

MEETING: Barnet Partnership Board	Date: 18 November
---	-----------------------------

REPORT OF:

Leader of the Council

SUMMARY AND PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To update the Barnet Partnership Board (BPB) on the Council's refreshed approach to equalities and the public consultation on the draft Equalities Policy 'Aiming for Equal life chances in Barnet- ensuring the right approach to equalities in changing times'

INPUT REQUESTED FROM BARNET PARTNERSHIP BOARD:

- To note the consultation on the draft Equalities Policy
- To give consideration to the suggested partner recommendations.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Lesley Holland,
Commissioning and Policy Officer, LBB
equalities@barnet.gov.uk (020 8359 7263)

1. Introduction

1.1 Barnet has always been a place where diverse communities have got on well together. Barnet will continue to grow and change over the next 15 years as development drives growth in regeneration areas, and the borough becomes more diverse with significant growth in older and younger generations. As local areas change and austerity causes shifts in the perception and receipt of public services it is important that the Local Authority works with partners to retain a focus on equalities and community cohesion.

2. Refreshing our approach to equalities

2.1 Nationally the equalities agenda has been shifting as a result of the change in government, the financial crisis and the need to target services. The independent review of the Public Sector Equalities Duty reported in September, recommending a further review in 2016. It is therefore business as usual for public bodies in being transparent about their objectives and performance on equality. The Equalities and Human Rights Commission will produce guidance on the minimum equality standards and the council will consider these when they are released. That considered, inequalities persist and public services have a key role in redefining the approach to these.

2.2 The council's Corporate Plan confirms growth as a priority and this brings with it opportunities and challenges to stability and cohesion as areas change. It is important that growth and equality of opportunity go hand in hand, so that everyone can benefit from Barnet's successes. Equally, current national policy changes such as welfare reform could have an impact on the profile of the

borough, for example to increase the wealth diversity or change the composition of households. The quality of our shared data and knowing what to monitor so that the council and partners can understand any potential impact means we can react to any resultant tensions.

- 2.3 Since the last Equalities Policy in 2010 the council has transitioned to the Commissioning Council model. Shared equalities and community cohesion objectives need to be implemented through a 'mixed economy' of service providers. Partners have equally gone through periods of change in their structures and governance. There is therefore currently an opportunity to update our policies to give clarity and strengthen leadership and delivery of these important agendas.

3. Development of an Equalities Policy and 'Communities Together' Plan

- 3.1 The council has refreshed its Equality Policy and developed a Community Cohesion Action Plan to coordinate partner activities, clarify roles and responsibilities and outline monitoring and review processes. These outline how the council will work with key partners and community organisations to meet its statutory responsibilities as part of the Equality Act 2010. There are 3 strands: elimination of discrimination, advancement of equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between communities.

4. The Equalities Policy

- 4.1 The Equalities Policy will provide an update to the 2010 edition to take account of the borough's demographics, the new commissioning approach, the Strategic Equalities Objective set out in the 2013 Corporate Plan, and the measures for assessing progress against our policy objectives and commitments.
- 4.2 It is important that local residents and community organisations have the opportunity to input into the development of the policy. We welcome comments and contributions to the public consultation which is available online (other formats available) here; <http://engage.barnet.gov.uk/consultation-team/draft-equalities-policy>
- 4.3 The council has made contact with partners to make them aware of the consultation and has proposed that we use this consultation period to discuss joint priorities, actions and coordinate our engagement activities.

5. The 'Communities Together' Plan and Network

- 5.1 Learning from Barnet's good response to the disorders in 2011 and the fire at the Somali Bravanese Community Centre earlier in the year helped to develop a 'Communities Together' Plan for community cohesion, which has been approved by Cabinet. This outlines how the council and its partners will engage with community organisations to promote understanding about what really matters to communities and to monitor and respond to any community tensions in a quick and effective manner.
- 5.2 The approach to community cohesion is based on continuing to build relationships with partners and community organisations with the council taking a community leadership role. The council has set up two networks;

- Firstly, an on-going 'Communities Together' Network made up of a wide range of community organisations; including faith groups, youth representatives, schools and key professional partners which will report to the Safer Communities Board. The network meetings are co-chaired by Pam Wharfe, Director for Place and Julie Pal, CEO of CommUNITY Barnet. The Network will focus on insight, information exchange and join action planning to support community cohesion. The group had its first meeting in October.

- Secondly, an Inter-Agency Staff Network. This Network will be made up of lead officers from a range of council delivery units and partner organisations, including Capita and the police. It will function as a virtual network charged with responding to issues and taking an operational lead.

5.3 Elected members have a key role in understanding their community and knowing how to report any concerns via LBB Customer Services.

6. Governance

6.1 The council will report its Strategic Equalities Objective and related performance measures to CRC at the end of each financial year, integrated with the end of year performance and finance reporting.

6.2 The 'Communities Together' Network acts as a subgroup of the Safer Communities Partnership Board and will provide them with an annual report

6.3 As part of the transition to the Commissioning Council model the council's approach to equalities creates greater level of autonomy for internal and external Delivery Units and ensures the council meets its public commitments and statutory duties.

7. Partner Recommendations

7.1 To continue to engage with and contribute to the Communities Together Network

7.2 To actively promote the consultation to share the Council's equalities Policy and define areas for joint action

7.3 To pool insight and data across partners in order to improve needs led commissioning through the Insight Network

7.4 To work together to build staff and organisational capacity to consider equalities as part of business and financial planning, considering cumulative impact where applicable

7.5 To work together to deliver better outcomes for citizens and aim for equal life chances for in Barnet.