

Case Study: The Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Journey

Creating a Shared Regional Commitment to Anti-Racist Practice Across Children's Services

Introduction

The Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Programme represents a significant sector-led improvement journey, bringing together all 11 local authorities across the region to develop a shared commitment to tackling racism, improving outcomes for children and families from Global Majority communities, and creating inclusive workplaces.

What began as a conversation between regional leaders has evolved into a collaborative movement that is influencing leadership, workforce development, practice improvement and organisational culture across children's services.

This case study outlines the region's journey, achievements, challenges and future ambitions.

The Starting Point

In May 2024, Essex County Council shared its developing Anti-Racist Practice approach with colleagues across the Eastern Region. The presentation prompted important discussions amongst Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) about the need for a more coordinated and ambitious regional response to racial inequality.

Recognising the shared challenges experienced across local authorities, the Eastern Region DCS group agreed in June 2024 to make Anti-Racist Practice a regional priority.

This decision marked the beginning of a collective commitment to move beyond individual organisational initiatives and develop a consistent regional approach.

Building a Regional Approach

To drive the work forward, a regional Task and Finish Group was established in July 2024, bringing together representatives from across the region.

The group was tasked with developing: a shared regional vision for anti-racist practice with common principles and expectation. Through extensive collaboration and engagement, the group developed the [Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Pledge](#), creating a collective commitment to action.

In January 2025, all 11 local authorities formally adopted the pledge, demonstrating an unprecedented level of regional agreement and shared ambition.

The pledge was officially launched in May 2025, providing a clear public statement of intent and a foundation for future developments.




Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Pledge

Racism affects Black, Asian, Mixed-Heritage and ethnically diverse communities. In all of its forms, it is a persistent and systemic issue requiring proactive and sustained efforts. In the Eastern Region, we are committed to demonstrating allyship in action. We will foster an anti-racist and diverse environment where all individuals, staff, and the communities that we serve are respected and valued. We, as members of the Eastern region, are committed to leading with integrity in the fight against racism.

We pledge to:

- Demonstrate Anti-Racist Leadership:** Actively promote and model anti-racist behaviours and attitudes within our workforce and communities, setting a positive example for others to follow.
- Promote Anti-Racism:** Actively encourage and support Black, Asian, Mixed-Heritage and ethnically diverse people within our communities and workforce, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued.
- Educate and Raise Awareness:** Promote understanding and awareness of racism and its impacts through continuous education and dialogue.
- Create Safe Spaces:** Establish environments where Black, Asian, Mixed-Heritage and ethnically diverse people and anyone who witnesses racism feels safe to express themselves and report incidents of racism without fear of negative consequences.
- Review and Revise Policies:** We will evaluate and update our policies on an annual basis to ensure they promote racial equity and do not uphold systemic racism.
- Engage with the Community:** Collaborate with community members and organisations to address racism and promote inclusivity.
- Hold Ourselves and our Partners Accountable:** Set clear, measurable goals to track our progress in promoting racial equity and hold ourselves accountable to these standards.
- Support Affected Individuals:** Ensure that systems, procedures, and support mechanisms are in place to prevent racism and assist those affected by racism to actively promote allyship.

Together, we believe that our collaborative efforts will lead to a racially just and equitable society in the Eastern Region where everyone is valued and respected.

[Eastern-Region-Anti-Racist-Practice-Pledge.pdf](#)

Our Vision

The programme is driven by a clear vision:

To create children's services that actively challenge racism, improve outcomes for children and families from Global Majority communities, foster inclusive and equitable workplaces, and embed anti-racist leadership and practice at every level.

The regional approach seeks to ensure that anti-racist practice is not viewed as a standalone initiative but as an integral part of service improvement, workforce development and leadership.

From Commitment to Action

As the programme developed, it became clear that meaningful change would require more than a pledge. The region therefore focused on building sustainable structures to support long-term improvement.

The work evolved around four interconnected pillars:

Accountability

Developing mechanisms to understand and measure progress through:

- ❖ Workforce and service-user data
- ❖ Benchmarking across authorities
- ❖ Reporting and governance arrangements
- ❖ Learning from regional performance trends

Implementation

Creating the leadership structures needed to embed change, including:

- ❖ Regional leadership forums
- ❖ Shared improvement planning
- ❖ Cross-authority collaboration
- ❖ Peer support and challenge

Improving Practice

Supporting practitioners through:

- ❖ Learning events and webinars
- ❖ Professional development opportunities
- ❖ Practice-sharing networks
- ❖ Evidence-informed approaches to anti-racist practice



Wall of Pledges created at the January Anti-Racist Practice Conference

Communication and Engagement

Ensuring lived experience and practitioner voices influence development through:

- ❖ Reflective spaces
- ❖ Providing engagement opportunities for staff, parents/carers, and people with lived experience
- ❖ Regional communications
- ❖ Promotion of good practice



Achievements and Impact

Since its inception, the programme has achieved significant progress in a relatively short period.

Regional Adoption

One of the programme's most significant achievements has been securing commitment from all 11 local authorities across the region. This demonstrates strong regional leadership, a shared commitment to anti-racist practice, and collective ownership of the programme's aims and objectives.

Creating Safe Reflective Spaces

The establishment of the Global Majority Reflective Space has provided a valuable forum for colleagues to share experiences, discuss challenges, build connections, and influence regional priorities. The space has created opportunities for honest dialogue and mutual support.

Participant feedback highlights the positive impact of the initiative:

"The sense of community is very helpful at this time when there is so much uncertainty around for those of us from the Global Majority."

"Feeling like I am supported, seen/heard and understood."

"I found the session really helpful especially having a space where people could speak openly and honestly about their experiences. Hearing others name things that often go unspoken was grounding, and it reminded me how important it is to have a space that feels safe, held, and genuinely reflective"

Workforce Learning

More than 900 professionals from across the Eastern Region have participated in a programme of eight regional learning events designed to raise awareness, build confidence, and support consistent anti-racist practice.

These events have provided opportunities for reflection, learning, and professional development, helping practitioners strengthen their understanding and application of anti-racist approaches in their work, examples include:

The Importance of Language in Enhancing Anti-Racist Practice

This webinar attracted 212 colleagues from across the region and explored the critical role that language plays in shaping inclusive and anti-racist practice. The session encouraged participants to reflect on their own professional language and consider how communication can contribute to positive outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Participant feedback included:

"Interesting and thought-provoking session."

"A good session for reflection on ourselves as practitioners."

"Very good presenter and very informative content."



Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice: Allyship Webinar

The Allyship Webinar was attended by 91 colleagues representing all 11 local authorities across the region. The session focused on the principles of allyship and provided practical guidance on how individuals can actively support anti-racist practice within their organisations and communities.

Participant feedback included:

“The key speaker was very knowledgeable on the subject. His passion came through with warmth, support and positive guidance. He was very engaging and I learnt lots from his session. A brilliant session and most enjoyable!”

“Really inspiring, with practical ideas for improvements that everyone can make.”

Building Evidence and Accountability

The programme has taken important steps towards establishing a robust evidence base and strengthening accountability arrangements across the region.

All 11 local authorities have completed a diagnostic assessment against the Anti-Racist Practice Pledge, providing a regional baseline from which progress can be measured. In addition, the development of a workforce and children & family anti-racist practice data collection framework is helping to establish a consistent approach to measuring workforce representation, experience, and progression, supporting evidence-informed improvement.

Supporting Under-Represented Groups

The delivery of the Black Male Social Worker Pilot has generated valuable insight into the experiences of Black male social workers, particularly in relation to recruitment, retention, career progression, and workplace culture. Learning from the pilot is helping to inform future workforce development activity and identify opportunities to better support under-represented groups within the profession.

National and Sector Collaboration

Partnership working with key organisations, including Social Work England and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), has strengthened the programme's reach and influence. These collaborations have supported alignment with national professional priorities, enabled the exchange of learning, and enhanced opportunities to promote effective anti-racist practice across the sector.



Key Milestones

May 2025 Anti-Racist Leadership conference – official launch of pledge	June 2025 Regional Anti-Racist Leadership Forum formed	September 2025 Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice CSC Data Collection underdevelopment	October 2025 Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Workforce Data Collection Developed and sent to LAs for collection
October 2025 Interactive Online training sessions – bi-monthly	November 2025 Global Majority Reflective Space launched - quarterly	December 2025 Anti-Racist Practice Diagnostic completed by all 11 LAs	January 2026 Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practitioners conference
February 2026 In Conversations with Black Males Pilot with SWE launched	March 2026 Eastern Region presented Regional Anti-Racist Practice work during SWE Practice week	April 2026 Eastern Region DCSs agreed Anti-Racist Practice as a continuing regional priority Childre	May 2026 Anti-Racist Practice Response to SEND White Paper

Challenges Along the Way

Like all large-scale improvement programmes, the journey has not been without challenges.

Different Starting Points

Local authorities entered the programme at varying levels of maturity. Some organisations had already developed anti-racist strategies, while others were at the beginning of their journey.

Resource Constraints

Capacity and resource levels varied across organisations, influencing the pace and scale of local implementation. Competing priorities, workforce pressures, and differing levels of dedicated resource meant that progress was not always consistent across the region.

Maintaining Engagement

Sustaining momentum across a large and diverse region requires ongoing communication, strong leadership commitment, and visible evidence of progress. Ensuring that partners remain engaged while balancing competing organisational priorities has been an ongoing focus throughout the programme.

Delivering Change in a Complex System

The programme has operated within a period of significant change, including local government reform, workforce challenges, and wider organisational transformation. Navigating this evolving landscape has required flexibility, adaptability, and a commitment to maintaining progress while responding to changing circumstances.

Despite these challenges, partners have remained committed to the shared vision and collaborative approach. Strong regional relationships, collective leadership, and a willingness to learn from both successes and challenges have enabled continued progress and created a solid foundation for future development.



Looking Ahead

The next phase of the programme focuses on embedding and sustaining change.

Key priorities for 2026–27 include:

- ❖ Developing regional minimum standards for anti-racist practice
- ❖ Introducing peer challenge and peer review processes
- ❖ Implementing standardised workforce and service-user datasets
- ❖ Undertaking regional workforce surveys
- ❖ Expanding learning and development opportunities
- ❖ Strengthening engagement across regional local authority networks, partner organisations and stakeholders, and with children, young people, and families
- ❖ Increasing the use of data to monitor progress and impact

The ambition is to move from commitment and infrastructure building towards measurable and sustainable improvement in experiences and outcomes.

Reflections and Learning

A key lesson from the Eastern Region's journey has been the power of collective leadership.

By working together, local authorities have been able to share expertise, challenge each other constructively and create a stronger voice for anti-racist practice than would have been possible individually.

The programme has demonstrated that sector-led improvement can successfully mobilise regional commitment around complex issues and create the foundations for meaningful cultural change.

Conclusion

The Eastern Region Anti-Racist Practice Programme has rapidly evolved from an initial discussion into a region-wide movement for change. Through collaboration, leadership and a shared commitment to improvement, the region has established a strong framework for embedding anti-racist practice across children's services.

While there remains significant work ahead, the achievements to date demonstrate what can be accomplished when organisations come together with a common purpose: creating services, workplaces and systems that actively challenge racism and improve outcomes for children, families and staff.

Anti-racist practice is not a destination but an ongoing journey. The Eastern Region has taken important first steps and is now building the conditions for lasting and meaningful change.

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