



Diversity Peer Challenge

Bristol City Council

Report

8-10th November 2011



1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Local Government Association and carried out by its trained peers. The report satisfies the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) for an external assessment at the Excellent level. The Peer Challenge is designed to validate a council's own self-assessment at the Excellent 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.

Peers were:

Cllr Cathy Bakewell – Somerset County Council/South Somerset District Council
Alima Qureshi – LB Hackney
Maria Tonks – West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Julian Horsler – Barnsley Borough Council
Gill Elliott – Local Government Association

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.

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

Bristol City Council (BCC) has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Excellent level of the Equality Framework. Our reasons for reaching this conclusion are as follows:

We found equalities embedded at every level of the Council. Political and senior management leadership on equalities is strong and there are good member/officer relationships. Members and officers understand the rapidly changing demographics of the city and the Council works hard to ensure that it has up to date statistics that are as accurate as they can be.

Strategic leadership is good and managers understand what they need to achieve for the community. The Council gathers a great amount of data about the communities who live in Bristol which is well interpreted and feeds into service delivery. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are embedded in the organisation and are informing decision making around services and budget cuts. However the quality and depth of some EqIAs could be improved

Community engagement takes place at many levels and there are a wide range of forums. Equalities are well resourced in the council. The Equalities team clearly does good work and has been important in the progress on equalities in the council. The council is delivering on equality outcomes for its communities. Residents have high expectations of what the council can do. They expect the council to “sort things out”. The Council and its partners understand the importance of community cohesion issues in the city. It is a testament to the good multi-agency response to civil unrest in part of the city in April this year that there were no serious riots in Bristol in August unlike many cities in England.

Although we judge the Council to be Excellent against the EFLG criteria, to help it improve further we would recommend that it:

1. Considers more fully the impact that decisions being made for some communities may have on the vulnerable and poorer white communities and communicate this effectively.
2. Is clear about its strategic equalities priorities which need to relate to its overarching priorities. These should be built into directorate/service plans.
3. Considers the allocation of equality resources (both internal and external) and how best to ensure they are deployed to deliver the required outcomes.
4. Continues to develop Service Managers to be confident to own and drive the equality agenda in their service areas.
5. Continues to recognise the need for a diverse workforce. The focus on Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees should be replicated across other protected characteristics whilst recognising that the priorities and interventions will vary for different groups. Ensure that all positive action initiatives are fully implemented and evaluated.

6. Draw out better intelligence from equalities data. Consider not just service take-up and need but also the quality of the service being received by different sections of the community.
7. Develops mechanisms to allow its equalities work to be externally challenged by the community and partners in a more formal setting.

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

1. The Challenge galvanised officers and members to pull together and present our evidence in a coherent way. This means we have a better understanding of each others work and the collective performance of the council on equalities.
2. The process and the preparation increased our self-awareness in relation to strengths and weaknesses. We are therefore in a better position to address weaknesses.
3. The Challenge has produced useful information from external stakeholders about how they rate and perceive our performance.
4. Gaining the views of a Peer Team that comprised equalities professionals from the public sector and a councillor perspective has been very valuable in that it has turned over stones and probed areas that needed scrutiny. This has all informed the 'areas for consideration'.
5. While preparation for the Challenge is resource intensive the evidence collated has longer-term use in demonstrating to our communities and stakeholders what we are doing to deliver equalities outcomes.
6. The final report will inform our future improvement actions and is timely in that we will be developing and refreshing our equality objectives as required by the Equality Act 2010 – by April 2012.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

1. A great deal of statistical information has been gathered and commissioned and the Council uses it effectively in decision making, service development and delivery. Examples of this include:
 - Customer services are using client data to target their face to face service to those most in need.
 - data being used to better plan and target library services at older people who cannot access existing libraries.

- New leisure centre will have tailored services following use of local demographics and needs analysis (eg for disabled people and those on low incomes).
- Safer Bristol identified low representation of BAME people for substance misuse programmes and developed action plan and created new post as a result.

2. The Council tries to ensure that data is as accurate as possible. It has challenged the Office of National Statistics on Somali population growth which was confirmed with Somali forum. A Somali community calculator worked out by number of births plus school aged children = child population. As a result population estimates were revised to between 6,500 and 10,000 Somalis not 30,000 as rumoured.

3. The Housing Department has a high response on tenant profiling with 100% information gathered on gender, 89.24 on ethnicity, 70% on religion and 71% on sexual orientation.. Data collection on new tenants enables the housing service to identify and support those who are vulnerable.

Areas for consideration:

4. There are gaps in the statistics on vulnerable groups. The Vulnerability Study and the Ethnicity Study are not yet shared with partners. These studies highlight where the most vulnerable people live and the nature of vulnerability including homelessness; mental health problems, people in care, benefit claimants etc.

5. There is some inconsistency in the figures on communities. For example the size of the Somali community has been quoted by different sources to be between 1500 and 6-25,000.

6. There is data on take-up of services but not often on outcomes such as, the quality of service or the amount of service. For example, is it known what proportion of bids from different sections of the community for housing were successful?

7. More intelligence could be gleaned from equalities data if it is cross tabulated for different equality strands such as BAME, age, etc. This allows for a deeper understanding of the complex make-up of community need and use of services. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) provides a helpful model for this, albeit on a smaller more focussed scale.

8. When comparing equality monitoring data make sure you compare like with like. For example, if out of 100 people surveyed only 50 gave their sexual orientation, and 2 indicated they were Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT). This should be presented as 4% (i.e. 2 out of 50) not 2% (i.e. 2 out of

100) because no assumptions should be made about those who did not declare.

3.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

9. The Chief Executive and Leader provide vision and direction on equalities for the organisation. The Chief Executive also takes every opportunity to act as a role model for women in leadership roles. There is a gender balanced management team.

10. The Leader feels strongly that the Council needs to focus on outcomes and that people look to the Council as a champion for the people and need to see evidence of what the Council is doing for them.

11. Equalities work is being performance managed by Members. The Single Equalities Scheme goes to Scrutiny, then Cabinet and then full council once a year. Exceptions are raised with cabinet members as they occur. The Party Leaders Meeting monitors staff numbers particularly BAME workforce statistics. Members recognise the need to improve recruitment and retention and progression of BAME employees. They also acknowledged the lack of recruitment opportunities at present.

12. There is an Overview and Scrutiny Committee plus several specific themed Commissions and task and finish groups. Most have outside bodies attending, depending on the topic. Community Safety has had the greatest number of co-optees.

13. Members are outward facing and involved in their communities. They have a good understanding of the complex diversity of their wards and the fact that there are multiple needs e.g. awareness that in mainly white wards there are growing numbers of Polish people, understanding that the elderly often suffer isolation. The Member Equalities Champion sits on the Cabinet and is very pro-active. Members are involved in activities with faith groups, disabled, elderly and young people in their wards as well as the Chinese community. They attend the Punjabi forum and Divali celebrations.

14. The Council introduced measures for making savings well before recent budget cuts. A vacancy management panel has been in place for two years prior to budget cuts. A business case has to be made for all vacancies. Four hundred posts have been lost as a result. Trade Unions are working with the council to avoid compulsory redundancies where possible.

15. There is an Enabling Commissioning Board with 5 work streams working to achieve a consistent approach to commissioning and a baseline across the authority.
16. The Council works extremely well with its partners. There is a huge commitment to making partnerships work and the LSP has helped form strong partnerships between public and voluntary and business sectors. The City's response to riots in April 2011 was multi-agency and rapid. Graffiti was removed in 12 hours. The typical response to poor TV publicity was "how can we make this work for the city?"
17. The LSP priorities and corporate plan both include and define the key equality priorities for the city. The LSP is well chaired, pro-active in dealing with the Council and has a plan to 2020. The LSP are not afraid to cut work streams and committees that don't deliver or have "had their day".
18. LSP members commented that the Council takes seriously all issues brought to it. Comments were made such as "A listening council" and "BCC is the key to where Bristol is going" The LSP representatives thought the council had done well on issues like the Prevent strategy; Stokes Croft riots; female genital mutilation, Muslim burial ground extension, mosques, Roma community – faith engagement. The LSP had a number of good examples of the council's response to community issues often led by politicians. They also felt that the Council press office was very pro-active.
19. Partners recognise that the council's use of EqIAs is good. The Council's EqIA on the investment programme was judged particularly impressive and could demonstrate that it affected the decisions taken.
20. Leadership on Community cohesion is good/excellent – officers and member commitment is very good. The Building Bridges Partnership on violent extremism in the Muslim community is building trust.
21. The Single Equality Scheme (SES) is monitored through Sparnet the internal performance management system. It sends reminders to lead officers who have not input their performance indicator data. The SES goes to overview and scrutiny every six months.
22. Although Operation Black Vote did not directly produce additional diversity of councillors, OBV work with the political parties has raised awareness of the need to attract and develop BAME candidates. The 2011 elections produced the greatest number of BAME candidates ever and work is ongoing to improve member diversity. Very good progress has been made on increasing the number of BAME school governors. In 2006/7 there were 94 and in 2010/11 there were 169.

23. Engaging young people into politics through work with the Youth Council “Bristol Big Youth Voice” led to a significant rise in votes from young people up to 22% of the electorate.

Areas for consideration:

24. Members of the staff group expressed the view that equalities and diversity still needed a top down approach. They felt that if a senior manager said “do it” it would be done but not otherwise.
25. Maintaining good community engagement links despite reduced council resources. A representative from the voluntary sector said that abolishing the community development team has left a gap in engaging with the council “relationships are based on individuals, when they go it leaves a gap”. Eleven VCS organisations met the assessors as a focus group. Some groups reported that they were aware of homophobic remarks made by a councillor. They felt that equalities training for members should be mandatory which would minimise the risk of such incidents. The voluntary sector would like to contribute to training for members rather than it being led by the equalities team'.
26. All the Members peers spoke to said that they would challenge inappropriate behaviour and were impressed with the way a recent homophobic incident was swiftly dealt with by Members. ..
27. Equality groups commented that not all scrutiny commissions have places for equalities groups. They had gained the impression that councillors tend to support the majority view at neighbourhood forums instead of minority views e.g. policing parking on dropped kerbs.
28. There is a need to train officers better about the commissioning cycle and the link to equalities.
29. EqlAs do not always consider the cumulative effect of cuts or the wider context in which they are taking place (cuts made by partners, central government or the wider economy), and this aspect needs to be monitored. It was not clear if there has been a report on this bigger picture.
30. There have been significant increases in the demand for primary state school places and the Council is necessarily developing a strategy to meet this. In so doing, it will be very important to ensure that work continues to improve the educational attainment of specific groups including BAME pupils. 'There has been a strong leadership and partnership focus on raising attainment with a resulting marked improvement in results including for children from BME groups. Bristol Legacy Commission has contributed to this improvement drive through Bristol Education Partnership'.

31. Greater linkage between the LSP Priorities and the Single Equality Scheme would add focus and clarity to the core equality priorities and ensure these are “red-lined” for budget cuts. This would provide greater purpose and relevance for the next Single Equality Scheme. Priorities should shape data collection as well as your data collection shaping priorities.
32. LSP partners thought that a lot of excellent work was going on but that there was more scope for joining up processes within the council. Representatives thought there were still some missing pieces “the council responds when we bring things to the table but needs to be more proactive”. Issues such as Gypsy and Travellers, asylum seekers; and health and well-being were seen as needing more political leadership. The council's support for City of Sanctuary did galvanise the commitment to support for and integration of asylum-seekers and refugees'

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

33. Equality forums in the city are excellent compared to other councils and are being driven by the equalities communities rather than the council. The Council has funded research to help the equality forums become free standing and access other funding. Women’s Voice and Influence research led to a proposal to establish a forum for discussing gender issues. External consultants are carrying out research for the race forum which was moribund at one stage but is currently in transition to become a free standing organisation. Neighbourhood partnerships have equalities groups as members.
34. The council has done some excellent work with the Gypsy and Traveller community. The Gypsy and Traveller community cohesion team worked with the voluntary sector partners and other councils e.g. South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. The “Talking Cultures” DVD has been an example to other councils. The Gypsy and Traveller community was involved in training staff from the Council and other agencies and in the layout of sites. Walkabout sessions for council and Health Service managers improved their understanding of the issues affecting the community.
35. The Council introduced a council pledge for services affecting children in care “Would it be good enough for my child?” The initiative won two national awards. Children in care meet twice a year with the senior leadership. Funding is provided for “Our Voice” magazine which is developed and designed by young people in care. This is also circulated to all staff.

36. A film to tackle age discrimination called “Acting My Age” with 10 school lessons has been put together by adult social care and teachers. The project will be going into Bristol schools in early 2012.
37. The Council provides support to help service users and stakeholders engage with the community e.g. the Fawcett Society received support from BCC to help produce their recent report.
38. The Council assisted a local third sector infrastructure agency VOSCUR and others partners to help them with fund raising bids.
39. The Strategic Partnership Against Hate Crime said that interaction with the council was good. It is involved in tackling hate crime including racist crime in partnership with the council, for example work with SARI (Support Against Racial Incidents) as reporting levels for racist crime are high.
40. Other examples of community engagement making a difference:
 - Home adaptations – engagement focus group with disabled people resulted in changing the assessment process so it took place in a neutral venue not the person’s home (unless requested) as disabled people said they felt more comfortable this way.
 - Use of local voluntary sector to do door-knocking to identify hidden homelessness and reasons for not accessing the service, leading to an action plan to improve.
 - Councils supports “Pride” and “Shout Out” also provides support for faith and community events; job fairs brought in more interest in fostering.
 - BCC Health and Social care actively engages with service users and Careers services to inform projects and other work e.g. LinkAge; personalisation road shows with the disability forum, partnership boards.

Areas for consideration:

41. The Council is excellent at facilitating faith groups but faith groups do have capacity and could do more. BCC need to tap into that capacity.
42. There is a lack of accessibility in key council buildings with examples of changing places for children and disabled people not being fully accessible or available.
43. The “crowd sourcing for cuts” process is excellent but there was no data on who was visiting the site and leaving comments/votes.

44. Bristol has been fairly slow to engage older people in “direct payments”. Low numbers are being processed at the moment. Bristol could usefully learn how higher numbers have been achieved by other authorities in the region.
45. There is a danger of always engaging with the “usual suspects” in tenant participation. There are 21 tenant associations of which 18 are active. These are not always representative of the diversity of the neighbourhoods.
46. The comment was made that the council does raise awareness of LGBT issues but people are still scared to come out. More confidence building work maybe required with support from Stonewall.
47. BAME groups said they were not always given feedback after consultation had taken place.
48. BCC focuses too much on using equalities groups. The infrastructure of equalities groups is good but they don’t feed down to all groups some of which are tiny. Not all the smaller communities are able to access them.
49. Concerns raised by the voluntary sector included:
 - The voluntary sector overall feel they don’t get a chance to influence council decisions. “people we represent feel the effect of the cuts more – we don’t get consulted on the impact abolishing a service will make” – disability carers.
 - the equalities team is very accessible but the rest of the council is harder to access.
 - A cut of 5% to voluntary sector providers which was top sliced should have been targeted more intelligently.
 - the council’s communications team could be more supportive of the equalities agenda for example by supporting International Women’s Day events.
50. A number of concerns were raised during the challenge from disability stakeholders. These include comments that:
 - the council does not put funding into voluntary organisations in proportion to the numbers of people they reach e.g. BAME get more money than disabled people.
 - the Cycle City steering group has no disabled people's group representation.
 - No EqIA was done on disabled people sharing footpaths with cyclists.
 - a representative of the disability equality forum said that it feels they are not always listened to by the Council, although representatives of other disability groups gave a more positive view of their engagement.

51. 75% of the community is happy with council services at the last survey. However, the target is to improve to 90% overall by 2014 (BAME currently at 64%).

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

52. There were many examples of the council making a difference to the inequalities faced by local people:

- Benefit take-up of £47 million for older people, disabled people and single parents.
- Low use bus services retained so as not to increase social exclusion of older people.
- Increased attendance at summer reading schemes for children on free school meals and those with language needs has helped prevent an education dip over the summer holidays.
- Increased number of LGBT and BAME cases being reported to multi-agency risk assessment conferences from 10% to 15% in one year.
- Increased bids through Home Choice from 65 plus year olds (10% to 16.5% made bid in last month) and from disabled people (27.5% to 35.5% made bid in last month).

53. The Council has used EqIAs effectively to design and develop services for its diverse community. Examples include:

- Traffic signal switch off – after a pilot the associated engagement process with disability groups demonstrated that the plan would have negative impact so was not implemented beyond pilot.
- Proposed cut to welfare rights and voluntary sector advice services were revoked due to the EqIA showing negative impact on vulnerable groups.
- A community transport procurement process was halted when an EqIA showed that it wasn't inclusive and accessible. The Council are now doing a full need assessment.
- A proposed bus lane in area of city that has high number of LGBT businesses was revised due to an EqIA showing a disproportionately negative impact on the community.
- A decision was made not to charge to secure tenants belongings after an EqIA showed it would have a detrimental impact on the BAME community due to there being a greater incidence of larger families.
- Budget review consultation with the Older Peoples Forum resulted in costly services being retained as users valued them.

54. The Council provides good services for vulnerable and marginalised groups in its community. Examples include:

- Work on domestic violence with Gypsies and Travellers; work with the Roumanian Roma community; Gypsy and traveller outreach work; a Roma seminar which was well supported; a Roma drop in centre with on average 20 families using it.
- The Illminster Children's Centre is an excellent example of specialist support to disabled children including integration with non-disabled children. There is an innovative/non-bureaucratic approach to short breaks for disabled children.
- The Malcolm X Somali advice centre provides key links for the Somali community to other agencies.

55. A joint mental health team is looking at whole commissioning cycle and will be developing a commissioning framework.

56. The home adaptations service was unable to meet the demand for assessment in homes so introduced a pilot scheme for groups to be assessed in assessment centres, to try out the equipment, choose their own and add money to upgrade or alter if they wish. Housing services also developed a welcome home DVD for new tenants raising their expectations of a tenancy and highlighting new initiatives.

57. Phoenix Court Customer Service Point has good accessibility and various ways that service users can report incidents or pay council charges staff desks; self service; high and low payment points. In addition mystery shoppers are employed by service heads using service users to ensure accessibility and a responsive service.

58. The in-house translation service co-ordinates 180 casual interpreters. Top translations include Somali, British Sign Language (BSL), Polish, Roumanian and Kurdish. BSL interpreters said they are regularly employed by BCC to sign at meetings.

59. Outreach work done by the commissioning team to encourage more applications from smaller and minority organisations e.g. tender sessions, including black communities as critical friends, supporting smaller organisations to set up consortia for funding. The Council has also organised provider open days to discuss equality impact of contracts.

60. A number of equalities groups are helping to shape and enhance policy and practice within children and young people's services, for example LGBT groups on tackling homophobic bullying in schools, disability groups on services to disabled children and the children in care council on work with children in care. As a result of the latter, RVoice is the regular newsletter

written by and for children in care. This is not only circulated to all children and young people in care in Bristol but also to all staff to raise awareness.

61. Bristol has an outstanding adoption service. LGBT individuals are now coming forward to be considered as foster parents. This has led to an improved placement of children.

62. Basic key skills for adults level 1 and level 2 is delivered in family centres and schools. When funding for English As a Second Language was cut by 60%, trained volunteers gave conversation practice.

63. The Council is tackling the problem of low attainment in its schools. Influential community and business leaders, the universities, parents of children are also taking ownership of attainment. There has been an attitudinal change and strong professional development for teachers. The result has been rapidly improving achievement in schools e.g. for secondary schools, up 5% per year for 5 years.

64. There has also been an improved performance for BAME groups especially amongst Somali children which is starting to reduce the gap. There has been strong support for getting ethnic minority asylum seeker children into school. The Asylum Service has strong links with other services and external partners.

Areas for consideration:

65. There is a low take up of direct payments for adult social care. It is currently 10% with a target to be 50% in two years time but there is no plan for how to achieve this. There is poor take up amongst BAME people generally although Somali take up is good.

66. Although educational attainment levels are improving for all children the educational attainment gap is not closing for some BAME children and white British boys are still under attaining.

67. Some staff are highly adept and confident to ask equality profile questions of customers (such as Phoenix Court staff) but there is still the need to increase the confidence of some staff to ask customers and clients' questions around sexual orientation and tackle disability equality.

68. Day Services appear highly valued but some are out of date and not meeting needs. Also they often fail to reach BAME service users.

69. Need to monitor if the outreach work around commissioning has helped to bring in more applications from smaller minority organisations.

70. The service plan for City Transport included no equality objectives yet there is evidence that this was a priority for local disabled people.

71. Disabled people are under-represented in council house tenancies, which is surprising given their greater need. However other than help to place bids using the choice based letting there appears to be no action plan to address this.

3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

Strengths:

72. There is a strong sense of commitment to equalities and diversity from senior managers and HR about the workforce – sense that the job is not done and there is more to do.

73. The Council has been innovative and determined in its efforts to improve the diversity of the workforce with regards to BAME people. It has commissioned research on the barriers and funded a 25 point action plan to address them. Initiatives include Reverse Mentoring; revision of the recruitment and selection policy to include BAME staff on selection panels, over twenty have been trained; involving the community in selection processes; Human Resources (HR) has visited schools in high BAME areas to encourage pupils to consider careers in the council; apprenticeships and paid undergraduate internships are targeted at BAMEs.

74. There has been an upward trend in the number of BAME employees in the workforce from 7.1% to 8.4% since 2009 but much greater progress is still needed. Social Care and other front line services such as customer services, housing have highest levels of BAME staff in the organisation e.g. customer services has 14% BAME staff.

75. There has been good progress on the gender balance at senior levels.

76. Diversity Leadership training is mandatory for 1st 2nd and 3rd tier managers. There has been 96% attendance. This training is being rolled out for 4/5 tier employees.

77. The appraisal scheme includes diversity objectives.

78. Flexible working is well embedded in the organisation e.g. there are job sharers in senior posts.

79. The Council is keen to empower its employees in addressing budget cuts. In a recent downsizing of the planning department, staff mapped the number of planning applications and staff time and changed their hours accordingly. This solution was accepted by Senior Leadership Team who will review it in two years.

80. There are effective and well supported self organised staff groups which are consulted on all policies.

81. The Council has recognised that staff survey results reflected growing dissatisfaction amongst staff with a disability and are working with HR to address the issues.

82. Senior management diversity champions are supportive and accessible. An example of how the organisation has changed is the open discussion of LGBT issues compared to 4-5 years ago.

Areas for consideration:

83. The BAME workforce profile has been the subject of a lot of focus and intervention in recent years but it is still not representative of the local community and 2011 census figures are likely to widen the gap. The BAME staff pay profile also remains “bottom heavy”. Whilst efforts to address these issues are impressive it will be important for the council to carry out a full evaluation of all the projects and initiatives around BAME employment and progression to determine which have been successful and which have not and why. For example we understand that although BAME staff have been trained to take part in selection panels, they have not actually done so yet. The BAME staff group felt that Senior Leadership Team (SLT) did not understand the importance of having BAME senior managers as role models. Redeployment opportunities for BAMEs are restricted because they are often in low paid low skilled jobs and less likely to have the qualifications for the next level up. The Council could consider widening its comparator figures for the population to possibly include the wider sub region area.

84. External stakeholders wanted the community to be told about HR targets on staffing levels to reflect the community and to be given figures about how many disabled people or BAME people the council actually employs.

85. Staff groups felt that consultation on policies and EqIAs was done with too little notice. They would like to have the forward plans on EqIAs and policies and more training on EqIAs.

86. Although there is good equalities training for senior managers, training for staff below senior manager level has been inconsistent. To some extent this is now being addressed with training for 4th and 5th tier employees.

87. Significant anxiety was raised by disabled employees about the impact of budget cuts - either actual or perceived that it will be disadvantageous to them.

88. Disabled employees feel they have been overlooked by the Single Equality Scheme and that the (draft) Workforce Strategy also doesn't give sufficient focus to their issues.

89. Some staff felt that management attitudes and understanding at all levels needs more work e.g. around understanding the purpose of staff groups and encouraging staff to attend; supporting disabled staff and making reasonable adjustments. One employee forum member said that managers used to "think outside the box" on reasonable adjustments and other support for disabled employees but now are too bureaucratic and there are too many processes with managers referring everything to Occupational Health.

90. Poor levels of equality profile data provided by highest paid managers (1 in 5 of those earning £50,000 has not provided data).

4. Examples of innovative projects and initiatives

1. Programme of projects to increase the workforce diversity with regards to people from a BAME background

Following research the council developed a programme of 25 projects to address the issue. Innovative projects include opportunities for reverse mentoring: white managers to be mentored by BAME staff; involvement of trained BAME staff on selection panels; community representatives on selection panels; a BME Leadership Programme; targeted apprenticeship and internship schemes.

2. Ilminster specialist children's centre and nursery school

The Specialist Children's Centre serves a predominantly white deprived community. The centre has health professionals on site with consulting and waiting rooms, hydrotherapy pool, soft play, assessment room with one way mirror, sensory room, children's kitchen - also used by young mums to learn cooking. It provides day care for children under three years old. The centre runs a dad's group once a month, baby massage, feeding groups and mother & baby plus a session for those suffering domestic abuse.

The Nursery School provides 4 classes of 3 to 4 year old with 30 in each class with one teacher and 2 early year practitioners, following Key Stage1 curriculum. The nursery also caters for 21 children with severe and complex needs, aged 3 to 7, split into 3 classes of 7. Asian inter-family marriage has led to high numbers of children with severe and complex difficulties. Children from other classes join the disabled children for singing, art and other activities. Similarly some of the disabled children go classes for Key Stage 1 lessons. A recent Ofsted report showed good educational achievement. Parents gave positive feedback, attended parents evening and provided support. Parents recently ran an Inset Day on ethnicity and ran separate groups for each country represented. During the last five years the BAME and Eastern European community has grown and at one point the school had 18 different languages spoken. It has received a Minority Achievement Grant.

Some of the special features of the school include:

- Embossed dado rails at child height around the walls to signpost blind & partially sighted children
- Feelings Board to assist children to express how they feel and can be used for safeguarding.
- All Children learn signing, children with more complex needs learn appropriate signing schemes.
- Part-time foreign language teacher visits regularly.
- Child Protection Plans known by all workers.
- Once a week parents come in to hear singing so they learn the songs and signing. Blind children use touch signing.

5. Signposting to areas of good practice

Direct Payments/Personalisation Agenda

Cornwall Council's Adult Social Care Department has made great strides on this issue which could inform provide Bristol City Council's approach.

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