



East and Equal

Strategy for Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

2021 - 2025

Contents

FOREWORD	2
WHY DO WE NEED AN EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY?.....	3
DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE DISTRICT	4
THIS ANALYSIS PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF THE EQUALITY CATEGORIES.....	4
WHAT PROCESS DID WE FOLLOW?	6
A FLOWCHART TO DEMONSTRATE THE KEY MILESTONES.....	6
WHAT IS 'EAST AND EQUAL'?	7
RESPOND	12
RELATE	14
REACH OUT	16

Foreword



Jonathan Kaye,

Executive Member for Engagement

“Global events have highlighted the need for East Herts to have a focused vision and set of actions to address equalities’ challenges. Recent issues have held a mirror up to our institutions and helped us re-think how our decisions and policies may be disproportionately affecting individuals and communities. Equally the impact of Covid-19 on health outcomes clearly shows disparities according to protected characteristics such as disability and ethnicity. Now is the right time for us to strengthen our approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion and set out how we as a council need to understand the challenges some of our communities face.”

Our East and Equal Strategy has been developed over several months, considered evidence from various sources and taken on board the views of many partner organisations to reach a set of objectives we intend to deliver over the coming years. At East Herts District Council, we are committed to being the change we want to see. We have decided to closely look at our communities and challenge existing disparities across the various identities in our community. This strategy outlines our visions to ensure an Equal embodiment of East Herts values”

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Corinne Crosbourne,

Joint Equality and Diversity Officer

East and Equal

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.


Information from our consultation with our partners confirmed our thoughts, that demographic groups that were at a disadvantage before the crisis have been affected more than others, exacerbating existing inequalities. Data has shown that if you're young, BAME, in insecure work or private rented housing, you're far more likely to have suffered financially due to the crisis.

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, hate crime amongst LGBT+ communities and the accessibility concerns of our elderly have been under review. Within this document we have highlighted how we as an organisation need to address 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.

Data and Demographics in the District

This analysis provides an overview of equality categories that we have taken into consideration, from data provided from consultation with our partners. This has helped us to develop a strategy which takes into consideration our rich and vibrant community and all the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race and sexuality) within it. We have also noted which areas in East Herts have been most affected by the pandemic within these categories.

<p>Rural output areas</p>	<p><u>Data</u></p> <p>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.</p> <p><u>Area and demographic affected</u></p> <p>In Bishops Stortford, there is a significant lack of documented services and local transport in the area, although the area is near the Town which obviously has many services and amenities. There is clearly deprivation on many levels in the area and there is concern for both the young and older populations.</p> <p>In Hertford Castle, high numbers of lone parent families with dependent children, relatively low levels of car ownership and a significant lack of local services and amenities and the area becomes an obvious choice for investment and improvement.</p>
 <p>Ageing population</p>	<p><u>Data</u></p> <p>In East Hertfordshire, statistics show that there is a projected percentage change in residents aged 65 plus, up until 2040 of 72.2%. Data has also shown that the Citizen's Advice Service has seen more demand from younger people and those traditionally in work.</p> <p><u>Area and demographic affected</u></p> <p>In Hertford Sele and Much Hadham, a focus on activities, facilities and schooling for the younger age groups will also support the relatively high number of lone parent families with dependent children.</p> <p>Sawbridgworth demonstrates a particularly high elderly population, for a small town.</p>



Ethnicity and Nationality

Data and demographics

As of September 2020, 7,180 EU Nationals living in the district applied for Settled Status. The highest countries of origin were Italy, Poland and Romania.

In diverse and vibrant communities in East Herts we also have a relatively present population of residents of Portuguese, Brazilian and other Hispanic nationalities.

Our partnership with GATE Hertfordshire, (Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment) has indicated that the GRT (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller) community as an ethnic minority group has also fluctuated due to inequalities and discriminations unfortunately experienced in in our district.



Physical Ability

Data

As of 2020, 11.1% of East Hertfordshire's working age population claimed disability benefits. Whilst the number of unemployed and physically disabled or permanently sick people in East Herts makes up only 2% of the population, this group constituted 10% of Citizen's Advice clients from 2019 to 2020, which suggests that even pre-pandemic they were disproportionately struggling. 24.4% of these individuals experience a physical impediment while 25.1% experience disability relating to mental health.

Area and demographic affected

As an example of an area where physical ability can prove a challenge, Munden's limited related health and wellbeing and community facilities, such as the lack of GP surgeries and libraries could prove a challenge to those with physical restrictions.



Mental Health and Wellbeing

Data

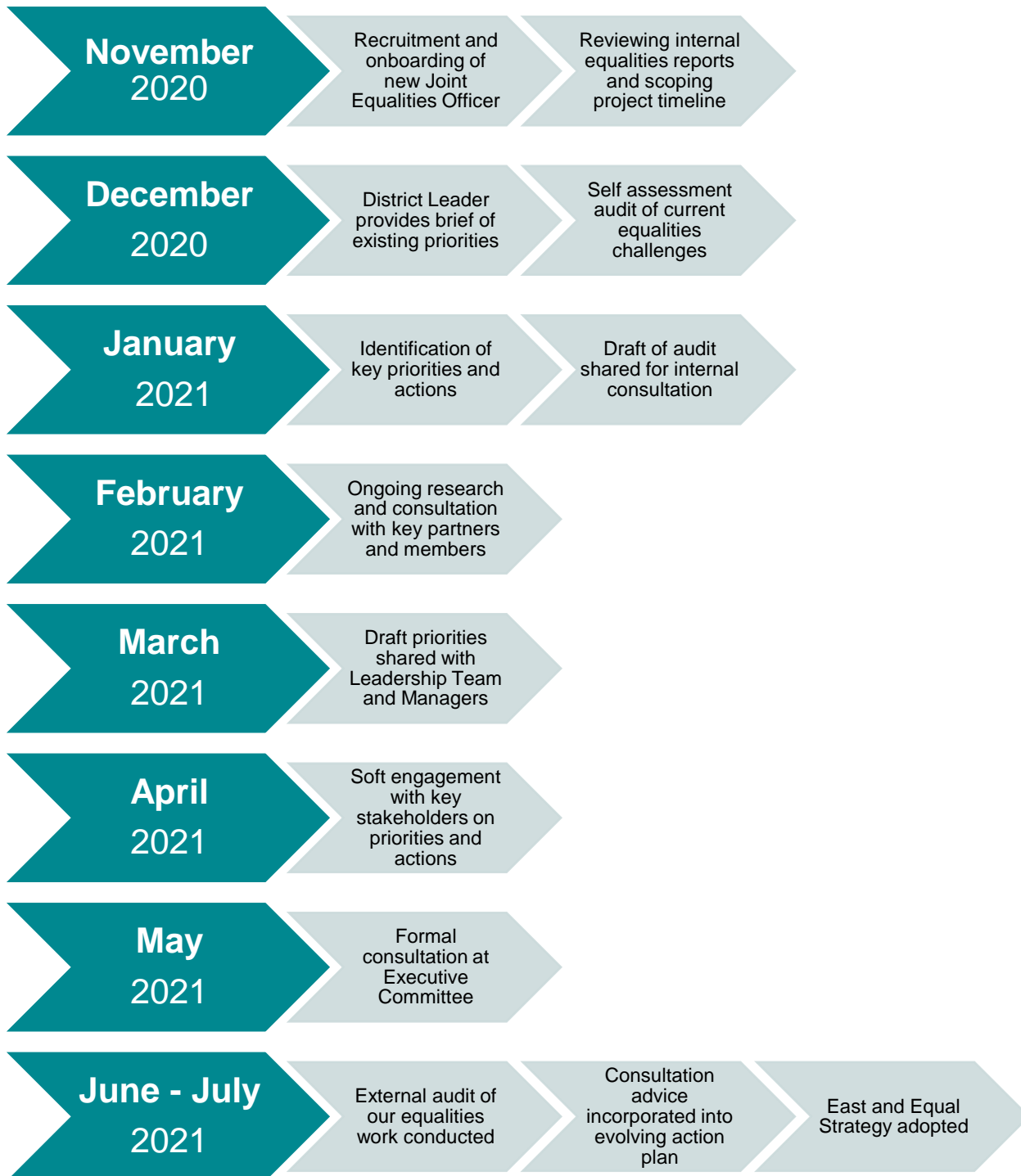
Due to the increasingly elderly population, it has been shown that as of 2020, there were roughly 1400 cases of dementia. There has also been a countywide effort to address mental health and wellbeing, the levels of which have shown to demonstrate a crisis of their own as a result of the pandemic.

Demographic affected

Hertfordshire County Council's BAME Network has sought efforts to address the mental health crisis within its community, with the support of the Director of Public Health. In addition to the demographic of race and ethnicity, work has been underway within the county's LGBT+ partnerships to address the needs of this community, which have also reflected an increased need for mental health support throughout the pandemic.

What process did we follow?

A flowchart to demonstrate some of the key milestones in developing our 'East and Equal Strategy'



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 Joint 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 Equality Framework for Local Government'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



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'

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'.

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.'



RESPOND, RELATE, REACH OUT

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'. Looking at the data and demographics in the district has helped us to initially see what challenges exist across East Herts District Council. Responding to these challenges will require a robust action plan, supported by our partnerships and elected Members, who have provided input in the consultation stages.

What are the issues?

As reflected in the data and demographics collected, there is work to be done to make sure that as a district we address the needs of our towns in a targeted and effective way. An internal audit completed in January and an external audit completed in July have found similarities in the following areas:

- A need for a corporate governance structure around Equalities
- A need to share data in an effective, efficient and accurate way across the districts and from the Council
- A need to pro-actively engage with different demographics to make sure that a diverse range of voices are heard within the district

Work completed by our Joint Equalities Officer has also provided useful mapping of where some of our inequalities cross over with Stewardship, which has been looking at the Harlow and Gilseden Garden Town Project. There has also been casework completed with our Planning department which has highlighted the need to engage with our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in a more effective and inclusive manner.

Furthermore, internal and external audits have both shown that Equality Impact Assessments, which are recommended under the Equality Act 2010's public sector equality duty are not undertaken or understood to an effective level. They ought to be more visible and accessible to staff, so that the effectiveness of our services is safeguarded in a way that ensures fair access and minimised discrimination.

RESPOND

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

What are the 'Respond' Priorities?

- Improve the resource behind the sharing of equalities data
- Use the data to enable deprived or affected communities to grow
- Ensure Services have the appropriate tools and know-how to complete Equality Impact Assessments

RESPOND, RELATE, REACH OUT

The Relate value aspires to ensure that the staff, elected Members and leaders of East Herts District Council are relatable and representative of their community. This value is a combination of the Equality Framework for Local Government criterion, ‘Leadership and organisational commitment’, which looks at how our senior members and executives can embed Equality initiatives within East Herts District Council. A ‘Diverse and Engaged Workforce’ is also important because it means that district employees and residents feel represented, which in turn has benefits in wellbeing and overall productivity.

What are the Issues?

Both internal and external audits in the process of developing this strategy have highlighted the need to provide a regular ongoing review of the corporate risk addressing equalities. 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.

There is a need to ensure that any discrimination or inequalities are accurately highlighted within the Annual Equalities Report and that there is a co-ordination between the Human Resources and Community focused elements of Equality. Adoption of internal Gender Pay Gap Reporting has also allowed conversations on Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting to come to fruition within the private sector, the notion of which has been supported internally, in a bid to investigate any unconscious bias. There has also been interest from staff, who are invested in their own self development through receiving training on psychological safety and microaggressions.

On an internal level, it has also been recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has seen an increase in the use of online activity in an increasingly digital world. An inclusive and diverse approach to our residents from a relatable perspective would ensure that our digital communications were accessible, such as the use of plain and easy-read text on our website was available and also the provision of text services instead of phones for those who are hard of hearing.

RELATE

What actions do we need to take?

- **Reconvene the Equalities Officer Group, with a clear Terms of Reference**
- **Ensure bespoke training on Equality Impact Assessments is carried out**
- **Use the Equality Impact Assessments contribute to a pool of data which supports our targeted equalities awareness within 'data and demographics'**
- **Bring a representative from the underrepresented ethnic communities in East Herts in the the Hertfordshire BAME Network Committee.**
- **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**

What are the 'Relate' Priorities?

- **Create an East Herts Equalities Officer Group**
- **Staff to receive training on Equality Impact Assessments**
- **Collaboration with Equalities Officer Group and Hertfordshire BAME Network**
- **Collaboration between Human Resources and Equality Officer in providing unconscious bias training and conducting ethnicity pay gap reporting**

RESPOND, RELATE, REACH OUT

The 'Reach Out' element of 'East and Equal' focuses on community, by ensuring that the work embedded within the Respond and Relate phases are communicated to the public. This value also aspires to display empathy for residents affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, using data gathered from consultation with our partners and also from the joint working with Hertfordshire County Council. 'Reach Out' is about ensuring that the community recognises that the district cares about them, with an emphasis on celebrating the various demographics within East Herts. These communities are to be understood and to be enabled.

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. Our consultation with CDA Herts highlighted the need for representation amongst some of the hidden communities, such as those in rural output areas who suffer from loneliness and have poor mental wellbeing. There are also communities in these rural outputs who have a community of Eastern European migrants. 'Reach out' also aspires to include refugees in East Herts who have language and literacy barriers, via the joint working with Hertfordshire County Council's BAME Network. This Network can also be used to address the tensions within the Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, who experience severe health inequalities, as addressed within the ongoing workshops on Mental Health and Wellbeing in Hertfordshire County Council.

The presence of hate crime and discrimination within East Herts is also of concern, as our LGBT+ communities, and BAME communities have suffered as a result of tensions in schooling and amongst the resurgence of the Black Lives matter movement in 2020. Finally, considering age as a protected characteristic, both the elderly and the young have also been impacted by the pandemic's impact on mental wellbeing, with neurodiversity, autism and dementia being highlighted within our consultations. We also want to ensure that our services as a district are efficient and running smoothly and so will be taking an action to reach out to the public within this phase to make sure this is happening.

REACH OUT

What actions do we need to take?

- ✓ Create and follow an East Herts Calendar of Events over the five year plan designed to engage with the public to celebrate and acknowledge our equalities work. The list below can be developed year on year to reflect our vibrant community as it develops:
 - 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: Pride Month, 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
- ✓ Undertake a mystery shop on our services to see how we respond to equalities issues and making reasonable adjustments

What are the 'Reach Out' Priorities?

- **Champion equality and diversity in a way that gives our residents' confidence in our commitment to inclusion, through our Equalities Calendar**
- **Establish an effective collaboration between the BAME Network, GATE and other minority communities**
- **Undertake a mystery shop on our services to ensure our departments are operative in an inclusive and fair manner**