Fairness strategy
A town built on fairness and social justice

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When we talk about social justice, what do we mean?

We mean fairness in society. Fairness when it comes to:

- opportunities
- access to services
- the expectation of living a long and healthy life
- being treated with dignity and respect

Our vision for Luton 2040 is rooted in fairness. By the year 2040, Luton will be a place where everyone can thrive, and no-one lives in poverty.

Together with our partners across the public and private sectors and in the community, we, the council, are committed to five key priorities to help bring this about. We want to create a **thriving economy** that benefits everyone, a **healthy town** where people can live well for longer, we want our town to be both **net-zero** and **child friendly**, and, above all, to be **built on fairness**.

The story of Luton and its people is bound up with a desire to improve the quality of life in the town for everyone. We want to defend human and social rights, tackle inequity, and contribute to the common good.

We want to create a fairer society for all.

Hazel Simmons MBE, Leader and **Robin Porter**, Chief Executive, Luton Council

Our pledge

We will – all of us together – work tirelessly to achieve:

- a town built on fairness with equitable outcomes for all of residents
- increased resilience across the community, protecting and enabling the most excluded and vulnerable residents
- a thriving voluntary and community sector to deliver on shared priorities with residents
- a welcoming and compassionate town, with respect, social responsibility and increased civic pride at its heart
- a stronger and more meaningful voice for all our residents to shape the vision and direction of the town

We all share in the reward of making Luton a town built on fairness.

Supporting a strong community, committed to fairness and local pride, with a powerful voice for all our residents

A welcoming and compassionate town with respect, social responsibility and increased civic pride at its heart.

A stronger and meaningful voice for all our residents to shape the vision and direction of a town.

Increased resilience across our community protecting and enabling the most excluded and vulnerable.

Fair and equitable outcomes for all our residents.

A thriving voluntary and community sector, delivering on shared priorities with our residents.

Many Voices One Town Fair for All

A town built on fairness with critical outcomes for all our residents.

The words we use

When we talk about 'social justice' we often use different words to describe it.

We use the collective term 'fairness' to express these values.

Equality: treating people the same way and ensuring they do not suffer discrimination because of who they are - but simply doing that might result in them not getting the end result they need!

Equity: Treating people fairly and recognising their needs as individuals - we don't all start from the same place, so everyone needs to take steps together to put this right.

We cannot assume that being part of a group lets us know who they are or what they need.

Diversity: recognising people's differences whilst understanding that people who share a common characteristic are still individuals.

- Different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued.
- Strong, positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds.
- People from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities.

Inclusion: social measures taken to change situations where some people do not have equal access to the opportunities and services that allow them to lead a decent, happy life.

This includes people being able to give input and have their voice heard on the rules of the society in which they live.

Cohesion: a community where there is an environment which offers a common vision and sense of belonging for all.

Human rights: the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world.

Social justice – a definition

Social justice **begins with human rights**. We've all heard of, amongst others:

- the right to life
- the right to liberty and security
- the rights to health, education and a decent standard of living
- the right to a private and family life

These are things that everyone can expect to enjoy. But not everyone has the same ability to fulfil these rights.

The aim of social justice is to **eliminate the harmful impacts of structural inequality** - social exclusion, discrimination, inequity, and poverty - that are **still experienced by many of our residents on a daily basis**, preventing them from enjoying their rights to the full.

Our Luton 2040 vision describes Luton as 'a place to thrive'. But for that to become true we must, through hearing the voices of Luton's people, understand these harmful impacts and seek to prevent and change them.

This means **focusing on the needs of the groups of people** who are suffering **higher levels of social exclusion.** The technical term for this is 'targeted universalism'. In doing so, in reducing inequity and discrimination and ensuring that we care for the most vulnerable, we create social and economic benefit for the whole community.

Wherever possible, we must collaborate to make this change happen.

Our starting point

By building on these steps, our goal of **social justice becomes possible**.

1. We have to comply with equality and human rights laws and duties
2. We must recognise that we don't all have the same access to our legal rights
3. A sense of belonging
4. Shared vision
5. If resources are invested strategically we'll see:
   a. increased social inclusion
   b. active citizenship
   c. system change for equity

Then we can multiply the **positive impact** of these laws with respect, equality and diversity to create social cohesion.

Our social justice model

Understanding **what needs to change** and bringing it about can only be achieved when people are directly involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Wherever possible, **we must all collaborate** to make this change happen. The first step in moving towards a just and fair society is to uphold the legal rights and responsibilities of the:

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty 2011

These are our legal obligations, but also our goals that support a vision of social justice.

We can build on our legal obligations by encouraging **widespread social and institutional respect** across our community and partnerships. When we see equality, diversity and respect combining, we'll see **a society that's more cohesive**.

A town free from hatred, where people from many different backgrounds live alongside each other in harmony

A cohesive society provides the foundations for people and groups to organise together - joining forces to create positive change. When **resources are invested strategically** into cohesive communities it leads to **increased social inclusion**.

When social inclusion is encouraged in this way by public institutions and their partnerships, and active citizenship is enabled **to collaborate toward positive change**, the means necessary for co-producing and **advancing towards the goal of social justice becomes realisable**.

For the council and all its partners, the aim of a town built on fairness and social justice requires a **shared culture of respect** for equality, diversity and fairness. This culture must be fully embedded and evident in our residents' access to rights, economic and social opportunities, and services.

It requires a focus on prevention and **a clear commitment** to tackle the causes and drivers of inequity.

It also means taking consideration of the steps necessary to **redistribute resources** to those who need it most in order to ensure equity.

Finally, the principles required to achieve this goal must also shape our approach to community leadership. We must **encourage and enable** citizens' active involvement, contribution and responsibilities in the development of the town.

Key principles

Our strategy will ensure that these principles are the foundation and focus for our work across three key dimensions:

1. **workforce and culture:** to become an exemplary employer for Luton
2. **community and residents:** as service commissioner, provider and deliverer, ensuring access to and meeting the needs of a super-diverse community
3. **citizens and civil society:** the council, as community leader, and partnership convener, must work towards a town built, on fairness and social justice for 2040

Luton - the place and the people

At the heart of work towards a town built on fairness is our current greatest asset - our community and their voice for change.

We know the starting point for achieving fairness is for communities to come together to organise and improve life in the town. This the **key driver in making changes happen** to tackle equality is always peoples' self-organisation.

This includes all assets of community value.

- **Communities of purpose:**
  - faith organisations
  - voluntary sector
- **Communities of geography:**
  - citizen engagement
  - members
  - ward work
- **Communities of identity:**
  - equality, diversity and inclusion
- **Communities of harmony:**
  - community cohesion

Inequality in Luton - statistics

Below are some of the key things we know about Luton the place, its people and the inequality that still exists. This data is taken from the 2021 national census.

- Luton's population has **increased by 11%** over the last 10 years (compared to a 6% increase nationally).
- Luton's **total population is 225,300** – an increase of 22,200, since the 2011 census.
- **82% of residents** say they are willing to help the neighbours.
- **80% of residents** agree that people from different backgrounds get on well together.
- Health life expectancy is **below regional and national averages**.
- **44.58% of children** in Luton, live in poverty.
- The COVID-19 pandemic **disproportionately impacted** Luton residents.
- More than **150 languages and dialects** are spoken in Luton.
- **Unemployment is at 6.4%** - consistently double the national average.
- Luton has a **super diverse** and **younger than average population**. Approximately **80%** of young people and **68%** of all people are from **ethnically diverse backgrounds**.
- **More than half of the residents** do not believe they can influence decisions locally.

Find out more about Luton's key statistics here.

We'll be working with our community to share, monitor and measure progress on the town's journey towards social justice as part of our strategy.

What our community is telling us

To understand the challenges to fairness in Luton, we must listen to the community. **When you speak, we need to listen, understand and act.**

We've set up equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) focus groups and networks across Luton. These groups include **over 300 residents** from a wide range of identities, backgrounds, and equality characteristics.

There are some strong challenges and common themes that have already emerged from this dialogue. **These themes are shaping the commitments in our strategy**.

We'll continue to work with, and develop, these networks to ensure they provide **voice, insight and challenge** to the council and all our partners.

Council engagement, dialogue and access

You shared a common perception that engagement and dialogue is lacking and that access is not enabled for diverse and excluded communities.

In response, we set up the Fairness Taskforce, EDI groups and networks across the community to encourage and enable everyone to get involved in making change happen.

Defining Luton in negative terms reinforces social exclusion and a deficit culture

We're building a marketing campaign to show Luton in a **truly positive light** for promoting future investment and business, focusing on our community's **creativity, uniqueness and talent**.

Workforce diversity and representation

You said our workforce needs to better reflect the community at all levels, so we created a new People Plan which includes a **clear commitment to make EDI the foundation** of our role as a recruiter and local employer.

Perception of unsafety - concerns around young peoples' vulnerability to exploitation and criminality

In response, we're supporting **community-led approaches** to safeguarding young people, tackling local criminal gangs and **seeking young people's ideas** on improving trust in the system.

Concerns around disability, age and employment

You shared common concerns around disability and age that are creating barriers to employment and impacting income standards,

As a result, we're working with our disabled community to understand what Luton should look like as a **disability friendly town** and how we can achieve this together.

Lack of access to family support services

You said there's not enough access to services that support families, such as Early Years and educational support.

We're developing **family hubs and community networks** across the town to provide services where they're needed. We're also making sure community projects focused around improving the lives of children **get funding**.

Improve understanding of diversity and the individual needs of people across our services

We've started **EDI networks**, recruited **EDI coordinators** and refreshed our **impact assessments** to support and meet the needs of our super-diverse community.

Lived experience of prejudice and discrimination is an everyday reality

We're setting up a network for all community partners working towards **'a town built on fairness'** and committing resources to ensure Luton is **'no place for hate'**.

Case studies for driving change

When we reduce inequalities for the most vulnerable and/or marginalised people, we create **social and economic benefit for the whole community**.

Black Lives Matter

Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, local community organisers worked with councillors to table the landmark 'Black Lives Matter' motion for annual report back. It received cross-party support.

As a result, responding to this voice, we've agreed some key priorities to work on with our community that are relevant for all residents. These include:

- strengthening our EDI commitment and practice with regard to our workforce
- making local diversity and community central to recruitment
- ensuring Luton Rising (the council's airport company run for community benefit) is working with the airport operator to make the airport an example of this
- addressing challenges around how education and the curriculum reflects community and identity in Luton
- tackling structural discrimination and inequality in the labour market
- advocating against structural inequality in national policy, for instance in areas such as immigration and criminal justice
- promoting and enabling deeper understanding of culture and identity amongst service providers across all sectors

We want to see more of this approach. You talk, we listen and, together, we find solutions.

Talk Listen Change

Following widespread concerns about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, we commissioned the University of Bedfordshire to undertake in depth participatory research with African, Black Caribbean, and South Asian communities.

With over 1,000 local participants, the research programme broke new ground in terms of community voice and evidence-based perceptions of local services.

The messages we heard included:

- we feel targeted and blamed
- we do not have access to healthcare
- we feel we're being discriminated against as employees and patients and we do not feel respected
- we want to see community diversify reflected in the local workforce to break down language barriers and promote understanding of different cultures
- we have to work - no choice because on low paid jobs

The delivery of specific recommendations for change are being driven through the Luton 2040 partnership.

These insights reinforce the importance of ensuring the development of our strategy is clearly driven by lived experience and community voice.

Shared community leadership

Enabling leadership that can support our community on the journey towards social justice is **fundamental to a town built on fairness**. Whether from councillors and council officers, active citizens, our partners across public and voluntary sectors or local businesses, we need leadership for fairness that is **fully inclusive and collaborative**.

The aims of the leadership are:

- to understand and respect cultural competency

- self-awareness of unconscious bias
- bring diverse communities together around a common vision and shared values
- model integrity that builds trust
- promote zero tolerance across the community; actively countering prejudice, hatred and extremism
- engage and proactively challenge institutions and communities on discrimination and uncomfortable issues
- understand and enable community organisation as an asset and equal partner in positive social change
- support the principles of equity and equality of opportunity for all - a clear commitment to the values of social justice

Developing these leadership qualities, skills and attributes across our workforce, and in partnership with our community and anchor institutions, is a **key priority** for our strategy.

Luton's Fairness Taskforce

We've set up the [Luton Fairness Taskforce](#) in partnership with The Young Foundation, Beds and Luton Community Foundation, and University of Bedfordshire.

Launched in November 2021, the Fairness Taskforce mobilises core principles of our strategy, finding new ways to invest in, and enable collaboration with, citizens, charities, faith groups, community groups and partners towards greater equity in the town.

It aims to **create the force for change** - shifting from 'for' to 'with' - by following these three key guiding principles:

- **starting with lived experience:** generating voice and insight through co-research
- **making sense:** sense checking and identifying what needs to change through co-design
- **making the change:** enabling new approaches across whole systems and community partnerships through co-production

Luton's Fairness Taskforce will enable our community, citizens, charities and our faith and community groups to actively shape the future of the Luton 2040 vision and of the town. It will be a critical friend, challenging leaders to respond to new citizen-led solutions for reducing inequity, achieving net zero and enabling social inclusion in Luton.

The group is already finding new ways to increase collaboration and investment with voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise groups and networks to address shared goals that increase fairness at all levels.

Feedback received at the Fairness Taskforce launch event

Attendees were asked to focus on three main areas – housing, money and debt, and the essentials, such as food and energy. They were then encouraged to share their questions, thoughts and ideas.

- What does **allyship** mean for the taskforce? What will it look like in reality?
- We need to break down the **barriers** that we know are holding us back.
- The **Black Lives Matter** has been passed in Luton. We can hold the council to account on this.
- How can you access Universal Credit if you don't have **access to the internet** on your phone?
- Creating a **fair and inclusive economy** for all.
- We've see a **140% increase** in requests for food bank vouchers. I'm concerned about those who won't or can't access our services.

- How can we say black lives matter when our **carbon emissions** are destroying black lives around the world?
- Culture talk can blind us to the structural reasons why people are living the way they are.
- **Digital illiteracy** is high. How is this going to be dealt with?
- We need a revolution of love, compassion and kindness.
- **11% of our families** live in deprivation, despite their hard work. Do you want to do something about it?
- As a town, we've been continually **enriched by our many communities**.
- We need **sustainable funding** - we're fire fighting for survival. My challenge to Luton is to encourage more full cost funding.
- We believe that, in diversity and inclusion, there's phenomenal **untapped potential**.
- Community leaders are trying to work with **conditions and barriers** that feel outside of their control.
- **Map what opportunities there are**, where they are, and then share.
- Raise awareness that adults can still **pursue their career goals**.
- Create a central hub with **cross-sector leadership buy-in**.
- Disability does not discriminate.
- There are two overarching issues:
  - **race**: people of colour are twice as likely to be unemployed
  - **class:** there are discrepancy in resources available to people
- There's a **perception that Luton is boring** and lacks opportunities.
- There's a **problem with engagement**, especially politically.
- I hit a glass ceiling, despite my qualifications and experience, so I had to take a risk. Now I'm successful.
- We have **talented people here in Luton**, so why are they not getting local jobs?
- My **disability was ignored**.
- Where does **power and privilege** sit within Luton?

Luton's Fairness Taskforce – creating the force for change.

Luton 2020-2040: A place to thrive

Luton – a town built on fairness and social justice

Our aims for Luton include:

- an inclusive economy
- achieving net-zero
- population health
- a child friendly town

This will be achieved by:

- understanding the lived experience and voice of our residents
- making a sense of what needs to change
- making the change together

The Fairness Taskforce with work to co-design this vision with the Citizens' Forum, made up of:

- Luton's citizens
- 2040 partners
- the voluntary and community sector

Enabling system change

Serving a super diverse community and enabling change towards social justice means **working alongside people so they can achieve their hopes and dreams**.

This means ensuring communities can clearly influence decision making, and a positive culture where **system leaders look to find a way to make change happen**, wherever possible. It recognises the strength of an 'asset based' approach with communities.

Seeing what's strong, not wrong.

The role of system leaders is to listen and support these plans to become a reality. This support could come from skills sharing, community-asset transfers, funding, influencing partners and opening doors, or just keeping out of the way and letting the community get on with their work.

To do this we need **meaningful engagement**. We must adopt co-design and co-production principles as a standard way of developing solutions with and for local communities. **We need to give people the voice and opportunity to take direct action** over issues facing their communities.

Moving towards asset based community development

Who's sitting at the 'decision making table'? Currently, this is mostly professionals, but we need to be in a position where more community members join the conversation and influence decisions.

Active citizenship and community networks

As part of this strategy, we'll be following, and encouraging others to follow, a simple idea to enable and increase the power of citizens and communities to tackle inequity.

Inspire

We need to inspire our citizens and give them the trust and confidence to see that change can be achieved, and that they're at the forefront when it comes to thinking differently and trying new ideas.

Act

We need to remove barriers to allow our community leaders to act in the interests of the communities they serve.

Enable

We need to enable our citizens to take action, deliver change and be leaders in their communities.
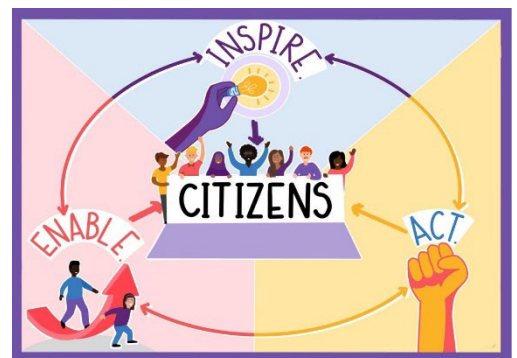
As part of our commitment to tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion, we'll work with partners across the system to establish place-based networks and projects. These will provide access to services and support that can protect vulnerable and excluded communities, enabling them to thrive

These neighbourhood networks and projects will work locally with council members, citizens, community organisations and partners on a range of activities identified including:

- identifying issues that matter locally and supporting activity to address these using community feedback and data
- providing better access to advice and support across council and non-council services to help improve lives

- supporting more collaborative and joined up working across public, private and local voluntary sector services in local neighbourhoods and wards
- making better use of council-owned and other community based buildings to link local priorities to the 2040 agenda

Buildings and community assets

Our buildings and community assets should be used as far as possible to benefit our communities and enable them to come together and thrive.

We'll review the community assets for groups suffering higher levels of social exclusion. This will enable us to:

- identify barriers
- understand how we can create more equitable opportunities for wider access

Maximising wider citizen engagement

Due to the diversity of our communities and neighbourhoods, different options need to be made available to maximise wider citizen engagement. We'll work with our citizens and partners to develop approaches to share decision making and power, including:

- **citizen assemblies:** where citizens come together to shape local solutions to issues, led by local residents, and linked into the Fairness Taskforce
- **community listening events:** deep dives into key issues and challenges faced by local people through building community networks and dialogue
- **participatory budgeting forums:** where citizens vote on the allocation of public budgets to specific projects proposed to address agreed priorities

The aim of these events is to improve trust and share leadership and power between communities and system leaders. They can lead to the development of community-led action plans that are relevant to a specific neighbourhood, community or issue. The responsibility for delivery lies with everyone involved.

Get involved!

Find out more about Luton 2040. To get involved, email SocialJustice@luton.gov.uk.