



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Introduction

This strategy has been developed during 2020 with the coronavirus pandemic having a direct effect on people's mental health, isolation, increased cases of domestic abuse, job losses and homelessness disproportionately affecting certain groups. Assisting these groups has been, and will remain, a major priority for the Council. The Council's own working practices have also changed beyond recognition with home working and more limited access to offices, thus impacting on the customer experience for residents.

International movements such as the progression of 'Me Too' and the more recent "Black Lives Matter" have been raised in importance by ordinary people, traditional media and social media. Also in the media has been the issues around "trans" rights. All of these are taken into account in this Strategy and in the Equalities and Diversity Action Plan.

But it doesn't stop there. Many people and groups don't have a voice and also face discrimination and harassment. This strategy equally focuses on the needs of disabled people; physical, mental and intellectual, and, although not a protected characteristic, it also aims to improve quality of life for people on low income.

In taking equalities further, and to reflect unprecedented changes and international movements during 2020, we have changed our ethos slightly from 'equality, diversity and inclusion' to 'diversity, inclusion and belonging'. The aim will be that diverse colleagues and residents feel truly valued and have a sense of belonging. This will be measured by a mixture of qualitative as well as quantitative data.

Where we are now

Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) is working towards improving diversity and inclusion within the local authority sector. Having researched a variety of assessment frameworks DBC has opted to adopt the Local Authority Equality Framework. It has assessed its performance on equality, diversity and inclusion against the performance areas within the framework, namely:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Involving your communities
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

The framework has three levels of achievement:

‘Developing’

‘Achieving’

‘Excellent’

After careful consideration DBC has assessed its recent performance as between **‘Developing’** and **‘Achieving’**

The gaps and improvements identified within the self-assessment against the framework, along with existing/outstanding diversity and inclusion actions, and actions emanating from this strategy, form its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.

DBC's Vision

Our Equalities aim is to:

“Challenge discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, improve access to services, champion mutual respect and increase participation in local decisions”

To help achieve this we have developed this strategy and an action plan to further our performance in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion to fully **‘Achieving’** in the Local Authority Equality Framework, with ‘Excellent’ in our vision.

The legal side

In addition to the Equality Act 2010, this strategy also takes into account relevant provisions within the Care Act 2014, the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. This strategy should be read alongside DBC's:

- Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adult's Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 are now well embedded and DBC continues to commit to the three requirements of the Duty, namely to have due regard in its employment and operations 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

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The protected characteristics referred to above are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This strategy explains how DBC will endeavour to meet its requirements in the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Eliminate unlawful discrimination

As an employer and in its role in delivering services at DBC must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination. The Equality Act identifies six types of discrimination; direct discrimination, discrimination by association, discrimination by perception, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

DBC's Corporate Plan sets out the vision, ambitions and plans for the next few years and are indelibly linked to equality, diversity and inclusion. Strategic priorities in respect of its employment obligations will include:

- Attract, recruit and retain talent
- Develop high quality leadership and management
- Develop individual and collective performance
- Engage and include Employees

The Corporate Plan explicitly state DBC's commitment to ensure the highest standards of equality, diversity and inclusion.

All colleagues receive mandatory introductory training on equality, diversity and inclusion and follow up refresher training every three years.

All colleagues (and customer groups where practicable) will be trained on the Social Model of Disability. This model, adopted by the World Health Organisation and UK Government, separates impairment from disability and is seen as a more positive way of identifying and removing barriers to communication and access.

Gender pay gap – DBC engages fully with the requirement to report on and publicise the salaries received by women and men within the organisation.

A core element at DBC, from the top and through all roles, is the expectation that every colleague has the right to challenge and where necessary report anyone within DBC they feel are negatively stereotyping, speaking or acting in prejudicial terms, bullying or harassing or discriminating in any way, without fear of repercussion.

Advance / promote equality of opportunity

Advance / promote equality of opportunity is defined as the need to

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic
- Meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic where these are different from the needs of people who do not share it
- Encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

DBC is committed to extending and improving the data it collects in order to identify gaps or trends and tailor its services where possible to advance equality of opportunity.

DBC will make use of provisions within the Equality Act 2010 to adopt positive action, where appropriate, to ensure colleagues and residents (to some degree), reflect as much as is reasonable, the diversity demographics of the local area.

The Equality Act 2010 also allows for 'more favourable treatment' in respect of disabled colleagues and residents and we will utilise these provisions when required. DBC will also continue to support the Job Centre Plus "Disability Confident" programme.

DBC aims to be a 'gay-friendly' organisation. It is committed to promoting equality within the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities. It will review its training activities, newsletter articles, support of regional LGBT activities and will continue to have a **zero tolerance** towards homophobic bullying, harassment or discrimination in addition to its stance on tackling homophobic hate incidents and hate crime.

Data collection

DBC is aware of the importance in collecting diversity data but recognises that previous resident profiling needs updating and this strategy will take full account of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 in ensuring only data meeting that strict criteria will be collected. This strategy focuses on the effect of a resident's protected characteristic on access and communication, resulting in much more effective outcomes. Although some specific data is required by regulatory authorities, residents will become much more familiar with DBC colleagues asking if they have "any additional or specific needs or requirements we should be aware of".

Foster good relations

Fostering good relations is defined as the need to

- tackle prejudice, and
- promote understanding

DBC will continue to work with voluntary and support groups for a variety of diverse communities within the areas it operates. With the long standing funding constraints in the statutory services associated with local authorities, such as social services and community

mental health teams, fostering relations with community groups and the “third sector” has never been more relevant and necessary.

Our residents

Only by understanding who lives and works in DBC will we be able to provide appropriate and good quality services that meet the needs of our Borough’s different communities. The information we hold about our communities is not adequate and we shall endeavor through the timeframe of this strategy to ensure that we evaluate and fully understand the needs of our Community. Using available information (internally and externally) to date we will develop an improved resident profile of DBC.

Delivering equalities at Dacorum

DBC will take responsibility to ensure that equality is integrated into service delivery and this strategy demonstrates our commitment to embedding equality and diversity practices in everything we do.

The strategy intends to:

- Inform Councillors, staff and the local community
- Provide direction, policy and initiatives
- Co-ordinate activity across the Council and ensure it is monitored and evaluated

The Council complies with the legal framework as set out by the Equality Act 2010. In order for the Council to deliver on its top priorities, our equality objectives seek to ensure there are appropriate processes and structures in place, as follows:

- Performance management systems are in place
- Assistant Directors and Group Managers, through their Service Plans have the day to day responsibility of ensuring improvements identified by service planning / community impact assessments are carried out.

- Will work to establish an equality and diversity forum which has the ability to challenge the Council and work with the Council on this strategy.

We aim to ensure that high quality service standards and equality are always maintained. In order to improve access to all, every service user has the right to:

- Receive accessible services and facilities and to be free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Be treated with respect and be provided with accurate and up to date information about Council services
- Feel able to access Council services and not feel excluded due to their gender, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age, marital status, level of income, family responsibility and educational attainment.
- Be consulted, directly or through appropriate representatives or groups on the way the Council Plan delivers its services.
- Assurance that contracts with providers and services will be incorporated appropriately with equality principles and that performance against these will be monitored.
- Expect us to procure goods from companies that have in place arrangements to comply with the Council's equality and diversity commitments
- Give feedback and raise complaints about services through clear and easy to use complaints/compliments procedure
- Contribute to the Council's decision making process through consultation and other means. This includes all user representative groups, community groups and those who historically have been under represented.

Other factors

Extremism

DBC takes the Government's Prevent Duty seriously. It is very mindful of the need to make colleagues aware of the safeguarding and national security implications of extremism and radicalisation.

Hate Crime

DBC's zero-tolerance of Hate Crime has already been mentioned in this document. The Home Office recognised motivators of Hate Crime are Disability, Gender Reassignment (Transphobia), Race, Religion and Sexual Orientation (Homophobia). DBC recognises the need for this to be dealt with differently from general ASB as hate crime is often targeted towards an individual and therefore has potential for repeat incidents. DBC will develop a robust Hate Crime Policy and this will be communicated to colleagues and residents.

Domestic Abuse / Violence

Following good practice nationally Dacorum has in place a bespoke Domestic Abuse Policy aimed at protecting all victims and survivors, irrespective of gender or sexual orientation or any other protected characteristic.

Dacorum is mindful of the fact its colleagues can also be victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse and to this end will develop a Domestic Abuse Policy for colleagues.

Child Sexual Exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. DBC has in place a Safeguarding Policy for Children and Young People. Although CSE is addressed in the policy and in Safeguarding training

sessions, Dacorum also includes awareness of CSE in Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training and reporting mechanisms such as Concern cards.

Supporting the Government's Serious Violence Strategy

The Serious Violence Strategy was published by the Home Office in April 2018. Although much of the strategy is about law enforcement, it also looks at the root causes of the problem and how to support young people to lead productive lives away from violence.

Action in the strategy is centered on 4 main themes:

- tackling county lines and misuse of drugs
- early intervention and prevention
- supporting communities and local partnerships
- law enforcement and the criminal justice response

DBC will raise awareness in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training and in Safeguarding Training of the increasing problems associated with 'county lines', where young people are being recruited into drugs trafficking and dealing outside of the big cities, and 'cuckooing', where vulnerable people have their homes taken over for drugs dealing and in some cases prostitution.

Modern Slavery

Modern slavery is a complex crime that takes a number of different forms. It encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking.

Diversity and Inclusion training sessions and Safeguarding training sessions include examples of Modern Slavery and encourage participants to be familiar with signs and to raise concerns with mechanisms such as the Concern Card.

Community Impact Assessments

DBC is keen in the lifetime of this strategy to improve the frequency and quality of Community Impact Assessments (CIAs). In the past many colleagues have found CIAs (previously EqIAs) to be cumbersome and without clarity or outcome. The new process is much more user-friendly and the aim is for all new policies, decisions, restructures and anything else with potential impact on colleagues or residents to have a CIA in place at time of Executive consideration.

Procurement

Contractors, suppliers and consultants working for or on behalf of DBC represent the face of the organisation and must therefore share the same ethos and approach to diversity and inclusion and the concept of identifying and removing barriers.

Those working with DBC, and any sub-contractors will be expected, in addition to standard partnering terms, to:

- 'Sign up' to this strategy and its objectives
- Provide DBC with relevant requested diversity data on their workforce
- In partnering arrangements agree to invest in and send relevant staff to appropriate diversity and safeguarding training opportunities at DBC
- Report to key DBC colleagues cases where they suspect the safety of children or vulnerable adults may be at risk

Unconscious bias

Implicit or unconscious bias happens by our brains making incredibly quick judgments and assessments of people and situations without us realising. DBC recognises the need for awareness training to colleagues, and in particular to recruiters and decision makers, on

unconscious bias, to enable them to become aware of the groups of people they may have an unconscious bias towards and take action to address it when necessary.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a relatively new term that refers to people who have autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, ADHD and other neurological conditions. DBC recognises that all too often we focus on the challenges associated with neurodiverse colleagues and customers, rather than the strengths. Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging training at DBC from 2020 will include awareness training on neurodiversity, estimated to affect about 1 in 5. The awareness training will include factors such as recruitment and performance in the workplace and tailoring support to individuals in the workplace and outside.

Involving customers

DBC recognises that people have differing needs and expectations, and will continue to provide a range of ways in which residents can become involved in discussing their views, including ensuring there are alternatives to formal meetings.

DBC will ensure that non-Council venues used for Council events and purposes are checked for accessibility and other diversity requirements such as food provision and staff awareness.

Colleagues

DBC is proud of its diverse colleague base and genuinely believe respect and inclusion is part of its culture. There is always room for improvement and during the life of this strategy DBC will analyse the representation of colleagues compared to the demographic diversity of the areas in which it operates. This will be done taking full account of GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018. If gaps or trends are identified it will take a proactive role in narrowing or correcting these, including consultation with colleagues, diversity groups within the

community, and the use of positive action to encourage under-represented groups to apply for vacancies.

DBC will endeavor to make full use of opportunities within its Apprenticeship Levy to develop a new generation of local authority professionals.

Excellent customer service is about knowing who your residents are and what their specific needs or requirements are, already mentioned in this strategy, but it also requires a happy and inclusive workforce. Throughout the life of this strategy DBC will develop a Diversity and Inclusion Sub-Group predominantly comprising colleagues representing the various protected characteristics – this will liaise directly with the internal Health and Wellbeing Group. It will actively engage with and empower this group in an attempt to improve morale, inclusiveness and general quality of life for all colleagues in what is recognised as a very stressful sector to work in. Activities such as social events, cultural festivities, dress-down days, celebration of national foods and charity events will form part the promotion of diversity within the organisation.

DBC's 10 point commitment

Dacorum Borough Council has chosen a simple 10 point commitment to equalities, diversity and inclusion to summarise its priorities.

In the period 2021 to 2024 we will focus on the following 10 aims:

- 1 Ensuring that the Council has a representative workforce; reflecting the diverse makeup of the area in which we operate
- 2 A continuation of encourage staff to challenge stereotyping and discriminatory practices: within the offices and outside
- 3 That Members and staff continue to receive the latest best practice and training on equality, diversity and belonging, including neurodiversity
- 4 That our procurement practices continue to ensure contractors and suppliers demonstrate a genuine culture of inclusion and equality of opportunity
- 5 Further promotion of our zero-tolerance approach towards hate incidents and hate crime
- 6 Improve our performance in ensuring resident-facing policies and procedures are subject to effective community impact assessments
- 7 That victims and survivors of domestic abuse (residents and colleagues) are supported and signposted to the most appropriate agencies
- 8 That residents representing all protected characteristics are encouraged to become involved in shaping services
- 9 Increase awareness of diversity-related safeguarding issues including extremism and radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, modern slavery and young gangs among staff, Members and the community
- 10 Develop working relations with more "third sector" agencies representing and supporting diverse communities and groups