

REPORT TO COUNCILLOR SUE GOWER MBE, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND HOUSING – 19 DECEMBER 2022

DRAFT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY – AUTHORITY TO CONSULT

Decision ref: CH 03-22/23

ISSUES

The draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy sets out three equality objectives for the next four years.

The draft policy is attached as an appendix.

OPTIONS

The Cabinet Member is asked to consider the following options:

- o To grant authority for officers to undertake formal public consultation with residents, partners and stakeholders on the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- o Not to grant authority to undertake formal public consultation on the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

DECISION

That the Cabinet Member approves this draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for formal consultation from 6 January 2023, for an 8-week period.

REASONS

Formal consultation on the draft Policy will ensure that it is shaped by residents from all backgrounds and raise visibility on the importance of the Council's work to promote equality.

Signed: Councillor Sue Gower MBE
Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing

Date: 19 December 2022

LAST DATE FOR CALL-IN: 5 January 2023

REPORT TO COUNCILLOR SUE GOWER MBE, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND HOUSING – 16 DECEMBER 2022

1. BACKGROUND

We are required by the Equality Act 2010 to publish at least one equality objective every four years.

In 2018, following a public consultation, we published our [Equality Policy 2018-2022](#). This set out two specific equality objectives, focused on developing our community leadership role, and reducing the educational attainment gap. A full report on progress on delivering this policy was provided to Cabinet in November 2021.

This policy has now reached the end of its term. We have drafted a refreshed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (the Policy), which sets three new equality objectives for the next four years.

We have made good progress on equality and inclusion over the last four years. However, there is much more to be done to reduce disparities, in the borough and in our workforce, and to help enable everyone in Bexley to reach their full potential.

The disproportionate impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and current rising inflation on some groups highlights the continued importance of acting to address inequality.

We are not legislatively required to run a public consultation on the Policy. However, the Policy will be most effective if it is informed by feedback from residents of all backgrounds, including residents from traditionally under-reached groups. Consulting will give us valuable insights on diverse groups' experiences and views. This will strengthen our qualitative evidence base and be helpful for wider equalities and policy work, as well as service planning.

Consulting on equality issues is in line with best practice as recommended by the Local Government Association. It is also a way to signal to residents that we are committed to promoting equality.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLICY

The Policy (attached as an appendix) is an overarching strategic document, setting out three equality objectives, outcomes under each objective, five guiding principles, and highlights some of the equalities work we are already doing. It relates to the borough and the workforce.

We have closely aligned the Policy with the Bexley Plan 2022-2026 which sets 'We believe in a fairer Bexley' as a guiding principle and embeds equality across the commitments made.

The Policy sets three equality objectives:

1. We will work with our partners to reduce inequalities between people and places in the borough, and champion equality.
2. We will commission and deliver effective and inclusive services that meet the needs of all residents.
3. We will recruit, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects our population.

The Policy is informed by:

- Data on Bexley's population and workforce, broken down by protected characteristic.
- The Tackling Racial Inequalities in our Communities Scrutiny Project Sub-Group final report and recommendations.
- Our participation in the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) pilot and accompanying Action Plan.
- Feedback from staff networks and Equality and Inclusion Steering Group.
- The Local Government Association's [Equality Framework for Local Government](#)
- [Inclusive Britain](#), the government's response to the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report.
- Analysis of other local authorities' equality strategies and approaches.

The Policy will be accompanied by an Action Plan for officers which we are continuing to develop and which the consultation responses will inform. This will ensure that our objectives are embedded in our day-to-day work and are met.

The refreshed Policy has retained many elements of the previous policy, including a focus on partnership working and embedding equalities considerations in all decision-making.

A key development is that the refreshed Policy also aims to tackle socio-economic inequalities, in addition to the nine protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010. There are numerous socio-economic factors underpinning and reinforcing deprivation and inequalities, such as low-income, job insecurity, and poor housing.

The Equality and Inclusion Officer Steering Group will provide strategic oversight of the policy and monitor progress made against it.

3. TIMESCALES FOR CONSULTATION AND ADOPTION OF POLICY

| Milestone | Date |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Authority to consult call-in period (5 days) | 23 December 2022 – 5 January 2023 |
| Consultation starts (8-week period) | 6 January 2023 |

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Consultation closes | 1 March 2023 |
| Consideration of survey responses and feedback | March 2023 |
| Public Cabinet | 18 April 2023 |

4. CONSULTATION

Subject to the approval from the Cabinet Member, consultation will take place between 6 January and 3 March 2023.

We propose to run an online consultation. We will publish a PDF of the draft Policy, alongside an online form.

The consultation will be open to everyone living, working or studying in Bexley, as well as organisations in Bexley. We aim to get respondents from all backgrounds and across all protected characteristics.

To make the consultation as accessible as possible to everyone, we will:

- A. Provide an Easy Read version, to enable people with learning disabilities to participate.
- B. Offer to provide copies of the policy and consultation in different languages upon request.
- C. Provide hard-copy versions of the consultation at Civic Offices and Central Library to enable residents that don't have digital skills or equipment to participate.
- D. Use images showing residents from diverse backgrounds to promote the consultation.

Responses to the consultation will be considered in the production of the final document. A final report will then be prepared for Public Cabinet to seek approval of the final policy.

Communicating the consultation

We will promote the consultation via our communications channels (website, social media e-newsletters and posters in libraries) and will circulate it to our partners via our partnership boards and to our network of community champions.

We will also promote it to the voluntary sector via the Bexley Voluntary Sector Council's newsletter and Partnership Forum. Officers will also offer to meet with interested organisations to discuss.

5. SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the consultation will be contained within existing budgets.

6. SUMMARY OF LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed consultation has been designed in alignment with the Gunning consultation principles:

- Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage;
- Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response;
 - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
 - The product of consultation must be conscientiously considered.

6. SUMMARY OF OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equality Opportunities

The proposal set out in this report should have a positive impact on promoting equality and fulfilling our obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

A full equality impact assessment will be undertaken on the policy.

Community Safety

The draft policy is connected to our work on promoting safe and strong communities and tackling discrimination and hate crime.

Environmental Impact

There are no environmental impact implications arising from this report.

Human Rights

The policy and proposed consultation will be delivered in accordance with human rights legislation.

Health and Wellbeing of the Borough

The draft policy is connected to the council's work on tackling health inequalities and we expect that the draft policy will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the borough.

Asset Management

There are no asset management implications arising from this report.

Data privacy

The policy and proposed consultation will be delivered in accordance with data privacy legislation.

List of background documents

Equality Act 2010

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Public Sector Equality Duty

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty>

Local Government Association Equality Framework

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/equality-frameworks/equality-framework-local-government>

Overview and Scrutiny Committee report

APPENDIX:

1. Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Contact Officers: Julia Owen, Head of Strategy, Performance and Complaints

Reporting to: Paul Thorogood, Director, Finance and Corporate Services