

## EQUALITY POLICY

### INTRODUCTION

At Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council we are committed to providing equality of opportunity for everyone we provide services to and to the people we employ and do business with.

We value the wide diversity of our communities and the benefits this brings. We will always consider this when providing services to the public, working with partners and in our role as an employer.

Our Equality Policy provides a framework for ensuring that we live this commitment in everything we do, whilst complying with our statutory duties under relevant Equalities Legislation and Codes of Practice.

Following the re-integration of housing services back into the council in February 2017 after the decision to wind-up the council's Arms Length Management Organisation, the council has a new opportunity to bring together the best from each organisation. We have now set five new, clear equality objectives, against which we will measure our success in achieving our equality outcomes, together as one organisation.

To accompany our Equality Policy we have published an Equality Scheme which explains in detail what actions we will take to achieve our equality objectives.

Our commitment to equality is reflected by the high-level membership of our corporate Equality Steering Group. This includes the Executive Director for Housing and Communities, the Executive Member for Policy and Culture and Heads of Service drawn from all areas of the council. The Steering Group takes the strategic lead on equality and diversity within the council, being responsible for setting and reviewing the policy, ensuring appropriate consultation takes place in setting the equality objectives and in regular monitoring of progress against the targets set. Importantly the steering group makes sure that our equality objectives flow through all areas of our organisation and that employees are clear about the council's commitment to being fair and inclusive in everything we do.

Tony Kingsbury

Simone Chinman Russell

## **BACKGROUND – ABOUT WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE BOROUGH**

### **OUR VISION, VALUES AND PRIORITIES**

Welwyn Hatfield Council provides services to 122,000 people who live in the borough and the many more who work and study here. The council has more than 500 employees and indirectly provides employment opportunities for the many contractors who provide services on the council's behalf.

We are passionate about delivering excellent, inclusive services within our borough and this is supported by our corporate vision, values and business objectives.

#### **Our Vision**

To make Welwyn Hatfield a great place to live, work and study with a vibrant, growing economy.

#### **Our Values**

Our values demonstrate what is important to us in our dealings with residents, businesses, partners and employees.

Our values are:

<i>Integrity:</i>	We will be honest, clear and consistent about what we do
<i>Transparency:</i>	We will be approachable, accountable and transparent in the way we communicate and conduct our business
<i>Respect:</i>	We will have respect for residents, businesses, partners and employees
<i>Fairness:</i>	We will fair in our policies and decision making, listening to the views and feedback we receive

#### **Our corporate priorities**

Our vision is achieved by working with our partners, businesses and residents towards our five key priorities.

1. *Maintain a safe and healthy community*

Work with partners to keep people safe

Help improve and maintain the health and wellbeing of residents

Provide for a wide variety of leisure covering arts, culture, fitness and sport

2. *Protect and enhance the environment*

Keep our streets clean and work with residents to reduce litter

Improve recycling rates and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill

Maintain and improve our green spaces

Deliver effective parking services

3. *Meet the borough's housing needs*

Plan for the housing needs of our communities

Increase the supply of new, affordable homes

Effectively manage the borough's housing stock

Allow for sustainable growth that protects our environment and heritage

4. *Help build a strong local economy*

Promote the borough as an attractive place in which to invest

Revitalise our town centres and other shopping areas

5. *Engage with our communities and provide value for money*

Deliver value for money

Provide outstanding customer service

Ensure fair and open access for our diverse communities

Effectively communicate what we do

DRAFT

## OUR LOCAL POPULATION – KEY FACTS

We have published detailed information about the people and communities who live in our borough. This information can be found at <http://www.welhat.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=9345&p=0>

Key trends and themes are:

### Population size

The population of the borough is rising, having increased by 10.4% between 2011 and 2016. The latest (mid-2016) estimate<sup>1</sup> puts the population of Welwyn Hatfield District at 60,400 males and 61,600 females.

### Age

Population projections show that the proportion of older people in the borough will increase significantly over the next 20 years. The proportion of people aged 65 and above is expected to increase from 16% to 19.5% of the population of the borough in this period.

### Ethnicity

The largest ethnic group in Welwyn Hatfield is White (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British), accounting for 76.5% of the population. That compares with a figure of 80.82% for Hertfordshire.

The largest other ethnic groups are 'white other' (5.89%), followed by Black/African/Caribbean/Black British: African (3.59%) and then Asian or Asian British: Indian (3.19%).

There has been a significant change in the ethnicity of the borough's population in recent years, with ethnic diversity in the borough increasing substantially.

Between 2001 and 2011 the proportion of 'white British' residents has fallen by over 12%, whilst the percentage of all other minority ethnic groups collectively has more than doubled to 23.5%. This increase has been spread across all the other non-white ethnic groups.

### Immigration

The increase in ethnic diversity is reflected in immigration data. There have been some important upward trends in Welwyn Hatfield. Since 2011/12 the estimated level of immigration has increased year-on-year. However this does not apply across all nationalities.

Between 2011 and 2015 immigration from New Commonwealth countries halved, from approximately 800 to 400 per annum whereas for the same period the registration of new migrants from EU13 countries increased from 400 to 1300 per annum. The largest increase in recent years has been Polish nationals. <sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Annual mid-year population estimates, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

<sup>2</sup> DWP 2017

**Proficiency in Spoken English**

In 2011, 91.44% of residents in Welwyn Hatfield used English as their main language. 0.99% of residents did not have English as a main language and could not speak English well. 0.13% of residents could not speak English at all.<sup>3</sup>

**Adult disability and health**

15,908 people stated that they had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities to some extent, which is 14.4% of the resident population.

**Religion or belief**

In 2011, over half of Welwyn Hatfield's population considered themselves to be Christian (57.54%), with over one quarter of the remaining population confirming they either did not have a religion or did not state one.

The 2011 Census saw increases from 2001 in the percentage of residents considering themselves to be Hindu (1.5%) and Muslim (1.4%).

**Sexual Orientation (Living Arrangements, Marital & Civil Partnerships)**

Specific data on sexual identity is not available for any areas lower than regional level so they are not reported within this policy.

---

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census

## **OUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE EQUALITY ACT 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 aims to make society fairer for everyone. It brings together and strengthens previous equality legislation. The Act was introduced to make equality law simpler to understand and easier to follow.

The Equality Act protects people who come from different groups and communities. The 'protected characteristics' covered by the Equality Act 2010 are: age (18+), disability, gender (sex), pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender re-assignment and sexual orientation.

The legislation applies to all organisations which provide a service to the public, or sections of the public. It also applies to anyone who sells goods or provides facilities. It applies to all services, whether or not a charge is made for them.

### **The Equality Act 2010 prohibits:**

#### **Direct Discrimination**

This is where someone is treated less favourably than another person because of a protected characteristic. This also applies to a person who does not have the protected characteristic themselves, but is linked to or associated with someone who does. Direct discrimination also applies where a person is wrongly thought to have a particular protected characteristic or is treated as if they do.

#### **Indirect Discrimination**

This happens when there is a rule, policy or practice that applies to everyone but disadvantages people who share a particular protected characteristic.

#### **Harassment**

This is where a service provider/employer treats an individual or group of people in a way which makes them feel threatened, humiliated or degraded.

#### **Victimisation**

Victimisation occurs when someone is treated badly because they have done something in relation to the Equality Act, such as making or supporting a complaint or raising a grievance about discrimination, or the service provider believes they have done so.

### **Requirement to take positive action**

Some people with protected characteristics are disadvantaged or under-represented in some areas of life or have particular needs linked to their characteristic. They may need extra help or encouragement if they are to have the same chances as everybody else. Positive action provisions enable public sector organisations to take proportionate steps to help people overcome their disadvantages or meet their needs.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

Welwyn Hatfield Council is required to comply with a Public Sector Equality Duty, introduced as part of the Act. There are two parts to this duty.

DRAFT

### **General Duty**

We must always give consideration to the following three issues when reviewing existing policies and services or when planning new ones. This also applies to staff development and management, such as training:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
2. Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
3. Foster good relations between people from different groups

### **Specific Duties**

The Act requires public sector authorities such as Welwyn Hatfield Council to fulfil additional 'specific duties'. The specific duty is all about providing information on its performance to the public. The information (which must be published in a clear, easy to understand format) should include:

1. How we comply with the General Duty
2. How we are assessing our policies and practices to make sure they are non-discriminatory
3. Our Equality Objectives – what we are doing to further the aims of the General Duty
4. How we have consulted with others to achieve the General Duty and to develop our Equality Scheme

### **Understanding the impact of our services and policies on the council's customers**

The Equality Duty requires us to understand how different people are affected by their policies so that they are better informed when making decisions about changing policies and developing new policies and services.

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will ensure that an Equality Impact Assessment is carried out whenever a new service or service-related policy is being developed, or existing ones are being reviewed. Through this process we will be able to identify whether people with protected characteristics are likely to be negatively impacted and arrangements can then be put in place to manage, reduce or eliminate the negative impact.



## EQUALITY POLICY STATEMENT

Through our Equality Policy Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will:

1. Make a positive difference to our communities and to the people we employ, provide services to and do business with.
2. Comply with all legislation and codes of practice, including the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (2011).
3. Set out clear objectives for our equality agenda and through our corporate Equality Steering Group, ensuring that we work towards them and monitor our performance against them.
4. Lead by example in the community in promoting good equalities practice and awareness of equalities issues.
5. Provide excellent services which meet the needs of customers, employees and other people and groups, including people with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010. The protected characteristics are:
  - Age
  - Disability
  - Gender re-assignment
  - Pregnancy and maternity
  - Race
  - Religion or belief
  - Sex
  - Sexual orientation
  - Marriage and civil partnership
6. Be proactive in preventing discrimination in any of its forms against any person or group.
7. Collect and monitor relevant information about our customers and employees so that we understand their requirements. We will use this information to make decisions about the type of services we provide and how they will be delivered.
8. Understand and assess the impact of our services on the people who use them. We will carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) when reviewing our services and policies, or when planning new ones. We will act on the findings of the EqIAs, where possible removing or reducing barriers where this which may prevent people benefitting from the services and opportunities we provide.
9. Keep our employees, contractors and partners informed on our approach to equality and diversity. We will provide training and briefings to support this, to ensure that they work in a way which reflects the council's commitment to equal opportunities for all.
10. Mainstream our approach to equality and diversity throughout the council and make sure that other policies and strategies reflect this.

11. Lead from the very top of the council in valuing diversity and promoting equal opportunities, to be achieved by close partnership working between senior officer and Members.

DRAFT

## OUR EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council has set five Equality Objectives. These will be monitored by our Equality Steering Group. We will challenge ourselves and colleagues within the council to ensure that everyone is accountable for achieving them.

### Objective one:

**We will lead by example within the community, promoting equality of opportunity and fairness.**

To achieve this we will:

- publish our approach to equalities widely
- engage with groups representing people with protected characteristics
- ensure that partners and contractors delivering services on our behalf adopt our principles and approach to equalities

### Objective two:

**We will value and understand the diversity of our communities, for the benefit of our customers and all residents of the borough.**

To achieve this we will:

- Collect relevant information about our customers so that we can understand more about their needs and preferences for services delivery and to help us identify barriers or potential barriers to accessing our services.
- Act on customer feedback when shaping our services, including information received through our complaints process and regular customer surveys.
- Deliver and support local events aimed at raising awareness of diversity and encourage community participation.
- We will work with employees, local communities and Members to ensure that our valuing of diversity is reflected in our local democracy.

### Objective three

**We will deliver fully accessible, fair and inclusive services**

To achieve this we will:

- Publish and implement a new Customer Services Strategy which sets out our commitment to delivering customer-focussed services.
- Offer a range of ways for customers to contact us and make sure that council offices and other public areas are accessible to people with limited mobility and different sensory abilities.
- Make the most of technology to provide 24/7 access to services and to help enable easy access to online services for people with different needs.
- Monitor complaints and investigate where there are concerns that people with one or more protected characteristic are impacted negatively by our services or lack of service provision.

- Assess the impact of our services and policies on our customers, taking into account the diversity of everyone we work with and for. Take a consistent approach to carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and ensure the process is clear for employees and simple to implement. Provide training to employees and publish a guidebook which explains how and when they should be carried out. Ensure that elected Members understand how to interpret the findings from Equality Impact Assessments so that they can make informed decisions on matters relating to changes to policies and services and the introduction of new ones.

**Objective four:**

**We will provide equal opportunities to our employees and encourage a culture of equality within the work place**

To achieve this we will:

- Have in place a Workforce strategy, setting out how we will attract, recruit and foster an effective and diverse workforce, maximising the potential of employees and encouraging people to be best they can be.
- Provide appropriate training to employees and elected Members so that they understand the council's approach to equality and how this translates into service delivery for all customers.
- Ensure that as far as is possible all corporate policies are aligned so that the council's commitment to equal opportunities is reflected in all areas of work.

**Objective five:**

**We will consult with residents and the community on matters which affect them, taking into account the diversity of our borough.**

To achieve this we will:

- Make reasonable adjustments to ensure that there are no barriers to prevent people participating in a way in which they feel comfortable.
- Encourage people to have their say through a framework of resident and stakeholder consultation methods including
  - Borough Panel
  - Tenants Panel
  - Focus Groups
  - Specialist Groups facilitated by the council, including the Disability Access Group
- Engage with other organisations through a range of forums including Welwyn Hatfield Alliance and other strategic partnerships
- Participate in relevant groups which operate in the borough, specifically those which meet the needs of people with different protected characteristics.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION

### Through the Equality Steering Group

The implementation of our Equality Policy will be driven by our Equality Steering Group. The purpose of the steering group is to:

- Lead by example – both within and outside of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- Promote the delivery of excellent services to meet the needs of our communities
- Agree actions to deliver excellence
- Ensure legal and statutory compliance
- Encourage good practice and challenge bad practice
- Develop realistic actions to mainstream equality and diversity beyond compliance in the council

### Through the effective implementation of related council policies and strategies

We recognise that we will only achieve our equality objectives when they are linked to all the activities which the council is involved in. Importantly, all corporate strategies must reflect and be cross-referenced to our Equality Policy. We have many corporate strategies and policies. They include:

#### Customer Services Strategy

Our Customer Services Strategy and three-year action plan will be launched in April 2018. The six principles of the Customer Services Strategy are:

1. *Customer focussed:* Using customer insight to get our service offer right
2. *Clear:* Be clear with customers and staff on what services we provide
3. *Accessible:* Offer a wide range of customer service/contact options
4. *Efficient:* Make best use of our resources and technology
5. *Reliable:* Get it right first time, serving customers consistently,
6. *Transparent:* Be open about how we perform

#### Workforce Development Strategy

We recognise the value of a diverse workforce for the benefit of our council, our people and the communities we provide services to. Our Workforce Development Strategy will ensure that the council has the right number and mix of skilled workers now and into the future. It ensures that there are opportunities for individuals employed by the council to develop their skills and knowledge and that these opportunities are open to everyone, regardless of their protected characteristics.

#### Safeguarding Policies

The council has clear policies on protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse. Through our Safeguarding Policies we will ensure that:

## WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

- Staff, Members and other individuals or groups delivering services to the community understand their responsibilities and receive regular training and appropriate support
- Clear procedures are in place to refer safeguarding concerns to Hertfordshire County Council and that records are maintained in an appropriate way
- New and emerging government policy on safeguarding-related issues is adopted locally, including those relating to modern slavery, radicalisation and child sexual exploitation.

### Procurement Policy

Our council has in place clear contract procedures rules. We will ensure that contracts that we enter into provide for services which are tailored to our community. Equality and diversity issues are reflected in our procurement procedures and tender evaluation model. We will:

- Provide more adaptable services to tackle social exclusion, support independent living and develop stronger and more cohesive communities.
- Improve the accessibility, quality and appropriateness of our services.
- Improve overall value-for-money in terms of goods, works and services

### Housing and Homeless Strategy

Our Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2013-18) is a five- year plan, which sets out the key issues, challenges and priorities for tackling homelessness and delivering housing and housing related services in our area. The Strategy identifies five key priority areas:

- Supply of Affordable Housing
- Raising standards in the private sector, particularly Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Making best use of housing in the borough
- Prevention of homelessness
- Meeting the needs of older people and other vulnerable groups

### Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan

Our draft Local Plan will shape future development and growth of the borough's towns and villages. It identifies the future demand for specialised housing, supported housing and care places for people with different needs, including our older people over the next 20 years. It is expected to be adopted in 2018.

## **OUR EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN**

Following the re-integration of the housing services previously provided by Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust the Equality Steering Group has identified the actions we now need to take to deliver our Equality Objectives and these are included in our new Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2017-2019.

The action plan will be supported by a communications plan, updated website and intranet content and a guide book for staff, setting out the council's expectations and new approach to carrying out equality impact assessments.

## **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT FOR THIS POLICY**

An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out by the Equality Steering Group on 17 November 2017. **[Outcome to be included here]**.

## **CONSULTATION**

The council's Equality Scheme and Action Plan will be subject to consultation with the council's Borough Panel, Tenants Panel and relevant partner agencies.

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW**

This policy sets out our approach up to 2020. We will review our Equality Policy by the end of March 2020 or at such time that new legislation or codes of practice require us to do so.

DRAFT