

Summary Sheet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 20 June 2018

Report Title

Equality and Diversity Peer Review Findings and Progress Update

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Rebecca Woolley, National Management Trainee, Assistant Chief Executive Office
01709 254020 or rebecca.woolley@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

All Wards

Summary

In October 2017, a peer review of Equality and Diversity within Rotherham Council was conducted by officers and members from Barnsley and Doncaster Councils. The purpose of this peer review was to offer an external assessment of the Council's self-evaluation against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

As a result of the peer review findings, an action plan has been developed to drive forward improvements and this is structured around five key themes.

This report includes the outcome of the peer review and an update on progress.

Recommendations

1. That the findings and recommendations of the Equalities and Diversity Peer Review be noted
2. That the progress made to date on implementing the recommendations of the Equalities and Diversity Peer Review be noted.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix A Equalities and Diversity narrative report for equality peer review 11th and 12th October 2017
Appendix B Programme Plan.

Background Papers

Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

Self-evaluation

Equality Framework for Local Government: Developing Level Diversity Peer Challenge Final Report Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, 11th – 12th October 2017

Equality for All Strategy 2016-19

Building Stronger Communities Strategy.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Equality and Diversity Peer Review Findings and Progress Update

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the findings and recommendations of the Equalities and Diversity Peer Review be noted.
- 1.2 That the progress made to date on implementing the recommendations of the Equalities and Diversity Peer Review be noted.

2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2017, a peer review of Equalities and Diversity within Rotherham Council was conducted by officers and members from Barnsley and Doncaster Councils. The purpose of this peer review was to offer an external assessment of the Council's self-evaluation against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).
- 2.2 The EFLG comprises five performance areas: knowing your communities; leadership, partnership and organisational commitment; involving your communities; responsive services and customer care; and a skilled and committed workforce.
- 2.3 This peer review focussed predominately on the first two performance areas – 'knowing your communities' and 'leadership, partnership and organisational commitment.' However, relevant observations around the other performance areas were also noted by the peer review team.
- 2.4 Performance against the framework is measured using three levels of achievement: 'developing', 'achieving' and 'excellent.' The criteria to meet the 'developing' level includes that systems are in place and that key policies and procedures relating to equalities have been adopted. The 'achieving' level focuses on the implementation of these systems, policies and procedures. The 'excellent' level covers being able to identify, assess and demonstrate the outcomes of the actions taken. It is also possible for Councils to fall short of any of these three levels.
- 2.5 Prior to the peer review, Rotherham Council completed its own self-assessment which evaluated that the Council is currently working at the 'developing' level. The self-assessment identified a number of areas of good practice, including the adoption of the 'Equality for All Strategy'; the establishment of a Corporate Equalities Group chaired by Councillor Alam, Cabinet Portfolio Lead; the development of equality objectives encompassing both employment and service delivery and the development of the Building Stronger Communities Strategy.
- 2.6 The self-evaluation also identified the need to improve in key areas, such as ensuring that regular equalities data analysis is in place, supporting staff to understand and implement equalities principles and embedding a consistent approach to engagement and consultation.

2.7 The Peer Review Team agreed with Rotherham Council's self-assessment that it is currently performing at the 'developing' level, which means that the Council currently 'understands the importance of equality.'

2.8 A number of strengths were identified by the Peer Review Team, including examples where the Council is working above the 'developing level'. The Peer Review team found that:

- The Equality for All Strategy is forming a strong foundation in building robust Equality and Diversity infrastructure.
- There are examples of excellent practice amongst frontline staff (such as the Neighbourhoods Teams).
- Core pieces of data are in place (such as JSNA, borough/ward profiles etc.)
- Data sharing systems are in place, including through the Rotherham Together Partnership.
- There are examples of services using data to develop more responsive services (for example, Sight and Sound, Safer Neighbourhoods).
- Some services are using engagement activity to inform service planning and decision-making (for example, Different but Equal, Views from Rotherham, Early Help).
- There is evidence of strong political and executive leadership and commitment to the Equalities agenda at a senior level.

2.9 Overall, the findings of the Peer Review align with the Council's own assessment that significant progress has been made to lay the foundations for equalities.

3. Key Issues

3.1 As well as identifying key strengths in Rotherham's approach to equalities, the peer review team also identified a number of areas for further development. These are outlined below.

3.2 Knowing Your Communities

Whilst it was found that the Council gathers and has access to key equalities data, the way that the Council utilises and acts upon this information was identified as an area that requires further improvement. For example, it was found that the process of sharing equalities data with partners doesn't always happen as effectively as it should, and that analysis of equalities data rarely explores deeper issues around the inequalities that certain groups experience. The peer review also highlighted that there are currently gaps in the Council's equalities data around certain protected characteristics, with a low volume of data available on certain groups such as the LGBTQ community and the Gypsy Traveller community. It was also found that there is a lack of evidence of data gathered on intersectional issues, such as the experiences of BME older people.

Additionally, it was found that community engagement practice currently does not facilitate a better understanding of the differing needs and priorities of certain communities. The Rotherham Voice report was given as an example, as the report did not explain how the project had made efforts to reach different sections of the community or evaluate how successfully it had done this.

3.3 Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Overall, the Peer Review Team was impressed with the practice and commitment of senior leadership within the Council, and also found excellent practice amongst certain frontline staff regarding equalities and diversity.

However, it was found that this is not currently embedded across the organisation, with the standard of equality analysis and the inclusion of equality and diversity objectives within service plans being variable. It was also suggested that equality and diversity gets 'stuck in the middle', with the daily demands upon middle managers currently limiting their capacity to prioritise equalities.

The peer review team also made suggestions on how existing practice could be further developed. It was recommended that for the 'Equalities for All' Strategy to be effective, it should be reviewed and updated annually to ensure that progress and performance is tracked and emerging priorities are identified. Additionally, it was suggested that all elected members should be encouraged to engage with equality and diversity training.

3.4 Observations on the other performance areas of the EFLG

Although the basis of the peer review was the first two performance measures (knowing your communities and leadership, partnership and organisational commitment) the peer review team also made observations relating to the other performance areas.

The team suggested that the Council's approach to involving the community could be improved in several ways. This included feeding back following consultations, ensuring hard to reach groups were reached and analysing community engagement results by protected characteristics. It was also suggested that particularly young people do not always feel listened to as a result of engagement with the Council, or assume that they will not be taken seriously.

The peer review team also suggested that the Council could do more to support and empower communities, such as by championing local activities on social media and by simplifying the process of applying for community grants.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 4.1 The peer review team made a number of recommendations as to how the Council could progress to the 'achieving' level. From these recommendations, the Council identified five key areas to focus on. These are outlined below:

- The Council needs to embed standards around equalities and diversity across the organisation, by determining what information Directorates should collect, how they should do this and how this information will inform decisions about services. This should include embedding equalities within Service Plans as well as influencing the design and commissioning of services.
- There also needs to be a more comprehensive and consistent approach to Equality Impact Assessments.
- A comprehensive evaluation of the current policy and action plan should take place, with the completion of an annual report with more outward facing objectives. This will ensure that the Council can be more responsive and proactive in identifying emerging equalities and diversity priorities.
- A Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit should be developed so that the Council has a clear, consistent and joined up approach to community engagement, which gives appropriate consideration to equality and diversity.
- Officers and members should be supported to build the knowledge and expertise to embed equalities protocols and practice, and representation from all protected groups in the workforce should be increased.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Although there will not be a requirement to consult on the implementation of the peer review recommendations, some of the actions will have a considerable impact on wider consultation practice within the Council.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 6.1 Considerable progress has already been made in implementing the recommendations from the peer review. The Council Plan for 2018/19 has been refreshed and priority 5 (a modern, efficient Council) now includes an action to ensure that the Council complies with good practice in equalities. To ensure implementation of this action, the % of recommendations implemented from the Equalities Peer review will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reported to the Cabinet/Commissioners' Decision Making meetings. In addition, the equalities section within the Service Plan template has been reviewed and strengthened to ensure accountability across the organisation.
- 6.2 The approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) has been reviewed, including the equality analysis form and guidance. A team briefing was produced and the equality analysis form and guidance were made centrally accessible on the Intranet to ensure that the workforce is informed regarding EIAs and that this information is easily accessible.
- 6.3 The Equality and Diversity policy has been reviewed and refreshed, along with the strategy and accompanying action plan. An annual report on the strategy is in development which will evaluate performance to date on the various objectives, and determine any key priorities. This will be completed by the end of July 2018.

- 6.4 Work to develop a Community Engagement Strategy and Toolkit is in progress. In March 2018, The Senior Leadership Team approved the proposal to develop the strategy and toolkit, along with the establishment of a Corporate Consultation Group, which will provide corporate oversight to consultations happening across the organisation. The aim of the toolkit, strategy and supporting group is to ensure that consultation and engagement plays an integral role in all change proposals and decision-making.
- 6.5 A central database of key contacts is also in development, which will be accessible to all Directorates to support consultation practice. This database will include contact information for Equality Groups and particularly those that are identified as 'hard-to-reach.' This will support Directorates to ensure that consultation and engagement practice is more inclusive.
- 6.6 The mandatory e-learning for new staff has been reviewed, and a new e-learning module has been designed which will launch in June 2018. New face-to-face Customer Services training with an equalities element included has also been developed to ensure that all frontline staff have the appropriate knowledge and expertise around equalities and diversity. The delivery of this training will coincide with the launch of the e-learning training in June 2018.
- 6.7 Specialist training will also be developed, which will cover LGBTQ and disabilities.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 Not Applicable.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The actions outlined within this report will support the Council to meet its legal duty relating to equality and diversity, as well as consultation.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report. However, there will be actions relating to organisational development and particularly developing the training offer regarding equalities and diversity.

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 Improving the engagement and equality practice will have a positive impact upon both Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults, as it should facilitate both groups having a stronger voice within the borough.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 Implementing the findings and recommendations of the peer review will support the Council to meet its legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:

- Race

- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

- 12.1 This report will impact on the way that all Directorates approach equality and diversity, and the way that key data is used across the Council to influence decision-making and service-delivery.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The Council needs to ensure that it complies with its equality duties. Failure to do so would result in the potential for members of the public and staff being treated unfairly and, potentially, the risk of legal action. The work of the Equalities team and the delivery of the action plan, will ensure that this risk is minimised.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Jackie Mould, Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement
Zaidah Ahmed, Corporate Equalities and Diversity Officer

Report Author: Rebecca Woolley, National Management Trainee

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