

Tower Hamlets Equality Policy 2023-2027

Our vision for Equality

Our vision for Equality is to build a strong, inclusive and fair borough addressing inequalities through our work and ensuring that our workforce reflects the community. Our equality policy sets out a clear commitment to ensure equality is at the heart of everything we do from the money we spend and the people we employ, to the community we serve and services we provide. The policy applies to all aspects of the council's functions including: our partnerships, services, commissioning, community engagement and our workforce.

For many years new communities have settled in Tower Hamlets, because of the opportunities to trade, do business and raise their families, creating a vibrant and diverse borough. One of the borough's biggest strengths is its proud history of fighting racism and fascism and its continued commitment to diversity. Our aspiration is to celebrate our diverse communities as a key asset, collaborating with partners to have a positive impact on residents and support them to reach their potential in all areas. We will use lived experience and data to understand the root causes of the challenges our communities are facing, especially – but not exclusively – those with protected characteristics. We will utilise this insight and engagement to co-produce and shape solutions in partnership with residents. Our ambition is to ensure that our leadership and workforce represent the community we serve and that decision making considers the impact on our communities.

Tower Hamlets has a public sector Equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- To advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

As part of this duty we publish [equality information](#) about our employees and residents who share a protected characteristic and to prepare and publish equality objectives. We use this information to support evidence-based decision-making and regularly review and update our objectives. We will regularly publish our performance on delivering our equality objectives and the good work undertaken by the council and its partners.

We shall research a range of issues that could affect opportunity, such as socio-economic and educational backgrounds and financial circumstances. Where these factors contribute to lack of equal opportunity for our residents, visitors, and workforce, we shall take measures to address them.

This will involve developing policies that address the inequality encountered by people who are non-binary and transgender.

Also, we are aware of the special circumstances of care-leavers and will take measures where appropriate to redress the disadvantage that may arise.

We will seek to support and promote the invaluable work and the huge contribution of the faith communities in Tower Hamlets and ensure that they are protected and encouraged by the Council.

We will also continue to work with our trade union colleagues in this important area of work.

Understanding our community

In order to understand our community and their needs we undertake regular Borough Equality Assessments (BEA) aligned with the key outcome areas of our Strategic Plan. The data below is taken from our BEA, the detailed information can be found [here](#). These assessments will be updated based on the census 2021 data which is being released through 2022-23.

Tower Hamlets is a borough of contrasts, with one of the fastest growing, youngest and most diverse populations in the UK, and it is the most densely populated borough in England and Wales.

It is a borough with phenomenal opportunity and resource, though this resource is unequally shared. The economic output in 2017 was £29.7bn more than Birmingham or the City of Manchester, however 86% of jobs were filled by non-residents and the ethnic employment gap for Tower Hamlets was twice as wide as that for London (-27% compared to -12.5%) (2016-19).

Women are at higher risk of experiencing particular challenges in the borough. In the year to February 2020 Tower Hamlets had the 5th highest rate of Domestic Violence Offences in London, data from the previous year shows that the majority of survivors were female (74% in 18/19), the majority of perpetrators, (92% in 18/19), were male. Further, the female employment rate is considerably lower than the male employment rate, at 61% and 85% respectively (2016-19). This is particularly pronounced for Black, Asian and multi-ethnic women in the borough for whom the employment rate is only 38%.

While deprivation has decreased in the borough, it remains a key challenge facing our residents, further compounded by the current cost of living crisis. According to the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation 60% of the borough still live in the 30% most deprived parts of England, and deprivation is higher amongst children and older people than the general population. Tower Hamlets has by far the highest proportion of older people in receipt of adult social care in England (2018/19). According to the DWP, more than a quarter of children (26.7%) in Tower Hamlets were living in poverty in 2022, equating to 15,385 children.

Two ethnic groups, Bangladeshi and Somali, have been identified as key groups of focus for the borough, due to the specific challenges these communities are facing. Bangladeshi residents were the largest ethnic group in the 2021 Census making up 34.6% of residents, Somali residents made up 2% of the resident population, the

largest black group (though not all Somali residents self-identify as Black). The specific challenges facing Bangladeshi and Somali residents will be updated based on 2021 Census data and made publicly available through the borough profiles and BEA.

Our commitment to equality

Utilising our evidence-based assessment of community needs, we have agreed our key Equality Objectives as set out in our [Strategic Plan](#), recognising that the diversity of our borough is a key asset and something to celebrate, we plan to:

1. Work with communities across the borough to bring people together from different backgrounds and promote understanding.
2. Uphold and protect equality and diversity in all circumstances.
3. Address inequalities particularly those faced by Bangladeshi and Somali communities.
4. Improve safety and opportunities for women.
5. Ensure our workforce reflects the community.

These objectives will be delivered through a Corporate Equalities Plan which will set out our areas of focus and ensure our work leads to improving outcomes for local people.

Putting the policy into practice

Equality is embedded throughout the council's plans, services and activities and is a key driver for everything we do.

We outline the ways in which we will achieve this.

As a council we will:

- Co-produce our services with the community to ensure services meet local needs and are fully accessible, checking any issues in service take-up through equality monitoring.
- Utilise research and evidence to understand the needs of our communities, undertaking [equality impact assessments \(EIA\)](#) to realise the impact of our decision making.
- Ensure our partnerships and suppliers share our commitments to equality, through the procurement process and in providing services for example community events and celebrations promoting cohesion.
- Bring the community into our processes, inviting residents – especially those who are underrepresented – to share their priorities and concerns, for example by inviting those with lived experience to scrutiny panels.
- Commit to continuous improvement, by inviting, listening to and acting on feedback and modelling on the best practice of others for example, other councils.

As a service provider we will:

- Work to provide opportunities for the local community, addressing inequalities in access to services and outcomes by those with protected characteristics and those with common characteristics which are not formally protected but which are important to us.
- Ensure our services celebrate the diversity of the local community, respond to the changing needs of residents and are delivered without discrimination, prejudice or bias.
- Make our services, buildings and information about our services, accessible – particularly to those at higher risk of disadvantage or discrimination.
- We shall treat service users fairly and equally, and we shall empower people to be aware of their rights and entitlements.
- Promote social integration and cohesion through our services and ensure that external contractors comply with our equality policy.
- Address inequalities in access to service provision by protected characteristics or groups and by groups with characteristics which are not formally protected but which are important to us.

As an employer:

The council aims to provide an inclusive and accessible working environment for existing and potential employees, one that is free from harassment and discrimination, where individual values, beliefs, identities and cultures are respected and celebrated. We aim to have a workforce that fully reflects, at all levels, the rich diversity of the community of Tower Hamlets and addresses areas of inequality – protected and otherwise.

The Council has a zero tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment, both in terms of how staff treat each other and our residents, and in return we expect our staff to be treated with respect – we will not tolerate discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards our staff.

All council employees are responsible for complying with this policy.

We will refresh our separate policy on the Workforce to Reflect the Community, which will include:

- Be an employer where local people choose to work and make good careers.
- Work towards a workforce that reflects the community at all levels of the organisation.
- Tackle inequality, including racial inequality, through our work to be an anti-racist employer and borough.
- Tackle areas of under-representation within the workforce, using disaggregated data to put in place targeted actions.
- Work to close our pay gaps, in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation.
- Promote our code of conduct and TOWER values to ensure we treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Provide equality & diversity training for staff, including as part of our new starter induction and ensure all staff complete this as part of annual mandatory training.

- Ensure staff can access confidential reporting systems, for those who may face bullying, harassment, prejudice and/or discrimination.
- Undertake regular staff surveys to help identify equality, diversity and inclusion trends or issues.
- Ensure that we consider individuals' needs and make reasonable adjustments where appropriate to remove barriers for disabled people.
- Implement and review our policies to support the health and well-being of our staff and promote well-being at work.
- Take action to protect employees who are at risk of violence while carrying out their duties.
- Ensure staff can safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and adults.
- Facilitate and support staff networks.
- Publish workforce information including the gender pay gap and use evidence to develop initiatives and interventions to address equality issues.
- Develop, review and promote policies and practices that ensure equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination in the workforce.

Roles and Responsibilities

Individuals and groups have specific roles in meeting our equality, diversity and inclusion responsibilities.

There is a clear infrastructure to help deliver equality in the council.

- **The Mayor and Cabinet:** Set the priorities for the council which focuses on tackling inequality, protecting vulnerable residents and ensuring Tower Hamlets is a great place to live work study and visit. The Mayor and Cabinet are also responsible for equality considerations in their decision making.
- **Councillors:** Represent the views of their communities and bring their views into the council's decision making process in their role as community leaders.
- **Corporate Leadership Team:** Provide visible leadership on equality ensuring it is embedded into policy, strategy and delivery as well as ensuring that the council is meeting its duty under the Act.
- **Corporate Equality Board:** Members include directors and representatives of each of our staff networks. The board aims to strengthen equality practice across the organisation and support activities and initiatives that help address inequality in the borough.
- **Directorate Leadership Teams:** Directorate leadership teams will maintain an overview for the directorate and ensure effective development, implementation and monitoring of service equality objectives and related actions; as part of business and service plans.

- **Officers of the council:** Officers are expected to have an understanding of equality and embed relevant policy and practice into service delivery. Our corporate values are an integral part of this ensuring we work Together, are Open, Willing, Empower and Respect everyone (TOWER). Our values underpin everything that the council does including our work with partners to improve the quality of life for everyone who studies, works and lives in Tower Hamlets.

The Strategy, Improvement & Transformation Division is responsible for ensuring this policy is embedded across the organisation, reviewed, and updated.

Equality Monitoring and Benchmarking

Under our legal duty we are committed to collecting equality data providing intelligence about employees and residents to better understand the needs of those who use our services, the people we employ and the money we spend. Visit the [equality monitoring](#) page for more information.

We have signed up to the Tackling Racial Inequality Programme's pilot scheme, coordinated by London Councils, to tackle racial inequalities designed to demonstrate visible leadership on the race equality agenda, both within authorities, but also across partnerships and our 'places'.

The council is a disability confident employer, meets the Race at Work Charter and submits on an annual basis to the Stonewall Index.

We also use our staff equality monitoring data to benchmark ourselves against other London boroughs, focusing on representation within the workforce as a whole and amongst the top 5% of earners.

We also monitor and publish pay gap information in relation to gender, ethnicity (which includes average hourly rates by ethnicity band), disability and sexual orientation, as well as the average hourly differences for Religion/Belief and Age

What happens when things go wrong?

As a council we recognise that sometimes our collective or individual decisions or actions may not meet the standards we have set out.

We expect our work and all colleagues to demonstrate our commitment to Equality, and we do not tolerate discrimination, harassment or victimisation. All customers have the ability to feed back on an experience with the council both positive and negative – comments, compliments and complaints can be made [here](#).