

**Brent Council**

**Equality Strategy  
2015 – 2019**

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## Introduction: our vision and purpose

The Equality Strategy 2015 – 2019 sets out how effective diversity and equality practice will be fully integrated into everything the council does – as a locality leader, as a provider and commissioner of services, and as an employer. The 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. Understanding how the work of local services affects different people, advancing equality of opportunity for all, tackling discrimination where it exists and fostering good relations between the different communities in the borough contributes to better services and improved outcomes for everyone.

The Equality Strategy fully reflects the explicitly stated core values of the council:

- fairness – we take a fair and balanced approach in our work and are mindful of the impact of our actions
- respect – we value everyone, recognising that what we do is for the benefit of all the diverse communities within Brent
- equality – we believe that every person is different but equal, and that everyone's unique talent should be recognised and encouraged and aim to create opportunities for people to make the most of their abilities
- excellence – we take pride in challenging ourselves to consistently deliver the highest quality of services possible. We promote personal and professional development. We aim to consistently exceed the expectations of our colleagues, customers and residents.

## Our context

Brent's population has increased by 18 per cent over the past ten years to 312,000. This is now the fifth largest of the London boroughs and we are the fourteenth most densely populated area in the country. The number of under five year olds has increased by 37 per cent and those aged 5-19 years by eight per cent, giving Brent a young population, often living in extended families.

Brent is also one of the most culturally diverse boroughs in the UK. People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds now make up 64 per cent of the total population. And we continue to welcome new communities today, such as the growing Eastern European, Filipino and Somali populations. We are proud of our historic ability to welcome different cultures, support their integration and create a context in which people from different backgrounds and cultures feel they get on well together. The cultural diversity of the borough and the cohesion between its different communities are major factors in Brent's characteristic vibrancy and dynamism.

Achieving and maintaining cohesion in this context has to be worked at, however. Good relations need to be fostered, nurtured and supported. Different communities need to work to understand each other's perspectives, and service providers must work to engage with our different communities – longer-established groups as well as new arrivals and those who are vulnerable and at risk of being marginalised – and to understand their needs. The council has a pivotal and leading role to play in ensuring that this happens.

The council's workforce closely reflects the wider community of Brent, although currently BAME, disabled and female staff are under represented at senior management levels. We actively promote the value of such a richly diverse workforce with our partners and providers

because it strengthens understanding of the perspectives of the different communities receiving local services. It helps us to develop and deliver effective community engagement, to build stronger communities, and to provide the best quality services, tailored to user needs. We aim to attract the most talented people from all backgrounds to our jobs and we value the wide range of skills, experiences and perspectives that they bring to us in Brent.

There is much to be valued in Brent as a place to live, work and do business. It is home to the iconic Wembley Stadium, the Wembley Arena and the spectacular Swaminarayan Hindu Temple, and our borough is the destination for thousands of British and international visitors every year. We are served by some of the best road and rail transport links in London. Our population is young, dynamic, entrepreneurial and growing. We have award winning parks and fine open spaces, good schools, and a vibrant cultural offer.

But ... there are also many challenges to be overcome if we are to ensure that the lives of all those living and working here continue to improve.

The median household income in Brent is the third lowest in London. One in every three children in the borough is living in poverty, and this increases to 50 per cent in our most deprived wards. Poverty, unemployment and adult skills levels are key challenges for the borough, underpinning the pressing need to promote growth in job opportunities, support residents to access them and to tackle inequalities.

Brent has the fifth highest private rent levels in London, making even two bedroom properties unaffordable for many on average earnings. There is a greater reliance in Brent than many other places on benefits and social housing. For families affected by the benefit cap, larger homes are not affordable and even two bedroom accommodation is becoming increasingly difficult to find. As a result, the government's changes to the welfare system will have a more widespread and more severe impact in Brent than in most other parts of the country. We need to tackle this by getting more people into work.

Living in poverty generally contributes to poorer health, well-being and social isolation. The statistics show that people on low incomes are more likely to have a life-limiting health condition, take less exercise and have a shorter life. This applies to many Brent residents.

The values of equality and fairness must be central to the way we meet these challenges and pursue our priorities. We need both to protect the most vulnerable in our communities and to help them improve their quality of life. This means creating more and better opportunities and improving access to those opportunities, reducing poverty and the inequality in wages levels, promoting the London Living Wage, and supporting independence and choice for all. We need to develop practical responses to issues such as fuel debt, expensive childcare, loan sharks and poor health outcomes related to poverty.

This strategy was created within this context and against the backdrop of a challenging financial climate which is impacting heavily on residents and on the services that are provided and commissioned by councils. In difficult times like this, our commitment to equality is more relevant than ever. We are ever mindful that the most vulnerable groups are especially hard hit and that there is a risk that financial hardship that is perceived as unfair can lead to community tensions.

Understanding difference, bringing people together and challenging unfairness must be central to the way we respond to this context. This is the responsibility not only of the council, but also of those we work with and alongside. The council recognises the key and enhanced role that our voluntary and community sector partners in particular will have to play. Their knowledge of our residents and communities, and the ability of many of them to provide quality services at a good price, will be increasingly important in ensuring that these

aims are met. This commitment to promoting equality and human rights is fully embedded in the Brent Borough Plan 2015 – 2019 which provides a shared vision for the borough and the priorities for making sure that vision is achieved.

## **Our duties**

The Equality Act 2010 was introduced to consolidate and strengthen all previous anti-discrimination legislation. It covers the following protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race - this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief - this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

The Act introduced a Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that all public bodies play their part in making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity for all. The Equality Duty requires public bodies to consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work - in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. By understanding how their activities can impact on different people, public bodies are better placed to deliver efficient, effective and inclusive services.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, in the exercise of all their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Public Sector Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, which require public bodies, including local authorities, to:

- publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually
- set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives and review these at least every four years.

The present strategy, and the annual action plan for its delivery, will ensure that we fulfil these duties and support our determination to be recognised as a model of excellent practice in equality and human rights.

## **Our commitments to equality and human rights**

A commitment to equality and an understanding of diversity are crucial to making our vision a reality; the council is determined to be an exemplar of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights. We see this commitment and understanding as critical to achieving the best possible outcomes for *all* those who live and work here.

To ensure that all who live and work here have genuinely equal opportunities to improve their quality of life, we will be mindful in all that we do of how our policies and practices can affect people in different ways – because of their age, caring responsibilities, disability, gender identity or expression, marital status, nationality, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic background. We will be mindful of the impact of discrimination and inequalities on all our local communities.

The principles of fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy which underpin the Human Rights Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are explicitly reflected in the council's core values, which are Fairness, Respect, Equality and Excellence.

A human rights based approach is about putting people first in decision-making and empowering them to understand and stand up for their rights, and about ensuring that individuals and institutions who are responsible for planning and providing services understand those rights and are accountable for ensuring that they are respected, protected and fulfilled.

The council is committed to adopting a human rights based approach. This means that the council will ensure that both the standards and the principles of human rights are integrated into policymaking and the day to day running of the services it commissions and provides.

## **Consultation**

The priorities and objectives set out in this strategy have been set following extensive consultation with councillors, employees, the Diversity Reference Group, Departmental Management Teams, trade unions and with stakeholders across the borough, including residents, through Brent Connects Service User Forums, partner organisations, including those in the community and voluntary sector, councillors, Trades Unions and staff.

## Objectives and outcomes

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

Objectives	Outcomes
<p><b>1. To know and understand all our communities</b></p> <p><i>We will gather and analyse equality data and work with a wide range of partners to develop a robust understanding of the changing identities and needs of our local communities.</i></p> <p><i>This knowledge will inform our planning and decision making so that we can ensure best quality services and deliver better outcomes for all our residents.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent, up-to-date published information on community profiles and needs that is easily accessible to all local people and partner organisations</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. To involve our communities effectively</b></p> <p><i>We will use new and creative forms of community engagement so that all of our residents – including under-represented groups – feel that they can participate in public life and that the council listens to them.</i></p> <p><i>We will reflect on lessons learned from our history and the experiences of our partners to improve our practices and our ability to identify potential impacts on equality when making changes.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation in civic and community life amongst all communities, especially those who commonly experience barriers to participation</li> <li>• An increase in the number of volunteers</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. To demonstrate leadership in equalities and human rights, both within the council and amongst partners, and organisational commitment to excellence</b></p> <p><i>Our commitment to diversity and equality will be at the heart of the council's vision, objectives, priorities and plans. We will encourage political leaders and senior officers to demonstrate leadership by championing equality, promoting respect, challenging prejudice and addressing negative stereotyping of any groups.</i></p> <p><i>We will work with a wide range of partners to foster good relations and build resilient, cohesive communities that take pride in and feel a sense of responsibility towards their neighbourhoods.</i></p> <p><i>We will share good practice with and benchmark our practice against local authorities and other relevant organisations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A vision, agreed with partners, residents and our different communities for a better future for the borough and the values, priorities and actions that will enable that vision to be achieved</li> <li>• An increase in the number of local people who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in Brent</li> <li>• External validation as an exemplar of good practice in equality and human rights</li> </ul>

<p><b>4. To ensure that local public services are responsive to different needs and treat users with dignity and respect</b></p> <p><i>Commitment to equality and human rights is integrated into our business planning and delivery, including service level procurement, resource allocation and performance management.</i></p> <p><i>We will ensure that the impacts of all policies and services on all communities are assessed in order to deliver positive outcomes for residents, service users and staff, and we will seek to ensure that all services are accessible.</i></p> <p><i>We will ensure that the best possible quality local services are provided, appropriate to the diverse and changing needs of all our residents and service users.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence of excellent analyses of and responses to local equality issues in business planning and delivery in local services</li> <li>• Continuously improving accessibility of services</li> <li>• Reduced inequalities in quality of life outcomes for different communities</li> <li>• A lower incidence of hate crime and violence against women and girls</li> <li>• Improved accessibility to public spaces and transport</li> <li>• Limiting the impact of welfare reform and cuts on vulnerable people</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. To develop and sustain a skilled and committed workforce able to meet the needs of all local people</b></p> <p><i>Our commitment to equality and diversity is integral to all employment policies, practices and procedures. We will recruit and retain a diverse, highly skilled and motivated workforce and create an inclusive workplace where all of our diverse employees feel engaged and able to be themselves, and are responsive to local communities.</i></p> <p><i>We expect our entire workforce to play a role in achieving the equality strategy and will strengthen their skills to work with communities in new ways. We will promote a commitment to equality and human rights with those we work with and require it in those from whom we commission services.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A public service workforce that reflects the community across all areas and levels including senior management levels</li> <li>• Progress towards a living wage for all who live and work in Brent</li> </ul>

## Our strategic priorities and equality and human rights objectives

It is in our everyday work that we must achieve our equality and human rights objectives. These objectives are therefore rooted in the overarching priorities set out in the Brent Borough Plan (please see table below for details) and will inform the way that the council's Corporate Plan will be delivered.

Strategic Priority	Outcomes promised
<b>BETTER LIVES</b>	
Supporting local enterprise, generating jobs for local people, helping people into work and promoting fair pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic growth through continued regeneration</li> <li>• More opportunities for local businesses</li> <li>• More new local jobs will be created each year through local regeneration schemes, totalling 5,000 by 2019</li> <li>• More people supported into work</li> <li>• More apprenticeships leading to full time employment</li> <li>• A closing of pay gaps compared with other London boroughs</li> <li>• A lower proportion of residents earning less than the London Living Wage, and progress of average incomes towards the London average</li> <li>• A reduction in the overall rate of unemployment in the borough, with progress towards the London average</li> <li>• A closing of the gap in employment levels between priority neighbourhoods and the rest of the borough</li> </ul>
Making sure that our children and young people have access to the best education and training, achieve to their potential and have the best start in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places in Brent schools for all who need them</li> <li>• All Brent schools are good or outstanding</li> <li>• Children and young people, including those with special needs achieve well</li> </ul>
Enabling people to live healthier lives and reducing health inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeing GPs will be easier, and more treatments will be available in a community setting</li> <li>• More people living healthier and longer lives</li> <li>• A transformed system for mental health</li> </ul>
Supporting vulnerable people and families when they need it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding procedures and outcomes for vulnerable adults are judged as amongst the best in London</li> <li>• Safeguarding procedures and outcomes for children and young people are judged as amongst the best in London</li> <li>• Families needing support get it when they need it most and become more independent</li> <li>• More provision and more choice for people needing care and support</li> <li>• Fostering and adoption outcome measures amongst the best in London</li> <li>• Vulnerable children and young people have high quality support when they need it and become more resilient</li> <li>• Outcome measures for those identified as vulnerable to domestic violence amongst the best in London</li> </ul>

Strategic Priority	Outcomes promised
<b>BETTER PLACE</b>	
Making sure that Brent is an attractive place to live, with a pleasant, sustainable environment, clean streets and well-cared for parks and green spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cleaner, safer streets and a healthier, greener environment</li> <li>• Outcome measures for street cleanliness and waste management and recycling amongst the best in London</li> <li>• Residents' satisfaction with the cleanliness and appearance of the borough's streets, parks and green spaces amongst the highest in London</li> <li>• More examples of communities taking action for themselves to care for their local parks and green spaces</li> </ul>
Continuing to reduce crime, especially violent crime, and making people feel safer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of crime and the fear of crime amongst the lowest in London</li> <li>• No wards feature amongst the 10per cent of localities experiencing the highest crime levels in London</li> <li>• Significant reductions in violent crime, including domestic violence</li> </ul>
Increasing the supply of affordable, good quality housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of 5,000 affordable homes in the borough</li> <li>• All social housing in the borough will reach the decent homes standard</li> </ul>
Providing good quality, accessible arts and leisure facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent sports, leisure and cultural facilities used by more people</li> <li>• Participation rates in sport, physical recreation and cultural activities amongst the highest in London</li> </ul>
<b>BETTER LOCAL</b>	
Building community resilience and promoting citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proportion of people who say that 'Brent is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together' will be amongst the highest in London</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 4,000 additional volunteers registered across the borough</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly more examples of communities taking action for themselves to improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods</li> </ul>
Making sure that everyone in the borough is able to participate in local democracy, has a fair say in the way that services are delivered, and is listened to and taken seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 95per cent of residents will be registered to vote under the individual voter registration scheme</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election turnouts amongst the highest in London</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving Brent Connects Forums, with higher participation rates year-on-year</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly more young people participating in local democracy events and processes like the Youth Parliament</li> </ul>
Working with partners to find new ways of providing services that are more finely tailored to individual, community and local needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A significant number of examples of local services being materially influenced by user views</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of examples of new service models developed and run in partnership with local people and organisations</li> <li>• Access to all key services 24/7 via digital channels</li> <li>• Levels of public satisfaction with local services amongst the highest in London</li> </ul>

Strategic Priority	Outcomes promised
<b>BETTER WAYS OF WORKING</b>	
An efficient and modern, customer-focused organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An independent, inclusive and thriving local voluntary sector</li> <li>• A skilled, motivated and effective workforce</li> <li>• Increased ethnic diversity within the council's senior management team</li> </ul>

Through delivering these strategic priorities, all council services will contribute to achieving the following equalities outcomes:

- transparent, up-to-date published information on community profiles and needs that is easily accessible to all local people and partner organisations
- increased participation in civic and community life amongst all communities, especially those who commonly experience barriers to participation
- an increase in the number of volunteers
- a vision, agreed with partners, residents and our different communities for a better future for the borough and the values, priorities and actions that will enable that vision to be achieved
- an increase in the number of local people who believe that people from different backgrounds get on well together in Brent
- external validation as an exemplar of good practice in equality and human rights
- evidence of excellent analyses of and responses to local equality issues in business planning and delivery in local services
- continuously improving accessibility of services
- reduced inequalities in quality of life outcomes for different communities
- a lower incidence of hate crime and violence against women and girls
- improved accessibility to public spaces and transport
- limiting the impact of welfare reform and cuts on vulnerable people
- a public service workforce that reflects the community across all areas and levels including senior management levels
- progress towards a living wage for all who live and work in the Borough.

The actions to be taken to achieve these objectives and outcomes over the coming year are set out in more detail in the Equality Action Plan and departmental equality action plans.

## Roles and responsibilities

Everyone who works for the council, whether directly or through commissioning, is responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the Equality Strategy are reflected in the planning and delivery of their services.

<b>Cabinet Members</b>	The Cabinet is responsible for taking a lead in ensuring that the Equality Strategy 2015 – 2019 represents a robust and shared vision, meets the needs of the locality, is adopted across the council, and that measures are in place to monitor, challenge and review its progress.
<b>Scrutiny Members</b>	Scrutiny Members are responsible for challenging Cabinet members, officers and others about decisions impacting on equality and human rights issues and on the evidence base supporting those decisions. It also enables Members to capture the views of their constituents to provide community leadership.

<b>Ward Members</b>	Ward Members have a role to play in championing equal opportunities and promoting cohesion and fostering good relations within their constituencies. They are responsible for paying due regard to equality and human rights in all of their constituency work.
<b>Corporate Management Team (CMT)</b>	CMT is responsible for ensuring that the Equality Strategy is robust, integrated into all aspects of service planning and delivery, and is effectively implemented across the council. Individual members are expected to have oversight of the strategy in their areas and ensure that information about the impact of their services on equality and human rights is gathered, made available and evaluated.
<b>Directors and Service Heads</b>	Directors and Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that officers within their areas understand their roles in implementing the strategy and that the strategy is monitored and reviewed.
<b>Diversity Reference Group (DRG)</b>	This senior strategic group acts as a Programme Board, responsible for driving the equality and human rights strategy and for monitoring the implementation of the strategy across the council. It ensures that evidence on the progress of the strategy is gathered and collated for challenge by the CMT and Members
<b>Departmental Equality Groups (DEGs)</b>	The DEGs form a link between the DRG and all council departments and services, acting as 'equality champions' to promote good practice on equality and human rights across all functions of the council.
<b>Council-wide managers</b>	All Brent managers are responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the strategy are pursued appropriately within their teams, for gathering and making available information about the impact of their work on different communities and for ensuring that individual staff members understand their specific responsibilities with regard to equality and human rights.
<b>Council-wide staff</b>	All council staff are responsible for conducting their work in a way that supports delivery of the strategy and which demonstrates the council's values of fairness, respect, equality and excellence.
<b>Equality Team</b>	The Equality Team, overseen by the HR Director, is responsible for the operational management of the strategy and its monitoring and review. The team co-ordinates equalities and human rights information across the council and ensures that evaluative reports on progress are made available to the DRG and CMT.
<b>HR Improvement Group</b>	This group, comprising senior stakeholders from all areas of the council, is involved in consultation on workforce diversity and equality initiatives.
<b>Trade Unions</b>	Two recognised trade unions within the council are responsible for supporting their members on matters including diversity and equality and for ensuring that they are consulted on diversity and equality initiatives.

## **Implementation of the Equality Strategy**

The Equality Action Plan sets out the key activities that are intended to achieve the objectives of the Strategy. The Action Plan is an annual plan: it will be monitored, reviewed and refreshed each year throughout the four-year timescale of the Strategy.

The Equality Strategy and Action Plan will be published on the council's website to enable wide access, transparency and scrutiny.

The Equality Strategy and Action Plan are supported by departmental-level equality action plans which highlight the key equalities priorities for each department.

## **Monitoring and Review**

Progress against achievement of the equality and human rights objectives will be monitored across the council throughout the year, co-ordinated by the Equality Team.

The Diversity Reference Group will review progress reports against the Equality Strategy and Action Plan and against departmental level equality action plans, with recommended remedial actions where appropriate, every two months. The Corporate Management Team will receive monitoring and evaluation reports every six months.

An annual report evaluating progress and outcomes achieved will be reviewed by the Corporate Management Team and the GP Committee, with subsequent posting on the council's website.