

	Cabinet 8 April 2024
	Report from the Interim Corporate Director of Communities and Regeneration
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Customers, Communities & Culture (Councillor Donnelly-Jackson)

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28 including the Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	Four Appendix A: EDI Strategy 2024-28 Appendix B: Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan Appendix C: EDI Strategy Engagement Findings Report Appendix D: EDI Strategy Equality Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report shares, for endorsement, our new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) ambitions for the next four years. It describes the journey that has been

undertaken to frame our new ambitions and includes a series of accompanying products and components that complement and supplement our new ambitions, including the engagement findings report, Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan, the UNISON Anti-Racism Charter and London Local Government Anti-Racism Statement. It also outlines next steps in relation to driving our ambitions through the new EDI Board and establishing an EDI dashboard to monitor our progress.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. To endorse the EDI Strategy 2024-28 and Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan (Appendix A and B).
- 2.2. To endorse signing up to the UNISON Anti-Racism Charter and London Council Anti-Racism Statement (see paragraph 3.2.15) as tools that will further complement our ambitions and commitment around anti-racism.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword

- 3.1.1. Brent's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2024 – 2028 and accompanying plans demonstrate our commitment to tackle inequalities and support individuals and families to reach their full potential. It is at the heart of our vision to move Brent forward together and ensure no one is left behind. Through the engagement which underpins this Strategy, we have heard the ideas and suggestions from our communities on how to celebrate, engage and empower local people. By listening to these ideas, we recognise that it is through understanding and celebrating differences and working together that we, as individuals, organisations, and communities can thrive. That is why our new ambitions are centred around equity and inclusion. Our ambitions also help frame the future of the organisation – we are keen to go beyond diversity representation and foster an inclusive work environment where everyone, at every level of the organisation is curious to learn and improve the council culture. This will help create the best conditions where we can use our knowledge to serve our communities more effectively.

3.2 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.2.1. This report contributes to the delivery of every Borough Plan priority. The report shares the organisations new EDI Strategy 2024-28 and accompanying draft Anti-Racism Action Plan. Both products are central to our organisational approach and culture and therefore underpin everything we do.

3.3 Background

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28

Developing the strategy

- 3.3.1. The process for developing the strategy began at the end of 2022 and our approach has been centred around engaging with and reflecting the voice of stakeholders. The engagement helped determine and frame the overarching focus of the strategy: 'inclusivity', which applies both to a community and organisational context. In its broadest sense, inclusion is about how well the contributions, presence and perspectives of different groups of people are valued and integrated into an environment.
- 3.3.2. Our methodology focused on targeted engagement with key stakeholders and supplementing the findings with the findings from the Borough Plan engagement exercise, which remains relevant and appropriate for the EDI Strategy. We engaged with the following groups:
- Brent staff – via Forward Together workshops
 - Brent staff network co-Chairs
 - Internal Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Delivery Group
 - Members Briefing Session
 - Deaf Parents Group
 - Brent Pensioners Forum
 - Brent Multi-Faith Forum
 - Middlesex Association for the Blind
 - Brent Disability Forum
 - Brent Youth Parliament
 - 3x open workshops in Wembley, Kingsbury and Stonebridge
- 3.3.3. The questions and style adopted for the sessions were tailored for the different audiences, but the themes explored remained the same across every session:
- Understanding and defining 'inclusion'
 - Community cohesion and togetherness across Brent
 - How well equity, diversity and inclusion are embedded, understood and experienced across the borough.
 - Specific issues, concerns and opportunities tailored to specific groups, based on the audience.
- 3.3.4. Appendix C is the EDI Strategy engagement findings report and provides additional details around the methodology and findings. In relation to the findings, the key themes include:
- External engagement – we engaged with stakeholders from different protected characteristics and interests, therefore most of the feedback was framed around their needs. However, some of the collective themes include:
 - The importance of accessibility and ensuring our systems, processes and infrastructure meet everyone's needs, specifically in relation to physical accessibility and written communications.

- Establishing greater cohesion across the borough by bringing people together through events and common themes.
- Engaging and working with seldom heard communities, in particular, to establish services and support that is tailored to their needs.
- Internal engagement – staff shared their high expectations and aspirations with the goal of Brent being leader around EDI. The questions asked centred around how the organisation can improve and reach this level of ambition:
 - ‘How can Brent become a more inclusive organisation?’. In response there were three overarching themes:
 1. Organisational Culture and Ways of Working – this focussed on collaborating with other areas and team building; having more opportunities to get to learn and empower staff in a safe and open environment, whilst acknowledging and celebrating success.
 2. Employee lifecycle – this included further learning about different cultures and protected characteristics; fairer, open and transparent recruitment processes and practices; managers having a more inclusive approach and understanding.
 3. Staff Networks – comments recognised and valued the role of our Staff Networks in establishing a more inclusive organisation. This centred around support for Staff Networks, their role in educating staff and organising events.
 - ‘What can we do to better harness our diverse communities?’. In response, there were four overarching themes:
 1. Community Events – ideas and suggestions around organising and facilitating community events to help bring people together.
 2. Empower and engage communities - providing a voice for all our communities, including those that are seldom heard through workshops and forums. Identifying and working with community leaders.
 3. Communication – accessible information for all, ensuring digital inclusion and translation services are available to those who need it.
 4. Education and learning about different cultures - raising awareness and understanding about diverse communities and cultures within Brent.

3.3.5. We have also engaged with Departmental Management Teams to share the draft ambitions; understand what departments need to advance their activities around EDI and understand what relevant activity is underway across

departments. This information, particularly the latter, has been used to help shape the strategy.

EDI Strategy 2024-28

3.3.6. The new EDI Strategy (see Appendix A) aims to reflect the feedback outlined above and seeks to achieve our overarching focus around inclusivity through the following objectives that will span over the next four years:

- Inclusion: Accessibility and Cohesion
- Narrowing the Gap: Tackling Inequalities
- Establishing an Inclusive Workforce

3.3.7. To demonstrate that we have listened to stakeholders and residents and aim to meet their needs and deliver what matters to them, each objective is categorised into the following sections:

- What you said – themes, concerns and areas of focus that have emerged from the engagement.
- What we will do – our commitments and how we will respond to the feedback.
- How we will measure it – how we will monitor progress and success.

3.3.8. The next step is to establish a monitoring dashboard comprised of a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress. Moving forward, the strategy will be driven and monitored primarily by the new EDI Board (see paragraph 3.2.16 below).

The Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan

3.3.9. The Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan is an important component of the EDI Strategy. The action plan complements the framing and delivery of our overarching ambitions; seeks to better coordinate existing anti-racism activity; defines and establishes our commitment to tackle racial inequality and sets a clear ambition to strive towards becoming an anti-racist organisation.

3.3.10. The action plan has been developed by drawing upon two complementary frameworks that the organisation is signed up to: the London Councils Tackling Racial Inequality Standard and the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES). Both frameworks are comprehensive and provide helpful guidance that we have drawn upon, combined with the existing activity underway in Brent, to create the action plan. The action plan is intentionally internal-only as it seeks to advance opportunities and resolve challenges within the organisation before establishing any ambition(s) for the borough.

3.3.11. As the action plan is internal-only, we have only engaged with internal stakeholders (staff) to ensure their voice is reflected within our ambitions. We engaged with the following groups:

- WRES Strategic Working Group

- Cultural Diversity Champions
- EDI Working Group (managers and Heads of Service across the organisation)
- Cultural Diversity Network

3.3.12. The key themes from the feedback include:

- Raising the level of aspiration and aspire towards becoming an Anti-Racist organisation, rather than framing our ambition around tackling racial inequality.
- Improving the way we capture and use data to identify trends, inform action and measure impact.
- Having clear indicators and targets, where possible, to help us demonstrate how we will be monitoring impact and change. Additionally, this will also help ensure accountability.

3.3.13. The Anti-Racism Action Plan will be a delivery strand of the EDI Strategy, overseen by the EDI Board, and will span over the same duration (2024-28). The action plan sets a new level of ambition for Brent: becoming an Anti-Racist organisation – this is defined within the plan through a series of ‘expectations’. The plan follows a similar structure to the London Councils Tackling Racial Inequality Standards and focuses on the following themes:

- Strategic Leadership
- Employee Lifecycle
- Training and development
- Policies and Processes
- Staff Networks
- Community Engagement (our organisational approach to this, through the lens of anti-racism)

3.3.14. The action plan also consists of actions, action owners, desired outcomes and performance measures that will form part of our broader, upcoming monitoring around EDI. The next steps around this product will follow the same journey as the EDI Strategy.

3.3.15. To further strengthen and demonstrate our commitment to anti-racism, it is recommended that the Council signs up to both the [UNISON Anti-Racism Charter](#) and [London Local Government Anti-Racism Statement](#) as means to work across sectors to tackle racial injustice and strengthen our commitments to anti-racism.

Delivering and monitoring our ambitions

Corporate Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Board

3.3.16. Our EDI ambitions will be driven and monitored by the new Corporate Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Board. The Board seeks to drive our EDI ambitions and work towards embedding EDI in our culture, approaches, processes and

activities. The Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and consists of representation across departments, Staff Network co-chairs and the Cultural Diversity Champions.

3.3.17. The Board first met on the 12 March where it explored and agreed its purpose and role, and agreed four priorities for Year 1 – these priorities will be explored in detail by the Board with the view of delivering or significantly progressing the given areas after the first year:

- Consolidating the Black Community Action Plan
- Improving information sharing and our data driven approach to EDI
- Improving our organisational EDI learning & development offer
- Refreshing our approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

3.4. Next steps

3.4.1. Following endorsement from Cabinet, the organisation will seek to deliver our new ambitions over the next four years. This will be driven particularly through the new EDI Board. We will also continue to develop a dashboard to monitor our EDI ambitions.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Extensive engagement has been undertaken to shape the EDI Strategy 2024-28 and Corporate Anti-Racism Action Plan. This is detailed within Appendix C.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 There are no direct financial considerations arising out of this report.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 Where it is reasonably thought that persons who share a protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic; and/or persons who share that characteristic have needs that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; and/or participation in an activity by persons who share that characteristic is disproportionately low, then section 158 of the Equality Act 2010 permits positive action where it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim of enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to overcome or minimise the disadvantage, meet specific needs or enable or encourage persons who share the protected characteristic to participate in that activity.

6.2 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Statutory Code of Practice in relation to services, public functions, and associations provide further clarity in relation to the positive action provisions in the Equality Act (the Act"). It explains that these enable service providers to take proportionate action to achieve fuller and more effective equality outcomes for members of groups that are socially or economically disadvantaged or excluded or who

otherwise face the consequences of past or present discrimination or disadvantage. Positive action can include, for example, providing additional or bespoke services, separate facilities, accelerated access to services, targeting resources, or induction or training opportunities to benefit a particularly disadvantaged group. Provided the action is within the parameters laid down in the Act and meets the test of proportionality, it will not amount to positive discrimination under the Act, which would be unlawful.

- 6.3 The Statutory Code also recommends that in order to identify possible causes of disadvantage, different needs, and under-representation and to develop appropriate positive action measures, service providers will benefit from the involvement of staff and members of groups sharing a relevant protected characteristic and such groups should also be involved in the evaluation of positive action measures which is following the Council's approach as set out in this report.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a "protected characteristic" and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

- 7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

- 7.3 There are no negative equality implications. The aim of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and our Anti Racism Action plan are to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relationships within our different communities, with service users and residents. Our Strategy promotes our ambitions for Brent to become a borough that is truly inclusive; where people of all cultures and backgrounds are represented, celebrated and most importantly feel that they belong. All of the potential equality impacts will be positive for all protected groups covered under the Public Sector Equality Duty. Impacts and outcomes will be evaluated over time through internal monitoring.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

- 8.1 There are no climate change and environmental considerations.

Report sign off:

Alice Lester

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Regeneration