



# Equality Objectives Consultation

Summary Report 2026





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# Consultation Headlines

 **Total Responses**  
**325**

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 **Comments received on the online survey**  
**606**


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 **Respondents answered all questions**  
**26.8%**

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 **Community contacts were contacted**  
**345**

**Social Media Engagement**

 **12,057**  
Total Impressions

**72**  
Total Engagement

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 **1,457**  
Total Impressions

**68**  
Total Engagement

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**288**  
visits to the website page

**13.91%**  
agreed with Objective Equitable Access

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**14.77%**  
agreed with Objective Belonging at Work

**15.15%**  
agreed with Objective Employer of Choice

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**14.86%**  
agreed with Objective Inclusive by Design



# Executive Summary

Between 8 December 2025 and 16 February 2026, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) carried out a ten-week public consultation on four proposed Equality Objectives for 2026–2030. The intention of the consultation was to gather meaningful insight from staff, stakeholders, and communities across Berkshire to ensure the new objectives are relevant, achievable and grounded in lived experience.

The Equality Objectives are designed to help RBFRS meet its legal duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) by improving equitable access to services, strengthening our culture and staff experience, and ensuring our information, environments and processes are inclusive for everyone.

In total, 325 responses were received, including surveys completed in English, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian and Urdu, as well as Easy Read submissions. Engagement was supported through social media, website content, press activity, internal communications, targeted outreach, printed materials and community contacts.

Feedback received through the consultation was wide-ranging, with many respondents providing detailed comments across the four objectives. While a significant proportion of responses expressed disagreement with the objectives, the findings show that much of this sentiment was shaped by broader national debates, concerns about impartiality, misunderstandings of equality legislation and perceptions about organisational culture, rather than the specific content of the objectives themselves. Alongside this, many constructive suggestions were made, particularly around clarity of wording, the importance of maintaining professional standards, improving communication, and strengthening staff wellbeing and trust.

Through the qualitative analysis, RBFRS identified several recurring themes, including concerns about fairness, misinterpretation of equity, psychological safety, and the link between culture and operational effectiveness. Cross-cutting issues such as generalised rejection, ideological polarisation, and high levels of non-disclosure in demographic monitoring also provided important context for understanding the responses.

As a result of the consultation, all four Equality Objectives were refined to ensure they use plain, operational language focused on safety, evidence and service improvement. Changes were made to clarify intent, reinforce that professional standards remain non-negotiable, and emphasise how each objective supports both staff and the wider community. A “You Said / We Did” summary has been included to clearly outline how feedback shaped the final objectives.

The report also includes our next steps pending approval of the objectives that sets out how RBFRS will implement, monitor and report progress over the next four years. This ensures transparency, accountability and alignment with statutory duties.

The findings of the consultation, together with the final proposed Equality Objectives for 2026–2030, will be presented to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on 30 April 2026 for consideration.



# Purpose

The purpose of the consultation was to gather meaningful insight and feedback from staff, stakeholders, and our wider communities to inform the development of our new Equality Objectives.

The Equality Act 2010 sets out the requirement for public authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty. This places a duty on public bodies to consider how policies and decisions conducted by the organisation affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.

The intention of this duty is to accelerate progress towards equality, by placing a responsibility on public bodies to consider how they can work to tackle inequalities and discrimination specifically relating to individuals with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act.

The requirements of the PSED are categorised into general and specific duties:

## General Duties

- Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires us to demonstrate compliance with the PSED.
- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not.

## Specific Duties

- Publish information to demonstrate compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually.
- Set equality objectives, at least every four years.

RBFRS has a responsibility to set clear, evidence based objectives that support the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty: eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations.

This consultation was designed to ensure that our Equality Objectives reflect the experiences, priorities, and expectations of our staff and the people we serve. By engaging directly with those affected, we aimed to test whether our proposed objectives are relevant, achievable, and meaningful and identify areas that may have been missed and understand any barriers that persist within our organisation or services.

The input received will help us refine our priorities, shape the actions underpinning each objective, and ensure our final Equality Objectives are grounded in real-world insight.



Ultimately, the consultation was intended to strengthen transparency, build trust, and demonstrate our commitment to co-production by giving people a direct voice in shaping our equality and inclusion agenda for the coming years.

# What We Consulted On

In line with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010, the Fire Authority encouraged as many people as possible to have their say on our four revised Equality Objectives.

The four objectives proposed were:

### **Equitable Access**

**Using risk-based analysis and robust evidence, we will ensure our prevention, protection and response activities are targeted where they are needed most, particularly for communities who face higher risks or barriers.**

**What does this mean?** We will strengthen our understanding of the diverse communities we serve, including their specific needs, vulnerabilities and risks, to shape evidence-based service delivery. This means ensuring that our prevention, protection, and response services are guided by data and informed by meaningful input from underrepresented and at-risk groups. By doing so, we aim to provide more equitable access to service and improve safety outcomes for all.

### **Employer of Choice**

**We will actively promote RBFRS as an employer of choice and will seek to attract and retain a workforce that reflects the community of Berkshire.**

**What does this mean?** We want to be an employer of choice, where the best talent is attracted, supported, and given the opportunity to thrive. We want to be known not just for what we do but for how we treat our people and the positive environment we create. We are committed to building a workplace where people from all backgrounds feel like they belong and are valued.

### **Belonging at Work**

**We will cultivate a workplace culture where every individual feels a strong sense of belonging by embedding inclusive behaviours into everyday interactions.**

**What does this mean?** By setting clear expectations for professional and inclusive behaviour and embedding this into daily practices, we will create an environment where everyone feels safe, supported and included - not just through policies, but through everyday actions. We will support employees to grow their knowledge, awareness and inclusive skills, while encouraging reflection and dialogue that challenges assumptions and address bias. We will continue to foster a culture where everyone understands, respects, and values the diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences of colleagues and the communities we serve.

### **Inclusive by Design**



**We will continue to embed inclusion into the planning, design and delivery of our services in order to proactively reduce barriers across our communications, processes and premises.**

**What does this mean?** We are committed to ensuring that everyone can access our services, premises and information. This means taking a proactive, not reactive approach to identifying barriers and designing inclusive solutions from the outset. By continuing to use Equality Impact Assessments effectively, we can ensure that the potential impacts of our decisions on different groups are considered early enabling us to design more inclusive and accessible services.

Respondents were asked to state on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree the extent in which they agree with the objectives and were furthermore offered the opportunity to express more detailed views in comments on each individual objective, as well as overall.

## Methodology

Prior to the final consultation a number of internal focus groups had taken place to form the objectives. Following this, the wider public consultation period ran for 10 consecutive weeks from 8 December 2025 – 16 February 2026. In carrying out the consultation, RBFRS followed the legal principles that underpin consultation. These are known as the four ‘Gunning Principles’ which specify how public bodies should consult. They specify that:

- ✓ Consultation should be carried out when proposals are at the formative stage.
- ✓ Sufficient information is provided to allow intelligent consideration of the proposals.
- ✓ Adequate time is given for response; and
- ✓ Responses are conscientiously considered before decisions are taken.

RBFRS’ [Consultation Strategy](#) can be accessed online.

The consultation was promoted through a number of channels detailed in the Consultation Resources and Communications Evaluation section.

## Consultation Limitations

While this consultation generated a high number of responses and provided valuable insight, there are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

### Self-Selection Bias

Participation in the consultation was voluntary and self-selecting, meaning respondents were more likely to engage if they had strong views whether positive or negative about equality, diversity and inclusion. This may have amplified more polarised perspectives.



### High Levels of Non-Disclosure

Across all demographic questions, a significant proportion of respondents either skipped questions or selected “prefer not to say”. In some areas, non-disclosure exceeded 50%. This reduces the ability to fully understand the representativeness of the consultation compared to Berkshire’s population.

### Uneven Representation Across the County

Engagement varied significantly between unitary authorities. Some areas with more diverse populations, particularly Slough were underrepresented. This limits the extent to which the findings reflect views across all communities within Berkshire.

### Public vs Staff Representation

Although the consultation was open to the public, narrative responses show that a considerable proportion of feedback was from staff members. This may have influenced the emphasis on internal culture, recruitment, morale and leadership concerns.

### Influence of National Debate and Ideological Framing

Many responses reflected wider national conversations around equality, identity and public sector impartiality rather than the specific content of the proposed objectives. This has introduced an additional layer of sentiment that may not be directly attributable to the objectives themselves.

### Psychological Safety and Fear of Reprisal

Some respondents expressed concerns about being identified or facing consequences for sharing views. This may have limited openness and reduced the depth of feedback, especially from underrepresented groups.

### Digital Exclusion

The predominantly online format of the consultation may have restricted participation among individuals with limited access to digital tools. While alternative formats were available, digital channels were the primary route, which could contribute to underrepresentation of some groups.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the consultation but provide important context for interpreting the results and ensuring transparency in how the findings are used.



# Consultation Resources and Communications Evaluation

The Equality Objectives consultation was publicised across the Service's digital channels, including social media platforms, website, intranet (available to RBFRS staff) and online and local media.

Consultation materials were made available via several accessible methods. These included:

- Online via [rbfrs.co.uk/consultations](https://rbfrs.co.uk/consultations)
- By emailing [consultations@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:consultations@rbfrs.co.uk)
- By writing to:
  - Claudia Trott, EDI Lead  
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue  
Newsham Court, Pincent's Kiln  
Reading, Berkshire  
RG31 7SD

## External Communications

We used several different platforms and formats to promote the Consultation with external audiences across the County.

### Press Release and Media Engagement

To launch the consultation, we published a [press release on the Service's website](#) and shared it with local media organisations such as newspapers and radio stations. In total, we contacted 10 media organisations in Berkshire.

### Website and Consultation and Engagement Hub

In addition to the press release, a more [comprehensive overview of the consultation](#), including an introduction open letter from Wayne Bowcock, former Chief Fire Officer, was published on the Service's website.

This [page](#) was published in the [Consultation and Engagement Hub](#), a section of the website dedicated to promoting consultations run by the Service. An [archive](#) of previous consultations, including those concerning Equality Objectives, is available in the Hub.

The [consultation page](#) included a series of supporting documents to help make the consultation more accessible to a wider audience. These included links to the consultation in multiple languages as well as in English:

- Polish
- Punjabi



- Romanian
- Urdu

[An Easy Read version](#) of the consultation document was also linked on the page. Below is a summary of the Easy Read, what it is, and how it was incorporated into this project. When compared to the previous Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Objectives consultation in 2022, the website page was viewed 288 times (by 246 unique users) compared to 113 in 2022.

## Easy Read

Ahead of the launch of the consultation, we created [an Easy Read version](#) of the consultation document.

Easy Read is a simple and effective way to make information accessible to people with learning disabilities so that they can understand complex information. It uses clear language and simple graphics to help everyone read and comprehend information.

## Social Media Advertising

The Consultation was promoted on two of our social media channels, Facebook and LinkedIn. Below compares the performance of the consultation on social media compared to the previous EDI Objectives consultation in 2022 (excluding posts in community groups).

*Figure one – Equality Objectives consultation social media statistics.*

Platform	Total Engagements (Reactions, Clicks)	Total Impressions
Facebook (2026)	72	12,057
Facebook (2022)	452	23,771
LinkedIn (2026)	68	1,457
LinkedIn (2022)	16	320
Twitter (X) (2022)	73	4,217

We shared the consultation 10 times on Facebook, one for every week the consultation ran. We also shared the consultation on Facebook community groups that represented different communities within Berkshire. We shared the consultation in 9 different community groups, the analytics for which are not captured in the above table. Those groups are:

- LGBT+ Forum: Reading & Berkshire
- Slough Muslims
- Asians in Reading, Berkshire, Slough, Southall & London
- Reading African Caribbean Society
- Open Polish Community in Slough
- Indians in Slough
- Wokingham Indian Community



- Pakistani Slough Association Group
- Berkshire Black Business

Compared to the 2022 EDI Objective consultation, our Facebook reach and engagement was lower in comparison. We managed just under half the total impressions and a significantly lower amount of engagement across our posts. We believe this was due in part to:

- Other ongoing consultations, including a consultation on our funding
- Balancing our social media feeds with other content.

The numbers do not indicate a decline in interest in our Facebook content. For instance, our Wholetime Firefighter Apprenticeship posts on Facebook are performing significantly better than in previous years.

The consultation was promoted six times on LinkedIn through the course of the consultation, and engagement was higher than in 2022. Impressions were four times higher than the last consultation and engagement was approximately five times better. This is likely a reflection of the growth of our LinkedIn audience since 2022 rather than anything specific about the consultation and how we promoted it.

Since the Service only currently uses X for warning and informing purposes, we did not promote the consultation on that platform this year.

## Community Contacts and Partners

When the consultation launched in December, we contacted 88 different contacts across Berkshire and the surrounding region to promote the consultation. These contacts varied from individuals such as MPs and Mayors to partner organisations such as blue light partners and local authorities.

We also targeted a number of community contacts (57) known to the Service across the county that are relevant to the consultation such as faith groups and charities.

In January, we followed up by contacting approximately 110 schools and colleges across the county by letter. This formed part of our promotion of the annual Summer Internship Scheme. However, we also took it as an opportunity to promote the consultation as part of our broader work around EDI.

In February, we sent out information aimed at 90 local parish councils to promote the consultation locally within their communities.

Two in-person engagement sessions were also held with a Reading youth group and the Ujala Foundation, a Muslim women's organisation. These sessions provided valuable insight from young people and Muslim women groups whose participation has historically been low in previous consultations and helped strengthen the diversity and representativeness of the feedback received.



## Printed Materials

As well as the above-mentioned letter for schools, we produced an A5 postcard to help promote the consultation. 250 of these were printed and sent to stations to be distributed by our crews.

## Internal Communications

We promoted the consultation to our staff by using several internal communications channels, most of which were digitally based.

### Siren and The Spark

We published an article on the Service's intranet (Siren) when the consultation went live, promoting the consultation and directing staff towards the survey where they could complete the consultation.

This Siren news article was then shared five times in The Spark, a bi-weekly newsletter that uses content from Siren and emails it to every member of staff.

### Computer Screensavers

Across the Service's network, a screensaver promoting the consultation was added to every computer throughout its duration.

For the first two weeks of the consultation, we created a dedicated screensaver with a QR Code linking directly to the consultation form. However, as more consultations were launched internally towards the end of December, a second screensaver was created that promoted all of them together and linked to the Siren News Page.

### The Shout

In line with our general approach to promoting consultations in The Shout – the Service's monthly staff magazine – we promoted the consultation.

In this section, the consultation was promoted in the December 2025 and January 2026 editions with a brief blurb and a QR code that linked to the page on Siren.

A copy of The Shout is sent to every station, Thames Valley Fire Control Service and the Service's Training Centre, therefore helping to promote the consultation across the county in the form of a physical, printed publication.



# Response to Consultation

All data for this consultation was gathered via an online survey hosted on Survey Monkey. Responses were anonymised in line with best practice. A total of **325 responses** were received, including:

- 299 responses completed in English (28 did not complete the full survey)
- 26 responses completed through translated versions of the survey:
  - 4 in Punjabi (2 did not complete the full survey)
  - 6 in Polish
  - 6 in Romanian
  - 10 in Urdu (1 did not complete the full survey)

To support transparency and participation, respondents were able to skip any question. Allowing this flexibility helped encourage completion and ensured that individuals who may have felt uncomfortable disclosing personal information could still contribute their views. Preventing respondents from skipping questions may have reduced engagement and limited the feedback available for analysis.

## Quantitative Data

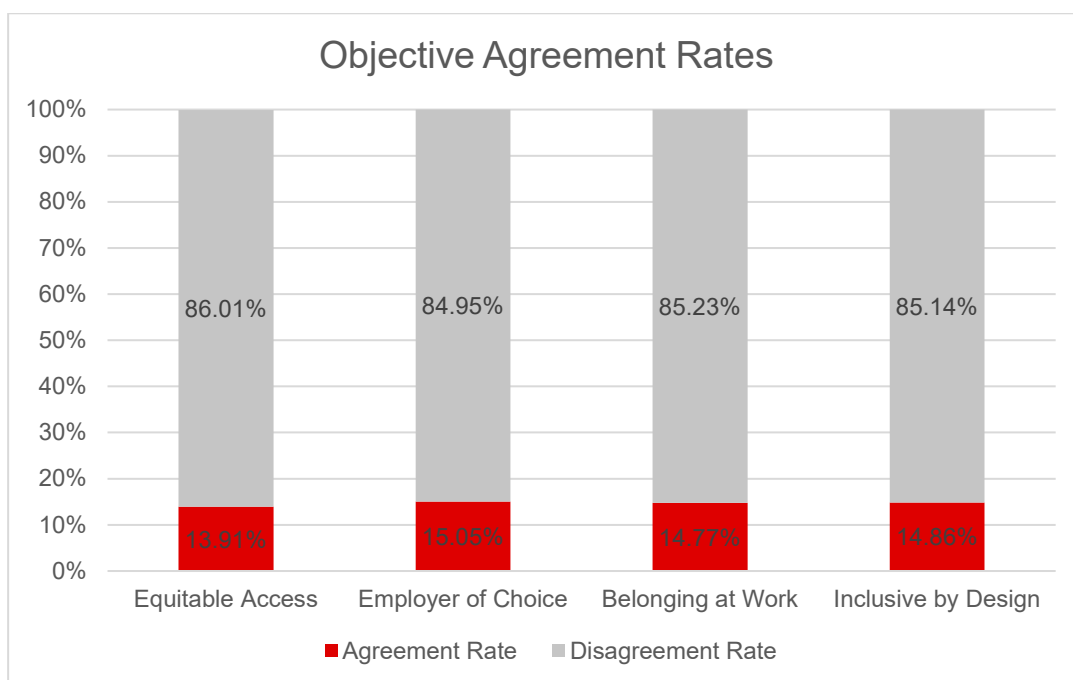
Quantitative data was used to understand overall response patterns, levels of agreement, and the demographic profile of respondents. Survey Monkey enabled RBFRS to:

- monitor completion and skip rates
- analyse equality monitoring data
- calculate overall agreement and disagreement rates for each objective

This provided a high-level picture of respondent sentiment across the four proposed Equality Objectives.



## Overall Response



The quantitative data shows that:

- Across all four objectives, the predominant response was disagreement.
- Employer of Choice had the highest agreement rate at 15.05%, equating to 45 respondents agreeing and 254 disagreeing.
- Equitable Access had the lowest agreement rate at 13.91%, equating to 42 agreeing and 260 disagreeing.
- Belonging at Work and Inclusive by Design had agreement rates of 14.77% and 14.86%, respectively.

In the previous Equality Objectives consultation, respondents were able to select a neutral option. This was removed for the 2026 consultation to encourage more definitive responses and richer insight, which may also have contributed to higher levels of disagreement.

## Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Consultation Responses

Respondents were invited to provide written comments for each equality objective as well as the consultation overall. A significant number chose to provide narrative feedback as detailed in the table below:



Objective	Number of Comments
Equitable Access	127
Employer of Choice	124
Belonging at Work	115
Inclusive by Design	86
Further Comments	154
Overall	606

A qualitative thematic analysis was undertaken on the consultation responses for each of the equality objectives. All responses were reviewed in full. Offensive or inappropriate language has been removed from the supporting documents, but the underlying views have been fully reflected in the analysis and findings. An automated keyword-based coding tool supported theme identification, with manual review used to synthesise key issues, concerns, misinterpretations, and constructive insights.

Some feedback has been paraphrased to ensure safety, clarity and professional standards.

## Equitable Access

Sentiment on this objective was highly polarised and predominantly negative. The strongest opposition came from comments using emotive or politically charged language, often based on assumptions about fairness or identity rather than the operational intent of the objective. A minority of respondents offered constructive or supportive views.

- Positive feedback supported risk-based targeting and engagement with underserved communities.
- Neutral feedback asked for further clarity, process detail or definitions.
- Negative feedback frequently included strongly expressed concerns about fairness, ideology, or safety.

### Themes Identified (127 comments)

#### Ideological rejection of equality objectives (31 comments)

The most dominant theme was rejecting the concept of equality work outright, describing it as “woke”, “Marxist”, “left wing”, or “political”. These comments perceived EDI activity as ideological rather than evidence based or legally required. Although largely non-constructive, they highlight a need for clear communication on statutory duties and operational rationale.

#### Perceptions of unfair prioritisation of minority groups (23 comments)

Respondents believed the objective disproportionately focuses on minority groups over “the majority”. This reflects a misunderstanding of equity, risk-based allocation, and the use of terms like “diverse communities”. Many equated equity with preferential treatment. This indicates a need for clearer messaging that risk-based targeting aims to improve safety outcomes for everyone.



### **Safety and operational concerns (17 comments)**

Some feared that equity initiatives could compromise emergency response standards or divert resources. This suggests a requirement for transparent messaging and reassurance that safety remains non-negotiable and that targeted outreach is designed to reduce risk, not increase risk.

### **Support for improved engagement and understanding needs (14 comments)**

Many respondents constructively recognised the need to understand community-specific risks and supported tailored engagement when justified by evidence. These views align directly with the intent of the objective.

Additional minor themes included concerns about resource allocation, universal fairness, and the importance of clear, neutral language.

### **Outcome of Feedback**

Feedback on this objective shows that while a number of respondents supported efforts to target risk and improve understanding of community needs, the majority of negative responses stemmed from misunderstandings about the purpose and meaning of equity. Many interpreted the objective as prioritising certain groups at the expense of others, or as politically motivated rather than operationally necessary. Concerns were also raised about perceived impacts on neutrality, fairness and resource allocation.

These themes highlight the need for clearer, more accessible language emphasising that equitable access benefits the whole community by ensuring resources are directed to those at highest risk. Respondents also sought reassurance that safety, professional standards and core emergency response are not compromised.

To address this, the objective has been revised to focus on evidence-based risk targeting, plain-English explanations and depoliticised terminology. The refined wording clarifies that equitable access is rooted in operational effectiveness and public safety, not ideology, and aims to ensure that those most at risk receive appropriate support.

### **Revised objective**

#### **Equitable Access**

**We will use data, evidence and community insight to focus our activity where can have the greatest impact, ensuring people who face higher risks or barriers are better supported while improving safety outcomes for all.**

We will analyse incident trends, vulnerability and access barriers to target our prevention, protection and emergency response work where it will be most effective. This ensures people with greater needs receive appropriate support, while all communities benefit from a safer and more responsive service.



# Employer of Choice

Sentiment was strongly negative, with more than 80% expressing disagreement or distrust. While some respondents welcomed a focus on wellbeing and fairness, most concerns related to standards, perceived bias, or ideological framing.

- Positive feedback supported staff wellbeing, professionalism and fairness.
- Negative feedback frequently expressed fears about reduced standards, ideological influence, and unfair treatment.

## Themes Identified (124 comments)

### Concerns about merit, standards and professionalism (35 comments)

Respondents feared that the objective implied recruitment targets or preferential treatment. Some perceived a threat to operational or physical standards. This reflects a misunderstanding: the objective does not propose reducing standards but rather aims to attract high-quality applicants by being a reputable, supportive employer. Reinforcing the distinction between equity of opportunity and competence is required and communications must emphasise that professional and operational standards remain non-negotiable.

### Ideological rejection of equality objectives (25 comments)

As with the objective Equitable Access many labelled the objective as part of a political or “woke” agenda. Terms such as “woke nonsense” and “ideological” were used frequently to describe the objective and broader equality agenda. This sentiment was expressed strongly by both staff and members of the public particularly believing equality and diversity efforts are incompatible with emergency service values. This reflects resistance to EDI concepts and highlights the need for operational, depoliticised language.

### Perceived reverse discrimination (21 comments)

Comments expressed concern that certain demographic groups particularly white, heterosexual men are being excluded or disadvantaged in RBFRS recruitment, development and promotion. Some staff reported feeling undervalued, or unable to speak freely. These perceptions, even if inaccurate, impact morale and trust and require transparent communication and fair, consistent practices.

### Low morale, trust and psychological safety

In addition, some comments highlighted poor morale, a lack of trust in senior leaders, and concerns about psychological safety. This includes comments from existing staff and indicates a broader culture issue. These views indicate that cultural and leadership factors are a barrier to achieving the Employer of Choice ambition and should be a priority focus.

### Safety and core mission concerns



A number of comments believing that focussing on being an employer of choice might distract from core emergency service priorities. Communications should clearly articulate how positive culture, effective leadership and staff wellbeing directly improve safety and public outcomes.

### **Support for community representation**

A small group supported the concept of a workforce reflective of Berkshire's population. These respondents cited benefits such as improved trust, engagement and local insight.

### **Outcome of feedback**

Feedback on this objective reflected strongly polarised views. While some respondents emphasised the value of supporting staff, improving culture and attracting diverse talent, the majority of negative responses related to concerns about standards, fairness and organisational trust. Many believed the objective implied preferential treatment or recruitment targets, and some expressed wider dissatisfaction with leadership, culture, or psychological safety.

These themes indicate that the original wording was interpreted as ideological or suggestive of lowered standards, despite this not being the intention. Respondents stressed the importance of merit, professionalism and transparency in recruitment and promotion.

To respond to these concerns, the objective has been reframed using clearer, neutral and operationally focused language. The revised wording places stronger emphasis on fairness, high standards, workforce wellbeing and the direct link between positive culture and public safety. The updated objective also commits to improving trust, development opportunities and clarity around processes while reinforcing that competence and capability remain central.

### **Revised Objective**

#### **Employer of Choice**

**We will create a fair, supportive and high-performing workplace where people want to join, stay and develop, and which reflects the breadth of experience, talent and perspectives within Berkshire.**

We aim to be an organisation where people feel valued, respected and able to do their best work. We will attract high-quality candidates from a wide range of backgrounds, provide clear opportunities for development, and build trust through fair processes and strong leadership all while maintaining the highest professional and operational standards.

## **Belonging at Work**

As with previous objectives, sentiment was predominantly negative, with approximately 85% disagreeing. However, there were more constructive suggestions than in other objectives, particularly around practical improvements and cultural consistency.



- Positive responses supported respectful behaviour, clear standards, and improved team cohesion.
- Negative responses often reflected ideological concerns, fairness issues, or mistrust.

### Themes Identified (115 comments)

#### Ideological rejection of equality objectives (28 comments)

A significant proportion of the comments framed the objective as ideologically driven using language such as “woke”, “Marxism” or “Virtue signalling”. Respondents felt it was imposed, irrelevant to operational work, or part of external political agendas. This mirrors patterns from earlier objectives, and the theme reflects broader societal tensions that may have influenced how some individuals interpret EDI work being a political agenda rather than cultural support. This indicates the requirement to review the language used within the objective to be more outcome and operational focused.

#### Morale, cohesion and cultural fatigue (14 comments)

Respondents described strained workplace culture, reduced belonging, fear of judgement, and “walking on eggshells”. Long-serving staff expressed a sense of disconnection from organisational changes, signalling cultural fatigue. This indicates the need to create psychologically safe spaces for dialogue and an environment where all feel welcome and heard.

#### Perceived reverse discrimination (12 comments)

The second most significant theme for the objective was perceived discrimination against majority groups. Respondents wrote that they felt excluded, undervalued or professionally disadvantaged, particularly if they identified as white, male and/or heterosexual and many believed inclusion efforts were not applied evenly or fairly. This reflects a trust and perception gap that must be acknowledged. This indicates the need to ensure that fairness for all is clearly communicated and work with all staff to identify how we can achieve inclusion for all.

#### Safety and operational capability concerns

Safety and Operational Capability concerns was highlighted through some responses. Participants linked EDI activity to negative impacts on operational performance, capability, and public safety. This indicates a need for clearer communication about the relationship between culture, capability, and safety and reassurance that competence and capability standards will never be compromised.

#### Constructive practical suggestions

There were more constructive comments than in previous objectives with constructive comments on how the objective should be delivered rather than what it aims to achieve indicating a perception that belonging is being promoted rhetorically, but not always embedded in everyday behaviours, decision-making, or management practice. In addition, several comments related to practical environmental factors affecting belonging such as facilities, the importance of single sex spaces and respectful workplace behaviours.



### Outcome of feedback

Feedback on this objective demonstrated a wide range of views. Some respondents supported the focus on respectful behaviour, team cohesion and professional conduct; however, many disagreed with the objective based on broader concerns about fairness, perceived exclusion, or the belief that equality initiatives disadvantage majority groups. A number of responses also highlighted low morale, psychological safety concerns and cultural fatigue across the organisation.

These themes show that belonging is interpreted very differently across the workforce. Many of the negative responses did not contest the aim of a respectful culture but instead reflected deeper issues around trust, communication and identity. Others expressed frustration with language they perceived as ideological or unclear.

To address this, the objective has been rewritten to focus on fairness, respect and psychological safety for everyone. The revised wording uses plain language, avoids jargon, and emphasises that belonging applies universally not selectively. It also strengthens the connection between behaviours, team performance and safety, acknowledging the need for open dialogue and consistent leadership.

### Revised Objective

#### Belonging at work

**We will build a respectful and psychologically safe culture where everyone feels they belong and can contribute to their full potential.**

This means setting clear expectations for professional behaviour, supporting open communication and helping staff develop the skills needed to work well with colleagues from different backgrounds. By embedding inclusive behaviours into daily practice, we can strengthen teams, improve wellbeing and help everyone thrive across the organisation.

## Inclusive by Design

This objective received the fewest comments (86). Sentiment remained predominantly negative, though with a higher proportion of constructive and supportive comments compared to other objectives.

- Positive comments referenced the value of improving accessibility, removing unnecessary barriers, and making buildings and communications easier to use.
- Negative comments followed similar themes of all the prior objectives.

### Themes Identified (86 comments)

#### Ideological rejection of equality objectives (25 comments)



As with the previous objectives the most dominant theme is a strong ideological rejection of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and inclusion practices. Many comments describe the objective using terms such as “woke garbage,” “Marxist,” and “virtue signalling”. Respondents frequently characterise the initiative as politically motivated, rather than practical or operational. This indicates a misunderstanding of the objective’s purpose and highlights the need to frame inclusive design clearly in terms of usability, safety, and efficiency - rather than equality language that some interpret ideologically.

### **Majority population prioritisation and fairness concerns**

Similar to Equitable Access, some felt the objective prioritised “the few over the many”. There was concern about over-focusing on specific groups at the expense of broader needs, reflecting misunderstandings about universal design principles. This could exacerbate tensions between staff who identify as “majority” vs “minority”. This indicates a need for clearer messaging that inclusive design is not about prioritising specific groups, but about designing services and spaces that function effectively for the widest possible range of people.

### **Support for practical, functional improvements**

In contrast to other objectives, a substantial proportion of respondents offered constructive feedback. These comments supported practical, operational improvements such as:

- Improving building accessibility
- Providing welfare spaces
- Ensuring gender-appropriate facilities
- Improving clarity and accessibility of communications

Respondents recognised the value of inclusive design when framed in functional terms and linked to service improvement. Some also drew connections to the Equitable Access objective, acknowledging that inclusive design helps remove barriers for vulnerable groups and improves overall service delivery.

### **Outcome of Feedback**

Feedback on this objective was more mixed than for the others, with a higher proportion of constructive suggestions. Many respondents welcomed practical improvements such as accessible buildings, clearer communications and better-designed processes. However, as with other objectives, some respondents rejected the concept of inclusion based on perceptions of ideology or unfair prioritisation of minority groups.

These themes indicate a need to frame inclusive design in practical, functional terms rather than abstract equality language. Responses showed that staff and the public support improvements when described in relation to usability, safety and efficiency.

Accordingly, the objective has been revised to emphasise clear communication, accessibility and evidence-based decision making. The refined wording highlights that inclusive design benefits everyone by reducing avoidable barriers and improving the effectiveness of services, processes and environments.



**Revised Objective**

**Inclusive by Design**

**We will design our services, information and environments so they are accessible, clear and easy for everyone to use.**

We will identify potential barriers early and develop practical, proportionate solutions to remove them. By using Equality Impact Assessments effectively and working with staff and communities, we will ensure our services, processes and premises are fair, inclusive and fit for purpose.

# You Said We Did

You Said	We Did
The language in the draft objectives felt unclear, overly conceptual or ideological.	We rewrote all four objectives in plain English, using neutral, operational language focused on safety, effectiveness and practical improvements.
Some respondents were concerned that equality initiatives might reduce standards or lead to preferential treatment.	We clarified across all objectives that professional, operational and safety standards remain non-negotiable and that fairness and competence underpin all actions.
Several respondents felt the objectives focused too much on specific groups rather than the whole community or workforce.	We emphasised how equitable access, inclusive design and positive workplace culture benefit everyone and improve service outcomes across Berkshire.
Staff highlighted issues with morale, trust, and psychological safety.	We strengthened commitments to respectful behaviour, supportive leadership, and creating safe spaces for honest communication.
People wanted clearer links between the objectives and real-world, practical changes.	We added references to evidence-based tools (such as risk analysis and EIAs) and clarified the types of practical improvements each objective supports.
Some respondents viewed the objectives as politically motivated.	We reframed the objectives to focus solely on statutory duties, evidence-based practice, and operational effectiveness, reducing the risk of ideological interpretation.



# Cross-Cutting Observations and additional comments

This section summarises feedback themes that did not relate to any single Equality Objective but appeared consistently across the consultation and in the further comments section. These wider themes help explain the context in which responses were formed and highlight areas for organisational learning beyond the objectives themselves.

## Generalised Rejection Without Reasoning

Across all four objectives and in the “Further Comments” section, a notable proportion of responses consisted of brief statements expressing rejection or frustration without explaining why. These comments often did not engage with the content of the objectives or offer alternative suggestions.

This pattern suggests that for some respondents, opposition was directed toward the consultation topic as a whole rather than the specific proposals under review.

## Polarisation and Distrust

Many written comments demonstrated strong polarisation, with emotive language reflecting broader national debates rather than the content of the objectives. Themes included:

- Distrust in public sector leadership
- Concern about organisational culture
- Scepticism about equality and inclusion work
- Fear that RBFRS was influenced by political agendas

These comments indicate a wider cultural backdrop that shaped how some participants interpreted the consultation, sometimes independently of the actual proposals.

## Public Sector Impartiality and Misunderstanding of Legal Duties

A prominent theme was confusion about how impartiality and equality obligations operate in law. Several respondents believed that equality work conflicts with the duty to remain neutral or assumed that impartiality should override the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The consultation therefore highlighted a need for clearer communication that:

- Impartiality requires decisions to be fair, objective and free from political bias
- Public bodies must meet their statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010
- Equality duties and operational impartiality work together, not in opposition

None of the objectives lower standards or introduce political content, but misconceptions about legal duties were a key driver of negative sentiment.



### **Psychological Safety and Fear of Reprisal**

Several respondents including some staff expressed worry about being identified for their views or feeling unable to speak freely. This perceived lack of psychological safety may have influenced both the tone and level of detail in some responses.

These concerns indicate a need to strengthen trust, reinforce confidentiality and create more supportive mechanisms for honest internal dialogue.

### **Misinterpretation of Equality Work as Lowering Standards**

A recurring theme was the belief that equality and inclusion activity could:

- Reduce operational capability
- Weaken recruitment standards
- Compromise public safety
- Prioritise representation over competence

These views were often strongly expressed but did not reflect the content of the proposed objectives, none of which suggested lowering expectations or changing operational requirements.

This theme highlights the need for clear messaging that professional standards remain non-negotiable.

### **Perception of Majority Disadvantage**

Some respondents expressed a belief that equality work disproportionately benefits minority groups at the expense of others particularly individuals who identify as white, male and/or heterosexual.

These perceptions, even where inaccurate, influence morale and trust and should be taken into account when shaping future workforce engagement and communication.

### **Language, Readability and Accessibility Concerns**

Some participants said the objectives were difficult to understand or used language that felt unclear or overly conceptual.

This indicates a need to:

- Continue simplifying equality language
- Use practical, operational examples
- Ensure documents are accessible, plain-English and jargon-free

This feedback directly led to the revised wording of the objectives.

### **Implications for Interpretation of Consultation Results**



Owing to the themes above particularly ideological polarisation, misunderstandings of equality law, and generalised rejection the overall rate of disagreement with the objectives cannot be interpreted solely as disagreement with their content.

Responses were often shaped by:

- Strong pre-existing attitudes toward EDI
- National political debates
- Concerns about organisational culture
- Misperceptions about intent

This context is essential when drawing conclusions from the consultation.

### **Conclusion**

These cross-cutting themes highlight the importance of strengthening communication, improving psychological safety, reinforcing trust, and using clear, neutral, operational language when discussing equality and inclusion. The insights from this section will shape future engagement approaches and inform how RBFRS continues to communicate and deliver its equality commitments over the next four years and will help build actions within the action plan.



# Equality and Diversity and Inclusion

RBFRS recognises the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

In line with consultation best practice, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed for the consultation process. The intent of the EIA is to ensure that we are aware of the risks and impacts of our work on individuals or groups who share protected characteristics, and other non-statutory social characteristics as identified within our documentation (such as rurality, homelessness and those with caring responsibilities). The requirement to ensure the responses included a balanced representation of the community was important and this was picked up through the communications approach detailed above.

## Equality Monitoring

RBFRS is continually working to improve how we reach and engage with different groups across Royal Berkshire. As part of this commitment, we make conscious efforts to increase the accessibility of consultation materials and offer a range of methods to encourage participation from diverse communities. In future consultation cycles, we will also explore opportunities for pre-engagement with key groups across the County to help shape consultation activity from the outset and further support inclusivity in our engagement work.

For this consultation, we ensured that the Equality and Diversity Monitoring questions aligned with those used within our workforce surveys. This approach allows for consistency in data collection and makes it easier to compare consultation engagement with workforce demographics and wider community data.

The following section summarises key themes from the Equality and Diversity Monitoring questions, presented by characteristic in line with the consultation structure. Respondents were given the option to answer these questions or skip them. Figures used to understand representation across Berkshire draw on the most recent available population data from the National Census and the Office for National Statistics. Updated Census information will be incorporated into future reporting once released.

## Respondents Profile

The demographic information below outlines the profile of individuals who completed the consultation via the Survey Monkey questionnaire. As part of our commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, collecting this information enables RBFRS to:

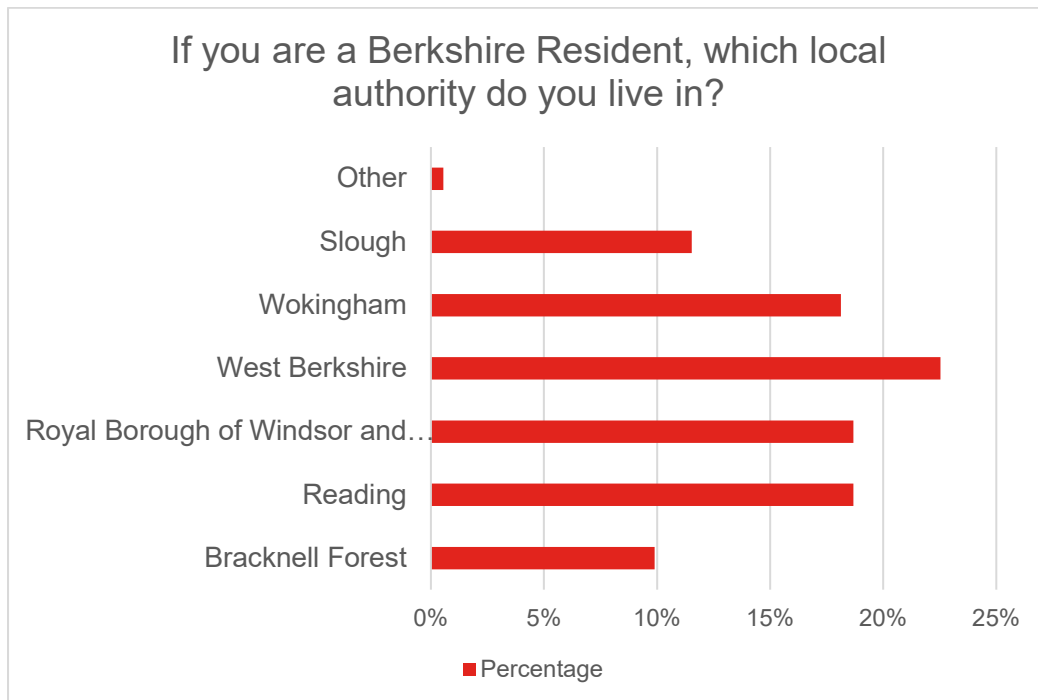
- Monitor response rates across a range of communities and backgrounds.
- Identify underrepresented groups in engagement.



- Evaluate the reach and inclusivity of the consultation.
- Understand the balance of responses between RBFRS personnel and members of the public.

This forms part of our ongoing work to improve engagement with diverse communities across Royal Berkshire.

## Unitary Response Rates

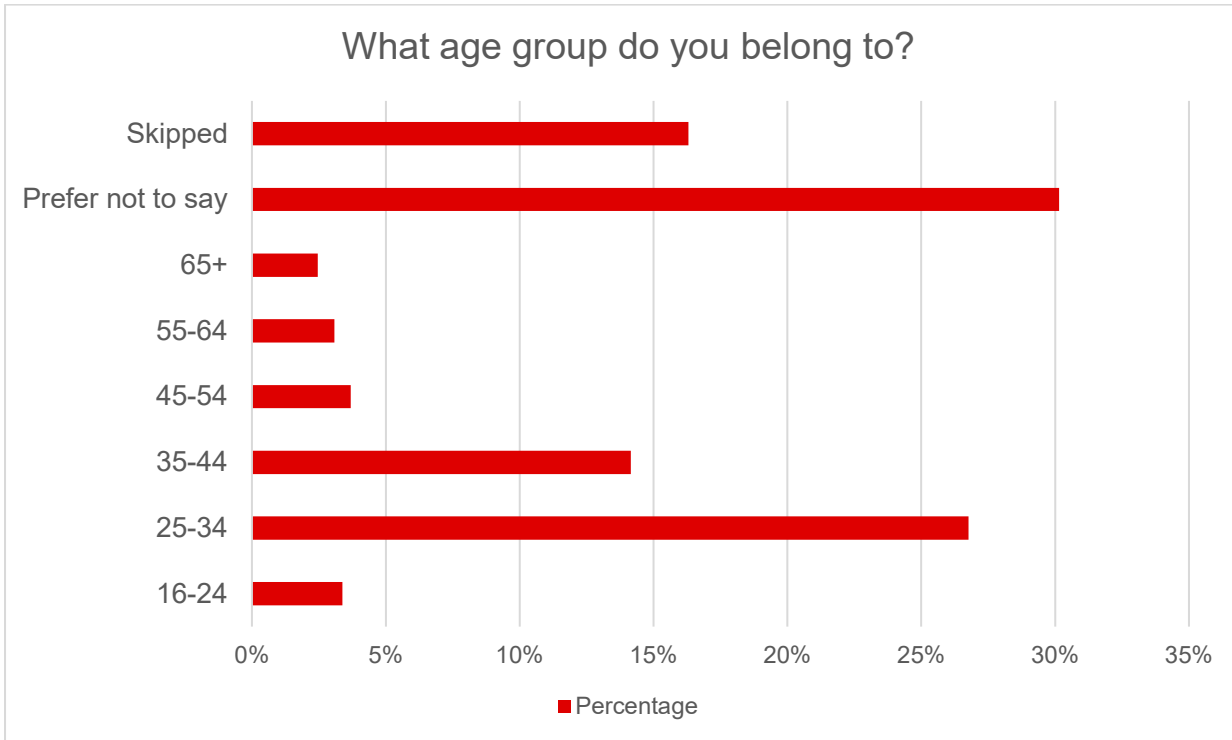


This data shows:

- The largest response group came from West Berkshire.
- There were similarly high levels of participation from Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham.
- Responses from Slough were low, with the fewest responses from Bracknell Forest.
- The distribution reflects a broadly similar pattern to previous RBFRS consultations.
- RBFRS may need to tailor future communications and engagement mechanisms particularly in areas with more diverse populations such as Slough to ensure equitable reach across the county.



## Age

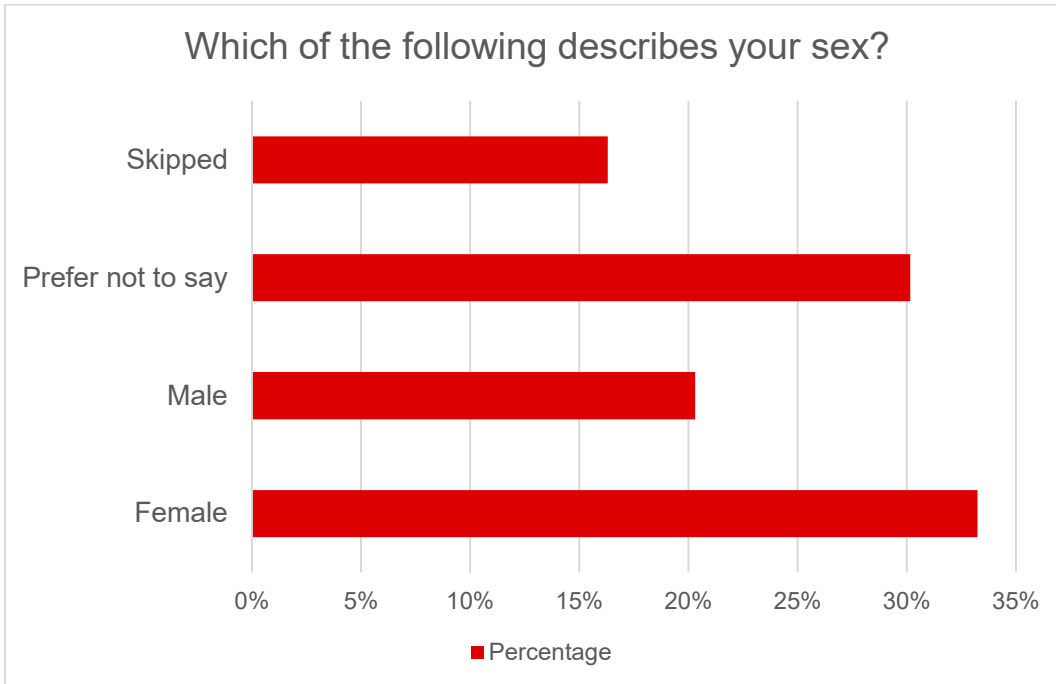


This data shows:

- The highest response groups were individuals aged 25–34, followed by the 35–44 age group.
- 46% of respondents either skipped the question or selected prefer not to say.
- There were low numbers of responses from older age groups.
- Patterns were similar to previous consultations, with lower engagement from younger age groups.
- While engagement was strong among working-age adults, younger people and older residents remain underrepresented, suggesting the need for more age-inclusive consultation methods, and more youth-focused engagement and outreach through community groups supporting older adults.

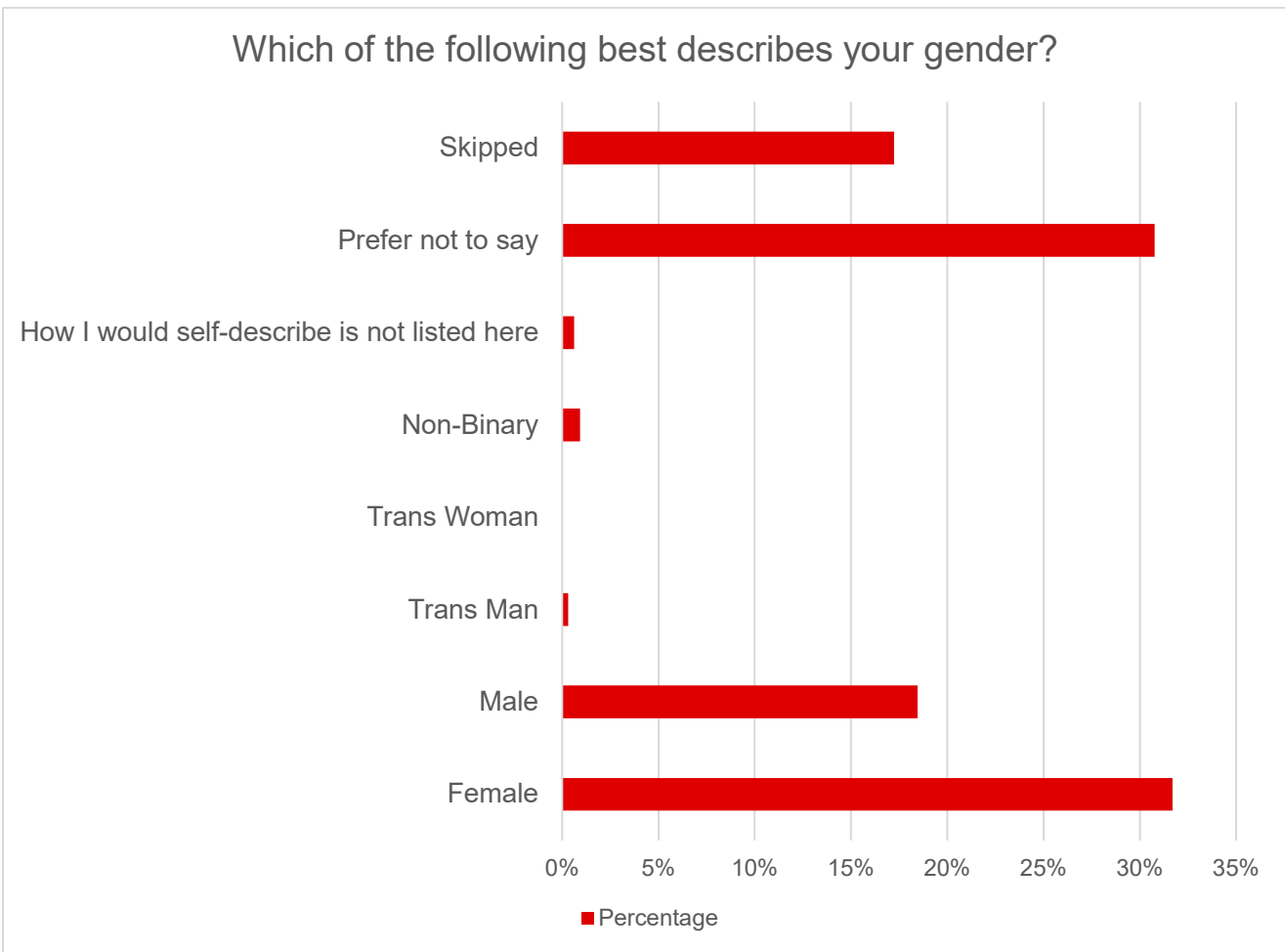


## Sex and Gender Identity



This data shows that

- 46.46% either did not answer or selected prefer not to say.
- Of those who provided information: 33% identified as female and 20% identified as male.
- This reflects a higher proportion of female respondents than seen in some previous RBFRS consultations.

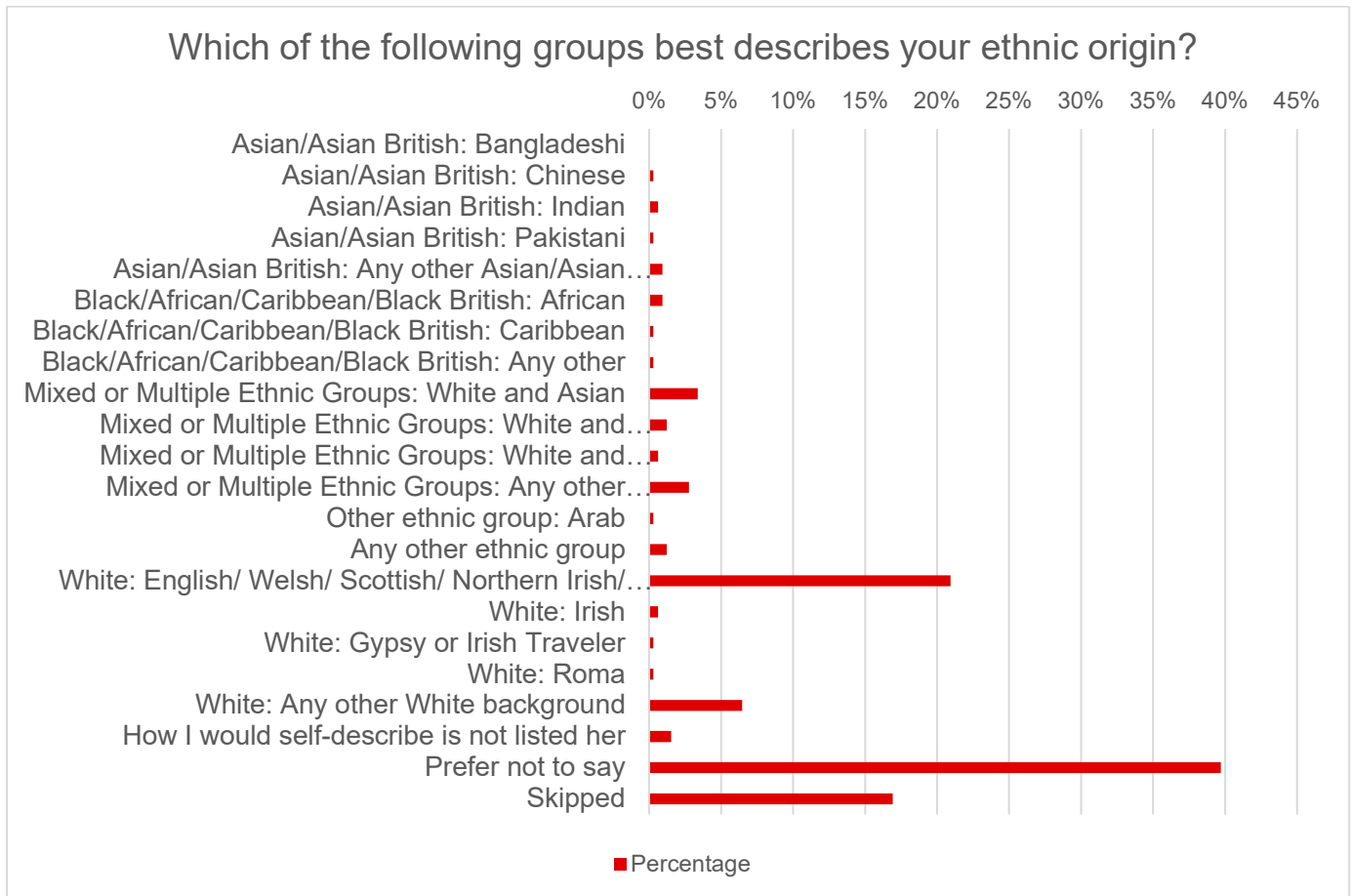


This data shows:

- 48% preferred not to say or skipped the question
- From those who responded:
  - 31.69% identified as female
  - 18.46% identified as male
  - A small proportion identified as non-binary, trans man, or used self-descriptions
- This differs from some earlier consultations where there was typically a higher proportion of responses from individuals identifying as male.
- Non-disclosure levels limit the ability to fully assess representation across sex and gender identity. Tailored reassurance about anonymity and data use may help improve disclosure in future exercises.



# Ethnicity

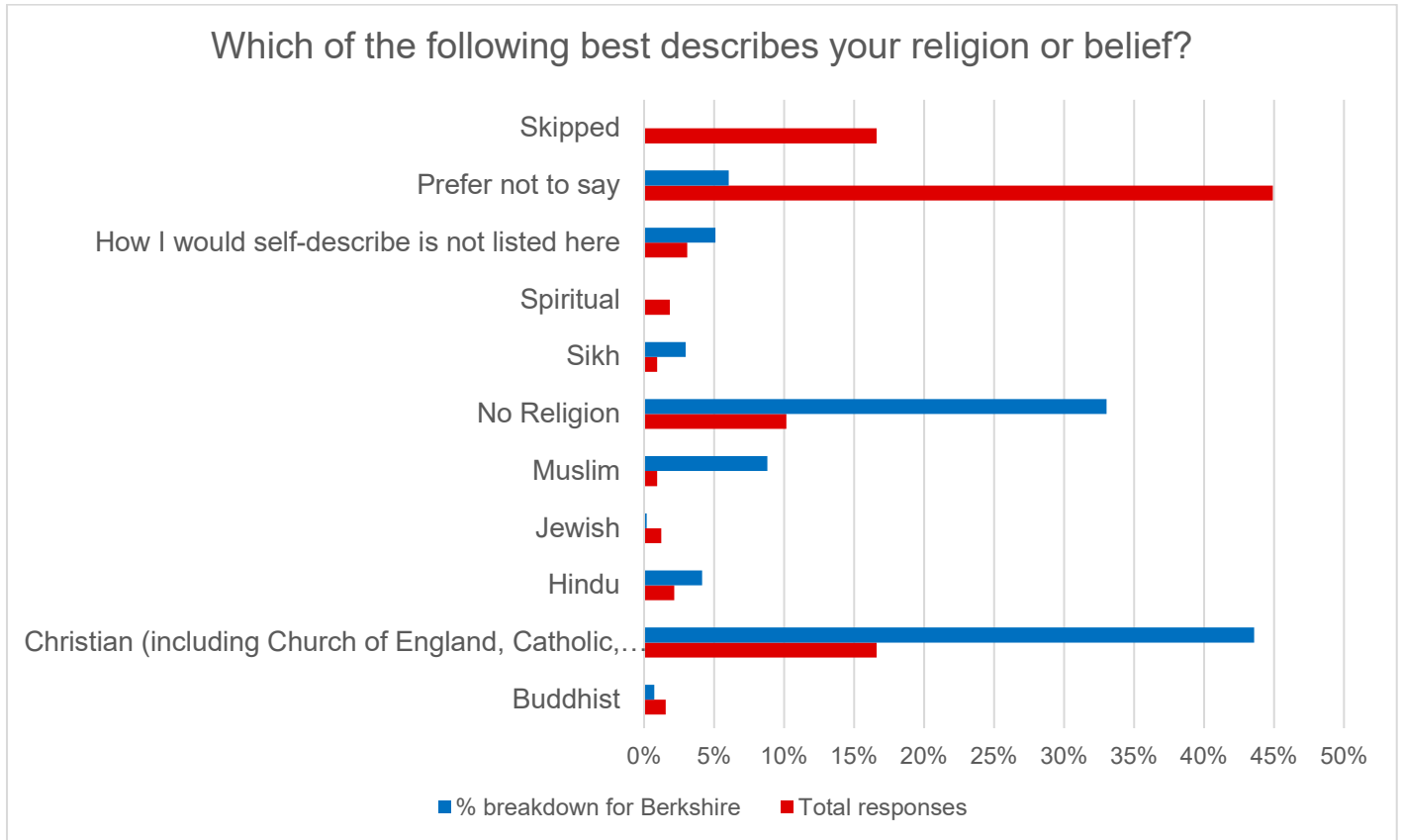


This data shows:

- 21% identified as White British
- 6.5% identified as White: any other White background
- All other ethnic groups individually made up less than 3%.
- 56.79% skipped the question or selected prefer not to say
- Comparatively, the 2021 Census reports that 26.9% of Berkshire residents identify with ethnic groups other than White British.
- RBFRS needs to strengthen efforts to reach ethnically diverse communities, particularly in Slough and Reading where the population is more diverse.



## Religion and Belief

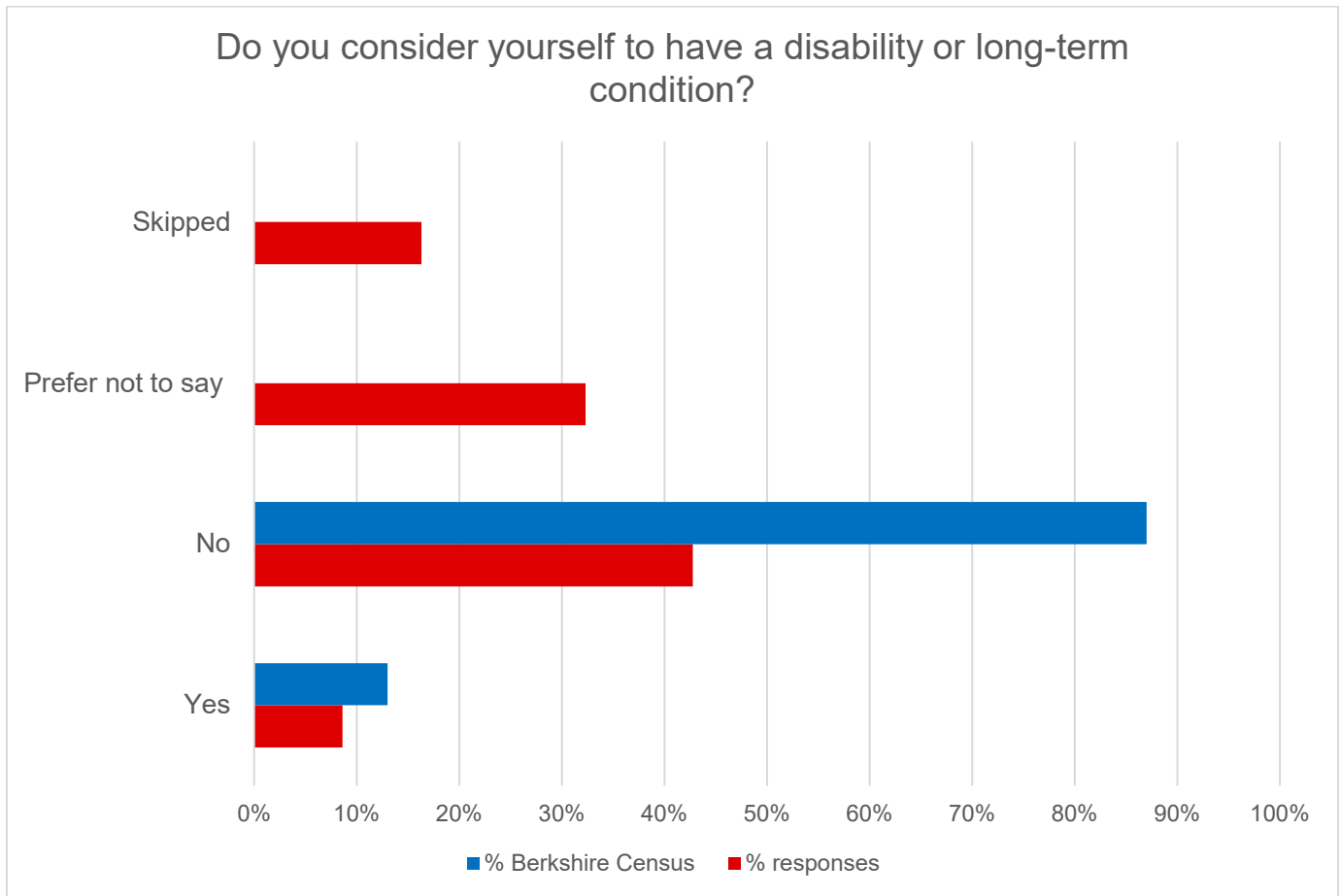


This data shows:

- 16.62% identified as Christian.
- 10.15% reported no religion or belief.
- Small percentages identified as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, or Sikh.
- 44.92% preferred not to say.
- A further 16.62% skipped the question.
- Religion and belief had the highest non-disclosure rate across all demographic questions.
- High levels of non-disclosure limit the extent to which we can assess religious representation. Future engagement may benefit from partnership with local faith communities.



## Disability

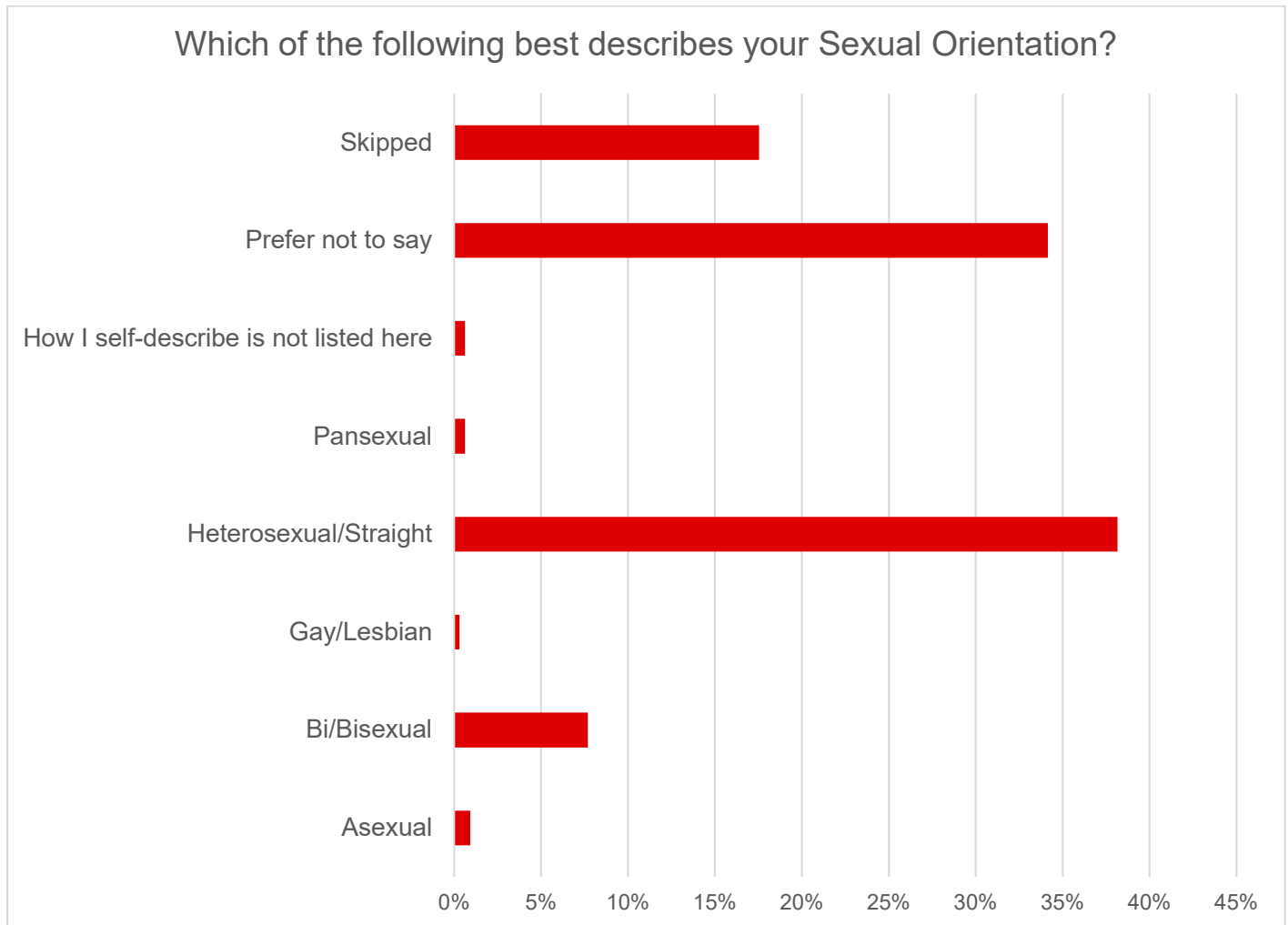


This data shows:

- 8.62% stated they consider themselves to have a disability.
- This is slightly lower than previous years.
- 48.62% either skipped the question or selected prefer not to say.
- People with disabilities remain underrepresented, suggesting a need for more accessible consultation routes, including enhanced outreach through disability organisations and community support services.



## Sexual Orientation



This data shows:

- The largest group identified as heterosexual/straight (38.15%).
- Responses were also received from individuals identifying as bi, gay/lesbian, and other sexual orientations.
- Nearly 8% identified as bi/bisexual.
- 51.69% preferred not to say or skipped the question.
- The high non-disclosure rate suggests respondents may be cautious about sharing personal characteristics. This highlights the importance of communicating how equality data is used and ensuring that consultation platforms feel safe and confidential.

## Summary

Taken together, the demographic profile shows that:



- The consultation achieved good engagement across several unitary authorities, especially West Berkshire and Reading.
- Representation was stronger among working-age adults than younger or older respondents.
- High levels of non-disclosure across all protected characteristics limited the completeness of demographic insight.
- Participation did not fully reflect the ethnic diversity of Berkshire, highlighting gaps in reach.
- Engagement with disabled people and other seldom-heard groups requires strengthening.
- Reassurance around confidentiality and improved plain-English communication could enhance disclosure and participation.
- Patterns broadly align with previous RBFRS consultations, suggesting persistent engagement challenges rather than one-off anomalies.

### Opportunities for Future Engagement

Based on the findings, future consultations could be strengthened by:

- Targeted outreach in areas with consistently lower response rates.
- Community partnership approaches, particularly with disability groups, faith groups and ethnically diverse communities.
- Offering in-person consultation options (e.g., pop-up events, facilitated workshops).
- Ensuring all consultation materials use plain, accessible language.
- Providing clear reassurance around anonymity and the purpose of equality monitoring.
- Broadening engagement channels beyond online surveys to ensure digital inclusion.

# Final Proposed Equality Objectives 2026-2030

## Equitable Access

**We will use data, evidence and community insight to focus our activity where can have the greatest impact, ensuring people who face higher risks or barriers are better supported while improving safety outcomes for all.**

We will analyse incident trends, vulnerability and access barriers to target our prevention, protection and emergency response work where it will be most effective. This ensures people with greater needs receive appropriate support, while all communities benefit from a safer and more responsive service.



### Employer of Choice

**We will create a fair, supportive and high-performing workplace where people want to join, stay and develop, and which reflects the breadth of experience, talent and perspectives within Berkshire.**

We aim to be an organisation where people feel valued, respected and able to do their best work. We will attract high-quality candidates from a wide range of backgrounds, provide clear opportunities for development, and build trust through fair processes and strong leadership all while maintaining the highest professional and operational standards.

### Belonging at Work

**We will build a respectful and psychologically safe culture where everyone feels they belong and can contribute to their full potential.**

This means setting clear expectations for professional behaviour, supporting open communication and helping staff develop the skills needed to work well with colleagues from different backgrounds. By embedding inclusive behaviours into daily practice, we can strengthen teams, improve wellbeing and help everyone thrive across the organisation.

### Inclusive by Design

**We will design our services, information and environments so they are accessible, clear and easy for everyone to use.**

We will identify potential barriers early and develop practical, proportionate solutions to remove them. By using Equality Impact Assessments effectively and working with staff and communities, we will ensure our services, processes and premises are fair, inclusive and fit for purpose.

## Summary and Next Steps

RBFRS will continue to review its consultation methods to ensure we communicate with our stakeholders in an effective and meaningful way. We welcome any feedback you may have, so please email [consultations@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:consultations@rbfrs.co.uk) with any suggestions.

On 30 April 2026, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority will conscientiously consider the outcomes of this report. The final objectives will be published accordingly following this.

### High-Level Action Plan (2026–2030)

The Equality Objectives will be implemented through a four-year action plan designed to ensure a structured, transparent and proportionate approach. The plan balances immediate priorities with



longer-term cultural and organisational development. Actions will be shaped in more detail following Fire Authority approval, but the high-level expectations for each year are outlined below.

### **Year 1 (2026–2027): Foundations and Engagement**

- Finalise and publish the approved Equality Objectives and accompanying action plan.
- Review existing data sources and identify gaps relating to risk, accessibility, workforce experience and community insight to support measurability.
- Begin delivery of key improvement projects linked to each objective.
- Begin monitoring early indicators of progress and publish the first annual update.

### **Year 2 (2027–2028): Embedding and Application**

- Continue delivery of key improvement projects linked to each objective.
- Continue monitoring early indicators of progress and publish the second annual update.

### **Year 3 (2028–2029): Evaluation and Integration**

- Undertake a mid-cycle review of progress against each objective.
- Commission targeted pieces of work where gaps or challenges persist (e.g., barriers to belonging, community access issues, inclusive design improvements).
- Continue refinement of data sources and performance measures.

### **Year 4 (2029–2030): Consolidation and Preparation for Next Cycle**

- Evaluate overall impact of the Equality Objectives against baseline conditions.
- Report findings to the Fire Authority and publish a summary for staff and the public.
- Identify learning and opportunities to strengthen the next cycle of Equality Objectives.
- Support the formulation of the next four-year objectives in line with legislative requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

This high-level plan provides a framework for delivery while allowing flexibility to adapt to operational need, organisational change and emerging evidence.

## **Governance, Monitoring and Reporting**

Effective governance and monitoring arrangements are essential to ensuring that RBFRS delivers on its statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and makes meaningful progress against the Equality Objectives. The following outlines the framework that will guide oversight and reporting throughout the four-year cycle.

### **Governance Structure**

- EDI Lead: Responsible for coordinating delivery, monitoring progress, and escalating any risks or barriers.
- EDI Steering Group: The Steering group comprising representatives from key departments (e.g., People, Prevention & Protection, Data & Performance, Communications) will support implementation and share best practice.



- Audit and Governance Committee: Scrutinise the progress against the objectives through the quarterly reporting.

### **Monitoring and Performance Measures**

RBFRS will monitor progress using a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators and targets or benchmarks will be set during Year 1 and refined as improved data becomes available.

### **Reporting and Transparency**

- RBFRS will publish an annual update on progress against the Equality Objectives in line with the Specific Duties of the Equality Act.
- Formal progress reports will be presented to the Fire Authority at least once per year, with additional papers provided if significant risks or issues arise.
- Staff will receive updates through internal channels such as Siren.

### **Review and Continuous Improvement**

- A mid-cycle review (Year 3) will assess the effectiveness of actions taken and identify areas requiring additional focus.
- Lessons learned will inform both ongoing delivery and the development of the next cycle of Equality Objectives.
- Feedback from staff, community partners and service users will be incorporated throughout, ensuring ongoing responsiveness and improvement.



# APPENDICIES

**Appendix 1 – Final Proposed Objectives for approval.**

**Appendix 2 – Respondent comments (*available upon request only*).**

**ROYAL BERKSHIRE**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

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-  Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
-  rbfrs.co.uk