



Diversity Peer Challenge

York City Council

Report

26/27th July 2011



1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Local Government Group 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 at the Achieving Level 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 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 an equality/diversity agenda in their own councils/organisations.

Peers were:

Cllr Louise Baldock – Liverpool City Council
Anna Morgan – Welsh Local Government Association
Paul Peng – Knowsley Borough Council
Gill Elliott – Local Government Group
Jonna Stevens – Local Government Group

The team appreciated 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.

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

City of York Council (CYC) has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Achieving level of the Equality Framework.

The council has very good data sources and its new Intelligence Hub will help to further mainstream equalities across the whole authority. The new Leadership and the Chief Executive provide strong drivers for change and have re-energised equalities and diversity work within the council. The council has good

governance structures for equalities and has clearly maintained much of its equalities resources despite budget cuts. Community engagement on the budget process is impressive and this will be further enhanced by the new Fairness Commission. The council has good consultation mechanisms with parts of the community e.g. older people; disabled people. It now needs to extend that to the other protected strands and the changing BAME population. CYC has a range of responsive services and it is clear that EqIAs are influencing and improving service delivery. Employees say that they are well trained to provide services to their diverse communities and that they have been given the skills to challenge discriminatory behaviour.

The Council's new leadership and its Chief Executive are ambitious for the council and are keen to progress to "Excellent" level status within the next two years. To help the council improve we have made some key recommendations in addition to the areas for improvement in paragraph 3.

1. The Hate Crime Strategy needs to be finalised, published and promoted, with a "zero tolerance style" campaign that explains the reporting process. Support mechanisms need to be put in place for victims and the Business Intelligence Hub needs to guide the work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

2. There needs to be more engagement with certain groups. Historically the authority has tended to focus mainly on the characteristics/strands that it had a public duty to consider. With the emerging and changing communities and legislation it will be necessary to expand this focus to others.

3. There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to maximise the benefits of the new Business Intelligence Hub and the reports and data it can produce.

4. Make use of improved workforce data to identify areas of workforce diversity which require further attention. Despite the difficulties caused by the current financial position the council could consider the following: mentoring scheme, shadowing, use of positive action in recruitment and promotion e.g. apprenticeships, CIPFA traineeships; targeted advertising.

2. The Council made the following observations on the impact of the peer challenge:

The challenge has been invaluable. The preparations for the review, although onerous, created a higher profile for the equality agenda, increased teamwork and led to greater internal exchange of experience than ever before. We discovered areas of good practice we never thought we had. By validating our findings and looking at issues we had not considered as strengths before, the peer review has re-energised both councillors and officers as well as our

partners. The peer team also looked into areas for improvement in detail and they have suggested different ways forward, some of which we had not considered before. We found the team very knowledgeable and willing to challenge us in a supportive way. They were a pleasure to have around and left a lot of us feeling very positive about what can be a very challenging process. Thanks to the team, we are now a lot clearer about what we need to do next and how.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

- The new leadership has a good understanding of the make up of York's new communities and recognises the rapid growth and changes within the population.
- Once fully utilised the Business Intelligence Hub will be a real asset. There is a good practice flow chart showing how Business Intelligence will help mainstream equalities within the business cycle. Business Intelligence has begun to create ward profiles and members are adding information to them.
- The proposals for the use of Experian/Mosaic are very progressive and will enable the "drilling down" into detailed ward data for the purposes of targeting specific equalities issues over the period 2011-2014.
- There is good mapping in the super output areas. As a result the Neighbourhood team discovered that there are considerable issues with poverty and older people and benefits maximisation, rather than job availability and the economy as previously assumed. The team is looking forward to targeting certain geographical areas for the Benefit Maximisation programme to focus on.
- Recent Community Conversations have made good use of relevant case studies to bring the issues to life.

Areas for consideration:

- To enable the "wider" York to recognise and understand the new population reality, not just the authority's Senior management team and political leadership, but all stakeholders, employees, partners and residents. The development of Community Cohesion processes if

constructed as a “framework” as opposed to a strategy, may give an opportunity to profile the context of York’s population fluidity. A framework rather than a strategy will also allow for the current national governments proposals reflecting social growth, community cohesion and big society to be reconciled on a target area basis which can be aligned with work on SOA’s. See signposting suggestion in paragraph 5.3

- Develop understanding and skills across the authority on how to best use the data created by the Business Intelligence Hub. Processes to integrate equality and diversity with the business planning process are for the most part “developmental” and the full understanding of the context is only within the knowledge set of a limited number of officers. The matrix which has been developed to integrate equality and diversity within the business planning process should be shared across all officer grades as an awareness raising exercise to demonstrate how the Council fully accounts for this agenda within employment and service delivery.
- **Customer Services** are not geared up to a “customisation” of service delivery. This issue is specifically relevant to the churn or fluidity of the population demographic; in essence the ability to adapt service delivery to meet the changing needs of the influx of the varied population groups to the City. It is possible that the wider use and sharing of the Experience/Mosaic data may address this point. However it will obviously require a comprehensive awareness raising process across what is generally termed “front facing workers”, in order for them to have the same knowledge and reality of the York City population as the senior management of the council and the Business Intelligence Unit.

3.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- The Chief Executive; the new political leadership and the lead director are all strong drivers for change around equalities. The Chief Executive’s background in equalities is a major strength for the organisation.
- The Equalities Leadership Group (ELG) has gained renewed energy from the new public sector duties, the new Chief Executive and the change in political leadership. The senior officers and councillors from the ELG as well the whole of the council Management Team meet with community members via the EAG e.g. to consult on EqIAs and budget cutting

- The Directorate Equality Leads Network (DEL) is a key group for progressing equalities in the council. It provides a forum to share information across directorates. DEL takes responsibility for equality impact assessments (EqIAs) and are more accountable for their completion. All DEL members have received EqIA training which has improved their capacity in this area. Each Directorate Lead reports to his or her directorate management team quarterly on progress with the Directorate Single Equality Scheme identifying achievements and areas for development.
- A new independent Fairness Commission has been introduced by the Leader based on best practice from Islington Council. Commissioners are major figures from the community and private sector who command real respect e.g. the Archbishop of York, the Joseph Rowntree Trust and the authors of Spirit Level. Spirit Level is a “report” titled “Why Equality is better for everyone”, which identified that the most successful communities are the most diverse. The authors are Professor Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett. The work of Spirit Level has already been templated by Islington Council and City of York is replicating the lessons learnt.
- The council has good representation amongst women, people with disabilities and young people. The majority of the Cabinet are women.
- Members have access to a range of training. There is an online learning suite license, including Equalities and diversity for twelve months from May 2011 but it has not been promoted well yet. This has the capacity to allow for monitoring of elected member take-up.
- The priorities which are within the domain of the individual organisations represented within the Local Strategic Partnership were clear. A good example of joint working was a cost based analysis of a positive outcome from a “mental health into employment initiative” clearly anticipating wider benefits.
- The increase of BME school governors is phenomenal and demonstrates a real commitment to involving under-represented groups in civic and public life.
- The triangulation between current the Hate Crime analysis that Safer York undertakes, the work on the development of the emerging Hate Crime Strategy and ward managed priorities is reasonably clear. Although processes to report and deal with hate crime are not yet fully defined in the context of a contemporary strategy, what has been evident is the ability of a rapid multi agency response to tackle issues as they arise.

- There is a good understanding of the areas of challenge across the Hate Crime Agenda. E.g. 18-24 year olds have been identified as a focus area.
- The One City Strategy (Community Cohesion) is driven by the authority. Although it is in a developmental phase for revision, there is an opportunity to work this up as a framework with greater emphasis on localised community interpretations of what community cohesion means. Developing the strategy as a framework would fit with the current national government proposals around community cohesion. The outcomes and benefits should be focussed on increasing “belonging to” and “ownership” of neighbourhoods. The more progressive Community Cohesion strategies have a content which is generally focussed on key principles which are (via a framework) interpreted by local communities from their individual perspectives. The outcomes reflect an increased understanding of how to influence civic decisions, with benefits being increased perceptions of ownership and belonging.
- Some senior managers are keen to have a better understanding of community needs, for example the Finance Director undertook visits to community projects to enable him to have a clearer understanding of the impact of budget changes.

Areas for consideration:

- DEL members feel that their group is not yet fully mainstreamed and see their involvement as an additional task rather than it being part of their management role.
- Focus of equalities training for members could be more positive with a focus on other than merely avoiding potential legal challenge.
- We have not seen evidence of an LSP performance management framework. The Equality Leaders Group (ELG) needs to work more closely and link in with the Local Strategic Partnership.
- There is a perception amongst some staff that there may not be enough capacity or commitment within the authority to act upon the findings of the Intelligence Manager about equality and diversity issues.
- Procurement and equalities is very much a work in progress. It does not necessarily meet the Achieving level although there is evidence that during 2011 –2012 there will be considerable progress. A detailed procurement and equalities plan was only recently agreed by the corporate management team. At present the diversity of contractors is not

known but there are processes being developed to address this via a supplier diversity management system.

- The Hate Crime Strategy needs to be fully developed and embedded and the quality of data for hate crimes needs to be improved by, for example including more partners in the reporting mechanism. The collation of “Hot Spot” hate incidents are not yet referenced within a formal prevention strategy.
- One interviewee talked about a high level of domestic violence compared with the regional average, which was connected with an equally high level of alcohol abuse, and the fact that Scarborough, with a similar profile could be approached for some joint working. We understand there is a draft Domestic Violence Strategy currently being considered.
- One partner expressed the view progress and work within the council moves forward if an individual leading member or officer has an interest in a protected characteristic; conversely if they don't, it doesn't. There is no strategic approach to the way issues are given priority.
- The elected member representation does not yet reflect the demographic of the population although advances are being made. The “A Councillor Who Me?” programme needs to be monitored with regard to who attends and data should be disaggregated to measure the outcome. Political parties should be encouraged to engage with different communities to broaden their pool of candidates. Operation Black Vote (OBV) run a good scheme to encourage shadow “councillings” which CYC might like to look into.
- Some interviewees identified that longer standing councillors can be more intransigent and more reluctant to engage with equality and diversity issues. More work needs to be done to encourage members to attend equalities training. Councillors have training profiles and targets which are reported to council annually, this could be a mechanism to encourage uptake. The council could also consider the development of equality and diversity member champions in each portfolio or for each protected characteristic.
- It was reported to the peer team that there is a reluctance to challenge individual councillors over inappropriate comments or behaviour. Whilst we absolutely accept that this is a delicate matter this issue needs to be addressed.

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- Community involvement on last year's budget was impressive. A number of sessions were held with the Equality Advisory Group (EAG). Every household received a survey. There was an internet consultation exercise as well as consultation with the business community. "Growth and Savings" sessions were held with staff to gain their views. Some critical budget decisions were affected by the feedback from the consultation exercises. The 2012-2014 budget will also use the newly established Fairness Commission to inform decisions.
- Ward committee newsletters and meetings are a positive way for the council to communicate about very local issues and residents told us they enjoy them and make them feel they have a voice where they can bring up things that matter to them at a very local level.
- EAG has been an effective forum for consultation and engagement on equality issues. The group considers EqIAs and puts forward recommendations. Its meeting minutes are available in easy read format and documents are presented in an accessible font.
- CYC is effective at gaining the views of older people. The top issues of concern recently identified for instance were the residential care review, the handyperson service and the toenail cutting service. The Older People Assembly will be meeting CYC Assistant Directors to discuss policy issues at an event very soon.
- As part of the Participatory budgeting process, the council has provided training in how to fill in forms for grants which was well received according to the EAG and it also gives advice to communities of interest on the geographical spread etc. to help with a successful bid.
- There is a new desire to involve young people more in policy and politics. Consultation with young people led to the development of the "YorOK" website for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and transgender and Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning LGBTQ youth.
- Positive interaction between Leisure Services and the community led to the development and delivery of a training course in partnership with the NHS.

Areas for consideration:

- "Big Conversations" will need to focus on all protected characteristics.

- The Council consults/engages with a number of known organisations. However these are not always representative of all views.
- The council has recognised that there are some significant gaps in its engagement with a number of communities of interest e.g. LGB and particularly the Transgender community, Women, the Chinese community.
- The view was expressed that CYC could/should have a stronger representation on consultation by members from the partnership boards such as health.
- Some consultation with young people was criticised. It was felt that CYC had historically allowed consultations to become a political issue when the Youth Assembly were encouraged to lobby for an extension of the “Yozone” bus discount card to 16-18 year olds in full time education but then decided against it. Concern was also expressed about the fact that CYC did not fund the Youth Assembly.
- EAG had a number of concerns. Some felt that there was “over consultation” with some groups or individuals. It was said that the same people are being asked to go to many meetings which is costly in time and money. EAG members thought there was a tendency for council officers to contact people they know when consulting – pet people or groups rather than reaching out further.
- The timing of EAG meetings needs to be considered and managed better in terms of organisation. There was poor representation on EAG with regards to people with physical and sensory impairments. Quotes from EAG “Evie is great and does her best. It is often down to political priorities of different representatives as to which agendas are taken forward”. “No action in this town”. “Talk, talk, talk”. “Things drag on”. “The last EAG meeting went on for three and a half hours. It was pointed out that whilst there is a lot of consultation on CYC issues and agendas, there seems insufficient time for CYC to listen to our “own” issues”.
- Issues were raised around the facilitation of the Physical and Sensory Deprivation Partnership Board need to be addressed. The feeling was that it needs a lot of support, interpreters, access etc. It is not as simple as just calling a meeting, if meetings are required they will require considerably more support and thought and provision than a meeting for able bodied people.
- Funding grant applications do not ask about accessibility of the thing/event that is being applied for funding for. This means that CYC is in danger of funding things that do not meet its own equalities and diversity policy aims

and objectives. As with procurement of services, grant funding guidelines need to ensure that public money is spent accordingly to the law and also meets the aspiration of the authority.

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

- The Older People's Assembly project to create positive images of older people and young people through a photo competition is a good example of inter-generational working.
- CYC had assumed that disabled young people would want more integration with their able bodied peers. Consultation and engagement showed that they actually wanted something separate. The result was the "Choose2" Youth Club for young people with disabilities.
- The Young People's LGBT group survived budget cuts after the ELG met them at an EAG budget consultation event.
- Changes have been made to the homeless strategy for 16-17 year olds as a result of the EqIA process.
- Learning Disability Hate Crime workshop discovered issues around abuse being experienced by people with learning disabilities using public transport and as a result CYC funded a travel training scheme for people with learning disabilities. As part of this people with learning disabilities gave a presentation to bus companies.
- CYC has made a £250K investment in new utility meters at traveller sites.
- Staff are able to point to a number of mechanisms they can use to contribute to improving services. e.g. Housing and Leisure staff are making good use of Easy Read and Story Telling for their younger clients.

Areas for consideration:

- The Gypsy and Traveller Protocol does not include more recent government edicts such as the "Regional Spatial Strategy" abolition and makes no reference to the Equality Act 2010. The protocol appears to date from 2007.

- Anti homophobic bullying is only part of generic Bullying policy at York. Many authorities have a stand alone strategy because it can be evidenced that schools and youth clubs will shy away from tackling homophobic bullying citing that “we have no gay kids here so we don’t need it” for instance. A specific strategy that requires a proper focus on this is very important. Homophobic attacks are the second most common amongst hate crimes.
- CYC’s previous focus on service delivery has tended to be on the three strands of race, age, disability but not any of the other protected strands/characteristics.
- The Mystery Shopper Panel for customer services needs to be more representative of the make-up of the community.
- There are ongoing issues around Blue Badge parking at the library. Despite an EAG promise Councillors seem to be struggling to get this through even now when in power. It was suggested that getting the Highways Department to move its position has been the problem. It is a real bone of contention at the moment that has damaged CYCs credibility and commitment in the eyes of the EAG attendees who came to the library for the meeting we had with them and had insufficient parking spaces. There is political commitment but seemingly Highways have not seen the same urgency.

3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

Strengths:

- There is political and financial commitment to maintaining apprenticeships for young people at a cost of £125k per year.
- The Staff Equality Reference Group (SERG) is a considerable asset to the organisation as its members are highly committed to the issues. We feel the facilities time allocated to SERG is generous but the organisation could use the group more effectively to effect change. SERG recognises the difficulty it faces in representing all equality strands including some where employees are less happy to be openly involved or to divulge personal information e.g. carers and LGBT. SERG are encouraged that there is now more “bottom up” approaches to them about issues rather than always being “top down” from senior management. Since September 2010 its Chair is a member of ELG.
- CYC offers recognition and support for staff with mental health issues.

- The council has a Mentoring programme to develop diverse members of staff. It suffers from a lack of mentors so is rather sporadic.
- The Council is sensitive to the needs of employees from different religions or beliefs.
- Employees have been provided with equalities training using a variety of methodologies that have been found useful and relevant to their roles. They were able to describe a number of mechanisms to help them challenge inappropriate behaviour.
- Flexible Working is considered, applied and monitored by managers.
- Staff engagement with CYC is effective. For example employees feel they have direct access to the Chief Executive.

Areas for consideration:

- CYC has insufficient knowledge about the profile of its workforce. Currently workforce statistics are not easily available to managers, although there is a new system which will address this.

The launch of the apprenticeship scheme is an ideal opportunity to target other under-represented groups, for example BAME, LGBT, people with disabilities and men and women in non-traditional job routes.

- The current workforce does not reflect the profile of the community in relation to numbers of BAME, young people and those with disabilities. We recognise that the recruitment freeze will make it more difficult to create a more diverse workforce.
- The disclosure level for disabled employees is particularly low even in comparison with other local authorities. Employee statistics are routinely gathered but the council should consider a campaign to better inform employees about the reasons why it collects statistics.
- SERG could raise staff awareness of their rights in relation to equality & the Equality Act 2010. SERG members commented that "not all managers are aware of Access to Work policies". It was suggested that line managers' training on equalities needs to be reviewed.
- The PDR system is driven by managers and is paper based. It provides little corporate data to inform training needs for example. PDR's should include equalities objectives but there is no mechanism for checking if this happens.

- Staff have not yet received feedback from the recent Staff Wellbeing survey.

4. Examples of innovative projects and initiatives

4.1 Fairness Commission

The Council has recently established an independent Fairness Commission to consider how York can grow its economy whilst maintaining equality, justice and equality of opportunity. The Commission will help guide the budget setting process for 2012-2014 by assembling a database of evidence about the city and its people, taking information from a range of sources including the voluntary and committee sector and the council's business intelligence unit. It will consider issues such as the living wage, equal pay, social care costs; outsourcing, TUPE and pensions and make recommendations to the council.

4.2 Ward Profiles

Through the Business Intelligence Unit the Council has been able to add to its defined demographic knowledge by drawing up detailed ward profiles. These profiles can be used by a range of staff and external partner agencies to deliver or amend services to suit individual neighbourhoods. Ward profiling is not a new process, however of late the types of information collated to determine the needs of target population groups has become more focussed across a range of socio economic indicators. Within the context of York's application of the conclusions drawn from the ward profiles, it is evident a maximisation and shift of resource and focus has meant that the authority has been more able to effectively target service delivery.

The ward profiles include maps, and a single-side bulletin of key statistics about the city. They can include results from incidental and scheduled Surveys for cross referencing and they will be cyclically updated. Taken to the current extremes, they can also include the latest needs assessment reports for health and wellbeing, community safety, housing, children and young people, transport and land use. It is a one-stop site for the most useful information available to the Council, and provides them with the intelligence to make sure that they are focusing their resources on the priority issues in the City. This is an evidence base which is viewed as a live hub where information is stored and where new data will be added as it comes in.

4.3 Budget EqlA – consultation process

The council has an impressive process to consult with and engage equality community groups in the decision making process for the budget. This informs the budget EqlA and influences budget decisions.

4.4 Staff Equality Reference Group

The Staff Equality Reference Group (SERG) is a considerable asset to the organisation. It is a group that encompasses multiple identities representing all protected characteristics. The group co-ordinators and members focus on common issues. This approach produces comprehensive consideration of equality issues and supports the organisation to produce better quality EqlAs. It also engenders teamwork and common purpose amongst staff with protected characteristics.

5. Signposting to good practice

5.1 Employee Engagement and Recruitment

A free toolkit titled '5-Points for Progress' is now available to promote employee engagement and give employers some practical tools and advice on how to be compliant with the Equality Act 2010. It contains the key steps employers should take to recruit the best talent for their organisation, how to reduce employee turnover and reduce related costs.

www.bitc.org.uk/workplace/diversity_and_inclusion/race/5_points_toolkit.html

5.2 LGB&T Issues

The Stonewall website has access to a range of useful guides for work in this area of equalities

www.stonewall.org.uk

Brighton and Hove Council is an Excellent level authority and an exemplar on LGBT issues.

Liverpool City Council has a highly-commended partner lead strategy with resource packs for schools and youth clubs on homophobic bullying etc.

5.3 Community Cohesion

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council through a sub group of the Local Strategic Partnership developed a Community Cohesion Strategy (2009- 2013) which has a “ framework” context. It also has resonance with current national

recommendations from central government. The Knowsley Community Cohesion strategy was developed through north west regional and national advice and guidance which included consultation with the Institute for Community Cohesion.

5.4 Collecting sensitive staff data

Have a look at the excellent example from Stonewall, “What’s it got to do with you” at <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/englishfullversionweb.pdf> which could be very helpful in explaining why we need to collect data.

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