



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Title	Towards A Fair Barnet
Date of meeting	5 March 2024
Report of	Executive Director Children and Families
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Appendices	Appendix 1 – State of the Borough Report 2023 Appendix 2 – Residents’ Perception Survey Summary Appendix 3 – Report on Resident Engagement Programme Appendix 4 – Building a Fairer City, The London Recovery Board
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Summary

Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026 sets out our vision for tackling inequalities and fighting poverty. We are developing a new external, community focussed equalities strategic roadmap, Towards a Fair Barnet, to reflect and align with the ambitions in the plan.

This report provides an update on the development of the roadmap and seeks the views of the Committee on our proposed approach and potential priorities prior to the submission of the strategic roadmap to Cabinet on 16 April and Council on 21 May 2024.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee considers this report and making comments and recommendations on the proposed areas of focus to support the development of the document for Cabinet.
2. That the Committee considers making recommendations for the portfolio holder and lead officer to consider when developing the final strategic roadmap document.
3. That the Committee considers making any further recommendations to Cabinet

(1) Reasons for the Recommendations

Background

- 1.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunities and foster good relations. Public authorities also have specific duties under the Equality Act to help them comply with the public sector equality duty. Public authorities must:
- publish equality information at least once a year to show how they have complied with the equality duty
 - prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years
- 1.2 Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026 made fighting inequalities and reducing poverty high priorities. We are developing the Towards a Fair Barnet Strategic Roadmap (including strategic equality objectives) to ensure that these are aligned to our corporate ambitions with a rigorous focus on inequalities faced by residents in their lives. The strategic roadmap will also set out how we will comply with the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010.

The Evidence Base

- 1.3 Our evidence includes both data, perception and engagement findings.
- 1.4 To support the development of the strategy, we prepared a State of the Borough Report (attached as Appendix 1) to start to build an understanding of residents' experiences of inequalities in Barnet and the impact. Bringing together different themes, it provides an overview of what inequalities look like in important aspects of their lives. The report highlights that people are shaped by a combination of multiple factors, including their age, disability, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic background. The causes of inequality are often inter-connected and recognising this "intersectionality" provides an opportunity for us to better understand the lived experience of residents and the issues they face.
- 1.5 We have also analysed the results of the Residents' Perception Survey 2022 to assess the levels of satisfaction and views of different parts of our community. Appendix 2 highlights the findings where significant inequalities exist in relation to residents' responses. It also summarises the findings of the ethnographic research with residents with disabilities which was instigated following the Residents' Perception Survey. Updated perception surveys for both adults and young people are expected in March.
- 1.6 We have undertaken extensive resident engagement to inform the new strategy. Over 200 residents participated in phase one of the programme through workshops and other activity from February to August 2023. A second phase of engagement using a mix of approaches to reach people with different protected characteristics took place from October to December 2023 to seek views on priorities for the strategy. A report on the outcome of the resident engagement programme is attached as Appendix 3.

1.7 Taking the State of the Borough Report and Residents' Perception Survey as an evidence base and using the outcomes of our engagement with residents and partners, this report sets out our proposed approach and potential priorities for inclusion in the new strategic roadmap.

Other Drivers

Responding to London Recovery Board: Building a Fairer City

1.8 The Building a Fairer City plan (attached as Appendix 4) outlines actions under four priority areas.

1. Labour market inequality
2. Financial hardship and living standards
3. Equity in public services (tackling structural discrimination)
4. Civic Society strength

1.9 Our community wealth building approach is broad-reaching and will address financial hardship, living standards and labour market inequality. This includes continuing to expand on the impact of our innovative benefits calculator, our employment and skills support through BOOST and considering what debt advice we may be able to provide. This is in addition to the socio-economic benefits levered through our social value policy.

1.10 In many of the areas covered by this roadmap, we work with our partners in civic society, benefitting from their strengths and assets to reach diverse communities, targeting initiatives to those most impacted by inequality. We also have public sector partners like the police and the NHS who we will work closely with to support their own plans for addressing discrimination.

1.11 Part one and two of the strategic roadmap below consider tackling structural discrimination for equity in public services in depth.

Our Objectives

1.12 To achieve a fairer Barnet, we recognise that we need to do some things differently and ensure that best practice becomes the normal way of working in the Council. Our approach will change from considering inequalities as single-issue effects happening to individual residents who require help to understanding that our residents are impacted by structural inequalities that require us to change the way our systems and services operate to tackle unfairness in access and outcomes.

1.13 To make sure this work becomes widespread in the Council, we are proposing an approach based on three strategic equalities objectives under our corporate themes of People, Places and Planet:

- People: See the whole individual
- Place: Be informed by and tackle place-based drivers of inequality
- Planet: Support a just transition to net zero minimising the risk of future inequity.

1.14 Our objectives aim to ensure that we focus on equity for outcomes based on differing needs, not just equality of opportunity. In the longer-term, they will help us to reduce the structural drivers of inequalities and improve outcomes for our residents, with a focus on tackling the gaps between different communities.

Part one: Focussed areas to kick-start the strategic roadmap

1.15 We want to significantly move the dial on some of our borough's inequalities and keep an eye on the future. To do this, we will need to target resources towards a number of specific

inequalities in addition to embedding approaches across the Council through our strategic equalities objectives. We highlight potential priorities under the objectives in the following sections of the report for consideration by the Committee.

People: See the whole individual

- 1.16 We will view people as their whole selves and not only by isolated individual equalities protected characteristics. People are shaped by a combination of multiple factors, including their age, disability, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation and socio-economic background and much more. The causes of inequality are often inter-connected and combine to create different modes of discrimination and levels of advantage or disadvantage. Recognising this provides an opportunity to better understand the lived experience of people and the issues they face.
- 1.17 In many cases we address individual problems residents come to us with, without considering the rest of the challenges they are facing. Seeing people through their individual experience and respecting their multiple identities is known as having an intersectional approach. As part of the new strategy, we are proposing that all services make plans to move from relating to residents just by the nature of their service-request to thinking about the whole person in the round of their experiences. This will mean improving the understanding of the lived experience of our residents, particularly those experiencing multiple disadvantages, by listening and observing through working with residents (often called ethnographic research).
- 1.18 Potential priorities under this objective could be:

Disability rights, voice and outcomes (including removing barriers to inclusion)

The 2021/22 Residents' Perception Survey showed that disabled residents are significantly less likely to be satisfied across a number of key indicators compared to residents without a disability. To investigate these findings in-depth, the Tackling the Gaps Group commissioned Habitus, a specialised ethnographic research company, to conduct a study to understand the lived experiences of disabled residents. The project set out to address the following objectives:

- To understand the lived experiences of disabled residents (and to some extent their families and carers) in engaging or accessing Council and community services.
- To explore how different protected characteristics and intersectionality shape disabled participants' lived experiences in engaging in community life.
- To identify barriers to participation in Council and community services.

Four recommendations were shaped by the disabled residents, parents, and carers who took part in the study:

- (1) Understanding how residents identify and want to be identified is key in meaningfully engaging with them.
- (2) Consider how disabled residents access information and find different modes of making this accessible.
- (3) Community matters – working with voluntary sector organisations can help disabled residents engage meaningfully in community life.
- (4) Create opportunities to enable disabled residents to engage in community life and civic participation in different ways.

The Tackling the Gaps Group is currently reviewing the recommendations to consider how the Council can best respond and this will feed into the action plan for the new equalities strategy.

Care experience

At its meeting in January 2024, the Council recognised that care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives and that they often face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system. They may also encounter inconsistent support in different geographical areas.

The Council adopted the Care Leavers Covenant and agreed to lobby government for a change in the law to allow care experience to become a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and other legislation. As a priority in the equalities strategy, we would aim to build on this decision by considering the needs of people with care experience in all aspects of the Council's work. We will proactively seek out and listen to the voices of care experienced people when taking decisions and developing new policies.

Place: Be informed by and tackle place-based drivers of inequality

- 1.19 Where you live can unfairly impact your life chances. We have often focussed on fixing individual problems that residents come to us with rather than tackling the structural root causes that are driving inequality. The State of the Borough Report 2023 shows us that many avoidable inequalities are determined by what you have access to in your neighbourhood.
- 1.20 Place-based drivers of inequality are the conditions at a neighbourhood level that influence our opportunities for good health and wellbeing. They influence how we behave and how we think and feel, all of which impacts our life chances. Some residents face discrimination and disadvantage with poorer access to infrastructure and services, such as libraries, public transport, parks and green spaces.
- 1.21 We will improve our understanding of structural, place-based drivers of inequalities. We will use place-based systems that work with local communities, public and voluntary and community sector partners to agree shared priorities for local neighbourhoods experiencing the greatest inequalities.
- 1.22 Potential priorities under this objective could be:

A selected focus within broader Housing and Homelessness (tbc)

There is clear disproportionality for specific groups in relation to housing and homelessness. In particular, mental health has major effects on an individual's housing journey and often contributes to poor outcomes such as homelessness, loss of tenancies, breakdown in communication with services and unsuitable accommodation placements.

In addition, the successful operation of early intervention and prevention support is limited by persisting barriers to accessing services, which can directly cause housing issues to grow. Digital barriers, language barriers and mobility issues all disproportionately impact certain groups.

Disproportionality studies undertaken show an over-representation of black people and those with disabilities (particularly mental health) approaching Barnet Homes as homeless. Young People's Homelessness has been identified by O&S as a key focus already.

Health inequalities

Health inequalities in Barnet vary across the borough and are often related to people's education, homes, employment, environment, and behaviours. Differences in life expectancy between population groups often provide a clear indicator of health inequalities. Access to good quality services is an important way to reduce such inequalities.

There are marked differences in people's life expectancy across Barnet. The difference between people living in the most and least deprived areas of the borough is 5.7 years for females and 6.7 years for males.

Wider determinants and the circumstances in which people live, work and age, affect both people's life expectancy and the years of quality health they live in.

In addition to targeted public health interventions, we will ensure that all policies and strategies include specific actions on improving health and health equity, including by creating good housing, employment opportunities and active travel links.

Planet: Support a just transition to net zero

- 1.23 As we go further and faster to tackle climate change, we are committed to doing all that we can to prevent inequalities in the future. In delivering our sustainability strategy we recognise that they journey to net zero needs to not only delivery emission reductions, but do this in a way that improves the lives of all of our residents.
- 1.24 We will think through how the urgent transition to net zero can happen trying to avoid creating new gaps or widening existing ones is. We will review impacts to ensure that the costs of climate policies do not fall unequally on different groups of people.
- 1.25 Our new Barnet Transport Strategy and subsequent action plan will consider how transport works as a barrier to opportunities and incorporate supporting a just transition in its vision and approach.
- 1.26 In attracting sustainable businesses and investment, we will work with our partners to address the existing inequalities in the green workforce, which is male dominated, with a lower proportion of workers from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in comparison with all sectors in London.
- 1.27 We will work with our regional and subregional partners to do all we can to protect residents from 'greenflation', where companies cost measures for tackling climate change out of the reach of the communities experiencing the worst of the impact.

Part two: Adapting our core work to tackle inequalities

- 1.28 All services will be tackling inequalities and addressing disadvantage through their own strategies and policies. These often focus on taking a preventative and early intervention approach to provide effective support to those at risk of poor outcomes.
- 1.29 All services are currently identifying the key activities in their work that they can undertake to tackle inequalities and disproportionality, so that these can be reflected in the roadmap where appropriate, but more importantly to enable us to increase the visibility of this work and monitor its effectiveness. Examples include the Barnet Youth Justice Plan which aims to tackle disproportionality in the criminal justice system, our Local Area Inclusion Plan which supports children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to achieve good outcomes and our community health screening programme focussing on areas of higher deprivation.
- 1.30 We will also continue to celebrate the diversity of our borough and foster community cohesion by encouraging mutual understanding between communities, including by supporting and organising events and celebrations. We will challenge discrimination and tackle harassment and hate crime in all its forms.

1.31 To ensure transparency, we will develop an on-line hub capturing the totality of what we are doing to address inequalities bringing this together in one place, with an overview in this final document.

Partnerships

1.32 The Council can not tackle this on its own and will work in partnership with others. For example, this includes working with health agencies to reduce health inequalities and improve healthy life expectancy through the Barnet Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Police and other partners to deliver the aims of the Barnet Community Safety Strategy.

Beyond the Strategy

1.33 We will develop an action plan to support the delivery of our work on our equalities objectives. Progress against the actions in the plan will be tracked and scrutinised by our Tackling the Gaps Group and reported to our senior Council Management Team. We will also report publicly on progress through our annual equalities report.

1.34 As mentioned above, we will also create an online hub to increase the visibility and transparency of equalities issues. This will include details of our core equalities work and the effectiveness of our interventions.

1.35 We will also strengthen our approach to equalities impact assessments to ensure that the effect of our decisions, policies and strategies on different sectors of the community are properly considered and publish these on our online equalities hub.

(2) Alternative Options Considered and Not Recommended

2.1 We considered having a strategy that covers all of the work the Council does to address disproportionate outcomes but residents have told us they want us to have a simple visual document, with a focus on actions.

(3) Post Decision Implementation

3.1 The intention is to submit the Towards a Fair Barnet Roadmap for approval by Cabinet on 16 April and Council on 21 May 2024. We will develop a detailed action plan to support the delivery of our work on our equalities objectives. Progress against the actions in the plan will be tracked and scrutinised by our Tackling the Gaps Group and reported to our senior Council Management Team. We will also report publicly on progress through our annual equalities report.

(4) Corporate Priorities, Performance and Other Considerations

Corporate Plan

4.1 Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026 sets out our vision for fighting poverty and tackling inequalities and commits us to:

- Fight inequalities and work to improve life chances for a good, healthy, happy and long life. Working in partnership, we will ensure no one is held back, that Barnet is the healthiest borough in London and our communities and residents can take advantage of every opportunity.
- Reduce poverty in our communities, boosting incomes and reducing costs. We will create an inclusive Barnet by promoting long-term economic growth that benefits everyone and where families and communities support each other.

- Be a family friendly borough where children and young people have the best start in life with the best education, the right support and safeguarding when they need it, and the right tools to live their lives successfully into adulthood. This especially applies to our children in care and care leavers, who we are 'corporate parents' for.
- Focus on all residents having the best opportunities to live well and feel part of the community. This will mean increasing the inclusion of older and disabled residents and celebrating their contributions. We will recognise people's goals and support them to build on their existing abilities and strengths. We will work with residents, communities and our partners to support residents to stay well and free from abuse.
- Tackle inequalities by actively listening to and considering different perspectives and needs in policy-making and service design.

Corporate Performance / Outcome Measures

- 4.2 We have prepared a State of the Borough Report to provide a baseline of known inequalities in Barnet to help inform the development of our new strategy. We intend to build and expand on this in future years to monitor and track progress against a range of inequalities outcomes and metrics.

Sustainability

- 4.3 One of the proposed priorities for the new strategy focusses on the need to consider environmental and sustainability issues from an equalities perspective to ensure that our journey to net zero takes place in a fair and inclusive way.

Corporate Parenting

- 4.4 People with care experience face disadvantage, discrimination and barriers in life. We have a particularly strong responsibility for this group. In January 2024, the Council adopted the Care Leavers Covenant and agreed to lobby government for a change in the law to allow care experience to become a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and other legislation. This commitment to people with care experience will be recognised in the new roadmap.
- 4.5 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 also places a duty on the Council to consider corporate parenting principles in decision-making. This includes ensuring that children in care and care leavers are not disproportionately impacted by any decisions the Council may make.

Risk Management

- 4.6 We monitor and report against our equalities objectives and action plans to ensure that we meet our statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.

Insight

- 4.7 An overview of the characteristics of our residents can be found in the Barnet Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. We have also prepared a State of the Borough Report which provides a profile of Barnet's population and gives a summary of known inequalities in the borough. The report is based on extensive research and draws on a wide range of resources and data.

Social Value

- 4.8 The updated social value policy outlines how we can extract benefits from our procured contracts and reinvest them into the community. The policy provides opportunities to further the equalities, diversity and inclusion agenda as well as reducing poverty.

(5) Resource Implications (Finance and Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT and Property)

5.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

(6) Legal Implications and Constitution References

6.1 The Council has statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and public sector equality duty. This includes a requirement to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years. The strategy will include new objectives to replace those in the previous EDI Policy 2021-25 to ensure alignment with Our Plan for Barnet 2023-2026 and to provide a greater focus on external inequalities faced by residents.

6.2 The Council's Constitution, Part 2B & Part 2C Terms of reference and delegation of duties to Committees and Joint arrangements. Para 9.2.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for Policy Development and Review – by supporting the Council and Executive in developing the policy framework and budget for the Council, working with partner organisations on issues that may be outside the remit of the Council and reviewing and/or scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions. Para 9.2.5 Pre-Decision Scrutiny following consideration of the Key Decision Schedule (Forward Plan) and with the agreement of the Executive, to scrutinise key decisions prior to them being made.

6.3 Under Article 3, the Full Council, the policy framework is set out at para 3.3.1. The policy framework includes plans and strategies which include the Corporate Equalities Objectives.

6.4 Under Part 3D, Budget and Policy Procedure Rules, para 8.1 - A copy of any proposed plan or strategy which is part of the policy framework shall also be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in sufficient time for the proposals to be included in the agenda for a scheduled meeting of the Committee, and for the Committee to make a report or recommendations to the meeting of the Council that is to consider the plan or strategy concerned. The Council shall not agree a plan or strategy until the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has had the opportunity to consider the proposals, subject to the need for statutory deadlines to be met.

(7) Consultation

7.1 We have undertaken extensive resident engagement to inform the new roadmap. Over 200 residents participated in phase one of the programme through workshops and other activity from February to August 2023. A second phase of engagement using a mix of approaches to reach people with different protected characteristics took place from October to December 2023 to seek views on priorities for the strategy. A report on the outcome of the resident engagement programme is attached as Appendix 2.

7.2 We will be consulting our partners through the Barnet Partnership Board in March 2024 on our proposed approach and priorities for the new equalities roadmap.

(8) Equalities and Diversity

8.1 The new strategy will strengthen the Council's ability to meet the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty. A new action plan will be developed to set out a new programme of activities to deliver the priorities. The strategy will have a positive impact on residents with protected characteristics.

8.2 A full equalities impact assessment will be undertaken on the new strategy. Further assessments will be undertaken as required on projects and activities taken forward as part of the action plan.

(9) Background Papers

9.1 This paper references the following programmes and strategies:

[Barnet Plan 2023/26](#)