have to unlearn old habits"**. 'This is a whole organisation approach. The impending Local Government Review may provide us with some opportunities to grasp this issue more meaningfully in terms of how the sector looks in the future'.

5.15 HR practitioners are very much alive to the issues around inclusive practice in the sector and the accompanying challenges this creates for the profession in relation review of existing HR policy and practice and ways of working. The next steps should leave no one behind, create an environment of constructive challenge and accountability across the sector to drive consistency of practice but also benchmarking and sharing of best practice to begin to better improve inclusion in the public sector. The engagement of the authorities most senior leaders and politicians, their shared ownership and accountability is key, and the HR function and other strategic players require equal weighting. WME are already well placed to deliver this support with a clear focus on supporting HR and Learning and Development practitioners.

5.16 Learning and Development practitioners and those charged with driving Equality and Diversity are working hard to embed inclusion throughout their organisations. This could be further integrated into organisational systems and processes through a more coordinated approach across the sector. This could draw on lessons learned to date, harness best practice and a coordinated communication strategy that is local government specific to ensure consistency.

5.17 The role of line managers cannot be underestimated. The good experiences reported by staff consistently reference managers who are proactive about engaging their staff around their ongoing development and career planning to improve retention in the workforce. A link to existing organisational processes such as annual Personal and professional development, talent management strategies and succession planning are important to ensure there is a link to the organisation's workforce development strategy in a way that is transparent, inclusive and fair.

5.1 A small number of organisations are moving away from traditional recruitment approaches towards one which are focused on organisational values and technical skills and ability, blind recruitment and selection approaches that only shares the most essential applicant information and exploring the greater use of social media to increase diversity and thereby reducing the potential for conscious bias. These are early days but close attention to the lessons learned along the way will be needed to increase diversity in and across the sector.

5.2 In some places there is a refreshing honesty about where the gaps are and a preparedness to acknowledge that all is not well in the sector when exploring D & I. HR colleagues and senior leaders are prepared to have the necessary and at times challenging conversations to support organisational development and inclusion practice in local government.

5.3 In the many conversations with staff and professionals, responsibility for embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusive practice was seen to be the responsibility of a specialised few or an appendix to an existing role such as HR. In a small number of cases authorities had a senior Head of ED & I or the function is delegated and integrated into the roles of junior learning and

5.4 OD staff. The issue of parity across the sector is key to ensure the voices articulating the issues are equally heard and decisions owned at the most senior levels.

5.5 In relation to the above, the preparedness of some authorities to undertake a critical examination and review of strategic policy and practice around D & I to ensure fitness for 21st century purpose is welcomed and needs to be appropriately supported by partners and collaborators.

5.6 EDI challenges were primarily articulated as being one of trust and authenticity. This was primarily in relation to creating the right conditions, systems, and structures as senior leaders in their organisations to progress a meaningful inclusion agenda through co-design and collaboration with the workforce and key stakeholders.

5.7 The challenge is to ensure a consistent approach to diversity and inclusion across the region irrespective of organisational size and community demographics. There was a view (not expressed by all interviewees) that a regional working group might prove useful in developing practice within the sector.

5.8 How to hold authorities individually to account in relation to inclusive practice is a continuing conversation amongst senior leaders but recognised that there is a need for more focused monitoring within the sector.

5.9 A small number of authorities are leading the way with several important initiatives that are focused on whole system review, change and action in the inclusion space. There is a real opportunity to collaborate and share the lessons learned along the way to support the shaping of inclusion practice at a micro and macro level.

5.10 Better representation of visible diversity at the most senior leadership levels in local government is an important aspiration but needs to be achieved in ways that are not tokenistic or time framed. Achievement of authentic inclusion should also be equally cognizant of matters of intersectionality. There are initiatives currently underway in some authorities but are a continued work in progress which can be further supported by relevant subject matter experts and the very groups they are intended to support to ensure they do not become mechanistic or well-intentioned but compound existing inequality.

5.11 Senior leaders recognised throughout the interviews that there are aspects to creating an inclusive organisation which require uncomfortable conversations or conversations not previously had and likely to be outside of their current skill set or experience. Requests for additional support and collaboration within the region would be a good place to start.

5.12 There is a will amongst senior leaders to move the dial in local government and a realisation that changes in relation to diversity and inclusion practice must go beyond mere articulation. Some authorities have taken brave steps, some have experienced a degree of inclusion paralysis at what they perceive to be the size of the task and others as a moment which will 'pass'. The communities in receipt of public services and the employees employed to deliver those services are changing at differing paces. All of those involved in the public sector vision have an expectation of being included, treated equitably, and valued for who they are. The leadership challenge is to deliver this from aspiration from the outside in.

6. Recruitment and Selection

6.1 The key line of enquiry for Recruitment and Selection directed the focus group to consider their experience of gaining employment in local government and how inclusive did they feel the process was, specifically whether there were any particular Equality and Diversity considerations

6.2 The report looked to establish how transparent and accessible the recruitment and selection process into local government is and the degree to which staff feel or experience it to be inclusive i.e., whoever you are, working in local government is seen as accessible but also fair and without bias.

6.3 The following sections provide a high-level overview of the consistent themes around recruitment and selection within the region. Authorities are not identified by name to ensure anonymity but also encourage participants to share their experiences with candour (positively or less so) without fear of any potential organisational or personal reprisals.

6.4 Securing a job in local government is still seen as the province of white middle class men and women or a sector populated overwhelmingly by white people even in diverse metropolitan or county conurbations. This was articulated as being more pronounced in smaller district councils where the workforce was often described as **"quite static"** with opportunities for new recruitment opportunities being driven by someone retiring rather than moving to a new role, even internally. Given the financial constraints currently being experienced in the sector, rather than recruit, often posts were regraded and merged to an existing internal role, further limiting the opportunity to diversify the workforce. Specific quotes from authorities included the following: **"Our workforce is still mostly, white and British, we don't have a main ethnic group and we have a higher proportion of older people…we're not as inclusive as we would like to be'. 'We're still not there yet, we're still a traditional council with a traditional workforce. The workforce isn't as diverse as we would like. It's predominantly women and middle-aged white men…"**.

6.5 Through the focus groups and some structured interviews, some employees reported that when jobs were advertised using external recruitment platforms it was a widely held belief that the successful applicant had already been identified internally and would be appointed. There were many examples where participants shared that their scepticism was borne out in the final appointment. Comments included the following **"…the best person for the job often isn't the successful applicant and sometimes they don't even get shortlisted when they're internal"** feeding an increased sense of cynicism but also calling into question the authenticity of the organisation's commitment to an inclusive recruitment process where everyone had an equal chance to apply and be shortlisted if one meets the essential criteria.

6.6 Participants reported the view that the recruitment process is a **"done deal"**, which was compounded by a commonly shared perception of **"…the best person for the job often isn't the successful applicant and sometimes don't even get shortlisted when they're internal"**.

6.7 Some participants articulated that they were systematically discriminated against because of their race in their jobs; **"I know that my name is an issue, they see that and suddenly they can't find my application, when I challenged this, they decided to interview me but I know I'm not getting the next role despite having the experience now….this has happened to me two times"**. This perception was supported by another participant **"I've found if you challenge the fairness of the process, you have a black mark against you…it's easier to keep your head down….I won't get on in my organisation"**. They felt that black staff were more represented at lower grades than middle or senior leadership positions. The seeming jumping **"through hoops"** further compounds this.

6.8 Despite the shortcomings or cumbersome nature of the application process (as articulated by participants) **"you need to understand local government speak and some of the terms aren't always explained'… "when I applied for a job in x organisation, there were no forms until the end, by that time you've got a bit of knowledge of what they're looking for" and "local government are a bit behind the times with application forms…they're so long..".** There was a strong perception amongst all focus groups that internal applicants are better placed and more informed about the do's and don'ts of the recruitment process and often have the advantage of access to internal networks, feeding the view of 'not what you know but who you know'.

6.9 In probing further to establish how inclusive employees felt the recruitment and selection process is, participants reported examples of internal candidates applying for roles where they could evidence that they had the relevant experience and formal qualifications. They recall that the role was given to the less able candidate because a prior 'offline' conversation had taken place, there was a perception that the successful candidate was favoured by the recruiting manager and also had the advantage of receiving additional support in the form of off-line mentoring in preparation for the recruitment process; further perpetuating a culture of cronyism. The following quotes are not verbatim but provide a window to participants experiences in this area. **"You only have to see who gets the jobs… they don't look like me that's for sure'. 'There's xx of us on this call…what does your SLT look like…? There's more diversity on this call than in my organisation".**

6.10 Whilst recruitment into local government is supported through several formal news platforms and mediums in the social media space, word of mouth is still seen as one of the main informal ways into becoming a public servant. Where potential candidates have access to an informal network of friends **"in the know"**, relatives or off-line mentoring which provide an inside track on the job then this is likely to feed an unconscious or conscious bias towards a particular candidate and the perception that the starting block into the world of work is not a line equally drawn. Whilst this perception was not articulated as the experiences of all of those on the call, it was a viewpoint discussed at length. Several participants commented that on joining their organisations, they were surprised by the number of people who knew someone who worked in their immediate team, or had a connection; referred to as **"2 degrees of separation without being a relative".**

6.11 All participants report their authorities to have a publicised Recruitment and Selection policy which sometimes but not always include the organisational values. The perception from some was that the organisations values are not always or consistently aligned to organisational behaviours. There appeared to be a disconnect with the internal culture and a missed opportunity to market the type of organisation a potential employee would be joining through the recruitment process. **"When I got the job, it was great…the behaviour I've seen doesn't match up… I'm still looking for these values that were in the advert".**

6.12 The impact of this omission for some, made the application process cumbersome and not always universally understood. Participants who recalled being an external candidate going through the process recounted "getting to grips with local government jargon' or not having a full understanding of the type of organisation they might potentially be joining. This further polarised applicants coming from backgrounds where they had not been exposed to or understood the language of the public sector or the importance of organisational values in shaping their application decision including the organisations approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. **"There's a whole new language that you learn when you join the council…you pick it up as you go along; it's another culture but if you're not a member of the in group you're stuck".**

6.13 This particular perception was further explored with participants where comments such as **"….you look at the organisation and you don't see anyone who looks like you…you know you're probably just wasting your time"** were expressed. This further underpins the experience of some focus group participants who believe that often recruiters are looking for people like them rather than who is the best candidate for the job, thereby perpetuating a recruitment of **"more of the same"**, not seeking or even considering someone different.

6.14 The research explored whether this experience was different by authority size and geography, participants articulated that whilst a smaller authority might have a less diverse workforce and therefore less chance of seeing visual difference being represented, this potentially gave rise to a view that **"it would be difficult for someone different to fit in' or 'people from x groups just don't apply for y jobs"** particularly in relation to particular ethnic groups.

6.15 This perception was shared irrespective of the type, size, and geography of the authority or the level of seniority. Conversely, the perception was shared that **"people from x group are good at y jobs"** and so this has a potentially disproportionate impact on career progression and promotion prospects as well as an inclusive, fair and transparent recruitment experience. Several participants related examples of going for promotion only to be told by their line managers that they **"couldn't understand why xx would want yy job…you're really good zz….I'm not sure that's for you".**

6.16 There is a perception amongst younger employees that that their employment and therefore prospects were limited by the type of employment contracts which are often (but not exclusively), fixed term. This can be attributed to participants being on graduate programmes, or higher apprenticeships but for some, who wanted to get onto the property ladder, the temporary nature of their roles impacts on realising this ambition.

6.17 Whilst some authorities do collect applicant tracking data in relation to the key protected characteristics; this is not consistently captured or analysed within their organisations, or indeed across the region to assess or evaluate what could meaningfully be done to improve the recruitment and selection process or improve the experience for internal or external candidates including the interview or assessment process. **"…we collect a lot of data around diversity but I'm not sure that we always know what we should be doing with it". "It's hard to put it (equality) on the agenda when we don't have a diverse workforce…it feels like we're just mentioning it to get a tick in the box and it shouldn't be like that".**

6.18 There were however some examples of good practice in the form of blind recruitment where personal details of the applicant are removed e.g. name, address, or any information that could give an indication of who they are or where they are from and the use of values-based recruitment where the process not only focuses on the technical abilities of the role but also the extent to which the candidate is able to demonstrate the values of the organisation in their application where they have been shared as part of an applicant pack.

6.19 All organisations shared that their recruitment campaigns included their organisational values, but few were able to articulate how this was actively integrated into the recruitment process itself.

6.20 Human Resources departments felt that their recruitment and selection policies were fair and equitable, included corporate equality statements and had an equality impact assessment.

6.21 A small number of local authorities had ensured that all staff involved in recruitment and selection processes had undertaken face to face unconscious bias training and some had used an online unconscious bias course. Several district/boroughs, metropolitan and county local authorities that had used name blind applications processes had found this a useful process.

6.22 There was a recognition by several employers that there are systemic barriers to promotion and progression for staff from diverse communities and their employee journey is hindered because of this. **"We know the playing field isn't level and we want to make it better. we know we need to be more creative about attracting a more diverse workforce, particularly at senior management levels. We are behind the curve…our graduate development schemes need to be more proactive and the websites aren't always as inclusive as we would like. Networks are important and can impact on who gets the jobs".** Whilst there are some welcome changes to the diversity of staff in senior leadership teams in respect to gender, there remains little in relation to race and this is recognised by all local authorities who took part in the research.

6.23 There was little evidence presented of a robust strategy by local authorities to tackle the potential for bias at the point of recruitment other than ensure staff receive unconscious bias training. No authority taking part in the focus groups had undertaken a critical review and evaluation of their unconscious bias training and other recruitment and selection initiatives, to assess any meaningful impact in candidate selection.

6.24 The most common challenge identified by senior leaders is the longevity of employees. Even in the most diverse conurbations it is recognised that this has the most impact on diversification of the workforce. Leaders still report their workforce as being primarily white, male, and female and middle aged with varying levels of representation in relation to age, ethnicity, and disability, many were not able to report specifically on representation in relation to sexuality.

6.25 This static workforce has a direct impact on councils being able to articulate a credible or attractive employee proposition which then becomes an integral part of a recruitment and selection strategy. For some ethnic communities there is a perception by the employer that working in local government (unless in professions such as Planning or the legal profession) is not socially desirable employment destination. This was reported anecdotally rather than based on facts.

6.26 There is a recognition from senior leaders that there is insufficient critical analysis of the applicant experience at the recruitment and selection stage, or indeed the wider employment experience as it relates to inclusion; this reduces the impetus for meaningful and lasting change in relation to inclusion practice and the potential for conscious and unconscious bias in the design of inclusive recruitment campaigns, the application and the shortlisting process and the remainder of the employment journey that follows.

7. Promotion and Progression

7.1 The key line of enquiry directed the focus group to consider what has been their collective experience when looking to move careers or obtain a promotion in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion practice in their organisation.

7.2 Having explored the diversity and inclusion challenges at the recruitment and selection stage of the employee journey, the research went on to look at the employee experience in relation to opportunities for career progression and promotion and hear about any diversity and inclusion challenges they had experienced in progressing their careers or accessing their next promotion. Participants were drawn from a range of backgrounds; examples include:

Social Workers	Culture Change / transformation and OD
Learning and Development & HR	Administrative and Support roles
Apprentices and Higher Apprentices	Mental Health Support

7.3 Experience in this area was reported as variable across the region. The common thread is the role of the line manager and the degree to which they are engaged in the ongoing development of their staff as well as the quality of the working relationship.

7.4 Where staff are managed by an engaged line manager, staff feel and perceive that access to developmental activities and opportunities for promotion is easy and managers are engaged in their future aspirations. This is evidenced through informal channels such as day to day conversation which is often increased before a formal recruitment process is launched internally or externally if managers feel the timing is right for one of their direct reports. Additional support is offered through informal coaching or mentoring but this increase in support is dependent on the quality of the working relationship. **"I had some great secondment opportunities as I've progressed through my own career…when I came back after maternity leave, I had a really supportive manager who enabled me to work across the authority and I had the opportunity to move sideways to support my development. As a manager I'm now proactive about supporting staff informally to develop their careers".**

7.5 Staff who had a positive experience around their progression and promotion reported that they continued and developed this mindset further **"…. made it my business to develop and grow. I have been disciplined in developing myself. I have kicked at doors and I now make sure that my team understand that personal development is in their gift".**

7.6 This was not the experience of staff from underrepresented groups however by contrast some Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic staff reported they had positive experiences of progressing their careers. They were the minority and by and large experiences and perceptions were less positive. **".... having self-direction is great, but for some ethnic minorities that can be received as being aggressive when you ask for what you want, even if it's the right thing to do"**.

7.7 The impact of informal networks cannot and should not be underestimated and the resulting exclusivity or cliques it creates goes to the heart of diversity and inclusion.

"....you just know that there's no point in applying for the job because it's already a done deal...even if you apply, you're going through the motions so it looks fair...I don't bother anymore". For candidates who are internal this was perceived as confirmation that opportunities for progression is not an equitable or inclusive process.

7.8 Staff from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (overwhelmingly but not exclusively) report that they experience barriers in accessing development and promotion opportunities for several reasons. Some of those reasons include an historically difficult working relationship where they have challenged the fairness of a decision with regard to access to training, challenging discriminatory behaviours or practice which include information about promotional opportunities given to a select group of colleagues and mentoring or coaching being offered to what is perceived to be specific groups of colleagues. **"The glass ceiling for BAME staff is real and if your line manager is prejudiced then you're finished before you even start...I don't have much faith in things being better"**.

7.9 This experience alongside the view that promotions are often **"promised but don't materialise"**, feeds a lack of faith in the recruitment and selection process and is further borne out through the experience of wanting to develop their careers. Specifically, participants recounting their experience, question the value of applying for that next move or if individuals do put in an application and are shortlisted, fear that the quality of the feedback they receive will not have any meaningful currency.

7.10 It should be noted that this view was also expressed in groups where participants were mainly white but was particularly pronounced where attendees came from underrepresented groups e.g., staff with disabilities or identified as Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic. On several occasions staff expressed that issues of intersectionality were not addressed as a consideration in relation to career progression and promotion i.e., where there were development needs related to an individual's disability which were being compounded by their gender or their race.

7.11 Conversely reported in similar numbers across small and larger authorities, is the tendency to promote from within whilst going through the motions of advertising a role externally and appearing to administer a fair and transparent process. **"I know the last two jobs in our department have gone to people who already work here, and they were advertised outside...it's the way it seems to be done; one of them had been promised to the person who got it; they told me". "Everybody knows that if it's a juicy job; there's always someone internally that management has their eye on, but they have to advertise don't they, otherwise that's breaking the law isn't it?"** The decision to promote internally had sometimes already been made but not explicitly articulated because of wanting to be seen to be equality compliant. This is further compounded when additional mentoring/support is offered to the preferred candidate in preparation for the interview process.

7.12 Whilst internal applicants are encouraged to apply for roles, they do so in the full knowledge that it was **"...to make the application figures look good...it's just a tick box exercise"**. This approach has a detrimental impact on staff trust and confidence in the recruitment process and opportunities for progression based on merit. In these cases, the organisations commitment to diversity and inclusion is frustrated as is any attempt at an authentic and inclusive talent management and career progression strategy.

7.13 Career progression and promotion has been hampered for some by the temporary nature of their employment contracts. Whilst a fixed term contract should not exclude an employee from applying for progressive developmental roles participants are often in junior roles such as apprenticeships or graduate development programmes.

7.14 These types of roles tend to be of 12 to 24 months duration and participants felt that they were more expendable if they are on a graduate or apprenticeship scheme with limited prospects of a permanent role at the end of their contract and therefore a perception that positioning or supporting them to achieve career progression or access training is not a managerial priority. **"....feel like I'm just a spare pair of hands rather than contributing to something that I can own. I get training but no one really expects or values what I have to say even if it's relevant...being a graduate or apprentice seems to mean you don't know anything and you don't always feel valued"**.

7.15 In smaller authorities the limitations around career progress and promotion are more pronounced as the workforce is static, older, and more established in their careers. **" if I want to progress... I've got to wait for the person currently in the role to retire...that's about 10 years away...I will need to move to get on"**.

7.16 The size of the organisation as well as access to a training budget is also a contributing factor which influences succession planning and career development opportunities. It is unclear however, if employees with long service are less likely to be proactive about taking up development opportunities, therefore contributing to an organisational passivity around training and development.

7.17 When training is offered there is also a question about its fitness for purpose. It's link to the organisation's long-term talent management or succession planning approach was often unclear; staff reported that it often feels piecemeal and reactive rather than linked to the organisational big picture.

7.18 There are examples of authorities who have a range of development opportunities available to support staff progression and development. It is important to note however, that specific attention to the career and progression aspirations of staff working in the sector is not consistently applied nor is there evidence of a transparent nominations process to ensure equal access by all staff.

7.19 Several councils are actively reporting or auditing on the race, gender pay gap but could not consistently say how they were using the data to progress their approach to an inclusive workforce development strategy, impact on positive action strategies or their learning and development offers for staff.

7.20 There are some examples of programmes available more generically in authorities within the region. These are listed below with the caveats outlined earlier. It was also not possible to definitively establish the extent to which there was any targeting to groups by protected characteristic:

Coaching through West Midlands Employers Coaching Pool as a general offer by authorities
Mentoring on an ad hoc basis and reverse mentoring where potential has been identified
Management Development for first line managers
Secondment opportunities
Future Leader Development Programmes
Apprenticeship programmes for employees new to work and Higher Apprenticeships for staff who have undergraduate degrees.

7.21 Review of the West Midlands Combined Authority Report 'Leaders like you' 2018 reveal that little has changed in the sector in terms of initiatives that support the progression of women or staff from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Examples of institutional racism were referenced **"My manager was keen to tell me what my career pathway should be, I wanted to progress, but he wanted me to stay in the same job. My moving on was inconvenient for him so he wouldn't support my application for a secondment. I was really upset when he supported my white co-worker for the secondment, and I think it was because they were friends, and they were white…what do you call that?"** (participant in a junior role in a larger authority) as was the tendency for patriarchal leadership, experienced as **"jobs for the boys/girls"**.

7.22 Organisational culture and the degree to which there is an open and honest discussion about the impact of race, gender, and disability in the public sector remains a thorny and sensitive issue when linked to opportunities for career development. The attention and light that the Black Lives Matter movement and the Covid pandemic has shone on the issue of inclusive practice offers several lenses through which this challenge can be examined. Practice around career development is one of them, as discussed within this report for the local government sector.

8. Training and Development

8.1 **The key line of enquiry considered how easy it had been to get access to training and development to support career aspirations; did this have a focus on transparency with attention paid to inclusion and equality'?**

8.2 The link between training and development and career progression have a direct correlation Many of the issues were not dissimilar to those previously noted, particularly in relation to the transparency of the process but also accessibility to training opportunities to support career aspirations.

8.3 The Covid pandemic has forced organisations to review how training and development is delivered but also style of delivery. Focus group participants report that the move to online learning whilst reducing time away from the day job, has created the unintended consequence of a perception of increased multi-tasking. Whilst online or self-managed e: learning opportunities are available, it is, in the main to support technical aspects of their roles rather than contribute to their career or promotion aspirations. In terms of the added value delivery of training in the current climate, the majority view was interaction in the classroom was preferable even with an appreciation of the limitations for social contact that the pandemic has imposed. **"…I'm doing a normal working day but still having to find time to do training on top…at least in the training room, you're away from your desk"**.

8.4 Participants share the value of having good digital skills but didn't feel that this was reflected in upskilling staff to be more digitally confident of competent and therefore enhance their promotion opportunities. There is a general perception that if someone works in IT in a technical role then they are more likely to get access to training and development that enables them to be more effective to do your job but it is only applicable to a small, specialised part of the workforce. **"I tend to get the new packages in first so before we roll it out to the wider organisation, we need to understand it ourselves. My staff get the training if they need it otherwise, we can't do our job"**.

8.5 The pandemic has forced unplanned organisational investment in technology, but staff report there has been little time taken to upskill them in its applicability to their work or more importantly as a tool to support engagement and communication amongst the workforce.

8.6 Older workers who have traditionally relied on being in the office have found it particularly challenging, either relying on colleagues supporting them informally or not actively engaging in team catch ups using communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams or zoom. Training and development on using technology to support workplace efficiency is not consistently.

"I noticed during lockdown that some of my older colleagues weren't on the MS Teams catchups… they would respond if one of us called them but would only say to a couple of us that they didn't like the technology…I think they were a bit isolated because of this".

8.7 The current financial constraints in the public sector is a prohibitive factor in trying to access development opportunities. The view of staff in the focus groups (in the main) was that in times of austerity the training budget appears to reduce substantially when in fact it should be increased as the organisational expectation is that staff need to work in different ways, often requiring the acquisition of new skills. The result of this organisational knee jerk was often reported as training being offered in a reactive just-in-time way to staff with a sense of **"running to catch up"** to deliver a service to the community or stakeholders.

8.8 There were a small number of staff representative of unitary, county, and metropolitan authorities who reported that whilst training was primarily taking place online, the offer is innovative, included a blended approach to the training offer and paid attention to the learning styles of participants therefore contributed to raising awareness about diversity issues which are inherent in training and development potentially limiting promotion opportunities. The examples given included an increased awareness of neuro diversity needs such as Asperger's, learning disabilities, visual impairments, and residual mental health issues. It is worth noting that this experience was the exception rather than the norm as staff in the focus groups were working in an adult and social care environment or in areas where services are provided to service users with a range of disabilities. Importantly, this was a positive demonstration of an inclusive training and development offer which could become common place.

8.9 Those on apprenticeships report a positive experience of getting training but not always an opportunity to apply the learning because of the perception of their junior status; thereby creating limiting returns on the organisation's investment in them.

8.10 In terms of the broader inclusion agenda and the link to accessing training and development opportunities to support career progression; as already noted earlier, there is a strong link to the degree of proactivity and quality of the relationship that staff have with the line manager. Many of the organisations in the focus groups have undertaken equality or unconscious bias training but were unable to relate this to training and development conversations other than those already noted. There is a strong feeling amongst participants that there is no meaningful connection to training on inclusion and diversity and the experience of employees and opportunities for career advancement **"....it really is just a tick box exercise"**.

8.11 Whilst staff report that they were able to access training it did tend to sit in the domain of supporting the functionality of their role rather than supporting their career aspirations e.g., accessing training to improve for example enhancing social work practice. **"There was a course I wanted to do for a while, I asked my manager if I could get a place on the next in- take. Getting a place would have also helped me apply for a management role…I kept getting reasons why I couldn't go…workloads, other people who were on a waiting list longer than me, and so on. We got a new member of staff on the team and they got to do the course quite quickly. I think that's because my skill set is quite specific and it would be difficult for them to replace me and I'm the only BAME person doing my job"**.

8.12 Staff consistently reported that where requests for training that would enhance career progression or promotion were made, they experienced that there were **"hoops that you need to jump through" to justify your request. Examples of those hoops included "waiting your turn", "not enough or no training budget", "you've just missed nominations' and 'xx has the place now…you will be next"**.

8.13 Staff from a Black, Asian Minority Ethnic background, in the main but not exclusively report that this was a regular occurrence for them, particularly if the request for training was to support their career aspirations. **"It feels like it's an uphill struggle to get the training you need…if you're working remotely from the centre; it's even more difficult as you don't have access to those informal channels…" "….a good relationship with your line manager helps or at least have one who's interested in your development"**.

8.14 In terms of an explicit link to the annual appraisal or Personal/Professional Development Review process, it remains unclear how consistently or comprehensively career aspirations are integrated into this discussion and subsequently acted upon or strategically integrated into the organisational training and development offer.

8.15 The managers view of an individual's role can limit opportunities for further development or access to training. If they see your abilities as "belonging to them" that can impact on personal career aspirations. Staff reported that **"…my manager only wants me to do a particular job…when I ask about other training opportunities that would support my development, they tell me about what I'm good at now; not my potential for development"**.

8.16 The underlying perception on the part of the employee is that the manager would be inconvenienced by them being further developed as they would need to fill the role and then **"….wait for someone new to get to the level of experience that I have"**.

8.17 Leadership development training supported by coaching development is on offer within several authorities with programmes ranging from 2 days to several months. In terms of programme content, it remains unclear what the consistency of the offer is within the sector or the extent to which inclusive leadership is a component, the link to the organisations workforce development strategy or an emphasis on managers as developers as an integral part of leading inclusively.

8.18 Larger authorities were seen to be broadly more proactive in the training and development space perhaps because of access to financial resources but programmes did not explicitly address the barriers to promotion that might be experienced by staff from underrepresented groups. One authority is however, about to embark on an organisation wide intervention around inclusive practice that will engage with and impact on many of the issues raised in the training and development space, workforce development or also long term organisational development.

8.19 Several local authorities have initiated a wide range of ED&I learning programmes. These have included generic ED&I programmes, unconscious bias training for recruiters through face to face and online courses. All employers have ED&I embedded within their induction and onboarding courses for new employees. There is however an absence of a clear read across to the range and type of learning and development interventions that would drive a strategy of inclusive training and development or workforce development.

8.20 There was little evidence to demonstrate that inclusive leadership training had been delivered to leaders or senior managers in the sector. However, several local authorities were considering rolling this out to leaders and senior management teams.

8.21 Most local authorities had not assessed whether their ED&I training had had a positive impact on recruitment, retention, creating an inclusive organisational culture and other ED&I workstreams.

9. Engagement and Inclusion

The key line of enquiry explored with focus groups was how issues of inclusion were discussed organisationally on two fronts i) in relation to the current Covid-19 Pandemic and ii) the impact of the BLM movement following the death of George Floyd on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in their authorities.

9.1   The focus of discussions here was against the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement which has pushed to the fore a requirement to meaningfully address the issue of systemic discrimination in all aspects of our daily lives, more so in the public facing services of which local government is one.

9.2   The Covid pandemic and the ongoing discussions around inclusive practice in the public sector has never been more relevant as many people continue to be away from their primary place of work because of local/regional lockdowns, shielding from a personal perspective, or shielding of loved ones/family members. Discussions around healthcare inequalities needs to extend to include wider systemic inequality which impact on educational, housing, social care and criminal justice equity and access to services.

9.3   These two, seismic world events go to the heart of inclusive practice. The research looked to establish how easily these conversations are taking place and how they are progressed. What are organisations doing to maintain contact and engage staff during these unprecedented times through discussion foras, briefings, or other types of communication.

9.4   There is a general feeling that organisations are having conversations with varying degrees of engagement, ease, or authenticity. "…It's the elephant in the room isn't it…some of us want to talk about it but we don't want to say the wrong thing…I talk about it outside of work, but it doesn't feel ok to do it at work…say's something about our organisation doesn't it?"

9.5   Focus group participants shared the view that they were not sufficiently senior enough to raise issues of inequality in the organisation without being perceived as potentially "problematic". Some staff have chosen to go directly to their senior leadership teams or were already members of equality networks where there is a straight communication line to the executive team.

9.6   Many participating authorities report the presence of an equality working group, staff networks for staff from underrepresented groups or staff with specific responsibility for driving organisational equality and diversity/responsibility for EDI practice. For other authorities equality is seen as the added responsibility of the HR Department with a distinction drawn between equality being ensuring compliance and inclusion as something not yet clarified. More common practice was the organisation's commitment being included in publicity statements which were not evaluated for impact, action, or applicability to the organisation's strategic ambition in any meaningful way. **"...we could and should do more but in honesty, I think it's just a tick box for us…not great but it's about moving forward isn't it?"**

9.7 The degree of effectiveness and integration into day-to-day business is very variable ranging from **"woven into the fabric of the organisation's business"** through to an afterthought which, given the current challenges facing the public sector, has appeared to create an inclusion paralysis.

9.8 Some staff say they been happy with the support provided by their authorities as this has been led by staff networks, supported by the Chief Executive and senior leadership team. Equal attention has been given to the impact of Covid on the wider community and support groups put in place.

9.9 Conversely, where some organisations have explicitly explored opportunities to provide a safe space to discuss inclusion and diversity challenges, other colleagues report that there has been a marked absence of discussion between immediate team members. Instead, this lack of engagement at a personal level has left people feeling further polarized within the organisation. **"Our Chief Executive has been brilliant…he asked to meet with us as the BLM group in our organisation, he listened, and he's prepared to do something not just talk. He's also asked managers to release us from our day jobs to go to BLM meetings. I've really appreciated it. I can't say the same for some of my colleagues…I expected better of them and I feel let down that some of them haven't felt that they could talk to me about what's going on. It's the elephant in the room and lockdown has made it more difficult to find time to discuss it"**.

9.10 For staff from underrepresented groups and colleagues who have openly declared their allyship positive engagement and discussion has provided a space to share stress and distress but also build communities of support for the future in the workplace. **"I feel really let down by my organisation…we've done more on Covid and that wasn't great…there's been no open acknowledgement of what BLM means for me as a person of colour, even if I'm not black"**.

9.11 Some participants report the lack of an open, authentic acknowledgment around what the BLM means for all employees, as well as the wider organisational agenda around inclusive practice or more particularly Black and Minority groups which has compounded issues of 'otherness', belonging or engagement. "….this is a political issue…the elected members and senior leaders are the ones who are responsible…it's not something that's wise for me to get involved in" (on the authority's lack of comment around Black Lives Matter').

9.12 Discussions in the focus groups reported a plethora of communications about Covid-19 which has taken the form of weekly briefings from senior managers, newsletters available on the intranet and the use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, closed Facebook groups and various other informal channels to support staff who are unlikely to return to the workplace for the foreseeable future.

9.13 Some authorities are actively engaging staff through staff surveys to gauge the employee mood around several issues including BLM and wider issues of inclusion. Equality is seen as the golden thread within their strategy. For some they are already clear that the findings will inform their workforce strategy, with equality being seen as the golden thread.

9.14 An important observation which shouldn't be lost in relation to the engagement strand of the focus group discussions was a sense that many attended because of their commitment to wanting **"things to be better in relation to inclusive practice across the region"**. It was noted on several occasions that allies to the issues or those who understand and are committed to having discussions around moving the organisational dial on systemic discrimination and wider equalities, were already in the room. The absence of voices or views who might be, uncomfortable or not interested in being engaged in discussions around inclusive practice was of concern.

9.15 Most, if not all employers had conducted a wide range of staff engagement sessions, recently around the impact on Covid 19 on employees. All local authorities had undertaken staff surveys over the last two years and had included key lines of enquiry around diversity and inclusion. A small number of local authorities looked at data separately for protected characteristic groups. Where this was undertaken it illustrated varying degrees of satisfaction between diverse employee groups.

9.16 Employers had developed specific staff networks for diverse staff and had used these to review HR strategies and policies.

9.17 Local authorities who had either less diverse workforces or smaller workforces, although clearly committed to the ED&I agenda, felt they did not feel that they have the critical mass to make diverse staff networks meaningful.

9.18 Some employees had access to staff network groups across six protected characteristic groups. However, these were few and far between. Employees did not feel that they were being engaged effectively and when they were engaged there was a lack of action and progress on the issues that they had raised. There was a lack of governance around staff networks as staff felt that the issues were misunderstood.

9.19 Staff overall had been consulted on the impact of Covid 19 and felt that some of their concerns were being listened to, but little action had taken place. Some Black, Asian Minority Ethnic staff felt that their concerns on the impact of Covid 19 on themselves and their families was not specifically addressed by their employers.

9.20 The Black Lives Matter movement was seen by some employers as a political movement and not an issue that affected the Black, Asian Minority Ethnic community in the UK. Local authorities had made symbolic gestures, but some staff felt that there were no substantial and meaningful commitments from local councillors and senior leadership teams. **"My organisation could have done much more…I'm embarrassed because friends have asked me what we're doing and I can't answer not even that what's going on has been acknowledged internally, we've just done nothing. I can talk to my friends outside work about it but not at work"**.

9.21 There is broad recognition by senior leaders that there is a disconnect between the experience of staff on the ground and the aspirations of senior leadership in progressing the diversity and inclusion agenda for their organisations. Importantly, is also the degree to which the wider organisation understands inclusion as an issue, how staff are engaged or the degree to which there is consistent senior leadership commitment or inclusive behaviours to drive this agenda forward within their organisations.

9.22 The Black Lives Matter movement and the Covid pandemic has had the unintended consequence of forcing organisations to review how representative and inclusive their workforces are alongside critically reviewing the experiences of their employees. Local government has been no exception to this. The challenge as articulated by senior leaders spoken to in this report, is that of integrating inclusive practice into their strategies and processes whilst not seeming to be mechanistic about its importance or opportune

9.23 Through the interviews, there were a few particularly good examples of senior leaders leading the way and setting the tone for wider organisational discussion around diversity. This includes leading staff foras, 'Ask me Anything Events', and Newsletters. All of these being positive demonstrations of leadership willingness to facilitate wider workforce discussion.

Annex 1

Data Overview

In order to support and understand the scale and scope of the research key Human Metrics were reviewed and tabulated from a number of sources:

> **ONS Employment and Labour Market Survey, June 2020**

> **WME Infinistats data collection service at 1st October 2020**

Figure 1 – Council Human Metrics Data

The chart below shows those councils (by percentage and council type) who have provided core data (through the WME data service Infinistats).

A number of the largest Councils in the Region have not provided this data, any suppositions made therefore by data extrapolation exclude a large number of the WM Region LA workforce.

Fig 1 — Data Provision by Council Type


- County
- Unitary
- Mets
- Districts
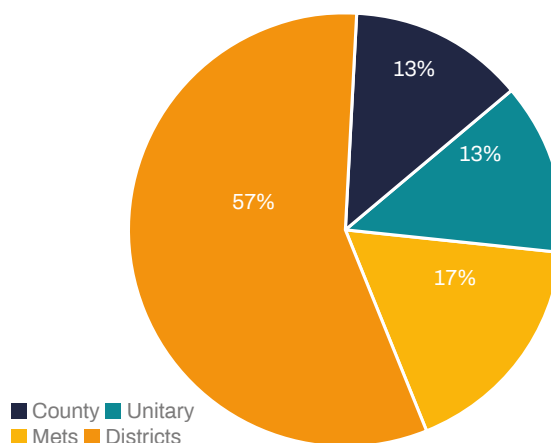
Figure 2 – Participation in the research groups compared to overall headcount

Fig 2 shows the levels of participation from the different council types compared to the overall headcount in each Council. Participation from Mets and Counties was lower as a percentage of the total headcount than for Unitaries and Districts.

It should be noted that whilst all Councils took part in some way (either through the provision of data, attendance of staff or HR leads in meetings or both) for some councils participation was limited, and the restrictions of virtual working for accessing certain types of employees (such as front-line staff without access to ICT platforms) is also noted.

Fig 2 — Participation Rates by Authority Type

- Participation
- Population
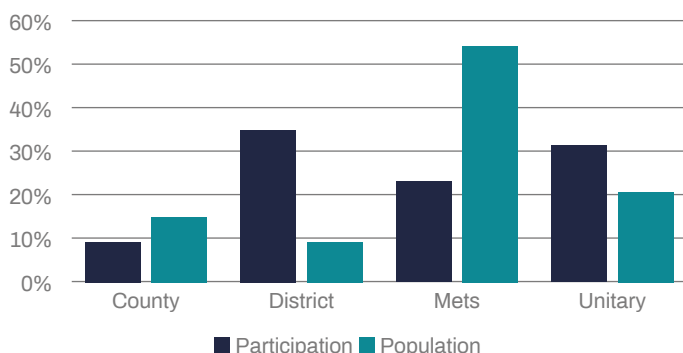
Figure 3 – Ethnicity in England compared to West Midlands

Fig 3 & 3a shows the ethnicity across the general population in England compared to the reported population in West Midlands Region and the available sample of Council employers. West Midlands Employers report lower ethnicity in the workforce for all groups except white when compared to the regional picture, even where the region has a higher population than the country as a whole.
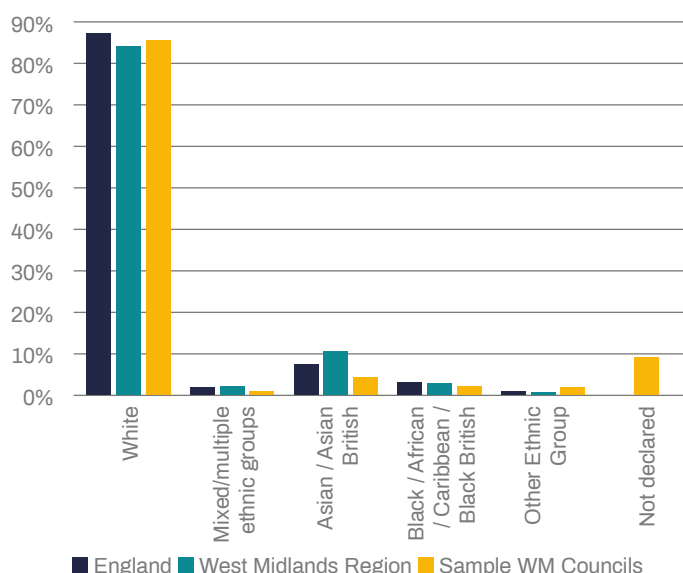
Fig 3 — Ethnicity Comparisons

- England
- West Midlands Region
- Sample WM Councils

Ethnic Group	England	West Midlands Region	Sample WM Councils
White	85.4%	82.7%	84.1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	2.3%	2.4%	1.1%
Asian/Asian British	7.8%	10.8%	4.9%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black/British	3.5%	3.3%	2.7%
Other ethnic group	1.0%	0.9%	2.2%
Not Declared			9.3%

Figure 4 – Gender of the Workforce

Fig 4 shows the correlation between gender in the working population (aged 16 to 64). In both England and the West Midlands region as a whole the gender split is 50 / 50. Within the West Midlands Councils workforce however the split is 67% female and 33% male (based on available data).

Fig 4

Gender Comparisons
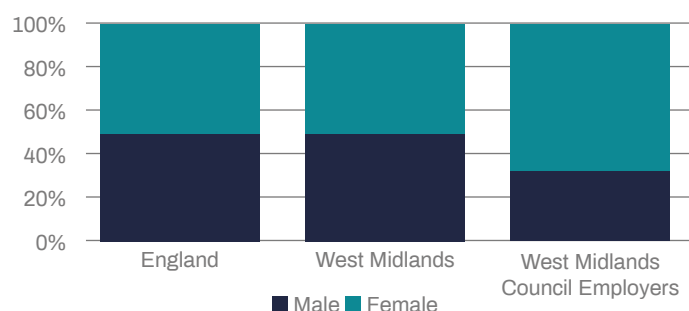
Gender Pay gap reporting

All Councils but 1 with less than 250 employees in the region submitted a Gender Pay gap report for 2018/2019, although with the Covid pandemic not all councils have yet submitted their return for 2019/2020 and the Government have eased the reporting requirements for this year in recognition of that.

Median pay gaps range from 20.5% in favour of women to 26.7% in favour of men across the Region, with 11 Councils with a gap of above 10% and 11 councils ranging from +5% to -5%.

District Councils are more likely to have a positive pay gap in favour of women, although the 2nd greatest detrimental gap is also in a District Council. Much of the impact on gender pay is driven by the make up of the workforce – with councils who have outsourced sections of the workforce who are in predominantly male or female occupations seeing the greatest impact on the headline figure.

Figures 4a to 4d
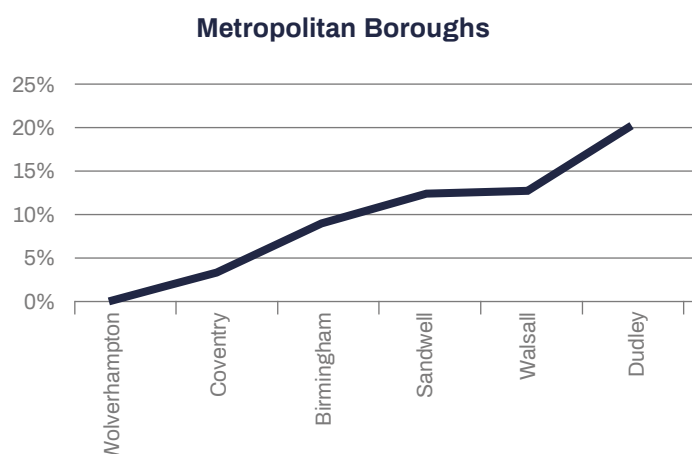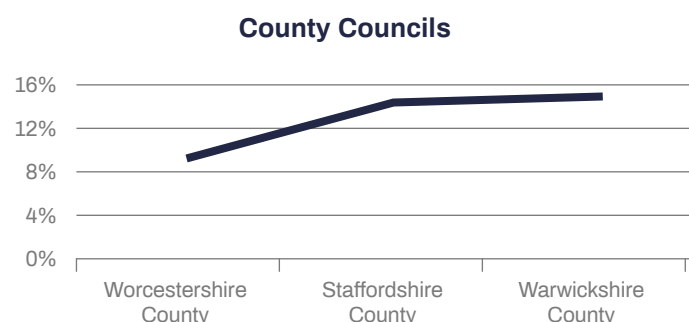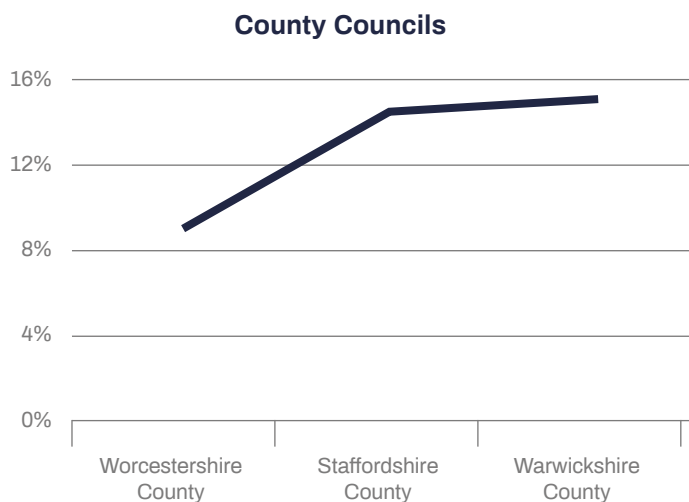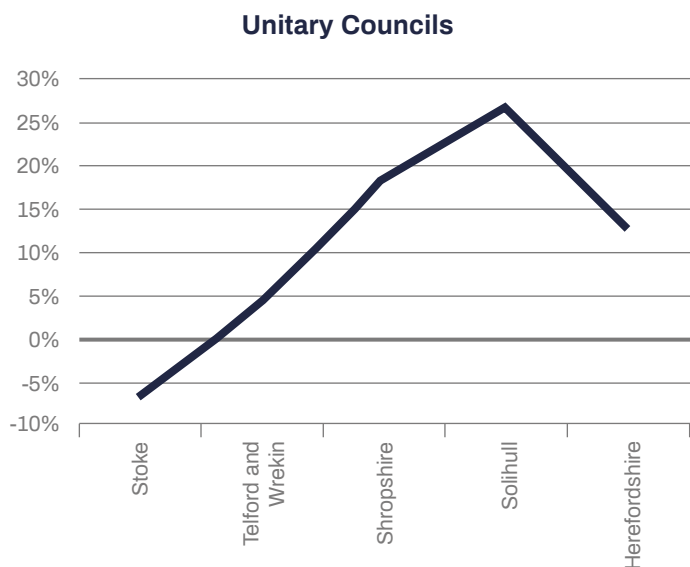
Fig 4a – Metropolitan Councils

Metropolitan Boroughs

Fig 4b – County Councils

County Councils

County Councils

Unitary Councils

Figure 5 – Disability in the workforce in England compared to the West Midlands Region and WM Council employers

Fig 5 – Percentage of working population self-reporting a disability

From the available data Councils in the West Midlands have 5.2% of staff reporting a disability, compared to the overall working population of 8.3% and the West Midlands average of 9%. Given the age profile shown at Fig 6 with an older workforce within the West Midlands Councils this is more noticeable and leads to questions about whether staff in employment who have a change in circumstance (rather than those appointed with a disability) then report their changed status to their employer.

Percentage of workforce self reporting a disability

Figure 6 – Age profile of the workforce in England compared to the West Midlands Region and WM Employers

Fig 6 – comparison of working population

The data shows significant variances in the age of the working population between the tree data sets, with a noticeable older working population in WM councils compared to both the national and the West Midlands picture, with significantly lower employees in the 20 – 24 age bracket.

Fig 6a

Age Range	All England	West Midlands	WM Councils
20 - 24	9.8%	14.5%	3.9%
25 - 39	32.0%	6.4%	24.7%
40- 49	20.1%	26.9%	25.5%
50 - 64	30.2%	41.2%	42.5%
65 +	7.9%	11.0%	3.4%

Appendix 1

About the Research Consultants

Elaine Clough

Elaine is an experienced Organisation Development Consultant, skilled in leading organisation-wide culture change, spearheading business transformation projects, and developing content for training purposes to enhance overall work performance. Working in the public sector for over 30 years with a strong background in people development, organisation development and staff engagement. Elaine has established, led, and motivated high-performing teams committed to achieving collective goals and shared vision. Elaine is experienced in the delivery of sustainable, whole system qualitative organisational outcomes in Organisation Design, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Arif Sain

Arif is the Managing Director of Inclusivity Global Ltd and a LGA Peer Assessor, he is a results- oriented diversity and inclusion specialist with a strategic and operational understanding of equality, diversity, inclusive leadership, and change management. He has over 30 years' experience of delivering ED&IL change management programmes, a detailed comprehensive knowledge of equalities legislation and the ability to devise and implement coherent diversity strategies & solutions.

Victoria Lee

Victoria has over 25 years' experience in local government HR. Having worked at district and county council level across all service areas, she has a strong background in operational HR with significant leadership experience in organisation culture, change and development. Vickie currently leads the HR and OD service for Wychavon and Malvern Hills district councils, where she is currently leading their agile working programme. She is actively involved with West Midlands Employers as a member of the District Heads of HR group and a member of the Service Advisory Group to the West Midlands Coaching and Mentoring Pool, through which she also works as a qualified coach and mentor across the region. Vickie is also a Peer with the LGA Peer Challenge Programme.

Appendix 2

Summary of Background Research
The 21st Century Public Servant

The 21st Century Public Servant report [1], published in 2014, set out to identify the skills, attributes and values demanded of effective future public servants, with a focus on those involved in the provision of local services. The research has resonance in the context of this Inclusion Insights Report because it was largely based on evidence from within the West Midlands region.

The report asks four key questions:

1. What is the range of different roles of the 21st century public servant?
2. What are the competencies and skills that public servants require to achieve these roles?
3. What are the support and training requirements of these roles?
4. How might central and local government better support and promote public service careers?

It identifies a series of roles and characteristics which cross traditional function role boundaries and set a framework of behavioural and aspirational challenges to meet the needs of public service in the 21st century.

The Local Government Association have placed this research centrally amongst workforce advice and support to the sector and a national steering group has been established to take forward further work to support the implementation of this approach across councils.

Diversity and inclusion are only occasionally directly referenced in the report. For example, the report shares concerns around a challenge of recruiting to values:

"Traditional public sector recruitment methods and processes were seen by some interviewees as limiting the diversity of the type of person who might join the public sector." [2]

For one person the solution appeared to be use of search consultants (head-hunters), with one participant justifying moves away from traditional local government recruitment channels:

"Some of the equalities thinking has made it harder to recruit for aptitude and personality…Here we put personal qualities and aptitudes and ask for demonstrations of how they were used in a current job…We advertise and we use our networks to get people to apply."

Of course, the danger of relying on such networks is that this can have the opposite effect of stifling diversity. There is clearly work to be done by HR teams to design (or re-design) inclusive recruitment strategies and processes which increase the range of people likely to be attracted to positions, and assesses them equitably against organisational values as much as (and sometimes more importantly than) technical requirements.

The report calls for a greater use of sabbaticals, secondments, and work shadowing as one route to share learning and gaining exposure to alternative organisational cultures across the wider public sector and beyond, into the private sector. But this fails to recognise that access to these often more informal opportunities must be inclusive to all, to ensure that diversity of opportunity and diversity of experience and thought is maximised for the benefit of the sector and its workforce as a whole.

The call for fluid and supportive organisation over silo and control-based thinking presents another opportunity to rethink structure and process. Whilst the 21st Century Public Servant report doesn't make any explicit link to workforce diversity or inclusion here, it seems evident from the findings of our Inclusions Insights research that the challenges and opportunities of more agile, flexible and integrated working practices must also be considered, and solutions must be designed, from an inclusion perspective

Finally, the concept of distributed leadership[3], where leadership is centred on shared activity by numbers of people across an organisation, rather than focused on purely hierarchical position, presents great opportunity for a shift in inclusive practice through this report, because it emphasises self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and collaboration:

"Interviewees emphasised the importance of leaders having passion, strong values and motivation ….", and

"This is an approach which …'requires being with people and allowing them to be themselves, listening, noticing, observing, and deploying yourself accurately in situations…'" [4]

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1 https://21stcenturypublicservant.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/21-century-report-281014.pdf   **2** See The 21st Century Public Servant report p12
3 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Distributed_leadership   **4** See The 21st Century Public Servant report p18

It does seem that perhaps the failure to make direct reference to diversity and inclusion in its widest sense as part of this report was an unfortunate omission. The report also frequently promotes the use of networks in various contexts without really posing any challenge about what these networks are and the extent to which they may inhibit diversity. However, the focus on shared humanity, authenticity, and the importance of relational working offers opportunity, encouragement and hope that councils using the 21st Public Servant report will see the need to place inclusion (of communities and their workforce) as central to their organisation development strategy.

Leaders Like You

The Leaders like You1 report, was published by the West Midlands Combined Authority and Leadership Commission in 2018. Research for the project was undertaken over a nine-month period with a broader focus on leadership within the region within which inclusion was an intrinsic part.

This report focuses primarily on the issue of diversity and inclusion across the wider public sector and draws on the experiences of leaders in the Private Sector, Police Service and The National Health Service. The intention was a call to action within wider the sector to address the challenges faced by aspirational leaders from Black, Asian and Minority ethnic backgrounds but also highlight the range of interventions that organisations could draw on to support employees to progress their careers.

Two years have passed and the business imperative for leaders in the sector has never been more relevant. Whereas the focus of Leaders Like You report was about leadership diversity in the region, in a range of organisational environments; this report takes a closer look at what is like to work in the one of the most diverse and youngest regions in UK, in local government.

By contrast, where one talks about diversity of leadership representation, the emphasis in this report starts at the gate of recruitment and selection and explores the diversity and inclusion journey, their experience of progression and promotion, access to training and development and inclusion and engagement within the frame of understanding the wider organisation strategic intent but also ease of conversations that explore diversity. This report takes place at a time when the world is grappling with conversations about health inequality and the Covid pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement has pushed conversations about inclusion that require action beyond listening exercises and time framed initiatives.

'The proportion of Black, Asian Minority Ethnic people in the workforce of local public and private sector organisations is generally significantly below that in the local working age population. It tends to be lower still in leadership positions' (where are we now p11)

The scepticism expressed by leaders from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in 2018 in HR and recruitment, continue to resonate in this report; particularly in relation to the advice and support received when exploring promotion and development opportunities.

'There is a need to fill the gap between often good recruitment policy, and everyday practice that has yet to catch up'. (recommendation 3d p17)

This exploration of the diversity and inclusion experience takes place through the eyes of several employee groups and does include, Leaders Like You, those in leadership roles and with protected characteristics such as gender or race.

In this report there is specific attention given to the employee experience, namely those in front line roles, practitioners in Human Resources, Learning and Development, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic employees, women in leadership and senior leaders with strategic responsibility for embedding a culture of inclusion within their organisations.

This approach takes a step before the important and related discussion around diverse leadership representation and focuses on brokering conversations that need to take place about the employee inclusion experience at the start and throughout their learning and development journey. If there is a genuine intention to improve and dismantle systemic discrimination then there is a need to interrogate systems and processes to ensure their fitness for purpose but also consistent application of best HR & learning and development practice within the local government sector.

The recommendations from this report should be read as a start but not an end as the sector changes to adapt and respond to the changing and diverse needs of its community's and the workforce.

There are some enduring themes and messages echoed in Leaders Like You

'……Mentoring is a powerful tool for building bridges into leadership'

'The lack of robust evaluation of leadership interventions means we don't always know what works.'

The Leaders Like You report draws on the leadership experiences of the private sector as well as the wider public services. This report with a specific focus on Diversity and inclusion in the West Midlands Region provides vital data that will drive a comprehensive and consistent approach to inclusive practice in the region and more importantly, provide a template that engages metropolitan, county and district authorities around the inclusion agenda.

http://stagebeta.wmca.org.uk/media/4fljzt00/leaders-like-you.pdf

Appendix 3

Ethical statement underpinning the research approach

An awareness of the sensitivities around the issues being discussed meant that the interviewers needed to assure participants that their attendance at focus groups or 1:1 interview was underpinned by the following principles:

Confidentiality	Non-judgemental
Their contribution	Owning our experiences
Candour	Mutual respect
Listening	

1. Participants were also informed of WME's legal duty of care to them. If in the process of sharing experiences in the focus groups, it became clear that there had been a breach of the Equality Act facilitators would liaise with the individual and their organisation outside of the process to flag the issue forward.

2. Given the current pandemic and regional lockdowns the focus groups were unable to be facilitated face to face, so the research utilised MS Teams as a preferred platform. Participants were able to join with or without video connections.

3. Whilst participants introduced themselves at the start of the sessions, they were not asked to declare openly what type of authority they worked for. This information was held confidentially as part of the booking process, managed internally by West Midlands Employers.

4. Figures 1 and 2 provide an overview of the type of authorities who engaged with the focus groups and the 1:1 interview and / or provided data.

Contact us

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or email the WME team info@wmemployers.org.uk**

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