



Diversity Peer Challenge
Rugby Borough Council

Report

24-27 February 2014



1. Background

Rugby Borough Council (RBC) asked the Local Government Association to conduct an Equality Peer Challenge to see if the Council satisfies the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government for an external assessment at the Excellent level. This report is a summary of the findings of that Peer Challenge carried out by trained peers. 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
- 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 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 Pauline Helliard-Symons – Wokingham Borough Council
Louise Sboui – Huntingdonshire District Council
Sharon Allman – Mansfield District Council
Diane Weston- Berneslai Homes
Gill Elliott – Local Government Association
Liam Paul – 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 Equality Peer Challenge, we have reached the following conclusion:

Rugby Borough Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Excellent level of the Equality Framework.

RBC is the first district council to achieve the Excellent level of the Equality Framework and it is to be congratulated on this. The award is a testament to the

commitment of its senior leaders in providing the leadership and resources and to its staff for their enthusiasm and hard work.

The Council knows its communities and it works hard with its partners to keep that knowledge up to date. It has clear equality priorities and uses equality impact assessments effectively to plan and review its services. The scrutiny of equalities related issues is impressive resulting in good action plans and outcomes.

The Council is committed to maintaining its funding of voluntary and community groups and it has delivered some excellent projects with its partners and the community and voluntary sector. Community cohesion within the borough is good. There is effective and wide ranging engagement and involvement with the community including those who are vulnerable.

The Council has a “can do” reputation amongst its community partners. Some said that they would like the Council to involve them more pro-actively and at a more strategic level, for example around Welfare Reform.

The Council’s Systems Thinking approach and the end to end service reviews are delivering good service outcomes and considerable efficiencies. Peers felt that the Council could do more to evidence that all parts of the community are able to access its services and have high satisfaction with those services.

There are high levels of staff satisfaction and staff view RBC as a good place to work. The Council has started to tackle the under-representativeness of its workforce. In terms of young people, its apprenticeship scheme has been very successful and is a source of pride for the organisation. However, going forward it also needs to address its workforce profile in terms of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and other protected characteristics.

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

The Council welcomed the opportunity to be the first Borough/District Council to undertake an Equality and Diversity peer challenge, and be assessed at the ‘Excellent’ level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. The 5 key areas of performance that were assessed during the peer challenge certainly facilitated the chance to demonstrate, and describe the council’s on going journey of improvement since achieving Level 3 of the previous framework in 2009. During this time the council used the framework as one of the ways of working to help improve in many areas.

The excellence peer review recognised the council had a clear agenda for ensuring equality and diversity was embedded across the organisation, and

continued to be led from the highest level of the organisation by the Deputy Leader and Senior Officers.

The council is proud of the work it has done to support the communities of Rugby which demonstrates a commitment to making a real difference. Achieving excellence has further reinforced the organisations role as community leader and local partner whilst providing continued confidence to customers that the council is delivering the best services it can, with the limited resources it has available. The excellence peer challenge focuses on outcomes for customers, communities and staff, rather than processes put in place to simply gather information. Numerous case studies were provided during the review to clearly show how the Council has made a difference and had a positive impact. For Rugby Borough Council the recommendations made from the peer review will only further enhance the ongoing journey for continuous improvement.

The work done so far has strengthened and prepared the organisation for the way it will continue to consider equalities as part of any future changes. The Council is committed to being 'Excellent' and plans to continue to see the importance of equality and ensuring it is embedded, as well as backing this up with the resources needed to meet the diverse needs of our communities wherever possible longer term.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities

Strengths:

- Good knowledge of the equality profile of the community that is regularly updated
- Council gathers information from a wide range of sources
- Partners contribute to RBC's knowledge of its community
- Strong evidence that staff and councillors know their communities
- Some good examples of how data has improved services for the community

RBC has good quality information about the make-up of its community and its minority groups which is regularly updated. Data on the equality profile of the borough is used to inform planning and monitor outcomes. Gaps in information are addressed, e.g. Targeted interviews with tenants provided detailed information on the likely impact of welfare reform and showed how many tenants would require ICT support to make online claims.

The Council gathers information from a range of sources. It is a partner of the Warwickshire Observatory which provides information and intelligence about the county and its people. In 2011, the Observatory was commissioned to produce equality and diversity profiles for all the districts and boroughs in the county.

These provide good quality information on the equality profile of its communities and their changing needs. The profiles were updated in late 2013 to incorporate 2011 Census data. The Council also uses Mosaic as well as localities data across the borough to help identify key equality gaps. A Quality of Life Report is produced annually as well as the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis. The Regeneration Strategy 2014-15 is a good example of how the Council has used information on the equality profile of its communities and its changing needs. The Strategy sets out the strategic priorities for the Council and partners on the Rugby Local Strategic Partnership. Progress is reviewed regularly and culminates in sharing information at the Compact event.

There are some good examples of partners working well together to share information and knowledge about communities, e.g. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service have trained council staff to identify fire safety concerns and report on to the Fire Service.

Service level agreements with community groups enable the Council to gain updated information on changing needs, e.g. community garden project and identification that some householders are facing financial hardship (cutting down on food and heating). The Housing service can demonstrate that it uses information gained with partners to inform service planning and delivery, i.e. anti-social behaviour informing allocations. Analysis of public order offences, domestic violence and anti-social behaviour by the Police and the Rugby Community Safety Partnership has led to an initiative aimed at tackling excessive alcohol consumption amongst the Eastern European migrants. RBC, the County Council, Public Health, GP Commissioning, and the voluntary sector have provided for funding for a fixed term role to raise awareness and improve access to services for this community.

Staff and councillors know their community well and this has led to service improvements. An example of this was a refuse collector who noticed that refuse/recycling bins were being used incorrectly. He identified that this was due to a lack of understanding by a Polish resident. As a result easy read information on how to use bins was provided and the problems were resolved. Another Member recognised that his ward had a number of Polish households and he printed introduction cards in Polish to engage with this community. Members led and supported the new Skate park projects, holding consultations with young groups to determine how they would like to parks to develop.

There are many good examples of how data and information about the community has helped to improve services. These include development of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre which now has excellent facilities for disabled people

Members led through Scrutiny involved Daventry Partners in improving the way cultural needs were able to be met by the new crematorium service. This included a "What you do when someone Dies" leaflet and individual, customised

services to meet diverse cultural needs. Focused work with the Gypsy & Traveller community on redeveloping the Woodside site, identified issues relating to poor health care. The authority worked with partners in Health to enable this community to access wider services, e.g. healthcare. Housing takes a 'diagnostic' approach towards tenants' needs. There is a more in-depth analysis and use of information in the support of tenants and finding solutions that meet the needs of the individual.

Areas for consideration:

- Widen access to borough and ward profiles
- Consider how best to capture customer profile information during second phase of the CRM
- Consider how to make best use of equality profile data
- Continue to ensure that Hate Crime reporting remains a priority

Consider improving access to the borough and ward profile information by placing them on the intranet and internet and publicise to staff and Members.

The peer team strongly recommends that the Council considers capturing customer profile information (including access and communication needs) during the second phase of the customer relationship management system. (CRM)

Consider how equality profile data can be captured and analysed and the best use that can be made of this data e.g. measuring levels of satisfaction or participation, to support completion of equality impact assessments (EIAs) and to help with compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Continue to ensure that Hate Crime reporting remains a priority. Under reporting has been identified by local groups in particular the Disability Forum and the Warwickshire Race Equality Partnership (WREP).

3.2 Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- Strong leadership on E&D from Councillors and officers
- Clear priorities to address equality and diversity issues
- Strong partnership working leading to positive outcomes
- Effective scrutiny
- Equality criteria in tenders/contracts which are regularly monitored
- Commitment to maintain funding for community and voluntary groups where possible
- Councillors are broadly representative of the local community
- Leadership

RBC has strong leadership on equality and diversity from its leading members and officers. Commitment and contribution appears to be seamless between them. This joint commitment has clearly influenced the culture of the wider organisation. The shared equality service with Warwickshire County Council (WCC) has also had a positive impact on equality and diversity in RBC. The Council is involved in organising events to benefit the community and celebrate its cultural heritage. The Rugby Festival of Culture was established and financed by the Council and is now in its fourth year and includes art, music, food and heritage from several communities.

RBC has clear priorities to address equality issues in the borough which are agreed and understood by senior officers, politicians and partners, including the community and voluntary sector. A shared vision is delivered through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and their action plans, specifically the Stronger Communities Partnership and the Regeneration Strategy.

The Council supports many successful projects resulting from working with partners, e.g. Benn Partnership; initiatives on Hate Crime with the Police and the Edible Borders project in New Bolton that focusses on providing local healthy produce to local residents in deprived areas.

Outcomes for the community have been enhanced and positive action has been taken as a result of the scrutiny process. Task force groups have enabled in-depth examinations on a number of important topics with an equality dimension, e.g. access to countryside for disabled people, employee wellbeing, the impact of budget changes and welfare reform.

The inclusion of equality criteria is standard practice within tenders and contracts and targets. Demonstrating compliance is regularly monitored through Co-valent. There are regular meetings with contractors to discuss progress.

The Council is committed to working with partners in the voluntary sector and recognises that it cannot provide all the services that are needed by itself. Funding for community and voluntary partnerships has been maintained where possible and the grants allocation system has been revamped to make application simpler. Where a service level agreement (SLA) is no longer possible the Council has tried to commission individual projects from associated organisations, e.g. the review of taxi licensing by the WREP.

Councillors are fairly representative of the diversity of the local community, especially in relation to the population in terms of women and BME.

Areas for consideration:

- Seek to increase public attendance at scrutiny groups
- Share with voluntary sector how their input has informed strategic and proactive planning

- Consider a skills audit for councillors (including E&D issues)

Consider how to encourage members of the public and partners to attend scrutiny committees and or task groups. Strengthen the various ways by which they could be involved in the scrutiny process by identifying needs, monitoring outcomes, and feeding back ideas and about how further improvement can be achieved.

Partners reported that RBC is very good at working with them to respond to problems etc, however they feel that they should be involved at a more strategic and proactive level, e.g. preparing for the full impact of Universal Credit in partnership with statutory partners and the voluntary sector. Some community groups involved in regeneration projects in the area felt that it was not an equal partnership but more of a directive role from the authority.

Consider carrying out a skills audit of all Councillors to ensure their skills, knowledge and experience is being fully utilised. This will increase the council's knowledge of the community as well as engaging those councillors who currently feel less engaged. Focus councillor training on real situations affecting people who live in the community, with a greater focus on customer service. Consider including case studies of both good and bad practice. Currently some members feel that training tells them only what they already know, so concentrate less on the legal issues and more on the realities of the community.

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- Key sections of the community are satisfied that the authority and partners have listened to them and taken their views into account
- There are positive outcomes for the community as a result of effective community engagement
- Community forums and the Compact events ensure engagement with representatives from marginalised vulnerable groups who are then able to influence decisions
- Consultation and engagement with young people

RBC has good working relationships with a wide range of community and voluntary groups who between them work with or represent all the key sections of the community. Independent consultants were engaged to work with the community and voluntary sector and community activists to ensure their voices were heard and helped to shape the Regeneration Strategy. The community development project in Newbold-on-Avon is a another good example of how input from the Council enabled the area's community groups to join together in a partnership that helped them to engage with the Council and its partners and to access funding for community projects.

There are many examples that demonstrate positive outcomes as a result of effective community engagement. They include Rugby Museum - The reading collection project to digitise a collection of over 20,000 photographs capturing the history and heritage of the West Indian Community; Daventry Partnership and the Race Equality Partnership were involved in the design of the new Crematorium advising on how to respond to multi faith beliefs and provide 'tailor made' services; Community groups including the Rugby Disability Forum were involved in the design of the new Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre to develop a facility that is able to meet the needs of the diverse community.

The authority holds regular Community Forums every quarter. These are at various locations within the district and are an opportunity for the community to engage with the authority, its members, the Police, NHS and local community and voluntary organisations to discuss what is important in their areas. Key themes emerging from these meeting are around antisocial behaviour, road safety, alcohol related crime and domestic abuse. Feedback to the groups is through presentations from the relevant organisations.

RBC is a signatory to the Warwickshire Compact and the Head of Customer and Information Services represents the Council as the Compact Champion. Annual Compact days are an opportunity for community and voluntary groups to contribute to decision making through engaging with the authority so that all involved have a clear understanding of the priorities for the borough and their individual roles in achieving them, e.g. the Comprehensive spending review and grants to the voluntary and community sector. The Council publishes how it awards grants, and asks the voluntary sector to put on workshops to help groups understand the application process.

There is good engagement with young people and different services have worked together to help each other consult and engage with young people. Consultation and engagement with young people in the development of facilities e.g. skate parks and Parcour Park in the district was led and supported by members, Investment on the "On Track" scheme; Youth Council; Rugby Youth Consortium.

Area for consideration:

- Ensure that community groups know how the council uses the intelligence they provide

Information is being fed in through community audits and intelligence yet the groups are unsure how it's being used to address the more strategic activities within the council. There are inconsistencies within the feedback mechanisms to these groups on how this information is used within the authority.

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

- Policy and decision making is informed by equality analysis
- Cumulative impact of decisions is understood and monitored across the authority and partners
- Individual services across the authority can demonstrate that improvements and equality outcomes are being delivered
- It appears that satisfaction with services for marginalised and vulnerable people is increasing
- Supporting Gypsies and Travellers to access services

Equality impact assessments are well embedded within the Council. They are completed for appropriate service changes and they form part of the Systems Thinking processes and End to End Reviews which are improving services, e.g. Revenues and Benefits where a number of changes were made to the way the service is delivered which have had a positive impact on customers. Committee and council agendas refer to EIAs and they are used as a positive tool to ensure inclusive decisions are made. e.g. taxi driver standards on wheelchairs. The EIA was completed with support of the Disability Forum.

Individual services across the Council were able to demonstrate that improved equality outcomes are being delivered.

- Decorating vouchers are saving money and time required to prepare void properties for re-letting.
- The Council is building modular housing so tenants won't need to move in the future. It is also encouraging housing associations to do the same.
- The Community Sports and Recreation Department worked with the Disability Forum and diverse community groups to breakdown cultural barriers in designing the new leisure centre. The result is that more customers are using the facilities and they are more culturally inclusive.
- Information and data from Community Safety partners on Eastern European migrants led to the establishment of an Eastern European worker funded by the CSP. This has been effective in addressing a number of anti-social behaviour issues such as swimming in a local quarry, unlicensed fishing; addressing domestic abuse and building awareness of cultural differences amongst staff and councillors.

Community wardens were concerned that the deaf community were unable to access services provided by the Environmental Protection Team. Two wardens completed Level One and Level Two of British Sign Language Skills and attended weekly meetings of the Rugby Deaf Club. The outcome has been that the wardens are more confident in communicating with deaf residents and Deaf Club members feel comfortable raising issues with the wardens.

Services are being designed and tailored to ensure access for vulnerable groups, e.g. design of the new Leisure Centre; play and open spaces. WCAVA provided evidence of greater satisfaction amongst service users through its 2000 groups.

Development of relationships between the Council and the Gypsy and Traveller community has led to mutual trust resulting in more gypsies and travellers accessing services such as health and education. The community now involve the police themselves if there are family disputes and welcome the police and family officers onto the site. Children are attending schools up to age 11.

Areas for consideration:

- Consider how knowledge and good practice is shared across the authority to improve services which have not yet been under systems review
- Whilst the authority can demonstrate positive outcomes at service level it is not clear if this applies to all protected groups
- Equality monitoring of complaints

There have been some really positive outcomes from the end to end service reviews and the Systems Thinking and Customer centric approaches. RBC should consider how the learning from these reviews can be better shared across the authority to improve the services which have not yet been under review. Quarterly lessons learned meetings do take place in Housing with regard to complaints and they do help to develop service improvements. This good practice could be shared more across the organisation.

Although RBC presented some good positive equality outcomes at service level, there appeared to be no corporate approach to equality monitoring, e.g. to determine service user satisfaction by equality group. In terms of customer satisfaction it was difficult to determine if this has been informed by analysis of customer satisfaction data.

RBC should consider how it can equality monitor the complaints it receives about services. Once the new CRM system has captured the customer profile, it could develop reports to ensure that satisfaction rates and complaints can be analysed by equality profile to identify trends and improve service delivery. This will also help to identify those who do not access services.

3.5 A skilled and committed workforce

Strengths:

- Commitment to addressing under representation of young people in the workforce
- High levels of employee satisfaction
- Staff recognise importance of E&D
- Training well received and making a positive difference

- Good relationship with Unions

The Council is committed to addressing the under representation of younger people in its workforce and has prioritised this as an equality outcome. It is having some success through its apprenticeship scheme and working with managers to encourage them to consider younger applicants. There was clear pride amongst managers towards the scheme and high levels of achievement amongst apprentices.

The council can demonstrate high levels of employee satisfaction with their working environment and staff say that the council is a good place to work, they feel listened to and that it is friendly and ambitious despite the financial climate. This can be evidenced through low levels of stress related absence and dignity at work cases. Significantly, staff reported that they would challenge inappropriate behaviour themselves. Member commitment around the wellbeing of staff was demonstrated through their involvement in the Employee Wellbeing study.

Peers saw evidence that staff recognise the importance of equality and diversity in the way services are designed and delivered and their customer care role as part of RBC customer focused approach.

Meetings with staff suggest that equality and diversity training is well received and perceived to be making a positive impact in terms of service delivery e.g. safeguarding training for housing staff leading to action being taken in a case of concern.

There is a good relationship between senior management and unions with regular communication between them, e.g. the Joint Union Consultative Forum. The Executive Directors have an open door policy and any reports containing a staff issue are automatically shared with the trade unions.

Areas for consideration:

- Tailored training for Members
- Consider in-house staff network/forum
- Consider how to better match BME profile within the workforce
- Better communication and celebration of successes
- Ensure all staff are genuinely practising E&D to the benefit of customers, not just following guidelines.

Ensure Member training is tailored to illustrate how equality and diversity is relevant for them in carrying out their duties. Consider focussing training on real life case studies and not just on legal requirements.

Disability disclosure amongst employees is high, yet there are no council employees on the Warwickshire County Council disability employment network.

The staff survey showed that disabled employees' have concerns about how people are valued/and how well the council manages stress. RBC should consider establishing its own generic staff network and ensure that disability issues and other equality issues are considered and that the forum is representative.

Figures showed that the Council's workforce is not representative of the Rugby demographic profile. 15.9% of the Borough are from a BME background but only 8.93% of the workforce. No evidence was presented on how these statistics were disaggregated by grade or section. RBC should start to explore its data in more depth and consider how it can start to address the under representativeness of the workforce.

The Council communicates well with its employees but more could be done to communicate successes and maintain the profile of equality and diversity in underpinning all the service achievements and good community relations.

Staff in some areas still need training in understanding the whole nature of equality and diversity (for example inappropriate use of language). Some staff are still 'going by the book' rather than being flexible and imaginative in their interpretation of guidelines, in order to give genuine help to customers.

4. Examples of notable initiatives

- The Compact events and Community Forums are good examples of community consultation.
- Refurbishing the Woodside Gypsy and Traveller site demonstrated good practice in developing links with the wider community.

5. Signposting to areas of good practice

- Bristol City Council has had some excellent recruitment and selections practices to address the representativeness of its workforce.
- Review of Hate Crime in Central Bedfordshire.

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