

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC)
Date:	4 th February 2026
Subject:	Equalities Plan Update
Lead Member:	Cllr Shah, Lead Member for Public Health, Wellbeing and Equalities
Chief Officer:	Sonia Khan, Director of Strategy, Change and Resident Engagement
Contact Officer:	Catherine Glossop, Head of Strategy & Performance
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices	Appendix 1 - Summary of Equality Plan Progress

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report updates the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee (CISC) on progress made across the council's equalities agenda since the LGA Equality Peer Challenge (September 2024), which focused on two of the themes of the LGA's Equality Framework for Local Government – namely Diverse and Engaged Workforce and Responsive Services & Customer Care.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee:
- Notes the progress being made as part of the [Equalities Plan](#), and
 - Provides challenge and support - with a focus on data and systems, approach to partnership working and impact on residents.

3. Report

3.1 Introduction

Slough is a young, diverse and entrepreneurial town. One quarter of the population are aged 15 or under, and almost half are from Asian ethnic groups, 36% from White ethnic groups, 7.6% from Black ethnic groups and 9.7% from mixed or other ethnic groups. Slough's communities are made up a diverse range of different faiths, including Christian (32%), Muslim (29.4%), Sikh (11.3%) and Hindus (7.8%).

Slough's demographic and socio-economic profile presents opportunities as well as challenges. Stark inequalities exist, including across health (healthy life expectancy is significantly below the regional average and rates of infant mortality are almost double),

income (including high rates of child poverty) and housing (including the highest rate of homelessness outside of London, where almost 70% of rough sleepers have no recourse to public funds). Disparities are evident across different ethnic groups and between resident and non-resident workers.

The Corporate Plan set out a clear focus on equality and inclusion, but a recent LGA Equality Peer Review (2024) identified significant scope to improve the council's approach. Since this review, the council has been building its analytical capacity to deepen understanding of the opportunities and challenges different members of staff and residents face, strengthen trust and relationships, and put equality at the heart of its improvement journey.

3.2 Background

In September 2024, the LGA conducted a Peer Challenge on the council's approach to equalities, focusing on two themes of the LGA's Equality Framework: Diverse and Engaged Workforce and Responsive Services & Customer Care.

The review revealed a strong commitment to equalities across council leadership, members and staff and identified examples of best practice across services that had the opportunity to scale. The review also identified areas of challenge around the council's understanding, skills and confidence, use of data (across workforce, community and service user profiles) and governance. Challenges were identified across internal recruitment practices and culture, with limited diversity across senior leadership, wellbeing challenges and a lack of psychological safety exacerbated by the council's organisational and financial challenges. The council's approach to community engagement and partnership working were found to be underdeveloped and there was scope to more fully leverage members' leadership role. Short and longer term recommendations were made (see Peer Challenge [report](#)).

In response, the council published its [Equality Plan](#) 2025-27, setting out how the council will deliver the equality objectives in the [Corporate Plan](#) 2023-27. The Equality Plan sharpened the council's focus on: the most vulnerable residents to address the inequalities facing disadvantaged children and young people, tackling local health inequalities and community safety challenges, and harnessing our political and officer leadership to improve data, insights and ensure our workforce reflects the communities we serve.

3.3 Progress

3.3.1 Diverse and Engaged Workforce

Since the LGA Peer Challenge, significant progress has been made to address workforce challenges. The [Workforce Strategy](#) (2025-27) sets the foundations for a more inclusive working environment through a focus on:

1. Getting the basics right (e.g. supporting staff to access to the right data and tools, such as delivering bitesize learning on data management)
2. Building trust and empowering our people (e.g. enabling staff to help shape the decisions that affect them through Our People Forum)
3. Fostering a healthy and inclusive environment (e.g. working across staff networks to bring lived experienced into policy design), and
4. Building a positive and transformative culture (e.g. through staff recognition awards).

Reflecting this, improvements have been made to the collection, use and management of [diversity data](#) to ensure we are attracting and retaining diverse talent. There has been an increase in staff engagement and understanding of equalities through increased investment in training (such as the forthcoming inclusive leadership training), enhanced internal communications and engagement with clearer signposting to support and sharing best practice.

Existing policies, procedures and ways of working have been refreshed (for example, bringing in culturally appropriate trauma support and a more flexible approach to leave reflecting diverse religious holidays). Our communications plan continues to celebrate the diversity of staff and residents and is increasing its focus on council-wide engagement and events (recently including: Black History Month, International Day of the Disabled Person, International Women's Day, and our own council Diversity Day to celebrate the diversity of our employees).

Staff feel more supported with staff networks in place promoting diversity and inclusion across race, gender (women), LGBTQ+, disability, neurodiversity in addition to a Carers Café and a Menopause Café. Staff Networks are sponsored by senior leaders, with representation on the Equalities Board. In the last staff survey, staff said they felt more valued and recognised for what they do in 2024 (55%) compared with 2023 (47%). Employee turnover is now in line with the wider public sector average of 7.51% (voluntary).

In terms of next steps, continuing to improve how the council collects and monitors its [diversity data](#) will be key, alongside deepening staff engagement, awareness and understanding of best practice. This will be supported by ongoing work to improve the council's management practice. Completion of end of year reviews (appraisals) is a current focus. In 2023, only 17% of end of year reviews were complete and this has increased from 70% in 2024 to 90% in 2025.

3.3.2 Responsive Services

Since the LGA Peer Challenge, significant progress has also been made to address the challenges facing residents and enable more responsive service delivery.

The council has been working to strengthen the 'golden thread' from Corporate (and Equalities) Plan commitments down to individual service plans to underpin a cross-cutting focus on equality. Governance has been strengthened with annual reporting to increase transparency and the creation of an Equalities Board to oversee delivery.

A dedicated drive to improve [data collection](#), incorporating national and local data sets, has improved understanding of the diversity of residents and local inequality challenges (examples include the [Slough Insights](#) pack, a [Poverty Pack](#), [Residents Survey](#) and the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#)). A training package is in-design to improve analytical capability, alongside guidance and tools to strengthen the link between data, decision-making and performance monitoring.

Staff are supported to draw on the latest data to conduct [Equalities Impact Assessments](#) and ensure equalities considerations are comprehensively reviewed, with challenge and support provided and training being rolled out. The [Corporate Performance Management](#) framework has been refreshed to ensure inequalities are tracked, progress is monitored, and services are supported to conduct deeper dives.

It is recognised that more effective communication, engagement, codesign and codelivery will be essential if services are to be responsive to the diverse needs of residents. Reflecting this, the council's approach to communications and engagement has been refreshed, with a clear [strategic approach](#), supported by toolkits, guidance and forums to share learnings, underpinned by a new governance process to raise the bar of practice. Progress will be tracked through community and

partner participation and feedback, monitoring the diversity of reach across engagement channels and annual [Resident Survey Results](#).

Strengthened partnership working is key to the council's future operating model and more inclusive ways of working are being co-designed in collaboration with Slough's diverse faith communities and partners.

Key to addressing Slough's stark inequalities will be working with residents and partners to co-design a [system-wide](#) approach, which the public health team is developing to tackle local [health inequalities](#) and strengthen the council's focus on prevention. Teams are mapping user journeys, identifying opportunities to link disparate data sets, and ultimately integrate service provision. Residents will be at the heart as the council shifts resources from health care setting to communities, and a trial will launch in the Britwell community hub this year.

In terms of next steps, further investment will be required to enable a more standardised approach to equalities data collection, monitoring and evaluation. Data collection and systems remain fragile and fragmented. A Data Plan is in development to grapple with these challenges.

Further progress also needs to be made to harness member understanding of Slough's communities and leverage their leadership role. Recent examples of member-led events include the [State of the Borough](#) event (July, 2025), the [Cohesion and Faith Forum](#) event (July, 2025), and the [Crime and Community Safety Summit](#) (October 2025). A programme of member-led community conversations to refresh Slough's future vision is now in-design, which will be supported by a broader member training and development programme.

4. Implications

Financial implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal implications

4.2 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on relevant public authorities, known as the Public Sector Equality Duty. This duty applies to the relevant protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation and marriage, and civil partnership (employment duty only). There is both a general and specific duty. The general duty requires all listed authorities, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010.
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

4.2.1 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 require public authorities to:

- a) Publish gender pay gap information on their employees.
- b) Publish information to demonstrate their compliance with the general equality duty ('equality information').

c) Prepare and publish one or more equality objectives which it thinks it should achieve to do any of the things mentioned in the general equality duty ('equality objectives').

The Council reports its gender pay gap to the Employment Committee and has reported a wide range of workforce data to that committee. The Council also includes details of the equality implications of any recommended decision to be decided at a member level, and updates Cabinet annually on progress against the Equality Plan objectives.

Equalities

4.3 The council is committed to being an inclusive employer and meeting its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and in particular, s.149, the Public Sector Equality Duty. This report sets out the council's approach as part of its improvement and recovery journey.

Corporate Parenting

4.4 Slough's Council's approach to equalities recognises that being care-experienced, whilst not a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, can be intersectional and often presents children and young people with additional life challenges to overcome. For this reason, care experienced people have been recognised as a "protected characteristic" by the council. The council's approach to supporting care-experienced children and care leavers is set out in our Corporate Parenting Strategy, which states how we will work to reduce the inequalities that may exist between our children and young people and their peers.

Risk management implications

4.5 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

Environmental implications

4.6 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

Appendix 1: Summary of Equality Plan Progress

Equality objective	Putting the basics in place	Progress update
<p>Equality Objective 1: Improve outcomes for children and young people who are more likely to be disadvantaged based on their protected characteristic, including SEND.</p> <p>Equality Objective 2: Work with partners, including housing providers, to target health inequalities and wellbeing between those from different protected characteristic groups.</p> <p>Equality Objective 3: Work with partners to improve community safety, in particular focusing on violence experienced by women and girls</p>	<p>Tackling Key Inequalities</p> <p>To make an impact the council needs to:</p> <p>Develop an understanding of key inequalities with a focus on children, health and community safety</p> <p>Theme 1: Develop a solid evidence base to understand key inequalities Slough residents face and what is driving them</p> <p>Theme 2: Establish and sustain engagement with the community, voluntary sector and partners</p> <p>Theme 3: Build a dialogue with residents in a wider range of accessible ways</p> <p>Embed equality into decision making, leadership and delivery</p> <p>Theme 1: Drive delivery of equality objectives</p> <p>Theme 2: Improve the quality of equality impact assessments (EIAs) to clearly demonstrate understanding of communities</p> <p>Theme 3: Ensure better governance of equalities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence base in development bringing together national and local data sets, including the Slough Insights pack, Poverty Pack, 2025 Residents Survey and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment increasing understanding of intersectional needs - Training, support and challenge being rolled out to improve quality of EIAs (Q1, 2026) - Golden thread strengthened across corporate priorities and service plans (Q4, 2025) - Performance Management Framework revised to track key indicators, supported by quarterly deep dives (Q2, 2025) - Governance strengthened with the creation of an Equalities Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, to oversee delivery and annual public reporting (Q1, 2025) - Strategic Partnership refresh underway to put equality at the heart of collaborative ways of working (Q2, 2026) - Comms & Engagement Plan refreshed to support a more targeted and tailored approach to communication and engagement (Q4, 2025) - Equality embedded throughout the design of the Target Operating Model as an 'enabling council' (Q4, 2026)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress tracked quarterly, including benchmarked through the Corporate Performance Management Scorecard (Q2, 2025)
<p>Equality Objective 4: The council uses a robust and comprehensive set of employment data to inform its workforce strategy and management practice, as well as benchmarking and sharing good practice.</p> <p>Equality Objective 5: The council actively ensures that the profile of its workforce (including the profile of major providers of commissioned services) broadly reflect the community it serves</p>	<p>Improving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our Workforce</p> <p>Theme 1: Equipping managers with better data to support diverse teams by identifying and removing barriers to inclusion</p> <p>Theme 2: Fostering a healthy workplace and inclusive culture</p> <p>Theme 3: Inclusive recruitment and staff development</p> <p>Theme 4: Developing leadership visibility and valuing staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Workforce Strategy set the foundations for a more inclusive working environment (Q1, 2025) - Improvements made to workforce diversity data collection and reporting (Q4, 2025) - Recruitment processes reviewed, blind sifting introduced and the Neurodiversity Network has supported improvements to the recruitment process (2025) - Investment in training and support to increase knowledge and understanding of equalities and share best practice (including inclusive leadership training) alongside improvements to line management practices - ongoing - Policies and ways of working refreshed (including trauma informed support) - Staff recognition scheme and regular cross directorate engagements sessions in place (2025) - Communications Plan celebrates diversity of staff and residents (including Black History Month, International Day of the Disabled Person, International Women's Day, and our own council Diversity Day to celebrate the diversity of our employees)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress tracked through monitoring training attendance, annual reviews, 360 feedback and monitoring workforce data (including annual Gender and Pay Gap reporting and Our People Poll survey results)
<p>Equality Objective 6: Political and executive leaders demonstrate personal knowledge and understanding of local communities and continue to show commitment to reducing inequality.</p>	<p>Developing the political and executive leaders' knowledge and understanding</p> <p>Theme 1: Celebrate diversity in the workplace</p> <p>Theme 2: Celebrate diversity in the community</p> <p>Theme 3: Develop and support Members as equality champions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Member training and support needs surveyed (Q3, 2025) - Member training programme developed (reviewed by Member Development Working Group - Q1, 2026). - Resident Engagement Framework refreshed, supported by tools and guidance to share learning and insights (Q3, 2025), including member engagement focused on harnessing community leadership roles (Q4, 2025) - Member-led community conversations to feed into future vision (Q2, 2026) - Faith Compact coproduced with Slough's faith communities to codesign future ways of working (Q2, 2026) - Structures and processes in place to monitor and respond to community tensions and promote cohesion (Q2, 2025) - Recent member-led community conversations include State of the Borough event (July, 2025), the Cohesion and Faith Forum event (July, 2025), and the Crime

		<p>and Community Safety Summit (October 2025)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Strategic Partnerships refreshed to put equalities at the heart of Slough's future vision (Q2, 2026 launch)- System-wide focus on prevention and earlier intervention in development to tackle health inequalities in a more integrated way, supported by a shared approach to commissioning (Council-wide Commissioning Framework forthcoming, 2026)- New Target Operating Model to provide accessible and integrated community-based support (to be piloted by Q4, 2026)- Progress tracked through community and partner participation and feedback at events, monitoring diversity of reach across engagement channels and annual Resident Survey Results
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