

Brent: Stronger Together

Stronger Communities Strategy 2019-2023

“We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than that which divides us” – Jo Cox



Foreword

In Brent our stories come from all over the world, but our lives tread the same path. For us this is something to be proud of and a source of strength – from our diverse experiences come values that we share and which help us to support each other. But we know our Borough faces unprecedented challenges – local, national and international.

Our residents have been hit harder than most by austerity cuts, hurting everyone but people who rely on services and people who have disabilities particularly hard. In some places we face a backdrop of long term poverty and exclusion. We still face gender divisions and entrenched racial inequalities. Loneliness and isolation affect people of all ages, but particularly elderly residents.

The fast movement of people challenges local people to accept and celebrate difference, overcoming division and ignorance. In the age of Brexit and a range of international crises which affect our residents, the forces of division and political violence seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of some of our residents.

These are the forces which divide. They are forces we can overcome.

We have set out our priorities in building community strength based on what you have told us through extensive engagement and consultation. In the same way the shared values we seek to encourage and use are sourced directly from Brent's residents. This strategy and the commitments that accompanies it explain how we will take what you told us and turn it into action.

Brent has a long and proud history as a place where people from different backgrounds and cultures feel they get on well together. It is widely accepted to be among the most diverse local authority areas in the country. This strategy builds on these strengths as well as outlining future activity so that we can all work together to make a great place an even better one for all our people, making the most of the strength brought by our diversity. It is based on extensive consultation with those who live, work and do business in Brent and sets an ambitious agenda for making the things you said you wanted to see a reality.

Forging strong communities that recognise we achieve more when we work together to deliver shared goals has never been more urgent. Join us on our journey to deliver on this important area of work. Together, we are stronger than that which divides us.

Cllr Miller – Cabinet Lead Community Safety

Introduction

Brent: stronger together sets a four year strategic approach to building and sustaining stronger communities. It sets a clear direction, building a strong sense of purpose and leading through our communities and their shared values. The four year timeframe gives space to build on our successes to date, the flexibility for changes in light of new legislation or guidance and enough space to make a real difference. This strategy is central to the achievement of the overall vision for the borough as set out in the Borough Plan 2019 – 2023. This vision is:

To make Brent a borough of culture, empathy, and shared prosperity

Brent: stronger together seeks to build towards these three aims by carrying out a programme of work based on the shared core values of Brent's diverse citizens. Most prominently these **values** are:

- Respect and tolerance for people
- Protecting the most vulnerable
- Pride in our area – Loving where we live
- Equality
- Active citizenship

These are integral to the **priorities** of this strategy:

- Tackling poverty
- Tackling extremism
- Engaging new and emerging communities
- Tackling underachievement
- Promoting gender equality

Stronger communities will mean different things to different people, but for the purposes of this document it is intended to mean:

“People living and working in harmony, with a shared sense of community spirit – having respect for each other as citizens and respect for Brent as a place”.

Strategic Context

Building stronger communities is a local priority that sits well with a range of policies and initiatives at national and regional levels. The fact that objectives and actions are aligned in this way is a source of strength in developing and implementing our own values and priorities. The council will continue to work with Government and the Mayor to ensure we all make a contribution to these shared goals.

At a national level this strategy is set within the context of the Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (Building stronger, more united communities) that was launched in March 2018 and funding streams such as the Integrated Communities

Fund. This is a £7m fund to support new approaches to build more integrated communities. In addition, the Controlling Migration Fund (£100m) is focused on helping local authorities and their communities experiencing high and unexpected volumes of immigration to ease pressures on local services. The fund is directed at achieving benefits for the established resident communities as well as emerging communities.

Our aim is to engage with these strategies on a critical basis, led by the needs of Brent's residents. The Council does not necessarily agree with government policy in each of these areas - in particular we believe that immigration and diversity are sources of strength to be celebrated. But the Council is prepared to work cooperatively with government where we see benefit to local people. Alongside these national policies are a range of publications that focus on stronger communities and community cohesion.

At a London level this strategy builds on the principles in the Mayor's "All of Us" strategy that puts an onus for integration on everyone. The Mayor's strategy has four main objectives: promoting shared experiences, supporting Londoners to be active citizens, tackling barriers and inequalities, and improving London's evidence base on social integration.

At a local level, building stronger communities is central to the council's overall vision set out in the Borough Plan (2019-2023). This is to make Brent a borough of culture, empathy and shared prosperity. The Borough Plan goes on to say that delivery of the vision will mean people from different backgrounds will feel at ease with one another, sharing together in cultural opportunities and activities, and valuing the principles of fairness, equality, good citizenship and respect for people and place. They will feel that they and their children are safe, cared for and can achieve well, and that they receive excellent services when they need them. Brent will also be a great place to live and work, where business and enterprise can prosper and local people can find employment, feeling that they have opportunities to change their lives for the better.

The over-arching aim of *Brent: stronger together* is to work with our partners, communities and residents to make Brent stronger, more active, and more cohesive.

Our Context

Brent is a borough characterised by constant change. It has long been somewhere new communities have settled and succeeded. This is reflected in the fact that it is one of the most culturally diverse boroughs in the UK. People from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds make up 64 per cent of the total population.

The council continues to welcome new communities today, such as the growing Eastern European, Brazilian, Portuguese and Somali populations. The council is proud of its historic ability to welcome different cultures, support their integration and create a borough 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.

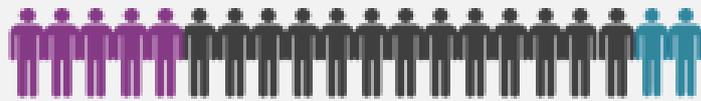
The borough's population is growing with about 335,800 residents today and projected to increase to almost 350,000 by 2023 and over 375,000 by 2030. Our residents are living longer too – the number of residents aged 65 and over will increase by 15% over the lifetime of this strategy and by 41% by 2030. The council's resources are also changing with significant savings having to be made.

The recent Residents Attitude Survey showed that 66% of respondents say that overall the council does a good job with 59% proud to live in Brent. Some 76% are satisfied with the local area. In terms of stronger communities 56% feel that people in their local area can contribute to making it better which will continue to be important as we all work together to help Brent realise its potential.

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 will be increasingly important.

About Brent

334,700 people live in Brent
we are the 6th largest borough in London



76,800 are under the age of 18
that's 23% of the population

39,500 are aged 65 and over
that's 12% of the population

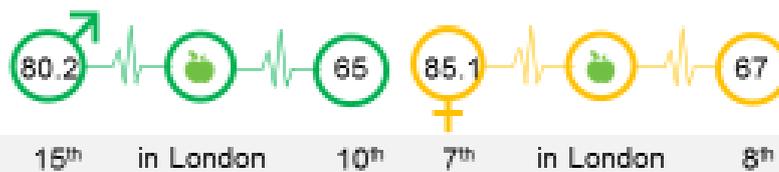
36
is our
average age



57%
adults don't exercise
the 4th highest
proportion in London



Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy



Employment

71.3%
in employment,
compared to
74.2% in London

Self-employed

17.6%
self-employed,
higher than
13.2% in London

Unemployed

5.7%
unemployed,
similar to
5.0% in London

Benefit claimants

2.2%
claiming DWP benefits
the same as London

53%

residents born abroad this is the
2nd highest proportion in London



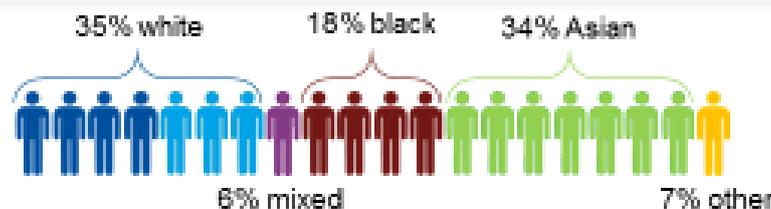
9% of residents
are born in India

37% of people do not speak
English as a first language

8% of the population speak
Gujarati, the most spoken
language after English

16%

Of the population is white
other, which includes
22,000 residents from
Romania and Bulgaria



15.7 births per 1,000
Higher than 14.1
the London average



0.49
Average 8 progress
score per pupil, the
2nd highest in London



8.2%
adults have
no qualifications
Higher than 6.8% in London



The crime rate is **70.8** per 1,000 population, 15th highest in London

What you told us

The values and priorities set out in this strategy have been set following extensive consultation. The consultation took place from 6 August to 31 October 2018. Consultation was undertaken at Brent Connects meetings and bespoke engagement events at the Granville on 11 September, Kingsbury Library on 21 September and Willesden Green Library on 28 September as well as at Wembley Park station on 26 October. The Time to talk session on 3 September featured a panel discussion on Stronger Communities. Discussions took place at the Multi-Faith forum on 16 October and the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum on 28 September. The online consultation also took place during this period.

Throughout the consultation you told us that you agreed with the values and priorities that we had identified. We asked you to rate the Values – with 5 being the most important and 1 the least important. Ranked by the ratings received these are:

- Respect and tolerance for people
- Protecting the most vulnerable
- Pride in our area – Loving where we live
- Equality
- Active citizenship

In terms of importance you said that respect and tolerance for people and protecting the most vulnerable are the most important with equality and active citizenship the least important.

We also asked you to rate the Priorities – with 5 being the most important and 1 the least important. Ranked by the ratings received these are:

- Tackling poverty
- Tackling extremism
- Engaging new and emerging communities
- Tackling underachievement
- Promoting gender equality

You told us that tackling poverty and tackling extremism are the most important priorities for you with tackling underachievement and promoting gender equality the least important.

We have listened to what you have said and have developed a set of commitments. This is attached as an appendix.

Values for Stronger Communities

We have set the following values for Stronger Communities.

1. Respect and tolerance for people

The council acknowledges the distinctiveness of the many cultures and communities which make up our borough, and celebrate its diversity, it is vital that these are not used to divide us. This commitment is seen in for example, our armed forces covenant and the Brent faith covenant. Instead, we must reaffirm our shared humanity and values in the face of hatred, and expose it as harmful and unfounded. We recognise this was given the highest importance in the consultation and will reflect this in our work to deliver this strategy.

2. Protecting the most vulnerable

Hand-in-hand with equality is the need to protect the most vulnerable in our communities and to help them improve their quality of life. Vulnerability can take many forms, such as sharing a protected characteristic mentioned above. People may also be vulnerable, and require support or intervention to prevent them from suffering abuse or being groomed, for example in relation to child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, involvement with gangs, or radicalisation into violent extremism. A further area of vulnerability concerns poverty, and its impact on all areas of people's lives, from their independence and choice to their health.

3. Pride in our area - loving where we live

A final component in fostering community cohesion is focusing on one key factor that every one of our residents has in common, which is the borough itself. Brent is an exciting, dynamic and vibrant place to live and work, well-connected by public transport within one of the great world cities, and home to one of the world's most iconic sporting stadiums. Culture is a cornerstone of the borough's vibrancy and identity, with first-class arts facilities which help bring people together, and these have been recognised in Brent's selection as the 2020 London Borough of Culture.

There is therefore much for local people to take pride in, and indeed Brent has always attracted large numbers of people from outside its boundaries. Our focus is on building a distinctive identity for the borough and developing a sense of belonging which is stronger than any lines of division.

4. Equality

The council believes that every person is different but equal, and aims to create opportunities for people to make the most of their abilities. The council is committed to better services and improved outcomes for everyone.

The council seeks to advance equality of opportunity for all, recognising that some will require greater support than others to seize and maximise those opportunities - including those with protected characteristics relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including nationality), religion (including the choice of no religious belief), sex and sexual orientation. This helps us ensure we deliver good quality services responsive to the needs of local people as well as meeting our statutory public sector equalities duty. That duty also extends to fostering good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

5. Active citizenship and participation

For a wider community to be cohesive, everyone must feel like they have a stake in it. A key element in this is having a voice that is heard when decisions are being made which affect that community.

While it is important to vote, this is dependent on age, citizenship status and the type of election, and elections are relatively infrequent. However, all residents can engage with public services year-round through a range of dedicated channels, such as the council's Brent Connects forums, Brent Youth Parliament, consultations and user groups. Elected councillors are also available to meet with their residents on a regular basis, and important decisions are taken in public by the Cabinet or the full Council itself, as well as planning and licensing decisions. Other opportunities can be found with voluntary or community organisations. In recent years the council has attracted a large number of people to register as volunteers.

We believe that active people and good citizens have the power to transform areas and communities for the better. We know that under austerity this seems forever harder, but we are committed to supporting civic society to win the funding it needs, provide local solutions to local problems, and create lasting change.

Priorities for Stronger Communities

These values are integral to the priorities we have set for the next 4 years. What follows is an overview of what we see as each of the priorities.

1. Tackling poverty

Low incomes, poverty and deprivation can make it more difficult for people to take part in some parts of community life. There may be activities they simply cannot afford, as well as other obstacles, such as the lack of a bank account, insufficient free time, and poor health and wellbeing (which is higher in more deprived areas). Though there are pockets of deprivation in various parts of Brent, it is concentrated in the south of the borough and social housing estates, including Church End, Harlesden, Stonebridge, South Kilburn, Chalkhill and St Raphaels. One in four children live in poverty, and we know that specific ethnic groups are particularly marginalised in this respect. You told us that tackling poverty was really important to you in making communities stronger. It will therefore form a cornerstone of our work going forward.

This priority is vital to our values of **respect and tolerance for people, equality, protecting the most vulnerable, active citizenship and participation and equality.**

2. Tackling extremism

Brent will work as closely as we can with the local community and civil society to stop people being drawn into violent extremism. Those with extreme views may not carry out, nor support, violence to advance them, but there are certainly examples in which

extremist and supremacist organisations which are non-violent have influenced people towards more violent activity. We have a moral duty to protect potential victims of violence both locally and further afield. We recognise that those who carry out politically violent acts are often victims of radicalisers and recruiters, and that with anti-radicalisation policies the risk of stigmatisation can be all too real. The topic is undoubtedly complex.

Our aim is to keep people safe from violence and exploitation, sensitively, in partnership with the local community, with opportunities for people's voices to be heard.

Extremist messages are less likely to find support where communities are cohesive and integrated, with a strong sense of common ground and shared values.

The ability to participate and social mobility are also vital, as is ensuring that vulnerable individuals are protected from grooming and manipulation. For this reason, it is absolutely vital that we work together, engaging with key communities and relevant institutions, to ensure that we instil all five of our values: active citizenship and participation; respect and tolerance for people; equality; protecting the most vulnerable; and pride in our area - loving where we live. We have previously engaged with the community on this as part of our "Time to Talk" series.

3. Engaging new and emerging communities

The council is keen to engage with new and emerging communities and has undertaken work in this area.

Representatives of these communities have expressed to the council some of the challenges that they face, including barriers to accessing information on key services and democratic processes (such as nationality and citizenship services, welfare and benefits, voting and registration). Other factors include better access to English classes and for community spaces which they can use for activities and events.

Britain's expected exit from the European Union also creates uncertainty and concern about the future amongst communities originating from EU countries. Brent has the second highest estimated number of European residents in London comprising a fifth (22%) of its whole population. Since the Brexit vote, the government has introduced the EU settlement scheme.

Engaging new and emerging communities is therefore crucial to our values of **active citizenship and participation**, as well as **respect and tolerance for people**, and **pride in our area – loving where we live**. This was recognised by the council in 2016, when it established a working group to look at the socio-economic barriers and challenges experienced by eastern European communities living in Brent. Following that group's findings, the council has carried out and is continuing engagement and information-sharing activities and materials with these communities, as well as supporting voluntary and community organisations to develop the skills needed to work with them. We are developing a better sense of these communities' needs, and an ongoing relationship with them. This work is in line with the overall Mayor's approach.

The council has recently been awarded a grant from central government to extend this work through drop-in sessions, community volunteers and hosting cross-cultural community events celebrating eastern European and Latin American communities. We will also be extending the existing provision of English language courses, and provide new arrivals with a 'Welcome to Brent' leaflet to help them find useful services.

4. Tackling underachievement

Most of Brent's ethnic groups which are large enough to report on, perform well compared to either the same group nationally or the national averages for all pupils. In 2017, the attainment of Black African, Asian Pakistani and White British pupils was above both the national averages for these groups and the national average for all pupils at Key Stage 2. White Eastern Europeans and the small group of Gypsy Roma pupils were above the national average for their groups. This success was repeated at Key Stage 4 for Asian Pakistani and White British pupils, who also performed above the national averages for their respective groups and for all pupils. Most of the larger groups on which we report (including the Somali group) made more progress at secondary school than the national average for all students, as did pupils with EAL.

However, Black Caribbean and mixed white/Black Caribbean boys are not performing as well as their peers. In Brent, their attainment was 12.2 percentage points below the Brent average for all pupils at Key Stage 2 in 2017, a larger gap than is the case nationally for this group. This gap is already evident at the Early Years Foundation Stage, the first statutory assessment of children at age five. At Key Stage 4, the attainment of Black Caribbean boys is lagging behind the national averages for those groups. Black Caribbean boys is the only Brent group on which we report to make less progress than all students nationally.

If we are to achieve our value of equality for all communities, we must address the gap in attainment and the impact on their qualifications, aspirations and life chances. The performance of Black Caribbean boys is a key priority in the 2017-2020 Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness. In June 2018, Strategic School Effectiveness Partnership Board chaired by the Strategic Director, Children and Young People agreed a set of proposals made in a report to the Schools Forum. The Schools Forum approved funding for a Black Caribbean boys achievement project for the next two years. However, this is only part of what needs to be done given the longstanding complexity of this issue beginning pre-school in early years.

This priority is vital to our values of **respect and tolerance for people, equality, protecting the most vulnerable, active citizenship and participation and equality.**

5. Promoting gender equality

Whilst British society has seen great progress in equality for women and opportunities for them to lead over the last century, they continue to face higher barriers than men. For example, Annual Population Surveys show that women in general have higher

economic inactivity rates than men, which acts as an obstacle to them contributing to their communities, and realising their own potential.

Nationally, as revealed in the gender pay reporting for companies and public bodies with over 250 employees (as of 5th April 2018), 78% of employers pay women less than men on average. Women are more likely to hold lower paid jobs, are not getting equal opportunities to top paid jobs or are more likely to take a career break for child or family caring duties. While the gap varies across sectors, none pays women better than men on average; women are underrepresented in top paid jobs in 82% of companies.

Brent is home to many different ethnic communities, and we must try to ensure that the same opportunities are available to women across the borough. The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper showed that nationwide, markedly more women than men from a wide range of communities (including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese or Other Asian, African, Arab or Other Ethnic Group, and Other backgrounds) cannot speak English well or at all.¹ The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper demonstrates that those with low proficiency in English are less likely to be in employment or economically active than those proficient in English language.² The Annual Population Survey shows that economic inactivity is highest amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim women (at 59%, more than double the levels for men from the same communities, for women overall, and for the overall population). In addition, our Outcomes Based Review on employment identified increasing women's access to the labour market as a priority for Brent, and this is a crucial way to ensure the integration of women from all cultures. We will continue to engage and identify reasons for not working and will aim to specifically address these.

We also recognise the importance of seeking to identify and support women who are at risk of marginalisation as well as establishing "safe spaces" for women to engage.

This priority is vital to our values of **active citizenship and participation** and **equality**. We have already identified the merit in exploring women-only events and forums for those women who do not feel comfortable engaging in the presence of men, and will work with the voluntary and community sector to continue to do this, building on events such as those held weekly at the Pakistani Community Centre. We will continue to work with organisations such as the Asian Women's Resource Centre as well as taking leadership from the communities themselves in addressing these problems.

What we have achieved so far

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf, P36

² Ibid

Whilst it is important that we are clear about what we are planning for the future it is also important that we acknowledge the work we have done to date. This has included:

- A campaign for the rights of EU nationals living and working in Brent;
- Open days to provide advice and guidance services to eastern European communities, as well as cultural programmes;
- A youth-led “Peace in the Streets” campaign against youth violence;
- Delivering *Tackling Hate Crime* for practitioners in Brent and commissioning work from Coventry University to understand, tackle and deliver support on hate crime;
- A comprehensive signposting campaign, encompassing White Ribbon Day, to increase awareness of voluntary service provision amongst victims and survivors of violence against women and girls;
- A new multi-agency Stronger Communities portal on the Brent Council website to signpost residents to services;
- “Time to talk” events on Stronger Communities, hosted by Harlesden-based radio station The Beat London that gives the opportunity to openly discuss issues that matter to people in Brent.
- Our Outcomes-Based Reviews on employment, gangs, domestic abuse and adolescents on the edge of care; and
- A Time to talk panel focused on Brexit.

The council has other programmes of work which impact upon our priorities for stronger communities, often delivered with partners. Some of these have already been mentioned, such as our plans for the 2020 Borough of Culture with local youth and young adults at the heart of the programme; the Safer Brent Strategy; our Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness; and our continuing work to address challenges for emerging communities, such as eastern European and Latin American groups.

Other relevant areas of work by the council include:

Employment Skills and Enterprise Strategy – this sets out a vision to reduce inequality and raise living standards in Brent through economic growth and employment. One of the strategy’s objectives is a strong focus on addressing inequality by reducing economic and social polarisation within our most deprived neighbourhoods, and amongst those residents who are furthest away from work. This includes particular BAME and migrant communities, people with disabilities, and those with mental health issues. Services are working closely to identify the core barriers to work and develop appropriate solutions, including seeking additional resources through external funding where possible.

Equality Strategy – this commits the council to setting an example of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights. This includes developing our understanding of

the changing identities and needs of our local communities, finding ways to engage them, fostering good relations, and ensuring that local services are responsive to different needs and treat users with dignity and respect. As part of this, the council has examined, for example, how to address disproportionate levels of overcrowding affecting ethnic minority groups living in Brent, such as Somali, Bangladeshi, Black African and White other groups.

Review of ESOL English language provision across the borough – this will allow us to better understand existing supply, make provision for longer term anticipated demand, and make sure those most in need receive the support necessary.

Delivery of this Strategy

The commitments attached detail our future focus. The focus is on strong and cohesive communities that foster a sense of belonging – to a place, to a group or to a community. When people feel they have a say in their community, they are more likely to get on well together, which can also help them to feel safer and more secure in their surroundings. Strong and cohesive communities can also act as a deterrent against anti-social behaviour, hate crimes, gang activity and violent extremism.

Monitoring and Review

It is important that the people of Brent can see what progress we are making in this important area. Therefore delivery against the commitments will be reviewed on annual basis and a progress report published.