

Diversity Peer Challenge

Brighton and Hove City Council

Report



**Diversity Peer Challenge Report
Brighton and Hove City Council
30/31st March 2009**

1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and carried out by its trained peers. The report satisfies the requirements of the Equality Standard for an external assessment at level 3. The Peer Challenge is designed to validate a council's own self-assessment at level 3 of the Equality Standard, by considering documentary evidence and by carrying out a series of interviews and focus groups with employees and other stakeholders.

The basis for the Peer Challenge is a benchmark which incorporates the set criteria of the Equality Standard at level 3. The benchmark focuses on four key areas: Leadership and Corporate Commitment; Community Engagement and Accountability; Service Delivery and Customer Care and Employment and Training.

The Peer Challenge is not an inspection; rather it offers an external assessment of a council's own judgement of itself against the Equality Standard benchmark, by critical friends who have experience of delivering an equality/diversity agenda in their own councils.

Peers were:

Samantha Jones – Bath and North East Somerset Council
Councillor Andrew Judge – London Borough of Merton
Nick Stephenson - Swindon Borough Council

The team appreciates of the welcome and hospitality provided by the council and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions.

2. Overall conclusion

Following this Diversity Peer Challenge, we have reached the following conclusion:

Brighton and Hove City Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for level 3 of the Equality Standard. Strengths and any weaknesses identified by peers are highlighted in paragraph 3.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Leadership and corporate commitment

Strengths:

- Brighton and Hove City Council has modernised its equalities agenda in the last two years. For the first time, equalities became one of the main five priorities of the council, with cross party support. Politicians are concerned with ensuring fairness in community issues.
- Elected members actively champion areas of interest. For example the current leader of the council has a particular focus on reducing inequality through improving the housing stock.
- The acting Chief Executive is an articulate champion of a modernised equalities agenda.
- The main corporate leadership within the council is provided by the Top Management Team which has provided consistent support.
- The scrutiny commission contains members capable of making a difference on equalities. In the past scrutiny was not used to monitor progress with regard to equalities objectives. There is now an intention to enable more effective scrutiny of equalities performance.
- The City Inclusion Partnership is seen as a positive development in bringing strategic partners together as part of the LSP to discuss equalities planning and implementation across the city.
- Outreach work to capacity build third sector organisations to apply for council contracts. Procurement – Council encourages use of local subcontractors when appointing contractors.
- Some staff reported good equality impact assessment training and support in completion.
- Capacity to address equalities issues has been maintained despite financial pressures
- Work to identify and address individuals and households experiencing multiple deprivation is in the process of development.

Areas for improvement:

Peer Challenge comment	BHCC response/action
Understanding of equalities issues is perceived to be good across many services in the Council.	Equalities Steering Group to develop a Communications Plan.
There is an issue of the Council not appreciating and celebrating much that is excellent.	
Failure to communicate positive messages about achievements is resulting in a lower level of confidence around equality issues across the organisation than is justified.	
The Equalities Steering Group acts as a	A new draft Terms of Reference for the

useful network and good practice discussion board, however it has not yet exercised leadership in terms of performance management and in agenda setting, which should be the next stage in its development	Equalities Steering Group to go to ESG in July 2009
There is a need for continued focus on community mapping.	This is underway via the Partnership Data Group of the LSP and the development of the Brighton & Hove Local Information System.
Being a leading organisation in response to LGBT issues has raised the bar for work in other equality areas. The council may benefit from clearly extending its good practice to all equality areas. It was reported that there appears to be some complacency and that it is difficult to get race equality issues on the agenda.	The development of the Single Equality Scheme to ensure all strands are addressed effectively. Race equality to continue to be a focus within Equality Impact Assessments and further action to be taken where issues are identified.
Recognition as nationally leading the way on LGBT issues may be difficult to maintain and lead to increased expectation – also creating an expectation that Brighton and Hove City Council doesn't need to do any further work on LGBT issues.	Continued use of the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.
Equality impact assessments lacked consistency across departments. There is a developing intention at all levels to improve the process. Having a consistently used and quality assured process in place will be key tool in developing and sharing further good practice.	Ongoing work needed to ensure that Equality Impact Assessments have consistent sign-off and quality control.

3.2 Community engagement and accountability

Strengths:

- The third sector representatives reported the perception that the Council genuinely recognises and values the diversity of their sector.
- The third sector representatives feel that although good mechanisms are available for consultation, it should be noted that Brighton and Hove City Council must continue to strive to feedback results of consultation to citizens.
- The Youth Council, Children's Rights Service and Citizen's Panel were all mentioned as good examples of working with citizens.
- Some third sector representatives reported that they are following the Council's lead and reviewing their web sites to ensure they are representative of the local population.

Areas for Improvement:

Peer Challenge comment	BHCC response/action
It was reported that there is little articulation of men's issues – a substantial lack of male voice in the city – it is noted that it was difficult to engage men (especially men who did not also identify as belonging to a minority group) when developing the Gender Equality Scheme.	Specific inclusion of men in consultation/engagement exercises – Single Equality Scheme and service-specific
Although the third sector representatives were complimentary of the 'Peoples' Day', some teams within Brighton and Hove City Council were unaware of the event, reflecting a lack of communication within some services.	Improved communication of Community Cohesion activities – externally and internally
The Council would benefit from improving partnership working with the third sector in order to assist in managing expectations. It was reported that the local third sector groups often have conflicting agendas; each with robust independent lobbying of the Council which dilutes their strength and can be 'distracting' for council officers.	Continued work with the Community & Voluntary Sector Forum. Clear messages within community engagement to support the management of expectations.
It was reported that Council resources don't always match aspirations an example was the Older People's Council.	The Older People's Council have expressed frustration in the level of engagement that they have had with services across the council. Further discussions to happen to explore this further and develop a way forward.
Although the Interfaith forum has been established for over 20 years it was reported that the Council does not have a strong or consistent approach to engaging the Interfaith group or local faith communities.	A number of initiatives are underway to engage with Faith communities to include support for the Health Faith Forum and a meeting with the Interfaith Forum. Equalities Steering Group to share best practice and work towards greater consistency.
Information about honour based violence has only just become available in the Community Safety Partnership.	Work now underway.
Work with BME groups is inconsistent although it was reported that the existing umbrella group has produced some good work.	Community Engagement principles to be applied to the work with BME communities.

The Prevent Strategy is becoming a priority area but has limited profile at the moment.

The Prevent Strategy Steering Group and working on the work programme to include communication issues.

3.3. Service Delivery and Customer Care

Strengths:

- The annual equality/procurement survey is a useful tool however robust equality in contract monitoring is necessary.
- The procurement top 20 (monetary value) equality monitoring survey will assist the Council to identify where there are potential risks re vicarious liability.
- Equality Impact Assessments are informing service developments in some areas.
- There is a programme of improvements for physical access to buildings with some reasonable alternative provision where physical access is still not yet possible (e.g. audio guides, interactive films etc).
- Staff fora have supported the Council in responding to public concerns.
- There is evidence of some strong partnership working re: Healthy Schools initiative.
- Work in schools regarding bullying (with particular reference to sexual orientation) is proving successful with some five schools identifying cessation of bullying.
- Robust race equality work was reported in some schools, ensuring collaborative working and responsibility being shared between teachers and parents.
- Some staff reported favourably on the work experience initiatives with schools, particularly to encourage young people who do not go on to further/higher education.
- The Youth Offending Team reported proactive and preventative work with young people at risk of offending and their parents/carers.
- Good reports of work around teenage pregnancy.
- The third sector reported that the CYPT parenting support for fathers' initiative has been well received across the city.
- Good work in children's centres with Disabled parents.
- Community Solutions develop individualised personal care packages which are clearly able to respond to needs identified from an equality perspective.
- Brighton and Hove City Council has access to use a Buddhist centre for respite care.
- Good practice was reported within Housing team – asking tenants to inform the Council of which times and days to avoid making contact so demonstrating respect for faith/belief.
- There is an allocated Domestic Violence resource and an independent DV advisor.
- Brighton & Hove City Council achieved a Traveller Liaison pilot scheme grant to employ conflict resolution staff on strength on member enthusiasm, commitment and leadership.
- Members were viewed as instrumental and inspirational leadership on traveller issues.

- The Council has refined its definition of BME citizens (in line with national guidance) to include a wider group of non-British white people who may experience discrimination on the basis of language and culture, and has begun to adapt services appropriately to their needs.

Areas for Improvement:

Peer Challenge comment	BHCC response/action
The internal and stakeholder communication response to the Pilgrim Homes issue has been poor and continues to cause concern for many Council staff and stakeholders.	Clear message to be communicated to concerned stakeholders. Development of co-ordinated corporate communication response to such issues of concern in the future.
It was reported that the Brighton Centre recognises that it needs to be proactive in engaging BME customers/users	This was a finding of their Equality Impact Assessment and various actions are being considered.
It was reported that although the Housing strategy is forward thinking there are still barriers to equality e.g. harassment/ tenancy.	Ongoing equalities work throughout housing services including the development of a LGBT Housing Strategy that aims to improve our response to tackling hate crime. Work on a BME Housing Strategy will commence later in 2009/10..
There is a policy on A boards in public areas but it was reported that it doesn't appear to be strongly enforced	Outcomes from scrutiny panel on licensing of street furniture and enforcement to be clearly communicated.

3.4 Employment and Training

Strengths:

- Brighton and Hove City Council demonstrate a positive approach to the employment of young people, borne out through work experience and apprenticeships
- Stonewall Workplace Equality Index – highest ranked Local Authority.
- Staff equality forums are functioning – Managers could actively encourage staff participation from across all service areas. It was reported that not all service areas access (or are able to access) the fora.
- Some staff gave a very confident/enthusiastic response to the question: “Would you feel confident to report bullying?”
- Work has begun on a Dignity at Work strategy being led by Human Resources team.
- The quarterly Human Resources departmental reports are beginning to identify key employment trends bringing potential for positive initiatives to be explored within specific services.
- The Council is developing a network of mentors and advisors for staff support.

- Human Resources are working with managers on early intervention strategies in instances of harassment and bullying.

Areas for Improvement:

Peer Challenge comment	BHCC response/action
The Council has not been able to meet its own employment targets other than that for disabled people.	Implementation of actions arising from Recruitment & Selection Equalities Impact Assessment
The Council needs to continue its focus on BME staff retention and would benefit from lessons learned from exit interviews.	
It was reported that there is a lack of a consistent/understood corporate response to the provision of translation and interpreting services to customers.	Corporate guidance to be developed.
Reasonable adjustments for Disabled people and interpreting/translation are currently funded through team budget; this may provide a barrier to good employment practice within areas where budgets are under pressure.	The Access to Work guidance has been updated and ongoing discussions are being held with the Disabled Workers Forum.
Concern about changes to the sickness management procedure was reported.	To be addressed within Equality Impact Assessment of Absence Management.
No transparent policy around disability leave was available.	
It was reported that support options in the job application process were not known by all managers and therefore were not made available to all job applicants.	To be addressed within Recruitment & Selection Policy Review to ensure clarity of requirements of managers in relation to reasonable adjustments. Effective communication to all managers and appropriate and timely adjustments to be made.
It was noted that there is poor application of awareness training into the work context for some people, for example “religion is not an issue at all in my service”.	Equality Impact Assessment to continue to focus on all areas and issues related to religion to be addressed appropriately.
The staff bus not accessible to people with mobility impairment.	Staff using public transport
The slow speed of consideration / provision of reasonable adjustment can be frustrating.	As above.
Responses to some requests for reasonable adjustment were institutionalised with managers assuming they knew what response was needed rather than making	

decisions with the disabled member of staff.	
The equal pay review process has been slow. The target date of completion in December 09 may be unrealistic.	Continuation of Equal Pay work.
Concern was expressed that not all posts have been considered in equal pay evaluation (with particular reference to seconded posts).	

3.5 Main Challenges

- Economic Climate – how is equality best practice going to be maintained when there is increased pressure on resources?
- Potential for breakdown of social cohesion as a consequence of a severe economic downturn.
- Failure to obtain sufficient capital resources to improve the housing stock to decent standards.
- Appointment of new Chief Executive.
- Resource strategy.
- Communication with staff.
- Consistent application of Equality Impact Assessment and ability to build outcomes into service planning.

