

The force diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) board

Introduction of a force diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) board to discuss, monitor, and provide strategic governance of DEI across the force.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Organisational
Topic	Community engagement Diversity and inclusion Ethics and values
Organisation	Essex Police
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2021
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Communities Disability LGBT+ Race/ethnicity Workforce
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Aim

The diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) board was established in 2021, following the launch of the force's diversity, equality and inclusion strategy in 2020. This was refreshed in 2023 to ensure its relevance and futureproofing through to 2026. Before its formation, there was no formal mechanism for monitoring or governing DEI performance and activity across the force.

The aim of the board is to provide better oversight, governance, and scrutiny of progress against the five objectives outlined in the diversity strategy:

- improving inclusive culture
- enhancing public trust and confidence
- workforce representation
- narrowing the disparity gap
- adopting and advancing the national DEI strategy

It aims to hold senior leaders accountable for departmental activity and offers a platform for staff support networks to raise concerns about organisational culture and/or share examples of best practice. All staff support networks and departments are represented on the board, alongside external independent advisory group (IAG) members, ensuring an inclusive approach reflecting internal and external perspectives.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the DEI board are to:

- improve inclusive culture – increase in volume and quality of diversity training across the force and Safe to Say data, which shows confidence levels of staff to declare their personal characteristics with the force and an indicator of our inclusive culture
- increase workforce representation – measured through force organisational management data and monitoring processes
- narrow the disparity gap in relation to use of police powers – visible through analytical data pertaining to use of force and stop and search and the intended outcome is a reduction in the levels of disproportionality experienced by ethnic minority people when compared to white people
- successfully adopt and advance the police race action plan (PRAP) – measured through public confidence data relating to Black people, staff survey information, disproportionality data relating to Black people, the number of engagement events involving Black communities
- improve trust and confidence for the public, local communities and victims of crime – to see an increase in confidence levels across communities and victims of crime through public confidence survey data

Description

The force's dedicated DEI team is responsible for coordinating DEI related activity, monitoring performance, and producing a quarterly DEI performance report for the DEI board. The team also compiles a DEI statutory duty information report to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality (PSE) duty.

The Diversity and Inclusion team, led by a superintendent, includes a chief inspector for DEI and positive action, a DEI co-ordinator, and a DEI officer. Together, they drive inclusive recruitment, develop and implement diversity strategies, ensure compliance with equality and human rights obligations, and support human resources (HR) initiatives through research, analysis, and project coordination.

The chief constable holds the lead for DEI over the force and initiated the establishment of a formal DEI board following the introduction of the DEI Strategy. This board was developed through the HR projects superintendent under the leadership of the director of HR, with senior leadership support secured via the wider senior leadership forum.

The HR projects superintendent prepared a report for chief officers outlining the requirement for a DEI board to provide governance over the force activity linked to the diversity strategy. Working to

the director of HR, the HR projects superintendent then presented the report to the chief officer group and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner to gain support and approval for the board to be implemented.

The quarterly board is attended by each head of department, who must submit a departmental command briefing in advance. Prior to the meeting, the HR projects superintendent consults with the chief constable and director of HR to finalise the agenda, which has been drafted following discussions with thematic leads across the force and staff support networks. Agenda items often include emerging issues such as disproportionality in stop and search data or national developments affecting staff networks, such as the UK Supreme Court ruling impacting the LGBTQ+ community. The agenda covers thematic DEI areas and topical issues, including the legal definition of 'sex' under the Equality Act and the policing response to immigration and asylum protests.

The HR projects superintendent submits the quarterly DEI performance report to the board, covering tangible performance data aligned with the five strategic objectives of the diversity strategy. This data is produced by analysts who focus on each of the five areas. Thematic leads then provide the contextual insight and narrative behind the data, which is further enriched by tactical leads across the force, such as the stop and search lead who contribute operational perspectives and frontline context.

The board meets for three hours each quarter. The chief constable sets actions at their discretion where further information is needed on specific areas. For instance, if higher levels of disproportionality are identified in the use of stop and search, an action may be set for the relevant lead to investigate and report back at the next board meeting.

Overall impact

The DEI performance report is published quarterly on Essex Police's website and forms part of the force's statutory duty information quarterly report, in accordance with the Equality Act, 2010. This is part of a continual monitoring and reporting process.

Since implementation of the board:

- staff confidence in declaring protected characteristics has improved

- trust and confidence in Essex Police has increased and ethnic minority communities now report higher levels of trust and confidence in Essex Police than white respondents to the survey
- female representation among police officers has risen from 33% to over 38% since the introduction of the DEI strategy and board
- ethnic minority representation among police officers has increased from 3.2% to 4.06% and while progress has been slower than hoped, the trajectory remains positive
- disproportionality in the use of police powers has remained static, however, the force is now better equipped to explain the reasons behind this disproportionality and is actively working with communities to understand and address it
- the police race action plan has been formally adopted by the force

Learning

The force DEI board having oversight from the chief constable has been instrumental in driving the success of DEI efforts across Essex Police. Its leadership has empowered local command culture boards, which feed into the central DEI board, and has fostered meaningful activity throughout the force. The board ensures ongoing monitoring and governance of DEI initiatives, with a strong emphasis on local leadership. DEI has become embedded in daily practice through this approach.

The force highlight that a significant challenge has been engaging staff to build a culture that supports open and honest conversations about force culture, inclusivity, and how these impact operational policing. These conversations are essential to improving service delivery and performance across all areas of policing. Some individuals lacked confidence in the culture to speak up and challenge when necessary. It has taken time and effort to dismantle these barriers and foster an environment where staff feel empowered to do so.

To support this cultural shift, Essex Police has delivered DEI training to all officers and staff. This includes the recent 'Upstander' package from the College of Policing, aimed at further enhancing an inclusive culture and creating safe spaces for all staff.

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