

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2022-26

**The Barnet
Group**

Introduction

At The Barnet Group, we believe tackling inequalities, increasing inclusion, and celebrating diversity provide a strong foundation for a committed and productive workforce and happy communities. We believe everyone has the right to equal access to opportunities, including representation, services, and employment.

We are a diverse group of organisations, each with a strong social purpose and a fundamental aim to tackle injustice and inequality. We know our employees are committed to and motivated by these goals, but we also acknowledge that strong values are not enough to lead to fair outcomes and that whilst we have made good progress in recent years, we have more work to do to ensure both our service delivery and our workplace value and support diversity, and are equitable and inclusive.

To make better decisions and to deliver the best services we possibly can, we know we need to employ a diverse workforce and ensure strong and visible leadership that our people can trust

and be inspired by.

The nature of our business means we support some of the most vulnerable people in society. In striving for fairness for all our customers, we aim to foster trust and promote independence.

By working to be a more inclusive organisation we will understand our employees and customers better and listen to them more closely, design and deliver more effective services that meet customers' needs, improve our decision-making, and make the best use of our resources.

We recognise that we will only achieve success by working together with our customers and communities, and we have developed this strategy in consultation with our staff and customers. Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy builds on the achievements we have made to date and sets out our aspirations over the next four years.

Executive Summary

Whilst we have statutory and regulatory duties to ensure we promote equality for our customers and employees, our approach is driven by good business practice and our moral duty to respond to the social diversity within the communities we serve and our workforce.

We want to make equality, diversity, and inclusion everyone's business, and our approach is intended to promote individual responsibility and enable a positive culture of inclusion within our organisation. We are most likely to succeed if equality, diversity, and inclusion is part of our core business and a key part of all our roles.

We are keenly aware of the need to act and not just to talk about equality and inclusion. We believe our focus on equalities, and particularly on race equality, over the past 18 months is starting

to bring positive change; however, we know we have more to do. We must ensure our approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion is not seen as a project, but rather is an organisational value that is embedded in our culture, policies, and practices. To make this a reality, strong and accountable leadership is required.

We know there are multiple challenges around understanding equality, diversity, and inclusion, and that to ensure we can achieve and maintain a positive impact we must focus initially on building our understanding and improving our data as the starting point to understanding the experiences and perceptions of our people and our customers, including where we are, where we want to be, and how we are progressing.

Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy is

intended to ensure our continued improvement in our functions as an employer and as a provider of services. So that everyone can achieve their potential, our aim is to create an inclusive organisation:

- where people are treated with respect;
- where inequalities are challenged; and
- where we anticipate and respond positively to different needs and circumstances.

This strategy aims to drive improvements across all our operations and is supported by both strategic and operational activities to ensure we celebrate difference, continually improve, understand and are responsive to diverse needs, and comply with

our legal duties.

To achieve our goals of inclusion, attainment, flexibility, and embedding and promoting equality within our culture, we are focused on three key aims:

- create a diverse workforce with fairness and equality embedded in how we support and develop our people;
- ensure customers have fair access to the services they need; and
- ensure our governance structures and support services work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of fairness.

What do we mean by?

Equality – the fair and lawful treatment of every individual to make sure they have an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, and the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of where they were born, where they come from, or what they believe.

Diversity – recognising, respecting, and valuing the differences, characteristics, and experiences that make us who we are.

Inclusion – tackling discrimination and intolerance, removing barriers that hold people back, and embracing and giving equal access and opportunity to all people irrespective of age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.



About The Barnet Group

The Barnet Group employs around 1,000 people and is a not-for-profit organisation; any income we generate is reinvested into building and maintaining homes, improving services, and supporting communities.

Our wide range of activities reflects the varied needs of our diverse customers, and includes:

- building and managing social housing;
- preventing homelessness and allocating social housing on behalf of Barnet Council;
- investing in communities;
- providing property maintenance services;
- carrying out urban regeneration projects;
- providing extra care, care homes, and sheltered housing services;
- providing specialist adult social care services to people with physical and learning disabilities, those on the autistic spectrum, and those with mental health problems; and
- providing support services to our residents and to other people living in Barnet.

Our Vision is **for customers to be our biggest advocates**.

Our Mission is to **make a real difference to every customer**.

Our Values of **show respect, find solutions, and make a difference** reflect our common understanding of what we stand for, how we shape our decision-making, and how we show our

customers and stakeholders what is important to us.

The Barnet Group's Strategic Plan 2019-24 is available on our website. It establishes our direction over this period, and sets out our commitment to delivering people-centred services that make a lasting difference to the lives of our customers and the communities in which they live. Our work is focused on three core themes:

- providing customer-focused services
- developing and empowering our people
- sustaining our business through growth

We also aim to reflect and embed our principles of challenging inequalities and meeting diverse needs through our operational strategies, including our People Strategy, Customer Experience Strategy, Community Engagement Strategy, Successful Tenancies Strategy, Communications Strategy, and Opendoor Homes' Strategic Plan.

Much of the work we do also contributes to the London Borough of Barnet's goals, including its Barnet Plan 2021-25 which aims to create an inclusive borough where no one is left behind, and the council's Strategic Equalities Objective: "All our communities will be treated equally, with understanding and respect. Both our council and our borough will be places where diversity is celebrated, and inequality is actively tackled; where people have equal opportunities and equal access to quality services."



The EDI context in which we work

The Equality Act 2010 provides a cross-cutting legislative framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Act applies in employment, service delivery, and the exercise of public functions. The Act protects people from discrimination on the basis of the following 'protected characteristics'; these many factors shape the identities and experiences of our employees and the customers and communities we serve:

- age
- disability
- gender (also referred to as 'sex')
- gender identity (whether someone identifies themselves as female, male, or neither)
- being married or in a civil partnership (this applies only at work or if someone is being trained for work)
- pregnancy and maternity (having just had a baby or being pregnant)
- race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour, and nationality)
- religion or belief (or lack of religion or belief)
- sexual orientation (whether lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual)

When we carry out public functions the organisations within The Barnet Group must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, and we are committed to taking steps to:

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

In addition to the legislative requirements we work to, we are also subject to regulatory requirements around equality, diversity, and inclusion in our social housing and adult social care operations. Through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and this strategy, we aim to meet our regulatory requirements and demonstrate we understand and are responsive to the different needs of our customers.

In our social housing operations, we work towards the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard, which governs registered providers of social housing.

In our adult social care operations, we work towards the Care Quality Commission's Fundamental Standard which requires providers of health and social care services to treat service users with dignity and respect, having regard to any protected characteristics, to provide care or treatment that is tailored to service users and meets their needs and preferences, and to prevent discrimination.



Our aims

Our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy covers both our functions as an employer and our role as a provider of public services. The main aim of our strategy is to ensure meaningful and measurable improvement in equality, diversity, and inclusion in all areas of our work.

We have identified three overarching aims to focus our EDI work in our roles as an employer, a service provider, and an organisation. Under these aims the objectives we will strive for and the activities we will take to ensure our success will be focused on the following themes:

- **inclusion** – we want to create an environment that is accessible and welcoming.
- **attainment** – we want everyone to flourish and succeed to the best of their abilities, and to ensure equality of outcomes for our customers.
- **flexibility** – we want to support different ways of working and accessing services.
- **embedding** – we want to actively promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, and embed it within our culture and behaviours.

1. Create a diverse workforce with fairness and equality embedded in how we support and develop our people.

To do this we will:

- Strive to employ a diverse workforce that broadly reflects our customers and the communities in which we work.
- Work to ensure our workforce diversity is better reflected in our decision-making bodies.
- Ensure our employees are clear about their roles and responsibilities in relation to EDI.
- Promote a company culture of inclusiveness where everyone feels valued and supported to do their best work;
- Provide our employees with accessible and inclusive learning and development opportunities to enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies to facilitate their roles.
- Work towards identifying and eradicating any gender or ethnicity pay gap that may exist within our organisations.
- Take further steps to provide a safe and supportive working environment by strengthening and communicating our commitment to eradicating incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination through a zero-tolerance approach, and improving employee confidence in our ability to deal with these issues if they arise.
- Increase the number of employees who feel comfortable completing staff profile information, which will enable improved service delivery that meets employees' needs.
- Improve our understanding of access to and outcomes from our 'people' processes, including recruitment and selection, employee progression, and personal development, so we can identify ways to tackle and remove any barriers and/or inequalities.
- Increase engagement of our people to build trust and ensure we have a satisfied, motivated workforce, all employees have a voice, and our approach benefits all and champions under-represented groups.

2. Ensure customers have fair access to the services they need.

To do this we will:

- Make improvements in customer diversity profiling to enable improved service planning and delivery that meets customers' and communities' needs.
- Continue to work with Barnet Council to better understand information about those who approach us as homeless or at risk of homelessness, with the aim of providing targeted prevention and support to groups that may be disproportionately represented.
- Ensure regular consultation, engagement, and feedback with our customers, including 'hard-to-reach', marginalised, and diverse groups, to enable us to deliver the most appropriate services to meet their varied needs.
- Improve our understanding of access to and outcomes from our services, so we can identify ways to tackle and remove any barriers and/or inequalities.
- Ensure the way we deliver services to our most vulnerable customers is fair, inclusive, and targets support to those who are most in need.
- Improve communications on our services, initiatives, and achievements for all our customers.
- Increase awareness of EDI and engagement in activities to celebrate the diverse communities and customers we serve and foster good relations between different groups.
- Monitor satisfaction levels with our services and take steps to improve our delivery if satisfaction is not comparable across equality groups.
- Monitor and take appropriate action to prevent and tackle harassment, discrimination, and hate crime affecting or committed by our customers.



3. Ensure our governance structures and support services work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of fairness

To do this we will:

- Embed our commitment to EDI within everything we do and ensure we show visible leadership.
- Raise awareness of EDI issues as part of our efforts to eliminate structural or unconscious bias.
- Ensure EDI is embedded within our governance structures and our boards demonstrate a clear and active commitment.
- Provide our boards with regular assurance about how our EDI commitments and objectives are being delivered.
- Be open and transparent by publishing information annually about our work to deliver our EDI commitments and objectives and the progress we have made.
- Take steps to attract board members with diverse backgrounds and attributes, to ensure our boards have regard to the diversity of the communities in which we work.
- Ensure our corporate communications are accessible and tailored to the needs of the intended audience.
- Use our buying power to achieve improvements in equality and diversity through the procurement process.
- Develop a vibrant programme of activities to underpin our EDI agenda.
- Work with other organisations to promote and share best practice in EDI wherever possible.





How we will deliver

We know we are most likely to see success if we “mainstream” EDI and make it part of the way we work. To ensure it is part of our core business, we aim to integrate our EDI-focused activities within all areas of our work to ensure we continue to deliver fair and equitable services to our full range of customers, and create and support a diverse workforce with fairness and equality at its heart. Our approach will be focused, ensuring EDI is integral to our key strategies and decision making, reflected in our everyday practice, and promoted throughout our whole organisation.

This strategy is supported by strategic activities to drive improvements across all our operations, and by operational activities which recognise the unique customer needs for specific service areas. Whilst much of our activity will be embedded within ‘business as usual’ service improvements, we will coordinate the delivery of key activities through an annual strategic action plan and will ensure EDI is at the heart of the action plans supporting other key strategies across the business.

How we will monitor progress

In implementing our strategy, we will strengthen our leadership and governance structure for EDI. We will ensure our employees have opportunity to give feedback about our progress and play a role in monitoring this and the outcomes being achieved through our existing frameworks including the Staff Network and the Race Equality Steering Group.

The coordination and monitoring of our EDI work across the organisation will be led by the Operations Board, which is made up of Heads of Service. The Operations Board is accountable to the Executive Management Team (EMT) and will provide updates on progress quarterly to the EMT and at least annually to the Group and Opendoor Homes Boards. Our Director and Head of Service EDI Champions will also play a key role in helping

to hold the business to account for delivering its aims.

We will ensure our customers are able to hold us to account by regularly publishing updates in our resident newsletters, and discussing our performance, plans, and progress with customers through our formal and informal involvement structures, including the Barnet Homes Resident Board.

Our Executive Management Team agreed a set of EDI performance indicators and targets in 2021, and we will publish an annual report on our websites that sets out our performance and the progress we have made in delivering the aims of this strategy.

How we will know we've been successful

We know that representation of diverse groups is important. We aim to always fairly appoint the best and the right person to our roles, so whilst we recognise that they may be difficult to achieve we have set aspirational targets to demonstrate our commitment to achieving greater fairness and equality of outcomes. Our targets are aspirational because we cannot take action to enforce these changes; however, we can take steps to improve inclusion, attract diverse job applicants, and ensure fairness in our recruitment and learning and development processes. In recognition of this challenge, to drive forward greater representation of staff and customers within our business we will also focus on our progress in identifying and removing potential barriers, and our annual reporting on EDI will reflect on this.

Our equality, diversity, and inclusion targets over the life of this strategy:

1. Aspire to decrease the gender pay gap by TBC% by 2026
2. Aspire to decrease the ethnicity pay gap by TBC% by 2026
3. Aspire to increase the percentage of women occupying the highest-paid jobs within The Barnet Group by 10% by 2026
4. Aspire to increase ethnic minority representation within The Barnet Group by 2026 by at least 15% of new employees being from an ethnic minority background
5. Aspire to increase disability representation within The Barnet Group by 2026 by at least

5% of new employees being disabled.

6. Aspire to increase the percentage of Barnet Homes and The Barnet Group board members from Black/Black British backgrounds by 10% by 2026 to better-reflect the communities we serve.

We will also know we have been successful when:

- we increase overall Barnet Homes tenant satisfaction to 75%;
- we hold more customer diversity data;
- we hold more employee and board member diversity data;
- we increase job applications from under-represented groups within our workforce;
- at least 72% of employees 'would recommend The Barnet Group as a great place to work'; and
- we understand more about the experience of employees from groups with protected characteristics from our staff satisfaction surveys.

The EDI performance information we will report on each year will include the gender and ethnicity pay gap, the proportion of women and individuals from an ethnic minority background in the highest paid jobs, how closely the profile of each organisation's customer group is represented within the staff profile and the board member profile, and how closely the profile of all staff is represented within the senior management profile.

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