



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2024-28 Engagement Findings Report

Introduction

This report details the engagement that has been undertaken to inform Brent Council's new Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28.

Engaging with key stakeholders and reflecting their views and ideas was at the heart of our approach whilst developing the Strategy. We targeted engagement with council staff, community groups and organisations and seldom heard voices across the borough. This engagement aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the key equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues and concerns our residents, service users, communities and staff may face. We engaged with people through group discussions, workshops and through our all-staff events. The engagement took place between March 2023 – September 2023.

Given the range of diverse groups the Council engaged with, slightly different approaches and questions were used, depending on the audience. (A full breakdown of the groups consulted with are available in Annex A). We explored the following themes at 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 which arose around EDI, based on the audience.**

Additionally, the engagement that was undertaken was designed to supplement the comprehensive consultation and engagement exercise that shaped the Borough Plan 2023-27, as the findings remain relevant and appropriate for the EDI Strategy. The Borough Plan engagement sought to understand the perspectives and priorities that residents and

partners had for the borough, some of which related to EDI. The detailed findings from the Borough Plan engagement can be found [here](#).

By reviewing this information and combining the findings, we have established the three overarching objectives that will guide the Council's EDI ambitions for the next four years:

Objective 1:
Inclusion: Accessibility and Cohesion

Objective 2:
Narrowing the Gap: Addressing Inequalities

Objective 3:
Establishing an Inclusive Workforce

This report will provide an overview of the key findings and outline how they translate into the three overarching objectives.

To help frame our action plan, Brent Council participated in the London Council's Tackling Race Inequality Standard pilot scheme. The purpose of this was to support London local authorities on their anti-racism journeys. Fourteen boroughs participated in the six month pilot. Brent Council was paired with Lambeth Council to undertake a series of informal challenge sessions where we reviewed each others EDI processes, policies and practices, initiatives and infrastructure.

Through this process, best practice was shared and informed our next steps to embed our Anti-Racism Action Plan across the organisation. This included reviewing our EDI infrastructure, to ensure key information is shared and communicated across the Council. It has also contributed to the creation of our new Corporate Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Board, that will drive and monitor our EDI ambitions. The peer review also highlighted the need for more visible leadership around anti-racism with regular and open dialogue amongst senior leaders and staff. Additionally, feedback suggested that there needed to be stronger communication with our external stakeholders, to ensure a greater understanding of the work the Council is doing, which may assist with co-

production of initiatives with our communities. In addition to the peer support review, there were also fortnightly meetings with the other boroughs, where impactful discussions were had on best practice taking place and the different ways pan-London initiatives, namely the London Councils Tackling Racial Inequality Standard and Anti-Racism Statement, are being adopted within organisations.

Our internal engagement with staff, centred around workshops with key staff groups to understand their concerns, challenges and level of ambition for the organisation. This action plan is an important component of the EDI Strategy as the action plan complements the framing and delivery of our overarching ambitions. It seeks to better coordinate existing anti-racist activity whilst defining and establishing the Councils commitment and ambition to strive towards becoming an anti-racist organisation.

Objective 1: Inclusion: Accessibility and Cohesion

There was a very strong sentiment that the Council should be genuinely accessible to everyone. This included the need to have the systems, processes and physical infrastructure adapted to meet everyone's needs.

It was unanimous across all groups that Council services should be physically accessible and all communications must be inclusive and cater to different needs and preferences, ensuring everyone is engaging with the same quality of information regardless of how they access it. For example, the Pensioners Forum emphasised the concerns about digital exclusion and were keen for options being available which were not solely available online. Additionally, they were keen to see greater physical access to buildings and parks, including more toilets and benches to enable them to feel less isolated and able to participate in public life.



The Deaf Parent Group also provided several suggestions around tools and face-to-face services that can support their needs. They requested that all Council communications be simple and available in a variety of formats and through different mediums.

To ensure needs of residents, communities and service users are being met, participants told us that the Council should continue to collaborate with residents and community groups to understand what matters most to them. It was suggested that certain minority groups or marginalised communities', including those with disabilities, felt that their needs were not widely recognised across the Council, which may result in a different quality of service delivery and engagement.

"Brent should be an inclusive borough that is aware of and responsive to the needs of residents"

A vital component of this included providing opportunities to celebrate Brent's rich diversity and enabling communities to have a voice. Many participants suggested that community events, programmes and initiatives were important ways of making Brent a more inclusive place. Feedback highlighted the need to educate and raise awareness of our diverse make-up. For example, providing opportunities through our events to engender a greater understanding of our different cultures, particularly of new and emerging communities. This was alongside the need to improve interactions with particular groups, such as the hearing impaired and visually impaired communities, who are often indirectly excluded due to lack of understanding of how to engage with them.

It was felt that the Council had a key role in creating a stronger feeling of belonging and a more cohesive borough through such opportunities.

"A day for all communities to come together to promote community spirit, understanding and togetherness"

Objective 2: Narrowing the Gap; Addressing Inequalities

“Let’s focus on equity, recognising not everyone is starting from the same point.”

Participants asked the Council to continue developing local solutions which address the needs of our diverse communities, ensuring no one is left behind. Working with and co-designing services with seldom heard communities would provide further insight into those communities’ needs and help develop the best solutions for them.

“Creating inclusive services and working with local communities to understand what works for them.”

Participants also highlighted the need to use data to better inform our services and activity. By looking at differences in access, delivery and outcomes of services, targeted work could be invaluable in addressing inequality. For example, providing improved support and opportunities for young people. This was discussed, in terms of looking at differences in educational attainment between children of different ethnicities and in reference to providing greater opportunity for young people to thrive within the borough. Feedback also suggested that some young people do not believe they have a voice with the Council, the Police or within the education system and therefore greater engagement with them, could reduce inequality.

Brent Youth Parliament participants expressed the need for greater and more targeted communications about initiatives and programmes such as Brent Youth Parliament, apprenticeship schemes and general activities across the borough.

“There are lots of opportunities available for young people ... [that they can be] involved in, apprenticeships and so on. But where are they promoted? Always lots going on in Brent but we don’t always know about it.”

Other areas where inequalities were highlighted, included women’s safety and health. Whilst there

was recognition that there are challenges around resources and funding, increasing women only spaces and raising awareness of initiatives to keep women and young girls safe need to continue. Similarly, in relation to health inequalities, having a targeted approach within particular communities is vital. In particular, having data and using their voices to understand needs must be at the heart of this.

“Looking at data cut by ethnicity, disability, and deprivation to understand who isn’t accessing our services.”

Objective 3: Establishing an Inclusive Workforce

Although we asked all stakeholders for feedback around our workforce, the majority of the feedback and suggestions were provided by staff, through our all staff events, staff networks, Cultural Diversity Champions and from our internal EDI working group.

Participants provided very clear and high aspirations around having a more inclusive workplace.

Key components of this included having a diverse, open and transparent environment where there was trust and support for all. This is illustrated in the word cloud.



“Safe to make mistakes’ culture, encourage open dialogue, and ‘it’s okay to ask!’”

Staff highlighted that a more inclusive workplace would bring better understanding of staff and their backgrounds, enabling them to bring their authentic self into work and in turn, positively impacting on the communities they serve.

The themes highlighted as being key to establishing an inclusive workforce within Brent include:

- Organisational Culture and Ways of Working – this strongly focused 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.
- 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.
- Staff Networks – a number of comments recognised and valued the role of Staff Networks in establishing a more inclusive organisation. This centred around support for Staff Networks, their role in educating staff and organising events.

Terms	Frequency
Diversity/Diverse	183
Respect	93
Fair/Fairness	80
Understanding	76
Welcoming	55
Equality	45
Trust	45
Supportive	43
Open	39

Diversity and representation at senior levels was another key area of focus, alongside the need for the Council to have a greater understanding of our staff’s lived experience.

Brent’s Internal Anti-Racism Action Plan

As the action plan is internal, engagement has been with staff groups to ensure their voice is reflected within our ambitions. The key themes emerging from the feedback were centred around raising the organisations level of aspirations and being bolder in expressing our commitments. This led to set the overarching ambition to strive to become an anti-racist organisation.

Staff also highlighted the need to improve the way we capture and use data to identify trends, inform action and measure impact. It was felt that it is vital to have clear indicators and targets to ensure the organisation can monitoring impact and change.

Annex A

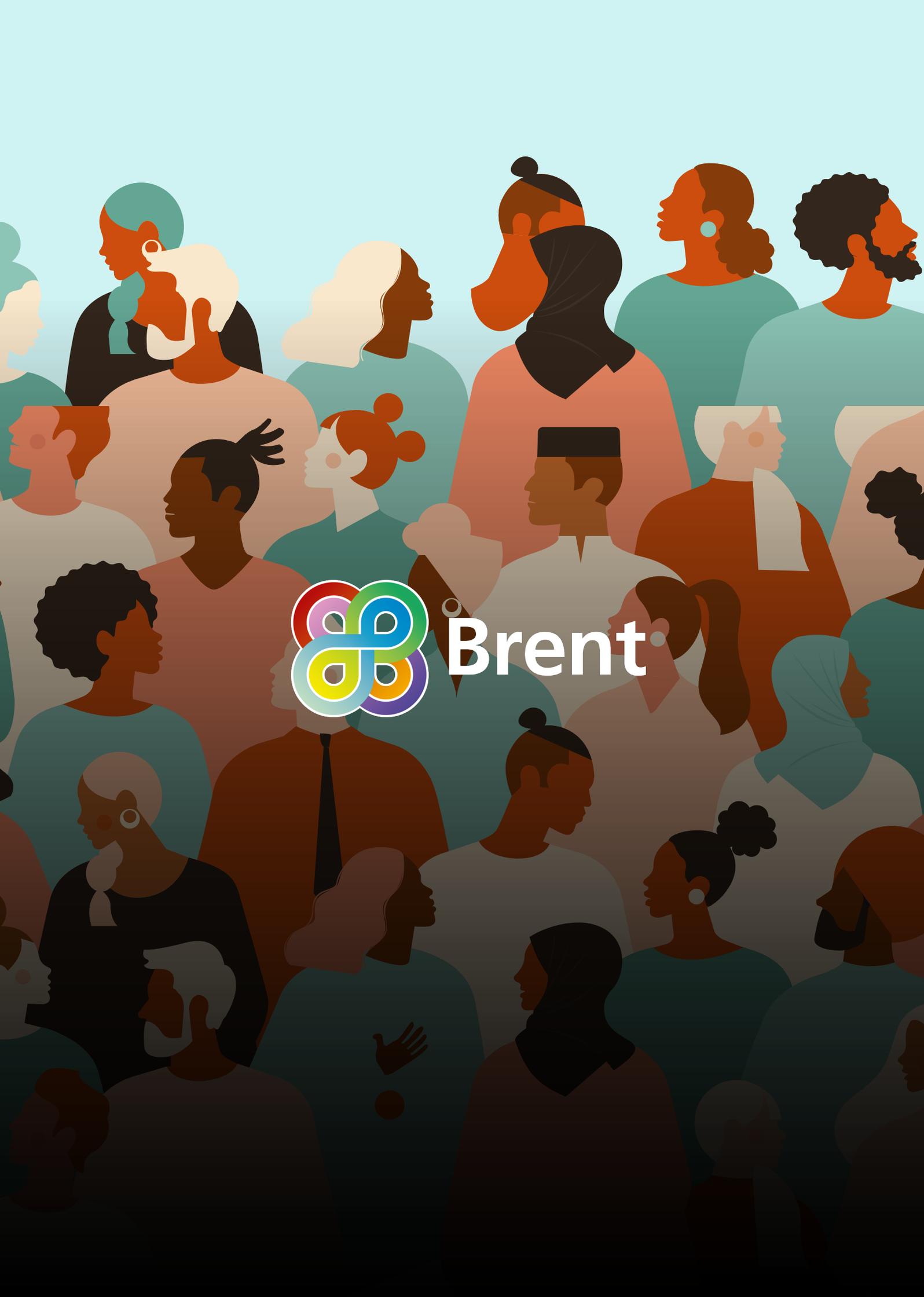
Groups engaged with to inform the EDI Strategy 2024-28 and internal Anti-Racism Action Plan

Internal Stakeholders

- All Staff Forward Together events took place during March 2023. In total five sessions took place. These provided information about the draft EDI Strategy and were an opportunity for staff to discuss the priorities with each other and provide feedback.
- Staff Networks and Cultural Diversity Champions (CDC's) workshops explored key priorities within the Strategy and how the Council's EDI ambitions could link in with the work of the Networks and Champions for effective implementation. The Cultural Diversity Staff Network and our CDCs are also key stakeholders in the creation and implementation of our Anti-Racism Action Plan.
- An Internal Working Group was set up earlier this year (2023), to assist in the creation, monitoring, and delivery of the EDI Strategy and the Anti-Racism Action Plan. The group has representation across all services to provide service area expertise and representation across management and staff networks.
- An online Member workshop took place that shared key information around the draft EDI Strategy and the emerging priorities. This provided an opportunity for Councillors to help frame our EDI priorities for the next four years and discuss EDI challenges and opportunities within Brent.
- Staff Survey for all staff took place 13 November - 8 December 2023, incorporated EDI questions, and the results will be fed into the Strategy. This will provide an opportunity to gauge the level of commitment staff feel the organisation has towards EDI and the awareness of the different initiatives and support available to all staff.
- Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) Strategic Working Group. This internal working group assists in the monitoring and evaluation of progress of Brent's action plan, against the six areas of workforce development provided by the WRES framework.
- Violence Against Women & Girls Delivery Group consider the Safer Brent Partnership's approach and progress in reducing violence against women in Brent and make recommendations for addressing these issues.

External Stakeholders

- The Brent Pensioners Forum brings older people together with organisations working on their behalf. The main purpose of this group is to represent the interests of older people.
- The Disability Forum is an interactive meeting for residents where a variety of topics are discussed and ideas shared. It is aimed at residents with a physical, developmental or a learning disability or those who in some way support or care for people with a disability.
- The Brent Multi-Faith Forum was established in 2003 with the intent of ensuring that the diverse faith communities of Brent are represented and considered.
- Brent Youth Parliament (BYP) is made up of young people aged between 10 and 19 (up to 25 for young people with special educational needs or disabilities) who represent their schools and youth groups.
- Brent Deaf Parents Group meets up once a month, offering a variety of workshops and discussion topics throughout the year.
- Middlesex Association of the Blind provide specialised services, care and facilities for the visually impaired.
- Brent residents open workshops in Stonebridge, Kingsbury, and Wembley (3 workshops) were open facilitated workshops for anyone living or working in Brent to express their concerns, issues and ideas around equity, diversity and inclusion issues across Brent.



Brent