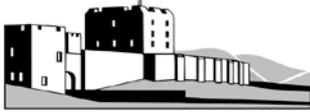


**CARLISLE
CITY COUNCIL**



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COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel Report

Public/Private*

Date of Meeting: 13th January 2011

Title: Comprehensive Equality Scheme Performance Report

Report of: Policy & Performance Manager

Report reference: PPP 01/11

Summary:

This report provides the Panel with feedback from the Diversity Peer Challenge Team, following the Council's successful 'Achieving' assessment under the Equality Framework for Local Government. The challenge created the first truly independent view on our progress and is an indicator of the performance of the Comprehensive Equality Scheme.

Questions for / input required from Scrutiny:

1. Members are asked to comment on the draft report from the Peer Team.
2. Members are invited to table any additional questions regarding hate incidents and crimes to help steer the analysis.

Contact Officer: Steven O'Keeffe

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1. Introduction

This report provides an update on the Council's progress against the Equality Framework for Local Government and the potential work programme following the assessment. The report also provides some further detail on the following specific areas requested by the Panel at the meeting of 7th October 2010: Carlisle and District Credit Union; Benefit Advice Service and Age Concern.

Also requested at the meeting on 7th October was further information on the number and nature of Hate Crimes in the District. The level of detail requested will be available by mid-January. A full year (2010) comparison with previous years will be presented in the Panel's next performance report, due on 10th February. This report will include a breakdown of the different categories and role of the Third Party Reporting Centres.

2. Diversity Peer Challenge (DPC): 18th & 19th October 2010

We were the first authority to undertake the DPC as part of the Achieving Equality in Cumbria Project. This Project¹ is a partnership with Cumbria County Council and all the District Councils with the goal of reaching the 'Achieving' standard of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

Four peers from Local Government Improvement and Development Team (LGID) were based in the Civic Centre for 2 days in October. Prior to the assessment, a comprehensive narrative and self assessment had been provided to inform the Team and set out the Council's approach in terms of equalities. The Comprehensive Equality Scheme was a key policy document and formed part of our evidence. The Peer Challenge was an intensive programme of one to one and group interviews between peers, Members, officers and stakeholders. The schedule of interviews was carefully planned to maximise the coverage of Council services and included staff from all levels of responsibility and seniority. The peers were given complete access to the Council's Intranet and reviewed all our processes and procedures with a keen eye on equality outcomes.

¹ Cumbria Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Project (CIEP)

At the end of the assessment the following result was fed back to all those involved:

Carlisle City Council had completed a satisfactory self assessment against the criteria for an 'Achieving' authority as set out in the Equality Framework for Local Government.

The draft report from LGID is included for the Panel to review and provide comment. The report reflects the five performance sections of the EFLG and highlights, within each, areas for consideration that would improve the Council's approach to equalities:

Knowing your communities & equality mapping

- Improved data collection to effectively target resources within constrained budgets
- Better identification of a broader range of diverse communities
- Further work to engage harder to reach and vulnerable service users

Place Shaping, leadership, partnership & organisational commitment

- More consistency when providing feedback to staff
- Improved liaison with the health sector
- Better communication of and engagement in the Council's performance system
- Large scale impact assessments to highlight specific area based issues

Community engagement & satisfaction

- Improved electronic access for the hearing impaired
- Clarify purpose of relationships with contracted third sector organisations
- Positive recruitment from diverse communities
- Better promotion of some services/engagement with some communities
- Ensure all Council departments fully engaged in corporate equality work
- Encourage political recruitment of young people from diverse communities
-

Responsive Services & Customer Care

- Prioritise sustainable funding of community based services
- Have regard to partners' budget constraints in deprived areas

- Balance budgetary constraints between discretionary & statutory services

A modern & diverse workforce

- Extend workforce monitoring to grievances; discipline and promotion
- Improved opportunities for young people
- Improved equalities training at both induction and refresher levels
- Re-instate exit interviews
- Engage all staff in corporate equality work – introduce suggestion scheme
- Positive action on recruitment of members/employees

3. Next Steps

The first and main part of the Achieving Equality in Cumbria Project is now complete, with all the Districts having been assessed as 'Achieving', pending the submission of further evidence in some cases. Funding for the Project is secured until June 2011 and collaboration will continue, within the EFLG framework, towards 'Excellent'.

The draft DPC report has been circulated to all members of the Corporate Equality Group as well as all the participants in the assessment process. The report will be considered at the next meeting of the Corporate Equality Group on 26th January 2011, at which point more detailed planning will take place on how best to progress the recommendations from the peer team.

The Comprehensive Equality Scheme will be reviewed alongside the draft DPC report and a new version discussed at the Corporate Equality Group meeting. It will be available to the Panel in time for the February meeting.

It is our revised and updated scheme that will form the basis for compliance with the new public sector duties and our commitment to continuous improvement.

4. Update on Local Organisations

Carlisle & District Credit Union

The Credit Union is consolidating well and now has 1700 members. It has received consistent, financial support from Riverside Housing Association but has also recently secured £42,000 from the County Council, which brings the organisation within sight of being able to purchase their premises on Lowther Street. Purchase of the building will aid the longer term sustainability of the project, maintain a high street presence and net the organisation a saving of £20,000 per annum in rent.

Benefit Advice Service

Our Benefit Advice Service is consistently oversubscribed with demand having increased over the last 12 months. In these circumstances however, staff will either offer detailed telephone advice or refer to another agency. Anyone who is seriously ill, over 80 or over 60 and ill, are generally taken as referrals. The service has also seen the number of appeal cases rise by 52% during 2010.

There is a reported increase of users from ethnic minorities, although overall numbers remain small. From 1 January 2010 to 23 December 2010, 15 Polish clients were assisted compared to 4 for the same period in 2009.

Age Concern Carlisle

A verbal update on the local work of Age Concern, now Age UK will be made at the meeting.

Impact Assessments

Does the change have an impact on the following?

Equality Impact Screening	Impact Yes/No?	Is the impact positive or negative?
Does the policy/service impact on the following?		
Age	Yes	Positive
Disability	Yes	Positive
Race	Yes	Positive
Gender/ Transgender	Yes	Positive
Sexual Orientation	Yes	Positive
Religion or belief	Yes	Positive
Human Rights	Yes	Positive
Health inequalities	Yes	Positive
Rurality	Yes	Positive

If you consider there is either no impact or no negative impact, please give reasons:

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.....

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If an equality Impact is necessary, please contact the P&P team.

Diversity Peer Challenge

Carlisle City Council

18 and 19 October 2010

Report



EQUALITY
FRAMEWORK
FOR LOCAL
GOVERNMENT

1. Background

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

The basis for the Peer Challenge is a benchmark against five areas of performance. They are:

- Knowing your communities and equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern and diverse workforce

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

Peers were:

Cllr Alan Melton – Leader, Fenland District Council
Jayne Dando - Equality and Policy Manager, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service
Ken Greensmith – Equality and Diversity Officer, Knowsley Council

The team appreciates 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.

1. Executive summary and recommendations

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

Carlisle City Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Achieving level of the Equality Framework.

To help the council improve we have made a number of recommendations. These are:

1. There is a pathway service available for young people who become homeless. The council provides support on education, learning, apprenticeships and support into employment. There is consensus that further development is needed in this area
2. There appears to be a lack of opportunity for younger people in the organisation. Younger people are not well represented and the council needs to develop a workforce strategy to ensure that younger people are attracted to work for local government e.g. apprenticeship schemes, review of job specifications and positive action. The Council have already pledged that the Learning and Development budget will be ring fenced to ensure they continue to upskill their workforce. By looking at apprenticeship schemes this will compliment the financial constraints of the Council as well attract younger people to the Council with a view to 'growing your own'
3. Members are provided with equality and diversity learning opportunities but these are not mandatory. The council should consider encouraging this training for all new members including providing planned refresher sessions for existing members

2. The Council made the following observations upon the impact the peer challenge has had: -

The unanimous decision to be the first district in Cumbria to invite in the Diversity Peer Challenge placed The Council at the forefront. We were confident that our progress since self assessing as 'developing' at the close of 2008/2009 had been substantial.

The act of calling for evidence in preparation for submission to the Peer Assessors reinforced our confidence. Managers across the district were keen to share their experiences of delivering equality outcomes for communities. Conversations started in impact assessments and needs assessments formed the basis for our self-assessment.

Preparing our narrative provided us with an opportunity to reflect on the changing characteristics of our City and the rural character of our district. The uniqueness of being an historic city continues to have a contemporary edge as a border city with a clear vision and goals.

The self-assessment and narrative created a snapshot of our position on the journey to excellence. This provided an opportunity to reflect and identify areas of strength and weakness, providing a focus for our next improvements.

The Diversity Peer Challenge has been a learning experience. The collaboration between managers and members was exceptional. Our confidence in our evidence enabled us to take a 'warts and all' approach, we highlighted our own weaknesses along side our strengths to the Peer Assessors.

The judgement of the Peer Assessors provides us with the first external and truly independent assessment of our progress. We can take this learning and continue to

develop our approach with new confidence. The challenges we face as a district, City and extensive rural area has been heightened by budgetary and economic pressures. Our continued efforts to integrate equality and diversity throughout our services and forward planning will provide us with the best possible path to excellence.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

- The protected characteristics covered by the Single Equality Scheme have been extended to include 'rurality'. This enables the council to focus on the needs of equally rural and urban areas appropriately.
- This approach has been supported by engagement with local parish councils which has been used to inform decisions about accessibility and local services.
- The council actively engages with the Gypsy and Traveller community who are very appreciative this approach. This was evidenced in the consultation exercise involving the members of the community in the design of the local Gypsy and Traveller site.
- Positive action has been taken to address homelessness and has received national recognition. Foyer, which is a pathway service, supports young people in finding accommodation and a route back into employment
- The council helped and facilitated the building of a mosque and community centre for the Bangladeshi community. The council is now embarking on a similar scheme with the Chinese community
- The council has a high number of well-used community facilities e.g. the community centres in the parishes and schools. Some of these are run by groups which generate a lot of data on the demographic and make-up of the area

Areas for consideration:

- A lot of good work is taking place but services are still not confident about 'who' their community is. Work is designed around face to face contact but critical mapping is still absent. Given the current budgetary constraints that will be faced under the comprehensive spending review the City Council is going to need to know who their community is in order to be able to effectively allocate resources. Data collected through all types of contact needs to be collated and used effectively to support any decisions that will have to be made around the prioritisation or reduction of potential services due to financial capacity.
- Whilst some work has been completed within the Polish community, the data could be and needs to be strengthened in other areas. This should link to the work of the task and finish group. The City Council needs to avoid data collection becoming a tick box exercise and ensure that any information relating to diverse communities is mapped to show where customers are based. This will require a comprehensive

data set which will show the broad aspects of individuals who fall within the City's remit. Work undertaken within the Polish community could be used as a baseline to identify ways in which to collect data which will give a comprehensive understanding of the community and the individuals who. Good equality mapping will provide a clearer picture of the communities in Carlisle

- The council should ensure that 'more difficult clients' do not fall off the radar e.g. feedback suggested that young vulnerable males are excluded as it is easier not to deal with them.

3.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- There are a large number of elderly people, as informed by local statistics, in the district and the council has received additional government funding to target specific services e.g. community centres in rural areas and people with Dementia receive housing support to keep them closer to their families.
- The Customer Contact Centre acts as a third party reporting site and dealing with hate crimes is a top priority. There is close partnership working with the Police to deal on this particularly in the city centre.
- Members' commitment is illustrated by the corporate 'Equality Committee' and all of the Chairs of Scrutiny are members of it. E & D is a top priority and is supported by officers and members. Consultation is a real exercise and not just a paper tick box. That is evidenced through the 'Equality Committee' and the council's strong scrutiny function
- Resources for the disabled facility scheme (DFS) are funded 60% by the council and 40% by Government departments. This shows real commitment by the council to improve facilities for disabled people. The procurement of funding for disabled demonstrates the commitment of the council to staff and members.
- The Senior Management Team (SMT) is visible and accessible to all employee groups. The Team carries out management and staff briefings in the various sites where employees work. They have taken pro-active steps to support staff in meeting the future challenges facing the authority, including briefings on the spending review and potential redundancies. There are also plans to change the format of the briefing sessions to include manager presentations. When staff said they do not know what is discussed at senior meetings the agendas and minutes are now available on the intranet. SMT scrutinise all EqlAs and will challenge if they feel it is appropriate, however some members of staff do not feel actively engaged and feel the work being undertaken on the transformation programme is a little reactionary, this could potentially be due to communication issues as staff feel information provided can be vague and feedback is not consistent across all service areas. There needs to be a more consistent approach to providing feedback, staff are involved but don't always hear the results and the impact these have on them.
- The performance management system Covalent allows equality and diversity actions which arise from the completion of EqlAs to be integrated and monitored

Areas for consideration:

- Although the council generally works well with partners, engagement with the health sector needs to be improved, for instance organisations are slow to respond to requests particularly with adaptations. The council should reinforce the dialogue through the LSP and LAA debate to ensure the Health Authority responds appropriately
- Equality objectives which have been identified within the EqlA process are used to populate 'Covalent' as part of performance management which has been identified as a strength however the process needs to be able to evidence who was involved and consulted in reaching decisions which have potential negative impact on marginalised groups and made accessible in other formats. This will ensure both transparency and accessibility.
- When working with 'thematic' EqlAs which are scheduled to be completed across the region, it will be important to be clear if there are specific adverse impacts to certain demographic areas within the city council area that these are made explicit

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- There is a pathway service available for young people who become homeless. The council provides support on education, learning, apprenticeships and moving into employment. There is consensus that further development of information is needed in this area
- The council runs welcome days and information sessions for minority groups. This is part of a strategy to take the council to the communities rather than to expect them to come to the council. There are two key community engagement activities which look at both Urban engagement in the 'Together we can' project and rural engagement under the 'Longtown' project. A wider approach to engagement is also taken with a specific Carlisle Focus through a residents' magazine. Broader consultation and engagement takes place through the Cumbrian Citizens Panel which enables the people of Cumbria to have their say.
- Working with schools over 60 workshops have been aimed at raising awareness amongst young people about different community groups and their needs. The council has paid for artists to go into schools to promote community cohesion.

Areas for consideration:

- Although the council can be contacted by phone or email, deaf people and people who are hard of hearing are faced with a mini com service on the telephones which they can't and don't use as this is an outdated system. Deaf people and people who are hard of hearing would like the council to consider introducing a short messaging service/text service to enable them to communicate with the council. The council should also ensure that emails are promptly answered and recorded in the CRM system

- Service level agreements do exist with external groups, *such as Outreach Cumbria, AWAZ and the Disability Network* but it is not clear how these are supporting the delivery of equality objectives other than using the groups for consultation and feedback on specific issues such as identified within Outreach Cumbria which has a specific LGB focus.
- The council should consider recruiting from specific communities within Carlisle e.g. the Polish or Chinese communities to work within the customer service centre. This could save money using the 'Language Line' and could help increase customer satisfaction.
- Good initiatives such as 'City Wheels', which provides accessible transport for people with disabilities, was put into place, however the initiative was not communicated to the community.
- The council sponsored the Carlisle Pride event however representatives of the LGBT community the team met would like there to be more ongoing engagement with their community. This could include joining the planning committee for the 2011 Carlisle Pride or holding an event either at the Council or within the City Centre to celebrate LGBT History Month in February.
- Council departments work in silos. This could improve. It was felt that departments have a lack of awareness of what another department are doing. It is suggested that the Council reviews the membership of the Corporate Equality Group and the Equality Monitoring Group to ensure each of the departments are represented.
- Although excellent initiatives, e.g. the Youth Council and the Young Mayor, are in place, the council should consider how it can encourage a diverse range of younger adults to stand for election. The council's political groups should take the lead on this issue.

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

- A wide range of affordable leisure services are offered to the community. Some services have been adapted to provide support for disabled users e.g. an accessible pool.
- Risk assessments are well embedded into the business and in understanding the impact of risk to equality groups in mitigating any potential negative impact.
- Outreach work has been done with museums and other arts organisations e.g. taking the service out into the community to make it more accessible to older people and in rural areas. Volunteers were used to deliver these services.
- The council recognises how some night clubs contribute to the economy although various hate-crime incidents have occurred. In response the council and the nightclubs' proprietors have worked closely with the police to set-up a project board to combat the hate crime. This strategy has proved to be a huge success and no incidents have since been reported.
- There is representation in the citizens panel from all of the groups identified within the protected characteristics – in particular the 'trans' gender strand.
- There is a pathway service, called 'Foyer', for young people who have become homeless. Support is given to find accommodation and training is provided to support them into employment.

- There has been a huge improvement in access to services over the last couple of years. Customers visiting services are more comfortable and informed and know where to go for information. Literature is available in different languages and a full translation service is also available through the one-stop shop to inform service users
- A proactive approach has been taken engaging young people in the provision of leisure services which had a positive impact on anti-social behaviour. Some activities, e.g. cage football, were rescheduled to more accessible times which resulted in more young people off the street. This specific initiative was supported with funding from Sport England

Areas for consideration:

- The council has committed a lot of funding in community support and will need to prioritise to ensure longer-term sustainability when budgets are cut.
- Some parts of Carlisle have specific issues e.g. deprivation, education support and low levels of aspiration. With the risk of other partners' budgets being cut, the council will have to employ risk strategies to ensure this is well managed
- The council need to ensure that where ring-fencing are removed from budgets, it does not have an adversely negative impact on the discretionary over the statutory services

3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

Strengths:

- Learning and development is a high priority for the council and SMT has confirmed that this budget will be protected. Staff are given paid time off to complete both internal and external training courses. The learning and development programme is available both online and in hard copy for staff who do not have access to the intranet or internet.
- The council has an annual celebration of learning event where both staff and members are congratulated alphabetically, not by level, on their achievements
- The council has a 'how can we do it' flexible working ethos. Many employees are either working compressed hours, flexi time or working from home. The scheme is available to all employees including those over 65 years e.g. one 72 year old cook is in the council service.
- As their pay review process meant that some employees will be losing pay career advice and extra training opportunities have been offered to help improve their future job prospects including financial packages to set-up businesses.
- The council offers work placements for people from different communities. For example a Polish student on one work placement made some basic Polish language cards for use in that community.
- The council has a positive approach to workforce planning and is aware of the older workforce. Staff are allowed to work over 65 by request e.g. the cook mentioned above.

- Casual staff in some service areas, such as leisure, works part-time on a rota basis. This can not only provide employment to younger people, but also allows them to go to college during the times when they are off duty.

Areas for consideration:

- Monitoring workforce data is currently only done at the recruitment stage through applications, selection and interviews. To help develop a better understanding of the workforce planning and development the Council should consider widening the areas in which they monitor i.e. monitoring grievances, disciplines and promotion.
- There appears to be a lack of opportunity for younger people in the organisation. Younger people are not well represented and the council needs to develop a workforce strategy to ensure that younger people are attracted to work for local government e.g. apprenticeship schemes, review of job specifications and positive action. The council should consider developing a 'grow your own scheme' for younger people. Due to possible redundancies this is a long term aim.
- Equality and diversity training must be made more explicit in the induction of new employees. It currently it features only within a pack handed out to new employees. It is recommended it is presented as a much more substantial training programme as well as planned/scheduled refresher courses for all staff
- The council used to offer exit interview opportunities but stopped due to too many negative comments received. This was attributed to the whole transformation process that is underway. A more robust process needs to be designed and put into place even though many negative comments would be anticipated as legitimate claims might be missed if exit interviews are not conducted.
- There is no clear link between the workforce and the Corporate Equality Group. Staff need to go through their manager to report issues. The council could consider introducing a suggestion scheme which could provide further insight into the workforce equality needs. The suggestions put forward by the employees could be tabled at the Corporate Equality Group and monitored through the Equality Monitoring Group, thus building the trust between employees and managers.
- The diversity of the workforce may not be representative of the community that Carlisle City Council serves. There is not much change in the makeup of the organisation as staff tend to stay in employment. Some positive action may benefit CCC in relation to increasing the number of BME councillors and employees as more minorities are moving into the city and there will need to be strong leadership to influence and change attitudes to culture at the grass roots level. Some analysis of the numbers of individuals applying and failing at the interview stage may help to identify a positive way forward.
The Workforce Development Strategy should include a section on attraction and recruitment as well as monitoring across the protected characteristics.

4. Examples of innovative projects and initiatives

- Following on from the report 'A Fresh Start: Improving literacy and numeracy' (DfES, 1999) and the resulting strategy, Skills for Life (DfES, 2001) Carlisle City Council adopted the framework proposed in the Local Government Skills for Life Strategy and encouraged all employees regardless of their job role to reach their full potential within the workplace and lead them along a path of continual development to both.
From an Equality perspective the employees who were initially the focus of the learning strategy were those employees who traditionally did not benefit from learning opportunities to the same extent as other employees for a number of reasons i.e born and raised in another country.
Employees are recognised for their achievements in an annual celebration of learning, regardless to qualifications achieved
Carlisle City Council were the first council in the North West to achieve to 'Go Award' in 2007 and were awarded The North West Skills Award with Distinction in 2010.
- Carlisle City Council have used Covalent a performance management system and mapped the Equality Framework for Local Government to Local and National Indicators, this allows the organisation to assess progress on equality outcomes identified through each of the criteria this shows the successes achieved within the organisation and will provide evidence when they move forward to the excellent standard.

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Local Government Group

The Local Government Group is made up of six organisations which support, promote and improve local government.



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