

Bracknell Forest Council
'All of Us'
Equality Scheme 2022-25

April 2022
www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Foreword

Leader of the council and Chief Executive

We are very pleased to introduce Bracknell Forest Council's Equality Scheme (2022-2025) setting out our commitment for progressing equality and inclusion within Bracknell Forest over the next three years.

The Equality Scheme describes how equality, diversity and inclusion are essential to the way we operate as a community leader, a service provider and an employer and integral to everything we do. It sets out clearly our priorities for our borough whether it is in how we work with our residents; in the services we provide or through the recruitment of our workforce

We are very proud of our borough, with its diverse mix of people and places that make it a great place to live and work. However we recognise that there are some pockets of deprivation and need in the borough. This equality scheme has been produced against continuing pressures on local authority finances as well as other significant external uncertainties. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately negative impact and been more severe for some groups than others and helped to entrench some existing inequalities while widening others.

The council has an integral role both in advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good community relations and also seeking to eliminating unlawful discrimination and harassment. This means focusing our resources on people and areas with the greatest need as well as early help and prevention so that struggling or vulnerable people can maximise their opportunities to become independent.

We also recognise that to continue to provide good customer service we need to ensure we regularly review the changing needs of our communities and provide fair and appropriate access to services that meet the individual needs of our residents and diverse communities.

As a council we have worked extremely hard to reduce inequality, however there is no room for complacency. We will continue our journey of improvement in reducing inequalities and fostering good community relations. We will monitor closely and report annually our progress in achieving our objectives, learn as we deliver and work with our partners to enhance equality and fairness for all.

We recognise that in providing goods, services, and facilities advancing inclusion and diversity in the workplace is good practice and make business sense. We are committed to ensuring diversity, inclusion, fairness and respect for all.

Photograph of PB and TW

Contents

1. Foreword	
2. Executive Summary.....	
3. The Public Sector Equality Duty.....	
4. Our Equality and Inclusion Objectives.....	
5. Monitoring and Reporting Progress.....	
6. Appendix 1, Protected Characteristics.....	
7. Appendix 2 The local context – The story of place.....	

If you need this information in a different format, accessible PDF, large print, easy read, audio recording or braille or wish to discuss the strategy with us please contact:

- email: equality@bracknell-forest.gov.uk
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1. Executive Summary

Welcome to the Equality Scheme

Bracknell Forest Council's Equality Scheme 2022-2025 builds on the good progress made over the previous years and further embeds equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do to make Bracknell Forest the Borough of Opportunity for all.

As a council we aim to provide high quality, appropriate and accessible services that meet the needs of our diverse communities. We want to ensure consistency in the delivery of our equality, inclusion, and diversity work across the council. It is cross directorate and part of everyday business and it is the duty of all of us to understand, respect and value difference.

We will continue to take equalities into account when making decisions to ensure they are made in a fair, transparent and accountable way which considers the needs and rights of different individuals and communities.

In developing the equalities objectives in this scheme, we held workshops and discussions with community and voluntary groups, partner organisations as well as elected members and staff. This was followed by an online consultation open to all residents, staff and elected members.

The Equality Scheme sets out our five key equality objectives to address inequalities in our role as community leader and an employer. These apply to all the council's functions, the council's role as a service provider and in our work with our communities.

As an employer Bracknell Forest Council is committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion among our workforce, and eliminating unlawful discrimination. We want everyone that works for us to feel that their individuality is respected and their unique contributions are valued. The aim is for our workforce to be truly representative of all sections of society and our customers and for each employee to feel respected and able to give their best.

2. The Public Sector Equality Duty

As a public body, the council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 which gives protection to individuals and groups identified with the nine protected characteristics. (see Appendix A).

The Equality Act creates a Public Sector Equality Duty which requires public bodies to consider the needs of all individuals in their day-to-day work - in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The Public Sector Equality Duty is supported by specific duties, which require public bodies, including local authorities, to:

- publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty
- prepare and publish one or more specific, measurable objectives at least every four years and to report progress annually
- publishing relevant equality information which will make public bodies transparent about their decision-making processes, and accountable to their service users
- information needs to be published and accessible to the public

As well as our commitment to the Public Sector Equality Duty our aspirations go further to include people in care, people with caring responsibilities and the inequalities resulting from financial hardship and disadvantage, veterans and armed forces communities

This strategy cannot be delivered in isolation. In order to successfully embed equality and inclusion in all that we do, this strategy will link closely with other council policies, strategies and strategic priorities including the:

- Council Plan
- Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy
- Climate change
- Local Plan
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

3. Our Equality and Inclusion Objectives

Our Equality Objectives are important to us as an organisation, they guide the work we carry out and show our commitment to challenging inequality and promoting a fair and inclusive borough. We have identified the following Equality objectives for our Equality Scheme.

Objective 1

'Inclusive in all we do'

Continue to make our services more inclusive and culturally competent in a borough where everyone is made to feel included and valued.

1. Maximise the social connectedness, independence and physical wellbeing of all citizens.
2. Work to improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing being of all citizens and address the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health.
3. Work to narrow the gaps in life chances and outcomes for vulnerable people and support them through prevention, early intervention and self-care.
4. Create an environment where all children and young people have similar opportunities in life.
5. Develop inclusive relationships between different communities and celebrate their diversity.
6. Work to tackle financial hardship with our partners and, where appropriate, to minimise the barriers for low-income families.
7. Work to ensure people with disabilities have equal and inclusive chances in accessing our services and facilities as others.

Objective 2

‘Accessible for all’

Our services, information and support will be accessible to those who need them.

1. Design, commission and deliver services that are fully accessible and responsive to the needs of all citizens and address inequality and exclusion.
2. Address digital exclusion and provide support to those who cannot independently access the council’s online services.
3. Ensure that we provide information, engage and communicate in ways that are easy to understand for all.
4. Continue to work with partners including voluntary and community groups to offer opportunities for greater community participation and involvement in decision making.

Objective 3

‘Accountable and Fair’

We will treat all people fairly without favouritism or discrimination while recognising some people will need additional support.

1. Demonstrate fair and open decision-making, ensuring all major decisions about the delivery of services are informed by equality impact assessments to understand the groups of people who might be affected.
2. Prioritise our resources on those who need our services the most so they can be healthy, independent and thrive.
3. Act to promptly investigate and respond to complaints.
4. Regularly review data and community engagement insight information to ensure our services are accessible to all communities.
5. Work with partners to understand the needs of our diverse communities.
6. Measure and share our progress and achievements in delivering our equality objectives.

Objective 4

‘Diverse and inclusive workforce’

We will strive to have a workforce who have the right skills, behaviours and mindsets supported by high quality people managers and inspiring leaders.

1. Ensure that there is an inclusive culture with openness, honesty and respect for individuality, diversity and wide-ranging perspectives. The culture will focus on people and relationships with procedures in place enabling staff to raise concerns in confidence.
2. Develop an updated Equality Policy and Dignity at Work Policy that focus positive relationships, transparency and quality communication first and foremost.
3. Introduce aspects of anonymous recruitment that enable us to recruit for skills and mindsets and remove potential bias.

Objective 5

‘Recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic’

Address the increased inequalities and disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people and communities.

1. Tackle health inequalities and the adverse impact of the pandemic on our communities.
2. Support vulnerable people including those who have been shielding to recover from the pandemic.

3. Involve community and voluntary groups in supporting citizens and services to recover.
4. Support local economic recovery, businesses and access to good quality jobs for all citizens.

4. Monitoring and Reporting our Progress

We will monitor and report our progress in delivering our equality scheme. The council's Equality Group will closely monitor the implementation and delivery of each of our equality objectives with the progress regularly reported to our corporate management team. Each equality objective will be underpinned by annual priority actions as required that take the council towards the achievement of the 3-year strategy.

We will publish annual equality reports that show our progress in the last financial year on achieving our equality objectives and highlighting equality and inclusion work across the council.

Our annual equality reports are published here: (add link to council webpage)

We will continuously check and review that the services we provide are appropriate and accessible, learning from the data and information we gather, alongside what our residents and employees tell us. To do this, we will:

- Use evidence to help us to design our services and ensure our workforce reflects the people we serve
- Complete Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) where appropriate to consider the impact that our policies and decisions may have on different groups
- Collect diversity information about our employees and use it to check that our employment policies and practices are fair, open and transparent and to help us build an accessible and inclusive working environment.

Appendix 1

Protected Characteristics

The Equalities Act outlines the ‘protected characteristics’ – the specific aspects of identity which are protected from discrimination. The nine protected characteristics are:



Appendix 2

The local context – The story of place

A thriving population

Bracknell Forest has a population of 124,165 (ONS 2020 estimate*) Of these, just under half (49.5%) are male. The population is relatively young (median age 39.6 years). 14.9% of the population is aged 65 or over, compared to 18.6% nationally, although this is expected to grow.

There is a smaller proportion of over 60s compared to the South East and England average, estimated at just under 25,000 people. There are approximately 4,848 residents over 80 in the borough, this is 3.8% of the population and a smaller proportion than the South East (5.5%) and England (5.1%) (ONS 2020 estimate).

Deprivation

Bracknell Forest has relatively low levels of deprivation with just under half of the neighbourhoods in the least deprived 20% of the country (ranked 291 out of 326 local authorities in England on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010). However, 16% of

neighbourhoods are more deprived than the national average with parts of Crowthorne and Wildridings and Central being the most deprived in the borough

Cohesive communities

Bracknell Forest has a similar profile of ethnicities compared to the South East. Initial findings from the 2021 Census will be released from March 2022, however the 2011 Census showed that 15% of the population belong to a minority ethnic group and 'white other'.

There are a notably higher proportion of 'other Asian' residents than other areas of the South East and England, partly due to a large community of Nepali residents linked to the Gurkha Company Sittang regiment based at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

Bracknell town centre wards generally have a higher proportion of residents from ethnic minority communities. However, there is also a significantly higher proportion living in College Town where there is a large Nepali population.

The proportion of school pupils from a Minority Ethnic Groups (other than White British) has increased steadily over the past few years rising from 23.2% in 2018 to 25.6% in 2020. 19.7% of pupils in Bracknell Forest schools have English as an Additional Language (EAL). (School, pupils and their characteristics; 2020/21)

Religion or belief

Initial findings from the 2021 Census will be released from March 2022, however the 2011 Census data showed the percentages of the population who identify with the major religious groups are as follows:

Christian: 60.5%	Buddhist: 0.73%
No religion: 1.9%	other religion: 0.43%
Hindu: 1.61%	Sikh: 0.40%
Muslim: 1.13%	Jewish: 0.16%

People with disabilities

Nationally one in five people in the United Kingdom reported having reported disability, (a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and long-term effect on their ability to do daily activities). (Source Family resource survey 2019 to 2020 Gov.UK)

Table 1 shows people aged 18-64 in Bracknell Forest predicted to have a serious disability projected to 2030.

2020	2025	2030
1,823	1,893	1,888

Table 2 shows people aged 18-64 in Bracknell Forest predicted to have a moderate disability projected to 2030. (Institute of Public Care – PANSI & POPPI databases + ONS)

2020	2025	2030
6,113	6,280	6,274

It is predicted that currently 1386 people aged 65+ in Bracknell Forest have a moderate or severe visual impairment and projected to rise to 2288 by 2030 (Institute of Public Care POPPI & PANSI databases).

It is also estimated that the number of people aged 18+ living in Bracknell Forest that have a moderate or severe hearing loss is currently 9,459 and projected to increase to 14,268 by 2030. (Institute of Public Care- PANSI database).

Sexual Orientation

ONS population survey 2019 estimated that 1.4 million people aged 16 years and over (2.7% of the UK population) identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019. For Bracknell Forest this would equate to 2676 people The LGB population comprised 1.6% identifying as gay or lesbian and 1.1% as bisexual

There is not an accurate figure for how big the trans community is Bracknell Forest. Stonewall estimate that around 1 per cent of the population might identify as trans, including people who identify as non-binary. That would mean about 1241 trans and non-binary people reside in the Borough.