

Diversity Peer Challenge

Brighton and Hove City Council

Report



(including action as at 29 October 2009)

**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
a) Understanding of equalities issues is perceived to be good across many services in the Council.	Induction and the Planning and Development Planning Scheme both have equalities built in and equalities training courses are provided for staff and managers. The Investors In People Assessment in February 2009 identified this as an “exemplary” area. Equality issues are regularly covered in City News, the Channel and on The Wave. The new Equalities & Inclusion policy was launched to staff with a poster and pledge card campaign across the city and as part
b) There is an issue of the Council not appreciating and celebrating much that is excellent.	
c) Failure to communicate positive messages about achievements is resulting in a lower level of confidence around equality issues across the organisation than is justified.	

	<p>of the annual staff conferences. This included posters of staff showing their contribution to the Council's priority to Reduce Inequality.</p> <p>Equalities Steering Group are developing a communications plan to include the on-going celebration of equalities achievements and ensuring that all staff are clear about their responsibilities. It will directly address all of the issues raised by the peer challenge. Equalities Steering Group is also leading the process towards the achievement of the new Equalities Framework. This will include a mechanism for the collation of good outcomes for reducing inequality and promoting inclusion.</p>
<p>d) The Equalities Steering Group acts as a 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</p>	<p>The Equalities Steering Group was the primary mechanism for ensuring achievement of level 3 of the Equalities Standard. Leadership was provided by TMT.</p> <p>The new Terms of Reference for the Equalities Steering Group have the following as key objectives for 2009/10:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To achieve Excellent / level 3 of the Equalities Framework by December 2010 • To provide leadership on the implementation, monitoring and review of the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and Single Equality Scheme Action Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lead implementation, monitoring and review in Directorates via Equalities Group and/or DMT ○ Share evidence of improvements to outcomes ○ Undertake joint community engagement/consultation • To raise and develop cross-council responses to equalities and inclusion issues arising from Equality Impact Assessments and other engagement and consultation feedback

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work jointly with the corporate team to update and develop new actions ○ Share learning from Equality Impact Assessments
<p>e) There is a need for continued focus on community mapping.</p>	<p>This is underway via the Partnership Data Group of the LSP and the development of the Brighton & Hove Local Information Service.</p> <p>The recent Place Survey (and other survey findings) are reported and analysed using equalities groups – and areas of the city relating to deprivation.</p> <p>There are plans for a new consultation portal which will allow communication with communities to be made easier and also allows us to build databases of groups to consult and their interests.</p>
<p>f) 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.</p>	<p>The development of the Single Equality Scheme over the course of the rest of 2009 will ensure that all equality strands are addressed effectively. This will specifically include race equality as the Council’s current Race Equality Scheme expires at the end of 2009.</p> <p>The Stonewall Workplace Equality Index does address LGB equality specifically but much of our evidence is based on generic equality actions.</p> <p>Race equality will continue to be a focus within Equality Impact Assessments and further action will be expected to be taken where issues are identified.</p>
<p>g) 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.</p>	<p>We don’t agree that this is the case. The Stonewall Workplace Equality Index is annually assessed and the assessment continues to be challenging with standards being raised year on year.</p> <p>New actions to address LGBT issues will be built into the Single Equality Scheme 2010 – 2012.</p>
<p>h) Equality impact assessments lacked consistency across departments. There is a developing intention at all levels to improve the process. Having a consistently used and</p>	<p>Ongoing work is needed by Equalities Steering Group, the Equalities & Inclusion Team and departmental equality groups to ensure that Equality Impact Assessments</p>

<p>quality assured process in place will be key tool in developing and sharing further good practice.</p>	<p>have consistent sign-off and quality control. It will also require leadership from TMT to ensure that Equality Impact Assessment is prioritised as part of policy development and service review.</p>
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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
<p>a) 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.</p>	<p>A focus group of men / men’s groups will form part of the joint consultation for the Single Equality Scheme as this is also an issue for our partners in the Health Service. The new “Thinking Men” group in the city have recently provided positive feedback on our existing Gender Equality Scheme.</p>
<p>b) 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.</p>	<p>Improved internal communication of events will be included in the Equality Steering Group communications plan. The People’s Day event on the 18th October has already received a higher profile this year and is featured on the Wave.</p>
<p>c) 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</p>	<p>On-going work with the Community & Voluntary Sector Forum is underway to support the effectiveness of the Stronger Communities Partnership (which is third sector led). The City Inclusion Partnership includes representation from the Stronger</p>

<p>'distracting' for council officers.</p>	<p>Communities Partnership and specifically from the new Equalities Coalition. Clear messages are needed within community engagement to support the management of expectations as set out in the Community Engagement Framework.</p>
<p>d) It was reported that Council resources don't always match aspirations an example was the Older People's Council.</p>	<p>Additional work with the Older People's Council is planned via the Get Involved project and quarterly meetings with Council Leadership will ensure that issues of concern are addressed more effectively.</p>
<p>e) 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.</p>	<p>A number of initiatives are underway to engage with Faith communities including support for the Health Faith Forum and meetings with the Interfaith Forum. The Racial Harassment Forum provides an effective link with BME faith communities and links have been made with churches across the city. The Community & Voluntary Sector Forum, which we commission to represent the third sector, is undertaking a review of the involvement of faith groups. Equalities Steering Group are already sharing best practice and working towards greater consistency.</p>
<p>f) Information about honour based violence has only just become available in the Community Safety Partnership.</p>	<p>Honour based violence is featured within the Domestic Violence Strategy 2008-2011 and support available is publicised via the Community Safety website and the Domestic Violence newsletter. The Domestic Violence forum includes wide representation from statutory and third sector agencies.</p>
<p>g) Work with BME groups is inconsistent although it was reported that the existing umbrella group has produced some good work.</p>	<p>As described above the Single Equality Scheme will specifically include race equality as the Council's current Race Equality Scheme expires at the end of 2009. Race equality will continue to be a focus within Equality Impact Assessments and further action will be expected to be taken where issues are identified.</p>

	<p>Community Engagement principles will be applied to the work with BME communities which includes tailoring engagement to the group and the situation. Again best practice will be shared via Equalities Steering Group.</p>
<p>h) The Prevent Strategy is becoming a priority area but has limited profile at the moment.</p>	<p>The Prevent Strategy Steering Group is developing a work programme to include communication issues. The provision of high quality media skills training for Muslim representatives has been agreed as an immediate action. This is a complex area of work which is developing well in partnership with a good range of local Muslim communities. Work to ensure that broader community cohesion issues are addressed effectively in strategy is underway.</p>

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
a) 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.	The Equality Steering Group communications plan will include a co-ordinated corporate communication response to such issues of concern in the future.
b) 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 underway including a programme of staff training and a review of how the Centre is marketed.
c) It was reported that although the Housing strategy is forward thinking there are still barriers to equality e.g. harassment/ tenancy.	Equality work is prioritised throughout housing services and specific work is undertaken by Housing Strategy 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.
d) There is a policy on A boards in public areas but it was reported that it doesn’t appear to be strongly enforced	A revised policy on Traders Objects on the Highway was presented for member approval in April 2009. This policy strengthened the council’s stance on certain street access issues, such as minimum pavement width. The policy underwent an extensive equalities impact assessment, which involved consulting

	<p>with a wide range of interest groups as well as with traders. The impact assessment revealed that a more in depth review would be welcomed by all parties in order to build on aspects of the current policy. As a result, a Scrutiny Panel on Street Access has been set up and is currently examining this issue. As part of the service/policy review, enforcement activity was clarified and improved.</p>
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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												
a) The Council has not been able to meet its own employment targets other than that for disabled people.	<p>We continue to actively recruit from all groups and monitor this activity on a quarterly basis. We are currently 0.5% away from our target for BME people in the workforce. The trends have however generally been positive and the table below shows that all groups are going through interview and on to appointment.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><u>Applications</u></th> <th><u>Interviews</u></th> <th><u>Offers</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>BME Group</td> <td>10.81%</td> <td>5.56%</td> <td>2.05%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>White Group</td> <td>89.19%</td> <td>94.44%</td> <td>97.47%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<u>Applications</u>	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Offers</u>	BME Group	10.81%	5.56%	2.05%	White Group	89.19%	94.44%	97.47%
		<u>Applications</u>	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Offers</u>									
BME Group	10.81%	5.56%	2.05%										
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b) The Council needs to continue its focus on BME staff retention and would benefit from lessons learned from exit interviews.													

	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Disabled</td> <td>1.93%</td> <td>2.78%</td> <td>3.21%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non Disabled</td> <td>98.07%</td> <td>97.22%</td> <td>96.79%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>41.37%</td> <td>47.47%</td> <td>50.63%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>58.15%</td> <td>52.07%</td> <td>48.73%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gender reassigned</td> <td>0.48%</td> <td>0.46%</td> <td>0.63%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LGB</td> <td>9.97%</td> <td>14.62%</td> <td>15.79%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Heterosexual</td> <td>90.03%</td> <td>85.38%</td> <td>84.21%</td> </tr> </table> <p>The Local Employment Partnership has succeeded in recruiting over 80 local people into the council who were previously long term unemployed. In order to continue to work towards a representative workforce we have recently undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment of Recruitment and Selection and actions identified include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment of Disability Officer to work in conjunction with Access Officer to improve access to work/retention of disabled staff. • Ongoing continuing consultations with the community around Recruitment & Selection policy & practice e.g. liaising with job centre to obtain feedback from unemployed BME group about encouraging BME applications and discussions with MOSAIC. • HR to raise equalities issues with DMTs promptly especially, when presenting quarterly equalities monitoring data. • Link to staff forum group on ‘understanding turnover’ and continue work on reviewing exit policy and information. 	Disabled	1.93%	2.78%	3.21%	Non Disabled	98.07%	97.22%	96.79%	Male	41.37%	47.47%	50.63%	Female	58.15%	52.07%	48.73%	Gender reassigned	0.48%	0.46%	0.63%	LGB	9.97%	14.62%	15.79%	Heterosexual	90.03%	85.38%	84.21%
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c) It was reported that there is a lack of a consistent/understood corporate response to the provision of translation and interpreting services to customers.	To be addressed within the ESG communications plan as above 3.1c																												
d) Reasonable adjustments for Disabled people and interpreting/translation are currently funded through team budget; this may provide a barrier to good employment	The Access to Work guidance has been updated and new work is underway with the reasonable adjustments working group as below 3.4j. As we have clear responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments and provide interpreting or translation they will continue to be prioritised within service budgets.																												

practice within areas where budgets are under pressure.	
e) Concern about changes to the sickness management procedure was reported.	This will be addressed within the current Equality Impact Assessment of Absence Management which includes a focus on how disability related absence is recorded.
f) No transparent policy around disability leave was available.	
g) 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.
h) 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 Single Equality Scheme will include actions in relation to religion and belief for the first time.
i) The staff bus not accessible to people with mobility impairment.	The current arrangements with Brighton & Hove Bus Company allow them to designate any available vehicle for use on the 11x route although they endeavour to ensure that only accessible buses are used. There are some buses that were purchased before the DDA regulations came into force and they hope to have all their buses fully compliant with DDA regulations by 2010, 7 years before regulations become law in 2017. Any members of staff using other transport are able to reclaim their fares via petty cash.
j) The slow speed of consideration / provision of reasonable adjustment can be frustrating.	A new reasonable adjustment working group has been set up with representation from the Disabled Workers Forum, the unions, HR, ICT, Health & Wellbeing, Supported Employment and appropriate managers. The group will explore what else needs to be put in place to ensure that everyone’s needs are addressed promptly and effectively.
k) 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.	
l) The equal pay review process has been slow. The target date of completion in	Work on Future Pay is underway to meet the December 09 deadline. Negotiations with the unions have started and all those affected will be informed once the

December 09 may be unrealistic.	negotiation process is complete.
m) Concern was expressed that not all posts have been considered in equal pay evaluation (with particular reference to seconded posts).	A number of grievances in relation to equal pay have been lodged and the processes are underway.

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.

