



East and Equal

○ Strategy for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

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Why do we need an Equality and Diversity Strategy?

The council has a public sector equality duty to care for all our residents for legal and ethical reasons. This is stipulated under the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. However, our duty is more than a legal one. Global events over the past 18 months have highlighted the need for East Herts to have a focused vision and set of actions to address equalities' challenges.

Health inequalities have been reported and recognised as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and a spotlight has been shone on race and ethnicity within our BAME communities as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement. These events have highlighted how we as an organisation need to understand the challenges some of our communities face.

A new strategy will enable us to identify some of the challenges specific to East Herts and how we as a District Council can work collaboratively with a focused vision to address them.

What are the demographics in East Herts?



RURAL OUTPUT AREAS

29.2% of Output Areas in East Herts are Rural in East Herts. Our leafy districts are picturesque, but often residents can feel isolated and struggle to access services, transport and broadband.



AGEING POPULATION

In East Hertfordshire, statistics show that there is a projected percentage change in residents aged 65 plus, up until 2040 of 72.2%. Age is one of the 9 protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010



EU NATIONALS

7,180 people living in the district applied for Settled Status. The highest countries of origin were Poland (1,200), Italy (1080) and Romania (1,030)



DISABILITY BENEFITS

11.1% of East Hertfordshire's working age population claims disability benefits. Disability is one of the 9 protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.



RACE & ETHNICITY

The white British population is the largest ethnic group in East Herts

Nearly 1,400 residents in East Hertfordshire have Dementia. The Director of Public Health



LGBTQ+

An estimated 6% of our population are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning their sexual identity. Sexuality is one of the 9 protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.;



DEMENTIA

Nearly 1,400 residents in East Hertfordshire have Dementia. The Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire County Council has recognized that the current pandemic has led to an increased need to focus on issues relating to mental health and wellbeing.

What process did we follow?



What is 'East and Equal'?

Our strategy branded 'East and Equal' has simplified the aspirations we want for East Herts within the next 5 years.

Our Equality and Diversity Officer, who also works for Hertfordshire County Council curated this piece of work, drawing inspiration from both the Hertfordshire County Council Equality Strategy and the East Herts District Council Cultural Strategy.

It combines the Local Government Authority's Framework and the aspirations within the East Herts Corporate SEED plan:

Sustainability at the heart of everything we do
Enabling our communities
Encouraging economic growth
Digital by design

And uses these aims to create our East and Equal three Rs of 'Respond, Relate, Reach Out'.

Respond

'Responsive Services and Customer Care'

'Enable Economic Growth'

Relate

'Leadership and Organisational Commitment'

'Diverse and Engaged Workforce'

Reach out

'Understanding and working with your communities'

'Enabling our communities'



RESPOND

This value is a combination of the Equality Framework for Local Government criteria ‘Responsive Services and Customer Care’ with our Corporate SEED plan pledge to ‘Enable Economic Growth’

What are the Issues?

- We have data and information about our communities but not all of it is up to date. The joint working with Hertfordshire County Council and Public Health regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has provided much needed insight about communities and individuals, however we do need to share and collaborate much more to receive a more accurate picture of our communities.
- In terms of consultation and engagement there have been specific examples of focused work such as engaging with young people over proposals in the District Plan. However, we have struggled to make sure a diverse range of voices are heard in the district. We need to be pro-actively engaging with different demographics when undertaking consultation.
- The grading within the LGA Framework found that our quality of Equality Impact Assessments and the approach taken towards needs development. Their visibility on places such as the website and intranet needs improving, because it is currently difficult to see how they are being embedded into the decision making processes in the council. Furthermore, they are a crucial part of understanding how our services need to be changed and adjusted to ensure fair access and to minimise any discrimination..

What are the Priorities?

- Improve the methods through which we gather, analyse and store data to inform decision making
- Strengthen our Equality Impact Assessment process and their role in decision making

What Actions do we need to take?

- Conduct an internal staff survey to assess current understanding, uptake and content of Equality Impact Assessments.
- Use the data to forecast trends between the perceived impact on protected characteristics and different services to create a bank of Equality Impact Assessments and use these to produce workshops and training where needed.
- Ensure Equality and Diversity Officer supports staff, provide constructive challenge and act as a central point of expertise and advice between councillors and the council]
- Develop a Staff Network which champions Diversity, identifying where there is a need for it from the data

RELATE

This value is a combination of the EFLG criteria ‘Leadership and organisational commitment’, which looks at how our senior members and executives can embed Equality initiatives within East Herts District Council, and aspires to achieve a ‘Diverse and Engaged Workforce’. Due to the nature of our increasingly digital world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this strategy aims to ensure our ‘Relate’ phase is Digital by Design in accordance with our corporate SEED plan. The Relate phase takes the data that we have gathered and looks inwardly, and takes on a workforce theme. It aspires to use integrity by practising our values amongst our own staff and leadership, to make sure we can accurately and fairly relate to our communities.

What are the Issues?

- The existing Annual Equalities Report produces demographics which includes actions on how we can improve recruitment to attract candidates from wider fields as well as other issues. We need to build on this to take the work insight further.
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- Having undertaken a self assessment of the organisation against the Equalities Framework for Local Government, East Herts does take steps to ensure its services are accessible to all. These steps include work completed on making the website accessible, using plain text in social media posts and offering text services instead of phones for those who are hard of hearing. However we need to ensure we are making all reasonable adjustments and the profile of this work could be raised both within the council and externally amongst residents, to show how relatable we are as local government.
- A recent staff survey indicated staff feel equalities issues are well understood across the council and very few employees face discrimination. In previous years, a staff network would meet to discuss equalities issues, however it has been disbanded for quite some time which means we are unable to take this dialogue further

What are the Priorities?

- Maximise joint working with Hertfordshire County Council
- Create a East Herts internal dialogue on Equality and Diversity
- Improve self-awareness on equalities issues in the district, such as those on race, ethnicity, disability and age

What Actions do we need to take?

- Reconvene the staff network on equalities, with a clear Terms of Reference, which offers guidance and challenge on Equality Impact Assessments
- Involve East Herts District Council staff in the BAME Network for Hertfordshire County Council and where necessary, make use of the Equality and Diversity Officer's ties to the Resources within Hertfordshire County Council. Ensure that the 'Ethnic Minority' part of the Committee is representative of East Herts' Eastern European and Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Community
- Undertake an Ethnicity Pay Gap report to acknowledge the influence of Gender Pay Gap Regulations under the Equality Act 2010
- Undertake bespoke training on unconscious bias and providing safe spaces, with Member support
- Undertake a mystery shop on our services to see how we respond to equalities issues and making reasonable adjustments

REACH OUT

The ‘Reach Out’ element of ‘East and Equal’ acknowledges the widespread inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This value aspires to access the economically underprivileged, those suffering from health inequalities and also address the needs of the LGBT+ community. The emphasis is on the ‘whole’ community, demonstrating our commitment to inclusion. This uses ‘Understanding and working with your communities’ from EFLG and fuses it with the Corporate SEED ambition of ‘enabling our communities.’

This value is a combination of the Equality Framework for Local Government criteria ‘Understanding and working with your communities’ and ‘Enabling our communities’ within our Corporate SEED plan pledge.

What are the Issues?

Some of our staff and residents feel East Herts needs to have a higher profile on equalities issues generally. Although we have been heavily involved in the countywide Covid response work, there is a recognition of the fact that East Herts needs to publicise the work done, so as to access and therefore enable communities.

We know there have been particular tensions between the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community and the housed community regarding planning issues. Whilst not easily resolved, we need to consider how these tensions can be addressed.

What are the Priorities?

- We need to champion, and be seen to champion equality and diversity in a way that gives our residents’ confidence we take the issues seriously
- We need to Support and collaborate with the County Council on the BAME action plan and post Covid recovery plans

What Actions do we Need to take?

- Create and follow an East Herts Calendar of Events designed to engage with the public to celebrate and acknowledge the protected characteristics :
 - August 2021: International Day of Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
 - October 2021: Mental Health Awareness Day
 - January 2022: Holocaust Memorial Day
 - February 2022 LGBT+ Awareness Month

- March 2022: International Women's Day
- Within the East Herts Calendar of Events engage with the public to celebrate and acknowledge the identity of East Herts:
 - April 2022: World Health Day (with an emphasis on Neurodiversity and Autism)
 - May 2022: Mental Health Awareness week (with emphasis on Dementia)
 - June 2022: **Carer's Week & World Refugee Day**
 - July 2022: Southern Maltings July Festival in Ware
 - November 2022: Remembrance Day
- Collaboration between the BAME Network and GATE on raising awareness of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community
- Support healthy engagement on health and vaccinations and in-person dialogue with caravan sites