

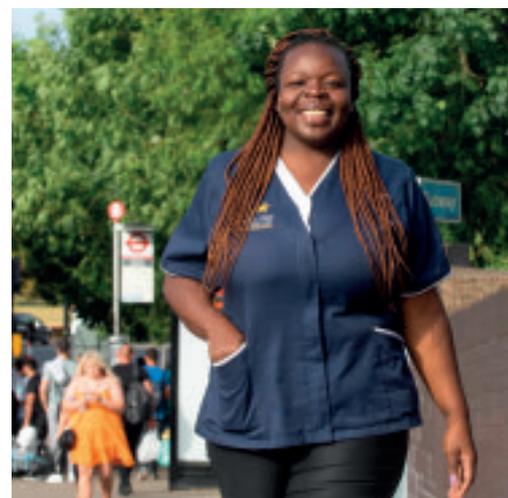


Ealing

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A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE

How Ealing Council is putting communities at the heart of its efforts to help lead London's post-pandemic recovery





Getting the measure of success

It has one of the youngest leader and chief executive partnerships in local government and that's invigorated Ealing Council with a new mission in its quest to create a more inclusive borough

As London emerges from the pandemic, the role of large outer boroughs like Ealing will be vital in the city's economic recovery.

And with a new leader and chief executive at the helm to take forward an ambitious, wide-ranging agenda, Ealing Council is primed to rise to the challenge.

Growth in the capital's third most populous borough is projected to outstrip London as a whole thanks to a host of factors, from the shift to flexible working to the sheer breadth of opportunities within Ealing.

Indeed, its growing role is captured in Ealing's new council plan: 'The pandemic has changed the nature of London's economy – and Ealing's place within it... London's economic success will be defined by the success of outer London boroughs like Ealing.'

This slice of West London was dubbed the Queen of the Suburbs more than a century ago. While that description still fits the bill for the leafy neighbourhoods of central Ealing, it doesn't capture the diversity and contrasts found across its other six towns.

Whether it's Southall's status as the capital of British Asian culture or the role of Hanwell – birthplace of the Marshall amp – in the development of rock music, every town has a unique heritage and identity.

But it is also a place of contrasting fortunes, with deep-seated inequalities having been exacerbated by the pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis. That's why the borough's future success will be framed around the degree to which those gaps can be closed.

This year, the council set out plans to shift power and reset the authority's relationship with residents. The scale of the ambition reflects the energy and appetite of leader Cllr Peter Mason and chief executive Tony Clements to modernise local government in a way that genuinely empowers communities and unshackles the council's workforce.

Cllr Mason, who was elected leader last year, says the overriding goal is for local people to feel they have influence over their lives, have a decent income, an affordable home and a happy and healthy life.



Whether it's the climate crisis, the economy or inequality between the different communities in the borough... we don't feel we can hang around and wait with these issues.

Cllr Peter Mason, leader of Ealing Council

Fairer future

A hard-hitting report is shaping the council's approach to tackling inequality while a new local independent body will gauge progress

One of Ealing Council's boldest moves has been to open up a forensic examination of the inequality and disadvantage facing its black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.

The independent Ealing Race Equality Commission, chaired by Lord Simon Wooley, published its findings earlier this year, setting out how a person's ethnic background acts as a barrier in so many facets of life.

Its headline recommendations called on those responsible for commissioning, delivering and codesigning services to build trust with communities, genuinely listen to the lived experiences of residents, and use data and insight to 'ensure the tenacious pursuit of narrowing inequality'.

The impact of the Commission's work can be seen throughout the new council plan – from the way it proposes to tackle health inequalities by embedding equalities in its Better Lives programme to promote independence and wellbeing to a pledge to build

an inclusive economy by ending pay gaps that disproportionately affect women and black, Asian and minority ethnic residents.

An action plan has been launched to tackle inequality across schools and a new civic leadership programme for diverse communities is being developed.

It's also led to internal change at the council with the creation of staff equality groups as part of an organisation-wide programme to be a more inclusive and effective employer.

However, the council has taken it a step further by creating a Citizens' Tribunal to hold it to account on progress against a wide range of priorities set out by the Commission. Believed to be the first of its kind, it's an independent body made up of 10 members of the community from a wide range of backgrounds that will hold annual public hearings to assess the performance of the council and its partners.

A separate group is being set up for businesses



‘It’s not that radical,’ he says. ‘But sometimes local government loses sight of that.’

Ealing may well be the first local authority in the country to be led and managed by millennials. It’s a generation that’s characterised as being motivated by a sense of mission and purpose and Cllr Mason believes he and his chief executive bring greater urgency to that.

‘Whether it’s the climate crisis, the economy or inequality between the different communities in the borough, there has to be a sense of urgency. We don’t feel we can hang around and wait with these issues.’

Last year the council set up an independent race

equality commission to take an in depth look at the disadvantages facing too many residents (see below). It is now acting on the commission’s findings and ensuring residents hold it to account through a new Citizens’ Tribunal.

It’s a crucial part of a final shift away from the traditional, paternalistic council of the past, says Cllr Mason, towards one that delivers great services but also passes power to communities. Plans include towns forums through which residents set spending priorities backed by £2m raised from a developer tax. A new community access guarantee for council buildings will

ensure local groups and start-up businesses can access affordable space across the borough.

In some cases, it’s effectively about ‘sponsoring communities to make greater demands of us,’ he explains.

The Let’s Go Southall initiative, an example of shared leadership with the community, is distributing 1,000 bikes to people in what is one of its most deprived towns (see overleaf). On the face of it, it’s about tackling health inequalities, but Cllr Mason hopes it will also ultimately encourage residents to lobby for better cycling infrastructure as hard as those in affluent parts of the borough. While reconnecting with communities is a thread that runs throughout the council’s agenda, success will largely depend on bringing about change within the organisation.

Tony Clements describes it as being about nurturing ‘a more humble culture in public service leadership.’

As part of a borough-wide consultation designed to shape the long-term vision for Ealing, staff were asked what changes they would like to see. They echoed local people’s views on the need for a resident-focused culture and for the organisation to reflect the borough’s diversity.

‘The new currency of success here is your preparedness to try new things in pursuit of our priorities and values,’ says Tony. ‘We want to liberate our staff by giving them permission to take some risks and be prepared to make mistakes, as long as we learn from them. It’s about giving them greater autonomy.’

‘I want them to have a deeper and more intuitive sense of what’s happening in our communities, so they know we’re delivering the right things. I think the most powerful thing we can do is foster, strengthen and enrich the civic social community life of Ealing beyond delivering services.’

Like many local authorities, the council is reconfiguring its workspaces to adapt to the shift towards more flexible work patterns. But it’s also about helping officers and members to work together, says Cllr Mason.

‘What I want to create with Tony is an environment in which people can properly collaborate and understand each other’s roles – including politicians with a mandate from the people and the creative, ideas and outcomes-focused people who will enable us to fix problems – and get communities included in that process.’ ●



which will examine the Commission’s recommendations on income and employment. Denise Charles, one of the 12 commissioners and head of curriculum for service industries at West London College, says the council’s

commitment was clear from the outset.

‘You could see they were taking it seriously and understood changes were needed. Since then it hasn’t been a case of them taking the report, sitting on it and doing nothing – making it nothing more than a tick-box exercise.’

‘For example, they could see they needed to put someone in place so that there’s movement on this agenda and therefore recruited a new assistant director of equalities and engagement – and asked me to be on the panel.’

She adds: ‘As well as launching the action plan, the council has been very forward thinking in setting up the Citizens’ Tribunal. It feels like it’s going to be supported and encouraged and that the council wants to ensure all stakeholders are engaged. This is life changing.’ ●

EALING IN NUMBERS

3rd	Largest London borough with 367,000 residents
7	Distinct towns – Acton, Ealing, Greenford, Hanwell, Northolt, Perivale and Southall
200+	Languages spoken
93.1%	Micro businesses, with 19,850 local business units in the borough
66%	Residents have a level 4 qualification or higher
#1	Eco-friendly borough in London (according to commercial estate agents CBRE)



Creative thinking

The growing importance of outer London is enabling Ealing Council to use its strengths to build a more inclusive economy



‘We have creative industries, food production, the diverse Asian economy, the retail offer in Ealing Broadway and the office market. For London – and particularly West London – to be successful then we need to be successful.’

Tony Clements, chief executive

One of the key pledges in the latest council plan is to create 10,000 new jobs over the next four years. There is also a commitment to secure 2,000 apprenticeships in order to

open up ‘more alternative routes into good, well-paid work’ and devote £1m towards training and support for 2,000 residents ‘with the toughest barriers to employment’.

With more than a quarter of jobs in Ealing paying

below the London Living Wage, the focus is very much on bringing better quality employment into the borough. The council’s cabinet recently committed £2m to enable it to pay the Living Wage to all homecare workers. It has also achieved Good Business accreditation and is working with other employers to help them follow its lead.

One of the key drivers will be the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC). The UK’s largest regeneration project, it will effectively create an eighth town in the north of the borough as part of a huge development of a 650-hectare site that also takes in parts of Brent and Hammersmith & Fulham. A community review group – the first of its kind in the country – has been established to ensure the plans reflect local people’s priorities.

While the programme is being run by the OPDC on behalf of Greater London Authority, the council is playing a key role in ensuring local communities are consulted at every stage.

‘This is the country’s biggest development project that will bring business and employment opportunities and new homes,’ says chief executive Tony Clements. ‘But it has to be the right kind of development for Ealing. Ultimately, we are the long-term stewards of that place.’

But the council’s drive for a more inclusive economy is equally about looking for opportunities throughout the borough’s existing towns.

Ealing has a highly diverse and well-connected economy with more than 93% of enterprises being micro-businesses, way above both the national and London averages.

The borough’s approach to supporting sustainable and high-quality growth is very much about developing tailored solutions for each town that reflect local needs and build on strengths.

For example, at Park Royal in Acton, a budding cultural and arts hub has taken root and was therefore a natural candidate to become one of the Mayor of London’s creative enterprise zones. It will receive funding to support existing businesses and nurture new talent and 30 local creatives are being backed with grants to enable them to develop community spaces.

It’s also a natural fit for the borough as a whole. This is, after all, the home of the world-famous Ealing Studios and a place that has continued to produce both films and TV series seen across the globe.

The borough’s many assets make it well-placed to play a different and more prominent role, explains Tony.

‘We championed ourselves in the past on our connectivity with central London and Heathrow and while that’s still a strength, things have changed. We now have hybrid working and it’s not going back to the way it was.’

‘Ealing was never entirely reliant on commuting patterns into central London. We have creative industries, food production, the diverse Asian economy, the retail offer in Ealing Broadway and the office market. For London – and particularly West London – to be successful then we need to be successful. What’s unusual about Ealing is we have more of those economic assets to build on.’ ●

On the right path



Southall has become a focal point of efforts to tackle health inequalities, raise living standards and build a more inclusive economy

Southall is one of Ealing’s most vibrant and diverse towns, but it’s also an area of high deprivation and growing inequality. The council recently launched a comprehensive programme designed to tackle some of the root causes with progress monitored by a community-led town forum.

The Southall Reset will invest in everything from active travel to supporting local businesses. The town has already staged its first business expo, aimed at promoting Southall as a great place to do business, and with help from social enterprise Meanwhile Space it has turned a listed manor house into a hub for fledgling businesses along with a community café and training facility.

In many respects, the Southall Reset programme will build on the success of Let’s Go Southall – a Sport England pilot programme launched in 2018, overseen by the council and run by community organisers working with charities and volunteers.

While it’s ostensibly an initiative to encourage more people to be physically active, it is actually about a fundamental shift in how public health issues are tackled.

It has seen four outdoor gyms installed, a parkrun established and the launch of the Southall Grand Union Canal Wellbeing Way, a project to transform local canals and towpaths to create appealing places for walking and cycling.

This year the council added Let’s Ride Southall to the programme, which involved the giveaway of 1,000 bikes – the biggest in London – as well as organising group riding sessions seven days a

week and regular maintenance workshops.

Jaspal Gill, programme lead for Let’s Go Southall, describes it as a whole system approach that enables people to take more responsibility for their own health. It’s essentially about creating the conditions for communities to take ownership.

‘We’re the first place to have accessible outdoor gyms and that only happened because they were co-designed with communities,’ she explains.

‘With the bikes, if we just give them out it’s not going to create that bigger impact around climate change, changing the local environment, economic benefits and so on. Southall has the highest car ownership rates in the borough.’

‘We are not a cycling community for many reasons. Therefore, by mobilising people through our teams model, we are creating increased social movement around many connected issues.’

‘One person said they hadn’t cycled for 50 years since they lived in India. She felt free and connected and that mental wellbeing element is one of the standout successes.’

Her advice to other local authorities? ‘If you want to create change you have got to move from transactional to relational work – shift away from contracts and targets because it won’t give you a very flexible process.’

‘Some of those fixes are at a grassroots level and exist in the community. We’re helping to spread the resources out, getting more social interaction and creating new leadership. The sustainability lies in recognising different neighbourhood approaches.’ ●