

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING	Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING	16 May 2018	
TITLE:	The Corporate Approach to Equality	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 A briefing on the corporate approach to equality including the legal framework, our approach to equality and the challenges we face.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Panel is asked to;

2.1 Note the report and consider the role of scrutiny in supporting this work.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

3.1 Nil

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 The Equality Act 2010; (also other legislation, notably Modern Slavery Act 2015; Crime and Disorder Act 2011).

5 THE REPORT

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This paper sets out the approach taken by Bath and North East Somerset Council to ensure that it is operating in a way that promotes equality and meets legal requirements. It provides an overview of the work being undertaken to ensure that services meet the needs of the community, so that the area is a great place to live work and visit for all members of our diverse society. The paper also highlights the distinct features of the Bath and North East Somerset area, and the particular challenges we face in respect of the equality agenda, along with some of our key successes.

5.2 The legal background

5.2.1 The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual because of certain personal characteristics ('protected characteristics'). As the Council is a public body, the law also requires that the Council proactively considers equality issues when carrying out its functions to make sure opportunities to enhance equality, tackle discrimination and foster good community relations are utilised. This 'Public Sector Equality Duty' (PSED) covers all aspects of our work including service delivery and commissioning activities – and the PSED is especially important factor when services are being reduced or redesigned as part of budget proposals.

5.3 How do we work within the Equality Act within Bath and North East Somerset Council?

5.3.1 Our approach to equality within Bath and North East Somerset includes the following:

- a) **Equality Team:** The team offers advice and guidance across the Council (for example - how to consult with a wide range of people; reasonable adjustments for disabled customers and employees; carrying out equality analysis (see below).
- b) **Equality training for staff:** To ensure our employees have the skills and knowledge they need to work with a diverse community, training takes places regularly. There is an equality workshop within Induction for new staff; Equality Training for Customer Service Staff; Equality Training for Children's Workforce staff; Equality Training for managers. Also, teams across the Council regularly receive 'bespoke' training in equality to reflect their specific requirements.

- c) **Equality training for elected members:** We have used a variety of approaches. Most recently we used a 'Theatre Learning' style of training, to enable elected members to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviour, and consider ways that they could promote equality within their various roles.
- d) **Customer feedback:** We encourage customers to give us their feedback, and we check complaints for any issues raised that relate to barriers for particular groups where we might need to do things differently.
- e) **Communicating with the public.** We try to ensure that we communicate in a way that is accessible to disabled people and those for whom English is an additional language. The Council has commissioned Oncall Interpreting services to assist with Interpreting and Translation where necessary.
- f) **Research and intelligence about the needs of our communities:** Our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) provides a single portal for facts, figures and intelligence about our local area, its communities and its population. It helps us to make decisions based upon evidence of the identified needs within Bath & North East Somerset.
- g) **Equality analysis:** Teams within the Council regularly review the services they are delivering by carry out equality analysis. Our equality analysis process helps to identify any issues that could create a barrier for particular groups, and, if any are identified, prompts us to find ways of removing or mitigating any barriers or obstacles. We publish the results of our equality analysis on our EIA web pages
- h) **Supporting our staff:** We have staff groups for Black and Minority Ethnic Staff, Disabled staff and LGBT staff. These provide support and we also use them as consultative bodies. We also have a robust Harassment & Bullying at Work policy.
- i) **Gender Pay Gap** - We have compiled a Gender Pay Gap report which shows that the Council compares favourably with organisations both across the whole UK economy. We have set some actions to address a number of areas to achieve greater gender equality. This was reported to the previous meeting of this panel.
- j) **Involving others in our work:** The Council hosts an Independent Equalities Advisory Group quarterly. This multi-agency group is made up of representatives from local statutory and voluntary sector organisations, and acts as a 'critical friend' to the Council, helping us to assess the likely impact of our work on equality groups.
- k) **Making fair financial decisions:** The Council carries out proportionate and appropriate screening of all budget proposals. Following this, responsible officers ensure that equality issues continue to be considered during implementation stages

through actions including the completion of equality analysis; ensuring inclusive consultation; agreeing clear communication; the incorporation of equality issues within commissioning specifications; relevant workforce training and development and ongoing monitoring.

5.4 Some challenges for us in Bath and North East Somerset

5.4.1 Bath & North East Somerset enjoys a unique quality of built and natural environment, world-class arts and culture, a relatively strong economy and low levels of unemployment. The area has relative high levels of educational achievement, low crime levels, excellent public services and an affluent and healthy population. There are a great many positive things about Bath & North East Somerset. However, there are a number of challenges in the equality agenda:

- a) There are **pockets of deprivation** within the district, so **narrowing the gap** between the most and least affluent is a challenge. Therefore 'Socio-Economic' status is an aspect of our equality approach in Bath and North East Somerset, in addition to the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act.
- b) Our **Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is smaller** than the national average. This means we have had a steeper learning curve than other Local Authorities in developing some areas of our work (for example, working with newly arrived Syrian refugees).
- c) There are relatively **few organised equality-focused forums** and groups (especially outside Bath city), which makes effective consultation and engagement with minority groups, such as the LGBT community, more difficult. We have managed to make some links and engage the community by holding events (for example, Holocaust Memorial Day, and LGBT history month).
- d) As the whole of Bath City is a World Heritage site, with many Grade 1 listed facilities, making improvements to **physical access to our public buildings** is often more complicated due to building conservation issues. However despite this we have achieved some successes (for example, improved and enhanced access for Disabled people at the Roman Baths).

5.5 Our successes and achievements

- a) Our Equality work was awarded the 'Achieving' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government when we last undertook an audit in 2010.
- b) We undertake preventative work with children and young people, who are taking a lead on making their schools and settings more inclusive. We now have over 50 E-Teams (equality teams) throughout Bath and North East Somerset, led by children and young people.
- c) Our LGBT equality work has received national recognition. We are rated as the top Local Authority in Stonewall's 2017 Education Champions Index.
- d) We continue to work towards the eradication of human trafficking and slavery in Bath and North East Somerset and towards the eradication of unlawful genital mutilation. We have approved Council motions against trafficking and slavery.
- e) We continue to work and have an agreed Council motion against these.

5.6 Interlinking agendas

- 5.6.1 There are numerous work streams and projects underway that are integral with the equality agenda – and to making Bath & North East Somerset a safe and inclusive place for all. These include work to resettle refugee families within the national Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, homing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children; work to highlight, address and prevent Human Trafficking, Modern Slavery, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Domestic Violence and Abuse. This work is overseen by the Responsible Authorities Group and the Local Safeguarding Boards.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.2 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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