forward

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

(2024-2027)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

At The Forward Trust, equality (and equity) diversity and inclusion (EDI) are central to our core vision that anyone - however marginalised and whatever their history or circumstances – gets the opportunity and support to live a positive life that fulfils their potential and inspires others to follow the same path.

Our work is fundamentally driven by the need for social justice, empowering people from all backgrounds and addressing and challenging discrimination and structural inequalities in the process. We are committed to building a truly inclusive organisation where everyone belongs and is valued and whose diversity reflects the communities we serve, enabling us to deliver the best possible services to all who engage with us.

Equality (equity) diversity and inclusion are essential priorities for us and we are working hard to ensure that these are maintained and embedded within all aspects of Forward's work.

What does Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion mean to The Forward Trust?

Diversity: We recognise, respect and value each other's differences. This includes different characteristics such as race, culture, religion, gender, age, neurodivergence, sexuality, as well as life experiences and upbringing. We embrace the benefits that this diversity brings and want to create the conditions for diverse teams and individuals to thrive in our organisation.

Equality: We will aim to provide fair treatment, access and equal opportunities for everyone and protect our colleagues and clients from discrimination in all forms.

Equity: We understand that people have different needs and will work hard to rebalance structures and remove systemic barriers that prevent some groups from fully participating.

Inclusion is when everyone feels like they belong. We want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to take part and contribute, sees themselves reflected when they look around, and feels welcome and valued.

This 3-year strategy sets out our plans to strengthen our commitment to meaningful change in the way that we embed EDI across all areas of the organisation, both as a service provider and as an employer.

The strategy is guided by the following underlying principles:

1. **Robust data collection and analysis** must be central to our decision-making in helping us to measure and drive change. We will keep listening and learning and be honest and transparent about our progress. We must improve on the quality of our data collection, learn from the data that we collect, including our staff and service user's experiences, to make targeted, fair and evidence-based decisions and to effectively monitor our progress.

2. **EDI is everyone's responsibility:** The responsibility for EDI lies with all members of staff and volunteers, but especially our leaders who need to set a strong EDI culture and standards. We must enable everyone to understand what EDI means to The Forward Trust, each directorate and their roles. We want everyone to take personal responsibility for learning, be equipped to recognise and challenge discriminatory behaviours and embed inclusive practices in all aspects of their work.

3. **Continuous learning and review:** In driving forward change, we recognise that we might not always get it right, but we are committed to learning from our experiences and to always ask how we can be better.

OUR HISTORY

Forward Trust is a UK-based charity that was founded in the early 1990s, and its work has always been focused on helping marginalised people to overcome barriers to fulfil their potential. As this work has expanded – we now manage over 70 separate projects, with 800 staff and 200 volunteers, serving over 25,000 clients – there has been a consistent focus on social justice and personal development, and a natural diversity to our workforce, and the people we provide services to.

But the organisation needs to guard against complacency:

▶ We are not immune from the historical social trends that have led to limited diversity in our senior management and governing structures.

▶ There are still underserved, and poorly served, sections of the community in many of our service areas.

▶ There are sure to be staff members, volunteers, and service users, who do not feel fully included or valued in the organisation's work.

Back in 2020, around the time of the murder of George Floyd, we reviewed our situation and concluded that we had not been sufficiently proactive in encouraging discussion of our own strengths and weaknesses around EDI, and of taking action to improve. This led to a commitment from the Trustees and Senior Management to have a specific focus on EDI across all our areas of activity, and a drive for change and improvement. This strategy takes stock of where we have come to so far on this journey and sets out our objectives and priorities for the next three years.

OUR PROGRESS SO FAR

Employee Resource Groups

We have launched six staff-led Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) across Forward which provide a supportive peer-led network to colleagues to discuss different lived experiences, provide insight into unseen barriers and support Forward to devise practical, creative and workable solutions to enable everyone to thrive and be their authentic selves:

1. Embrace (disability, neurodiversity, and mental health)
2. RACE Forward (race and ethnicity)
3. Proud (LGBTQ+)
4. ForWomen (Women)
5. Belonging (Allyship, Culture & Inclusion)
6. Lived Experience of the Criminal Justice System

Training

▶ We have added a mandatory training day for all new staff to receive good quality training around basic EDI principles, as part of our routine onboarding plans.

▶ We are in the process of refreshing additional equality and cultural competence training for all staff.

▶ We have developed and rolled out specialist training to support staff members working with clients that identify as LGBTQ+.

HR

▶ We have dedicated HR support to recruit a diverse workforce with lived experience of different vulnerabilities, ensuring clients are supported by people with whom they can identify.

▶ We have been applying the British Dyslexia Association style guide (2018) when writing Service User-facing documents (not 'justifying text' across the page, printing materials on grey/off-white backgrounds, not underlining, etc.) We plan to apply these standards to staff documents as well.

Data

▶ We are routinely collecting protected characteristics data for employees and clients, and plan to improve our compliant rates, analysis and sharing of this data.

Leadership

▶ We created the role of Head of EDI to provide strategic leadership and create impact across the organisation, and to continue to centre EDI at the heart of everything we do.

▶ Board members have participated in a programme of 'Inclusive Leadership' training, and we have identified two trustees to be our EDI leads to ensure accountability at the highest level of the organisation.

▶ We appointed Ruebik Consultancy to conduct a programme of EDI leadership training for all of our Executive Directors and Senior Management Team.

Improving employment engagement

▶ We have been helping our staff and clients to celebrate Pride, Black History Month, International Women's Day, World Mental Health Day and Mental Health Awareness Week and other important diversity celebrations and awareness-raising events throughout the year.

▶ We have been hosting regular online EDI or wellbeing sessions around different EDI topics open to all staff.

Improving service users' experience

▶ Engaging strategic EDI partners to directly support delivery and advise on inclusivity, e.g. Do-It profiler, experts on neurodiversity.

▶ Links with specialist agencies to overcome challenges such as lack of support network, and difficulties accessing services (due to immigration status).

▶ Applying trauma-informed approaches to address mental health needs, create safe environments and prevent re-traumatisation, e.g. isolation/separation from family, trauma/loss (e.g. asylum seekers).

▶ Dedicated Inclusion Coordinator in our East Kent services providing specialist support and guidance to LGBTQ+ clients and those working with them.

▶ Linking with The Traveller Movement for advice/guidance and integration with national campaigns, e.g. Stop Shaming, Operation Report Hate, to build confidence in our service.

▶ Conducting thorough assessment, signposting to Primary Care/ IAPT/MIND or other local organisations for screening if we suspect an untreated mental health condition - those with severe mental health conditions are twice as likely to disengage from treatment, affecting outcomes.

▶ Provided new client-facing material translated into many different languages to ensure we can provide services to clients who don't speak English.

▶ Providing a Release Pack for clients subject to deportation action, offering vital, country-specific information to support their return, e.g. important documents, healthcare agencies, warnings and advice.

OUR EDI VISION AND STRATEGIC AIMS

Our vision at The Forward Trust is of an organisation characterised by a culture of inclusion, fairness and mutual respect in which the staff, volunteers and individuals that we support feel that they belong and can fulfil their potential.

To help us achieve this vision, we have developed three strategic aims against which we will prioritise our activity over the next three years (2024-2027).

1. Develop and embed a culture of inclusion throughout the organisation

We aspire to create a culture that encourages people to bring their whole selves to work, whomever they are. Encouraging allyship and role modelling, celebrating diversity and promoting open and respectful dialogue will therefore be an important part of this. We want everyone to feel safe and confident to challenge discrimination and unacceptable behaviour at Forward, and able to raise concerns with the assurance that they will be taken seriously and acted upon promptly and fairly. In order to achieve this, we need to ensure we have both the appropriate structures and culture at our organisation to enable everyone to thrive.

How will we do this:

- Equip leaders to champion areas of EDI, model behaviours and lead on embedding inclusive practices across the organisation.
- Integrate and embed EDI into our key people management policies and practices.
- Develop and support participation in our staff-led employee resource groups.
- Provide ongoing learning opportunities for staff to broaden and deepen their understanding of EDI and its relevance to their roles.
- Deliver internal communications that promote and increase visibility of EDI and organisational commitment.
- Maximise opportunities for internal consultation with staff and volunteers via informal and formal mechanisms such as the ERGs, town halls and annual EDI survey.
- Ensure that our response to concerns or complaints is fair, reasonable and solutions-focused.

How will we measure this:

- Evidence of leaders cascading their commitment to their teams and implementing specific EDI-related actions for their areas.
- EDI discussed in all performance reviews.
- Participation numbers in employee resource groups.
- Rapid feedback surveys following key awareness events and other ERG activities.
- Progress reports from ERGs.
- Feedback from our annual staff EDI survey.
- Anecdotal feedback and evidence from our staff.
- EDI training compliance rates and analysis of post-training surveys.
- Number of incidents logged relating to discrimination/harassment.

2. Maximise opportunities to attract, develop, support and retain diverse talent across the organisation

We want to increase the diversity within our workforce at all levels and work harder to ensure that staff from underrepresented groups can develop and progress in the organisation. It is important that our employees reflect the communities we serve and the people that we support. We know this will both enhance the culture of the organisation and improve the services we provide. To do this we need to strengthen our use of diversity data and review our recruitment, selection and progression processes.

How will we do this:

- Improve our employee, trustee and volunteer equality monitoring data collection methods.
- Routinely analyse employee, trustee and volunteer equality monitoring data to identify gaps and target groups.
- Set recruitment targets for specific underrepresented groups at different levels of seniority across the organisation in line with the demographic makeup of the communities we serve.
- Complete an end-to-end review of our current recruitment, selection and promotion processes.
- Introduce initiatives to increase representation at all levels within the organisation, by conducting diversity audits and taking positive action in recruiting diverse talent.
- Work towards gaining accreditations to support recruitment and retention of target groups and enhance our visibility as an inclusive employer. e.g. Disability Confident Employer.
- Review our external communications to ensure they speak to and on behalf of the diverse communities we work with and for, with an emphasis on accessibility, language, imagery, storytelling and increasing the visibility of Forward's EDI initiatives.
- Introduce mentoring opportunities for underrepresented employee groups to support their career progression and development.

How we will measure this:

- ▶ Improved equality monitoring data and compliance rate.

- ▶ Increased diversity of applicants, appointment and retention rates through the recruitment and progression cycles.

- ▶ Achieving an inclusive employer accreditation.

- ▶ Achieving greater diversity at SLT and Board level.

3. Ensure that our services are accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all who need them

We will strive to provide inclusive services and to promote equality of access, experience and outcomes for all clients. We want to get better at reaching those who are currently underrepresented in our services and tailoring our services to address the declared vulnerability/ protected characteristics of the clients we support yearly to achieve improved outcomes.

We are focused on reaching and delivering better services to those who fall under the nine protected characteristics, as well as people from other disadvantaged groups who often experience difficulties in accessing and benefitting from health and social care services i.e. people who are living in poverty or experiencing homelessness. We want to ensure that our clients can access our services in ways that suit their individual needs and circumstances.

How will we do this:

- ▶ Improve our client equality monitoring data collection methods.

- ▶ Analyse and report on client equality monitoring data to inform our understanding of who is underrepresented in our services and plans for targeted outreach.

- ▶ Develop and embed an EDI framework to support local services and delivery teams to assess their EDI maturity and identify areas for improvement as part of their overall service plans.

- ▶ Identify and support a group of EDI leads/ champions across our service delivery teams who are responsible for communicating, promoting and driving EDI improvements in their services.

- ▶ Provide needs-based training to frontline staff to enable them in their work to support clients with diverse needs.

- ▶ Develop local partnerships with specialist and/or 'by us for us' organisations to help raise awareness of our services and engage underrepresented groups.

- ▶ Develop our understanding of the main barriers to accessing and benefitting from our services for minority groups.

- ▶ Seek new and creative ways to tailor our services that consider clients intersectionality, individual needs, and cultural backgrounds.

- ▶ Consult with service users from minority groups to understand their experience of our services and how we can improve this.

- ▶ Facilitate the sharing of successful EDI initiatives between services and teams.

How we will measure this:

- ▶ Increase in number of clients with protected characteristics and/or from other disadvantaged groups in term of referrals, assessments and completion of structured interventions.

- ▶ Feedback from service user exit surveys and consultations.

- ▶ Improved diversity amongst our 'Forward Connect' community.

- ▶ Increase in staff confidence and knowledge of how to provide needs-based and culturally responsive support.

- ▶ Monitor EDI data on Ulysess reporting on complaints, compliments and incidents.

- ▶ Progress reports from service delivery EDI Leads/Champions.

- ▶ Where necessary, conducting EDI service audits to assess progress.

The plan on these pages will be reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Head of EDI and EDI Board to provide the organisation with a tool to monitor progress. We recognise that, at present, we are unable to set quantitative targets based on the available data, but as our work in this area continues we plan to update the action plan with further success measures.

In addition, the Head of EDI will produce an annual EDI report for publication internally and externally to demonstrate transparency and organisational self-awareness. This annual report will set out progress made against agreed objectives for the previous 12-month period, including monitoring data, the impact of actions, and the outstanding challenges to be addressed over the forthcoming year. The annual report will be submitted to the Board for consideration and approval.

Timeline

The table below sets out our implementation plan for this strategy – what we aim to achieve in each year against each of the strategic aims:

Strategic Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Develop and embed a culture of inclusion throughout the organisation	▶ Establish an EDI Board to support the implementation of the EDI work plan and monitor progress ▶ Pilot equality impact assessments on key policies/strategic decisions to support staff to adopt an 'inclusion by design' mindset ▶ Review and improve the current EDI staff training offer for staff, with different learner journeys for frontline staff, managers and leaders ▶ Support wider participation in ERGs and develop their role in EDI initiatives, comms and policy reviews ▶ Continue to celebrate awareness days and months across Forward Trust, providing material to all staff to enable celebrations in their services. ▶ Introduce an EDI communications plan on updates and progress ▶ Review and improve our current policies, processes and practices on staff grievances, harassment and discrimination	▶ Embed a relevant EDI objective in each directorate annual work plans ▶ Review our key people -management policies through an EDI lens ▶ Further develop role of ERGs as a 'critical friend' to the EDI strategy ▶ Improve quality and relevance of EDI resources on our EDI Sharepoint and LMS.	▶ Include EDI in all performance reviews along with key EDI behaviours ▶ Continually review staff feedback and develop practices to improve culture if required

Strategic Priority	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Maximise opportunities to attract, develop, support and retain diverse talent across the organisation	▶ Run campaign to encourage staff and volunteers to share equality monitoring data on HR Cascade system ▶ Analyse equality monitoring data and Identify gaps in recruitment and progression ▶ Set targets for recruiting underepresented groups ▶ Review current recruitment and selection processes for staff, volunteers and trustees ▶ Publish a skills/diversity audit of the board of trustees, and senior leadership team. Identify and act on areas of underrepresentation. ▶ HR and senior leadership team to undertake inclusive recruiter training ▶ Hiring managers to undertake inclusive recruiter training	▶ Work with HR and hiring managers to build inclusive recruitment practices ▶ Work with comms to ensure our employer brand is inclusive and representative with a focus on accessibility, language, imagery, storytelling and increasing the visibility of Forward's EDI initiatives. ▶ Develop mentoring opportunities focusing on our areas of underrepresentation ▶ Establish suitable inclusive employer accreditation and start working towards this ▶ Identify and enter into partnerships with community organisations to increase job applicants from diverse backgrounds	▶ Continue to work with HR and hiring managers to build inclusive recruitment practices ▶ Successful completion of inclusive employer accreditation ▶ Continually review diversity data and develop targeted actions as required
Ensure that our services are accessible, welcoming and inclusive to all who need them	▶ Support local teams to understand who is underrepresented in their services through analysis and comparison of service user and local population data ▶ Identify priority underserved groups ▶ Support local teams to identify current areas of good/poor practice in regard to EDI and their service delivery through EIAs and/or EDI self-assessment tool ▶ Identify EDI leads across all key service delivery teams ▶ Support EDI leads to develop their own localised EDI actions plans and to embed these in their overall service improvement plans ▶ Roll out mandatory cultural competency training for all frontline staff	▶ Embed EDI considerations into internal service audits ▶ Review and monitor EDI service action plans, providing centralised support where appropriate ▶ Work with Service User Coordinator to ensure that clients from minority groups are represented in service user work ▶ Invest in resources to research differences in access, experience and outcomes of our services for clients with protected characteristics	▶ Support local teams to share EDI best practice/ learnings with each other ▶ Review and monitor EDI service action plans, providing centralised support where appropriate ▶ Use the findings from research to train staff responsible for designing and/or delivering services to understand how to adapt their interventions

EDI GOVERNANCE

We believe that EDI is everyone's responsibility and at the core of everything we do. All colleagues at The Forward Trust have a responsibility to comply with equalities legislation, to promote equality, equity, diversity and inclusion and to challenge unfairness and discrimination. However, explicit responsibility for ensuring that the Forward Trust lives up to its responsibilities, and implements this strategy, is held by the following groups:

Trustees

The Board of Trustees must be confident that The Forward Trust are compliant with equalities legislation and employment law in the decisions and information that is presented to them, as well as aspiring to meet the EDI principle of the Charity Governance Code. They are expected to challenge the Executive Leadership Team and the wider organisation to ensure that we go beyond compliance and strive for best practice in terms of EDI.

Leadership

The Executive Team will ensure that EDI priorities are embedded into their strategies. They will provide strategic oversight of our EDI work, while role-modelling inclusive behaviours and addressing inequalities.

Head of EDI

The Head of EDI is responsible for championing Forward's EDI values, chairing the EDI Board meetings and for co-ordinating strategic planning, leadership, advice and support on EDI issues across the organisation.

EDI Board

The EDI Board, chaired by the Head of EDI will comprise of our EDI Trustee leads, representatives from all departments and some ERG leaders. They are responsible for supporting the development, implementation, and monitoring of the organisation's EDI action plan and ensuring that all parts of the organisation are working towards inclusivity. They will be expected to raise the importance of EDI in their areas, using data to drive future direction. They will also advise the Executive Team on relevant issues, share good practice and take other agreed initiatives consistent with the aims of this EDI strategy. They will report on how their departments are doing in regard to EDI actions to the Board and Executive Team on a quarterly basis.
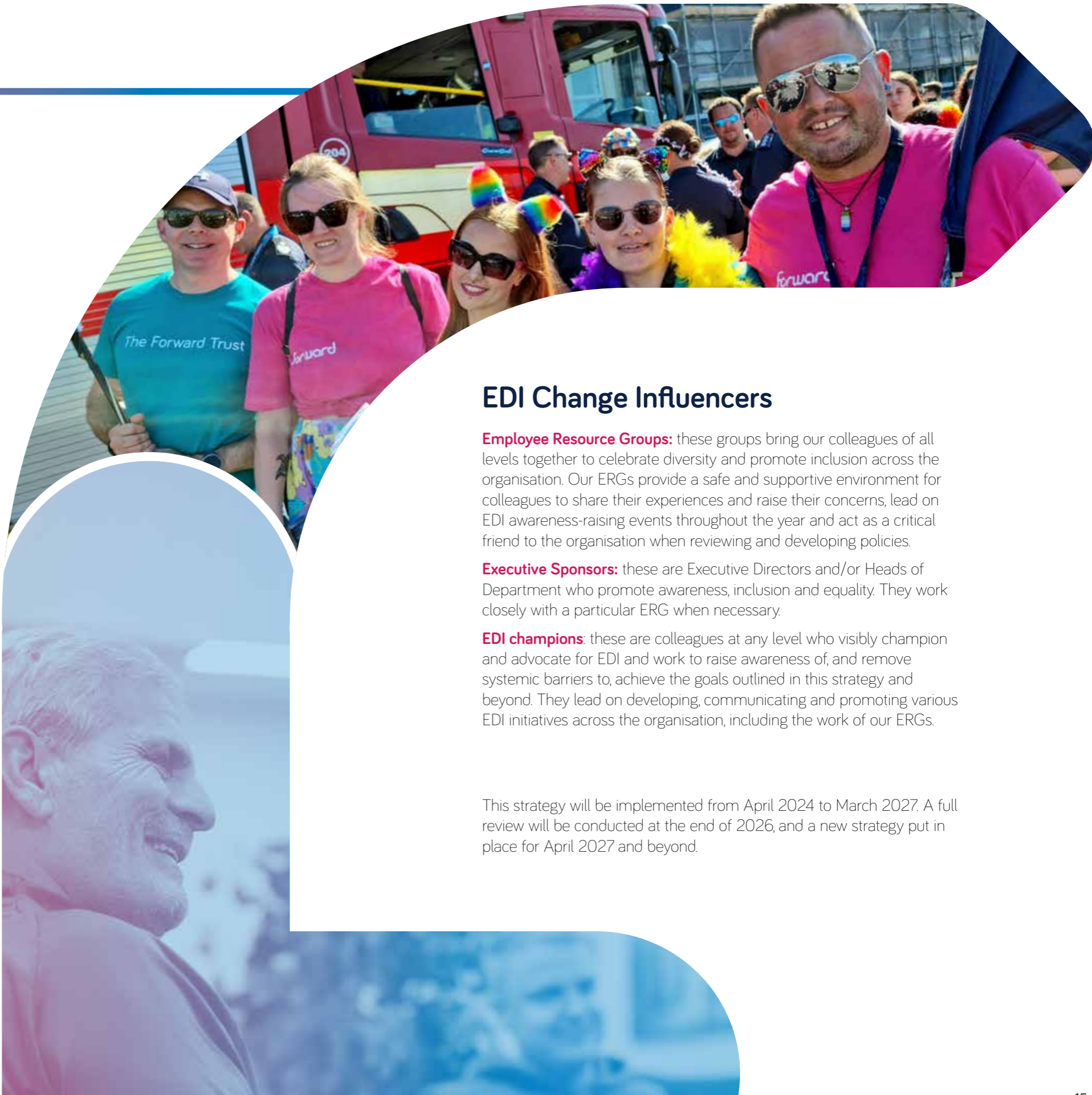
EDI Change Influencers

Employee Resource Groups: these groups bring our colleagues of all levels together to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion across the organisation. Our ERGs provide a safe and supportive environment for colleagues to share their experiences and raise their concerns, lead on EDI awareness-raising events throughout the year and act as a critical friend to the organisation when reviewing and developing policies.

Executive Sponsors: these are Executive Directors and/or Heads of Department who promote awareness, inclusion and equality. They work closely with a particular ERG when necessary.

EDI champions: these are colleagues at any level who visibly champion and advocate for EDI and work to raise awareness of, and remove systemic barriers to, achieve the goals outlined in this strategy and beyond. They lead on developing, communicating and promoting various EDI initiatives across the organisation, including the work of our ERGs.

This strategy will be implemented from April 2024 to March 2027. A full review will be conducted at the end of 2026, and a new strategy put in place for April 2027 and beyond.

ABOUT
Forward

Forward empowers people to break the often interlinked cycles of addiction or crime to move forward with their lives. For more than 25 years we have been working with people to build positive and productive futures. We believe that anyone is capable of lasting change. Our services have supported thousands of people to make changes to create better lives with jobs, family, friends and a sense of community.

If you are interested in learning more about our EDI work or collaborating with us, please email edi@forwardtrust.org.uk or call 020 3981 5525 and ask to speak to a member of the EDI team.