

Diversity Peer Challenge

Cheshire West and Chester Council

5th & 6th July 2011

Report



1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Local Government Improvement and Development 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.

Peers were:

Councillor Stuart West – Shropshire Council and Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
Kal Parkash – Shropshire Council
Steve Shaw – London Borough of Greenwich

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.

2. Executive summary and recommendations

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

Cheshire West and Chester Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Achieving level of the Equality Framework.

The council provided excellent comprehensive documentation supporting their assessment, and were able to back up this documentation through the interviews and focus groups that were held on site.

This relatively new organisation has seized the opportunities that this offers, embedding a culture of inclusivity and meeting customer needs into its new structures and ethos. There are many examples of proactive approach to equality, consultation, involvement and inclusion. These include inviting partners and others to comment on their website,

establishing reference groups, and aiming for good internal communication, particularly from the Chief Executive. Sustaining the momentum since inception may prove to be the challenge, but Cheshire West and Chester Council is demonstrating a good approach and aspiring to be the best it can be for its citizens. This ran right through the organisation, and across all service areas.

Services have largely been designed or influenced by consultation and engagement with local people, service users and reference groups. The examples given in Section 3.4 'Responsive Services and Customer Care' are a sample of the many examples that were given, and the list is by no means exhaustive.

The Council leadership took the opportunity to build equality and diversity into the new culture with the start of the authority in 2009 when it became a unitary authority. The simple concept of "Everybody In" has enabled them to start the organisation with a sense of inclusiveness and opportunity for all, permeating across all staff groups and service areas.

To help the council improve we have made a number of recommendations. These are:

1. To update the 'Knowing your Communities' Report for 2011/12 and 'Story of Place' after 2011 Census information is published.
2. A Corporate focus or 'surge' on Culture and Recreation to make a difference to community engagement and help address health inequalities that exist in some wards.
3. To refresh the Equality Impact Assessment process, in particular more use of data, to inform decision making.
4. Complete and update all equality and diversity information for the workforce in order that positive action strategies and equalities objectives/targets for addressing under representation can be put in place, tracked and performance reviewed.

2. The Council made the following observations upon the impact the peer challenge has had: -

The Diversity Peer Challenge process enabled us to assess and celebrate our achievements in relation to the equality and diversity agenda. In developing our self assessment and narrative, we were able to ascertain where we had taken steps forward and evaluate the quality of our progress. The challenge prompted the Council to collate a wide range of case studies that demonstrate the outcomes of our work.

Preparing for the challenge has also helped engage staff and members, share good practice and raise the profile of equalities across the Council. It was heartening to hear the positive comments and testimonies we received from partners and community groups.

The judgement of the Peer Assessors provides us with valuable external and independent assessment of the areas for improvement. We can take this learning and continue to develop our approach with renewed confidence. The challenges we face have been heightened by budgetary and economic pressures. However, we are confident that our

continued efforts to integrate equality and diversity throughout our services will provide us with the best possible path to excellence:

Everybody In

Involved in shaping services and challenging set priorities

Interested in influencing and championing equality through effective partnership work

Inspired and motivated to promote equal life chances for everyone

Included in supporting communities to get on well together

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

- The authority uses Mosaic and other customer Insight data to gain better understanding of local communities and needs and is overlaid with other service specific data to ensure right service is being provided. The Revenue and Benefits Team have used the information to identify households not claiming benefits and to encourage take up where low.
- Ward profiles give detailed demographic and other equality information, including putting the ward in context with the whole council area. They are provided to every councillor so that they are fully aware of any inequalities that exist in their ward.
- Extensive equality mapping has been done of Ellesmere Port, due to its relatively high concentration of areas of deprivation compared to the rest of the borough, resulting in a Local Integrated Service Plan covering 10 Neighbourhood wards highlighting key characteristics on a geographical and communal basis.
- There is evidence of partner agencies sharing equality mapping data, for example, working with the PCT on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and regional work with Data Observatory, Research and Intelligence Collaborative (DORIC) feeding into the Sustainable Community Strategy, Health Inequalities Plan and Ageing Strategy.
- Participation, along with partners, on Equality Mapping training by a nationally recognised expert on equalities, community cohesion and social inclusion along with partners.
- The Research, Intelligence and Consultation (RIC) team is a strong resource. It produces good reports such as information on the Black & Minority Ethnic Community in Cheshire West and Chester and surveys such as the recent survey on personalised budgets and ward profiles. Research team identified gaps in 2009 when became Unitary and mapped each ward across strands and disaggregated national and performance indicators by locality.
- The RIC team commissioned reports such as ‘Lions’ Pride’ examining issues facing LGB people in West Cheshire following targeted discussion groups.
- There are a range of community surveys and questionnaires such as ‘Our Community Survey 2010’ and consultations on 2011 budget.
- The Local Economic Assessment ‘Story of Place’ report (February 2011) includes a section on people and communities and identifies deprived ward communities and threat of an ageing population to economy.

- The 2010 Faith Sector Audit for West Cheshire (carried out with 'Link Up') identified faith groups, projects and initiatives being undertaken.
- There is success in engaging the Bangladeshi Community in one particular ward through community events leading to establishment of BME Women's Group.
- Equality Objectives were clearly stated in Directorate Service Plans across the Council using equalities data and information linked to the Single Equality Scheme.
- There is evidence of wide dissemination of equalities objectives, targets, and information (such as quarterly monitoring reports) to Corporate Management Team, Equalities Steering Group, Overview & Scrutiny and officers.
- Complaints mapped against six equality strands.
- Gypsies and Travellers have been identified as the largest minority ethnic group in Cheshire. Outreach work with them helped to map their health needs in new encampments.
- Children's Centres have been located in areas where the highest needs were identified through equality mapping.
- Use of external networks such as Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Equality Leads Group (CHEWS) group for sharing best practice and benchmarking data.
- Data mapping by Marketing and Communications team on use of social media sites and on-line services such as Insight users.

Areas for consideration:

- Equality Monitoring Report "Knowing our communities" from 2009 to be refreshed and made available to staff and managers.
- The authority may want to consider consolidating all its equality related performance targets such as national indicators and separate targets from Corporate Plan into general Headline Equality Indicators.
- Review 'Story of Place' report after 2011 Census information is published as there is likely to be significant changes in data.

3.2. Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- Leadership is demonstrated on equality by all key players: the Chief Executive, the Leader and the Member Champion. The Chief Executive ensures that staff know it is important to him and senior team when communicating with staff (e.g. example 'Chief Executive' sessions, staff conferences and briefings and 'keeping staff informed' emails). The Leader focuses on a number of key equality projects (e.g. within Children's Safeguarding), and is a visible figure at many community events in the Borough, including celebrations such as Eid, Diwali and Chinese New Year which raises Council profile and demonstrates the importance of celebrating diversity.
- The Corporate Equality Steering Group (CESG) provides good strategic leadership (describes itself as 'engine room to drive equality and diversity agenda'). Structure and membership and reporting bodies such as Directorate groups and 'Everybody In Employee panel' is successful at achieving officer buy in. Also linked with external equality and diversity group for sharing best practice and benchmarking.
- The Leadership and Policy, Performance and Partnership team hold Service Directors and heads to account over spending plans and budget cuts by challenging the impact on equality groups. In one case, this led to decision to invest in 'Supporting People

Service' and re-commissioning of some work where adverse impact on local vulnerable residents was identified.

- The 'Everybody In' concept was adopted at the authority's inception. This means that appreciation of diversity and supporting inclusiveness are core values. The 'Everybody In Employee Panel' has been a successful staff sounding board for discussing equality and diversity issues. Addressing inequality is seen as the vehicle for ensuring that customers or residents are put first and is part of the Council's overall vision that will drive positive outcomes for local communities.
- Councillors sit on some of the community focus groups. This enables them to get closer to equality and diversity issues at ground level. This helps to reinforce the confidence from staff and managers that councillors from all parties are on board with the equality agenda.
- Councillors have a personal budget (£10,000) to fund individual projects within their ward. This can be used to also contribute to shared projects with other Councillors to enable them to work collaboratively (eg several councillors pooling some money to support a Regatta and road crossing).
- There are good examples of strong partnership working, supported by members of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) who indicated that strong partnership working contributed to the running of successful services. Good examples of partnership work include:
 - shared services with neighbouring Councils.
 - the North West Gypsies and Travellers Strategy Group and its work with Gypsies and Travellers within the Ellesmere Port area (includes a dedicated Cheshire Partnership Gypsy and Traveller Coordinator)
 - the recent 'Prevent Strategy' self-assessment was a partnership project and led to an action plan.
 - work on recent welfare reforms involved sharing equality impact assessments among partners, and the partnership taking a joint and targeted approach to implement the changes.
- Work with the Local Chamber of Commerce to improve links with local businesses and to ensure that appropriate courses and training programmes are run by Further/Higher education colleges so that skills needed by local employers are available.
- Equality objectives are set at corporate level and are embedded throughout the Council's performance management framework from Business Plans to priorities in Area Partnership Boards down to staff appraisal system. Targets are monitored across the council using National Indicators and those from the Corporate Plan and made available to all managers on the intranet where targets can be tracked
- Community focus groups feel valued by the Council because they still receive financial support despite the well publicised cuts. There has been £10 million investment in third sector and a seconded Council officer available to act as main contact for the Third Sector such as entering dialogue over funding and support. Funding is provided to a variety of community groups such as Eastern European Migrant Worker Project, Gypsy & Traveller Voice, the Turkish Association, Wah Lei and the Cheshire Asian and Minority Communities Council. In addition, the Disability Information Advice Line (DIAL) was commissioned by the Council to provide advice and information to people with disabilities.
- Hate crime reporting process set up with call handlers trained by the police. Crimes can be reported in Council reception areas and through Customer Services. Incidents are monitored and there has been a recent increase in disability hate crime which is being investigated further to identify actions to take,

Areas for consideration:

- The legacy councils were at different stages in their equality journey when the new unitary was established. Some work is still needed in some areas to ensure that all areas of the council's work and influence are well developed. The CESG has begun this work, and should be encouraged to continue its progress.
- Community groups understand the financial pressures the council is under, but there could be more flexible ways that the council could support them, rather than direct funding. For example, providing a venue or office space. Where grants are cut, it is important to ensure that community groups have the required notice and support, particularly if new funding streams emerge. Although this is currently being addressed, there were some concerns that this support may be lost in future.
- Some improvement to consultation feedback may be needed. This is partly about feedback to the LSP, but also on clearly communicating the links between equality impact assessments, consultation, and the resulting information used to rationalise changes being made. Improved feedback from consultation supports good relations with the LSP partners and voluntary and community sectors, and helps to build capacity through knowledge.
- There were some concerns on embedding equality into new initiatives (such as locality working). The authority should ensure that the good work it has started embedding equality in all work of the new organisation should continue in the future. This includes ensuring that new Scrutiny arrangements include considerations of equality and diversity.

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- There is a clear structured engagement process with all sectors of the community as evidenced by Corporate plans, Sustainable Community Strategy, Multi-Agency Group, LSP and various other engagement groups such as 'Safer and Stronger and Community Cohesion'. Part of this structured approach is to tackle engagement by geography at three distinct levels using local networks at ground level, then community forums and Area Partnership Boards for consulting across a wider area.
- There are many examples of positive engagement with different communities through events, seeking regular advice, partnership working and networks. The different engagement mechanisms use different techniques (such as celebration events, YouTube, funding and supporting reference groups), and the authority has demonstrated how it acts on the information gathered through its various engagement mechanisms. For example a new 3rd Sector Resource centre is being built by the council which will house voluntary and community sector groups along with a GP surgery. Feedback is provided through community forums and annually on the website. There is also a "you said, we did" section on the council's website.
- Community engagement events involve a large range of groups across all equality and diversity strands and also in size such as smaller Bangladeshi and Chinese communities identified in some ward areas.
- Partners in the Multi-agency Group all contributed to work with Gypsies and Travellers communities. For example, a local community centre was established to provide services to this community to promote healthier and safer lifestyles and welcome packs regarding Council services and information on local councillors and wards.

- Voluntary and community organisations feel involved in decision making within the areas that they represent, for example there was big support for the Council funded ‘Eid at the Epic’ celebrations which has now become an annual event. They feel empowered to challenge and participate. Dial, Older People Forum, Women’s group & Multicultural group all cited good working relationships with key officers who are accessible and encourage participation and involvement.
- Locality working projects in Ellesmere Port have led to the integration of local services. There was good engagement with several community groups such as Turkish Association and positive outcomes were achieved, such as ESOL classes, venue for evening prayers and a Residents Advisory Group set up.
- The council recognises the importance of funding for community groups in continuing engagement, showing commitment and support to the voluntary and community sector in flexible ways – funding, staff support and use of venues. The Older People’s group is funded by the council and also has support from two members of the Research Team to help them collect and analyse data. The Multicultural group also received help to establish itself and seek sources of funding. The Women’s group was recently established and uses council facilities for meetings and events. Council officers attend the Access Group at Dial House, and they were able to offer two placements for people on the Future Jobs Fund scheme. The Third Sector Assembly was fully consulted over review of grant allocations on becoming a unitary authority and maintained for 12 months while the review was undertaken.
- Older People Network (OPN) started by Council still funded and supported despite cuts, with database of up to 700 members, and good councillor involvement. There are forums run every 3 months in different neighbourhoods with guest speakers, and regular engagement through discussion groups on specific services such as transport and provisions in rural areas.
- Engagement with younger people is varied; examples include work through Connexions Youth Service and running of anti-bullying strategy in schools. There is also the Parent Partnership providing support to parents and carers on free and confidential basis.
- Encouragement of young people in Council affairs with UK Youth Parliament representatives co-opted on overview and scrutiny committee and shadow area partnerships (held at times that can accommodate them). There is also a mock council held with college students participating.
- Council supported setting up of a Women’s Group and access to funding for projects such as training for women to become lifeguards and women only swimming classes.
- Engagement with West Cheshire Inter Faith Forum with ‘Link Up’s faith audit.
- Use of media to engage people through Council website, web casts, Facebook and YouTube.
- Lions Pride Reference Group engaging with LGB community leading to questionnaires which reference civil partnerships being improved when used by Council services.
- Use of new media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and webcasting to engage on Council issues, popular with the younger generation but also working professionals and older residents becoming more technologically aware.

Areas for consideration:

- The council has some geographic areas such as Ellesmere Port, where past investment has not managed to improve some deprivation indicators in the most deprived areas such as health and well-being and education of local residents. In view

of any additional focus and grant funding, it will be important to learn from the positive results of regeneration elsewhere and apply this to these areas.

- Voluntary groups felt engaged but at an earlier stage where possible before proposals are written into the process of service change or redesign so that their views are genuinely taken on board.
- More evidence was given on other peer reviews about digital inclusion and how the Council is making its services and consultations more accessible. It is clear that the authority is addressing barriers to the public through online services and consultation portals but, as with all large geographical authorities, the challenge will be ensuring it is able to consult with hard to reach groups without on-line access.
 - Focus on LGBT issues in community is often on negative aspects such as homophobic bullying etc... and more could be done to recognise and celebrate this diverse minority in line with other equality strands.
 - Locality working needs to be balanced across the authority as some localities wanting support for provision of services may feel disengaged if there is a perception that all the resources are only being put into certain areas.

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

- Co-location of all agencies in one place, where possible, to use resources more effectively e.g. HEET Centre dealing with Health, Education, Enterprise and Training. This includes the one stop shop for jobs, skills and housing advice in Ellesmere Port. This was established following engagement with local residents.
- The Council commissions targeted services in line with its community priorities and needs
- Policy team identified adverse impact on frontline service and challenged budget proposals resulting in investment in supporting people programme (at budget level above national level of allocation) and Youth services / Connexions.
- Examples from Community Forum publications regarding 'You said, we did'.
- Approach to localism is ahead of the planned government introduction as evidenced at neighbourhood level to ensure services meet needs locally.
- The Legal Team provide translation of school and transport appeals and provide updates on relevant equality and diversity legislation such as the Equality Act

Procurement and commissioning

- The authority uses the e-tendering system CHEST, which is accessible to all sizes of supplier and bidder.
- Streamlined procurement processes are being developed to enable low value construction to be tendered for by smaller local businesses.
- Council supports local suppliers through the marketing of tendering opportunities such as 'Meet the Buyer' events to assist in the completion of tender documents. Also runs provider forums to engage with the market to improve standards & quality, for example delivering dementia care.
- The council requires compliance with equalities and a good record as minimum standard at the pre-qualification stage. However, it is important that this is monitored as part of contract management.
- The Council has managed full procurement processes for Children and Younger People (CYP) services and included detailed specifications within Framework Agreements to reflect the needs of various parts of the community.

- Strategies lead to commissioning plans, which are all assessed for equality impacts. For example, Children's Centres and the 'Aiming High' government scheme.
- Commissioning is evidence-based. For example, homelessness support, and 'Supporting People'.
- There is a value for money approach to contract management and includes equality evaluation.
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Libraries

- Libraries find out the languages of new users to help plan ESOL classes in the borough.
- Customer services trained staff in libraries to deal with blue badge and concessionary fare applications, and basic customer service information to reduce the need for residents to travel and allows them access to these services locally.
- Video kiosks to allow customers to contact the call centre using web technology are located in libraries. Library staff are trained to assist if users experience difficulties.
- There is a lot of evidence of work currently undertaken in libraries to promote health and wellbeing:
 - Circus skills workshops, reading challenge
 - Wii Sports events for children and young people
 - Older People's Day Fair with contribution from the Police and OPN
 - Various taster sessions for adult learners week
 - "Easy Movers" armchair aerobics
 - Reading groups
 - "Letter Box Clubs" to improve life chances of looked after children by sending regular parcels with books and other resources
 - Reading group for visually impaired people

Revenues and Benefits

- Revenue and Benefits targeting deprived areas and conducting outreach work to increase benefits take up "our duty is to help people".

Marketing and Communication

- Marketing and Communications Service use many different media channels to respond to enquiries from the public and provide a quick response. Example includes use of twitter to provide emergency response to fixing a pathway/wall following an accident.
- 'Talking Together' partnership publication with Police, PCT and Fire & Rescue sent out three times a year.
- Council invited the Shaw Trust to examine the external website and accessibility across online channels

Children and Young People

- CYP Plan has three strategies all aimed at improving lives for vulnerable people so focussed already on data-led analysis of those most unequal
- The authority encourages engagement with looked after children. It has supported their role in influencing decisions and policy by having children or young people on Scrutiny panels to listen and contribute to debate.
- There are no children in care permanently excluded from school and excellent attendance has been achieved.

- Children's services participated in the joint CHAWREC (Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Race and Equality Centre) and Manchester Metropolitan University project on tackling racism in schools.
- Participation in Government 'Aiming High for Children with Disabilities' with use of Conway Centre to provide overnight residential stays for short breaks and outdoor activities for this targeted group.
- Raising the achievement levels of Gypsies and Travellers children is a priority for the education service.
- The Fostering programme is targeting the recruitment of a wider and more diverse representative group (particularly more BME and LGBT carers) in order to place a wide range of children in foster care.
- Investment in services for children with sensory impairments has been protected
- Early intervention and proactive work in multi-agency context led by YOS resulting in very good reduction in first time entrants to youth justice system and much improved education access for those leaving custody or orders.
- Allocation of additional resources such as music provision, targeted at schools where high percentage of pupils receive free school meals.
- Council Autism service rated by the National Autistic Society as 'Outstanding'. Also Joint CAMHS and Education provision achieved outstanding outcomes for children experiencing mental health problems. This was judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted
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Adults' Services

- There are varied inter-generational work projects in specific communities, for example, fishing activities, gardening through community gardens. This has often been funded through councillors' personal budgets (see section 3.2 Place Shaping and Leadership).

Areas for consideration:

- Equality Impact Assessments are about identifying both positive and negative impacts. The website implies that you only look for negative impacts whereas it is just as important to look for positive impacts as you may change the way you deliver services in order to increase the positive impact.
- The forthcoming investment in Leisure offers an important opportunity to support various community needs. It is recognised that the Council, with the support of future investment, could do more to provide a range of diverse sport activities for different sections of the community for example modern sport facilities or clubs for people with disabilities, special classes for older and younger people or BME groups and more Green outdoor Gyms in Parks for youths to keep occupied. The use of Equality Impact Assessments when commissioning of new Leisure Centres/Resources will help to identify some of these needs. We also encourage the council to look at how other authorities have been proactive in widened participation in sport and leisure in ways that local communities may not be aware of, rather than just acting on the suggestions of local communities. We understand that this work is already under way and we encourage Cheshire West and Chester to continue to improve in this area.
- Customer service information is not currently used right across the Council. The team are currently working on a single view of the customer database to ensure that this information is used by all services

3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

“This is a progressive and modern council and staff are very positive about working here”

Strengths:

- The workforce underwent a difficult change period in 2009 prior to becoming unitary resulting in a redundancies and a reduction in staff morale. These changes however appear to have strengthened the remaining workforce which identifies with the new organisation and its values.
- The council has established a positive employee relations culture within the new authority evidenced by low numbers of grievances, disciplinary cases and industrial action/employment tribunal cases. Trade Unions are seen as a valuable partner in the modernisation of the workforce. The willingness of staff and managers to embrace shared services and alternative delivery models indicates that this is a modern workforce. There are monthly meetings of the ‘People Panel’ which is attended by employee representatives from Directorates to discuss workforce issues.
- The Human Resources team is driving the equality agenda internally. It has prioritised the harmonisation of employee terms and conditions and the policies and procedures, to ensure fairness for all across the former legacy Councils.
- All of the Council’s policies are being or have been reviewed and reduced to a more manageable number. Revised policies are having their equality impacts assessed, and policies are being used to support equality and diversity in the workplace, for example the Dignity at Work procedure and flexible working policies.
- New ‘Shining Through’ Performance Appraisal introduced Council wide includes corporate objective covering equalities and a requirement to undertake the equality i-learning module.
- The council delivers a range of equalities training both on-line and tailored to specific services or groups of people for example ‘letting through light’ training on cultural differences. Training highly regarded by staff as is delivered in a way that helps them carry out their jobs. However, attendance or participation is not routinely monitored by equality characteristics. It is also not clear if diversity awareness training is being targeted at front line staff and if there has been any evaluation of the training for example where staff use i-learning modules/ workbooks or attendance at corporate training events. There has also been little evaluation of outcomes and benefits to local residents.
- There is a variety of learning, development and support for members such as buddy scheme for new members, Personal Development Plans, training and mentoring. Members receive regular briefings on key subjects such as Children’s Safeguarding, equality issues and commissioning methods at flexible times to enable high attendance.
- The authority achieved the Disability Two Ticks in 2009 and Investors in People award in May 2011.
- The authority is identifying gaps in workforce data by recent monitoring survey which attracted a good response. The authority took advice from ACAS, Stonewall and ‘Everyone in Employee Panel’ before sending out survey and supporting information to ensure accessibility, and to ensure all the relevant issues were being addressed.
- Analysis of the top three grades is done by gender, race and disability, identifying under-representation of both BME and disabled employees. However, this analysis does not appear to be leading to clear positive actions to address any inequalities or under-representation that may exist.

- There are a range of initiatives to attract younger people into the workforce such as apprenticeship scheme and outreach work in schools and colleges which in the past has led to placements resulting in significant appointments. The authority participates in the National Graduate Development Programme and offers work experience for students from local schools.

Areas for consideration:

- The 'Everybody in Employee Panel' for minority staff has recently experienced a fall in regular attendees. This may be because it is not clear how to join, or meetings not been widely publicised. The authority could therefore try and increase membership and across all equality strands or consider using individual forums for BME, disability etc but still include under the corporate umbrella of an 'everybody in' panel.
- The Equal Pay and terms & conditions review is still ongoing although good progress has been made given the scale of the challenge due to legacy authorities being at different stages.
- More could still be done on LGBT agenda corporately such as looking to get onto the Stonewall index (see section 5 for signposting)
- Staff satisfaction surveys in the past have not monitored feedback by equality characteristics.
- Although there is workforce monitoring on recruitment on gender, disability and race, this not been done consistently for other workforce issues such as training, development, bullying, harassment or grievances.
- Equality Impact Assessments on HR policies are not currently using all available data. For example recruitment and selection data, employee relations data (grievance, discipline, capability reviews and employment tribunal cases), redundancies, secondments, training and development, requests refused for flexible working all could be reviewed by equality strand to identify any adverse impact and how a change in the policy could prevent this.
- The 'You said, We did' initiative on the website could be established on the intranet for staff issues, ensuring that staff know that their contributions to consultation and engagement make a difference.

4. Examples of innovative projects and initiatives

- Individual budgets for councillors – Councillors use their personal annual budget (£10,000) imaginatively and collaboratively which has increased their involvement locally and enhanced the visibility of the council. Examples include the Boughton Heath and Vicars Cross series of funding for a playgroup for Under 5s where the member contributed £1,400 to a total cost of £1,600. In Northwich West Ward, the member contributed the full £5,500 cost for provision of an activities centre for older people.
- Relationships with the Gypsy and Travelling communities has improved dramatically, with community members coming forward to the council to ask for support, confident that they will get it. Work has been done to improve understanding of rights, including democratic rights, as well as education for the young people in these communities.
- Best example seen of Council equality objectives being properly mainstreamed into Directorate Service Plans.
- Success of 'Project Springboard' expansion from just home safety assessments by Cheshire Fire & Rescue, to the first stage of 'Single Assessment Process' involving

social services, health services and Age UK to review mobility aids, meals on wheels, or other support that the over 65's may need.

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5. Signposting to areas of good practice from Local Government Improvement and Development

- Procurement – Barrow Borough Council is successful in working with local SMEs to enable them to bid for contracts through the CHEST system.
- Sports and leisure – Barrow Borough Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Leeds City Council, Wycombe Borough Council, Barnsley, Preston. These all have a variety of examples of inclusion and increased participation in sport and leisure facilities by different minority groups.
- Stonewall Index – Leeds CC and Barnsley MBC have worked to get on the Stonewall Index of good employers for LGB people.

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