



Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Foreword

Today, more than ever, the importance of a firm and unwavering commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is undeniable. There are those who seek to bring division globally, nationally, and locally, focusing on what divides, not unites, us. For Watford, this is not our way or who we are. We recognise the strength that comes from our diversity. Our approach to EDI is not just about compliance but recognising the richness that different perspectives bring to what we do and ensuring that we are genuinely inclusive. We are proud to celebrate what makes each of us special and appreciate the role everyone plays in our town and council.

We are fully committed to placing EDI at the forefront of everything we do, from our role as an employer, across the services we deliver and, vitally, in our role as community leader, where we can lead by example and inspire others. It sets the standard for how we treat each other, our partners, and the community we serve. It reflects our dedication to creating an environment where everyone, irrespective of their background, identity, or circumstance, can thrive, feel valued, and contribute to the best of their abilities.

Having a robust EDI policy ensures we are responsive to the varied needs of our diverse population and by promoting an inclusive environment, we can harness the full potential of our staff and community, ensuring Watford benefits from a broader range of skills, experiences, and ideas. We believe our dedication to EDI strengthens public trust, enhancing our reputation as a progressive, fair, and responsible council.

We invite you to embark on this journey with us, as we strive to create a Watford where everyone feels a sense of belonging, where opportunities are accessible to all, and where the vibrancy of our diversity shines through. Together, we can build a brighter, more equitable, and inclusive future for Watford.

Councillor Aga Dychton
Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Community

Councillor Mark Watkin
Portfolio Holder for Resources

Introduction

Watford Borough Council is an ambitious organisation that is committed to championing equality and embracing diversity in everything we do. We see this commitment as going beyond our statutory duty so that we understand the community we serve and are working with them, to make sure everyone in Watford feels part of our town and can access and enjoy all that it has to offer.

When we talk about equality, diversity, and inclusion in Watford, we mean treating people fairly, impartially and without bias. We are creating conditions in the workplace and our community which encourage and value diversity and promote dignity and inclusion.

Equality does not mean treating everyone the same; it takes account that people, whilst similar in many ways, are also different. Therefore, equality means treating people as individuals and recognising their different needs.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion make a vital contribution to our aspirations for the town and our community. In Watford, we want everyone to feel welcome, accepted, valued, respected, and included to strengthen our unity, sense of belonging and mutual trust. This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy will guide our efforts to:

- Understand and celebrate the diversity of our communities so that everyone feels welcomed, respected and accepted in Watford.
- Deliver accessible, inclusive, and responsive services to our community.
- Employ a workforce that reflects and embraces the diversity of Watford's population.
- Ensure we address the climate and ecological emergency effects in our community in an equitable and just way.

This Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is guided by three key pillars:

- Our Role as Community Leader
- Our Workforce
- Delivering Services

Meeting our statutory requirements

Watford Borough Council aims to demonstrate excellence in equality and diversity issues across all areas of policy and practice. In addition to meeting the legal requirements and responsibilities as a public body, we seek to always fulfil our public duty in ways that are:

- accessible
- inclusive
- responsive
- fair

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. Everyone has at least one of the protected characteristics, so the Act protects everyone. The Act defines the protected characteristics as:

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|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Age | Race | Marriage and civil partnership |
| Disability | Religion and belief | Sexual orientation |
| Gender reassignment | Sex | Pregnancy and maternity |

The Equality Act 2010 also includes the Public Sector Equality Duty, which aims to ensure that all public bodies have ‘due regard’ to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation and any other prohibited conduct.
- 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.

Having due regard involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people with protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

Fostering good relations involves:

- Tackling discrimination, and
- Promoting understanding between different groups of people.

Watford Borough Council is committed to championing equality and embracing diversity and inclusion beyond just complying with our statutory duty in the Equality Act. The Act also requires councils to annually publish relevant, proportionate, information to demonstrate its compliance with the Equality Duty and to publish its equalities objectives at least every four years.

To comply with the Equality Duty, we may treat people with protected characteristics differently in order to treat them fairly and ensure that discrimination does not occur. As both a service provider and an employer, we recognise that the specific requirements for equality, diversity and inclusion in Watford can change. Therefore, community engagement helps us to continue to meet the changing needs and demographic of our residents, visitors, employees, and businesses. As an employer of choice, we ensure that mutual respect is embedded into the culture of the organisation through a suite of policies that include Employee Code of Conduct, Safeguarding, Bullying and our Behavioural Framework.

Our approach to equality, diversity & inclusion

- **Equality** is treating everybody equally and fairly, regardless of their personal characteristics, such as their ethnicity or sexuality. It is also ensuring that everybody has equal opportunity.
- **Diversity** is recognising and celebrating the difference between people and communities. A welcoming borough celebrates its wide range of cultures. A diverse workplace welcomes the variety of ideas, innovations, and representativeness that diversity brings.
- **Inclusion** is creating an environment that actively includes, welcomes, and values everybody, regardless of their background. This policy represents our ambition to become more proactive in our inclusion, reaching into communities, meeting people where they are, and attracting the best talent to our inclusive workplace.

Watford Borough Council is a borough that is full of potential. We have a richly diverse and growing population; an emerging and strengthening business sector; an ambitious regeneration and housebuilding programme; and an attractive natural environment. Exciting prospects lie ahead for the borough, and it is essential that Watford's growth and development aims to support disadvantaged residents in order to reduce inequality gaps and increase community engagement.

Our Council Plan 2022-26 has identified equality, diversity, and inclusion as a key area for action to create a diverse, happy and healthy town and to listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford.

The Delivery Plan 2022-24 expands this to deliver our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy so it underpins what we do and how we engage with our community; making sure it reflects our cosmopolitan town where everyone can thrive. This is important because knowledge and discovery help us to understand what matters to Watford's community.

Everyone who works for the council has a part to play in our vision to provide a lifetime of opportunities for all. Equality, diversity, and inclusion lies at the heart of everything we do as we embark on ambitious regeneration and commercial projects, grow our business sector, and attract new industries into the borough, provide vital services for our communities, and ensure that we adapt and mitigate against climate change impacts.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to publish equalities objectives every four years. We have established our equalities objectives through three key themes: –

- Our role as community leader
- Delivering services
- Our workforce

Our role as community leader

We are committed to building on our reputation as an organisation that is inclusive, provides relevant and accessible services, and recognises the value of every individual. We also realise the importance of encouraging a sense of belonging, to a place, organisation, and community and we will work together with faith, voluntary and community sectors as key partners for us on this journey. Our values and behaviours aim to reinforce this commitment through informal and formal working practices that promote mutual respect and co-operation.

We are developing a Borough Profile based on data from the Census 2021 to help us to understand who lives in Watford because it is important that we understand the varied needs of our diverse community. We also recognise that it is important to ensure all residents feel welcomed, valued, and can contribute to the attractiveness of Watford.

As community leader our objectives are to:

- Work with our partners to implement the Council Plan, which seeks to improve the social, economic and environment aspects of the borough.
- Lead by example by modelling good practices of equality, diversity and inclusion as a service provider, commissioner and employer.
- Maintain good relations between communities through our communications and promote cultural diversity.
- Celebrate the inclusiveness of our borough, making Watford an accessible and safe borough for all.

Delivering services

Equality, diversity, and inclusion are also central to the decisions we make on how to deliver the best outcomes for our communities at a time of considerable financial challenge for the council. We will continue to use our limited resources efficiently, and our workforce will continue to maintain high standards in service delivery to support all residents in the most effective and efficient way possible.

As a further part of this commitment, we undertake equality impact assessments (EIAs) of policies and functions which impact on employees and/or external contacts or the wider community. These impact assessments are a means of promoting equality and good relations, supporting inclusion, whilst

also ensuring that we carefully consider the different needs of those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The assessments contribute to the social value we seek to deliver by raising awareness and understanding, and by promoting equality through the work we do.

As a service provider our objectives are to:

- Deliver services that are accessible to all and that are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of our community.
- Demonstrate behaviours in line with the Employee Code of Conduct. Employees are expected to promote equality by not discriminating against anyone and by treating members of the public, colleagues, and elected members with respect.
- Engage with all groups in our community when making decisions about our services; and purposeful engagement with those groups where involvement is low.
- Consistently collect and monitor relevant equalities data from our service users so that we can understand how effective our services are at reaching and improving outcomes for our diverse communities. This helps us to understand the needs of our different residents and design policies and services to meet those needs.
- Embed the EIA process more thoroughly to support effective decision-making.
- Ensure that commissioning and procurement arrangements comply with equalities standards and add social value to the borough.

Our workforce

At Watford Borough Council we consider equality issues alongside other factors when making decisions as an employer of choice. We are committed to ensuring that we have effective policies, strategies, procedures, and processes and that we encourage behaviour which promotes equality, encourages diversity, and contributes to an inclusive organisational culture. Our Workforce Monitoring Report provides an analysis of council employees in relation to the characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010.

We recognise that the talent and commitment of our employees is key to delivering high-quality services, so we want our workforce to benefit from development opportunities and feel empowered to direct their own progress and to achieve even more.

As an employer our objectives are to:

- Provide appropriate and on-going equality training and support to enable employees and councillors to manage and/or work within a diverse workforce.

- Increase equalities disclosure on recruitment and workforce monitoring information to support our aim for a diverse workforce, reflecting our community.
- Raise the profile of our Staff Ambassador, Mental Health, Career Coaches, and Wellbeing groups and support their work.
- Promote a working environment that promotes dignity and respect where individual differences, and the contributions are recognised and valued.
- Demonstrate zero tolerance of any unfair and unacceptable treatment in the workplace, and to discipline those that breach this policy.

Our Human Resources and Organisational Development Team will promote fairness in the workplace and ensure that all employees are informed of this policy, and of their obligation to comply with its requirements.

How We Will Deliver

A delivery plan underpins this policy to ensure that we meet our objectives and monitor our progress. Strategic accountability for the delivery plan will be through the Corporate Equalities Working Group (CEWG). This group consists of senior leaders from the council, representatives from employee networks and EDI Champions with collective breadth of experience or insight to represent as many of the protected characteristics as possible. Oversight by the CEWG enables us to keep this policy under review, monitor and evaluate Watford Borough Council's progress on our equality journey and identify any improvement opportunities.

Operationally the delivery plan will be driven by project leads/responsible officers who will have responsibility for individual actions. This could either be led from within individual services or leads of task and finish groups that are likely to be established to deliver specific pieces of work. Engagement and feedback from Staff Ambassador Group, employee engagement sessions, and employee training workshops may play a key role in the implementing the actions in the delivery plan. Risks, delivery, and reporting will be monitored through the council's internal governance arrangements including updates to the Corporate Management Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy links to other council strategies

Our commitment to EDI is demonstrated across the full range of our services, and strategic links including:

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| Council Plan 2022-2026 | Local Plan 2021-2038 |
| People Strategy | Customer Experience Strategy |
| Community Engagement and Participation Strategy | Communications and Conversations Strategy |
| Domestic Abuse Policy | Safeguarding Policy |
| Values and Behaviour Framework | Employee Code of Conduct |
| Environment Strategy | Workforce Monitoring Report |
| Housing Strategy and Housing Nomination Policy | |