

Appendix C: Workforce Equality Review Final Report

Manchester City Council Workforce Equality Review

Background

Manchester City Council (MCC) is committed to demonstrating equality and inclusion in its workforce and is already performing at a very high standard on this front, as evidenced by the organisation currently holding the 'Excellent' level accreditation of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

However, MCC want to continue to make progress in this area and aim to lead by example for the rest of Manchester in regards to everyday equality and diversity in the workplace.

Previous research conducted by MCC has revealed that the workforce face some issues and concerns, specifically in relation to equality issues statistically (i.e. underrepresentation of BAME and disabled employees throughout the grading structure, an ageing workforce etc.) and there is also anecdotal evidence of the wider workplace issues around equality from engagement with equality network groups.

However, there are gaps in knowledge and understanding and as such MCC are keen to gain a better understanding of any other areas of concern or perceived ineffectiveness through more research.

To that extent, a programme of primary market research was commissioned to conduct a detailed and focused review of your equality activities with members of your workforce across various employee identities, grades and locations.

The research goal is to enable MCC to better understand how effective your employees think you are in the areas of equality and inclusion, by exploring their first-hand experiences, perceptions and attitudes.

The research will also generate knowledge of your workforce's understanding and awareness of your stance on equality, the measures in place, and achievements so far, as well as revealing ideas and suggestions for improvement on how to make further advances or address any present concerns.

Key research objectives

The results of this review will be considered by MCC and benchmarked against your existing practice and best practice in the field, in order to inform an action plan produced in partnership with key stakeholders to address identified issues.

Specifically, the objectives of this research project are to:

- Identify what's currently working well in the areas of equality and inclusion, as well as areas for improvement or development.
- Understand perceptions of what good practice is in the areas of equality and inclusion, how this can be delivered and whether it is currently being delivered.

- Ascertain awareness and understanding of the role of inclusion and equitability in the delivery of the 'Our Manchester' and 'Our People' initiatives.
- Identify how best to engage the workforce in ongoing discussions, developments and delivery of equality within the Council.
- Assess perceptions on who has responsibility for delivering effective equality practice, where the support needs to come from and how the manager/employee relationship can be utilised effectively to deliver this.

Wider context

Diversity is high on the agenda and is referenced in most workplace trends for 2018.

Employers in both the public and private sectors are more focused than ever on attracting and retaining a diverse workforce and everything is pointing to diversity being taken much more seriously in 2018. As such, many organisations are expected to revisit their policies and approach to diversity.

To ensure a happy and productive workforce, organisations are looking to improve their human resourcing processes as a whole, from identifying recruitment issues and challenges (reducing unconscious bias) through to assessing training needs (reviewing the opportunities available) then through to career progression (ensuring fairness and transparency).

One case of this recently highlighted in the media was the racial training for staff at Starbucks, where two members of the public were arrested following racial judgements made by staff members. The instant reaction to this situation by the public highlights the importance of issues like these in our society.

There is the opinion that a focus on diversity will have numerous benefits to organisations, including increased community engagement, better employee satisfaction and retention rates, more creativity and innovation and ultimately a happier and more diverse workforce.

Inequality is a hot topic right now and the UK is making strides to address the gender pay gap.



The UK has recently undertaken a data gathering exercise that, to date, is unrivalled anywhere else in the world. Over 10,000 UK companies published statistics on the gender pay gaps in their businesses, which revealed structural inequality of

opportunities within the workplace and will therefore force employers to look at the barriers facing women's progression in the workplace.

According to the government's gender pay gap reporting, on average, three-quarters of large UK businesses pay men more than their female counterparts. (Source: The Financial Times)

Although the recent attention to this issue has been positive, there is still a great deal of work to be done in regards to how the findings of this research will be used to address inequality in the future.

Societal movements encourage more people to speak out and address the issues of inequality head on.

Campaigning on issues such as gender, sexuality and race is nothing new – people have been fighting for equal rights for centuries. However, such issues have never been as pertinent as in 2018.

#MeToo, #TimesUp, #BlackLivesMatter, #WomensMarch, #LGBTRights, #IllRideWithYou, #TransLivesMatter.



These are just a fraction of the hashtags used over recent years to promote and highlight societal movement campaigns, whereby people across the world are joining forces about common issues faced.

As campaigns of this type gather momentum and people are encouraged to speak up and share their experiences it is a necessity that diversity and equality is promoted within the workplace, and that any relevant issues are addressed with empathy and confidence.

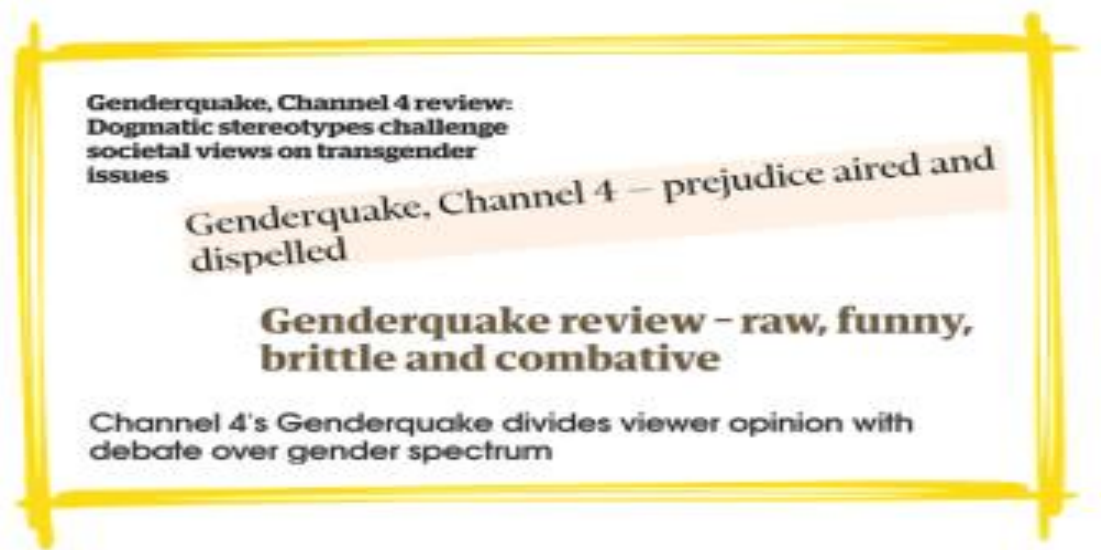
"It does seem timely that this has been done and I'm sure it's been done for all the obvious reasons in terms of press coverage and me too and that sort of thing and it is good that the city council are doing this."

Council employee

Times are constantly changing. Although the term 'LGBT' was once considered inclusive, it is no longer considered as politically correct. The acronym has now been extended to LGBTQI +.

Whilst some acronyms contain up to 12 letters, the one that is becoming more common practice is LGBTQI+. In addition to lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transsexual there is now queer or questioning, intersex and + which ensures that the description is always inclusive of all identities.

In early May 2018, a two part documentary was aired on channel 4 (Genderquake) that aimed to bring the issues of gender and identity to the forefront. In the series, a group of eleven millennials with various gender identities lived in a house together for a week with the aim of challenging any prejudices amongst themselves and assess how perceptions can differ within older generations.



The series received critical acclaim and was considered to be thought provoking – the fact that people can be anywhere on the gender spectrum and that this is often fluid as opposed to static not only challenged the perceptions of those taking part but also of the wider viewing audience.

What we did

The agreed methodology for the research initially was for MCC to recruit volunteer participants from their employee base, and for Mustard to conduct 4 x 120-minute workshops, each including 8-10 staff members. Alongside this, it was agreed that Mustard would also conduct 42 one-to-one depth interviews which would each last twenty minutes.

It is common for methodologies to alter slightly once research has begun based on insight revealed during the process, and this was the situation with this particular project. After recruitment had started, it became apparent that workshops were particularly difficult to recruit for, and that one-to-one interviews were much easier and preferred by participants (although they were lasting much longer than the estimated twenty minutes on average).

Given this, it was agreed that Mustard would instead focus on one-to-one interviews (although one workshop was still conducted). The breakdown of how many people

were spoken to in various formats is provided in the table below, and based on this, it is estimated Mustard spent approximately 28 hours in total engaging with employees (in comparison to the 22 hours they would have spent engaging with employees with the previous methodology).

Method of engagement	Number of employees
Workshop	6
One-to-one interviews	44
Face-to-face	23
Telephone	21
Total	50

It was also agreed that Mustard would ensure a variety of different staff grades and types were included in the research, with employees self-selecting which aspects they wished to discuss equality and diversity before engaging with the research team. The aim initially was to ensure a mix across BAME, disabled and LGBTQI+ groups, but the self-selected aspects were much broader than this, as shown in the below table. (Please note the total sums to more than the 50 employees engaged with as research participants could self-select multiple aspects to discuss).

Self-selected area for discussion	Number of employees
BME	15
LGBT	9
Disability	18
Work location	16
Women	2
Age	3
Part-time work	2

Grade of employee	Number of employees
Grade 1 - 4	11

Grade 5 - 8	29
Grade 9 - 12	8
SS01 and above	2

Fieldwork was conducted from 8th – 27th April 2018, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. All fieldwork and analysis was conducted by the research team at Mustard to ensure an unbiased and independent review of the situation regarding equality and diversity within the MCC workforce.

Executive Summary

On a general level, Manchester City Council is performing well in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion, particularly when compared to other companies across Manchester. All recognised the current diversity of the workforce and acknowledged the lengths MCC had gone to welcome all regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability.

The external recruitment process was highly praised by most, saying its anonymous approach sets a precedent to all other organisations. Having all identifiable information removed from applications was seen as a truly inclusive method.

Having numerous channels which allowed staff to have their say and give feedback to the Council was just one way MCC currently shows good practice. 'Be Heard,' 'Staff Surveys,' 'Listening in Action,' one to one sessions with managers and 'Our Manchester' were all initiatives staff recognised as helping the Council be a progressive and inclusive workplace.

Frequent cultural celebrations, recognition of national days, supporting movements, and allowing volunteer days for staff (Our People) were just some of the initiatives employees further praised. Although all were successful at promoting the Council's support of equality and diversity, there is further need for promotion (both internally and externally) in order for the whole workforce to feel included.

The new Chief Executive, Joanne Roney, was praised by most employees, specifically in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. Her recognition of areas MCC needs to improve on in order to be truly inclusive (particularly seeing more BAME and women in senior roles and making locations outside the Town Hall Extension feel included) sets a clear message that equality and diversity is a priority.

For most employees, the changes they wanted to see are already in place and just need further work to improve. This puts MCC in a positive and successful position to make the improvements staff want to see.

The definition of equality is changing, with most staff saying it is not just about being treated the same, but about giving people the same opportunities in order for them to be treated fairly. It is important for the Council to recognise their staff are individuals and therefore should be supported in different ways depending on their needs.

Training was also an area many felt MCC could improve on. Firstly, ensuring that equality and diversity training is mandatory and something that is constantly

refreshed would strengthen perceptions that MCC is making equality a priority. Staff also felt that training was something all employees should be engaging with in order to tackle unconscious bias.

Further training for BAME staff was also an initiative many felt MCC needed to make a priority. Due to the lack of diversity in senior roles, ensuring training sessions are truly inclusive would allow for BAME staff to get the support they need to progress within the organisation.

Both 'Our Manchester' and 'Our People' have been successful at creating awareness of equality and diversity at MCC. Both were front of mind for many employees and as both were frequently praised, it appears they are having the desired effect.

The 'Our People' initiative was commonly referred to as a volunteering scheme, rather than by name, suggesting further clarity is needed in what else 'Our People' entails. Others failed to connect 'Our People' and volunteering together, suggesting there is potential branding confusion.

Despite this, the volunteering scheme was specifically praised by many employees. Providing staff with the opportunity to take volunteer days was not only allowing staff to give back to their community, but was also helping celebrate equality and inclusion.

Volunteering aided in:

- Allowing staff to better themselves personally by helping others,
- Allowing staff to learn new skills that can be transferred back to their day to day work,
- Building confidence,
- Understand things from others point of view (be that religion, background, disadvantage etc.)

Some did mention ways in which 'Our People' could improve, firstly by allowing staff more volunteer days. Some feared three days was not enough time to have a lasting impact on communities or to engage for themselves. There were further suggestions that the Council should be encouraging staff to 'go out of their comfort zone' when it came to the areas staff volunteered in. There were concerns staff were volunteering in areas that didn't challenge them and therefore some were not receiving the full benefits.

MCC has many successful initiatives in place which are currently successful at engaging with staff, for example; Be Heard, Staff Surveys, One to One sessions with managers, Listening in Action sessions and Staff Groups.

However, many were frustrated feeling the Council is encouraging them to talk are but failing to listen; suggesting there are issues with 'closing the loop.' There is a need for the Council and the Equalities Team to further communicate back to staff, particularly those who engage. Staff need to know they have been heard and it is important for the Council to converse further with staff, letting them know what changes have been, or will be, made.

There were further concerns that communications on equality and diversity are being lost due to overwhelming volumes of emails or busy workloads. Allowing employees to 'subscribe' to the equalities team could help in making sure messages are getting to the right people (be this via emails or online bulletin boards).

Listening in Action sessions were recognised as successfully engaging staff. There were suggestions for the equalities team to be more active by holding their own Listening in Action sessions in order to allow the consultation of staff in regards to changes, needs and creating new policies. Making sure staff are included in conversations, specifically regarding changes and policies that directly impact on them, will reassure staff that the Council is thinking of the 'person behind the policy'.

Reengaging the Staff Groups would be a successful way of engaging with staff. There is currently confusion in the purpose of some of these groups; therefore there is a need for better communication in regards to what the Groups discuss, do and achieve. Further to this, many were concerned with how some of the staff groups have been tarnished with negative perceptions. These need to be addressed before people will re-engage.

Finally, continuously showing how equality and diversity is a priority of the Council's is crucial in order to keep staff engaged. The Chief Executive is instrumental in making sure staff do not feel this is falling by the wayside. Along with this, ensuring those less noticeable (those outside of the Town Hall Extension, those working part-time, those slightly older) are being included is critical to making sure everyone engages and feels like part of the MCC community.

There was confusion with regards to who is currently responsible for ensuring equality is delivered within MCC with many being unaware that the Equalities Team sat within HR. Many were also unsure of the Equalities Team's current focus.

It was clear however that HR, the Equalities team, and management in general should all be working together in order to ensure all staff feel equal and receive necessary support. It is crucial that all three are successfully and frequently communicating with staff in order for the Council to show they are active in equality and diversity.

Ultimately, managers are representing MCC's standpoint on equality and diversity to staff. It is therefore critical to make sure all managers are reflecting the correct message. Those who have managers who focus on equality and diversity had positive perceptions of how successful MCC is as an organisation overall. Those whose managers are less understanding tend to have a negative perception on MCC's performance.

Many agreed that management should be the first point of call when it comes to accessing support, however some feared that those with poor relationships with their managers would not feel comfortable turning to them. Many recognised the importance of having a dedicated support team.

Not only would this team be able to support junior staff, it could also be an initiative that managers could turn to if needed. Many recognised that managers were struggling with their own workloads and therefore could not dedicate the necessary time to supporting staff. Others understood that managers could not possibly know

everything when it came to giving support (particularly when it came to complex disability issues).

What Equality and Diversity means to the MCC workforce?

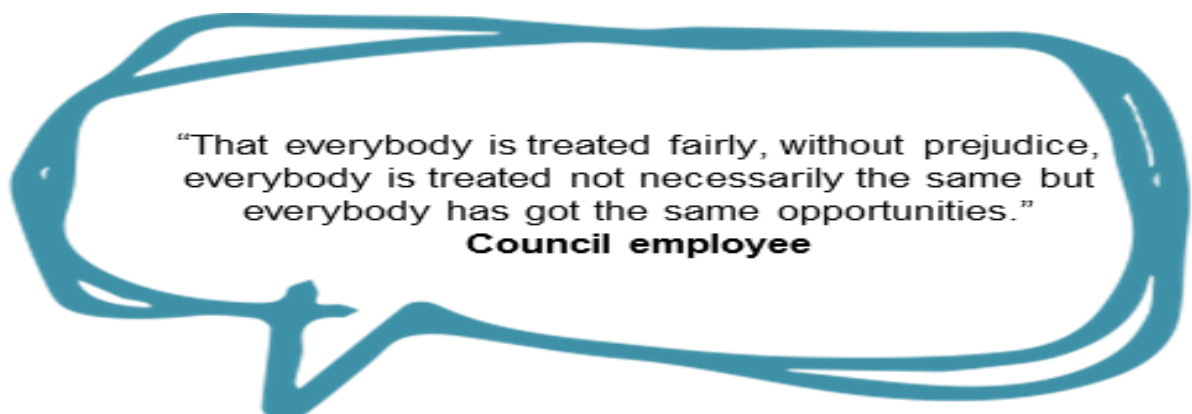
All employees involved in this research understood the importance of equality and diversity in the workplace, recognising that they should go hand in hand and should be at the forefront of the Council's agenda.

When prompted, diversity in the workplace was not only about making sure that people from all backgrounds were accepted in the Council (for example gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion and disability) but was also about accepting that the workforce have diverse working styles and individual needs. Many stressed the importance in accepting that everyone has their own working styles and strengths and this is something that the Council should be encouraging.

Overall, employees felt the Council were exceeding expectations in terms of recruiting a diverse workforce. All recognised that the workforce had a unique mix and that this was something that the Council should be praised for as well as further celebrate and promote. However, many were worried that this diversity was not representative across all grades or within senior roles.

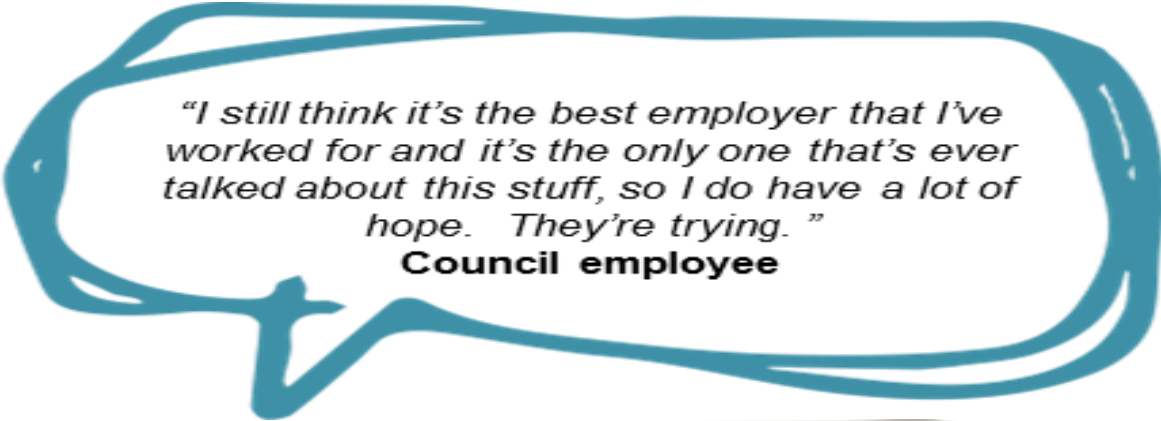
There were also concerns that the Council were not quite hitting the mark with diversity in working styles. There was a common perception that the Council 'has a way that things should be done' and managers were not accepting, encouraging, or promoting different working styles. Some staff felt stifled when it came to letting their creativity show, whilst others felt they were not encouraged to play to their working strengths, but rather told to follow [potentially] outdated working procedures. Encouraging managers to accept and celebrate that everyone works in different manners, especially considering the size of the workforce, would improve perceptions of achieving diversity in the workplace. The Council being more flexible in its working style was something that was encouraged by the majority of employees we spoke to.

The perception that equality means that everyone is treated 'equally' is increasingly seen as outdated. Employees recognised that making people feel equal is ensuring that people are treated in the way they want or need to be treated, rather than being treated the **same**. Allowing flexibility and recognising that employee working needs are different is something the Council needs to ensure it is doing in order to make all staff feel truly equal.

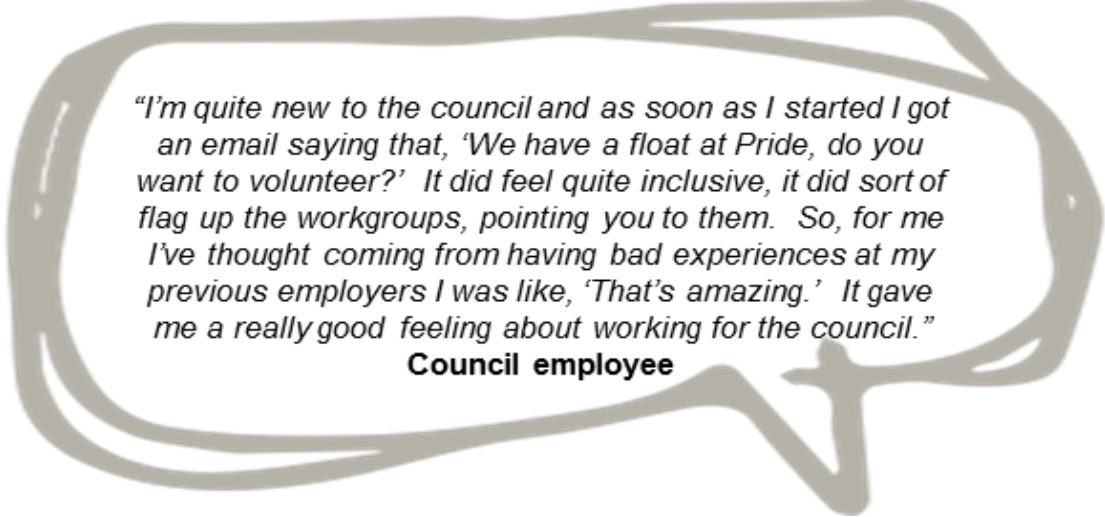


What is working well at MCC?


Most staff said, on a general level, that MCC is performing well in terms of inclusion, equality, and diversity, particularly in comparison to other companies or previous employers. Almost all recognised the diverse workforce that was currently working within the Council, praising its external recruitment process in ensuring everyone had an equal chance of being welcomed into the Council. All new starters we spoke to praised how quickly they had felt included and recognised how the Council was somewhere that encourages diversity.



"I still think it's the best employer that I've worked for and it's the only one that's ever talked about this stuff, so I do have a lot of hope. They're trying. "
Council employee



"I'm quite new to the council and as soon as I started I got an email saying that, 'We have a float at Pride, do you want to volunteer?' It did feel quite inclusive, it did sort of flag up the workgroups, pointing you to them. So, for me I've thought coming from having bad experiences at my previous employers I was like, 'That's amazing.' It gave me a really good feeling about working for the council."
Council employee



"It was just always really clear from day one that it was important for the council and that these were important issues. So that always gave me hope that it was a good employer because they were talking about these issues and they were saying that these issues are important to us."
Council employee

Along with this, the majority of staff we consulted with praised the Council for frequently giving the whole workforce the opportunity to have their say. Most recognised this was a benefit they may not have if they worked in other organisations or other sectors. They appreciated that it was rare for organisations (particularly ones as large as MCC) to allow their staff to feedback concerns, desires, and recommendations for improvement.


The number of opportunities, routes and channels available to staff allowing them to be 'listened to' was celebrated. 'Be Heard', 'Listening in Action sessions' and one to one sessions with managers all allowed staff to have their say, in turn making them feel included and like they had an equal opportunity to make a difference.

Frequent celebrations of cultural events were also something most staff recognised MCC were performing well on. These celebrations not only prompted awareness of other cultures but also helped set a precedent for the Council's attitude towards welcoming all and promoting the inclusion of all communities. Pride, Chinese New Year, Eid, St Patrick's Day and International Women's Day were just some of the events people recalled being involved in recently through the Council.



Although most staff spoke about these events in a positive light, some felt the council risked playing to stereotypes. Others felt there were further opportunities for the Council to advertise their involvement in these events (e.g. make it clear they are hosting / associated with any cultural events), ensuring the Council shows its pride in their involvement. There was also a concern that the Town Hall Extension was more frequently included in these celebrations than other Council locations, therefore there is scope to promote celebrations in locations outside of the city centre.

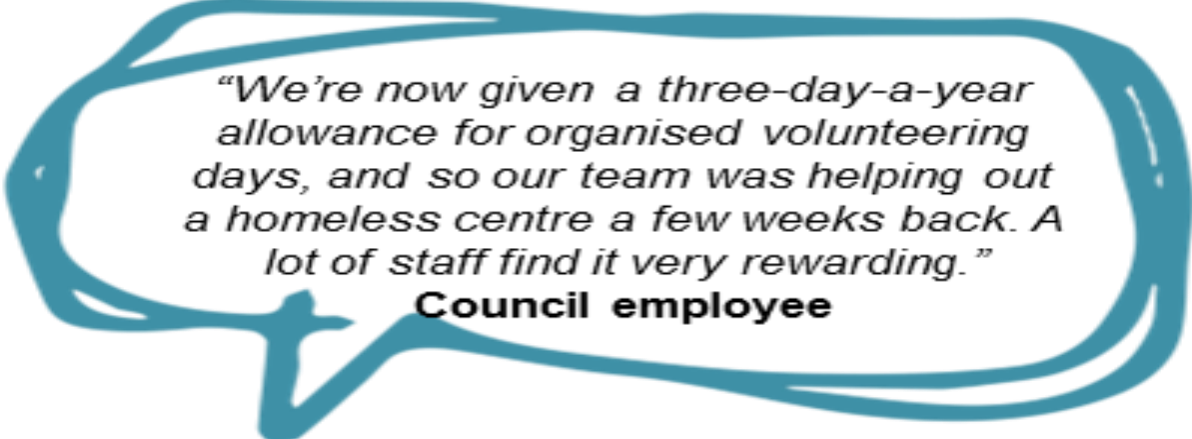
The new CEO, Joanne Roney, was praised by many as having a positive impact on the Council, especially in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. Her "human" approach was praised by staff from all groups, with many appreciating that she is accepting that the Council has more to do. This is especially true when it comes to BAME staff and women in senior roles. In order for the Council's workforce to be truly inclusive and representative of the wider Manchester community, a clear message of making equality and diversity in the Council a priority should continue to be heard by staff.



"We were out on the steps this morning for the one-minute silence. So she invited people to go out. She came around in here, said hi to everybody in the department, whoever was there on the day when she arrived and they took some photos and that. It was nice that she came around and introduced herself, was smiley and we thought "Oh she's nice" you know. She's probably very tough but she sent a "thank you" email afterwards to say it was lovely meeting you all".

Council employee

Others praised the Council's efforts in allowing staff to give back to the community. Providing all staff with the opportunity to take volunteer days was another way of ensuring the Council celebrated equality and inclusion. This scheme was praised, not only for allowing staff to give back to the community (which in turn improves the general view of the MCC from the public's point of view) but aided in allowing staff to better themselves personally by helping others. Further to this, it allowed staff members to learn new skills that can be transferred back to their day to day work. Those that had taken advantage of the volunteer programme praised how it had helped them not only build their confidence but also helped them in terms of seeing things from other points of view. Helping those less fortunate than themselves, interacting with people from different backgrounds, or spending time with people who had encountered completely different experiences than themselves helped MCC employees understand the needs of others and aided in appreciating the importance of understanding diversity.



"We're now given a three-day-a-year allowance for organised volunteering days, and so our team was helping out a homeless centre a few weeks back. A lot of staff find it very rewarding."

Council employee

Some mentioned ways of improving this process by allowing for more volunteer days and a proportion of the staff we spoke to felt three days was not enough time to have a lasting impact on communities and the staff member themselves. There were also some concerns that people were 'sticking to what they know' and there is potential for the Council to encourage staff to go out of their comfort zone when it comes to the areas they volunteered in.

Overall, the Council was viewed as an organisation that is leading the way for the rest of the city, however, there is still a lot that could be done to make perceptions of working in the Council more positive and for staff to feel included and heard.

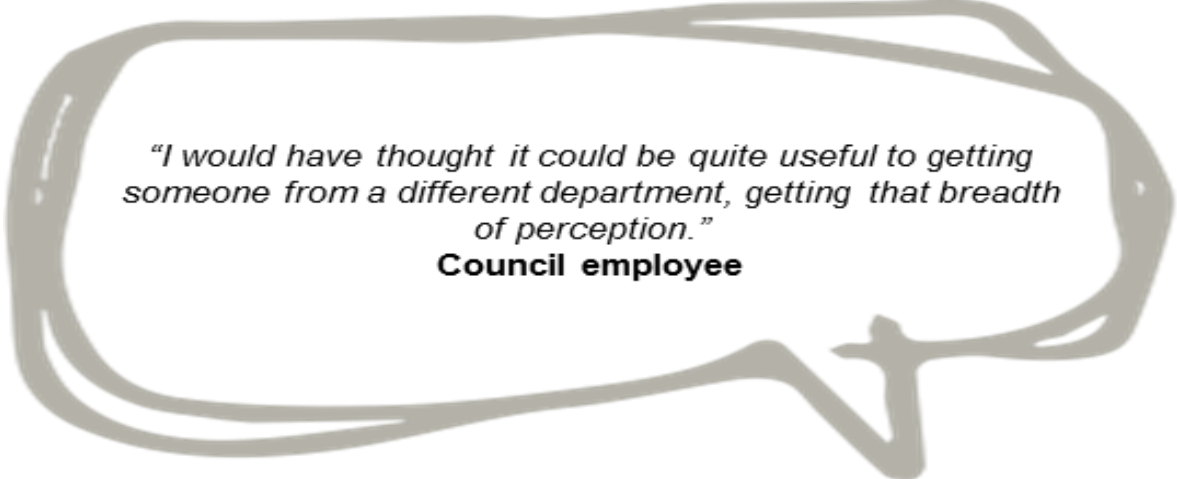
What is working less well at MCC?

There were several areas where staff members felt there could be improvements to how the council tackles equality and diversity.

Although MCC was recognised for its inclusion of staff from different communities, backgrounds and needs, there was an overwhelming under representation of BAME staff in higher grades. Almost all the staff we spoke to, from both BAME and non-BAME backgrounds, recognised the need to see more progression for these colleagues. Many felt that without a diverse senior level, the Council would never meet the expectations of an organisation that is truly reflective on the Manchester community. Without seeing BAME staff in these roles, MCC could never be a truly diverse organisation.

Many were also concerned about the internal recruitment process. Although external recruitment was seen as something the Council was performing well on, when it came to progression within the organisation, many felt there was a culture of 'who you knew' being more beneficial than 'what you knew.' Although this perception was strongly felt by BAME participants, staff members from all backgrounds and characteristics recognised how the Council were failing to make this a fair and equal process.

When asked how this process could be improved in order to ensure MCC delivered good practice, a large proportion of staff questioned the validity of the current recruitment panels. Firstly, there was concern as to how reflective or unbiased a panel could be if it lacked diversity. Many noted how most panels were made up of senior staff of similar make-up who could unconsciously hire those who mirrored their own ethnicity or background. Further to this, there was a strong perception that the Council were failing to prevent recruitment bias as it was not currently mandatory to have interdepartmental panel members. Employees felt this led to frequently unjustified decisions when it came to recruitment. Having panel members from other departments involved in this process ensures honest conversations are had about applicants; guaranteeing accountability and rationality in all recruitment decisions.



"I would have thought it could be quite useful to getting someone from a different department, getting that breadth of perception."

Council employee

Staff also praised MCC for allowing them multiple opportunities to have their say, however there is concern the Council are failing to actually 'listen'. For the majority of the employees initiatives such as 'Be Heard', 'Staff Surveys' and frequent one to one sessions with managers were starting to feel more like 'tick box exercises' rather than real opportunities to be heard. There is a risk of frustration turning to anger if MCC continues to ask for staff opinions without these communications leading to action. The Council risks falling under the remit of 'The Psychology of the false promise,' whereby failure to deliver or act on staff concerns is more detrimental to the perception of the Council than failing to allow staff the opportunity to have their say altogether.



For most it was a matter of closing the loop. Doing this would not only mean taking action on the feedback MCC receives from these channels, but also means communicating back to those that engaged. Whether or not MCC is currently acting on the feedback it receives, the need for further communication from the Council is essential to ensuring MCC is demonstrating good practice when it comes to equality and inclusion. Currently, staff believe MCC are failing to take action as messages of change are not reaching those that want to know. If the suggestions received are not achievable, good practice includes feeding this message back to staff. MCC employees understand not all change is attainable, however, explaining why not is just as important to staff as seeing effective change.

Training opportunities were also something staff felt the Council was performing less well on. Not only were BAME staff concerned about the lack of training and support available to them, many were concerned about a lack of training available to staff below senior level. There were doubts whether MCC's current training process was being a truly inclusive one due to many feeling opportunities were more likely be given to those in higher levels that potentially didn't need it. In order to see MCC as a truly progressive organisation, there needs to be a push for training being offered as a step for genuine development, rather than helping the successful climb higher.

Further to this, most staff we spoke to were concerned with the lack of mandatory equality and diversity training. Most struggled to remember if they had ever completed training sessions, and if they did, those that undertook training in the last year were few and far between. Almost all employees stressed the need to have

frequent equality and diversity training in order for MCC to achieve good practice. Although equality training was stressed as a necessity for management, all staff recognised the positive effect this training would have if all employees undertook such training.

A common frustration concerned middle management, with perceptions on how managers approached creating equal workforces being polarised. Although some praised the level of support and understanding they received from managers, many recognised that there were inconsistencies in management styles across the Council. There appeared to be more employees frustrated with management than those that felt they were receiving the necessary support.



Understandably, many claimed their main perception of how MCC is dealing with equality and diversity comes from their interactions with middle management, who, according to employees, should be the Council's biggest advocates of equality and diversity policies and practices.

However, most gave examples and anecdotes of situations where this wasn't the case. It was also apparent that employees believed the Council may have been sending out communications related to equality and diversity, and may have different policies and procedures in place, but that middle managers were acting more as barriers than supporters of this information by withholding it from other staff.

When asked for ways in which this could be improved in the future, examples included ensuring manager styles are more consistent across all managers, perhaps informed by training and education of how that style should look. It was mentioned that a more consistent style of managing might also eradicate the problem of some managers being more obviously favourable towards some employees than others. A bigger degree of flexibility was also suggested by many, and the acknowledgement that all employees are different to one another and need different types of support and assistance from their managers.

Many were unaware that the Equalities Team sat within HR. There was also confusion about who was responsible for delivering effective practice. Some felt equality and diversity fell under the remit of HR whilst others felt the Equalities Team should be accountable for ensuring inclusion is a priority. Increased viability of the Equalities Team could help reduce this confusion. However, most were in agreement that both teams should be working together to ensure messages on equality and diversity were delivered successfully.

Along with this, many stressed the need for consulting with staff when it came to creating new policies. Many noted frustrations when measures were put in place without understanding the needs of the employees these would affect. Communication to staff in regards to when these new policies would be discussed, along with giving staff the opportunity to input their ideas was something staff felt was necessary in making them feel included. Many felt that the Equalities Team holding their own listening and action sessions would be a successful way for their ideas to be heard.

Although many noted management should be the first point of call when it came to accessing support, some feared that those with poor relationships would not feel comfortable turning to their managers when they needed. Many suggested that it would be useful to have a dedicated support team (which could be an internal or external) solely dedicated to supporting staff in equality and diversity matters. Further to this, communication on the support systems currently in place should be extremely clear.

The intranet was frequently mentioned as a channel that could be used for this but is not currently being used to the best of its ability. Most staff were frustrated at how busy and confusing the intranet was, suggesting there is a need for clarity and direction in where employees can find the information they desire.

Overall, the changes employees want to see are already readily available within the Council. Instead of people asking for large, timely, and costly changes, we frequently heard “we want more of...”, “we want this to be better,” and “we want this to be amended.” Overall, it appears that the council is in a positive and successful starting position to make the improvements employees want to see.


Opinions on MCC’s equality and diversity across characteristics

LGBTQI+

The vast majority of LGBTQI+ employees we consulted agreed the council is a fair, equal, and inclusive organisation; with most saying it was the most inclusive place they’ve worked.


Although the Council has made positive strides in the past with regards to supporting the LGBTQI+ workforce, giving them a voice and support network to access, there is a sense the Council are missing important opportunities to showcase their support for this group and proactively promote inclusivity. A number of employees mention that, although recognising the Council’s involvement in Pride was a great start, there was more that could be done to advertise the Councils connection to the celebration. Simple suggestions such as making logos more prominent and ensuring all Council

locations are contributing to the celebrations could help the LGBTQI+ community feel more included.



"As equality goes, you don't see the Council's branding or the Council generally associated with events, for example, Manchester Pride. Their link there is pretty much non-existent and as far as I can remember always has been."

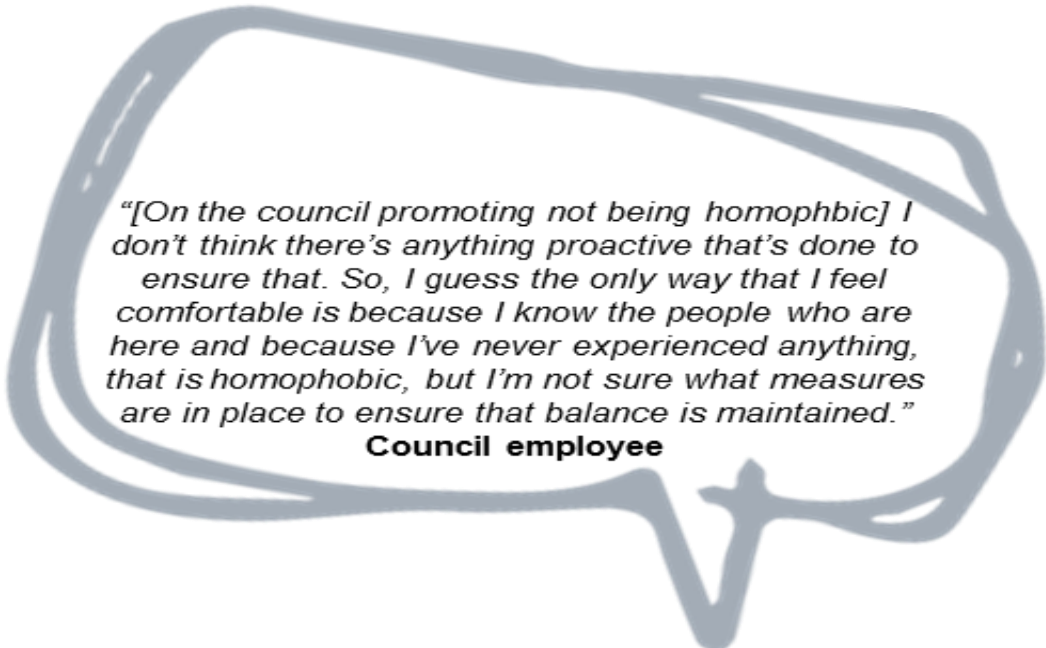
Council employee



"You see the logo on Pride events but it's really tiny in the corner and they should be the ones pushing it because Manchester is their city. You just don't get that and it doesn't feel like it's something that they are particularly affiliated with."

Council employee

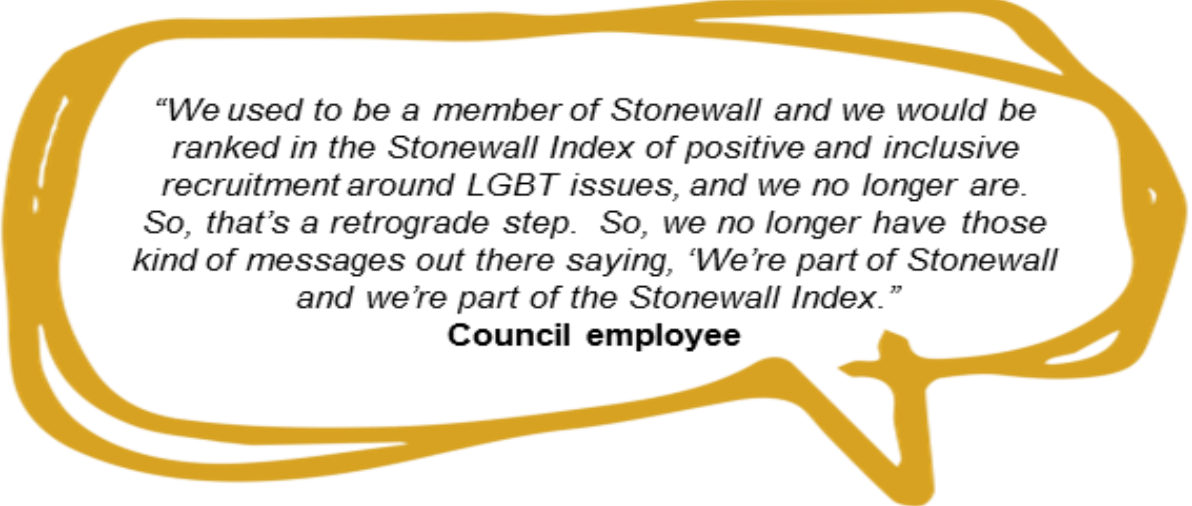
Although few of the LGBTQI+ employees we consulted with have ever experienced any first-hand homophobia, there were subtle undertones of unsupportive behaviour with one employee referencing that other colleagues were reluctant to "come out" to their managers. Another felt there was nothing proactively being done to highlight issues related to homophobia within the Council and a third employee said those in locations outside the Town Hall Extension do not experience the same levels of inclusion as those in the centre.



"[On the council promoting not being homophobic] I don't think there's anything proactive that's done to ensure that. So, I guess the only way that I feel comfortable is because I know the people who are here and because I've never experienced anything, that is homophobic, but I'm not sure what measures are in place to ensure that balance is maintained."

Council employee

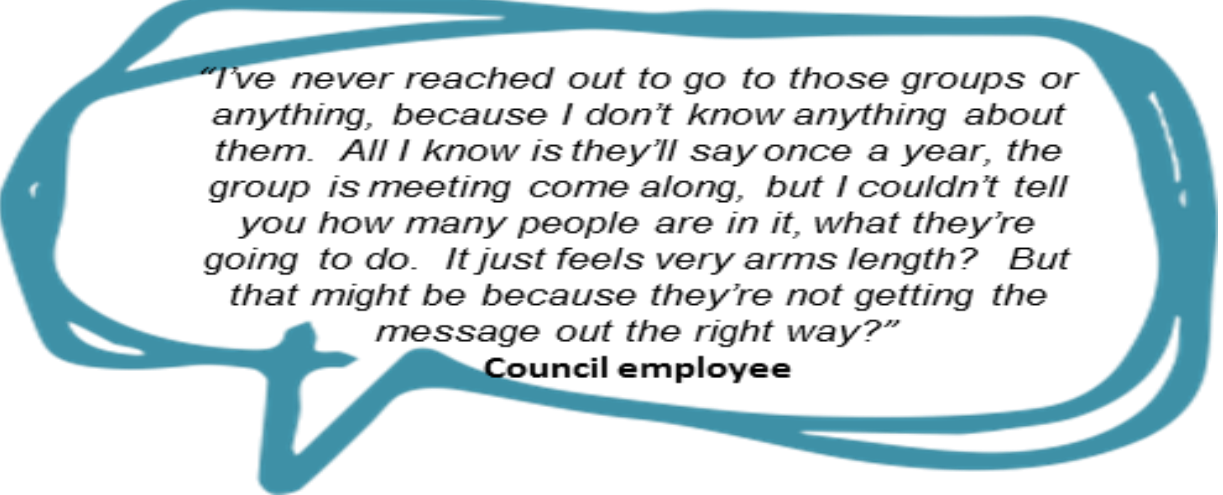
There was also the sense that the LGBTQI+ Staff Group is losing the support it needs to have any acclaim within the Council. The lack of a Chair has frustrated members; with many feeling it has diluted the group's credibility. Although most understood the conversation and decision to move away from the Stonewall Workplace Index, a few still feel this was a step backwards for the Council, therefore there may be further need to communicate the reasoning behind this decision.



"We used to be a member of Stonewall and we would be ranked in the Stonewall Index of positive and inclusive recruitment around LGBT issues, and we no longer are. So, that's a retrograde step. So, we no longer have those kind of messages out there saying, 'We're part of Stonewall and we're part of the Stonewall Index.'"

Council employee

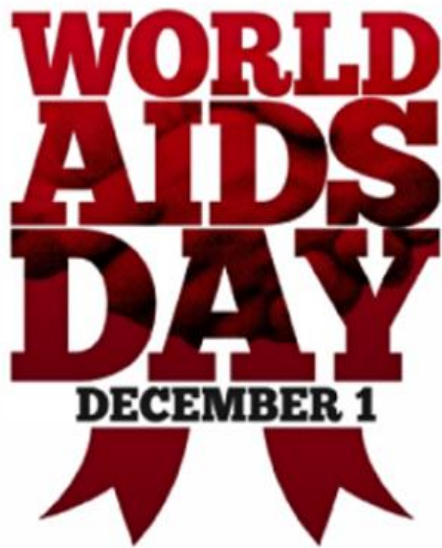
Although the majority were aware of the LGBTQI+ Staff Group, there are some employees that claim to be unaware of the group and / or its purpose. Some felt the group was not relevant to them as they take place in a different location to where they are based. There was also the suggestion that these groups are not being promoted effectively and that communication around what is on the agenda could be improved. Some struggled with the 'social' aspects of these groups, saying they had turned to the group for support but it was more of a 'get together' than a group that sets out to make a difference within the Council.



"I've never reached out to go to those groups or anything, because I don't know anything about them. All I know is they'll say once a year, the group is meeting come along, but I couldn't tell you how many people are in it, what they're going to do. It just feels very arms length? But that might be because they're not getting the message out the right way?"

Council employee

There was also a suggestion the Town Hall could be lit up red to highlight World Aid's Day, as they light it up for other occasions.



"When it's World Aid's Day for example, I can't think that the Town Hall has been lit up in red the same as they would light it up for other things. They could make a point out of that."

Council employee

Disability

From the disabled employees we spoke to the overall perception of working within MCC was positive. Almost all the staff we spoke to (across all characteristics) recognised how the Council was a diverse workforce, specifically mentioning the inclusion of disabled staff.

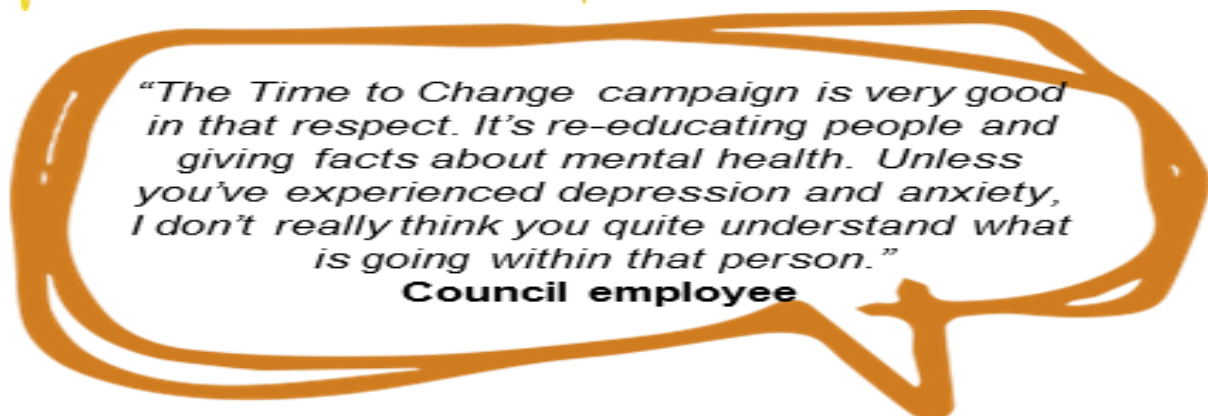
"That means different disabilities and different ethnicities, and just people being different and it's not a standard. There is a lot in the council. It's very diverse."

Council employee

"They appoint people that perhaps other organisations wouldn't. A colleague of mine has got very severe sight problems and hearing problems, and she's got a job and they've given her lots of equipment to help her do the job."

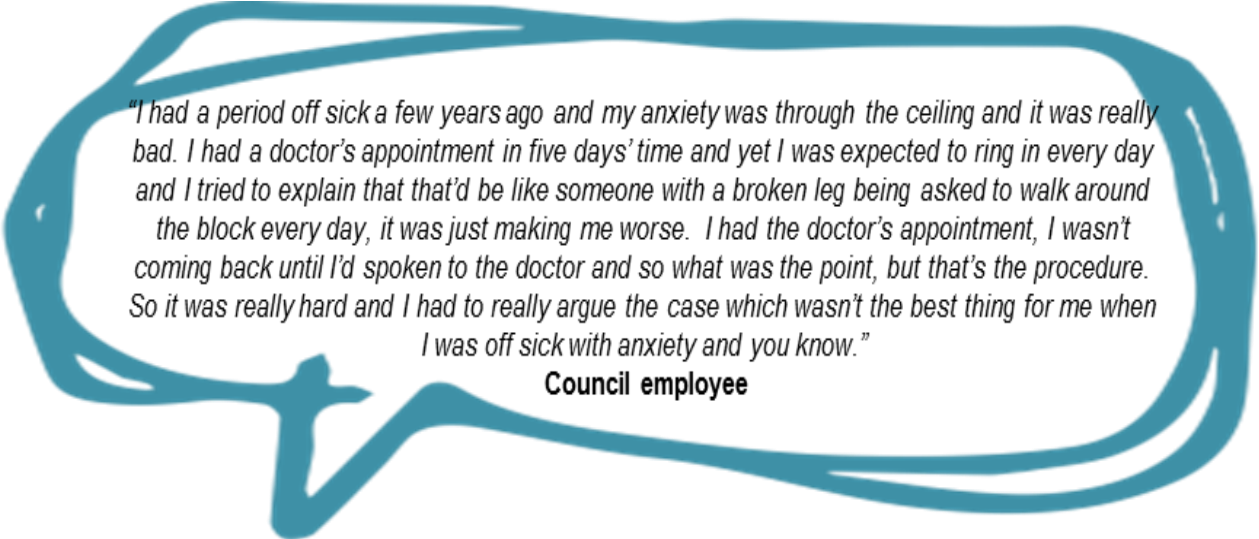
Council employee

Supporting the 'Time to Change' campaign was a strong example of the positive and effective things the Council has done to raise awareness of mental health. Employees hope this is not something that will eventually be pushed to the wayside, emphasising the importance in frequent promotion of 'Time to Change', be that on the intranet or through emails.



In terms of accessibility, overall disabled staff were happy with the efforts the Council was making to ensure staff could access everything they needed. There were small concerns with the recent closure of the Town Hall leading to an increase in people and equipment in other buildings, resulting in less space for those that needed it. Those that require extra room for access reasons felt that, for the time being at least, offices were a little harder to manoeuvre around. Most understood the reasoning for this however, ensuring 'space' being considered in the development of new buildings (both Town Hall and elsewhere) is important for disabled staff to feel included. Giving staff the opportunity to express their needs, along with the Council actively communicating their plans for development and explaining how access needs have been considered, are essential for good practice.

There was an essence of a 'failure to believe' culture with some managers. A number of employees felt they had been accused of manufacturing a disability-related condition with others feeling they frequently had to 'prove' or provide evidence of their condition. Although employees recognised that *some* may try and cheat the system, many felt the Councils lack of trust in its own staff was unfair and disheartening.



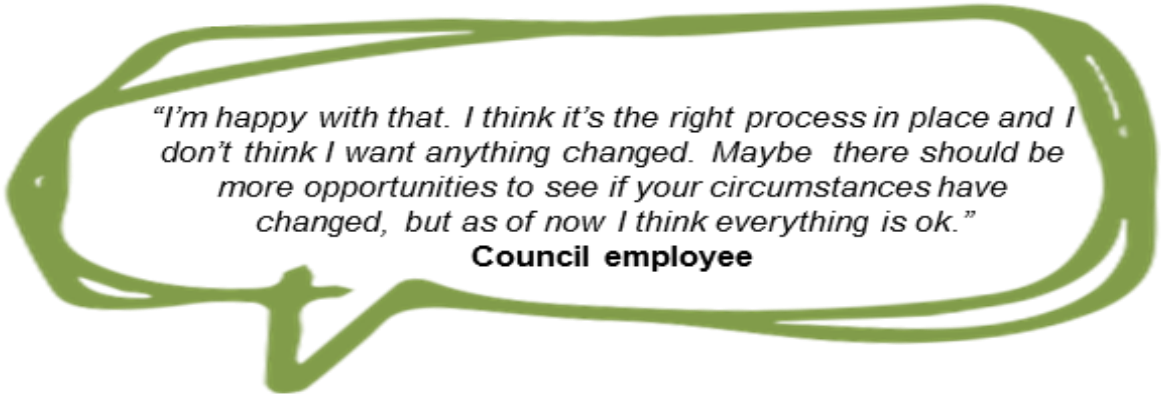
"I had a period off sick a few years ago and my anxiety was through the ceiling and it was really bad. I had a doctor's appointment in five days' time and yet I was expected to ring in every day and I tried to explain that that'd be like someone with a broken leg being asked to walk around the block every day, it was just making me worse. I had the doctor's appointment, I wasn't coming back until I'd spoken to the doctor and so what was the point, but that's the procedure. So it was really hard and I had to really argue the case which wasn't the best thing for me when I was off sick with anxiety and you know."

Council employee

Once this trust issue had been resolved most felt their managers, and the Council as a whole, were generally proactive and supportive. Few felt pressure to return to work if they needed to take leave and most felt their return process was a successful one.

Having good quality 'return to work' sessions with managers was something many disabled employees praised. Allowing the discussion of their needs, slower returner periods, and flexible working hours was important to staff in order to feel supported and included. Although the majority praised this exercise, a small proportion (mainly with less supportive managers) felt these sessions risked becoming 'tick boxy.'


Ensuring managers understand the importance of these sessions, be that through training or allowing managers themselves to get support from HR or the Equalities Team, was something staff needed to see in order for this initiative to be successful for all.



"I'm happy with that. I think it's the right process in place and I don't think I want anything changed. Maybe there should be more opportunities to see if your circumstances have changed, but as of now I think everything is ok."

Council employee

Although many recognised the lengths the Council are going to in order to stress the importance of talking about health and wellbeing, many feel training was still needed. Staff understood managers could not possibly know 'everything about everything' when it comes to health and / or disability as the range of needs of individuals could be vast. Without basic or tailored training, or frequent refresher sessions, managers could become overwhelmed with understanding the level of support certain staff may need.

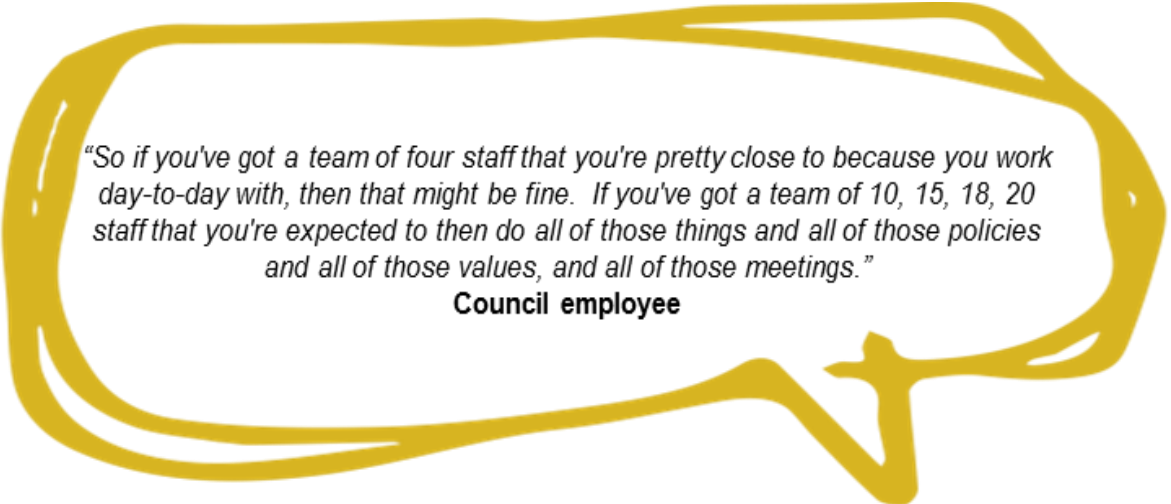


"We started getting all these broadcast emails talking about mental health and saying 'We're totally fine about this and it's time to talk', so when I first came out to my manager, it was still the council but my last manager, but he couldn't really handle it very well. So it was like I was getting this message that it was okay but actually he hadn't been equipped to deal with the reality of it."

Council employee

Managers themselves were concerned with how their own workloads were affecting team morale. Most managers who truly desired to give staff high levels of support however were overwhelmed by their own workloads and therefore frustrated by the limited time they could offer.

Others felt the Council needed to reassess the number of managers allocated to departments. There appears to be inconsistencies in the sizes of teams. Those managing smaller departments found it easier to balance their day to day targets with managing the health and wellbeing of their team. Those with larger departments recognised they were letting disabled members of their teams down by not being able to give staff dedicated support sessions.



"So if you've got a team of four staff that you're pretty close to because you work day-to-day with, then that might be fine. If you've got a team of 10, 15, 18, 20 staff that you're expected to then do all of those things and all of those policies and all of those values, and all of those meetings."

Council employee

Disabled participants also voiced frustrations with Occupational Health. Although many recognised this was a crucial initiative in getting people back to work, some had negative experiences of this process.

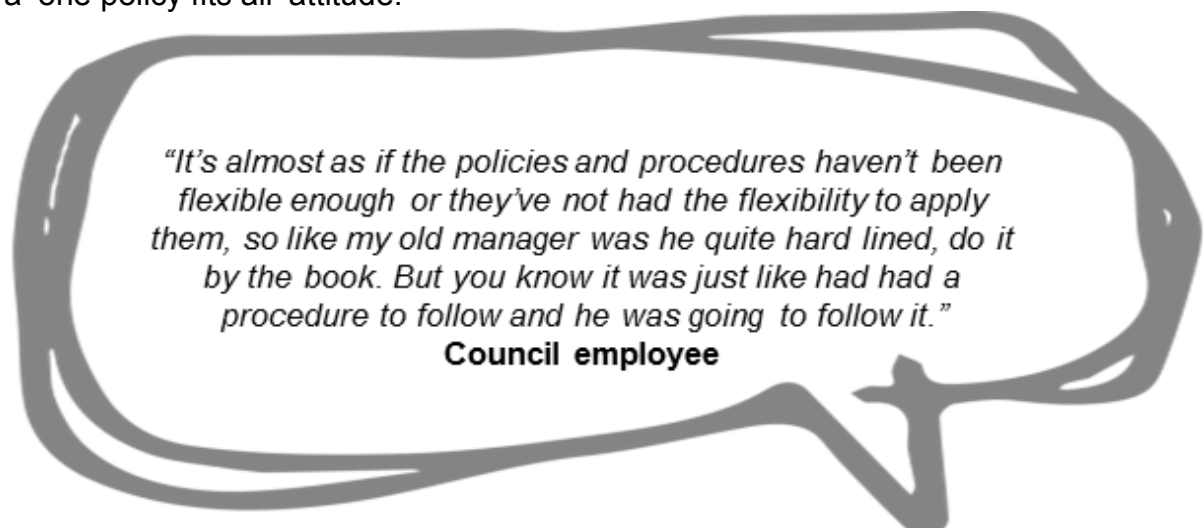
There was mention of feeling unduly pressured to attend meetings with an individual's access requirements not being considered on its own merit or in an empathetic way.

Furthermore, there is a sense that the processes for ensuring appropriate measures and adjustments are in place to enable disabled staff to work effectively is taking longer than necessary.

When it came to policies the majority of staff we spoke to praised the Council for a number of measures in place to ensure disability equality was included. There were however, concerns with how these had been created. Many questioned whether the council ever spoken to staff these policies affected whilst they were being created. Most stressed the need for this to be collaborative process in order to ensure good practice.

For this to happen, employees wanted to see more Listening in Action sessions specifically around disability. Many were aware that these sessions were taking place across the council but due to the lack of communications (or potentially due to relevant communications being lost or drowned out by other subjects) some disabled staff were not aware if, or how, they could have their say.

Further to this, many felt the policies currently in place were too rigid. There was concern that managers followed policies to the letter and, although this may be reasonable in other cases, when it comes to health and wellbeing there should not be a 'one policy fits all' attitude.



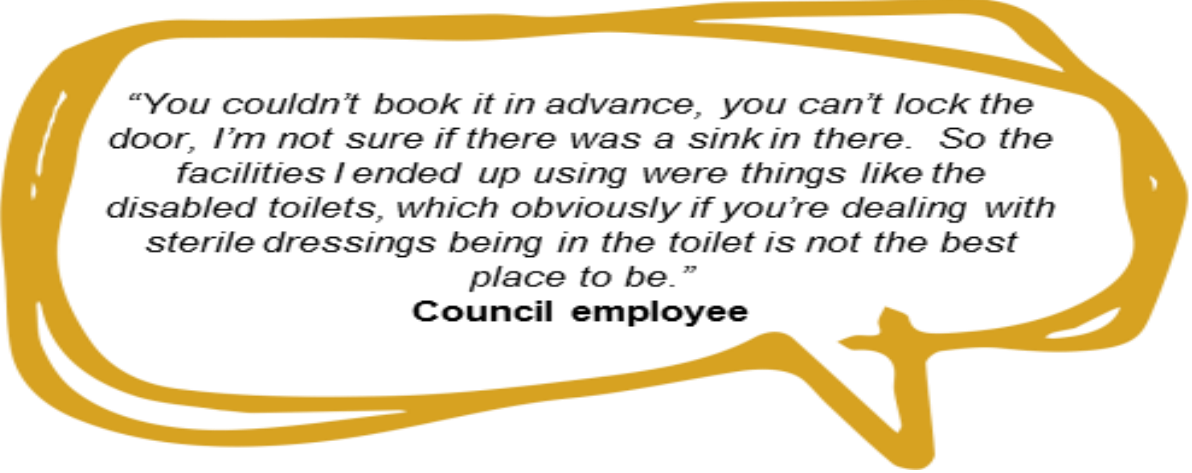
The lack of flexibility in policies and procedures concerning health and wellbeing make some policies feel contradictory of equality. The Council needs to understand that when it comes to health, each employee has individual and unique needs in order to make sure they are included and can work to their best ability. This emphasises the importance of one to one sessions with managers as it allows disabled staff to flag or address how policies are addressing / excluding their needs.

When asked how the Council can ensure flexibility is given and understanding of staff needs is improved, most disabled employees felt there is scope for more training. There is a sense that some managers would benefit from training that promotes understanding in the workplace at a wider level and assists in managers learning how to deal with various individual situations in both an empathetic and impartial manner.

When we asked disabled staff what their biggest day to day frustration was, the majority mentioned the lack of facilities available in order for them to protect their

privacy. Although most understood there were welfare rooms and recovery rooms available, most who needed these said they weren't fit for purpose.

Welfare rooms and accessible WCs are being used by those that don't necessarily need them (e.g. as changing rooms) and rooms not having locks were forcing staff to have to attend to their personal medical issues in unhygienic places such as bathrooms. This not only made staff feel overlooked but also making them feel like their dignity is being taken away from them. Allowing staff the sufficient space for them to attend to their own needs is crucial in helping some disabled staff to feel equal and respected in the workplace.



"You couldn't book it in advance, you can't lock the door, I'm not sure if there was a sink in there. So the facilities I ended up using were things like the disabled toilets, which obviously if you're dealing with sterile dressings being in the toilet is not the best place to be."

Council employee


BAME

The majority of employees we spoke to (across all characteristics) spontaneously praised MCC for having a diverse workforce in terms of ethnicities. Many recognised the wide range of employees from different backgrounds, religions, and nationalities across the whole organisation.

There is a perception that the Council are performing well with regards to the number of BAME new starters and this is an area the Council is excelling.

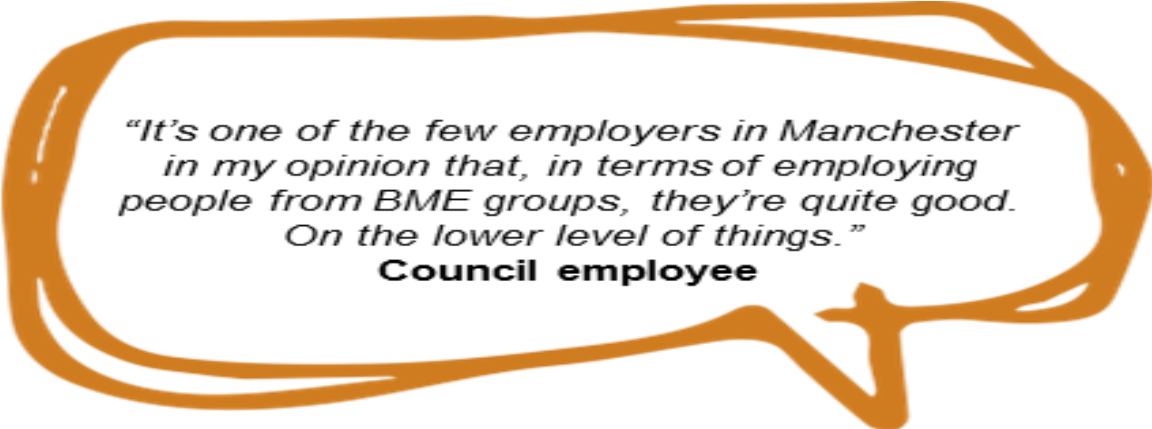
Further to this, the external recruitment process was praised as a whole. The anonymous application submission, which removed all identifiable information or characteristics, was seen as a progressive way of recruiting that sets an example of equal and diverse recruitment for the rest of the city. Many felt this was a successful way of removing prejudice or unconscious bias from the recruitment process, which in turn helped increase the feeling of inclusivity and diversity. Many felt this is something the Council could further promote.

For those new to the organisation, there was confidence in the Council for being a company they could successfully progress within. Positively, many described themselves as being at the start of a long career within MCC.



"That makes me feel really positive because it makes me realise that I'm probably at the start of my career here, and if I choose to stay there's a lot of potential for progress and working across a lot of different, interesting things."

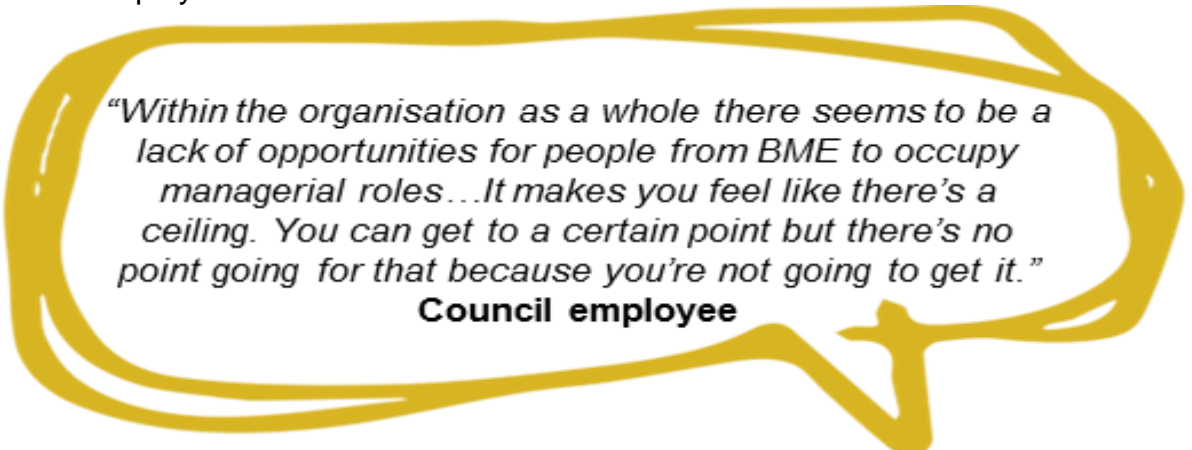
Council employee



"It's one of the few employers in Manchester in my opinion that, in terms of employing people from BME groups, they're quite good. On the lower level of things."

Council employee

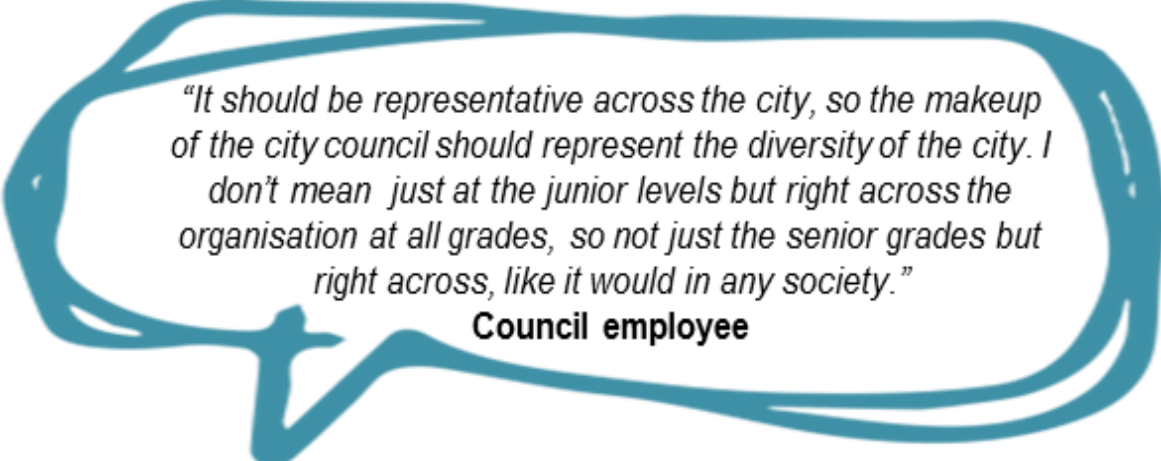
Unfortunately this encouraging perception of progression for BAME staff was not echoed by longer standing employees. Although the Council was praised for its diversity in general, it was widely recognised that there is a lack of representation of BAME employees in senior roles.



"Within the organisation as a whole there seems to be a lack of opportunities for people from BME to occupy managerial roles...It makes you feel like there's a ceiling. You can get to a certain point but there's no point going for that because you're not going to get it."

Council employee

The lack of representation of BAME staff in higher grades was not only recognised by BAME staff but by the majority of the employees we spoke to, emphasising the scale of the concern. Although many commented on how successful the Council was at reflecting the diversity within the city as a whole, some felt the lack of diversity in senior roles damaged this perception.

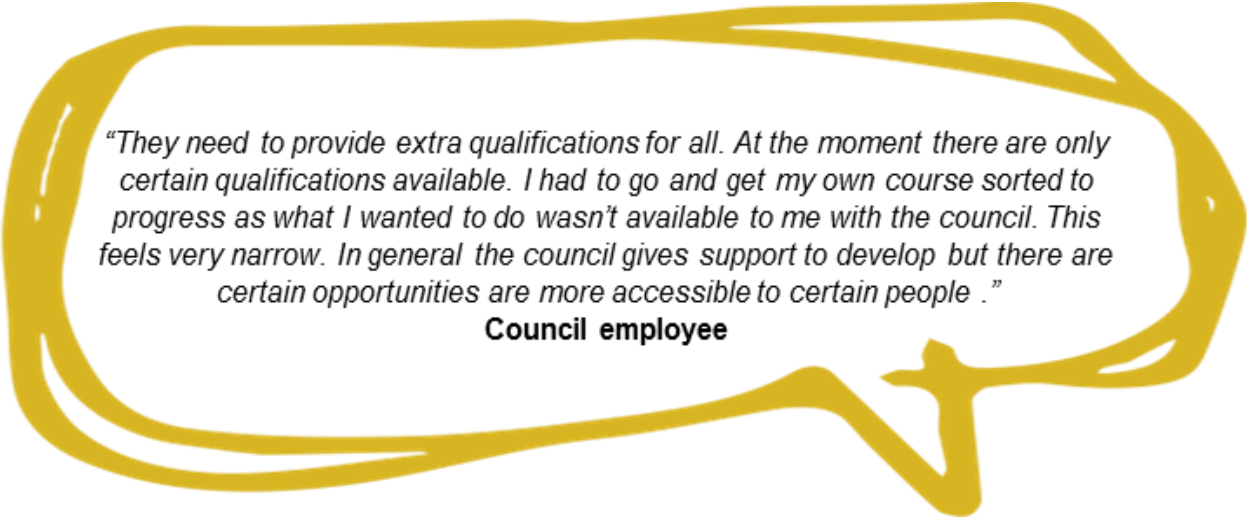


"It should be representative across the city, so the makeup of the city council should represent the diversity of the city. I don't mean just at the junior levels but right across the organisation at all grades, so not just the senior grades but right across, like it would in any society."

Council employee

Almost all of the BAME staff we consulted with commented on the lack of developmental support within the Council, feeling that people with a BAME background were significantly less likely to be offered help or training in order to progress. If the help and direction is currently there, the message is not currently filtering down to all BAME employees.

Several of the BAME employees we consulted with have taken matters into their own hands in terms of training and further education. A small proportion were not confident the Council would provide them with the opportunities they needed and are therefore using their own money and time to better themselves by enrolling on courses outside of the Council. Some feared the only way they could progress in their career would be by leaving MCC altogether.



"They need to provide extra qualifications for all. At the moment there are only certain qualifications available. I had to go and get my own course sorted to progress as what I wanted to do wasn't available to me with the council. This feels very narrow. In general the council gives support to develop but there are certain opportunities are more accessible to certain people ."

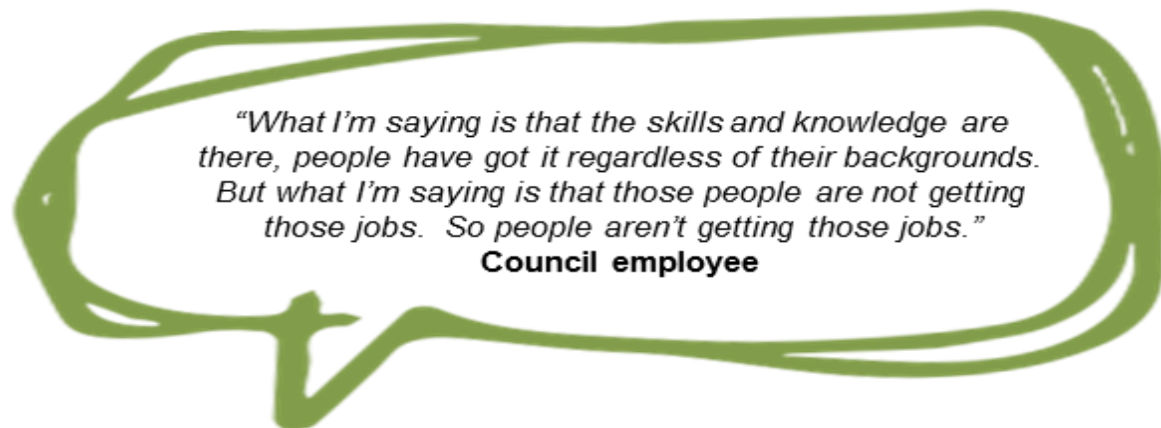
Council employee

Others had the perception that most training opportunities were only being offered to people in higher roles and therefore was not something the majority of BAME staff could access. Altering the way training is currently offered was suggested as a way of including more BAME employees in these training opportunities.

Offering the same 'anonymous' application process as recruitment was one potential way of reducing unconscious bias when it came to training selection. Along with this, ensuring there is a reflective representation of staff in all training sessions and guaranteeing diversity is considered when accepting applicants is a step towards reassuring BAME staff they will have the opportunity to learn and progress.

Further to this, many noted the need for a proactive push from the Council to ensure more BAME staff were enrolling on training courses. A suggested way for the Council to achieve this was by targeting communications on training to BAME staff as soon as the training became available.

Some also comment on non-BAME staff being promoted ahead of them (or other BAME colleagues), despite feeling the successful applicant was not the right person for the job (e.g. limited experiences or fewer qualifications).



The negative perceptions with regards to internal recruitment panels discussed by other groups were echoed by BAME employees, citing this as another barrier in terms of BAME progression. Many stressed the importance in having diverse recruitment panels in order to make the process more equal, fair and inclusive. Although a minority suspect managers were intentionally preventing BAME staff from progressing, many felt that unconscious bias was unavoidable in unrepresentative panels.

The need (and desire) for diverse recruitment panels, in all cases, was perceived as a necessary step for many in order for BAME members' to progress within the Council. Having panel members that represent as many communities as possible would prevent people from subconsciously hiring people that mirror their own ethnicity or background and would force honest discussion as to why people had been awarded roles. Along with a diverse panel, having panel members from other departments that are more likely to be impartial would further prevent people being hired for 'who they are' rather than 'what they know.'

Many praised how the Council gave everyone the opportunity to request feedback on their interviews, however, there was a feeling that the reasoning they received felt unfair and there were undertones of it being related to their BAME background.



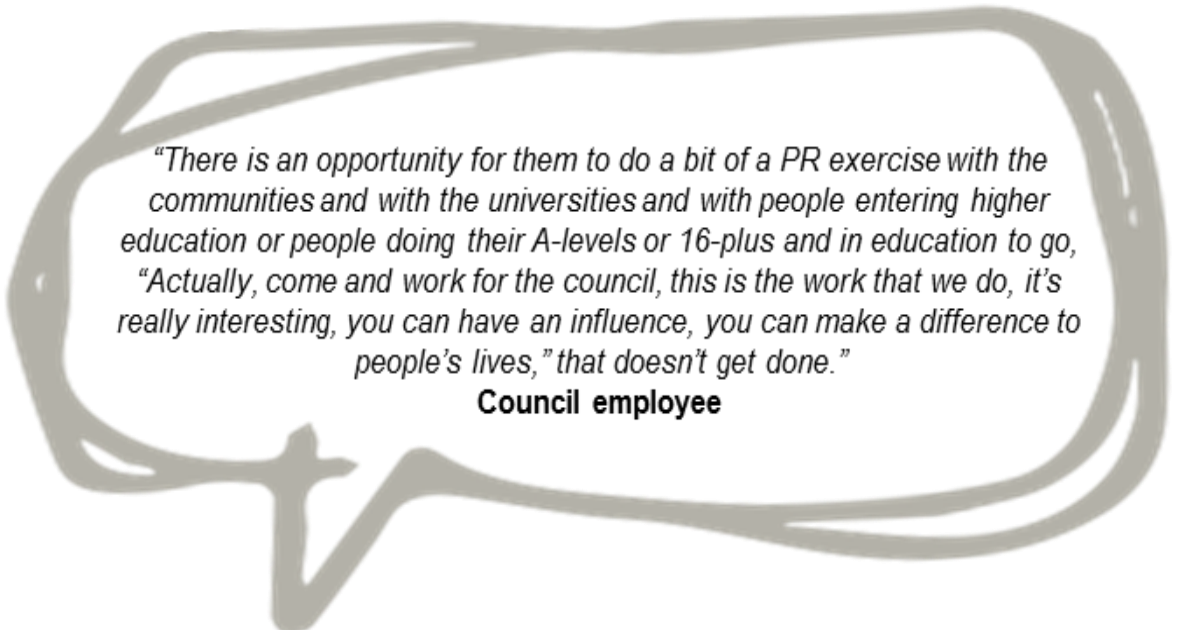
When asked how the Council could aid in providing BAME staff further opportunities to progress, mentoring schemes were frequently cited. There is currently confusion as to whether or not these schemes are available, and if so, who they are available for -suggesting the need for further communications on this.

Development of a mentoring scheme was suggested, whereby more senior employees would mentor individuals of lower grades. This would provide BAME staff with more exposure to these roles as well as give them introductions to the people recruiting for these roles. Many felt having a BAME visibility amongst the senior staff would further prevent unconscious bias when it came to hiring senior staff.

Although many felt there was a long way to go in terms of seeing BAME officers in senior roles, some recognised the positive impact Joanne Roney is having on BAME progression. Employees praised how she has vocally addressed the lack of diversity and BAME women in higher levels. Many were confident that she will make sure this issue is addressed, which stresses the importance in the Council making an active change. Failure to address these issues after the CEO has publicly acknowledged the issue would further impact on the 'broken promise.'



Further suggestions for improvement related to how the Council positions itself to the outside community. Many suggested the need for the Council to further promote itself to outside communities, clearly communicating how accepting MCC is to diversity. Some felt the Council being actively present in schools, colleges and universities throughout Manchester is an opportunity to target youths in BAME communities. Approaching these groups and promoting MCC as an organisation which celebrates diversity to audiences who are about to choose their career path could help boost BAME staff numbers. Further to this, promoting the Council as a place where the BAME community can be successful, progress, and make a difference to the wider community would help in reducing the negative perception some BAME communities have about working for the Council.



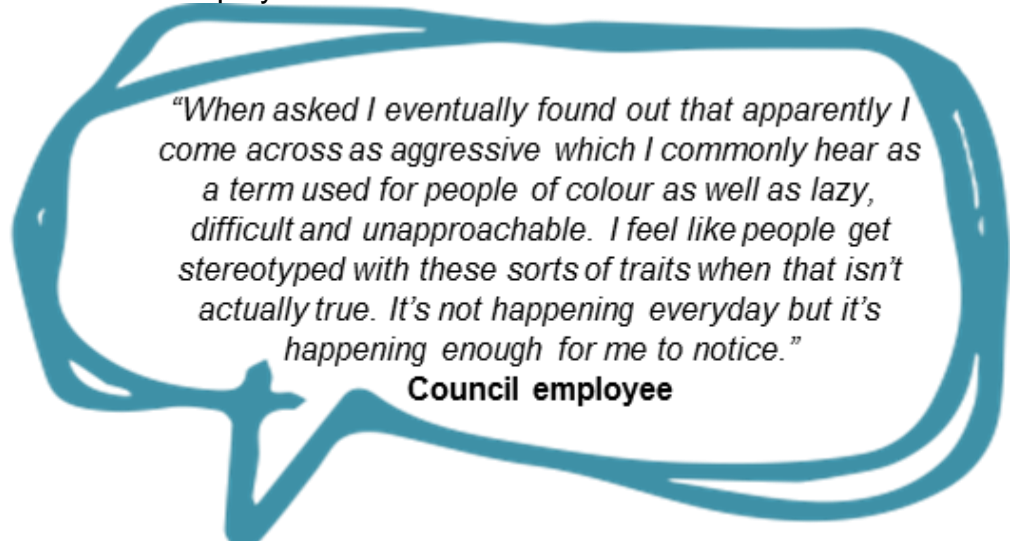
"There is an opportunity for them to do a bit of a PR exercise with the communities and with the universities and with people entering higher education or people doing their A-levels or 16-plus and in education to go, "Actually, come and work for the council, this is the work that we do, it's really interesting, you can have an influence, you can make a difference to people's lives," that doesn't get done."

Council employee

For most BAME staff experiences of direct racism were few and far between, with many saying that their day to day work life was generally unaffected. However, some did mention occasions where comments, language and stereotypes had been attributed to themselves or other BAME colleagues.

When prompted it was noted that the words 'lazy,' 'confrontational,' 'difficult,' and 'unapproachable' were used to describe their own or others character and working styles. A number of employees said these were words used to 'justify' not promoting BAME staff.

Although staff accepted that not every BAME employee was 'gold standard', as there are workers from all communities that fail to meet exceptional working standards, some staff were commonly, and unjustly, hearing this language used for large numbers of BAME employees.

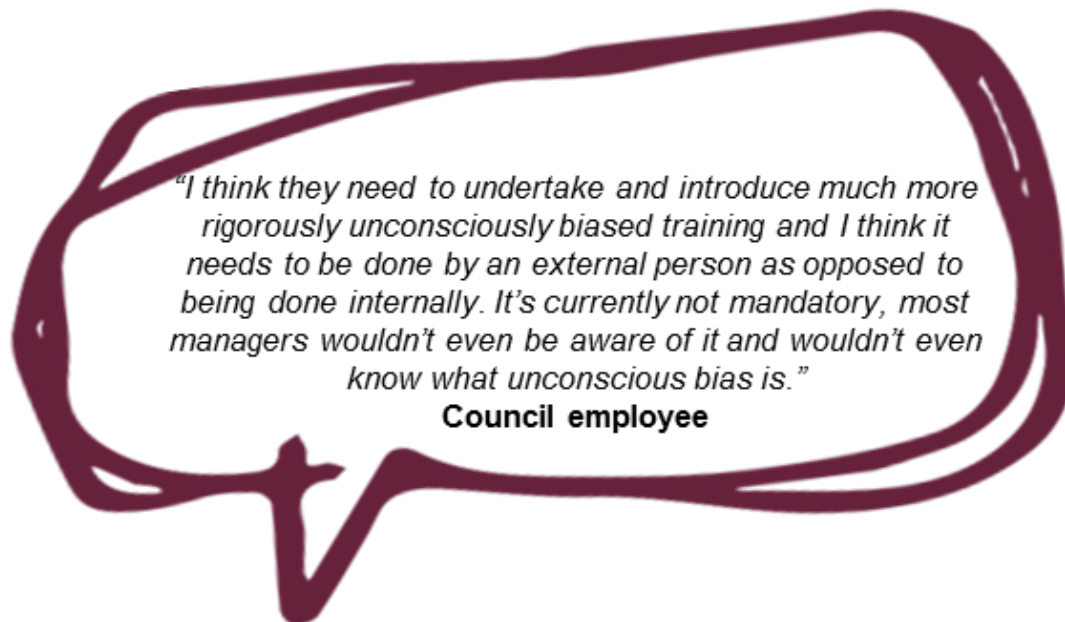


"When asked I eventually found out that apparently I come across as aggressive which I commonly hear as a term used for people of colour as well as lazy, difficult and unapproachable. I feel like people get stereotyped with these sorts of traits when that isn't actually true. It's not happening everyday but it's happening enough for me to notice."

Council employee

Specific and mandatory training sessions aimed at tackling unconscious bias was commonly suggested as something that should be implemented by the Council in order to challenge and change the language used against, and the treatment of


BAME staff. Although many recognised that this could be a costly and timely exercise for the Council to implement, many felt it was a necessary step to set a precedent in how people should be treated - bringing to light the subtle behaviours people have in terms of interacting with BAME staff and demonstrating that treating BAME staff equally and fairly is something at the top of the Council's agenda.



A small number of the BAME employees we spoke to had said they had experienced direct racism within MCC. Those people were disappointed in how the Council tackled and resolved these issues. In some cases staff felt isolated in their department and that their colleagues were aware but turning a blind eye, and this in turn had a negative impact on decisions to speak up and address issues with their own managers. This strengthens the need for impartial support systems being in place.

Most BAME employees that we spoke to mentioned the importance of seeing BAME staff in senior roles, noting the positive impact it could have on BAME staff in general. Having clear visual representations of BAME communities in higher grades was seen as a necessity in order to encourage BAME employees to put themselves forward for progression, making it an achievable goal. Many commented that, due to the lack of BAME senior staff, there was a lack of BAME role models for staff to follow.

Few staff spontaneously mentioned the BAME Staff Group, but from those that did there were many reasons as to why people felt the group had lost momentum. Firstly, many felt being associated with the group was detrimental to both their career and character. Several employees mentioned hesitation in being involved in these groups for fear of being labelled a 'troublemaker' for being associated with a group that actually promotes progressive and positive change. Others felt this label would follow them when they were looking to develop and change roles within the Council.



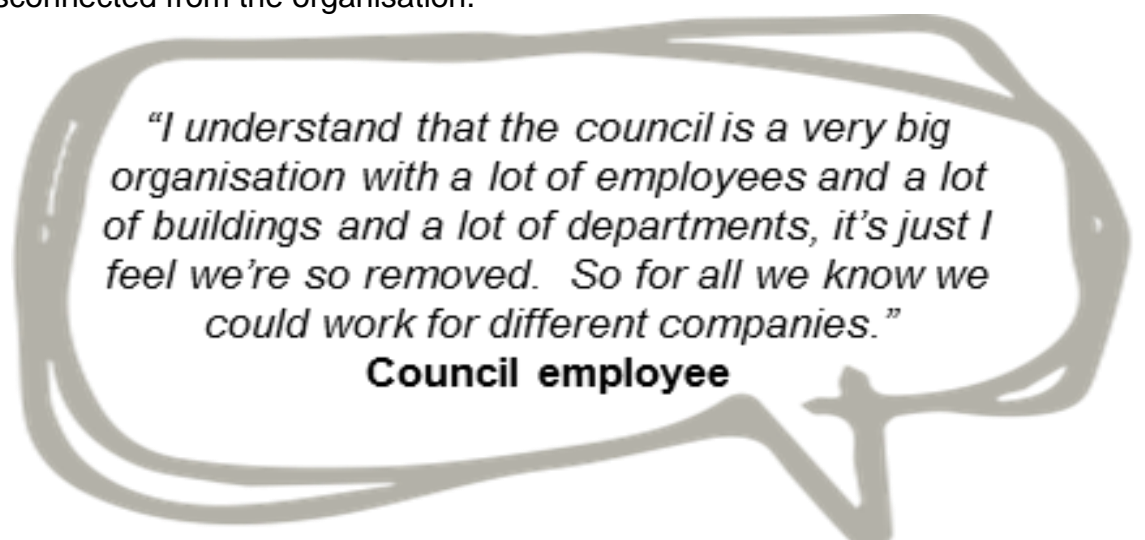
"I think with the race staff group in particular there was a strong perception that if you're affiliated to this group it's going to affect your career chances. Because you're seen as being difficult because you're challenging the organisation. That was more specifically for the black staff group."

Council employee

From those with limited awareness, there were inconsistencies in understanding the purpose of these groups and there appeared to be a lack of awareness in the reasons for attending. Like with other staff groups, there was potential for further promotion. A lack of understanding on the aim and purpose of these groups, the events that take place within them and the changes that can be made by attending need addressing through further communications and promotions.

Location

Historically many outside of the Town Hall Extension felt disjointed from not only the central office, but from the Council as a whole. Most felt that there was a lack of engagement or involvement from the Council which resulted in them feeling disconnected from the organisation.




"I understand that the council is a very big organisation with a lot of employees and a lot of buildings and a lot of departments, it's just I feel we're so removed. So for all we know we could work for different companies."

Council employee


Some examples as to why some felt unequal to the staff within the Town Hall Extension include:

- Only receiving email and intranet access within the last few years / months
- Less opportunities for training / development and progression
- Inconsistencies in working flexibilities e.g. flexi time, office opening hours, how well policies are adhered to
- Roll outs of new procedures, systems and policies are filtered down rather than across the board at the same time
- Limited or slow communications

- Lack of investment and development in buildings




"You'll see all the emails about there's a brilliant new thing being started and it's just for the town hall."
Council employee



"I used to work in this building when I first started working for the council, and this building hasn't changed in 20 years. It still feels the same, and I think the environment kind of stifles that sense of wellbeing. I came back into this building now and felt kind of depressed."
Council employee

Alexandra House was described as "The Town Hall's poorer cousin." Many felt there was a lack of power as well as a lack of voice for those working within this building. For those in other offices, some felt like they were an afterthought.


Many commented on the lack of opportunities they have compared to the Town Hall Extension, be that training courses, development opportunities or chances to progress in their career. Some feel that by working outside of the City Centre they are being held back as the Council does not provide them with the exposure they need.



"In the town hall, this is what I've noticed, you get senior a lot more and you get opportunities to progress."
Council employee

However, most employees outside the Town Hall Extension recognised the Council's efforts in making all departments feel included and equal. They can see that

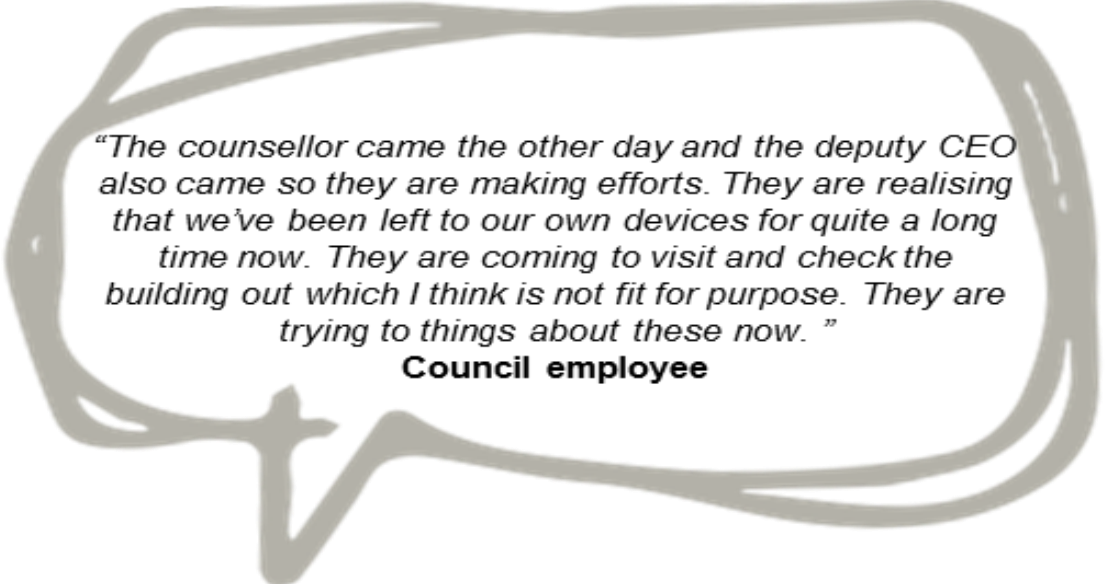
improvements are being made, however there are still frustrations at how long these changes are taking. When asked how the Council can improve on making other locations feel equal, the response was mostly 'more of what you are already doing.'



"I do understand in a company that is so large it's kind of impossible to have that community of it because it is a very big organisation, it's just they are trying, I know they are trying to not make us feel a difference but it's taking a very long time."

Council employee

Joanne Roney is also helping bridge the gap in making those outside the Town Hall feel equal, as well as bringing all locations together. Her human presence within many of the offices is not going unnoticed and is helping to make staff feel like they are part of the overall organisation. Knowing the CEO has recognised some of the frustrations employees within these offices have helped them feel included, valued and like she is working towards bringing the organisation together as a whole. More appearances from her and more acknowledgements to locations outside of the Town Hall in her communications could help remind everyone that they are part of 'the Council community.'



"The counsellor came the other day and the deputy CEO also came so they are making efforts. They are realising that we've been left to our own devices for quite a long time now. They are coming to visit and check the building out which I think is not fit for purpose. They are trying to things about these now. "

Council employee

Holding listening and action sessions in locations outside the centre are allowing more employees to feel like they have the opportunity to be heard and to feel like they are part of 'the community.' For some, these sessions are the only times they are made aware of changes being made within the Council. There are still ways however, in which these sessions could improve. Having more of these sessions in more locations will continue to make those in offices outside the Town Hall Extension

feel like they are able to have a say and that the Council wants to understand their needs. Some do feel that, although having the opportunity to be heard is great for locations outside the city centre, frustrations are echoed in regards to no outcomes being actioned from these sessions. The let-down of the broken promise continues.



The Be Heard survey is helping to make those outside the city centre feel included. It's giving everyone in the organisation a voice, rather than just the few. Again, there are concerns that the loop is not being closed in terms of the concerns addressed actually being answered.

Another way in which some staff working outside of the Town Hall claimed they could be made to feel more included in the Council workforce was by having shadowing sessions. Some staff felt that there was a shadowing scheme already in place; however there could be confusion with mentoring schemes discussed earlier. This potential confusion again highlights the need for clear communications about mentoring or shadowing opportunities.

As many felt those in the Town Hall had more working flexibilities there are potential positives in allowing staff to shadow or be mentored by those in the Town Hall. Allowing staff to experience the working styles implemented within the Town Hall would allow them to introduce these methods into other locations, helping to enforce fair working conditions across all departments and locations.


The introduction of short HR sessions within other locations is appreciated. Giving people the opportunity to sit down with HR face-to-face, outside of the Town Hall is welcomed. Having said this, many believe it is another example of something that could be improved greatly with only minor adjustments. Given that staff at the Town Hall are able to visit the HR team at any point during their working week; those outside of the Town Hall claimed they should be able to engage with the HR team more frequently, and for longer periods of time. Many also expressed that a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the context behind these HR sessions would be invaluable to them. Staff were unsure as to the purpose of these sessions, what they could say, what they couldn't say and what might happen after speaking to the HR team. This lack of knowledge was seen as an initial deterrent to using the service, which was agreed, could be a critical step towards equality and diversity throughout the workforce if implemented fairly.

Age

For the most part ageism was not an area that came up naturally in discussion amongst the vast majority of the employees we spoke with. From this we could infer that this is an element of diversity and equality which is less visible relative to other facets. This is not to say however, that it is of less importance.


Amongst the older employees we spoke with there were a few recurring themes - these related to a lack of opportunity, feeling unsupported as they approach retirement or feeling pressured into continuing working rather than retiring.

Amongst those approaching the retirement age band there was a feeling that they were less investable than their younger counterparts and there was evidence of situations where age had appeared to be a barrier to progressing / developing further.



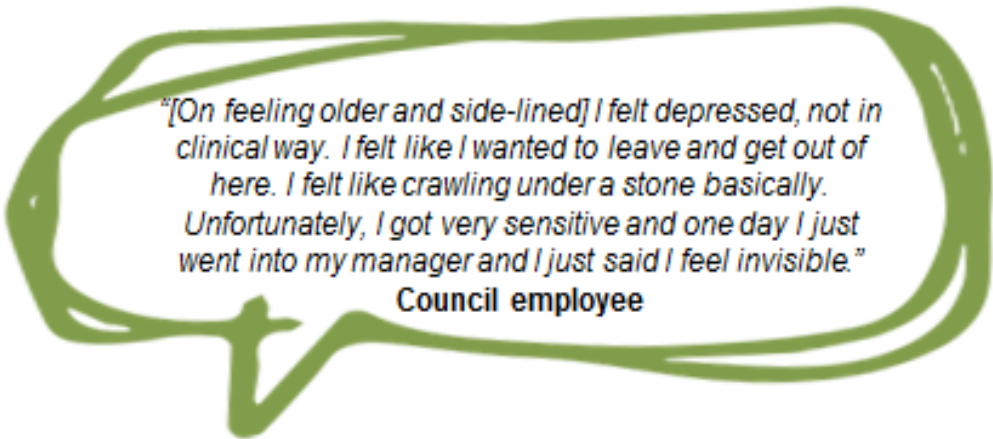
"My only experience really is of being older now and less valued and I'm just on the track to retirement so there is not much point in investing in me. It's kind of the feeling that the workplace belongs to the youth."

Council employee



"In terms of equality I'm a 53 year old woman and I've got lots of experience. There's another woman in the team in her 30's, very dynamic but I actually felt that because it was a new team, I felt like I was being side-lined. I don't think that was deliberate in anyway but it did make me ask questions about older workers."

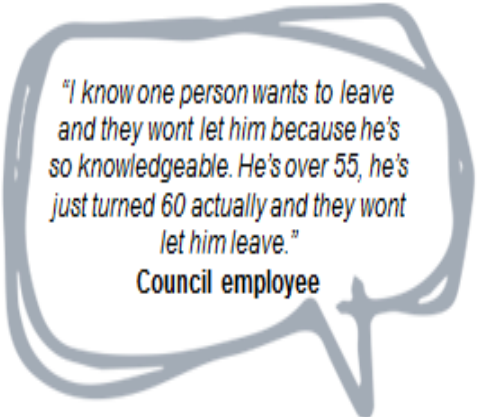
Council employee



"[On feeling older and side-lined] I felt depressed, not in clinical way. I felt like I wanted to leave and get out of here. I felt like crawling under a stone basically. Unfortunately, I got very sensitive and one day I just went into my manager and I just said I feel invisible."

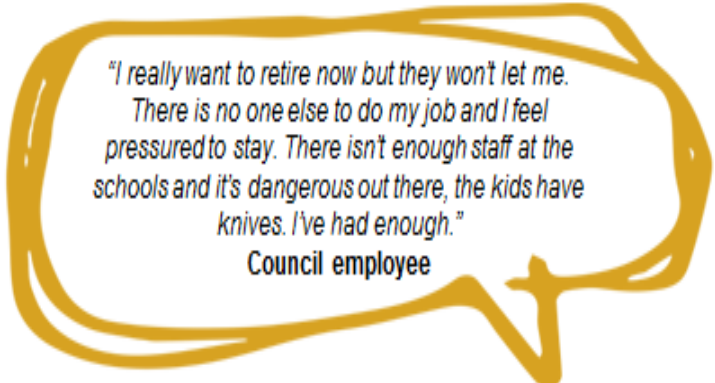
Council employee

There was also an indication that some older employees approaching retirement felt the Council did not want them to retire and were actively discouraging this. One employee claimed another colleague had a desire to retire but as they held all of the knowledge on their role the Council were not allowing this. Another employee stated they felt pressured to stay in their role as there was nobody else who would be suitable to take over their role.



"I know one person wants to leave and they won't let him because he's so knowledgeable. He's over 55, he's just turned 60 actually and they won't let him leave."


Council employee



"I really want to retire now but they won't let me. There is no one else to do my job and I feel pressured to stay. There isn't enough staff at the schools and it's dangerous out there, the kids have knives. I've had enough."


Council employee

Although some older employees feel that they have been discriminated against, there is a sense that when ageism is experienced within the workplace it tends to be more subtle when compared to other areas of inequality.



"I mean I think my age has counted against me in terms of recent opportunities. I've been asked 'Well how old are you' and then other things have then followed through which made me think 'Oh, the judgement has been made because I've told them and I'm within that bracket of retirement' and I think that was unfair."

Council employee



"[On development opportunities] Well nobody helps develop anybody. You just get on and do your job. I don't expect to retire at 66, but I don't know I wish I could make them see that. I told my manager when she said 'You'd have to go to university and get a degree'. So I said 'Well I know I'm not far off of possible retirement age but I don't think I should be retiring any time soon.' I think they just want a fresh face."

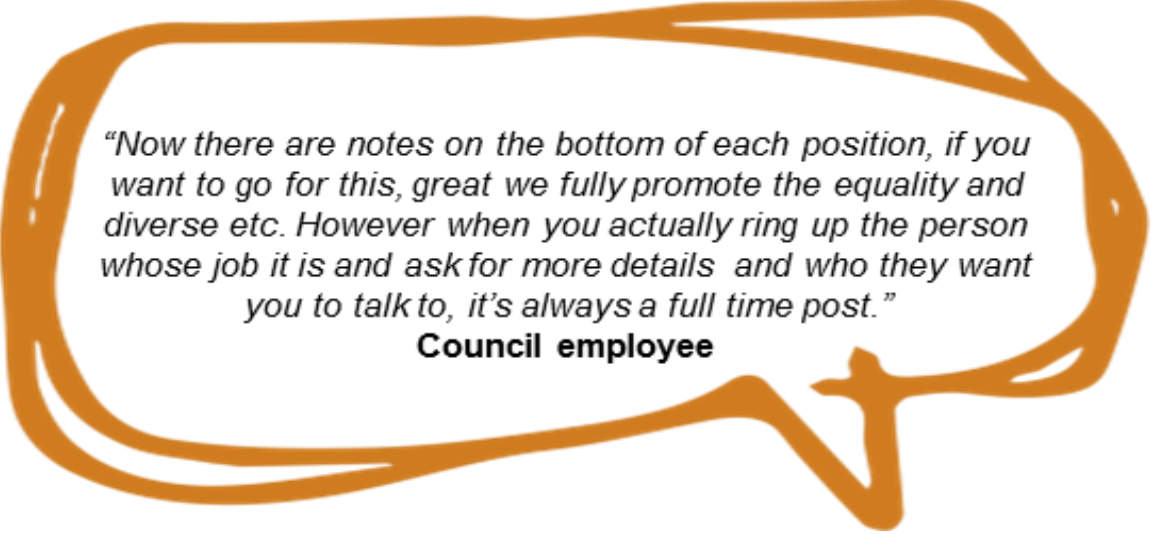
Council employee

Part-Time Staff

Another potential area of equality and diversity that was less visible is that of those in part-time positions. Like with ageism, this topic was only apparent for a small number of the employees we spoke to, although this could be reflective of the proportion of part-time workers within MCC.

Providing employees with part-time opportunities was recognised as a strong point for the Council as it allows and promotes staff to fit work around other areas of their lives. However, the limited opportunities and lack of support expressed by older employees was echoed by part-time workers. There were concerns regarding limited prospects to move into new roles or develop within the Council. There were frustrations concerning how most new opportunities within the organisation were advertised as full time roles, with further frustrations regarding the acknowledgement


of promoting equality and diversity within the adverts, but when challenged the option of going part-time was dismissed.



"Now there are notes on the bottom of each position, if you want to go for this, great we fully promote the equality and diverse etc. However when you actually ring up the person whose job it is and ask for more details and who they want you to talk to, it's always a full time post."

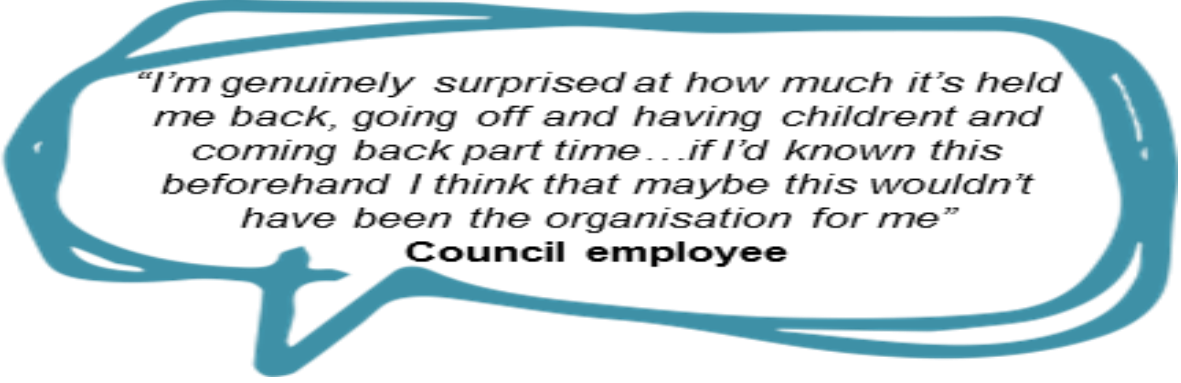
Council employee

Some felt making the decision to go part-time had been detrimental to their career, feeling like they were being deskilled by being 'stuck' in a role. There was a perception that the lack of opportunity for part-time staff was restricting them and, in some cases, there was resistance from managers to help with progression. Part-time workers echoed the concern that some managers were actively discouraging staff from progressing, applying for other roles or moving to different departments within the Council. This lack of supporting growth led to feelings of disappointment in not only management but the Council as a whole.



"I feel at times I'm being deskilled because I'm not able to move into another position which I know I could definitely do. I'm not sure the organisation is prepared to put support in place for people who are part time. That has been a real struggle for me. ."

Council employee




"I'm genuinely surprised at how much it's held me back, going off and having children and coming back part time...if I'd known this beforehand I think that maybe this wouldn't have been the organisation for me"

Council employee

The lack of consistency between management and departmental treatment was also echoed by part-time staff, with them recognising that other departments have more flexibility when it comes to part-time workers. Ensuring that all departments treat their part-time staff in an equal fashion, ensuring that there is consistency in how these staff are managed, is critical to good practice and making these employees feel equal.

When asked how the Council could improve the working environment for part-time staff and help make them feel more equal and included, there was enthusiasm for the Council improving job sharing opportunities. There was the perception that this is currently only offered to long standing staff, rather than being an opportunity for all. Introducing job shares across the board and allowing multiple staff to share one full time role would help part-time staff feel valued, heard, re-motivated, and would allow them to progress.



"The job share is definitely not embraced in our department and I know in other departments job share is very common. I've asked about job shares since literally coming back [from maternity] and I've been back part time five years. So it's been a long time."

Council employee

Further characteristics

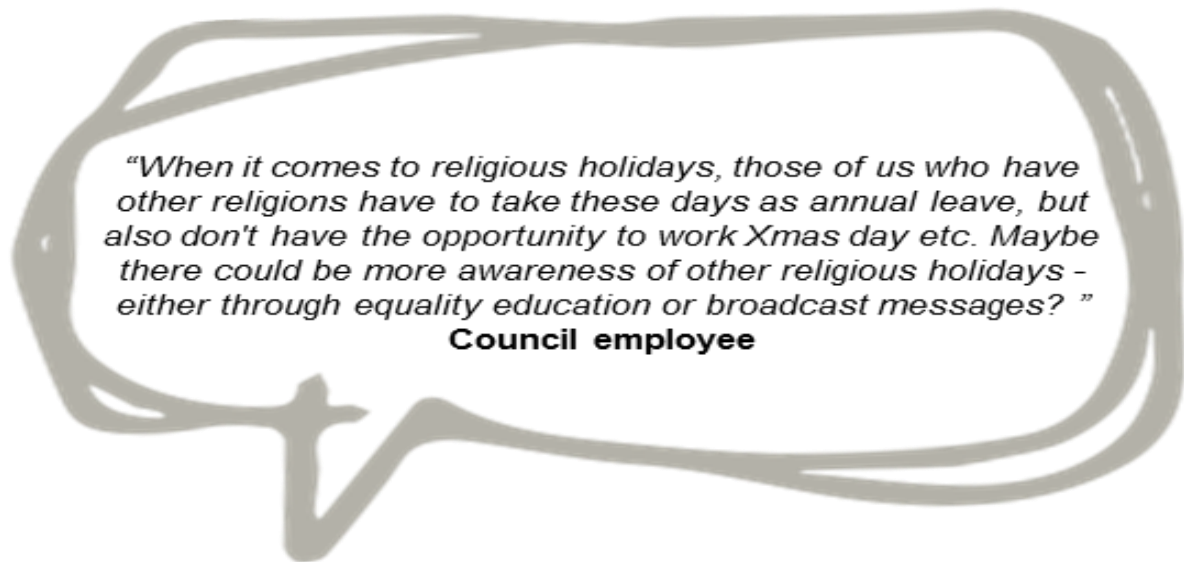
Along with the above characteristics discussed, gender and religion were anecdotally mentioned by a small number of employees.

There was reference to MCC having a good representation of genders across the Council, with some having the perception there are more females than males. Considering recent media attention and online movements regarding gender pay gaps there were concerns that the Council may be missing the mark when it came to equal pay for male and female counterparts, however, this was based on opinion rather than fact.

There were further comments about maternity and paternity leave. There was uncertainty from some as to whether shared maternity leave was an initiative the Council allowed its staff to benefit from. Allowing shared leave was something some felt would help show the Council was an equal and inclusive workplace.

Religion was also something addressed by a small number of employees, with most noting how the council was accepting of all religions.

There were, however, frustrations with leave over religious holidays with some noting that annual leave was needed for certain religious holidays but not others (e.g. Christmas). Creating more awareness of religious holidays and allowing flexibility in religious leave is something MCC could focus on. Allowing staff to work over Christmas if this wasn't a holiday they celebrated, and ensuring no one has to use annual leave to celebrate their own religious holidays is one way of making sure all staff felt included.



Recommendations and achievable next steps

There are some achievable steps that MCC could implement in the short term:

Closing the loop

Ensuring there is more communications between the Equalities Team and staff, particularly those engaging with equality and diversity will help staff feel heard. Staff need to know they have been listened too and it is important for the Council to converse further by acknowledging engagement and letting staff know what changes have been, or will be, made.

Promote training to BAME staff

Due to strong recognition in the lack of BAME staff in senior roles there is a need for the Council to ensure more BAME staff receive the support and training necessary for progressing within the organisation. Targeted communications and ensuring training is diverse and inclusive are potential first steps to helping BAME staff into senior roles.

Re-evaluate internal recruitment processes

As staff praised the external recruitment process it is important MCC re-evaluates the internal process in order to improve staff perceptions of equality in the workplace. Ensuring panels are diverse and interdepartmental is one way to reducing unconscious bias during the recruitment process.

Communication

There is no such thing as too much communication when it comes to equality and diversity in the workplace. Allowing those who are truly engaged in equalities to 'subscribe' to the equalities team; be that via email or an online community board, will ensure people can easily access the communications they want to hear. MCC also needs to continue to strengthen communication and engagement to offices outside the Town Hall Extension.