

Equality Policy

May 2016



Human Resources

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1. Introduction

Brent Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and cohesion in everything we do – as a locality leader, as a provider and commissioner of services, and as an employer.

We aim to ensure that all our current and future residents, staff and stakeholders are treated fairly and receive appropriate services and equal opportunities regardless of their protected characteristics (age, disability, ethnicity (including nationality), gender, gender identity and expression, marital / civil partnership status, pregnancy / maternity, religion or belief, sexual orientation), childcare and/or caring responsibilities, health and income status.

2. Our Approach

The council's vision is to create opportunities for everyone who lives and works here to change their lives for the better. This vision is supported by the values of fairness, respect and excellence which are embedded and demonstrated in the delivery of our services and our approach to equality.

A commitment to equality and understanding of diversity are crucial to making our vision a reality. To ensure that all who live and work here have genuinely equal opportunities to improve their quality of life, we need to be mindful of how our policies and practices can affect people in different ways – because of their protected characteristics. We recognise that these factors shape not only our identities, but also our needs and our life outcomes.

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a Public Sector Equality Duty to make equality a greater part of the day-to-day business of public bodies. In carrying out all of our activities, Brent Council is required to consider how we can:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- encourage good relations between people from different groups.

Brent Council requires all decisions to take account of equalities considerations. We will carry out equality analysis of changes to policies, strategies and services to ensure that our policies and practices are fair, to help us to deliver the most effective and responsive services for local communities and to help us to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Brent will collect equalities information about our staff and residents to help us to:

- understand the needs of our diverse communities
- design policies and services which are effective and appropriate
- monitor our progress in meeting our equality objectives
- ensure we are treating people fairly
- demonstrate compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and other statutory duties.

3. Policy Statement

Policy summary

Brent is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; the council is determined to be an exemplar of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights. The equality policy underpins the above commitment and sets out how we will promote diversity and equality in everything that we do to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Brent.

As a provider and commissioner of services, we will:

- always treat every customer as an individual and with respect
- improve our knowledge and understanding of our communities so that we can ensure best quality services that are appropriate to the needs of our service users
- ensure that the potential impacts of our policies, services and decisions are assessed in order to deliver positive outcomes for residents and service users where possible
- ensure that all residents have equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process and feel that their voices are being heard
- ensure that our commitment to equality and diversity is integrated into procurement and commissioning processes and initiatives.

As an employer, we will:

- recruit, retain and reward a diverse, highly skilled, motivated and flexible workforce that is equipped to provide an excellent service to all our local communities
- use positive action measures to address the under-representation of any groups of people who share a protected characteristic in our workforce
- create an inclusive workplace where all of our diverse employees feel engaged and able to be themselves
- ensure that equality and diversity are integral to all employment policies, practices and procedures and that they are compliant with equalities legislation.

As a locality leader, we will:

- work with a wide range of partners to promote good relations between communities and address negative stereotyping of any groups
- build resilient, cohesive communities that take pride in and feel a sense of responsibility towards their neighbourhoods
- share good practice with partner agencies, local agencies and other relevant organisations
- tackle discrimination, harassment and victimisation relating to a person's protected characteristic/s.

To fulfil all of these commitments, we will ensure that Elected Members, senior managers and staff have a robust understanding of their responsibilities under equalities legislation.

4. Definitions and general information

Equality

Brent Council understands 'equality' to be about fair and equal treatment. Critically, this does not mean treating everyone the same. Instead, this requires us to focus on improving equality of outcomes for our residents and employees. We may need to respond to people in different ways in order to meet their particular needs and to address any disadvantages faced by people who share a protected characteristic.

Diversity

Brent Council understands 'diversity' to be about recognising and valuing difference. We believe that celebrating the rich diversity of our local community helps to make everyone feel valued and respected and to break down barriers between different groups. We are committed to recruiting, retaining and rewarding a diverse, highly skilled, motivated and flexible workforce that is equipped to provide an excellent service to all our local communities.

Resilient, cohesive communities

Brent Council aims to build resilient and cohesive communities. By 'resilient', we mean people and communities that are able to cope with changes in their lives and communities. By 'cohesive', we mean that people from different backgrounds will enjoy good relations and live and work comfortably together.

Protected characteristics

We use the term 'protected characteristics' to refer to the equality characteristics protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation in the Equality Act 2010. We recognise the important influence that the inter-relationship of these characteristics has on the identities, needs and outcomes of our residents and staff.

Discrimination

We use the term 'discrimination' to mean treating someone less favourably than someone else because of one of their protected characteristics. Forms of discrimination include:

- applying a rule, policy or practice to everyone in the same way, which has a worse effect on people with a certain protected characteristic compared to those without the characteristic – this is known as indirect discrimination
- treating someone less favourably than another person because of their association with someone with a protected characteristic
- treating someone less favourably than another person because you mistakenly think they have a protected characteristic
- positive discrimination, where someone is treated more favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic
- failing to make reasonable adjustments for disabled staff and residents.

Age

'Age' refers to people of a particular age or age range..

Brent Council is committed to tackling discrimination against younger people and older people. We recognise that negative attitudes and common stereotypes about these groups can lead to discriminatory behaviour towards them and to their ongoing social and economic disadvantage.

Brent Council will provide targeted services to meet the needs of people of particular ages, especially children and vulnerable older people. Brent will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that people of all ages receive best quality services that meet their needs. Brent will involve people of different ages in reviewing and making decisions about proposals and services that affect them.

Childcare and caring responsibilities

Brent Council recognises that many of our residents and staff have caring responsibilities for children or for ill, frail or disabled family members or friends who rely on them for care, attention and assistance with their daily routine. Caring responsibilities affect men, women and children. Many of these people will not consider themselves to be carers – they will think of themselves simply as a wife, husband, son, daughter, mum, dad or friend helping a loved one. These childcare or caring responsibilities may place an emotional, physical and financial strain on an individual.

As an employer, Brent Council recognises that people with childcare or caring responsibilities may need to work more flexibly and are entitled to time off for dependents to deal with unforeseen circumstances. We will accommodate these requests where operational need permits and where the matter is an emergency, we have to allow time off unpaid.

Disability

'Disability' refers to anyone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Brent recognises that many impairments are not visible.

Examples of disabilities include:

- physical impairments or illnesses that affect mobility, such as arthritis, multiple sclerosis or a stroke
- facial disfigurements
- sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing
- mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression
- learning disabilities
- developmental conditions, such as dyslexia and autism
- long-term health conditions such as HIV, cancer and diabetes.

Brent Council is committed to tackling discrimination against disabled people. We recognise that negative attitudes and common stereotypes about disabled people can lead to discriminatory behaviour towards them and to their ongoing social and economic disadvantage. Brent Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate disability discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

As a service provider, Brent Council is required to make anticipatory reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled services users have equitable access to all our services. Brent Council will provide targeted services to meet the needs of disabled residents. Brent will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that disabled people receive best quality services that meet their needs. Brent will involve disabled people in reviewing and making decisions about proposals and services that affect them.

As an employer, Brent Council is required to make reasonable adjustments to remove disadvantages faced by disabled staff and job applicants when applying for, doing and keeping their jobs. Brent Council has been awarded the Two Ticks positive about disability symbol by Job Centre Plus because we are committed to employing and developing disabled people. We offer guaranteed interviews to all disabled job applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy. We make reasonable adjustments to working practices and the working environment to help disabled staff carry out their jobs effectively and stay in employment.

The following conditions are not considered to be disabilities and are not covered by this policy:

- addictions, such as alcoholism and drug dependency
- hay fever
- problems with standard vision that can be corrected by glasses or contact lenses.

Brent Council is aware of its responsibilities to individuals with addictions – both as an employer and a service provider – and is conscious of the impact of substance misuse on mental health.

Gender identity

The Equality Act 2010 protects people who have undergone, are undergoing or are planning to undergo gender reassignment – that is, who transition from one gender to another – from discrimination. Brent Council recognises that a broader range of people may experience atypical gender identity and the ways that people express their gender roles may vary widely.

Brent Council is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination against transgender people and people who experience gender variance. We will, as far as possible, consult with transgender people on issues which affect them to improve services and their quality of life. Brent Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate all forms of transphobia, discrimination, harassment and victimisation against transgender people.

Brent Council will respect the preferred gender identity of our residents and staff.

Marriage and civil partnership

Brent Council recognises that it is unlawful to discriminate against people who are married or in a civil partnership in employment.

Pregnancy and maternity

Brent Council recognises that it is unlawful to discriminate against people who are pregnant or who have recently had a baby.

We recognise that it is a woman's right to breastfeed a baby in public without interference. We will ensure that the public areas of our buildings provide a welcoming environment for women to feel comfortable to breastfeed their babies.

Brent Council will not reject a job application or deny existing staff opportunities for training, transfers, promotions or other work-related benefits because of pregnancy or maternity. In recruitment, we will never ask interview questions related to pregnancy, maternity or childcare.

Ethnicity

'Ethnicity' refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.

Brent Council is committed to tackling any discrimination based on ethnicity. We are conscious of the racism and disadvantages faced by our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, especially new migrant groups, refugees and Gypsy and Traveller communities. We recognise that negative attitudes, common stereotypes and structural inequalities in wider society can lead to racism and to ongoing social and economic disadvantage for some ethnic groups. Brent Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate all forms of racism, harassment and victimisation and to promote good relations between all our local communities. Brent will involve people from all our local communities in reviewing and making decisions about proposals and services that affect them.

As an employer, Brent aims to build a diverse workforce that represents the local community. We may use positive action measures to address any under-representation of some ethnic groups in different parts of our workforce.

Religion and belief

'Religion and belief' includes all religious and philosophical beliefs that affect an individual's life choices, including a lack of belief (that is, atheism) though there are limitations regarding the religion or belief being cogent, serious, cohesive and compatible with human dignity.

Brent Council is committed to tackling any discrimination based on religion or belief. We recognise that negative attitudes and common stereotypes about different religious groups can lead to discriminatory behaviour and to social and economic disadvantages. Brent Council will continue to work in partnership with faith groups and other agencies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation related to religion or belief and to promote good relations between all our local communities. Brent will involve faith groups in reviewing and making decisions about proposals and services that affect them.

Brent Council supports activities organised by religious groups which are inclusive and accessible to all our communities. We do not support exclusive religious activities or activities that promote any specific religious or ideological views.

Brent Council recognises that our staff have a diverse range of religious customs and practices. Some staff may need to work more flexibly to observe their religious or cultural practices. We will accommodate these requests where operational need permits. Brent Council will not permit staff to refuse to carry out work duties because of their religious beliefs where this could affect our ability to provide a service without discrimination.

Gender

'Gender' refers to men and women.

Brent Council is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination and sexism. Negative attitudes and common stereotypes based on gender are damaging to both men and women. We recognise that women are far more likely than men to experience sex discrimination which contributes to social and economic disadvantages. Brent Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to promote gender equality, to eliminate sex discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, and to prevent all forms of violence and abuse against women and girls.

As a service provider, Brent Council will provide targeted services to meet the needs of men and women where these are different or to address disadvantages faced by men or women. Brent will involve men and women in reviewing and making decisions about proposals and services that affect them. When consulting with local communities, we will be conscious of the need to engage with female as well as male representatives.

As an employer, Brent Council recognises that female staff and single parents (men and women) may need to work more flexibly. We will accommodate these requests where operational need permits. We may use positive action measures to address any under-representation in different parts of our workforce.

Sexual orientation

'Sexual orientation' refers to whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes. Brent Council recognises that an individual can also have a broader sense of their sexual identity and may not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) or heterosexual/straight. We are also mindful that fear of discrimination and prejudice may prevent people from being open about their sexual orientation.

Brent Council is committed to tackling discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Council will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate all forms of homophobia, biphobia, discrimination, harassment and victimisation against LGB people.

As a service provider, Brent Council recognises that the LGB community is diverse with a wide range of different needs. We will, as far as possible, consult with LGB people on issues which affect them to improve services and their quality of life. We will provide targeted services to meet the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people where these are different to each other or to heterosexual/straight people or to address disadvantages faced by LGB people.

As an employer, all our employment policies and benefits will apply equally to people in same sex and opposite sex relationships.

Health and income status

Brent Council recognises that an individual's health and income status has a significant influence on their needs and life outcomes. Although health and income status are not protected from discrimination by law, we are committed to tackling health and socio-economic inequalities in the local area.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Everyone who works for Brent Council, whether directly or through commissioning, is responsible for conducting themselves in line with the principles set out in this policy.

Brent's Equality Strategy sets out roles and responsibilities for upholding and implementing the Council's equality and diversity commitments and procedures.

6. Applying the equality policy

Brent's Equality Strategy sets out how effective diversity and equality practice will be fully integrated into everything the council does in line with the principles detailed in this policy.

Brent's Customer Promise sets out our commitment to providing good quality, easily accessible services and information to all customers and details how we apply our equality principles in customer services.

Brent's Recruitment and Selection Policy sets out how we apply our equality principles in recruitment.

Brent's Code of Conduct sets out the behaviours we expect all staff to uphold in relation to equality, diversity and treating people with dignity and respect.

Brent's Grievance Policy sets out how staff can resolve bullying and harassment issues at work.

All policies and procedures at Brent will be screened to assess their relevance to equality and will be subject to equality analysis to ensure that they are fair and non-discriminatory.

The overall implementation of this policy will be monitored by Brent's Corporate Management Team with support from the Diversity Reference Group and the Equality Team.