

CABINET
13th December 2022

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: North Herts Council’s Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027

REPORT OF: *Policy and Communities Manager*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Executive Member of Community Engagement*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST; A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report proposes a refreshed Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy and revised Equality objectives to comply with the specific duty to publish one or more as set out by the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Cabinet be recommended to:

2.2. Approve the Council’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027 as attached at Appendix 1.

2.3. Approve the Equality objectives as set out below:

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.
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.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The previous Corporate Equality Strategy (2017) was revised to ensure consistency with the latest public sector equality legislation and obligations. The refresh of the Strategy reflects the Council’s ongoing commitment to fulfil our legal obligations as set out in the Equality Act and to set out the new equality objectives.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 That the Strategy remains as it is. The Strategy would not align with the current relevant Council priorities with the Council plan (People First and A Brighter Future Together). Additionally, since 2017 the environment in which councils operate has substantially altered - i.e., the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 No external consultation has been undertaken in preparation of this report. The Executive Member for Community Engagement (Cllr Judi Billing), The Leader of the Council, Corporate Policy team, and Service Director for Legal and Community were consulted on the revisions of the Strategy.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 14th February 2022.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The original Corporate Equality Strategy was agreed in 2009. The Strategy was further amended in 2017 to include any references to the Public Sector Equality Duty and the obligations that it placed on public bodies when shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to employees. The previous iterations did not also reflect the demographic changes of the community since they were published. Specifically, the Census data of 2011 and latest Office for National Statistics data.
- 7.2. Following the sad passing of Cllr Judi Billing MBE, the foreword for this Strategy stands as a tribute to her work as the Executive Member for Community Engagement, and a reminder of her passion for equality and the communities she served. This passion is captured in the Strategy and its objectives, which stand as only a small part of Judi's legacy.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty was created by the Equality Act 2010, and replaces the race, disability and gender equality duties. It is supported by the specific duties contained in The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, which have replaced the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011.
- 8.2 The Strategy and objectives commit the Council to deliver good practice on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as a community leader, service provider and employer. As a statutory document it sets out the scope, legal responsibilities (both general and specific), commitment and equality objectives.
- 8.3 The Strategy proposes the following Equality objectives:
- Work with young people through youth engagement to make it easier for them to have their voices heard in local decision-making and democracy.

- 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.

- 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.
- Achieve consistency in measuring the likely equality impacts of our emerging policies and services.

8.4 In direct reference to these objectives the Strategy also proposes the following 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 during 2023/24.

8.5 Our commitment is underpinned by the current People First priority and the Brighter Future Together priority, laid out in the Council Plan¹. These priorities states that we value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything; and that we plan for the long-term so that the district continues to thrive.

¹ [Council Plan page](#)

- 8.6 The formation of 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 a greater understanding of the perspective of all employees. 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.
- 8.7 Further information also accompanies this report to assist Members, in the form of Appendix B – Progress to Date, Appendix C – EDI Strategy glossary and Appendix D – Equality profile of North Hertfordshire (the last being partly based on the new 2021 census data, as the ONS is yet to publish some of the data sets).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.6.1 the exercise of the following function "to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council".
- 9.2 Listed authorities are required to prepare and publish one or more objectives which they consider they should achieve the aims as set out in paragraph (a) to (c) of subsection (1) of s.149 of the Act (i.e., to eliminate discrimination, harassment victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act, advance opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no direct revenue, capital or financial implications arising from this report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 NHDC strives to offer equality of opportunity in its service provision. Public authorities are legally obliged to promote this equality of provision and not to merely avoid discrimination. There is a risk if this provision is not offered then non-compliance with legislation could lead to the EHRC taking steps to encourage compliance before moving to enforcement, as outlined above. This is also the potential unequal treatment of staff and the wider North Hertfordshire community. As such, the Council would not be able to achieve its commitment of achieving equality of opportunity as an employer, a provider of services and as a community leader.
- 11.2 As long as the Council has a robust strategy and processes in place to demonstrate that due regard is being shown, then the risk of non-compliance is well managed.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 The Equality Strategy directly demonstrates the Council's obligation to show due regard to equality legislation in its decision-making process and service provision. As part of this

ongoing function, Equality Impact assessments (EqIA) will be conducted throughout the civic year.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The Corporate Policy team have responsibility for the maintenance of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy and other specific corporate actions. The other Council actions identified in the Strategy are / will become a part of the services provided to the community. The formation of the officer lead Inclusion group seeks to drive the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda forward within the organisation. This is supported by existing officer resource.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – North Herts Council Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy
Appendix B – Progress to Date
Appendix C – EDI Strategy glossary
Appendix D – Equality profile of North Hertfordshire

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Council plan 2022 -2027– [Council Plan | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/council-plan)

Corporate Equality Strategy 2017- 2022 - [Equality and diversity | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://north-herts.gov.uk)

Public Sector Equality Act 2010 - [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://legislation.gov.uk)