

London Borough of Bexley's Equality Policy

1. Introduction

This document sets out the London Borough of Bexley's Equality Policy. It sets out our vision, approach, key activities and monitoring arrangements in relation to tackling inequalities in the borough.

It outlines how we will advance equality of opportunity, tackle discrimination and foster good relations between different communities and groups. It also describes what we will do to advance equality within our workforce.

We also recognise that we can't deliver this vision on our own and that others have a role to play. Working with our communities and partners we want to create an environment in which everyone in Bexley can take a full part in the social, cultural and economic wealth of the Borough. This links to the Council's Stronger Communities Strategy which looks to draw upon community strengths, local knowledge, lived experience, and skills and capacity to build cohesive, socially active, healthy and successful communities.

In order to deliver on this vision, there is a need to know and work with our diverse communities. Our approach is based on a clear vision and a commitment to working in partnership with our communities and other partners to deliver this vision. The Strategy has been informed by research and data, as well as evidence gathered from public engagement.

The high level activities outlined in this policy will be supported by an annual action plan that will detail what we are doing to deliver our ambitions.

2. Statement of Intent

We recognise that some members of our communities may be disadvantaged on the basis of a 'Protected Characteristic' they possess. These Protected Characteristics are set out in the Equality Act 2010 ("the Act") and are: age, race, sex, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and gender reassignment. We will provide leadership, commitment and strong partnership working to eliminate prejudice, unlawful discrimination and victimisation within the communities we serve and our workforce.

The Council intends to achieve all its targets in respect of the equalities agenda and progress against the equalities standards.

3. Our aim

We want to see strong, resilient and cohesive communities in Bexley. We will continue to develop and promote policies and systems that make sure that the Borough's communities and our workforce are not unlawfully discriminated against.

The Council is required by the Public Sector Equality Duty ("PSED") contained in the Act to "have due regard to the need to":

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act; and
- Foster good relations between people from different backgrounds who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations requires the Council to publish accessible information each year demonstrating how we have complied with the PSED as well as to set at least one equality 'specific and measurable' objective every four years.

4. How will we deliver our commitment?

Our approach is based on partnership, working with our communities and colleagues to deliver our vision for Bexley. We will work through the Bexley Equality Partnership to bring our communities together to understand their priorities and to give them a voice in shaping the work that we do.

There will also be an action plan, revised annually, that will set out the current actions that we are taking to deliver our vision. We will engage with the Bexley Equality Partnership to review progress against our ambitions and to develop our understanding of equalities and the equalities agenda.

This policy also links to Bexley's Corporate Plan which can be found on the London Borough of Bexley [website](#)

The Corporate Plan sets out a vision of Bexley in 2025. From this vision flows the priorities that the Council will adopt to work with partners and wider communities in order to achieve that vision for current and future generations.

The five key priorities for the coming years are:

1. Growth that benefits all
2. Clean and green local places
3. Strong and resilient communities and families
4. Living well
5. Innovation and self-sufficiency

The Corporate Plan will be underpinned by policies such as the equalities policy. We will ensure that our equalities policy and values shape the delivery of the Corporate Plan.

In working to deliver our commitment we will also review our progress and performance against five key areas of performance outlined in the equality framework for Local Government (EFLG). We will review and evaluate our progress in key identified areas and address underperformance and weaknesses in policy and practice.

The five areas of performance that underpin our progress are:

1. Knowing our communities
2. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
3. Involving our communities
4. Responsive services and customer care
5. A skilled and committed workforce

We are committed to ensuring that our services meet the varied and complex needs of people living and working in the Borough. As part of this we will aim to assess our performance against the five performance areas set out above. We will use this framework to reflect on and improve our own equalities practice.

5. Our key ambitions: What can residents and staff expect from us over the next four years?

A) Accessible services and partnerships

In Bexley we believe that by working together with local people and partners we can achieve remarkable value and even better outcomes for people.

We are developing an approach to commissioning that ensures we look to communities as well as our voluntary and private sector partners and health service partners to plan, scope and create local services and support for communities.

We want to find the solutions that will make the most positive difference to our communities.

The Council will promote equal opportunities to all by:

- Working in partnership with our communities, voluntary sector and other statutory service providers;
- Providing accessible information and ways people can comment on our services;
- Carrying out equality impact assessments of new and existing policies and practices
- Delivering services which are appropriate to the needs of the community;
- Removing barriers which deny people access to our services;
- Using our powers to make sure that organisations providing services on our behalf work in line with this statement;
- Consulting with and involving our diverse communities;
- Promoting an environment which gives all residents an equal chance to learn, work and live free of unlawful discrimination and prejudice

B) Knowing our communities and providing community leadership

The Council will use its local leadership role and its commissioning capability to create the conditions and opportunities required for people and organisations to work in partnership to build a place that we can all be proud of; where communities support each other and individuals receive the care and responsiveness they need.

The Council will foster good relations by:

- Learning more about Bexley's residents;
- Working closely with local voluntary and community groups;

- Looking for community solutions through co-design and co-production;
- Exploring digital solutions and different financial models to achieve outcomes;
- Creating partnerships that unify diverse communities
- Taking steps to build an inclusive and cohesive community in the Borough.

We want to continue to work together with our partners in the NHS, local volunteers, local charity and community organisations and local businesses to use this resource to make a difference.

C) Equal and appropriate treatment in employment, training and recruitment opportunities:

We will ensure that the aspirations set out in this policy are reflected in our role as an employer as well as in our role as a service provider.

We will always employ the best person for the job regardless of their personal characteristics. Our employment offer ensures not only that our human resources (HR) policies and procedures reflect good practice in equality and diversity, but also that anyone who applies to work at the Council or who works for it feels confident that they are treated fairly.

We will develop a modern and diverse workforce by:

- Developing a workforce which reflects the community we serve at all levels;
- Addressing equality issues in our workforce strategies and plans;
- Using workforce data to inform and improve our strategy, plans and practice;
- Ensuring that all policies, procedures and practices are assessed for their impact on equalities issues and promote equality;
- Establishing systems for staff engagement that develop high levels of satisfaction across all sections of the workforce;
- Promoting an inclusive working environment across all staff groups particularly those with protected characteristics;
- Monitoring and reviewing our pay and remuneration arrangements to ensure equal pay;
- Ensuring that procedures are in place that support all employees to receive fair treatment and address any harassment or bullying;
- Ensuring that appropriate performance management systems are in place that support staff to be accountable for ensuring equality outcomes and confident and effective in managing issues around equality; and
- Ensuring that learning and development is undertaken so that staff understand the importance of equality and are well-trained and equipped to meet the diverse needs of local communities.

6. Key Measurable Objectives

Over the next four years, the Council will particularly focus on:

Objective A: Developing our community leadership role and developing stronger communities

- We will take a more active role in fostering good relations between communities.
- We will hold public events that bring people together to celebrate our commonality as well as our diversity;

- Facilitate opportunities for communities to come together around shared challenges;
- Enable community-led support for the wider community (co-production).

We will have been successful if:

- We see increased awareness of rights, responsibilities and expectations;
- We see increased civic participation; or
- We do not see incidents occur which stem from poor relations between communities.

Objective B: Reducing the attainment gap at KS4 between young people with special educational needs and those who do not have special educational needs.

Until this year, young people in Bexley with Special Educational Needs experienced poorer educational outcomes at KS4 than in other local areas. In 2015, SEN attainment at GCSE [5 x A*-C] was just 13% (57/440) and the non-SEN attainment was 61% (1715 / 2811).

In 2016, the new 'Attainment and progress 8 Scoring' has been introduced and it shows there is still a gap in our educational outcomes. However, for the first time Bexley is just in line with the national average. We will work to sustain this direction of travel through our work with schools on SEN attainment.

We will be successful if:

- We see Bexley's 'Attainment 8 Score' for young people with Special Educational Needs (37.5 in 2016) is closer to that of young people without Special Educational Needs (55.8 in 2016);
- We see Bexley's 'Average Progress 8 Score' for young people with Special Educational Needs (-0.35 in 2016) become closer to that of young people without Special Educational Needs (0.4 in 2016); or
- We see Bexley continue to perform above the national average in relation to both: 'Attainment 8 Score' for young people with Special Educational Needs (Bexley 37.5, National 36.2 in 2016); and 'Average Progress 8' score for young people with Special Educational Needs (Bexley-0.35, National -0.38 in 2016).

7. Responsibilities

The Council is committed to equality in employment and service provision. In order to support this public commitment, managers and staff play a key role in ensuring that our services and practices are designed and delivered to meet the needs of all sections of our community.

All Members, employees, workers, agency staff, consultants, partners and contractors of the Council are required to comply with our values of promoting equality and diversity and to treat colleagues and service users with dignity and respect at all times.

This commitment must be evidenced in practice. Any behaviour that falls below these standards is unacceptable to the Council. The failure of staff to meet expectations in relation to our commitment may amount to misconduct.

The embedding of equalities is part of a proactive agenda. This demands proactive thinking, planning and action.

As a standard of good practice we will ensure that officers across the council meet the following standards.

Area of development	What managers are expected to do	Bexley will
Knowing our communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be at the forefront of best practice on equalities • Embedding equalities within their respective service areas 	Collect relevant, proportionate and appropriate information about local communities and their protected characteristics.
Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where appropriate set equality targets, monitor outcomes and develop relevant action plans • Raise equality-related issues with their staff and senior colleagues • Encourage leadership on equalities amongst their staff and service users • Monitor service provided on our behalf by contractors and other parties 	<p>Promote the equalities priorities, objectives and outcomes for the local area and ensure that they are being acted upon to reflect the vision for the local area.</p> <p>This will include the JSNA, highlighting the health inequalities and equalities priorities.</p> <p>Demonstrating that the organisation is actively addressing inequalities through its strategies.</p>
Involving your communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage innovative thinking to involve residents in developing policies and evaluating their effectiveness. • Train staff on identifying local communities and understanding their shared protected characteristics. • Facilitate dialogue across agencies and with partners to ensure their views are obtained. 	Ensure that efficient mechanisms and structures are in place to involve equality stakeholders and enable them to scrutinize service delivery, decision making and progress.
Responsive services and customer care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call for regular in-service reports from team leaders • Establish system for service monitoring • Publish the results of assessments, consultations and monitoring • Evidence consultation carried out with staff and service users 	Ensure that an equality impact assessment is integrated systematically into planning and decision making across the organisation.
A skilled and committed workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all service functions to demonstrate that commissioned/ procured services are helping the Council achieve its equality priorities and ensure elimination of unequal treatment of staff and services users 	Ensure that the staff within the organisation have a basic understanding of the policies and practices that will continue to enhance the equality and diversity in the workforce including reasonable adjustments, equal pay, flexible working and family friendly policies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff on equalities issues that are relevant to their area of work • Consider making local changes to improve the at work experience for staff e.g. better access for people with disabilities • Make guidance readily available to staff 	
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8. Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Our commitment will be implemented through our Corporate Equalities Action Plan. The Plan will set out the arrangements for taking action on individual tasks that will help deliver the broad aims set out in this statement. We will set clear deadlines and give responsibility to named officers who will be accountable for implementation of the given tasks.

The Bexley Equalities Partnership (with the help of feedback from our community groups, service users and employees) will continue to develop arrangements to monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of our employment and service delivery policies. If their monitoring reveals any gaps in Council policies, we will take necessary action.