

City of York Council Equality Advisory Group (EAG) (ex Social Inclusion Working Group - SIWG)

Arrangements for the period April 2010 to May 2011

This paper is the result of extensive Group discussions that took place in February 2008, May 2009, December 2009 and March 2010.

The arrangements in this paper were finalised and agreed at the EAG Development Day on 29 March 2010.

1. Background

The Group was set up in July 2006. Its main objective was to advise the council's Executive about equality issues in council services, through the Executive Member for Social Inclusion who chairs the Group.

The Group revisited its objectives at a workshop in December 2009 and concluded that they should be:

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- i. advise the Executive on major council projects and initiatives and on equalities issues generally in the City of York Council;

- ii. extend and build contact with other equality groups and individuals in York in order to facilitate as wide an input as possible

Currently the Group is made up of 5 councillors (including the Chair), representatives from 10 equality community groups and relevant officers. It faces a number of opportunities and challenges that have resulted in this interim review of its role and objectives:-

Opportunities

The Group has gained a good reputation amongst council officers as a time and cost efficient mechanism that supports equality community groups feed into and influence the **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)** process, in accordance with the council's Fairness and Inclusion Strategy and corporate single equality scheme 2009-12.

In 2009/10, there were about 2-3 additional requests for the Group to consider proposed changes to council policy and practice, every time the Group met. This was partly due to a significant increase in the number of EIAs undertaken by council services. In 2008/9 officers undertook 18 EIAs. In 2009/10 year officers had upward 78+ EIAs in hand.

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Since March 2008, the Group has considered approximately 40 council policy and service EIAs and has made comments and observations that have contributed significantly to: raising the profile of equality and diversity in the council; increasing awareness about equality and inclusion issues amongst councillors and officers; and influence changes that benefit customers from equality groups in the long run.

Although benefits arising from the EIA process will take time to come through, below are examples of changes that have resulted from EIAs that the Group has considered:

- The debt recovery policy was amended to take on board the needs of people from the equality strands, who through no fault of their own may find themselves indebted to council
- Door-step recycling processes were reviewed to ensure that disabled residents are enabled to recycle
- Current and future processes in the York Customer Centre were altered to take on board the needs of vulnerable users
- Council HQ design principles were reviewed to make sure that they were inclusive and the design brief issued to developers was amended accordingly
- Council communications (especially the internet and intranet and some key information leaflets) were reviewed to make them more accessible
- Competency assessment and disability equality training for drivers of wheelchair accessible hackney carriages and private hire vehicles was put in place, working with disability groups in the city

Challenges

- As a result of increased awareness about the importance of equality and diversity to customer-focused services, the number of EIAs in the council has increased significantly. As a result, officers need to ask the Group (community representatives in particular) for input more frequently than before.
- Key challenges arising from the economic situation and the recent change in government are putting pressure on councillors' time.
- Community representatives who face a lot of demand on their time
- Continuing confusion between the Group and Inclusive York Forum, mainly arising from having similar-sounding names
- The introduction of the Single Equality Act from 1.10.10

Next steps

In view of challenges faced by the council in 2010-11 (and beyond) because of the continuing recession as well as the council election in May 2011, during the Development Day in March 2010 the Group discussed and arrived at interim arrangements for the period 1.4.2010- 31.3.2011. These are outlined below.

1. Name

So as to avoid the continuing confusion with Inclusive York Forum, during this interim period, the name of the Group will be **Council Equality Advisory Group (EAG)** - the name agreed at the Development Day in

March 2010. **This new name will need to be approved by the Council Executive.**

The Group and Inclusive York Forum

The Group works to improve council and council-led equality and diversity **practice** in council service and employment.

Inclusive York Forum (IYF) works to improve equality and diversity **outcomes** across the city. It works to improve life in the city for people from the equality strands.

2. Membership and way of working

The membership will remain largely as it is at present.

Elected members

As the Group advises the Executive, it will continue to be chaired by the Executive portfolio holder for Social Inclusion.

In the interest of continuity, councillors who are currently members of the Group should remain for the period 2010-11.

As the role of the Group is advisory rather than decision-making, there is no need for political proportionality or for a minimum number of elected members to be present for **business meetings** (please see below for definition) to proceed . However, the Chair or the Vice Chair should be present during business meetings.

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Roles and responsibilities for EAG councillors were developed at the Development Day on 29 March 2010 and can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Community representatives

Community groups that currently attend EAG (including those who send expert witnesses) will nominate no more than two representatives each, to attend the **business meetings** (see below). For the purpose of continuity in this interim period, the groups will be encouraged to confirm current attendees as their nominated representatives.

As agreed last year, the York Independent Living Network - YILN (previously referred to as Centre for Independent Living) should be invited to send two representatives to business meetings. This is because in the past year the Network has made progress in developing an inclusive organisation for disabled people in the city. YILN representatives will serve side-by-side with the Access Group, the Valuing People Partnership and York People First, who in the interest of continuity should continue to be members of the Group for this interim year.

In addition the Youth Council will be invited to engage with the Group in ways that its members deem appropriate.

Officers

Business meetings will be supported by Democracy Services. The Chair will be supported by the Corporate Equality and Inclusion Manager and the Council Management Team Equality Lead, who in 2010/11 is the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods.

Way of working

Every effort will be made to have fully accessible meetings. There will be:

- Accessible venues
- Support for community representatives to attend and participate, if requested
- Accessible communication, including short reports (whenever possible, no longer than 3 pages of A4), preferably in font comic sans serif (or other sans serif fonts), size 14, in plain English and whenever possible in Easy Read
- No Power Point presentations in general, unless done in Easy Read.

Roles, responsibilities and ground rules

Roles and responsibilities for EAG members were agreed at the Development Day on 29 March 2010 and are in **Appendix 1**. Ground rules for meetings are in **Appendix 2**.

3. Meetings

Because of increased demand on councillor, officer and community representatives' time, during this interim period there will be 3 business meetings, 2 community engagement events (EIA Fairs/ Help us to get it right days), and one meeting with Council Management Team.

Business meetings

- Will take place in June, November and February.
- Will be organized and supported by Democracy Services.
- Will be open to the public and announced on the Council internet site.
- Minutes and matters arising from the meetings will be considered by the Executive, with a request that this is a distinct item on its agenda.
- Will be 3-hour long, including 15 minutes interval half way through
- Light refreshments will be served from 5:30 pm, the meetings will start at 6:00 pm and end at 9:00 pm at the latest
- The agenda will include:
 - A session at the beginning of each meeting lasting one and a half hours. This will cover issues concerning council policies and services tabled by community representatives, in advance of the meeting whenever possible. Issues of concern to a number of strands, will be considered first. Officers will

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respond to issues tables in advance during the meeting or by the following meeting at the latest.

- Reports on progress with the corporate Single Equality Scheme
- Reports about progress made with actions arising from the EIA process
- The members of the Corporate Equality and Inclusion Team will be available to brief and support elected members and community representatives before each meeting.
- Community representatives who attend business meetings, will be offered free transport to and from the venue and will be able to claim for attendance-related costs e.g. caring costs.
- In between business meetings, the Executive Member will co-ordinate attendance by councillors who are members of EAG, at community group meetings. The purpose will be to offer the opportunity to EAG community groups to discuss and share issues about equality in council services and employment with EAG councillors.

Community engagement events

("Help us to get it right" days, also called "EIA days")

- **Will take place in October and January.** Dates will be announced by August 2010.

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- One will take place 10:00 to 15:00 (with lunch), the other 15:00 to 20:00(with supper), to make sure that those who are not available during the day or in the evenings get a chance to attend.
- There will be at least 9 EIAs considered at each event
- Will be open to all equality community "groups-of-groups" in the city, as listed on the York CVS site, not EAG groups only. They will be invited to send a limited number of representatives each (excluding personal assistants).
- All community representatives who attend, will be offered free transport to and from the venue and will be able to claim for attendance-related costs e.g. caring costs.
- Meetings will be organized and supported by the corporate Equality and Inclusion Team and the council's Directorate Equality Leads network (DEL).

Meeting with Council Management Team (Directors and Chief Executive)

This meeting was first requested by EAG community groups at the Development Day in May 2009 and agreed in principle with the Chief Executive and corporate management team Equalities Lead in post at the time. The meeting is:

- Expected to take place in December 2010
- Likely to take place 10:00 - 15:00 or 15:00 - 20:00 with refreshments

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- Not open to the general public, but open to all equality community groups-of-groups (or "umbrella" groups) in the city. They will be invited to send two representatives each (excluding personal assistants)
- The main aim is for each Director to:
 - report on progress with their directorate equality scheme
 - present and discuss personal and directorate equality objectives for the coming year
- Organised and supported by the corporate Equality and Inclusion team.
- All community representatives who attend, will be offered free transport to and from the venue and will be able to claim for attendance-related costs e.g. caring costs.

4. Budget

There is £7,240 total available for 2010-11. This is expected to be spent as follows:

- **£ 3,240** to go towards accessible meetings costs, including the 2 EIA Fairs and the meeting with Council CMT
- **£ 3,000 (£250 each)** to be allocated equally amongst the 12 EAG community groups. The groups are:
 1. YOPA (older people)
 2. Higher York (young people in higher education)
 3. Youth Council (young people)

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4. YREN (race)
5. ACCESS the Group (physical and sensory disability)
6. York People First (learning disability)
7. Valuing People Partnership (learning disability)
8. Mental Health Forum (mental health)
9. Interfaith Forum (religion and belief)
10. York Humanists (belief)
11. LGBT forum (sexual orientation, trans issues)
12. York Independent Living Network (disability)

Increasingly, officers need to approach one or several of the EAG groups outside scheduled meetings to seek guidance about strand-specific issues, sometimes at very short notice. So far groups have been asked to help on a voluntary basis and have not been recompensed for their input.

Given the anticipated rise in EIA numbers during 2010-11, the need to approach groups outside scheduled meetings and at short notice is likely to increase. Therefore, each EAG group will receive a sum of £250 early in the municipal year in lieu of making limited members' time available when required, to attend discussions about EIAs- even if this request comes at a short notice (not shorter than 5 working days). If members of community group(s) have to travel to meet with officers, travel and attendance expenses will be paid from the £250 given to each group, except for expenses over £50

(mainly expected to be for translation etc). These will be met from the £3,240 available for accessible meeting costs.

The Equality and Inclusion Team will make the necessary arrangements and brief both officers and community attendees before they meet. Officers will make no more than 5 such requests per group per year (excluding business meetings and EIA Fairs).

- **£1,000** to be available in 2010-11 for EAG community groups to work collaboratively to promote awareness about poverty and social exclusion as it affects people from the equality strands, in the context of **2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion**¹. This will help the council meet equality legislation duties, as well as the requirements of its own single equality scheme. It will also raise awareness about poverty and exclusion faced by people who have multiple equality identities. In recognition of the findings of the Place Survey and various studies recently published in the city, events funded from this budget will be encouraged to focus on B&ME, younger and older people and LGBT poverty and exclusion issues, as a priority.

¹ Details about the European Year can be found at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/1905&format=HTML&aged=0&language>

Appendix 1 - Roles and responsibilities as agreed at Development Day 29 March 2010

The role of **EAG community representatives** is:

- To be the main conduit of information between EAG and the community group they represent.
- To be a voice for the community and strand they represent.
- In relation to council services, to find out the views needs and experiences of members of the group(s) they represent and bring them to the attention of EAG
- To contribute to council EIAs

They will be expected to:

- Attend regularly (at least two out of three meetings)
- Be mandated or elected by their group
- Be open and transparent
- Be realistic
- Value and respect other EAG members
- Be prepared to provide information to, and learn from, other members of EAG
- Cascade information to and from the group they represent
- Put forward representative rather than personal opinions
- In relation to council services, find out the views needs and experiences of members of the group(s) they represent and bring them to the attention of EAG

The role and responsibilities of **EAG councilors** are:

- In the case of the Chair, to be the main conduit between the Group and the Executive
- To be the main channel of communication and information between EAG and the wider councilor body
- To be the voice for equality issues in the councilor body and to help raise awareness about equality and diversity in the council in general

They will be expected to:

- Attend regularly or send their nominated substitute
- Be open and transparent
- Be prepared to learn from community representatives
- Listen and act .
- Respect and value community representatives
- Not to be political
- Visit EAG groups between EAG meetings
- Be well informed about equality and diversity

The role of **council officers** who support and attend EAG(including Council Management Team members when they attend) is:

- To make information accessible to community representatives - for example, use font Arial or Comic Sans Serif when they write reports; use Easy Read whenever possible

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- Take action as agreed and provide regular updates about progress

They will be expected to:

- Be well informed about equality and diversity. [*Council Management Team members will be encouraged to undergo mandatory equality awareness training*].
- Avoid "council-speak" when they communicate and/or provide glossary of terms
- Show respect and goodwill towards community representatives
- Attend business meetings and update EAG about progress with equality action in each Directorate. They should be senior officers and Directors(not just the Director responsible for equality in the council)

Officers should be clear that the Group is not a substitute for consultation and engagement with specific equality communities and partnerships, where the work area under review relates mainly to specific equality strands. Groups and partnerships that fall in this category include YorOK, Physical and Sensory Impairment partnership, Valuing People Partnership etc

Appendix 2 - EAG meetings ground rules as agreed at Development Day on 29 March 2010

- Respect each other's learning and level of expertise
- Allow previous speaker to finish before speaking
- Respect each other's opinion, even though you may disagree
- Work through the chair of the meeting