# Reform’s local government surge challenges DEI amid looming legal roadblocks



Reform's recent political ascent has undeniably shaken the foundations of English local governance. With control over ten councils and two metro mayor positions, the party has emerged as a vital force opposing the current Labour government, now led by Keir Starmer. This victory signifies a growing tide of discontent among the electorate, many of whom are disillusioned by Labour's perceived abandonment of traditional values. The party's platform—articulating a sharp anti-immigration stance, rejecting net-zero policies, and pushing back against the excesses of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives—has struck a chord with voters hungry for change. Promises of aggressive cost-cutting and audits to eliminate waste resonate with those who have long felt overlooked by the political establishment.

However, these bold plans may falter if legal challenges arise, particularly regarding the Equality Act 2010, which imposes stringent obligations on local councils under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Experts caution that any move to dismantle DEI initiatives could plunge the party into a quagmire of legal disputes. A former Tory MP recently observed that while Reform may attempt to alter certain superficial elements, they will struggle to evade essential legal responsibilities. This reality poses a substantial risk: the potential for the party to be ensnared in costly and drawn-out court battles if they proceed without due diligence.

The implications of Reform's policy aspirations reach far beyond council management; they epitomize a growing backlash against the prevailing progressive governance model that has dominated UK politics. In fact, major financial regulators recently rejected new diversity regulations aimed at the financial sector, signaling widespread concerns about the economic viability of such measures. This trend feeds into the narrative that questions the efficacy of DEI frameworks within a rapidly evolving political context.

The push to eliminate diversity roles in government departments, championed by figures like Esther McVey, highlights a broader ideological shift within the opposition to Labour. Critics maintain that this focus has diverted attention from essential public services and core management duties. Yet, opposition from trade unions underscores the potential pitfalls of this approach, warning that it could lead to a surge in discrimination claims—a prospect that could drain local resources and disrupt public service delivery.

While Reform's proposals appeal to a segment of the populace that views current DEI measures as overreaching or damaging, strong resistance emerges from civil rights advocates who fear that dismantling these initiatives threatens to reverse hard-won protections and widen societal gaps. The recent retreat by Labour from its commitment to reform gender recognition laws amid political pressures exemplifies the challenges of navigating public sentiment and legislative priorities in sensitive areas of identity and equality.

As the party seeks to implement its agenda, the coming months may reveal whether Reform can adeptly balance its ideological commitments with the complex demands of governance. The stakes are high, not only for the effectiveness of their policies but also for the broader implications on the UK’s commitment to equality and social justice in an era increasingly characterized by polarization and contention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2052907/reform-uk-plan-major-barrier-nigel-farage-councils> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/c3b25079-f394-4a40-84af-2c11fa0f6338> - Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, gained control of ten English councils and two metro mayor positions in the 2025 local elections. The party's platform includes anti-immigration, anti-net zero, and anti-'woke' stances. Locally, Reform promises aggressive cost-cutting, audits to reduce wasteful spending, elimination of DEI initiatives, and opposition to housing asylum seekers in hotels. Experts warn these promises may face practical and legal limitations, as much local funding is tied to statutory social services and national mandates. Reform plans to challenge such constraints in court if necessary, but historical precedents suggest mixed outcomes.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-financial-watchdogs-drop-diversity-name-shame-reforms-2025-03-12/> - The UK’s top financial regulators, the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), have decided against implementing proposed rules to enhance diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the financial industry. They have also halted efforts for a stricter approach to non-financial misconduct. Regulator feedback indicated concerns about added regulatory burdens. Despite acknowledging the benefits of D&I, PRA CEO Sam Woods noted that new requirements might conflict with efforts to bolster the financial sector's competitiveness. Additionally, the FCA will not adopt a 'public interest' test for publicizing firm investigations. Lawmakers had criticized this approach, suggesting it could be ineffective. However, the FCA plans to increase transparency by potentially publicizing investigations into both regulated and unregulated firms, typically on an anonymous basis, with final policies expected by June. The shift in regulatory focus follows a broader trend, influenced by the backlash against liberal policies in the US under President Trump’s second term. Critics worry that these changes might ultimately hurt long-term sector stability.
4. <https://inews.co.uk/news/common-sense-ministers-plan-ban-diversity-jobs-legal-claims-3052434> - Cabinet Minister Esther McVey plans to scrap diversity roles across government departments, arguing that Whitehall managers are becoming distracted by costly 'woke hobby horses' rather than delivering core functions. However, a trade union representing professionals and managers in public services warns that this move could lead to more legal claims, as civil servants may accuse ministers of covering up equality failures. Lucille Thirlby, Assistant General Secretary of the FDA union, expressed concern that removing vital diversity roles could result in the government spending more money defending employment tribunals for discrimination or judicial reviews on the lack of public service provision.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/12/19/scrap-equality-act-to-tackle-wokery-urges-jacob-rees-mogg/> - Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg has called on Rishi Sunak to ditch the 2010 Equality Act to tackle 'wokery' and restore 'common sense' to the workplace. He argued that the Act has codified 'woke ideology' into law and needs to be repealed. The former business secretary stated that workers should be allowed to focus on their jobs without being distracted by moralistic progressivism. The Equality Act, introduced in 2010, brought in the concept of protected characteristics in law and has been criticized for creating conflicts between the rights of women and transgender people.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqll1edxgw4o> - Reform UK's 2024 manifesto includes plans to leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the 'foreign' court in Strasbourg that oversees that international agreement. The ECHR is an 'international' court, and if the UK quits, it would join a club of two nations - Russia and Belarus. Critics say the ECHR interferes in the deportation of terrorism suspects or sending asylum seekers to Rwanda. On terrorism, the Strasbourg court has not ultimately stood in the way of the UK sending suspects to other countries, providing they won’t be tortured. The court did indeed temporarily stop the first Rwanda flight, but only for as long as British judges needed to consider the policy and rule whether the country was safe. Of the 68,500 cases piled up in Strasbourg as of last year, 0.2% of them concerned the UK - and only one of those 127 cases went against the government. Opponents of the ECHR say the UK does not need the input of other countries to do the right thing. But the convention’s supporters say membership helps the UK in its modern mission to bring other states up to our standards of fair and equal treatment.
7. <https://care.org.uk/news/2025/02/labour-shelves-plans-for-gender-law-reform-amid-rising-political-pressures> - Labour has halted plans to reform gender recognition laws, The Times reports, in response to political pressures and a surge in polling by Reform UK. The party previously promised to simplify the process of obtaining gender recognition certificates, which some criticized as 'self-ID by the back door.' Sources suggest the reforms, while not officially dropped, are no longer a priority. Amending the Gender Recognition Act would have allowed individuals to change legal gender with a single doctor's approval and without the two-year waiting period. However, the move is seen as politically risky. One insider linked the decision to polling concerns, calling it 'catnip' for Reform UK leader Nigel Farage, while others warned it could ignite further criticism from figures such as Elon Musk and Donald Trump. Labour is also navigating challenges on issues like winter fuel payments and inheritance tax. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has recently taken a firmer stance on biological sex after past controversies.