



Equality Peer Challenge

Cornwall Council

April 2013

Report



1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of an equality peer challenge organised by the Local Government Association (LGA) 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 'achieving' level. The peer challenge is designed to validate a council's own self-assessment at this level by considering documentary evidence and carrying out a series of interviews and focus groups with employees, councillors and other stakeholders.

The basis for the peer challenge is a benchmark against five areas of performance. They are:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

The peer challenge is not an inspection; rather it offers an external assessment of an organisation's own judgement of itself against the EFLG benchmark, by critical friends who have experience of delivering an equality agenda in their own organisation. The assessment is a reflection of the evidence presented to the peer team, through reading the documentary evidence submitted in advance, and the interviews and focus groups when on site.

The team was:

Louise Murphy – Bath and North East Somerset Council
Nick Stephenson – Swindon Borough Council
Councillor Graham Brown – Powys 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.

2. Summary and recommendations

Following this diversity peer challenge, we have reached the following conclusion:

Cornwall Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the 'achieving' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

Cornwall Council only became a unitary authority in 2009 so it is a relatively new organisation which is still on a development journey in many aspects. This includes equality and diversity. Good progress is being made against the equality framework for local government. The Chief Executive, portfolio holder and Member equality champion take direct and personal responsibility for promoting greater equality and the organisation

has committed the resources and expertise since 2009 to maintain that momentum. A wide range of training is provided for Members and staff to ensure that they understand and implement the Council's commitment equality and diversity. The induction process for new Members has been specifically designed to include equalities training. New staff equality forums are being developed in response to staff concerns around disability, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) and black and minority ethnic (BME) issues.

The Council has a good understanding of its communities, including the extent of inequality and disadvantage, and has used the information to set stretching equality objectives in consultation with partners in the public and voluntary and community sectors. It has information and monitoring systems that allow it to disaggregate data where appropriate and to assess progress in achieving objectives and targets. It has begun to share profiling and other relevant data with other agencies and partners. Information on its website is easily accessible and detailed.

It uses equality analyses and equality impact assessments when reviewing all major corporate and service changes in policy, and systematically monitors the effects of its services on different groups. The research project around Welfare Reform is an excellent example of this.

The Councils Responsible Procurement process is good. Potential contractors' equality and diversity commitments are considered when seeking tenders. As contracts are reviewed it will be important to maintain this rigorous approach.

Moving forward the Council needs to spread the good practices seen in services like Adults, Children and the Fire and Rescue Service across the whole authority. Peers observed some very good processes but heard relatively little about the difference these are making. Being able to articulate and celebrate equality achievements will be important for the Council as it progresses towards the Excellent level of the EFLG.

To help the council improve we have made some key recommendations. These are to:

1. Involve backbench members more in equality issues. It will be important to maintain the interest and involvement of new Members after the elections in May.
2. Develop a greater understanding of communities within the protected characteristics. Cornwall is a changing community and it will be important to understand communities as they develop and change.
3. Develop and share good practice better across the organisation. There are some excellent practices with the Adults and Children's' services which could be shared better with services that are currently less engaged with equalities.
4. Become confident in talking about equality in relation to services, equality groups, development, strategies and outcomes for the people of Cornwall.

3. Impact of the challenge

The council made the following observations upon the impact that the peer challenge has had:

There has been a significant improvement around equality and diversity practices since the move to unitary authority in 2009, bringing together a County Council and six district council's functions. Since then, because the Council's progress has been significant and based on outcomes from a mock assessment conducted in June 2011, the target date for reaching 'achieving' was moved forward from April 2014 to April 2013.

The commitment from across the organisation, statutory and voluntary sector partners, has been substantial and has contributed significantly to Cornwall Council being awarded 'achieving'. The peer assessment has focused activity and helped to drive progress forward against the Equality For Local Government criteria. A mock assessment in November 2012 assisted to highlight gaps, which have been addressed in readiness for the formal assessment. Having a clear focus on reaching 'achieving' has prioritised this activity and seen improvements made across the organisation.

Obtaining 'achieving' is a real confidence boost for all partners, officers, managers, senior representatives and Members involved in this agenda, and it is important to maintain the momentum going forward. A plan will be implemented to address the 'areas for consideration' highlighted in through this process, to ensure that equality and diversity continues to be integrated through service delivery and improvements made.

Cornwall Council would like to thank the team of peer assessors for their time and would welcome them back in the near future to assess progress against the areas for consideration.

4. Detailed findings

4.1 Knowing your communities

Strengths:

1. The Council gathers equality data and intelligence using a range of formal and informal techniques. It has a highly regarded corporate intelligence team whose members have access to a network of analysts from partner agencies which include the police and Health. The Intelligence Team has worked with the Equalities team on a joint approach to the use of data. There has been joint training on the use of intelligence when completing equality impact assessments. The teams have also had a joint response queries from staff around equality monitoring.
2. The Council has good arrangements for sharing of data with its partners. There is ample evidence that data has been used to determine priorities by both the Council and its partners. The "Understanding Cornwall" tool uses Council and partner evidence to facilitate sharing, increase impact and reduce duplication. It has helped to develop an understanding of the key priorities for Cornwall and the challenges that factors like

rurality and deprivation bring. Specific work has also been done to understand the different demographics in Cornwall by protected characteristic group and themed papers have been produced using up-to-date data (e.g. deprivation and road safety); Understanding Cornwall has an equality evidence base which shows differences by neighbourhood and a 'Cornwall People Profile'. A separate 'Understanding diverse population groups in Cornwall' has also been produced. Understanding Cornwall has been used as the evidence base for Cornwall Council's Business Plan, Cornwall's Framework for Action and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2011 (the JSNA, in turn underpins the emerging Health and Wellbeing Strategy).

3. A research project on Welfare Reform has been well received by partners and other local authorities. The research has ensured that the Council knows who in the community will be affected by the reforms and the likely impact. The information will be used to scope indicators to monitor the effects of welfare reform across Cornwall.
4. Intelligence and data is used by services within the Council. The service planning template produced for service managers encourages them to refer to equality mapping data. Community Safety and Protection Directorate, Adult Care and Wellbeing Directorate and Children, Schools and Families Directorate; have data analysts within their services, who produce detailed intelligence. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service as part of the Community Safety and Protection Directorate uses both corporate data and community safety data.
5. The Council's website has easily accessible community data for the public, staff and stakeholders. Information is available down to super output areas and is disaggregated by protected characteristics. Parish and settlement profiles are published and include 2011 census data.

Areas for consideration:

6. There is more potential to use the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process to scope and target consultation exercises about specific projects and development proposals. The intelligence gained could also be used to inform and add to corporate knowledge.
7. It was clear that some services are using data and intelligence more actively than others. Adults and Children's services are at the forefront. One example of this is the comprehensive annual report produced by Children's Services. Their experience and expertise could be used to develop data use across the organisation which would lead to a more coherent approach.

4.2. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

8. There are a good range of processes and structures in place to address equalities issues within the Council. This includes EIAs which are required before a cabinet decision. We believe this is good practice and there is also a supporting level of quality assurance and training in respect of this important function. The Council's commitment to continue using EIAs is very positive and the directorate equality action groups (DEAG) structure in evaluating them is extremely useful. There were examples of EIAs being returned and consequent delays in cabinet decision making which are indicative

of a growing confidence in the EIA process. There were issues around the varying skills of DEAG members which need to be addressed.

9. The Chief Executive, Portfolio Holder and Equality Champion have a clear understanding of and commitment to equality and good practice. It was impressive that they also acknowledge their limitations in the area and this level of self-awareness will stand them in good stead as they move forward.
10. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) has had an 'early start' on embedding equality issues within a service and it is a good source of learning and support for other Council areas. The learning from CFRS' 'achieving' level has been good and its way of thinking about inclusion, structures and project managing equality is a good model. We do question whether there is an over reliance on the Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service experience and achievement.
11. There are very good examples of partnership working. The Council's work with its voluntary and community sector (VCS) theme group to develop equality objectives is impressive. Groups have been well engaged in talking about priorities which has been important in ensuring that there is a breadth of awareness and community agreement for the objectives. The Partnering agreement between the Council and, Town and Parish Councils around training and access to the Intranet is good practice. The use of partnership in the alternative service delivery (ASD) models, provide opportunities to develop good practice. The relationships enable service delivery to be looked at differently and from different perspectives while maintaining a clear dialogue.
12. The Responsible Procurement process is a clear demonstration on how equality considerations can be embedded in general council process – it is impressive.

Areas for consideration:

13. There is an issue around the confidence of the council's leaders to talk specifically about equality and protected characteristics. For example, it was at times hard to get interviewees to talk about what was being done to address inequalities facing black and minority ethnic (BME) or lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT). Generally there is a reliance on some individuals and group areas to be the only specialists about equality. The potential to ensure a shared understanding clearly and regularly led by senior managers and members will embed good equality practice. The dialogue will increase confidence of staff to recognise, talk about, address and celebrate equality practice in all their work.
14. The Council has been on a fast equality journey. Support for a new set of members will need to be up to speed in terms of council process and objectives as well as the legal framework.
15. A number of partnership arrangements and set ups could be more fully utilised to support, challenge and develop Council process and responses. e.g. The Equality & Human Rights Partnership.
16. There is an opportunity for contract reviews to send clear equality messages. Implementation of the Responsible Procurement process can be measured by how

serious and willing the council is to use the contract reviews to ensure its equality requirements are being met.

17. There needs to be greater levels of cross-function working. Amid restructures of its services, organisation and committee structures the Council could lose cross cutting knowledge and expertise or it could become vested in silos or individuals. There also needs to be greater use of the scrutiny function – there are some developments at local levels.

4.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

18. The development of the voluntary and statutory sector Cornwall wide equality objectives is impressive. Over a hundred people attended the consultation event in March 2011 and the objectives cover a wide range of issues, many of which address specific protected characteristics.
19. The Member equality champion has contact with a wide range of equality and diversity groups within Cornwall and works closely with many of them.
20. The Council's equality and diversity communication strategy is thorough and sets out how it will communicate positive messages to customers, stakeholders, partners and staff. The plan includes a timetable for communicating about issues such as training opportunities, the Council's employee forums, how members of the public can report hate crime, and the Council's involvement in community events such as PRIDE.
21. The Intranet has clear guidance for staff on running consultation events, and the public web pages entitled 'public participation and consultation' give members of the public a range of options to make their views known.

Areas for consideration:

22. There are opportunities to broaden the use of social media and technology to engage with the community e.g. Twitter. The Council could also consider Young Persons Webpage to increase engagement with young people.
23. Due to the large geographical area of Cornwall, the Council understandably has challenges around involving smaller voluntary organisations in engagement events and meetings. It would seem that voluntary groups of disabled people are the most disparate and may need more efforts towards involving them.
24. Disability Cornwall's guide to running an inclusive event is available to staff on the "What is Equality and Diversity?" web pages. However it needs to be more easily accessed from the main consultation and engagement web pages, as there is currently no immediate link to it from these pages.
25. The view was expressed that the Council had missed an opportunity to robustly respond via the media to the recent inappropriate remark by an Elected Member. It was felt that this was an opportunity for the Council to re-state its commitment to equality and disability and to condemn the remark.

4.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

26. There are clear examples of where services have been tailored to meet particular needs of customers. E.g. the Migrant Workers Action Group (MIGWAG) has helped to improve housing standards for migrant workers; the Youth Offending Team response to a racial comment by an offender which involved the provision of training to resolve the situation; the EIA process around public toilets which led to a change in a proposal. The team were also impressed with the case study describing how schools have been given guidance on working with transgender pupils.
27. EIAs are an integral part of many processes across the organisation including procurement, the service planning template, and cabinet reports. They provide transparency and clarity of consideration about equality and diversity implications and impact.
28. Alternative service delivery (ASD) provides some positive examples of tailored services e.g. Cornwall Housing work to improve gypsy & traveller facilities and other services; the use of tenant monitoring information to target services and new developments.
29. The Equality and Human Rights Partnership believes that the Council delivers best practice human rights considerations in its Adults and Children's Services. This feedback is an indication that the Council doesn't always know how good it is and the lack of confidence in its own achievements.

Areas for consideration:

30. It is recommended that the EIA template is developed to ensure more thorough consideration of each protected characteristic. Consideration of generic equality issues is good but more specific references are needed to really ensure each protected characteristic has been considered to identify gaps, develop services - and to be able to respond to any potential judicial reviews. EIAs should also record the reasons for deciding that there will be no impact.
31. The requirement for equality monitoring of protected characteristics should be included within commissioned service specifications. This can flow from EIAs but would need to be specific.
32. Membership of the web feedback group should be reviewed to ensure it is representative of customers and staff across the protected characteristics. The two hundred strong group could be developed to ensure broad coverage from equality groups. For example, younger people involved with the group might be able to offer specific guidance on how to make web content and format more appealing to a younger audience.

4.5 A skilled and committed workforce

Strengths:

33. Workforce data on the website is accessible and detailed. The Council is starting to produce detailed workforce data and reports. This should be improved upon even further when dashboard information is better used. The dashboards enable Directorates to have accessible and real time information about sickness level, discipline cases, workforce profile etc.
34. Some positive actions have been put in place to respond to under representation of members and staff. The Council leads on the countywide apprenticeship scheme. It can provide up to two hundred apprenticeships. Ninety-nine are currently in place. Better equality monitoring of the apprentices would be useful. The council has a number of other initiatives to create employment for people with learning disabilities such as job carving. The Council has tried various ways of encouraging the member body to be more diverse and representative of the community such as a stand at the Royal Cornwall Show and events at County Hall with a video showing diverse images of members called 'Will you stand for it?'
35. There are a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff and members. Plans are in place for new member induction programme which will include equalities. The 'Cornwall Essentials' training package is mandatory from September and includes an equality and diversity element. In addition equality training is being integrated into the wider learning and development offer. There are a range of methodologies to suit a variety of learning access needs.
36. There is clear evidence that the Council is focussing on employees' experiences to make working for the Council as positive as possible. The organisation's response to concerns within the staff survey has been very open and transparent, with an action plan put in place to tackle the perceived inconsistency of management decisions on issues such as reasonable adjustments, carers leave, and a perceived long hours culture. The Modern Working programme now includes tailored workplace assessments to ensure employees have appropriate working spaces. A number of employee forums have been put in place including disability, LGBT and BME. Some of these are still very new and are being encouraged to develop "organically" albeit with support from the organisation. There has been a pilot project within Adult Services to generate a better response to harassment and bullying. This has involved training staff as champions - people other employees can contact to discuss harassment or bullying. It is hoped to roll this approach out across the Council.
37. EIAs have helped to identify improvements in employment conditions. e.g. The Council's Homeworking policy; the Personal Development System (PDS) system is now more accessible. The Council gained a CIPD national award for the introduction of its pay and reward system and the use of an EIA within this.

Areas for consideration:

38. The accuracy of workforce data still needs to be improved. Building trust with staff about the uses the information is put to will be key to more people inputting accurate

data about themselves. Data gained from the staff survey should be dis-aggregated to ensure that the organisation is aware of the views of minority staff.

39. There is room for better communication and engagement with staff. Staff said they wanted more posters and repeat messages. There was a general consensus that most staff thought the Big Conversation patronising.

40. Member diversity could be improved upon. Future elections will build on opportunities already grasped such as the 'Would you stand for it?' video and a presence at Cornwall Pride.

5. Signposting to areas of good practice

[Theatre Learning](#) – an interactive training method to engage newly elected members

Challenge Manager: Gill Elliott

Tel No: *07747 7532635*
E-mail: *gill.elliott@local.gov.uk*

Local Government Association

Local Government House
Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Appendix – Feedback presentation

Knowing your communities

Strengths:

- Good formal and informal sharing of data with partners.
- Good examples of use of data and intelligence to set priorities and objectives.
- Welfare Reform research project well received.
- Intelligence Team has worked with Equalities Team on a joint approach.
- Service planning template encourages staff to refer to equality mapping data.
- Website has easily accessible community data.
- knowing your communities

Areas for consideration:

- Potential to use the EIA process to scope and target consultation exercises about specific projects and development proposals
- Some services use mapping data and intelligence more actively than others e.g. Children's' and Adults Services

Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- Good range of processes and structures in place.
- Chief Executive, portfolio holder and equality champion have a clear understanding of and commitment to equality and good practice.
- FRS 'early start' on embedding equality issues is a good source of learning and support for other Council areas.
- Working with VCS Theme Group to develop equality objectives.
- Use of partnerships and ASD system provide opportunities for good practice development.
- Partnering agreement between Council, Town and Parish Councils - training and access to Intranet.

Areas for consideration:

- Confidence of leadership to 'talk equality and protected characteristics'.
- Support for members.
- Partnership working opportunities.
- Opportunity for contract reviews to send clear equality messages.
- Greater levels of cross-function working

Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- Development of voluntary and statutory sector Cornwall wide equality objectives is impressive

- Member equality champion works closely with some equality and diversity groups
- The equality and diversity communication strategy is thorough
- Intranet has clear guidance for staff on running consultation events

Areas for consideration:

- There are opportunities to broaden the use of social media and technology to engage with the community e.g. Twitter
- Challenges around involving smaller voluntary organisations.
- Disability Cornwall's guide to running an inclusive event needs to be more easily accessible from the corporate consultation document
- View was expressed that Council had missed an opportunity to robustly respond via media to the inappropriate remark by an Elected Member

Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

- Clear examples of tailored services to meet particular needs of customers
- EIAs are an integral part of many processes across the organisation
- Alternative service delivery (ASD) also have positive examples of tailored services
- Equality and Human Rights Partnership believes that Council delivers best practice human rights considerations in Adults and Children's Services

Areas for consideration

- Develop EIA template to ensure more thorough consideration of each protected characteristic
- Include requirement for equality monitoring of protected characteristics within commissioned service specifications
- Review membership of the web feedback group to ensure it is representative of customers and staff across the protected characteristics

Skilled and committed workforce

Strengths:

- Council is starting to produce detailed workforce data and reports
- Some positive actions have been put in place to respond to under representation of members and staff
- Wide range of training and development opportunities for staff and members
- Clear evidence that council is focussing on employees' experiences to make it as positive as possible
- EIAs have helped to identify improvements in employment conditions

Areas for consideration:

- Improving level and accuracy of workforce data
- There is still room for better communication/engagement with staff
- Actions to increase Member diversity could be improved upon
- Staff survey results indicate need to improve management behaviours – this is being addressed.

