
Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee
Report of the Equalities Review Task Group

12 November 2014

Equalities Review - Final Report

Summary

1. This draft final report presents the information gathered in support of the Equalities scrutiny review, together with the draft recommendations proposed by the Task Group, for this Committee's consideration.

Background to Review

2. In September 2013, this Committee received a report highlighting the criteria for achieving Excellence for the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), together with an update on progress in implementing the council's Excellence Equalities Improvement Action Plan against each of the EFLG performance areas. Representatives from Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, an authority who had already achieved the excellent level in their EFLG, attended the meeting to share their experiences and provide information on their journey to achieving that level.
3. A further report was presented to the Committee at its meeting in November 2013, which suggested there may be a role for Scrutiny in helping the authority to achieve excellence level for the Equality Framework for Local Government. The report provided a number of review options and the Committee agreed to proceed with a review around raising awareness of the democratic process amongst York's Communities of Identity, and identifying any required equalities training for Members.
4. The Committee set up a Task Group made up of the following members, to carry out the review on their behalf and tasked them with identifying an appropriate review remit:

Cllr Ruth Potter
Cllr John Galvin
Cllr Neil McIlveen
Cllr Lynn Jeffries

Initial Information Gathered

5. The Task Group met for the first time in early December 2013 and received background information on the Equality Framework for Local Government and specific information on the its performance area 'Community Engagement and Satisfaction':
6. Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)
The EFLG helps an organisation demonstrate to its service users and the wider community that equality is fully embedded in everything it does and the services it delivers, in particular for those with protected characteristics. These are individuals who are protected by the Equality Act 2010 in that they can not be treated unfairly or discriminated against, harassed or victimised because they have one or more protected characteristic. In York those with protected characteristics are known as Communities of Identity (COIs) which covers:
 - Age
 - Disability – physical and mental impairment
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation
 - Carers
 - People living in York's most deprived areas
7. The EFLG covers five performance areas, and it is intended that this review will help support improvements in one of those areas – 'Community Engagement and Satisfaction'.
8. Community Engagement and Satisfaction
The important thing with community engagement is ensuring that the views of a wide cross-section of people who live and work in an area are obtained. This means finding ways to facilitate the participation of all local people, including the vulnerable and marginalised, through working effectively across agencies and with partners. Community engagement and satisfaction comprises two main elements:
 - Engagement structures
 - Effective engagement

9. EFLG Assessors examine whether effective forums are in place to enable all equality stakeholders / representatives of vulnerable and marginalised groups to challenge and scrutinise decision-making and progress; and whether key sections of the community are satisfied that the authority and its partners have listened to them and taken their views into account.

10. There were five improvement actions identified within the 'Excellence Equalities Improvement Action Plan' that relate to the Community Engagement and Satisfaction performance area. All of those actions have been completed i.e.:
 - Identifying where those who share protected characteristics reside in York
 - Reviewing how Community Impact Assessments (CIAs - formerly known as Equality Impact Assessments) are undertaken
 - Reviewing how the Equality Advisory Group examines community contracts
 - Writing a case study demonstrating how EAG has involved a diverse range of people who have influenced service delivery
 - Creating fact sheets to show how members consult and engage

11. Having considered the initial information provided and taking account of the views of CSMC that the review should focus on raising awareness of the democratic process amongst York's Communities of Identity, and identifying the equality training needs of Members, the Task Group agreed the following review remit:

Aim

To encourage wider involvement in the Council's democratic traditions i.e. elections, decision making and community engagement, by raising awareness across York's Communities of Identity, and in particular those who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Objectives:

- i. Examine national best practice by other Local Authorities currently achieving excellence level in their democratic traditions

- ii. Identify optimum methods for raising awareness of the democratic process amongst York's Communities of Identity.

- iii. Identify any barriers in York preventing the involvement of York's Communities of Identity, and identify possible solutions

- iv. Identify appropriate equalities training required for members to help them better serve Communities of Identity within their wards

Further Information Gathered

12. Objective (i) - National Best Practice Examples

In September 2013, CSMC received a presentation from the Equality and Diversity Manager from Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, an authority who had already achieved the excellent level in their EFLG. He provided information on the journey undertaken by his authority to achieve excellence and stressed the importance of evidencing the journey and the need for continuous improvement.

13. In regard to the EFLG performance area 'Community Engagement and Satisfaction', **Barnsley** were able to evidence how they engaged young people in democracy, local decision-making and service improvement through their work with Barnsley's Youth Council and its various sub-groups and networks.
14. They provided evidence of funding and support for a number of community events and their use of them for community engagement and improving their understanding of different communities (e.g. Diversity Festival, Carers' Event and transition conference for parents of disabled children).
15. In addition, Barnsley were able to evidence how they had improved neighbourhood engagement and service delivery with partners in individual neighbourhoods through engagement specifically designed to appeal to the local communities in each area. They were able to show how their Councillors engaged in the development of area plans and ward working, feeding in their local knowledge to help improve operational, strategic and community resilience. They also seek comments and feedback through all their council publications, and promote the option for groups to request an officer or a councillor to meet with them to explain services or policies.
16. It was confirmed that Barnsley:
 - Provide all information in easy read format
 - Improved their website to make it more accessible and improved the way they cascade information to those not online
 - Use Equality Forums to assist in the preparation of tender specifications

17. **Newcastle Council** also achieved excellence level by demonstrating a good understanding of their communities. They were shown to be good at sharing information with partners and using it to influence the way priorities are determined to drive service improvement.
18. They provided clear evidence of a very strong commitment to tackling inequalities in Newcastle from councillors and officers. There was clear evidence of cross party support in ensuring that equality and diversity was an integral part of the work that the council was undertaking. Newcastle Council is seen as a regional leader in terms of progressing work on the equality and diversity agenda and the council is keen to lead by example.
19. Newcastle residents were shown to be satisfied with the opportunities they have for engaging with the council. This was evidenced through focus groups and site visits involving community representatives. The council was seen to value the contribution made by the voluntary and community sector, by its development of its good working relationship with the sector and through its support of groups through resource allocation.
20. Newcastle council has worked hard to ensure that its services are accessible to its residents and this has been highly valued by its residents. The council has also been proactive in using impact assessments to help adapt services and help inform decision making. In particular, the council has responded well to tackling child poverty and has achieved Beacon status for this work.
21. Newcastle Council also provided evidence of a good range of equality and diversity training, as well as positive action initiatives to ensure that their workforce receives appropriate support to develop their skills. Finally, the council had also achieved Charter Plus for Councillor Development and Investors in People across all directorates.
22. Here in **York**, The Task Group received an update on the mock peer assessment undertaken in preparation for the Council's planned Excellence level assessment. The findings from the mock assessment specific to the EFLG performance area 'Community Engagement and Satisfaction' are shown at Annex A.

23. **Objective (ii) - Methods for Raising Awareness Specific to York's Communities of Identity**

The Task Group received information on a community mapping project undertaken by the Council to understand the engagement experiences of York's many communities across the city, which was initiated following a previous peer challenge visit in mid June 2013.

24. The main purpose of the project was to identify all the communities in the city, including black and minority ethnic communities living and working in York, and assessing their engagement experience and formulating a better way for them to engage with the council and other local communities at large.

25. Over a period of five months, various community groups in York were identified and interviewed, both on a 1-2-1 basis and through group discussions and the evidence showed that the experience of each community group differed widely depending on the location, size and composition of members and needs of their community.

26. Recognising that the work undertaken on the project, supported their scrutiny review, the Task Group noted the assessment of the engagement experiences of those communities that many BME communities felt less comfortable with what would be considered the more traditional ways of engaging with the Council e.g. Residents Forums. It showed that some groups are well organised and hold regular formal meetings, whereas others are less structured, coming together to meet informally or to celebrate religious occasions etc. The Task Group also noted the resulting list of contacts drawn up from a wide range of York's BME communities, including:

- Chinese Christian and Professional Association
- Japanese Family Association
- Sri Lanka Community Association
- Bangladesh Community
- Indian Community
- Nepalese Community
- Philipino Community
- Turkish Community
- Refugee Action York (RAY)

27. **Citizenship & Encouraging New Citizens to Vote**

The Task Group learnt that as part of the citizenship process, York Registrar provides each applicant with an information pack. At the citizenship ceremony itself, Electoral Services provides each new citizen

with an electoral registration form (with some guidance notes) and a personalised letter encouraging them to register.

28. Encouraging Young People to Vote

The Task Group considered information on the 2010 General Election which showed that only 44 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds voted (50% of men aged 18-24 and 39% of women aged 18-24), the lowest turnout of all age demographics. Even if they wanted to cast a vote on polling day, more than half of 18-24 year-olds could not, because they hadn't registered to vote and were not on the electoral register.

29. The Task Group were pleased to note the work of a national social enterprise 'Bite the Ballot' (BTB) which had been founded to address the lack of young people voting in Britain. As young people can register to vote at 16, BTB has established [National Voter Registration Day](#), taking place on 5th February each year.

30. In addition, over the past three years, BTB has been running workshops in schools, youth clubs, colleges and youth offending institutes and has registered more than 15,000 young people to vote.

31. As part of their workshops they talk about issues young people relate to like the educational maintenance allowance (EMA) being cut, youth clubs closing, how expensive travel is, university tuition fees being tripled etc. They then get young people thinking about the country's budget, getting them to divide up the money showing there's not enough of it to go round, leading to difficult decisions have to be made, in an effort to demonstrate that if you're not part of the conversation you're views don't count.

32. They also highlight the concessions governments make towards the demographic that vote the most i.e. pensioners - 96% of the over 65s are registered to vote and there's an inherent link between voter registration and policies e.g. the winter fuel allowance, free bus passes, free eye tests and free prescriptions.

33. As the work of BTB has proven successful (as detailed above), the Task Group queried what the Council as the Local Education Authority, was doing to help reignite this country's democratic traditions by encouraging secondary schools to educate York's young people on their rights to vote etc.

34. They learnt that whilst these workshops have not been run in York's secondary schools and colleges, the council has previously participated in a pathfinder programme, known as 'Take Part York', which aims to support young people across the city to take a more active role in local democracy. A resource pack was produced for primary and secondary school children, to provide young people with the opportunity to influence local decision making.
35. In addition, as part of an annual Local Democracy Week, the Council also invites a number of schools to spend a morning in the Mansion house learning about the role of the Lord Mayor and in the afternoon participate in a mock budget meeting hosted by the Lord Mayor. Members of the city's Youth Council have also previously been invited to participate.
36. Equalities Advisory Group (EAG).
In April 2014, the Task Group received information on the current make-up of the Group and the role it plays within the Council. They also received feedback from a neighbourhood working workshop held in June 2013, at which EAG attendees were asked to consider the following questions (see feedback at Annex B):
- When the council advertises local meetings or events in your neighbourhood how do you prefer to be informed about them?
 - If you want to have your say on a local issue what are your preferred methods of communication?
 - What is your preferred style of meeting or event? Are there any barriers that prevent it from being a positive experience?
37. The Task Group agreed more could be done to encourage individuals from York's COIs to feed into the work of the Group, particularly those who are not already members of the organisations represented on EAG. They also agreed that EAG was under utilised and could be used as a vessel for improved consultation with COIs.
38. Opening Doors Heritage Lottery Fund Bid
In May 2014, the Task Group received information on Stage 1 of the Council's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for money to open up the Mansion House to the public, and an update on the preparation of detailed plans for Stage 2 of the bid which were due to be submitted in November 2014.

39. In particular, the Mansion House, Guildhall & Civic Manager provided an update on the democracy strand of the HLF bid and information on the sort of groups being consulted (including hard to reach) in order to encourage 'wider community engagement' with the Council's democratic traditions and ties in the Mansion House - see a summary of the Activity Plan shown at Annex C.
40. The Task Group were pleased to note that the plans involved working with different audiences to raise awareness of the project, consulting on the proposed plans and trialling activities with specific audiences. And, that this work would be evaluated and fed into the Activity Plan part of the HLF bid.
41. **Objective (iii) - Barriers to Involvement**
Having considered the project work outlined in paragraphs 23-26 above the Task Group recognised that amongst other issues, BME groups were finding it difficult to understand their rights, in regard to participating in the Council's democratic processes including registering for party, voting and standing for election. In particular, they noted that the Turkish and Ghurkha communities in York were keen to be more involved in the Council's democratic processes.
42. To follow up on this, and in support of their review objectives (ii) & (iii), the Task Group agreed to undertake a consultation event with 'Communities of Identity' groups to:
- Help improve awareness of the council's democratic traditions
 - Further explore their views and discuss the barriers they perceive that limit their involvement
43. The event was held in late June 2014 and invitations were sent to representatives from BME communities across the city. Following a brief introduction to the scrutiny review, the attendees were given the opportunity to participate in a short tour of the Mansion House. There was also a series of stands which the attendees could wander around. Each stand covered a theme highlighting the current methods of engagement & opportunities for participation, and each was manned by appropriate officers (see below).

Stands

- Residents Associations & Parish Councils
- Setting up a Community Group

Staffed By:

- Neighbourhood Manager
- CVS Advice & Learning Team Representative

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Being a Cllr and Residents Forums | Members of the Task Group |
| • Volunteering (Schools Governors, Street Buddies, Snow Warden) | CYC Volunteer Coordinator |
| • Local Democracy & Community Engagement (Mansion House HLF bid; decision making; registering to speak etc) | Democratic Services Manager |
| • Citizenship and Elections | Electoral Services Manager & Registration Service Manager |
| • CYC Contact Centre | Customer Services Support Manager |
| • Equalities Advisory Group | Community Involvement Officer |
| • Housing | Tenant Equalities & Engagement Facilitator |

44. Officers were asked to keep in mind that some of the attendees might have English as their second language so the information they provided on the evening needed to be kept simple and supported by handouts/leaflets etc.
45. CVS agreed to provide information on how to start up or develop a community group, voluntary organisation or social enterprise, together with some information on how BME communities might engage with other groups through forums and get their voice heard through representative structures.
46. Consultation Findings & Analysis
A breakdown of the feedback from attendees and CYC officer responses to some of the issues raised is shown at Annexes D & E.
47. Having considered the attendees comments (shown in column 1 of Annex D) the Task Group agreed that improvements were required to:
- CYC's relationship with University Community Groups
 - Communication on Council Services
 - Representation on EAG
 - Public Participation

- Member Induction Training – understanding ward demographics etc
- Design & Use of Community Hubs
- Volunteering – reaching out to under-represented communities

48. They therefore agreed the following:

- a. Feedback on website issues to be forwarded to team working on website improvements including the need for a translation tool
- b. Toolkit by ward to be included on website
- c. Ward Demographics / Profiles and information on the Joint Service Needs Assessment at ward level should be provided to Members as part of their induction as a new Cllr
- d. Members should receive mandatory training on corporate equalities and at ward level.
- e. Member Training is required on CIA's
- f. The Council could disseminate more information via Community Hubs for those with no access to internet
- g. General improvement is required in the ways CYC communicates the services it provides. They suggested that CYC looks for opportunities to use other organisations communications to provide information on Council Services etc e.g. schools, Parish Councils etc
- h. Share feedback regarding representation on EAG with the group, and consideration should be given to how to improve its profile amongst York's COIs.
- i. Communication with University Community Groups needs improving as they could be used to disseminate appropriate information and improve engagement.
- j. In an effort to encourage the public's engagement and interest, better use could be made of West Offices' lobby area e.g. by providing access to information on:
 - Public meetings taking place in the building
 - The Council's democratic processes
 - Elected Councillors.

This could also include providing facilities for the public to register to speak at meeting etc.

49. The Task Group also considered all the engagement tools currently made available by the Council (see Annex F) and the different channels of influence i.e.:
- Frontline channels of influence e.g. Equality Advisory Group, Residents Forums, Scrutiny Reviews
 - Secondary Channels e.g. Ward Teams, Task Groups, Meet the Director
 - Strategy e.g. Fairness & Equality Board, , Without Walls, Fairness Leadership Group
 - Support & Quality Profiling and Monitoring - from the Teams who facilitate the channel e.g. Communities & Equalities, Overview & Scrutiny
50. They recognised that not all the engagement tools would be suitable for every community group but that offering and better advertising the range of ways to engage, would help BME community groups and individuals to identify a method that best suited their needs.
51. **Objective (iv) - Equalities Training for Councillors**
Since the last local election in May 2011 access to equalities training has been limited to an 'Equalities and Human Rights Workshop' run as part of the Council's induction programme for new Councillors. Whilst this was aimed at new Councillors, all 47 were given the opportunity to participate. In addition, during municipal year 2011/12 Councillors could choose to access an online course in Equalities through this Council's membership of the online 'Modern Cllr' training programme. In 2012/13 the Council's membership lapsed and no equalities training has since been included in the annual core training programme.
52. The Task Group agreed that the only way to ensure the uptake of equality training would be to make it mandatory. Suitable equalities training for Councillors would need to be identified so that it could be recommended to the Member Steering Group.

Review Recommendations

53. In light of their findings, the Task Group made the following recommendations, which were subsequently endorsed by the Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee on 12 November 2014:

- i. Feedback from consultation to be taken into account as part of the ongoing work to update the Council's website
- ii. New Councillor Induction to include ward demographics / profiles and information on the Joint Service Needs Assessment at ward level
- iii. Members training on corporate equalities and at ward level to be mandatory.
- iv. Member Training to be provided on Community Impact Assessments (CIAs)
- v. Consideration to be given to improving CYC communication, including better use of Community Hubs, use of other organisations communication tools, and University Community Groups
- vi. EAG to consider its membership to ensure it properly reflects all of York's Communities of Identity and identify improvements in the way it engages with those Communities, recognising that the organisations currently involved do not represent all of the COIs in the city.
- vii. Facilities to be provided in the lobby area of West Offices to enable improved access to information for, and greater participation by members of the public.

Council Plan 2011-15

54. This review supports the Council's corporate priorities of building strong communities and protecting vulnerable people.

Implications

55. **Legal** - This review will support the Council in achieving its legal and moral duties to promote equality of opportunity and better enable it to be sensitive to the diverse needs for local services within its communities.
56. **Equalities** - Under the Equality Act 2010 the council has responsibilities to promote equalities as a provider of services, as a democratic body which is representative of all interests in the community, as a major employer and as a community leader. Councillors in their leadership role therefore have responsibility in establishing a strong vision for equality and improving equality outcomes.

57. All of the recommendations could be accomplished within existing **Financial** and **HR** implications and there are no other known implications.

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HR & Financial: Charlie Croft - AD Communities, Culture & Public Realm

Wards Affected: **All**

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes:

Annex A – Findings from Mock Assessment of the EFLG performance area
‘Community Engagement and Satisfaction’

Annex B – Equality Advisory Group Feedback from Neighbourhood Working
Workshop held June 2013

Annex C – Heritage Lottery Fund Activity Plan

Annex D – Feedback from Attendees at Consultation Event

Annex E – Officer Update on Multi-Agency Hate Crime Strategy for York

Annex F – Council Engagement Tools

Abbreviations:

BME – Black, Minority, Ethnic

BTB – Bite the Ballot

CIAs - Community Impact Assessments

COIs – Communities of Identity

CYC – City of York Council

EAG – Equality Advisory Group

EFLG - Equality Framework for Local Government

EMA - Educational Maintenance Allowance

HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund