



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

EQUALITY OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

2025-2029

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INTRODUCTION

Bedford Borough is home to a vibrant and diverse population, where more than 100 languages are spoken. It is a welcoming place, shaped by a rich mix of cultures, faiths and communities. Across the Borough, people come together to celebrate religious, cultural and awareness events — from flag-raising for national independence days to local equality and inclusion campaigns.

As a Council, we are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all aspects of our work. This means ensuring that our services meet the needs of a diverse population, and that our workforce reflects and is responsive to the communities we serve. We want Bedford Borough to be a place where everyone feels respected, included, and able to thrive.

The Council delivers a wide range of essential services — including education, social care, housing, public health, environmental services and more. This plan recognises the importance of embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into all areas of service delivery and organisational culture. A full list of Council services is available on the [Bedford Borough Council All Services webpage](#).

The statement below outlines our commitment to advancing equality and inclusion across our workforce, services and community:

As a Council, we are committed to championing equality, diversity and inclusion by ensuring our policies and practices reflect the diversity of our community and workforce. We will promote fairness, support inclusive decision-making and service delivery that reflects the needs and experiences of our residents and staff.

The objectives outlined in this plan set out how we will deliver on this commitment across our workforce, service delivery and community.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

At Bedford Borough Council, we are committed to building a community where everyone feels valued, respected and included. As a Council, we have a responsibility to lead by example and to champion equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do.

This Equality Objective and Action Plan (EO&AP) sets out our pledge to create a culture that celebrates difference, addresses barriers and ensures that everyone has fair access to opportunities and services. This is not just a matter of compliance — it is about doing what is right for our residents, our workforce and our community.

We recognise that fostering equality and inclusion means addressing systemic inequalities, listening to underrepresented groups and embedding fairness and respect into all our decisions and actions. Whether we are shaping policies, delivering services or working alongside our communities, inclusivity must be at the heart of our approach.

The plan has been shaped through consultation with staff and communities, and it focuses on four objectives that reflect what we heard. While it applies to our workforce, services and community, delivery will primarily focus on workforce-related objectives, reflecting the structure of our EDI function. We are committed to ensuring the plan remains relevant, meaningful and aligned with the Council's wider strategic direction.

By committing to measurable actions and holding ourselves accountable, we can create a borough where everyone — regardless of background, identity or circumstances — feels a true sense of belonging.

Together, with our colleagues, residents and partners, we can build a future that reflects our shared values of fairness, opportunity and inclusion.

Laura Church

Chief Executive

Bedford Borough Council

NEED FOR EQUALITY OBJECTIVES & ACTION PLAN

This EO&AP serves as a dedicated framework for addressing inequalities and promoting inclusive practices within the Council and the community it serves. It sets out a clear direction for delivering the objectives developed through consultation with staff and communities, supported by measurable actions and regular reporting to ensure accountability.

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty), Bedford Borough Council must develop and publish equality objectives that help further the aims of the general duty in carrying out its responsibilities as both a service provider and an employer.

The three aims of the general equality duty are to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

Under the specific equality duty, public authorities must:

- Publish equality information
- Publish one or more equality objectives every four years
- Publish annual gender pay gap information

These duties apply across nine protected characteristics, as defined in the [Equality Act 2010](#):

- **Age**
- **Religion and belief**
- **Race**
- **Marriage and civil partnership**
- **Sex**
- **Disability**
- **Pregnancy and maternity**
- **Sexual orientation**
- **Gender reassignment**

These characteristics underpin the Council's legal equality duties and have been considered in shaping the objectives and actions.

UNDERSTANDING OUR WORKFORCE¹

To ensure our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion actions are meaningful and targeted, it is essential to understand the diversity of our workforce. The information below provides a snapshot of our organisation as of March 2024 and helped us to identify areas of progress and where further work is needed.

- Headcount: 2011²
- 66.56% are full-time; 33.44% are part-time
- Sex: female 67.03%; male, 32.97%.
- 65.53% have a religion or belief
- 6.12% have declared a disability.
- Sexual orientation: heterosexual 96.92%, LGB 3.08%.
- Gender pay gap: mean 1.47% and median 2.75%

Age	Percentage
16-29 years old	8.16%
30-49 years old	43.11%
50-64 years old	41.47%
65+ years old	7.26%

Ethnicity	Percentage
White British	72.35%
Non-White British	6.68%
Black or Black British	7.86%
Asian or Asian British	10.03%
Mixed or multi ethnicity	2.23%
Arab or other	0.85%

¹ Workforce data as at 31 March 2024 set out in the annual Workforce Equality Report March 2025 published at [Workforce and gender pay gap | Bedford Borough Council](#)

² This figure includes casual & relief workers

OUR LOCAL COMMUNITY PROFILE³

To make services more inclusive and responsive, it is important to understand the profile of our local community. The data from the 2021 Census below highlights the population characteristics that helped shape our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion priorities, including where there may be barriers to access or underrepresentation.

- Population 185,300. An increase of 17.6% since 2011, largest increase in East of England.
- Sex: female 50.8%; male 49.2%.
- 63.2% of the population is of working age (16-65 years old).
- 60.1% have declared a religion or belief
- 16.3% have declared a disability.
- 8.5% are unpaid carers⁴
- Sexual orientation: heterosexual; 90.04% LGB 2.70%, not answered 7.25%.

Ethnicity	Percentage
White	75.7%
Black, Black British/Welsh, Caribbean or African	5.3%
Asian, Asian British/Welsh	12.6%
Mixed, or multiple ethnic group	4.6%
Other ethnic group.	1.8%

Age	Percentage
Under 16 years old	20%
16-34 years old	23.5%
35-64 years old	39.7%
65+ years old	16.7%

³ [How life has changed in Bedford: Census 2021](#)

⁴ [Census Maps - Census 2021 data interactive, ONS](#)

OUR EDI VISION AND APPROACH

Our EDI vision is to be a fair, inclusive and representative organisation that values diversity in all its forms. We are committed to ensuring that everyone — whether part of our workforce, using our services, or living in our communities — is treated with dignity and respect, and has equitable access to opportunity, influence and support.

This plan was developed through engagement with both staff and the community to identify the key themes that should shape our objectives. A number of workshops were held, both in person and online, to encourage maximum participation from staff and community groups.

To support effective engagement, participants were given a presentation on Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Intersectionality. This included an overview of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), helping to ensure a shared understanding and informed discussion.

The three focus areas of our plan — Our Workforce, Our Services and Our Community — were identified, reflecting our responsibilities as an employer, a provider of public services, and a community leader. Our consultation process helped to define what the plan should prioritise within each area and informed the development of four objectives.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

Our EO&AP is structured around the following three areas:

1. **Our Workforce** – We have a duty to ensure our workforce is supported with their development and empowerment, and that we provide an inclusive and safe space for all.
2. **Our Services** – The services we deliver affect both our staff and residents. It is important that our decision-making is fair, transparent and fit for purpose.
3. **Our Community** – Bedford is diverse, with strong representation from many ethnic minority groups. Diversity is a strength, and this must be celebrated. Fair, inclusive and accessible services, support in upskilling, accountability and transparency were key issues raised through consultation.

Delivery will primarily focus on workforce-related objectives as this reflects the structure of our EDI function, which is centred on the workforce sitting within Human Resources. The plan continues to provide a framework for inclusive service delivery and community engagement, which remain central to our overall approach.

In each of these areas, we will set out a series of objectives shaped by our priorities and informed by what we heard through our consultation. Each objective will be supported by clear actions and measurable outcomes that will help us track progress and maintain accountability.

OUR OBJECTIVES

The objectives below reflect the values, needs and expectations shared through our consultation. They form the core of this plan, guiding our actions and measurable outcomes. Two relate to Our Workforce and one each to Our Services and Our Community:

Our Workforce Objective 1: Empowerment and Representation

Increase workforce diversity so that it better reflects Bedford Borough's population, including at senior levels, and improve access to development and progression for staff in all roles.

Our Workforce Objective 2: Inclusion and Belonging

Create a more inclusive and supportive working environment by improving internal communication, staff voice and understanding of EDI across the organisation.

Our Services Objective: Demonstrating Change

Embed EDI into service design and delivery, and demonstrate progress through inclusive and responsive practice, using communication, service user feedback and transparent reporting.

Our Community Objective: Engagement and Empowerment

Ensure communities, particularly underrepresented groups, are meaningfully engaged and able to influence decisions affecting them, helping to support more inclusive and equitable approaches across the Council's work. (Delivery of this objective will be supported through the Council's Community Engagement Strategy).

ALIGNMENT WITH KEY STRATEGIES

This EO&AP aligns with key corporate documents to ensure a joined-up approach across the organisation. The objectives support delivery of the current People Strategy, the Corporate Plan and the Community Engagement Strategy.

People Strategy

The two workforce objectives support priorities in the People Strategy focused on building a diverse and inclusive workforce, supporting staff wellbeing and enabling progression. They reflect the Strategy's emphasis on inclusive leadership, internal communication and creating a culture of belonging.

Corporate Plan

The service delivery and community objectives together support the Corporate Plan's commitment to service excellence and putting residents at the heart of what we do. They promote transparency, inclusion and responsiveness by embedding EDI into both the design of services and the way residents — particularly underrepresented groups — are engaged in shaping decisions that affect them.

Community Engagement Strategy

The community objective complements the aims of the Community Engagement Strategy by promoting more inclusive and equitable approaches to engaging residents. While delivery will be led through the Community Engagement Strategy, this plan strengthens the focus on underrepresented groups and supports alignment between engagement activity and the Council's wider equality and inclusion goals.

OUR PROGRESS SO FAR

We are proud of the positive steps already taken across the Council to support equality, diversity and inclusion. The examples below demonstrate the progress made so far in building a more inclusive workforce, delivering services that meet the needs of all residents, and working with our communities in meaningful and representative ways. These actions form a strong foundation for delivering the objectives in this plan.

Our Workforce	Examples of Activity
Leadership and Staff Voice	Weekly One Team articles and quarterly One Team Hour with the Chief Executive and other members of the Corporate Leadership Team help share key messages across the organisation and provide opportunities to recognise the work of individuals and teams. Staff-led networks support staff voices and lived experiences.
Health and Wellbeing	Employees have access to a range of support including Occupational Health services, an Employee Assistance Programme, annual flu jabs for frontline staff, eye test vouchers and access to a sports therapy clinic through the University of Bedfordshire.
Inclusive Recruitment and Opportunity	The Council is a Level 2 Disability Confident employer and guarantees interviews to disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria. Similar guarantees apply through the Care Leavers Covenant and Armed Forces Covenant. Flexible and family-friendly policies support carers, parents and staff with disabilities.
Learning and Development	Over 30 EDI-related e-learning modules are available to staff, including unconscious bias, allyship, inclusive leadership and disability awareness. Children's Services has delivered additional training including Anti-racist Practice, LGBT+ awareness and Intersectionality.
Lived Experience and Staff Voice	Events such as the African, Caribbean and Asian Employee Network's Black History Month Lunch and Learn and the Big Conversation series offer opportunities to raise awareness, share lived experience and promote cultural understanding. Topics have included corporate parenting, menopause, Pride and neurodiversity.
Progression and Representation	Gender pay gap reporting is published annually alongside voluntary reporting on ethnicity and disability pay gaps. The Council has supported 15 women into Science, Technology,

	Engineering and Mathematics apprenticeships as part of our wider commitment to inclusive development.
Inclusive Pathways	Supported internships are offered for 16–24-year-olds with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and an Education, Health and Care Plan, helping them gain experience in real working environments and progress towards sustained employment.
Directorate Support	EDI Champions are in place across the Council and support equality analyses, raise awareness and embed inclusive practice within directorates.
Our Services	Examples of Activity
Accessible Delivery	The Council website includes spoken and multilingual content to reflect Bedford's diversity. Sign Live provides a real-time sign language interpreter service for deaf residents attending appointments.
Inclusive Social Care	Children's Services support carer recruitment at festivals to increase diversity in the fostering community. Carers are supported to celebrate religious holidays in line with the cultural backgrounds of children in care.
Community-Sensitive Practice	LGBT+ groups have been established in residential care homes to support inclusion and visibility of LGBT+ residents.
Empowering Through Learning	The Centre for Independent Living, in partnership with local organisations, supports adults with learning disabilities to build confidence and develop skills in areas such as math and money management.
Health Equity	The Public Health team run targeted outreach through community leaders and partnerships, including health advice events and campaigns around breast screening, diabetes and mental wellbeing. Integrated contraception, sexual health and blood-borne viruses mobile testing services target under-served communities.

Inclusive Activity	The Beyond Limits program offers multi-sport sessions for young people and adults with special education needs and disabilities. Local parks have been updated with accessible play equipment to support inclusive use.
Co-Production and Strategy Development	Council strategies have been developed in partnership with people from diverse backgrounds, including a group of adults with learning disabilities involved in shaping the Corporate Plan. The Council also participates in a regional Equality Impact Assessment Forum.
Partnership Practice	The Council worked with the University of Bedfordshire to mark Race Action Week, including a seminar on anti-racist leadership and collaboration.
Refuge Support	The Council corporately administers a South Asian Women's Refuge, which supports up to six women at any one time.
Our Community	Examples of Activity
Visibility and Celebration	Flags are raised at the Council offices to mark national independence days and awareness events. Lighting displays and social media campaigns are used to celebrate key equality dates throughout the year.
Youth Engagement	The Bedford Borough Youth Cabinet provides a platform for young people to campaign on issues that matter to them and engage with decision-makers.
Community Voice	The Community Network, run in partnership with CVS, brings together over 200 community organisations to share updates and discuss accessible, inclusive engagement.
Consultation Practice	Workshops were held with local residents, groups and organisations during the development of the Community Engagement Strategy. Focus groups were also held as part of the consultation on the Corporate Plan 2025–2027.
Shared Spaces	Events such as the Bedford River Festival and community food markets bring together residents from across the Borough to celebrate our shared culture and identity.

DELIVERING OUR EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

This section sets out the key actions we will deliver for each of our four equality objectives. For each action, we have identified the intended outcome, who will lead in that action, the timeframe and how progress will be monitored and reported.

We are taking a proportionate and practical approach to monitoring, aiming to track meaningful progress while making best use of available resources and existing data. Where appropriate, we will align established reporting routes—such as the annual Equality Workforce Report and directorate updates to the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team—to review and share progress, support accountability and guide ongoing improvement.

Our Workforce Objective 1: Empowerment and Representation

Increase workforce diversity so that it better reflects the Bedford Borough’s population, including at senior levels, and improve access to development and progression for staff in all roles.

Action	Measurable Outcome	Lead	Timeframe	Monitored/Reported
Encourage staff to update their equality data through internal communications and staff network-led campaigns, to strengthen workforce insight and support targeted action.	Year on year improved disclosure rates for protected characteristics, enabling clearer workforce diversity analysis and action.	Senior Officer EDI	Annually from 2025/26	Workforce Equality Report
Utilise equality monitoring data for apprenticeships to identify underrepresentation and support a more inclusive talent pipeline.	Identification of access gaps to inform targeted action to improve progression routes for underrepresented groups.	Workforce Development Adviser	Annually from 2025/26	Findings and resulting actions shared with extended Corporate Leadership Team

Track completion of Recruitment and Selection in-person and Unconscious Bias e-learning training by recruiting managers to promote fair and unbiased selection processes.	Reporting shows increasing completion rates of inclusive recruitment training undertaken by recruitment panels.	E-Learning / Workforce Development Support Officer In collaboration with Team Leader (Resourcing)	Twice per year from 2025/26	HR dashboard to extended Corporate Leadership Team
Undertake an equal pay audit to identify and address any unjustified pay disparities between women and men.	Equal pay audit completed with findings and recommendations; action plan developed where required.	Head of HR and OD	2026/27	Equal pay audit findings, recommendations and action plan agreed with Corporate Leadership Team
Work towards achieving Disability Confident Leader status, or an equivalent framework, to demonstrate commitment to disability inclusion and improve attraction, retention and progression of disabled staff.	Deliver associated actions to improve disability inclusion to the equivalent level of Disability Confident Leader status.	Senior Officer EDI	2027/28	Workforce Equality Report
Develop an HR dashboard for equality data by pay level per Directorate, with local workforce comparisons to identify underrepresentation, particularly at more senior levels.	Clearer visibility of representation across pay levels in each Directorate informing actions to increase diversity.	Senior Officer EDI in collaboration with HR Data & Processing Officer	2027/28	HR dashboard to extended Corporate Leadership Team twice per year

Our Workforce Objective 2: Inclusion and Belonging

Create a more inclusive and supportive working environment by improving internal communication, staff voice and understanding of EDI across the organisation.

Action	Measurable Outcome	Lead	Timeframe	Monitored/Reported
Enable EDI Champions to advise their directorates on completing equality analyses.	More equality analyses completed with EDI Champion input, with improved consistency and increased confidence in undertaking these across directorates.	Senior Officer EDI	2025/26	EDI Champions feeding back to and working collaboratively with their service areas
Develop and promote an Inclusive Language Guide to help staff communicate respectfully and inclusively.	Guide is published and promoted, with evidence of use across internal communications and positive feedback from staff networks and teams.	Senior Officer EDI	2025/26	Report and Guide approved by Corporate Leadership Team
Monitor and report compliance with mandatory Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging e-learning course at induction and two-year refresher points and offer dedicated EDI training for senior leaders to strengthen their role in modelling inclusive leadership.	Improved compliance with mandatory e-learning, progressing towards 100% completion. Senior leader participation tracked, with follow-up opportunities to reflect on how the training influenced inclusive leadership.	E-Learning / Workforce Development Support Officer (e-learning) and Manager for Organisational Development (Senior leader EDI training)	E-learning: twice per year from 2025/26 Senior leader offer: by 2026/27	E-learning: HR dashboard to extended Corporate Leadership Team Senior leader training: participation and reflections shared through briefing to Corporate Leadership Team

<p>Monitor and report on progress against sexual harassment prevention action plan, with a focus on service area risk assessments and compliance with mandatory Sexual Harassment e-learning training.</p>	<p>Track overall progress, including HR-led monitoring of training completion and service-led assurance of risk assessment compliance. Gaps identified with follow-up actions set out.</p>	<p>Manager for HR Policy & Projects and Service Directors/ Heads of Service</p>	<p>Twice per year from 2025/26</p>	<p>Reported to Corporate Leadership Team via action plan progress briefings.</p>
<p>Include a targeted question on inclusion and belonging in staff survey to establish a baseline and enable progress to be tracked over the life of the plan.</p>	<p>Baseline established through staff survey, with key themes identified and at least one improvement action or communication delivered. Progress monitored through follow-up questions in future surveys.</p>	<p>Manager for Organisational Development</p>	<p>2026/27 (then ongoing tracking)</p>	<p>Staff survey, actions and comparative information to senior leaders, staff & trade unions.</p>
<p>Sign up to UNISON's Anti-Racism Charter and implement the Charter's commitments to strengthen the Council's commitment to anti-racism.</p>	<p>Demonstrable progress in creating an anti-racist and a more inclusive workplace through evidenced implementation of the Charter commitments.</p>	<p>Senior Officer EDI</p>	<p>Sign-up in 2026/27 with delivery within the required 12 months period</p>	<p>Progress reported to Corporate Leadership Team</p>

Our Services Objective: Demonstrating Change

Embed EDI into service design and delivery, and demonstrate progress through inclusive and responsive practice, using communication, service user feedback and transparent reporting.

Action	Measurable Outcome	Lead	Timeframe	Monitored/Reported
Ensure EDI is embedded into service planning, reviews and changes that affect residents or service users, including completion and publication of equality analyses.	All significant service changes include a completed equality analysis.	Service Directors/ Heads of Service	From 2025/26 ongoing	Directorate updates to Corporate Leadership Team
In line with the Supreme Court ruling and forthcoming EHRC guidance on the definition of 'woman' under the Equality Act 2010, review workforce and service delivery arrangements. This includes reviewing workforce-related policies, procedures and staff training. Service areas are responsible for updating their own service delivery arrangements, policies and staff understanding.	Complete the review and implementation of all necessary arrangements to ensure compliance.	Head of HR and Service Directors	2025/26, ongoing	Progress report to CLT
Develop and publish guidance to support service areas in considering the needs and circumstances of people with care experience when completing equality analyses.	Guidance published and embedded in the toolkit; guidance applied by service areas in relevant assessments, demonstrating due regard to care experience.	Senior Officer EDI	2025/26	Feedback from EDI Champions and service areas on use of the guidance, shared with Corporate Leadership Team.
Collect and analyse equality data from service users to identify access barriers and ensure representation for all protected characteristics.	Equality data informs improvements to access and outcomes, evidenced by examples.	Service Directors/ Heads of Service	Annually from 2026/27	Directorate updates to Corporate Leadership Team

<p>Ensure service communication and feedback processes are accessible, culturally competent and include ways for service users to give feedback.</p>	<p>Services complete annual reviews of key communication and feedback channels to identify and implement changes that improve accessibility and inclusion.</p>	<p>Service Directors/ Heads of Service</p>	<p>Annually from 2026/27</p>	<p>Directorate updates to Corporate Leadership Team</p>
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Our Community Objective: Engagement and Empowerment

Ensure communities, particularly underrepresented groups, are informed, engaged and able to influence decisions that affect them. Delivery of this objective will be supported through the Council's Community Engagement Strategy.

Action	Measurable Outcome	Lead	Timeframe	Monitored/Reported
Support and advise on the inclusion of diverse voices in Council engagement activities, ensuring that consultations, forums and advisory groups are inclusive and accessible.	Underrepresented groups are represented in engagement and consultation activities, with feedback used to inform service design and priorities.	Senior Officer EDI	Ongoing from 2025/26	Community Engagement Strategy updates
Promote the use of inclusive and plain-language communication across community-facing content to support trust, understanding and participation.	Increased accessibility of consultation and engagement materials; positive community feedback on ease of understanding and trust in Council communication.	Senior Officer EDI	Ongoing from 2026/27	Community Engagement Strategy updates
Offer cultural competency training and resources to staff engaging directly with communities, to strengthen inclusive and responsive engagement practices.	Staff involved in community engagement have improved understanding of cultural competency principles, with training participation tracked and practice reflected in engagement approaches.	Senior Officer EDI in collaboration with Community Engagement Team	From 2026/27 onwards	Community Engagement Strategy updates

LOOKING AHEAD

Our Equality Objectives and Action Plan sets out our clear direction for advancing equality, diversity and inclusion across our workforce, services and community. We are committed to delivering meaningful change and will track progress against these objectives to ensure our actions are making a difference. We will make updates where needed to ensure the plan remains relevant and effective.