

Appendix 1

Tower Hamlets Council Equality Policy

December 2019

Review date 2022



What is this document?

The equality policy sets out a clear commitment to ensure equality is at the heart of everything we do from the money we spend, the people we employ, to the services we provide.

The policy applies to all aspects of the council's functions including:

- Development of policy and strategy
- Provision of services
- Commissioning and purchasing of goods and services
- Recruitment, employment, training and development of staff
- Grants to voluntary and community organisations
- Landlord functions in respect of housing and other property
- Exercise of statutory powers and responsibilities
- Partnerships with other organisations
- Community involvement
- Consultation with local people
- Communication and publicity

Why is this important?

The council has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Tower Hamlets is a dynamic place where a thriving economy co-exists with high levels of poverty. Through this policy we are working to make our borough a safer, cleaner and fairer place to live and improve outcomes for local people, reduce dependency on public services and enable people to live more independent and fulfilled lives.

Understanding our community and meeting its needs

Tower Hamlets is a borough of contrasts. As with any inner city area, we face issues including crime, pollution with a transient and changing community. The borough is the second most densely populated local authority in the country. Almost 19,000 people are on our housing waiting list – the second highest in London – and 35,110 additional homes are needed over the next decade. It is a place of contrasts and contradictions where a thriving economy co-exists with high levels of poverty. There are great disparities of wealth with one in four residents living below the poverty line. The average household income of our most wealthy ward is more than double that of our poorest.

Our borough has significant health problems and has the lowest life expectancy rates in London (disability-free) and 43 per cent of Year 6 children are overweight or obese. Tower Hamlets experiences the third highest emissions of air pollution which contribute to the average lung capacity of our children being 10 per cent smaller than other parts of the UK.

Tower Hamlets is diverse which is one of its greatest strengths. The borough's position in the heart of London makes it a desirable place to live and work contributing to its unique make up as outlined below:

- The 16th most ethnically diverse local authority in England.
- One of the fastest growing populations in England: expected to reach 365,200 by 2027.
- The 3rd highest economic output in the UK.
- The 50th most deprived local authority in England.
- The largest Bangladeshi population in the country who comprise 1 in 3 residents.
- The 4th youngest population in the country.
- Half of all residents aged 60+ live below the poverty line (three times the national rate).
- Highest rates of child poverty in England at 32.5%.

Our commitment to equality

The council is committed to creating cohesive communities that are strong, fair and inclusive. We want Tower Hamlets to be a place where people have equal access to opportunities and where inequality is actively tackled. We recognise that we can only do this by working with our partners to advance equality, promote good community relations and tackle discrimination.

We know the diversity of our community is one of our greatest strengths and assets. We value the strength that comes with difference and the positive contribution that diversity brings to our community. The council will build upon this by working with our partners to provide accessible and responsive services that enable everyone to take part in the social, cultural and economic wealth of the borough. We are committed to using our leadership role to understand and meet the needs our community.

We recognise and accept that discrimination means some people may have not had equal access to services or employment or fair chances in life. Therefore we support the view that it may be necessary to develop or create some services or opportunities to specifically meet different needs. We know that discrimination can be institutionalised and are committed to combating any unintended institutional discrimination by developing an anti-discriminatory organisational culture, placing equality at the centre of everything we do.

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. Outlined below are the ways in which we will achieve this.

As a Community Leader we will:

- Advance equality of opportunity by undertaking equality analysis to assess the impact of our decisions on our community.
- Foster good relations between local people through commissioning and organising events and celebrations to promote community cohesion.
- Work with partners to address borough priorities including equality issues to tackle prejudice and discrimination.

- Actively engage with the local community through communication and consultation to ensure that our services meet local needs and are fully accessible.
- Regularly review our population and its needs using information from analysis, consultation and surveys.
- Monitor and identify any issues in the access and take-up of council services through equality monitoring.
- Promote the community and voluntary sector and work with groups, individuals and organisations to provide culturally specific services, with equalities firmly embedded in those relationships and projects.
- Expect suppliers and contractors to fully comply with our equality policy statement and ensure it is embedded in our commissioning and procurement function.
- Encourage participation in local democracy and representation on various bodies and in our processes, from people who may normally feel free excluded from, or underrepresented in, our decision-making.
- Ensure we learn from best practice.

As a service provider we want:

- Service users to receive fair, sensitive and equal treatment when accessing services, and are treated with dignity and respect.
- Services to be relevant and responsive to the changing and diverse needs of our local population, and are delivered without discrimination, prejudice or bias.
- Our services, buildings and information to be fully accessible, particularly to those groups or individuals who face disadvantage or discrimination.
- Our services, buildings and information to promote social integration and cohesion.
- Information about our services and policies to be accessible.
- External contractors comply with our equality policy.
- Empower service users to be aware of their rights and entitlements when receiving services.

As an Employer

The council aims to provide a safe and accessible working environment for existing and potential employees, one that is free from harassment and discrimination, where individuals' values, beliefs, identities and cultures are respected. All council employees are responsible for complying with this policy and must follow it as part of their conditions of service.

Council staff must not discriminate against anyone, persuade another employee to discriminate, tolerate or condone discriminatory practices, harass or abuse other employees or members of the public - for any reason. In return we expect our staff to be treated with respect and we will not tolerate discriminatory or abusive behaviour towards our staff.

We will

- Be an employer where local people chose to work and make good careers. We want to have a workforce that best serves our community.
- Promote our code of conduct and values to ensure we act professionally and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

- Provide equality and diversity training for staff including as part of our induction training for all new starters.
- Ensure staff can access confidential reporting systems available for those who may face bullying, harassment, prejudice and/or discrimination.
- Undertake regular staff surveys to help identify equality and diversity trends or issues that may need addressing.
- Ensure that we consider individuals' needs and make reasonable adjustments where appropriate in order to remove barriers for disabled people and resolve issues relating to disability.
- 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. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- Facilitate and support staff networks, where there is demand for them.
- Publish workforce information including the differences in pay between men and women (the gender pay gap) and use it to develop initiatives and inventions to address equality issues including gender pay gap.
- Develop, review and promote policies and practices that ensure equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination in the workforce throughout all areas of employment (including recruitment, retention, learning and development, promotion, grievance, disciplinary and retirement).

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The council is committed to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') and in the exercise of its functions we will have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The protected characteristics set out in the Act are listed below:

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| • Age | • Pregnancy and Maternity |
| • Disability | • Race |
| • Gender reassignment | • Religion or belief |
| • Marriage and civil partnership | • Sex |
| | • Sexual orientation |

Annual publication of information

As part of the public sector equality duty the council has a specific duty to publish equality information about its employees and residents who share a protected characteristic. We are required to prepare and publish equality objectives and equality analysis that supports our decisions. The council is committed to publishing information that is accessible and helps us to shape interventions and meet the needs of our service users and community.

We will gather and publish information about the community and our workforce and use it to support evidence based decision-making as well as 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.

Equality Monitoring

As part of the council's legal duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 the council collects equality data about its residents and employees.

We are committed to collecting equality data that provides the council with intelligence about its employees and residents so that we can better understand needs of those who use our services, the people we employ and the money we spend.

Making it happen

Council priorities

The council's equality objectives are embedded in our key strategic priorities which provide a framework for everything we do. We have worked with our partners to develop our borough-wide Tower Hamlets Plan and the council's Strategic Plan each document has a set of priorities that ensure equality is embedded in everything we do as a council and with partners.

Our council priorities drive our performance management and accountability framework which is designed to demonstrate our progress. The council adopted an approach that focusses on improving outcomes for local people. Our key priorities are:

- Priority 1: People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities.
- Priority 2: A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in.
- Priority 3: A dynamic, outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough.

An annual equality report will set out our progress against our equality objective and will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet as part of Strategic Plan reporting and published on our website.

Roles and responsibilities

Individuals and groups have specific roles in meeting our equality and diversity responsibilities. There is a clear infrastructure to help deliver equality in the council.

The Mayor & 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 Councils 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: Chaired by the Chief Executive to progress the council's equalities work and meeting of its duties under the Act, 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: Staff 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, Policy and Performance service is responsible for ensuring this policy is embedded across the organisation, reviewed and updated.

Benchmarking

The council benchmarks itself against a number of external resources. As an employer the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index is used to measure progress on Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans inclusion. The council is a disability confident employer and accredited by the Mayor of London as a Healthy Workplace . We also use our staff equality monitoring data to benchmark ourselves against other London Boroughs.

As a service provider we compare ourselves against other Local Authorities and use the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) to review and improve performance across key performance areas which include knowing your communities; leadership, partnership and organisational commitment; involving your communities; responsive services and customer care; as well as a skilled and committed workforce.

What happens when things go wrong?

The council recognises that sometimes things go wrong or not how we had planned. When this happens it will seek to ensure it can put it right.

Complaints

We expect everyone who works for and with the council to demonstrate our commitment to equality. The council's aim is to make sure our customers, whether they are residents, visitors, or local businesses, have a positive experience. All customers have the right to access information and have the ability to contact the council to give feedback on an experience with the council or if they believe they are being discriminated against.

All complaints will be reviewed and responded to within 20 working days. If the response received is not satisfactory a final review can be requested and the previous decision will be reviewed to decide if it was fair and reasonable.

The council does not tolerate discrimination, harassment or victimisation and will take appropriate action.