

**Raising Awareness of Ward Councillors & the Democratic Process –  
New Scrutiny Topic Scoping Report**

**Summary**

1. This report provides information on the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) and the related results from the recent Big York Survey and proposes an associated scrutiny topic for review by this Committee.

**Introduction**

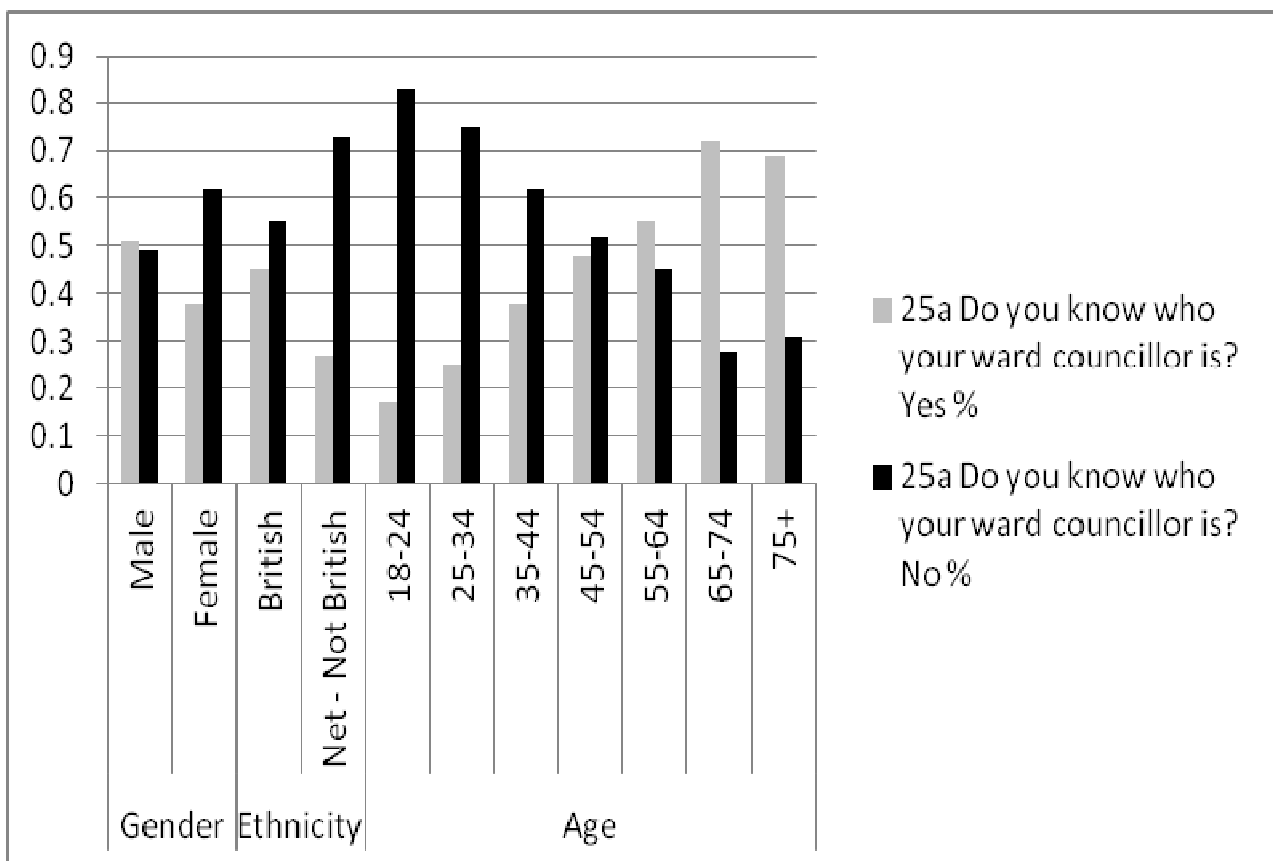
2. Equality Framework for Local Government  
City of York Council is currently at the 'Achieving Level' of the EFLG and is hoping to achieve 'Excellence Level' in May 2014.
3. At its last meeting this Committee received a detailed update on progress in implementing the Excellence Equalities Improvement Action Plan against each of the following five EFLG performance areas:
  - a. Knowing your communities
  - b. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
  - c. Community engagement and satisfaction
  - d. Responsive services and customer care
  - e. A skilled and committed workforce
4. In regard to 'Leadership, Organisational and Partnership Commitment', a key component of the Equality Framework for Local Government inspection, is to evidence that all parts of the community are able to influence decisions; in terms of resource allocation, compliance with public duties, democratic engagement, scrutiny, service planning and procurement. Assessors also examine whether York Councillors are drawn from a wide and representative range of backgrounds.
5. Specific to this performance area, a number of improvement actions were identified within the improvement action plan, and the majority have

since been completed. However one action remains outstanding as the Council is unaware of the equalities profile of its members.

6. At its previous meeting in September 2013 this Committee resolved that all councillors should be encouraged to complete their equality profiling information. All councillors have since been contacted and asked to either input their information directly onto the council's HR system or to complete a questionnaire by the end of November 2013.

7. Big York Survey

The recent results from the recent Big York Survey revealed that 57% of respondents do not know who their ward councillor is. This figure worsens when examining results for Communities of Identity. The graph below provides further analysis by Community of Identity covering gender, ethnicity and age.



8. The Survey results revealed that men are more likely to know who their ward councillor is (although it is less than 50%) compared to females. The over 55s are also more likely to know who their ward councillor is in particular those between 65 and 74 and 75 plus.

9. Those least likely to know their ward councillor are the under 45's in particular those aged between 18-24 and 25-34.

10. The results also showed a high percentage of non British respondents are unaware of who their ward councillors are.
11. Most recently the Communities and Equalities team have been working with Black and Minority Ethnic (BaME) communities in York, and it has become apparent that there is little awareness of the democratic process. This was particularly evident within the Turkish community and whilst evidence is lacking with regard to other communities, it is likely that this is also the case with other BaME communities. Due to the anonymous nature of voting it is not possible to determine what % of the BaME community votes.

### **Suggested Review Remit**

12. Taking into account the findings from the EFLG and the Big York Survey provided above, the Committee are asked to consider undertaking a scrutiny review to:
  - i. Examine how best to:
    - a) Increase awareness of ward councillors to females, young people, and BaME communities in their wards
    - b) raise awareness of the democratic process amongst York's Communities of Identity, in particular those who have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
  - ii. In support of the outstanding improvement action in the Excellence Equalities Improvement Action Plan to:
    - a) Examine how representative councillors are of the community they serve and how councillor representation can become more diverse should this be required when election vacancies occur
    - b) Identify any equalities training required for members to help them better serve Communities of Identity within their wards

### **Suggestions for Undertaking Work on the Review**

13. The Committee may choose to set up a Task Group to carry out the review on their behalf or conduct the review as a whole committee.
14. A programme of conversations with appropriate groups could be drawn up using the Communities and Equalities team's existing contacts, to help identify ideas on how to improve awareness of the democratic

process. The findings could later be fed into actions for Democracy Week 2014.

15. In regard to consultation, utilising the Customer Centre, residents could be asked if they know who their local councillor is, and if not asking for ideas on how to raise awareness of ward councillors within their ward.
16. A questionnaire or focus group session could also be organised to ask for ideas/ actions to raise awareness of who ward councillors are.
17. In regards to gathering councillor profiling information, whilst this is already underway, Councillors undertaking this review could champion this and where councillors have not provided this information, make contact with them to encourage them to do so.
18. The review could also include examining best practice by other Local Authorities already achieving 'Excellence Level' of the EFLG.

### **Council Plan 2011-15**

19. The proposed review supports the Council's corporate priorities of building strong communities and protecting vulnerable people.

### **Implications**

20. Carrying out the proposed 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. 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.

### **Recommendation**

21. Having considered the information within this report and previous reports to this Committee on the Council's ongoing work to achieve Excellence for the Equality Framework for Local Government, the Committee is recommended to:
  - i. Proceed with a review in line with the suggest review remit shown at paragraph 12 above

- ii. Set up a Task Group to carry out the review on behalf of the full Committee
- iii. Agree a timeframe for completion of the review (in time for the findings to feed into the Council's peer assessment under the Equalities Framework for Local Government in May 2014)

Reason: To support the Council in its efforts to achieve 'Excellence Level' in the Equality Framework for Local Government, and progress the work of this Committee in line with agreed scrutiny procedures and protocols.

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 29 October 2013

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** N/A

**Wards Affected:**

**All**



**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers: None**