

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 09 February 2026

Report Title

Inclusion Strategy and Annual Report

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Executive Director of Corporate Services

Report Author(s)

Michael Holmes, Policy and Strategy Officer
michael.holmes@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The report summarises the Council's new Inclusion Strategy, which updates the previous Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy.

Building on the vision of the Council Plan of creating inclusive growth, the new strategy sets out the Council's approach to addressing inclusion-related issues, ensuring services are accessible and the voices of all communities are heard.

In addition, the annual report for 2024-25 includes key achievements and case studies that demonstrate progress in addressing EDI issues.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Inclusion Strategy 2026-30.
2. Approve the action plan for February 2026 to March 2027.
3. Note the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2024-2025.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Inclusion Strategy 2026-30
- Appendix 2 Inclusion Strategy action plan February 2026 to March 2027
- Appendix 3 EDI Annual Report 2024-25
- Appendix 4 Consultation Report
- Appendix 5 Equality Screening
- Appendix 6 Equality Analysis
- Appendix 7 Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

EDI Strategy 2022-25

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Inclusion Strategy and Annual Report

1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) requires the Council to be compliant with the Public Sector Equality Duty by having due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 1.2 The nine protected characteristics under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.3 The Council also has a specific duty to publish equality objectives at least every four years. These are part of the Inclusion Strategy, which is appended to this report and summarised below.
- 1.4 In addition, the Council produces an annual report to demonstrate how it is delivering against the duty. The annual report for 2024/25 is appended to this report. It provides an overview of relevant activity and achievements over the last year.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Council Plan 2025-2030 sets out the ambition to create an inclusive borough where no one is left behind and everyone can achieve their potential.
- 2.2 The Inclusion Strategy 2026-2030 reflects this ambition. It reinforces the inclusive growth focus of the Council Plan's vision of building a borough where opportunity is extended to everyone, where people can grow, flourish and prosper, and where no one is left behind. It describes how the Council will focus on listening to residents, engaging with them meaningfully – particularly those whose voices are not always heard - to address their concerns and ensure services are accessible.
- 2.3 It acknowledges that the Council has made good progress on inclusion and inclusive growth issues, such as providing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between different groups.
- 2.4 Several significant recent achievements are highlighted in the Strategy. This includes receiving an outstanding Ofsted rating for Children and Young People's Services, establishing the RASCAL (Rotherham Adult Social Care Always Listening) group to enable individuals with lived experience to shape future adult care services, and working with local organisations to deliver a community cohesion programme after securing £600,000 from the government's Community Recovery Fund.

- 2.5 At the same time, it recognises that more can be done to ensure that people do not feel excluded, disadvantaged or held back due to their race, gender, disability, or any other characteristic.
- 2.6 The Strategy is informed by a series of focus groups held between August and November 2025, as well as an online survey. Participants in the focus groups reflected the range of protected characteristics.
- 2.7 Details can be found in the consultation report at Appendix 4, but some of the issues raised included:
- the importance of regular and appropriate communication.
 - the accessibility of services.
 - Co-producing with communities.
 - Sharing feedback from consultation.
 - Concerns about safety.
- 2.8 These and other findings have directly informed the Strategy's themes and areas of focus.
- 2.9 The Strategy focuses on the following themes:
- *Working together* – demonstrating how the Council will continue to engage with residents and, where possible, design and produce services and plans with them, acknowledging the need to proactively reach out to those who find it more difficult to engage.
 - *Responsive services* – focused on the importance of listening to residents, consistently providing feedback, and showing how services are being reshaped (where appropriate) in response.
 - *Welcoming places* – reflecting concerns about feeling safe, which is a significant issue for some groups.
 - *Employer of choice* – outlining ongoing efforts to ensure that the Council's workforce reflects its diverse communities, with an inclusive approach to recruitment and staff engagement.
- 2.10 Each theme includes an indication of what excellent looks like based on relevant criteria from the Equalities Framework for Local Government.
- 2.11 A series of actions are included for each theme, providing a focus for activity over the lifetime of the Strategy. A more detailed action plan for 2026-27 is attached at Appendix 2.
- 2.12 The Annual Report for 2024-25 (Appendix 3) provides a summary of recent achievements within the framework of the 2022-25 EDI strategy. Examples include:

2.13 Understanding, listening to and working with Rotherham's communities

- Children's Capital of Culture engagement – supported five festivals, engaging over 10,000 participants and embedding youth voice into local events.
- Rotherham's Learning Disability Strategy was shaped by nearly 250 people with lived experience, including those with learning disabilities, carers, and professionals.

2.14 Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

- Rotherham's services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) received the top rating from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission. Inspectors praised how well local organisations work together to support children and families.
- Rotherham held its Holocaust Memorial Day event in January 2025 to honour victims of genocide and promote reflection on inclusion and justice. The event brought together faith leaders, councillors, schools, and residents to share messages of remembrance and hope.

2.15 Responsive services and customer care

- The Council provided free baby packs to expectant mothers, containing essentials like clothes, toys, and books to support early parenting. Over 600 families signed up in the first few months, with feedback showing the packs are a lifeline for many. The scheme also shares health advice and connects families to wider support services.
- In 2024/25, the Council delivered £12.3 million in validated social value, with a strong focus on employment, education, and community support.

2.16 Diverse and engaged workforce

- Around 200 employees attended a wellbeing event for frontline staff at the Hellaby depot, offering support on mental health, finances, and general wellbeing.
- In late 2024, a wide-ranging engagement exercise was carried out to understand how different communities perceive the Council as an employer. A series of focus groups and workshops enabled participants to explore innovative, inclusive ways to attract, recruit, develop, and retain a more diverse workforce.

2.17 The Annual Report also includes several case studies that illustrate how positive equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes have been achieved as part of the delivery of services and initiatives.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The recommendations are:

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Inclusion Strategy 2026-30.
2. Approve the action plan for February 2026 to March 2027.
3. Note the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2024-2025.

- 3.2 The recommendations reflect the priorities that have been highlighted during the consultation. They also ensure ongoing compliance with the Council's statutory duties.
- 3.3 An alternative option is to not agree the Inclusion Strategy and, instead, consider publishing alternative objectives in order to comply with statutory duties.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Substantial consultation was carried out through twelve focus groups, as well as an online survey. The focus groups mainly involved voluntary and community sector organisations or advocacy organisations, as well as Council officers. Participants reflected the range of protected characteristics, including people who might face particular barriers to accessing services. Detailed information is included in Appendix 4.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Progress in delivering the Strategy will be included in subsequent annual reports, which will be presented to Cabinet.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. In the event that any costs are subsequently identified in future, these will be highlighted and addressed through the monthly revenue budget monitoring process and will need to be managed within the existing budgets.
- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report. However, where there is a need to appoint third party organisations to deliver against the strategy and action plan, these must be procured in compliance with relevant legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023) dependent on the route to market identified and the Council's own financial and procurement procedure rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty requiring it to have due consideration to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality, and fostering good relations for people with protected characteristics (as set out above) when exercising its functions. This means that the Council must consider the reduction of inequalities and fostering good relations, not just avoid direct discrimination as required generally under the Equality Act 2010. This requirement also involves publishing equality objectives and data, as required by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 demonstrating how the Council meets these duties.

- 7.2 The Strategy and associated action plan sets out how the Council will comply with the above duties, and ensure the Council continues to adhere to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 Inclusion will be an underpinning theme within the Council's updated Workforce Plan. This will particularly support delivery of the Inclusion Strategy's *employer of choice* theme, including monitoring and taking action on workforce diversity, and ensuring relevant learning and development provision is in place.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Age is a protected characteristic under the provisions of the Equality Act, which applies to children and young people as it does to other age groups. An important aspect of the work around inclusion is to ensure that the voices of vulnerable adults and young people are heard and acted upon.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 In developing and implementing a strategy to ensure people are included in society, can access the services they rely on, and feel safe in their communities, the Council is directly addressing equalities and human rights considerations and fulfilling its equality duty.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 This report has no significant implications for CO2 emissions and climate change. However, certain protected characteristic groups, such as older or younger people or those with physical disabilities, are likely to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 Partnership working is an important aspect of the Council's approach to inclusion. In delivering the strategy, it is recognised that there will need to be close working with partners in the voluntary and community sector, as well as other public sector organisations.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Any significant risks that are identified will be assessed, mitigated and monitored through the corporate risk management processes.

14. Accountable Officers

Fiona Boden, Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	21/01/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	20/01/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	19/01/26

Report Author: Michael Holmes, Policy and Strategy Officer
michael.holmes@rotherham.gov.uk

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).