



**North
Herts**
Council

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy

Foreword

Despite progress made on various equalities issues over recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic, closely followed by the Cost of Living crisis, has both highlighted and exacerbated serious health and economic inequalities within our communities, and these are likely to deepen during the next months and years. As well as this, other forms of disadvantage, discrimination and inequality continue to exist, and manifest themselves in many different ways and in a range of contexts every single day.

The Council has a key role to play in advancing equality, fostering good relations between different groups within our community, and helping those who are disadvantaged to feel heard, represented and given practical help and support in our systems of local democracy and the decisions that are made here.

Beyond equality and the duties placed on us by The Equality Act, working to improve diversity and inclusion can make a significant difference to the experiences of our residents, staff and councillors, helping them feel welcome and valued for their differences.

Over the last year, I have been particularly proud of North Herts' response to welcoming and supporting refugees from Ukraine, and of all the other work we have undertaken to engage with a wide range of communities. We want everyone to have the ability to actively participate in local democracy and civic life, and to feel that the Council both represents and supports them. This is vital as a large contributor towards our Council objective of putting People First.

I am therefore pleased to introduce the Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy for 2022-2027. The Strategy sets out our objectives within the district, as a promoter of electoral democracy, and as an employer.

Cllr Judi Billing MBE

(Executive Member for Community Engagement May 2019 – November 2022)

1. Introduction

This Strategy sets out North Herts Council's approach to equality, diversity and Inclusion and builds on our previous Corporate Equality Strategy (2017), demonstrating our continued commitment towards fulfilling our legal obligations as set out in the Equality Act 2010, as well as striving to go beyond our legal duties in advancing equality, celebrating diversity, and promoting inclusion across our services and workforce.

We recognise that disadvantage and discrimination are still experienced across the district and that people may experience more than one form of discrimination at some stage in their lives. North Herts Council are resolute that disadvantage and discrimination have no place in our district, and we will work within our powers to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups, to work towards a brighter future together.

As an employer, the Council is committed to equality of opportunity and recognises the benefits of a diverse workforce and inclusive culture. This can help all staff feel valued, and allows for a wide-range of skills, ideas, and perspectives, and a better knowledge and understanding of the different communities that make up North Herts.

This strategy sets out our vision for furthering equality, diversity, and inclusion at the council and within the district.

2. Understanding equality, diversity and inclusion

- **Equality** means that all individuals are treated fairly and have access to the same opportunities, resources, and services as others. Equal opportunities require equitable provisions.
- **Equity** means providing various levels of support and assistance depending on specific needs and abilities. This requires eliminating barriers which may prevent individuals from accessing equal opportunities, as well as providing appropriate support to ensure that equal outcomes are accessible to everyone. Individual needs may therefore need to be met in different ways.
- **Diversity** is the difference of characteristics between individuals. Diversity within the Council is employing, serving and engaging with people who have a range of different backgrounds, experiences, and ideas. We recognise, respect, and celebrate the added value that differences bring.
- **Inclusion** is actively providing equal access to opportunities and resources; ensuring that nobody is excluded or marginalised due to their identity, personal characteristics, or background. An inclusive environment is one where everyone feels welcomed, valued, able to contribute, and able to succeed.

3. Scope: Who does the strategy apply to?

This Policy applies to all those who live, work in, and visit North Hertfordshire.

This includes:

- Elected Members / Councillors
- Council Employees, volunteers, agency workers, consultants
- Suppliers, sub-contractors, and partners in supply chain
- Residents of North Hertfordshire / North Herts Council's service-users

We all have a right to be treated fairly, with dignity and respect. We are also each responsible for ensuring that our own actions and behaviours are fair and that we respect the dignity of others.

4. Our Legal responsibilities

North Herts Council will continue to fulfil all legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act'). This key piece of legislation protects people from discrimination based on nine protected characteristics:

- Age • Disability • Gender Reassignment • Race • Religion or Belief (including lack of belief) • Sex • Sexual Orientation • Pregnancy and Maternity • Marriage and Civil Partnership

The Act legally protects people from direct and indirect discrimination, both in the workplace, and in wider society. The Act sets out that it is unlawful to treat someone in a way that discriminates, harasses, or victimises because of a protected characteristic. The Act also sets out duties and provisions to ensure the promotion of equality in public services.

SIDE NOTE: 'Public authorities also need to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership

status. This means that the first aim of the duty applies to this characteristic but that the other aims (advancing equality and fostering good relations) do not apply.’)

4.1 Public Sector Equality Duty

The General Equality Duty under the Act requires public authorities to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work. This includes policymaking, service delivery, and in relation to employees.

The General Equality Duty requires the majority of public bodies, including councils, to have due regard to the need to:

- **Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act**
- **Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

This means:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Take steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encourage people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life, or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

This means:

- Tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups.

Having ‘due regard’ means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. To make this consideration fairly and transparently, we conduct equality analyses on all decisions taken by Council, Cabinet, Committee, or delegated decision. This means that for each decision we examine the potential outcomes, impacts, and unintended consequences for the various groups and individuals who may be affected, and whether it will be fully effective. Doing this helps us understand how a decision should be revised and improved to mitigate or avoid possible negative effects. As well as complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, this works towards our Council objectives of putting ‘People First’ and ‘A Brighter Future Together’, and implementing decisions which have a positive impact on our residents.

To help us understand residents’ views, the Council regularly holds consultations on various issues and proposals. Where relevant those participating in consultation will be asked to provide information on their personal characteristics. This is done voluntarily, with no obligation to provide the information. Where information is provided it will enable us to understand the extent to which our services are accessible to different groups of residents and support us in conducting these equality analyses.

The Council will use any data provided sensitively and in accordance with the Data Protection Act and with our Data Protection Policy. Information given will never be used to identify an individual.

We also conduct and publish an annual Corporate Cumulative Equality Impact Assessment of all decisions which identify equality implications, which allows us to monitor trends and comply with the General Equality Duty. We will provide updates on our equality objectives as part of this review.

4.2 Specific Duties

The Council, as well as other public bodies, is also subject to The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017. The specific duties require the Council to:

- Publish gender pay gap information
- Publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general equality duty
- Set equality objectives, at least every four years.

North Herts Council will continue to fulfil our general obligations under the Act. This includes:

- Adherence to the statutory codes drafted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- The duty to make reasonable adjustments
- The provisions relating to enforcement
- The provisions relating to positive action
- The general and specific public sector equality duties

5. Who is responsible for equalities?

Equality is the responsibility of every Councillor, employee of North Herts Council, and any other person or organisation employed by the Council to work or to deliver services on its behalf.

The Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) agenda is designed to be embedded at the core of service delivery and our organisational culture. Each service area and every staff member therefore have a role to play in taking responsibility to advance equality and challenge discrimination.

- Elected Members will promote our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion in their day-to-day work.
- The Council has a responsibility towards its elected Members, including supporting policies which enable and encourage diversity amongst those standing for election, and considering adaptations that can be made to local democracy systems to support participation of our members (e.g Councillor Parental Leave Policy).
- The Leadership Team and the Inclusion Group¹ will be responsible for overall management and direction of EDI commitments.
- The Corporate Policy Team will oversee this policy, monitor progress against our objectives, and provide an annual cumulative equality assessment.
- Managers will ensure that EDI is core to service delivery and employee management.
- Contractors, suppliers and potential suppliers will be expected to adhere to our EDI commitments and the statutory duties relating to this.

¹ The officer-lead Inclusion Group seeks to drive the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda forward within the organisation. The Group is open to all officers and aims to gain an understanding of the perspective of all employees and what can be done to make the Council more inclusive. This includes the experiences of those who share a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The group is also able to feedback and propose actions to the Leadership Team.

- Staff will be aware of the Council values, and duties under the Act, and will work to uphold the principles of reducing discrimination and harassment and fostering good relations between different groups of people.
- Our service users also have a responsibility to treat our staff with dignity and respect, and to let us know if they require assistance or adjustments to enable them to better access our services.

Promoting diversity, preventing inequality, and tackling discrimination is not solely the responsibility of the Council. We will also work with wider partnerships and organisations to promote an equal and inclusive approach across the whole of the District.

6. Our Commitment

Beyond our legal obligations, and as part of delivering our council priorities, we are committed to embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion into all areas of our work. This commitment includes ensuring that we are welcoming and accessible to all our residents; that we promote equality, diversity, and inclusion amongst our staff and elected Members; that we consider how to best engage with seldom heard groups and recognise that some EDI issues relate to characteristics not covered by the Act (e.g socio-economic status); and that we remain open to ideas and feedback from Members, employees, and residents as to how we can further progress EDI.

Our commitment is underpinned by the current People First priority, laid out in the Council Plan². This priority states that we value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do. By fulfilling this commitment, we strive towards our Council priority of A Brighter Future Together.

7. Our Objectives

Following feedback from our recent engagement work, we propose objectives around two key groups within the community, each of whom share a protected characteristic as defined by the Act; as well as objectives around the council as an employer and the way we measure the impacts of our work:

1. Work with young people through youth engagement to make it easier for them to have their voices heard in local decision-making and democracy.
2. Improve our engagement with marginalised, seldom heard, and new communities to make it easier for them to participate in local decision-making and democracy, and to have their views and experiences heard by the council.

These groups may include but are not limited to:

Black and minority ethnic groups; refugees and asylum seekers; disabled people.

3. Improve our understanding of broader EDI issues and their impacts, such as neurodiversity and economic disadvantage; as well as the intersections between inequalities, using our Inclusion Group as a channel.
4. Achieve consistency in measuring the likely equality impacts of our emerging policies and services.

We recognise the need for leadership, commitment, and engagement from elected Members and staff at various levels to drive forward our objectives, as well as the need to find new ways of engaging with our communities to meet our first two objectives.

² [Council Plan page](#)

8. Measures

Objective	Measures
1. Work with young people through youth engagement to make it easier for them to have their voices heard in local decision-making and democracy.	Engage with 20 youth organisations per year. Schools' visits with Councillors on a termly basis.
2. Improve our engagement with marginalised, seldom heard, and new communities to make it easier for them to participate in local decision-making and democracy, and to have their views and experiences heard by the Council.	Engage with 40 organisations representing marginalised/new/seldom heard groups per year. Support events which provide a platform for the experiences of marginalised, new, and/or seldom heard communities.
3. Improve our understanding of broader EDI issues and their impacts, such as neurodiversity and economic disadvantage; as well as the intersections between inequalities, using our Inclusion Group as a channel.	Inclusion Group meeting focused on neurodiversity during 2023/24. Inclusion Group review of topics for consideration during 2023/24.
4. Achieve consistency in measuring the likely equality impacts of our emerging policies and services.	Development of a Council-wide approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) during 2023/24.

9. Conclusion

The council is committed to continuing the advancement of equality, diversity, and inclusion across our services and workforce. We will continue to reflect upon our past actions and decisions and seek feedback from our residents, service users, and employees to enable us to think further about how we can drive forward this agenda over the coming years. This Strategy will be reviewed as relevant legislation and developments arise.

APPENDICES:

A: Progress to Date

B: Equality Profile of North Herts (Protected characteristics)