



## **Annual progress update on Brent Council's equalities objectives and action plans (2015/16)**

### **1.0 Summary**

This is an annual progress update on Brent Council's equalities objectives set out in its Equality Strategy 2015 – 2019.

### **2.0 Detail**

Brent Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and cohesion in everything we do – as a locality leader, as a provider and commissioner of services, and as an employer. The Equality Strategy is central to the achievement of our vision for the borough of Brent, agreed with partners, which is to make Brent a place that creates – through excellence in all local services – the right opportunities for *all* who live and work here, and to change their lives for the better.

We have set five equality and human rights objectives in order to achieve key equalities outcomes for those who live and work in Brent:

1. To know and understand all of our communities
2. To involve our communities effectively
3. To demonstrate leadership in equalities and human rights, both within the council and amongst partners, and organisational commitment to excellence
4. To ensure that local public services are responsive to different needs and treat users with dignity and respect
5. To develop and sustain a skilled and committed workforce able to meet the needs of all local people.

Some of the notable achievements against each of the five equality objectives are listed below. These achievements are derived from the 2015/16 Master Equality and Diversity action plan comprising:

- The 2015/16 Equality Strategy action plan
- Councillor Pavey's HR and Equalities review action plan
- The EFLG recommendations from the LGA peer team visit, and
- The recommendations from the 2014/15 Annual Workforce Equalities report
- The recommendations from staff focus groups carried out in April – May 2015.

## **2.1 To know and understand all of our communities**

- The council was awarded with the excellent level of the Equality Framework for Local Government in April 2016. One of the main strengths identified by the LGA was the council's knowledge and understanding of its diverse communities
- Brent was the only local authority that was shortlisted as a finalist at the 2015 Race for Opportunity conference and was praised for its approach to equalities monitoring in the Transparency, Monitoring and Action Award category
- Both the communities and workforce diversity profile templates and guidance have been updated and communicated to staff in May and June 2015. The equalities monitoring data is used to inform the council's decision-making, service planning and service design processes
- In addition to the annual Borough-wide diversity profile, the Research and Intelligence team works with individual services (including Adult Social Care; Labour Market; Regeneration and Growth; Children and Young People) to produce and update service user diversity profiles to help inform service plans and decisions
- A report on Brent's Equality Analysis (EA) process was taken to the Equalities Committee in October 2015 and the Committee concluded that the council's EA process is sufficiently robust.

## **2.2 To involve our communities effectively**

- The Council launched a Volunteering Brokerage Service, provided by Groundwork London called Volunteering Brent in June 2015. To date 531 people registered as volunteers. In addition, a number of Community Action Groups are being set up to foster and support sustainable and harmonious local communities

- In early May 2016, following the success of Volunteer Brent, the council launched a staff Volunteering policy enabling and encouraging employees to volunteer their skills and time to support local community groups and initiatives
- The internal management arrangements of the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) were reviewed and improvements implemented for cohort 17 that started in October 2015. All graduates have been allocated Strategic Directors, Operational Directors or Heads of Service as mentors. A local graduate recruitment exercise was held in December 2015 and will be held annually
- The council's apprenticeship programme was reviewed by Grant Thornton in June 2015, with all recommendations already implemented. HR are working with the Looked After Children team to proactively market the apprenticeship and graduate opportunities. A careers fair targeted at local people was carried out on 20 January 2016 and will be held on an annual basis
- The council launched the findings from its Brent Equality and Exclusions in Schools project aimed at supporting Brent schools in reducing the fixed period and permanent exclusions of Black African and Black Caribbean pupils. The Project Group intends to instigate a longer-term monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact from the changing practice on subsequent exclusions of Black African and Black Caribbean pupils.

### **2.3 To demonstrate leadership in equalities and human rights, both within the council and amongst partners, and organisational commitment to excellence**

- The council was awarded with the excellent level of the Equality Framework for Local Government in April 2016
- The outcome of the council's first assessment in Stonewall Workplace Equality Index was announced in January 2016. The council is on 295th place out of over 400 organisations
- In October 2015 Brent council retained its silver level Investors in People accreditation. Equalities were considered as a key strength of the council

- A cross-party Members' Equalities Committee was established in June 2015 to oversee the Council's equalities plans and ensure the council is an exemplar of good practice.

#### **2.4 To ensure that local public services are responsive to different needs and treat users with dignity and respect**

- The Brent Stronger Communities strategy was agreed by the Cabinet in November 2015. The strategy is an integrated approach to working with our partners, communities and residents to make Brent stronger, more resilient and cohesive. The strategy focusses on tackling the risks to our community posed by hate crime; extremism and radicalisation; domestic abuse and harmful practices; child sexual exploitation and gang-related crime
- A comprehensive and robust Equality and Procurement Guidance was produced and communicated to staff in July 2015 and is available on the Intranet. The tender and selection process for contracts above £100k incorporates a section on social value and E&D requirements where potential contractors/providers are asked to demonstrate how their proposals will add value and will contribute to the council's equality objectives
- In December 2015 the Brent council was granted with the DWP Disability Confident Employer status. In November 2015 the council was awarded with the Business Disability Forum Disability-smart Award. Brent was also recognised as a best practice example in the government's Accessible Britain Challenge
- Consideration of equality implications is integrated in the council's decision-making process and templates, with full Equality Analyses supporting the decisions with identified equalities impact. All budget proposals are screened for relevance and are informed by consultation with stakeholders and full Equality Analyses, where required.

#### **2.5 To develop and sustain a skilled and committed workforce able to meet the needs of all people**

Following Cllr Pavey's review on HR and Equalities his recommendations were put into an action plan that was owned by the Corporate Management Team and overseen by

the Equalities Committee. A detailed annual progress report was presented to the Equalities Committee on 7 April but some of the notable outcomes are listed below:

***Recruitment, management and retention policies and practices:***

- Taleo was introduced to ensure that equality details of job applicants are captured and monitored. Equality data is collected at long list, short list and interview stage
- The Oracle system was adapted to make entry easier and a new staff self-disclosure campaign will be re-launched from April 2016
- Staff self-disclosure rate is currently at 93% (where staff have disclosed equality information on three or more protected characteristics)
- A mandatory e-learning module on Recruitment and Selection incorporating Unconscious Bias was introduced for hiring managers / panels
- The HR policies were reviewed by the LGA and found to be sound.

***Staff engagement***

- A number of focus groups were carried out in April and May 2015 and the recommendations were incorporated in the 2015/16 Master Equality & Diversity action plan
- Four staff equality networks (Cultural Diversity, Gender, Disability and LGBT+) were established and meet quarterly
- A staff survey was launched on 21 March 2016 and the outcomes of the survey will inform the Council's 2020 vision and future equality plans and work.

***Development opportunities for staff***

- Council's Aspire Leadership and Development programme was launched in March 2016. In total, 38 staff members have been enrolled in the first cohort, which is reflective of the Council's and Borough's diversity profile
- Council's Let's Talk Collaborative Mentoring programme was launched in January 2016. This is an enhanced programme of opportunities fostering a regular dialogue and interaction between senior managers and staff. To date over 60 staff members have taken part in one or more of the above initiatives
- In early May 2016 the council launched a staff Volunteering policy enabling and encouraging employees to volunteer their skills and time to support local community groups and initiatives, which will also enhance their own skills and experience.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

Over the past year there has been significant progress on the equality and diversity agenda, which has also been recognised by external organisations such as the LGA, liP and DWP. However, we cannot be complacent because there are still many challenges ahead. The 2016/17 Equality and Diversity (E&D) action plan aims to help the council build on the great work achieved so far and further enhance the lives of all those living and working in Brent.