

Draft Policy: London Borough of Bexley

A Fairer Bexley: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2022-2026

Celebrating difference and valuing everyone

Foreword

I'm delighted to introduce our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, which sets out our commitment to make Bexley a fairer place.

This policy is for everyone and we will regularly refresh and update it to make sure it is effective.

Bexley has a proud history of strong neighbourhoods, underpinned by community spirit and respect for each other. We want to make sure that everyone in Bexley feels like they belong, can be themselves, and participate in all of the cultural, social and economic life in Bexley.

We aim to work together with our partners to build a fairer Bexley, now and into the future. We will do this by working to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination and strengthen good relationships between residents.

I'm proud of the progress we have made so far on equality, diversity and inclusion. We've created a Data Hub that pulls together data and insights about our residents, allowing us to better understand and serve. And recently we're implementing the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard, which helps us tackle race inequalities in our workforce.

We've also supported our staff networks for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+, women, and disabled staff. We've been trying to get better at listening, learning, and working with all our staff to put inclusion at the heart of what we do. We know we can best serve Bexley residents when our staff feel they can be themselves at work and are valued.

Celebrating diversity is really important, we've flown the Pride Flag at our Civic Offices and curated library displays for events including Black History Month and South Asian History Month.

We're also proud to be a Disability Confident Employer and have worked with local businesses to promote employing disabled residents. We have consulted on a new strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and continued engaging with the Bexley Interfaith Forum on hate crime issues.

But we know that there is more we can do, and need to do, to tackle discrimination, inequalities and disadvantage in Bexley. Some Bexley residents are not living for as long or as healthily as they could be. There are significant differences in life expectancy, health, and economic well-being and participation between some groups and some areas. This is starkly illustrated by the gap in life expectancy Bexley's least and most deprived wards. The rising cost of living and the legacy impacts of the pandemic are intensifying some of these challenges.

It is so important we meet these challenges. I'm confident that we, alongside our partners, and guided by this Policy, can make positive progress in the next four years, for the benefit of everyone in Bexley.

Leader of the Council, Councillor Baroness O'Neill of Bexley OBE

Equality, diversity and inclusion – what do we mean?

Equality – We will provide equal opportunities and fair and equal treatment to everyone, ensuring that no-one is disadvantaged by their protected characteristics or socio-economic status. This doesn't mean treating everyone the same.

Diversity – We will recognise and value differences between individuals and groups. We believe diversity enriches Bexley and our workforce.

Inclusion - We will act to include everyone, removing barriers to access and participation, so that everyone feels like they belong, can be themselves, and are welcome in Bexley.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are all part of the concept of fairness.

Introduction

Our Equality and Inclusion Policy is an integral part of our wider vision to make Bexley even better. You can find out more about our vision in our [Bexley Plan 2022-2026](#).

This policy guides our Councillors, staff, partner activities and decision-making and lets our residents know what they can expect from us and how they can contribute to an inclusive borough.

We want to help enable everyone in Bexley to reach their full potential and benefit from everything Bexley has to offer. This will mean Bexley, as a borough, can reach its full potential too – with a thriving economy and cohesive and strong communities.

We recognise and welcome our commitments under the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to have due regard to the need to:

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation**
- **Advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- **Foster or encourage good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share that characteristic. The duty applies across the nine protected

characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 (with the exception of marriage and civil partnership, where the council is only required to eliminate unlawful discrimination with regard to this characteristic).

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

We recognise that socio-economic factors, such as income, housing, job security, and education, underpin and reinforce many inequalities. For example, the areas in Bexley that are the most deprived, with the highest levels of income poverty, are also the most ethnically diverse. We are committed to understanding and tackling these challenges to

Our Equality Objectives, outcomes, guiding principles and values

Equality Objective 1 -

We will work with our partners to reduce inequalities between people and places in the borough, and champion equality

Outcome 1 – Good relations and understanding between people from different groups and backgrounds across Bexley.

Outcome 2 – Councillors are supported to champion equalities.

Outcome 3 – Communities are protected free from discrimination, abuse and hate crime.

Outcome 4 – Strong partnerships with the voluntary and community sector enabling us to work together to shape and improve opportunities for all.

Equality Objective 2 -

We will commission and deliver effective and inclusive services that meet the needs of all residents

Outcome 5 – Effective collection and analysis of data on the experiences and needs of all residents.

Outcome 6 – Residents have opportunities to share their feedback and experiences with us.

Outcome 7 – Staff and councillors have the knowledge and skills to understand the needs of diverse groups and make decisions that improve equalities when planning and delivering services.

Outcome 8 – Services are regularly reviewed to ensure they are accessible, effective and meeting the needs of all groups.

Equality Objective 3

We will recruit, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects our population

Outcome 9 – Effective data and reporting systems allowing us to monitor and analyse staff trends.

Outcome 10 – Our recruitment processes enable us to attract and appoint from a diverse set of applicants.

Outcome 11 – Our development and training opportunities for promotion are fair and inclusive.

Outcome 12 – Our staff work in an accessible and supportive workplace.

Our principles:

1. We put equality and inclusion at the heart of everything we do.
2. We recognise and value diversity.
3. We work with our partners for a fairer Bexley.
4. We engage with and listen to our residents.
5. Equality and inclusion is a shared responsibility

Our values:

- Open and accessible
- Innovation
- Listening and responding
- Leadership
- Collaborate
- Impact

Our guiding principles:

1. We put equality and inclusion at the heart of everything we do

We won't get the change we need unless we embed equality in everything we do – as a service provider, community leader and partner and employer. This includes how we spend and prioritise resources, our services, our policy and decision-making, our public spaces and facilities, our employment processes and how we work with others.

This policy and action plan does not capture everything we are doing to address inequalities. It cuts across all of our other local strategies and plans, which deal with issues including health and wellbeing, housing, community safety, employment, climate change, social care, and planning and growth.

Our individual services, including our Public Health, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, and Education services build equalities, diversity and inclusion into their service planning.

We use Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAS) and our [Data Hub](#) to make sure we understand and are considering everyone's needs when we make decisions.

EQIAs help us to assess whether any groups of people sharing a protected characteristic are disproportionately affected by decisions we make and what we can reduce or remove any negative impacts.

We also collect and monitor data on the protected characteristics of people using our services (which we store securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations). We use this data to develop, improve, and monitor our services.

2. We recognise and value diversity

People living, working in, studying in and visiting Bexley all have different life experiences, backgrounds, and needs.¹ Our job is to understand what these are, deliver services that meet these needs, and

actively remove barriers that limit access to services and places and limit achievement.

We have a [zero-tolerance approach to discrimination](#). Everyone should feel safe living and working in Bexley.

3. We work with our partners for a fairer Bexley

We deliver many of our services to Bexley residents with commissioned service providers and voluntary sector partners and NHS partners.

We have over 400 voluntary organisations and 1000 community groups in Bexley. Our work with the community and voluntary sector is underpinned by the Voluntary Sector Compact which includes a shared commitment to be inclusive, accessible and fair.

Effective partnership working is also one of the key principles underpinning our Bexley Plan. We will work alongside our providers and partners to promote equality. We set our equalities expectations through our procurement and contract management processes. We also try to deliver social value through our procurement processes.

4. Equality and inclusion is a shared responsibility

Councillors are responsible for:

- Overseeing the Policy and Action Plan.
- Championing equality and inclusion.

Corporate Leadership Team is responsible for:

- Delivering the Policy and Action Plan.
- Visibly championing equality and inclusion.
- Ensuring that the Policy and Action Plan are sufficiently resourced.

Equalities and Inclusion Steering Group is responsible for:

- Providing strategic oversight of Bexley's equalities work – internally and externally, identifying gaps and challenges, and monitoring progress against this Policy.

Managers are responsible for:

- Embedding equalities considerations in their service and team work plans.
- Delivering actions in the Action Plan.
- Creating supportive and inclusive team environments for their staff.

All staff are responsible for:

- Understanding and complying with the Policy, our values, and contributing to a fair and inclusive working environment.
- Treating all people with respect, fairness and open-mindedness.

Commissioned service providers and voluntary sector partners are responsible for:

- Complying with this Policy and embedding equalities and inclusions considerations into the services they provide.

Residents are responsible for:

- Treating other residents, Council staff, and Councillors, with respect, fairness and open-mindedness – online and in person.

5. We engage with and listen to residents

We know that it is important that all residents feel like they can have a say in the decisions we make. We think that we can get better at this. Over the next four years, we will work to strengthen our engagement with residents.

We will support communities and people, across all protected characteristics and socio-economic status to engage with us and influence decision-making.

We will also try to identify the groups within the community whose needs are not adequately met by services we provide and act to address this.

We have set three ambitious equality objectives for the next four years and outcomes under each objective

1. We will work with our partners to reduce inequalities between people and places in the borough, and champion equality

Outcome 1 – Good relations and understanding between people from different groups and backgrounds across Bexley.

Outcome 2 – Councillors are supported to champion equalities.

Outcome 3 – Communities are free from discrimination, abuse and hate crime.

Outcome 4 – Strong relationships with the voluntary and community sector, enabling us to work together to improve opportunities for all.

Why is this important:

The London Borough of Bexley is in a position of influence to other organisations and employers in Bexley. We can be a force for positive change in Bexley if we influence all our partners to promote equality alongside us.

A reputation as a strong and inclusive leader will help to build trust in us and improve civic participation amongst residents from all backgrounds.

Some of the work we are already doing to achieve this:

- Our Bexley Twofold Scheme supports disabled residents into work.
- Our Equality and Inclusion Steering Group, made up of representatives across the organisation, provides strategic oversight of our equalities work.
- Councillors are provided with equalities training.
- We are part of the London Council's Race Equality Project.
- We have commissioned Stop Hate UK, funded by the Bexley Safer Neighbourhood Board and MOPAC, to provide support to residents affected by hate crime and to help prevent hate crime.
- Our Community Safety Partnership works to ensure that Bexley is a safe place for everyone.
- Our libraries are welcoming, inclusive and safe spaces for everyone.

2. We will commission and deliver effective and inclusive services that meet the needs of all residents

Outcome 5 – Our data systems allow us a strong understanding of the experiences and needs of all residents.

Outcome 6 – Residents have opportunities to share their feedback and experiences with us.

Outcome 7 – Staff have the knowledge and skills to understand the needs of diverse groups and make decisions that improve equalities when planning and delivering services.

Outcome 8 – Services are regularly reviewed to ensure they are accessible, effective and meeting the needs of all groups.

Why is this important:

We provide and commission a wide range of services to Bexley residents – who all have different backgrounds and needs. Some groups and individuals may have more complex needs, be under-reached, be harder to reach, or need adjustments so that they can access our services.

Some of the work we are already doing to achieve this:

- We provide mandatory equality training to all staff, as well as service specific training.
- We use Equality Impact Assessments and provide guidance and training to staff on how to effectively do them.
- We collate information about our residents in our regularly updated Data Hub.
- We monitor and analyse data about residents and the people our services are supporting.
- We provide Easy Read versions of many of our policies.
- We continuously update our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment so that we can understand the health and wellbeing needs of our residents and plan our services.
- Our Bexley Youth Council gives young people an opportunity to engage in our work.

- Our Community Champions programme provides an ongoing mechanism for residents to discuss what matters to them.

3. We will recruit, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects our population

Outcome 9 – Effective data and reporting systems allowing us to monitor and analyse staff trends.

Outcome 10 – Our recruitment processes enable us to attract and appoint from a diverse set of applicants.

Outcome 11 – Our career development and training opportunities are fair and inclusive.

Outcome 12– Our staff work in an accessible and supportive workplace.

Why is this important:

We have a duty of care towards our staff and want to do what we can to support our staff to be healthy and feel a sense of belonging at work. Some of our staff are disabled or have long-term health conditions and we need to ensure they can access the support they need. There is clear evidence that organisations made up of diverse teams working in inclusive environments perform better, more creatively, and have engaged and happier staff. Having a diverse workforce means we benefit from diversity of ideas and perspectives.

The London Borough of Bexley will benefit from growing its reputation as an inclusive employer of diverse, happy, and high-performing staff. This will enable us to attract the best workforce, from the widest talent pool, possible. In turn, this will allow us to best serve the residents of Bexley.

Some of the work we are already doing to achieve this:

- Each member of our Corporate Leadership Team has a champion role for a specific protected characteristic.

- We have staff networks for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, LGBTQ+, disabled, and women staff. We provide annual funding and communications support to the networks.
- We complete annual staff equalities monitoring, benchmarked against other local authorities and the borough population
- Our Manager Essentials Training programme includes training on equality, diversity and inclusion.
- We publish internal communications to celebrate cultural awareness dates.
- Our Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) Steering Group meets regularly to discuss progress against our WRES Action Plan.
- We are a Disability Confident Employer (Level 2).

How we developed our Equality and Inclusion Policy

Our Equality and Inclusion Policy is informed by the [Local Government Association Equality Framework](#), which outlines four areas of focus:

- Understanding and Working with our Communities
- Leadership and Organisational Commitment
- Responsive Services and Customer Care
- Diverse and Engaged Workforce

The Policy is also informed by our learning from the Workforce Race Equality Standard, analysis of best practice, [data](#) and evidence on our borough and workforce, and feedback from our staff networks.

Monitoring and accountability

Each year we will publish an action plan setting out what we will achieve that year to progress against the objectives.

Our Equalities and Inclusion Steering Group will review progress on the Action Plan each quarter. We will provide an annual progress report to Cabinet.

We want to make sure that our actions have an impact.

Key indicators of progress for our workforce include:

- Our gender pay gap
- Representation of staff from diverse groups in senior roles.
- Proportion of staff that have provided their equalities monitoring information.
- Feedback from our staff survey.
- Feedback from our annual WRES survey.

Key indicators of progress for the borough include:

- Life expectancy, by protected characteristic, and in different areas of the borough.
- Health inequalities outcomes.
- Employment rates, for all protected characteristics.
- Rate of hate crime offences benchmarked locally and nationally and broken down by protected characteristics.
- Data from the Community Safety Survey.
- Rate of domestic abuse incidences benchmarked locally and nationally.

About Bexley

You can find more information about Bexley's residents and communities in our regularly updated [Data Hub](#).

Links to other strategies and policies

[Bexley Plan 2022-2026](#)

[Connected Communities 2019-2023](#)

[Bexley Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)

[System Wide Prevention Strategy 2020-2025](#)

[Obesity Strategy 2020-2025](#)

[Community Safety Partnership Strategy 2022-2025](#)

[Learning Skills and Employment Strategy 2019 –2023](#)

[Climate Change Statement and Action Plan 2022-2026](#)

What do you think?

We are open to your feedback, stories and ideas – please contact us on equalities@bexley.gov.uk