

CONSULTATION DRAFT

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

**EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY:
JANUARY 2024 TO MARCH 2026**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONSULTATION VERSION OF OUR NEW EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

Cllr Eleanor Stringer, Deputy Leader of Merton Council and Cabinet Member for Civic Pride

As Cabinet Member for Civic Pride, I am delighted to introduce the draft of the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which we will consult widely on between July and October 2023.

Reducing inequality, tackling discrimination, and promoting and celebrating diversity across our borough are fundamental to our administration's commitment to nurturing civic pride and this strategy document is intended to set out how we will tackle these issues over the period 2024 to 2026.

The strategy covers the nine 'characteristics' afforded with protection by the Equality Act 2010 and by the Public Sector Equality Duty: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation. As an administration we are committed to ensuring that people do not experience disadvantage and discrimination on the basis of these characteristics, but we also want to go further in identifying possible causes of disadvantage. To that end, I am very pleased to highlight our intention to broaden the scope of this strategy to include:

- Care experienced young people;
- Armed forces veterans;
- One-parent households;
- Socio-economic status.

We know that care experienced young people and armed forces veterans experience a range of disadvantages in everyday life and we will continue to explore ways in which those disadvantages can be reduced or eliminated both in the way in which we deliver our services and by encouraging others to recognise and mitigate the challenges faced.

We also know that single-parent households and those with lower socio-economic status are more likely to experience disadvantage in accessing services and opportunities and over the life of this strategy we intend exploring ways in which we and our partners can reduce and mitigate the impact of these disadvantages.

Between now and October 2023 we will be consulting widely on this strategy and I look forward to discussing it with a broad range of groups and communities. If you would like us to come and discuss the strategy with you please contact Keith Burns: keith.burns@merton.gov.uk to make the necessary arrangements.

Eleanor Stringer

Cabinet Member for Civic Pride.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out the Council's equality objectives and outlines how we will embed equalities considerations into our day-to-day business.
- 1.2. Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty to ensure that in exercising our functions and delivering services and partnership work we:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share a protected characteristic
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 1.3. The Act also introduced nine Protected Characteristics; Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex and Sexual orientation. Unless otherwise specifically stated, the commitments and objectives set out in this strategy and the associated delivery plan apply equally across all nine protected characteristics.
- 1.4. When developing new policies and making changes to services the Council is required, at the decision-making stage, to assess how changes to policies and service delivery will affect individuals with a protected characteristic. Where a potential for negative impact is identified the Council is required to identify ways in which those negative impacts can be mitigated. By requiring this of Council's, the Act requires that we take steps to ensure equity of access to services for all our residents.
- 1.5. As a Council we acknowledge that we have a key role to play to promote a fair and more equal society and that we can do this by putting equalities considerations at the heart of the decisions we make about strategic priorities, policies and plans, service delivery, contract arrangements and employment. Through the Merton Partnership we will continue to engage with partner organisations to identify ways in which we can work together to deliver better equalities outcomes for our residents and communities.
- 1.6. We also recognise that our understanding of the inequality impacts in relation to each of the nine protected characteristics is not equally well developed and over the lifetime of this strategy we will seek to address this with targeted research and consultation work. There are a number of specific commitments focused on improving our understanding of inequality impacts relating to specific characteristics set out in the delivery plan that supports this strategy.

- 1.7. In producing this strategy, we have developed objectives that promote equality, diversity and inclusion in Merton by:
- listening to our diverse communities and understanding that everyone is unique and “one size does not fit all”
 - taking measures to address existing inequality and differential service outcomes
 - developing strong partnerships with our Voluntary and Community Sector to work towards co-producing the delivery of services that increase access to services and opportunities that nurture Civic Pride
 - seeking opportunities for building a sustainable future for all
 - appreciating the different backgrounds cultures and experiences that make Merton a great place to live, work and visit.
- 1.8. In developing objectives that promote equality, diversity and inclusion in Merton we have also recognised that there are a number of groups of people with shared characteristics, beyond the nine characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010, who are at risk of experiencing disadvantage in accessing Council services and in other aspects of their day to day lives. The Council will, therefore, consider these groups to be within the scope of this Strategy and, in particular, will take into account those characteristics when undertaking Equality Impact Assessments. The four identified groups / characteristics are:
- Care experienced young people;
 - Armed forces veterans;
 - One-parent households;
 - Socio-economic status.

Our Commitment

- 1.9. The Equality Act underpins this Strategy and the objectives apply to all the protected characteristics identified in the Act, as well as to the four additional characteristics / groups identified at 1.7 above. As a Council we will not tolerate discrimination and will endeavour to consider all the protected characteristics in the delivery of our services.
- 1.10. We have developed an Equality Charter that is our statement of intent and outlines our commitment and sets out the framework for the management and effective delivery of equality, diversity and and inclusion in Merton and contributes to the newly adopted Council Plan for 2023 to 2026 “Building a Better Merton Together”. The council is committed to “Nurturing Civic Pride “ and want residents to be proud of their local area, feel more connected to their community and get more involved in making Merton a great place to live, work and visit. Our Equality Charter is set out in Appendix 1 of this Strategy.
- 1.11. The Council’s Equality Charter has been informed by London Councils’ Anti-racism Statement (reproduced at Appendix 2 of this strategy) and by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives’ Statement of Intent on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ([ED&I Statement of Intent 2022.pdf](#)

(hubspotusercontent-na1.net). The Council endorses both the London Councils Anti-Racism Statement and the SOLACE Statement of Intent on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

- 1.12. The Strategy has been designed to cover the period from January 2024 through to March 2026. This end date aligns with the end Date of the Council Plan and coincides with the end date of the Equality and Human Rights Commission's four-year cycle. It is intended that the next iteration of this Strategy will be developed alongside the next Council Plan so that reducing and tackling inequality continues to sit at the heart of the Council's commitment to our residents and communities.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives

- 1.13. To underpin our commitment to prevent or reduce identified inequalities in Merton, and to support and promote diversity and inclusion, we have developed four Equality Objectives that aim to improve the life chances of our residents and create a more level starting point for all. The objectives are outlined below:

1. Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances and the resulting differences in access and outcomes

2. Promoting Community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people and develop services to meet the differing needs.

3. Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together

4. Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making

These four objectives underpin this Strategy and the action plan which accompanies it.

Intersectionality

- 1.14. We recognise that people share more than one protected characteristic and as a result some may face multiple disadvantage and discrimination. As a council we will do all we can to address issues of intersectionality and inequality, both in our actions to reduce inequality and in recognising the potential for cumulative impact when undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

The Council as an employer

The Council recognises that as well as our obligations to promote and enable equality, diversity and inclusion across the borough in the way we deliver services, we also have a key responsibility to our own workforce, both current and future. We are committed to creating an environment that drives systemic change and works to ensure that we bring to life our pledges, remain committed to our values, and embed a diverse and inclusive culture that allows everyone to realise their potential. As an organisation our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion approach will include fair recruitment, continuous education and awareness of EDI to make everyone feel their uniqueness is valued, and ensure all staff are comfortable in their own skin. The Council's people strategy, 'Our People and Culture' is where we set out our equalities objectives as they relate to our workforce. Our People and Culture should, therefore, be viewed as a companion document to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

2. Merton the place

Demographics

- 2.1. We are a growing and diverse borough – Merton is home to 215,187 people, an increase of 7% over the last 10 years, and the population is made up of a broad range of ethnicities. One third of residents were born outside the UK and the most common languages spoken after English are Polish, Gujarati and Urdu, which reflects the Polish, Eastern European and Asian communities across Merton. Contextual demographic information, taken from the Council Plan, is reproduced overleaf.

Local issues and how the Strategy aims to address these

- 2.2. The aim of the Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategy 2024-26 is to nurture Civic Pride and address key issues evidenced from extensive engagement with residents, communities and organisations in the borough; commissioned research into the impact of COVID-19; and a range of demographic data. More detail on these evidence sources is contained in the next section of the Strategy.
- 2.3. Based on this evidence, the aims of our work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion are:
- 2.3.1. bridging the gap between the levels of deprivation and prosperity in the borough particularly focusing on:
- raising educational attainment for all children and young people and reduce attainment gaps for target groups including children with special education needs or disabilities, those who are looked after in care, specific B.A.M.E groups, specific groups of White boys and those who are excluded from school
 - tackling rising unemployment particularly among young B.A.M.E. communities and disabled residents and supporting those who are long term unemployed back into work
 - Reducing health inequalities particularly the issues affecting some B.A.M.E. communities, disabled and older residents.
 - Supporting residents who may be affected by mental illness or dementia
 - increasing education and economic opportunity in the east of the borough
 - Providing good quality and affordable homes
 - Supporting residents with the pressures of the Cost-of-Living crisis
- 2.3.2. Improving understanding of the borough's diversity and fostering better understanding between communities.

- 2.3.3. Working towards being a borough of sport and supporting residents to be active and have equal access to sporting facilities
- 2.3.4. Supporting those who do not usually get involved in decision-making to better understand how they can get involved and get their voices heard
- 2.3.5. Tackling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that has compounded existing inequalities
- 2.3.6. Tackling financial and food insecurity that disproportionately affects residents in the Wards to the east of the borough
- 2.3.7. Supporting residents to access on-line access services
- 2.3.8. Providing services that meet the needs of a changing population and that are equally accessible to all.

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A SNAPSHOT OF OUR BOROUGH

Population and demographics

Residents: 215, 187 (Census 2021)

Population by age:

Age 0-15: 23%

Age 16-64: 65.3%

Age 65+: 11.8%

Born in the UK: 59% (Census 2021)

Main language other than English: 21.45%

(Census 2021)

Ethnic group (Census 2021):

Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh: 18.6%

Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: 10.6%

Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: 5.9%

White: 60.2%

Other ethnic group: 4.6%

Education and Qualifications

60.6% of adults with a degree or equivalent: **2.3%** of adults with no qualification:

(APS 2021)

24.2% of pupils eligible for free school meals

(DFE, 2021/22 academic)

12.8% of Primary school pupils getting SEN support

14.8% of secondary school pupils getting SEN support (DfE 2022)

Economy and Environment

£6,299 million GDP in Merton at current market prices: in 2020 (ONS, 2022)

13,305 Businesses in Merton : (Inter-Departmental Business Register – IDBR, 2020)

80.9% Employment rate: (Annual Population Survey – APS, June 2022):

18,633 Universal Credit recipients (*DWP Claimant Count, December 2022*)

Built and Natural Environment

2.7 tonnes CO2 emissions per capita (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy – BEIS, 2020)

79,871 tonnes Total waste collected: (DEFRA, 2020-21)

10.5% Fuel poverty rate: (BEIS fuel poverty sub-regional statistics, 2020)

28% Canopy cover as of 2020: (Merton Climate Delivery Plan Year 2, 2022)

Health and Wellbeing

78.6 years Male 83.5 Female Life expectancy (Merton Story 2022)

7.7 years for males and **5 years** for females - gap in life expectancy between the 10 % most and least deprived (Merton Story 2022)

53.3% of adults getting five-a-day (Sport England, 2019/20)

67% of adults getting enough physical activity: (Merton Data, 2020/21)

10% of residents aged over 65 live with frailty (Merton Story 2022)

Social & Cultural Environment

86% People who feel a sense of community cohesion: (Merton Residents' Survey, 2021)

6.6 Crime rate per 1,000 people: (MPS data, 12 month rolling August 2022)

63% People who feel safe during the night: (Merton Residents' Survey, 2021)

204 Charities based in Merton: (Merton Connected, 2021)

17,945 Volunteers involved in local charities: (Merton Connected, 2021)

3. What has informed the strategy and what we are doing to address issues.

- 3.1. In developing the strategy and identifying the Equality Objectives set out in the introduction to the Strategy several cross-cutting themes have emerged that inform and underpin our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. These themes reflect issues that affect our residents in different ways and it is important, therefore, that the development of our Strategy takes account of these issues. It is also important that we implement measures to produce positive outcomes for all and recognise that successful implementation will require collaborative working across the council and Merton Partnership
- 3.2. The issues and themes identified are not all new and existing strategies such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and our Cost of Living Action Plan have started to address those known themes and issues. The new Council Plan similarly seeks to address a range of relevant issues including those relating to housing and the environment as well as focusing on inclusion and equality through nurturing Civic Pride.
- 3.3. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement and the Cost-of-Living crisis have brought to the forefront a range of challenges faced by our residents that increasingly requires the council and our partners to deliver services in a joined-up way that acknowledges and understand the borough's diversity and is culturally sensitive to the varying backgrounds and needs of our residents.
- 3.4. We recognise not everyone receives the same start in life and this can significantly shape an individual's opportunities throughout their life. As a council we recognise that understanding this inequality is key to addressing some of the complex issues that create barriers and exclusion for some of our residents. On this basis, we are committed to working toward:
- Everyone having an opportunity to fulfil their potential from the outset
 - Individuals having choice and control to improve life chances and outcome
 - Tackling the structural barriers that lead to inequality
- 3.5. It is evident that some families experience inter-generational disadvantage that results in individuals experiencing inequality throughout their lives. The challenge, therefore, is for the council to work with partners to find ways to break the cycle of deprivation still faced by many. The complex challenge of cyclical disadvantage is experienced by a range of people including Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities; children growing up in lower socio-economic households; Gypsies and Travellers; the long-term unemployed; people living with a disability; and young adults leaving care.

- 3.6. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all our lives and has further entrenched the inequalities that were already evident in society as a whole and across our borough . This has focused our attention even more on the need to work with our communities to promote opportunity and proactively take steps to eliminate discrimination and the disadvantage faced by many.

Health Inequalities

- 3.7. The existence of health inequalities in the borough is well evidenced by our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The key findings from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment have informed commitments in our existing work, including measures in the Health and Wellbeing strategy to address the poorer health outcomes for residents of the East of the borough. Everyone has the right to live a healthy life regardless of income and social status and should be able to have a good quality of life.
- 3.8. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights inequalities in the wards in the East of the borough in life expectancy, mortality and morbidity for main diseases. Overall life expectancy in the borough is 78.6 years in males and 83.5 years in females, and healthy life expectancy is 66.6 years in males and 67.1 years in females. The gap in life expectancy between the 10% most deprived, primarily in the East of the borough, and the 10% least deprived in Merton, is 7.7 years for males and 5 years for females.
- 3.9. The pre-existing health inequalities have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022 illustrates that “the pandemic has not impacted health and wellbeing in Merton equally, with some groups affected more than others including older people, young people, those with learning disabilities, those living in wards in the East of the borough and some ethnic minorities.
- 3.10. The Health and Wellbeing Board commissioned research by Black Asian Minority Ethnic Voice and Mencap that gave an insight into the effects of the pandemic on B.A.M.E. communities and residents living with a disability. The findings and recommendations from this work have informed the development of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The council is committed to working in partnership to tackle the long term impact of Covid-19 and supporting our communities to be resilient and have access to the tools to promote healthy lifestyles.
- 3.11. In the short term we have worked with local community organisations such as Black Asian Minority Ethnic Voice and the Polish Families Association to better understand the issues their communities face and have gained insights that now inform this Strategy.

- 3.12. Going forward we will continue to work with Voluntary and Community organisations and the Integrated Care System to deliver the Health and Wellbeing strategy and the Local Outbreak Management Plan to provide fair and equal access to health care.

Black Lives Matter

- 3.13. The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on B.A.M.E. communities and the horrific death of George Floyd in the United States prompted a resurgence in the Black Lives Matter movement across the world. Both events have underlined the ongoing issues of structural inequalities and racism that affect B.A.M.E. communities in the UK.
- 3.14. In Merton we are committed to continuing to engage with our diverse communities to better understand and develop appropriate measures to address the issues affecting the borough's B.A.M.E. communities. We will continue to work in partnership to identify and address the causes of the inequality still faced by some of our residents.
- 3.15. Within the council we have re-established a B.A.M.E. staff forum and have been working with the Race Equality Network (REN) to develop Equality Diversity and Inclusion training and anti-racist initiatives across the council.
- 3.16. The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on some communities underlines the importance of small community led voluntary groups in Merton to support and engage with more marginalised communities. These groups have consistently told us that our criteria for awarding grant funding do not always recognise the benefits that these smaller grass roots organisations can offer. As part of our response to Black Lives Matter, we committed ourselves to recognising the contribution of these groups to tackling inequalities and this led to us reviewing the way that we award funding through the Civic Pride Investing in Communities Grant Programme to ensure a fair and balanced distribution of resources. We will continue to refine this approach for future funding rounds.

Community Engagement

- 3.17. In 2021 we undertook extensive engagement to get a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on our residents and young people and what is important to them. We spoke to individuals and community groups and we discovered that residents valued the amount of green spaces in the borough and the strong community feel. Residents' frustrations included feeling isolated as a result of the pandemic; litter and cleanliness; traffic and congestion; anti-social behaviour and crime; and concern about the declining high streets.
- 3.18. Looking to the future residents could see opportunities to build on the community spirit that emerged during the pandemic; maximising our green

assets such as parks; making Merton a green borough through active travel and green transport; and revitalising our high streets for the whole community. Additionally, young people asked for improvements to make them feel safe and wanted to be included in decision making.

- 3.19. We have reviewed our existing corporate engagement structures and developed a new approach for engaging with residents and other stakeholders that includes using new digital tools and refreshing some of our existing structures, such as the Community Forums.

Cost of Living

- 3.20. We are committed to supporting our residents with the Cost-of-Living crisis and are working in partnership with the Voluntary sector to address five priority themes:

1. Food Poverty
2. Energy Efficiency and Homes
3. Finance, Benefits and Debt
4. Jobs and Skills
5. The Next Generation.

- 3.21. Working with our voluntary partners means that our cost-of-living support is informed by and embedded in our communities. The Young Peoples survey conducted in 2021 showed the level of food poverty in Merton. Ten percent of young people have skipped meals because there wasn't enough food, while twenty percent went a whole day without eating. By considering how residents are being affected and how best to prepare them for future challenges, we are delivering support that meets immediate needs and also starts to build longer-term resilience.

Education inequality

- 3.22. We are committed to providing Merton's children with the best start in life and a good or outstanding education for all. Further information about how Merton works in partnership with schools to secure and maintain improvement to educational outcomes for all children can be found in our education standards report, Celebrating Success.
- 3.23. Merton also works in partnership with schools to facilitate the Black Lives Matter and Equalities Forum, which meets half-termly. The forum has enabled opportunities to hold events, discussions and consultations which drives forward our work on anti-racism and equalities. A review of achievements in 2022 and priorities for 2023 are captured in The Strategy to Address Racism and Racial Inequality across Merton Schools 2022 – 2023.

Access to decent housing

- 3.24. Merton, like other London boroughs, faces a housing crisis with increasing numbers of households in temporary accommodation, the pressures of living with high housing costs and poor-quality accommodation.
- 3.25. We are working towards improving our housing offer for care experienced young people.
- 3.26. We are also committed to increasing the supply of affordable and sustainable homes aiming to build 400 affordable homes on council owned land by 2026 and prioritising the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden. We are working to improve standards in social and private housing through introducing selective licensing and strengthening our housing enforcement activities.

Transforming How We Work With Communities

- 3.27. Through the Transforming How We Work with Communities project, we have developed a new bespoke 'Working Better with Communities' Framework in partnership with a range of stakeholders including the voluntary and community sector. This Framework provides a toolkit for services to use to work collaboratively with communities. It sets out how the council can take action at different levels to mobilise all the assets in the borough and to create the connectivity and community resilience needed to ensure that everyone gets help when they need it. Tackling disadvantage and promoting equality and inclusion is a key element of the framework.

Digital Inclusion

- 3.28. Increasingly public services are moving online and the pandemic has demonstrated that not all households have access to smart devices or broad band (either at all or at speeds that enable good access) – highlighting a digital divide. As such there is a risk that a sizeable number of residents may be digitally excluded from accessing services. Data from Merton Mencap shows that Merton carers are above the national average for digital poverty; 33% are basic or non-users compared with the national average of 22%, and likely to be the most digitally excluded group of residents. Over the period of this strategy we will be undertaking significant work to improve the ways in which residents and businesses can access services and communicate with us as a Council. Avoiding further exclusion of digitally excluded households and individuals will be central to our approach to this work.

Funding

- 3.29. “The Covid-19 pandemic has not just revealed some of the inequalities existing within Merton’s wards east of the borough, it has also exposed a failure to protect and keep afloat, B.A.M.E. organisations which knew and understood the needs of their communities” – B.A.M.E. Voice report, 2021.

We have listened to the concerns of our communities, using the Transforming How we Work with Communities framework, and revised the grant funding process to enable smaller organisations to successfully bid for Civic Pride funds.

- 3.30. The Civic Pride Fund 2023-26: Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector aims to:

1. Invest in and support Merton’s local voluntary and community infrastructure
2. Nurture a strong sense of community and reduce inequalities
3. Bring together preventative services that provide information, advice and support in the community to strengthen Merton resident’s physical, social, emotional, and economic resilience.

- 3.31. We have allocated almost £5million, over the three years 2023 to 2026, from the Civic Pride Fund to organisations in the voluntary and community sector – a sizeable amount has been given to organisations supporting; older people, people living with disabilities and B.A.M.E. communities.

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) terminology

- 3.32. In Merton we value the borough’s diversity and aim to provide an inclusive and culturally sensitive service to all. Through engagement with our residents we have learned that many people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (B.A.M.E.) backgrounds do not identify with or feel comfortable with the use of that term to describe their ethnic identity.

- 3.33. For the purpose of data collection and analysis the term B.A.M.E. can be useful for the collective categorisation of ethnic groups. However, we understand and respect that our diverse ethnic communities have their distinct characteristics histories, cultures and identities that should not be homogenised. We are working to improve our understanding of the different communities in the borough and collaborate with voluntary sector partners to shape inclusive services that are culturally sensitive.

- 3.34. We are developing an inclusive language guide for staff and through continued engagement with our communities, we are aiming to develop more appropriate terminology to describe the borough’s diverse communities.

Equality Analysis

- 3.35. An Equality Analysis (EA) is an assessment and improvement process that helps us to determine how the Council's policies, procedures, services, practices, or new proposals will impact on or affect different communities – especially those groups or communities who experience inequality, discrimination, social exclusion or disadvantage. Undertaking Equality Analyses is a key way in which the Council ensures ongoing compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.36. In Merton Equality Analysis is generally used to inform and or support the following:
- Growth and Savings proposals (as part of the annual budget setting process)
 - Major policy changes that could impact on service access
 - Proposals to close or remodel services, or to change availability
 - Organisational restructuring proposals
- 3.37. Senior managers within Departments are responsible for identifying which proposed changes require an Equality Analysis. Additionally, officers are required to provide decision takers, including Cabinet Members, with sufficient evidence about who the stakeholders are; how they will be affected by proposed changes; and what mitigation is required to reduce / remove any negative impacts.
- 3.38. As noted in the introduction to this Strategy, we are reviewing our approach to Equality Analyses to ensure, among other improvements, that consideration of the potential impact on four characteristics / groups is included in addition to the core nine Protected Characteristics. The four characteristics / groups are:
- Care experienced young people;
 - Armed forces veterans;
 - One-parent households;
 - Socio-economic status.

4. How performance in delivering the strategy will be measured.

Leadership – responsibility and accountability

- 4.1. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is part of the Council's policy framework and elected members therefore have overall responsibility for delivery. The Cabinet Member for Civic Pride has the executive responsibility for promoting equality and diversity across the partnership and all council services, including those delivered on its behalf by businesses, voluntary, community and faith organisations.
- 4.2. Our Corporate Management Team and Departmental Management Teams will have responsibility for the operational implementation of the strategy. This includes making sure that equality diversity and inclusion is central to all work done by the council, communicating and promoting the strategy to others inside and outside the council, setting out what we aim to achieve in terms of equality and diversity, and holding departments to account through performance reviews.
- 4.3. All managers must be familiar with the strategy and be responsible for ensuring equality and diversity is an integral part of any policy development; service design and delivery; employment practices; and procuring and commissioning of goods and services.
- 4.4. All staff including those in organisations we work in partnership with, and who are contracted or commissioned to work on our behalf, have a responsibility to promote equality; eliminate discrimination in their day-to-day work; and recognise and respect the different backgrounds and circumstances of people.

Monitoring of delivery

- 4.5. The strategy will be monitored through the governance structure outlined below:
- 4.6. The Corporate Equality Steering Group is chaired by the Corporate Management Team Equalities Champion and includes senior departmental representatives. The group will take the lead in monitoring the delivery of the strategy's commitments and where necessary highlight issues of concern and make recommendations to the Corporate Management Team for further improvements.

- 4.7. Departmental Equality Steering Groups - each department has a steering group comprised of representatives from across the department. They will be responsible for local delivery of the corporate objectives and will review and revise the priorities based on assessment of service need.
- 4.8. Departments, Services and Teams - will be responsible for the delivery of the strategy through service planning and personal development plans.
- 4.9. The Corporate Management Team - will receive progress reports twice a year.
- 4.10. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission - will receive an annual update on our progress towards achieving the priorities identified in the strategy. This annual update will also be taken to the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities.

Implementation Plan

- 4.11. The plan for implementing the strategy, and the four key objectives, is set out on the following pages. During the consultation period we will develop a range of robust equality diversity and inclusion related performance indicators that will help us monitor our performance and to report on our progress in delivering against the strategy. These will be included in the final version of the action plan outlining the priorities for action against each objective.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024 – 2026: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
Equality Objective 1: Tackling poverty, the structural differences in social circumstances and the resulting differences in access and outcomes					
1.1	Delivering the Council’s Cost of Living Action Plan	2024 - 2026	Mitigated impact of the cost of living crisis on low income households	Cost of Living Action Plan	Innovation and Change
1.2	Ensure contingency and exit plans are in place to minimise negative impacts of ending of the Government’s Household Support Fund	2024	Tapering of support where practicable to reduce any ‘cliff edge’ impacts.	Cost of Living Action Plan	Innovation and Change
1.3	Continue to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme (subject to continuing funding from Government)	2024 - 2026	Increased Volume of children on Free School Meals accessing the programme over time and increased engagement in healthy activities	Cost of Living Action Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
1.4	Continue to support the ‘Black Lives Matter and Equalities Network’ in partnership with Merton Schools.	2024 - 2026	Improved academic / inclusion outcomes for pupils of black and minority ethnic background.	School Improvement Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
1.5	Increase the number of ‘in-house’ specialist SEND school places by 2026	2026	Additional 354 places by 2026	SEND Strategy	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
1.6	Ensuring a mix of affordable housing, with a priority on social housing, in well-designed schemes that promote	2024 - 2026	Number of housing units approved/built and percentage of affordable	Merton’s Housing Delivery Strategy;	Housing and Sustainability

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Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
	inclusion and integration.		accommodation – Annual Housing Performance Monitoring Report	Local Plan	
1.7	<p>Increase financial Inclusion by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to offer a wide selection of payment methods including cash. 2. Maintaining the Council tax support scheme 3. Maintaining the Local Welfare Support Scheme 4. Continuing to provide a Discretionary Housing Payment – where housing benefit or universal credit does not cover housing costs for exceptional circumstances. 5. Offering extended payment arrangements for council tax or other payments due to the council. 	2024 - 2026	<p>Reduced Council Tax bills for low-income households.</p> <p>Increasing take up of Local Welfare Support scheme and Discretionary Housing Payments.</p> <p>Residents benefit from convenient payment methods and terms.</p>	Council Plan	Finance and Digital
1.8	<p>Increase Digital Inclusion in a range of ways by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connectivity – ensuring that 	2024 - 2026	Reductions over time in the extent and impact of digital exclusion.	Council Plan	Innovation and Change & Finance and Digital

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
	<p>residents and organisations can access both the internet and council services wherever they are in the community.</p> <p>2. Democracy - making maximum use of digital technology to increase community engagement and collaboration, improve transparency, and optimise democratic decision making.</p> <p>3. Inclusion – continue to develop new ways of ensuring that the benefits of the internet, digital technologies and digital services are available to everyone.</p> <p>4. Services – ensuring that access to Council services is designed around the needs of residents and users, rather than reflecting professional, organisational and technological silos.</p>		<p>Access to services in ways that suits all residents and does not exacerbate digital exclusion.</p>		
1.9	<p>Review the Strategic Partners Grant (Civic Pride Fund – VCS) programme to improve access to funding from small organisations</p>	2025-2026	<p>Number of small organisations accessing funding either directly or indirectly, via investment</p>	Council Plan	Innovation and Change

Ref	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate(s)
			from the new programme commencing in 2026.		

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	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	Equality Objective 2: Promoting Community engagement to empower our residents, improve understanding of the issues faced by local people and develop services to meet the differing needs.				
2.1	Continue to embed the Council's new approaches to how we engage communities and residents: Working Better with Communities / Community Engagement Strategy.	2024 - 2026	Framework and toolkit in routine use and impact measurable.	Council Plan / Community Engagement Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.2	Initiate and maintain a Standing Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with community representation across the nine statutory Protected Characteristics plus the four additional groups.	2024 - 2026	Better informed Council decision making on matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. Improved planning for annual events and marking of key dates.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.3	Continue to work with the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) with Ethnic Minorities, BAME Voice, Merton Centre for Independent Living and Faith and Belief forums to create a dialogue and an opportunity to shape and influence policy / service delivery relating to specific Protected Characteristics.	2024 - 2026	Regular or quarterly meetings	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
2.4	Continue to support and champion a	2024 - 2026	LGBTQ+ communities'	Council Plan	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	vibrant and active LGBTQ+ Forum for the borough.		views and needs increasingly represented in policy and service development work.		
2.5	Continue to celebrate diversity by promoting community cohesion activity such as Black History Month and Pride Month	2024 - 2026	Hold annual civic event for Holocaust Memorial Day and promote Pride History Month and Black History Month events	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
2.6	Continue to strengthen role of the Youth Parliament in the oversight and delivery of the Children and Young People's Action Plan.	2024 - 2026	Members of the youth parliament attend Children's Trust Board meetings and are enabled to make a meaningful contribution.	Children and Young People's Action Plan	Children, Lifelong Learning and Families (Children's Trust)
2.7	Continue to support parent champion programme and advisory groups in support of delivering Children Centre and Family Hub Programme	2024 - 2026	12 Parent Champions recruited by 2024	Family Hub Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
2.8	Ensure equality of access to Sport and Cultural activities for all. Social or community sport should be available for all ages across their whole life and for all abilities with choices and inclusion and diversity at their heart	2024 - 2026	Reporting from providers on use by groups demonstrates increasing access over time.	Sport and Physical Activity Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
Equality Objective 3: Promoting a safe, healthy and cohesive borough where communities get on well together					
3.1	Work with the Metropolitan Police Service in its local implementation of the Commissioner’s Turnaround Plan and broader response to the findings from the Casey review.	2024 - 2026	Improved community relationships. Better collaboration at local level between Council and Police services.	Turnaround Plan (MPS)	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.2	Continue to promote and develop Family Hub services across local communities	2024 - 2026	Uptake of services reflects local community	Family Hub Development Programme	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
3.3	Ensure the effective implementation at local level of the Home Office’s planned changes to operational Prevent delivery.	2024 - 2025	New arrangements implemented without reduction in effectiveness during the transition	Prevent Delivery Plan	Innovation and Change
3.4	Develop new ways of engaging effectively with our diverse communities and promoting positive communications that celebrate and showcase our diverse communities.	2024 - 2026	Increased community cohesion Increased community awareness of diversity and achievements	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
3.5	Ensure continued delivery of the Council’s Hate Crime Strategy	2024 - 2026	Reductions in hate crime incidents Victims are better supported	Hate Crime Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
3.6	Deliver and promote a series of events to promote Hate Crime Awareness week annually	2024 - 2026	Profile of work to reduce hate crime raised	Hate Crime Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.7	To deliver and promote a series of annual events to promote 16 Days of action (activism) against Domestic Violence	2024 - 2026	At least two events held annually	Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.8	Ensure planning policies promote a more cohesive borough.	2024 - 2026	Better designed environments that support integration and cohesion.	Merton's Local Plan	Housing and Sustainability
3.9	Ensure residents are fully engaged in the Mitcham Carnival organising committee	2024 - 2026	Resident contributions inform the themes and activities of the Carnival	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
3.10	Encourage and support the development of Friends of Parks groups in parks that are underrepresented	2024 - 2026	Increased number of active Friends of Parks groups Increased accessibility to parks and open spaces across the borough	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

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	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
Equality Objective 4: Improving our evidence base to inform our decision making					
4.1	Compile and publish an annual Council service user diversity report.	2024 - 2026	Improved understanding of accessibility of key Council services and identification of potential areas of under-representation for further investigation and mitigation. Compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.2	Deliver, over the lifetime of the strategy, a programme of focused research and consultation work to improve our understanding of the inequality impacts relating to specific individual Protected Characteristics.	2024 - 2026	Improved understanding of the inequality impacts for individual communities, enabling more tailored and appropriate service responses to be developed.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change
4.3	Ensure continued compliance with requirement to publish rolling three years of gender pay gap data.	2024 - 2026	Transparency on whether progress is being made in reducing the gender pay gap over time.	Our People and Culture Plan	Innovation and Change
4.4	Introduce an updated Equality Analysis methodology that incorporates the four additional Protected Characteristics identified in	2024	Better informed Equality Analyses informing policy and budget decision making.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	Innovation and Change

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
	the Strategy				
4.5	Utilise published Census 2021 data in conjunction with Greater London Assembly data and other nationally published data (Office for National Statistics, Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) to produce an up to date 'diversity index' for the borough	2024	Improved understanding of diversity across our population and communities. Better targeting of future interventions. Better informed Equality Analyses informing policy and budget decision making.	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
4.6	Seek to work with an academic institution to develop a model for understanding the inequalities related to socio-economic status in the borough and use this model to develop appropriate interventions.	2024 - 2025	Improved understanding of the impact of socio-economic status on our residents. Improved targeting and design of services enables mitigation of negative impacts relating to socio-economic status.	Council Plan	Innovation and Change
4.7	Continue to make use of survey feedback to review outcomes of under-represented groups when making policy decisions relating to children and young people	2024 - 2026	Improved service design and delivery.	Children and Young People's Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families

	Key activity	Timescale	Intended outcome	Key strategy/Plan	Lead Directorate
4.8	Continue to use detailed contextual data arising from schools' census and other published children's data to identify underperforming groups	2024 - 2026	Improved learning outcomes for	Children, Lifelong Learning and Schools Directorate Plan	Children Lifelong Learning and Families
4.9	Identify and examine disproportionalities in crime and anti-social behaviour patterns via the Annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment (PP)	2024 - 2026	Safer and Stronger Executive Board enabled to make better informed decisions about targeting of available resources.	Community Safety Partnership Plan/ Strategic Assessment	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate
4.10	Utilise local parks management plans and asset surveying to identify areas of under investment to ensure equitable and community-based improvements in parks	2024 - 2026	Park local management plans & service asset information	Council Plan	Environment, Civic Pride and Climate

Appendix 1

Merton Council's Equality Charter

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy will be delivered to meet the aims of our Equality Charter

We are committed to making a real difference by:

- Making Merton a welcoming borough where everyone feels they belong
- Inspiring trust and confidence in all the borough has to offer
- Recognising, valuing and celebrating diversity
- Listening to and understanding the diverse needs of all people
- Building good relations and understanding between people
- Creating a fairer borough through promoting inclusion, participation and equal access
- Challenging discrimination, harassment, bullying, hate crime and victimisation
- Eliminating barriers, encouraging people to reach their full potential, raising aspirations and creating opportunities for growth beyond limit.
- Eliminating subtle and covert unchecked "prejudice, assumptions, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping that lead to Institutional racism" (McPherson Report)

As an organisation we will:

- Actively promote equality
- Work with partners and the community to make our information, services and products more accessible and inclusive
- Put equal opportunity at the heart of our recruitment, employee development and service delivery
- Continually review the diversity of our workforce and ensure it's representative of our local community across all levels
- Address all allegations of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation
- Promote good relations between people from different backgrounds
- Share good equality practice with our partners
- Measure and share our progress and success.

Appendix 2

London Local Government Anti-Racism Statement

Local authorities in London are committed to achieving racial equality because we recognise that persistent racial inequalities are unacceptable and adversely affect all Londoners.

We know that some groups are more likely to face inequality, experience poor outcomes and to live in poverty. We also know that this is sometimes used as an excuse not to acknowledge racial inequality. But groups don't happen to be more disadvantaged by chance. Structural disadvantage is rooted in racism and discrimination that is both historical and current.

We do have legislation to protect against overt racism, negative attitudes and treatment, but many of the systems that discriminate do so because of more subtle and covert unchecked "prejudice, assumptions, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping."

This wording draws on the Macpherson Report 1999 definition of institutional racism which is still relevant today. This is a dehumanising process that is unacceptable and communities are tired of being treated this way.

We cannot let another generation down by not responding to what remains a clear and compelling articulation of what must change.