

Diversity Peer Challenge

Oxford City Council

18th-19th January 2012

Report

1. Background

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

The team was:

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 Rex Webb - Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service, Wiltshire Police
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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:

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

Oxford is a hub for the local area. Surrounded by very rural district councils, it is a vibrant and thriving city, with a diverse range of residents, and those that visit and work in the city. Oxford City Council is aware of the need to meet these varied and sometimes competing needs and is using various partnerships and its assets (including its staff) to identify ways to address the issues raised imaginatively.

Partnership working appears to be strong, with the neighbouring district councils, the county, and other public sector partners.

OCC is involving communities in decision making, particularly the housing developments, considering how communities might be affected in different ways by physical changes around them. There is a dedicated team to ensure communities' diverse needs are accounted for, and a model for local involvement by the council with groups and individuals.

The council is using its power as a planning authority to influence development, looking to the future needs of the city and approaching landowners and asset owning partners early in the thinking process.

OCC has identified key priorities to work on, which include areas that they do not directly provide services. For example, one priority is to improve educational attainment in schools, despite the fact that it does not directly provide education services to its residents.

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

1. Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA): the team heard mixed reports as to the quality and benefit of EqIAs. The team saw only one EqIA, and only found two published on the website. This could be because OCC is building equalities into all new developments (policy, practice or delivery) and therefore does not need to do a separate EqIA; if this is the case however, it would be good practice to make this clear. The relevant page of the website should include information about EqIAs, their role, benefits and how communities can get involved in assessing the performance of Oxford City Council. EqIAs remain the clearest way to demonstrate that councils have paid due regard to addressing inequalities and promoting equality of opportunity. Without clear demonstration of this, OCC could find that it is difficult to prove that it has complied with equality law.
2. In order to be sure that the work OCC does is not discriminating against particular groups, equality data needs to be routinely collected on staff and service users. OCC should make clear that this is essential to service improvements, explain how the information will be used, and remind people that answering questions about identity is always optional. In particular, there is a general lack of confidence and understanding on the importance of collecting and analysing data around sexual orientation
3. OCC could benefit from establishing a clearer structure for ensuring that diverse staff views are taken on board, and that there is a clear mechanism for quality assuring all equality work such as EqIAs. An internal equality forum could provide this, with a forum available for communities to be involved in monitoring equality in service provision. Alternatively, OCC needs to demonstrate more clearly how communities are involved in monitoring equality objectives, commenting on EqIAs, and ensuring that it is meeting its equality obligations.
4. Ensure that the action plan arising from the validation as a Stonewall Champion is implemented as soon as possible. The team saw little evidence on progress against this action plan, but suggest that it uses Stonewall's recommendations in future equality work.

3. Impact of challenge

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

- External validation of the progress we have made in reflecting the diverse needs of the community in service provision;
- Useful exercise which provides a focus for future improvements;
- Reinforced a view that equalities and diversity should be inherent and implicit within everything we do – not a separate consideration or something late in a process;
- We aim to consider the impact of services in a variety of ways much earlier in developing policy, equalities being one such consideration; and
- The process gave us an opportunity to realise how much we have achieved and something which we could celebrate organisation-wide and to promote even more effective communication and ongoing engagement with our customers and wider strategic partnerships

4 Detailed findings

4.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

1. Data is collected and analysed in a systematic fashion by the Policy and Partnership Team. This work began a few years ago with extensive research to establish a base line and this information is now routinely used by services to design and manage their work (e.g. leisure services and contact centre development). The older data is now being refreshed. This information is routinely and regularly cascaded throughout the organisation and shared with partners, including sharing an officer with neighbouring District Councils in order to ensure good quality data locally.
2. OCC officers and members understand the significance and complexities of Oxford, particularly:
 - the inequalities in educational attainment (some of the lowest performing schools in the country and the highest number of PhDs in the country)
 - the inequalities in wealth (some of the wealthiest people in the country and some of the most deprived neighbourhoods and estates in the country)
 - Oxford's position as an urban hub for a wide rural area (there are small market towns in the outlying areas but few cities until Coventry or Reading; Oxford is also part of the commuter belt with a large number of residents commuting every day into London, or coming into the city from the villages to commute)
 - the importance of tourism and the contrast between the elegant much-visited city centre and the housing estates where some residents don't come into the city or use its facilities.
 - the impact of the different skills needed and provided by local industry and the higher and further education sector (there are examples of industry having to look elsewhere for staff because the skills needed are not available locally, whilst the city has some of the most educated people in the country living in it)
3. OCC recognises the importance of understanding who communities are before designing services, for example the housing development at Barton (see Section 4 "Innovative Practices" for more details)
4. Community mapping of East Oxford Area:
 - acknowledgement that the community is fluid
 - identifying ways to be more responsive
 - schools being a good test for changing communities

- Using data to “bend the spend”, for example health putting money into local GP surgeries to target particular patient groups and projects to tackle educational under-achievement with investment in schools. These are examples where OCC has identified potential areas of rising need and rising cost and targeted money where it can have most benefit.

Areas for consideration:

- There is a lack of understanding about the importance and value of collecting data about people’s sexual orientation. The team saw little evidence of how the Stonewall Action Plan has progressed since the assessment in summer 2011. Managers were not clear about the relevance or value of collecting that data.
- Client-base information should be more consistently used and shared across all services. There may be a need to have a central point for owning and distributing the data council-wide. Some teams are collecting and using the data very well (for example, Community and Neighbourhoods Team) but this does not appear to be universal, for example in Parks and Open Spaces. This team has anecdotally identified that increasingly diverse groups and individuals use the parks but at present this is not routinely captured or shared with other services.
- It was not clear whether data on wider issues of vulnerability, rather than inequalities was collected or used to improve services, for example, data on employment or poverty levels.
- There was a keenness to ensure that the new census data is robustly interrogated and used, particularly around migrant communities. Some concerns were expressed that this could be missed.

4.2. Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational

Strengths:

- Senior management and elected members are ambitious and clear about what they want to achieve and are committed to equality. They have a visible presence locally (e.g. attending Area Forums and Neighbourhood Partnership meetings). It uses its assets and commercial income to enable it to address inequalities imaginatively (e.g. the partnership of housing development and investment in education to tackle under achievement).
- Members are involved actively locally (e.g. Rose Hill Christmas Tree ceremony) and build equality into scrutiny arrangements.
- OCC sees Oxford as a regional centre or hub for many areas. It takes a proactive approach to regeneration and works with a variety of partners, such as major landowners and neighbouring district councils. It uses partnerships as vehicles for influence and has taken the lead where others have made cuts, even where they don’t run something e.g. education, youth work.
- Partnership working: There is effective partnership working with various organisations and sectors. For example, with the Neighbourhood Policing teams, which meant little anti-social activity during summer 2011 when many cities and towns experienced riots. The police directed council staff to remove rubbish that could have been used as weapons (as happened in London). Oxford Voluntary Sector Forum is held twice a year, using workshop and interactive learning and sharing. Key speakers include OCC’s Chief Executive. The role of partnership officer is part paid for by other district councils and the officer is well connected in Oxfordshire County Council as well.

5. The “World Class City for Everyone” strapline, originally developed for the city council, is widely accepted and adopted, including by partners. This includes Fusion, a leisure services provider, adapting it on the front of their own leaflets

Areas for consideration:

1. There are equalities leads in each directorate, but it was not clear where these leads report to, and how they share information on performance. OCC could benefit from an internal equalities group that can set, monitor and review equality targets as there is not currently a system that takes on this role.
2. OCC recognises a variety of challenges, including the effect that the “Right to Buy” council property could have on their house building programme, e.g. Barton Northway development recognising this could be a barrier to inclusive community development.
3. There is a risk of programmes stalling if resources are not allocated. Partner agencies may need to contribute to the Area Forum plans in order to ensure that they address all issues needed. .
4. Top level partnerships such as the local strategic partnership, do not have a diverse membership. There may be a need to ensure that alternative methods are used to ensure that diverse views are heard, valued and used to influence decision making.

4.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

1. Customer satisfaction rates are high where they are measured in Essential Repairs Grants team; surveys are distributed quarterly, results are monitored and built into service improvements. It is not clear if this is the case for all services.
2. There are different levels of involvement for communities:
 - locally it is mostly with small community groups and individuals
 - at neighbourhood level it is with larger community groups, voluntary sector service providers and some partner providers and officers
 - city-wide working with Oxford Council for Voluntary Action providing two forums a year for voluntary and community organisations, Oxford Stronger Communities Alliance
3. Area Forums have replaced Area Committees which has led to an improvement in engagement and active citizenship. There is confidence that area partnerships are building confidence for individuals and groups to influence area forums but it is too early to demonstrate long term influence.
4. OCC understands the importance of capacity building in communities, although some services inevitably find it frustrating that this takes time. For example, the Barton Housing development and the Active Citizens programme.
5. OCC is thinking about existing communities before developments begin. The housing development at Barton is a good example of this. OCC is working with existing communities in advance of the development and using the development as a method of freeing up some housing in other estates.
6. There is a Citizen’s Talkback Panel comprising 1000 residents who are statistically chosen to reflect the diverse communities in the city. This panel comments on policy and strategy.
7. The establishment of the Community & Neighbourhoods team brought contact with communities together from across the council as a team approach. This made the work more focused and there is much more work about how the council supports

communities in a joined up way. However, individual services conduct their own community engagement, and so a more co-ordinated approach to managing engagement and involvement may be needed. A strategy to sharing and using this information would also be beneficial.

8. There are examples of how the Community and Neighbourhoods team have worked differently with different communities to encourage more active involvement in decision making. This includes building community capacity in some areas (see section 5) and work on community-led planning in different areas of the city. There is a clear understanding of the need to build capacity before handing over responsibilities.
9. There are examples of the Community and Neighbourhoods Team working with diverse community groups including the Oxford Civic Society, Parish Councils and parish councillors, the Sikh Foundation and Chinese community groups. However it was not clear how the whole council engaged with diverse communities or with the Community and Neighbourhoods team to maximise the intelligence gathered.
10. The new swimming pool demonstrates engagement with communities and groups from an early stage and throughout the process. As a result they have introduced a flexible blind system to ensure that although lots of glass is used in the design, privacy is still possible for sessions in the pool such as women only sessions. The council believes there has been a wider use of hoists and access points than would otherwise have been the case.

Areas for consideration:

1. The governance arrangements of resident and tenant groups should be more robust, for example with the Leys' residents groups. However, this is being tackled by the Community and Neighbourhoods team through capacity building projects (see section 5).
2. There may be some possibilities of low cost (or no cost) 'quick-wins' in places where engagement has been difficult, for example dealing with parking issues and garages in specific local areas.
3. Residents don't always have the capacity to engage with a high end economy e.g. skills gap and poor schools. OCC is tackling this through the capacity building projects and working with schools to improve educational achievements.
4. There are inconsistencies across the council about community engagement, and an apparent lack of central co-ordination. For example, community involvement in East Oxford is good and diverse despite changing population. Some managers were not able to give examples of how community engagement had influenced services or policies and others were able to list a number of examples. There was a lack of systematic community engagement in the EqlA process, and the team did not see a consultation or engagement strategy which would bring all the work together. We heard some reports of 'consultation fatigue' on the part of some community groups, and a clearer strategy and co-ordination of all the council's engagement would help to monitor and limit this.

4.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

1. The initial focus for improved work on equality was internal. Within the last eighteen months there has been a big change to focus now on external issues in order to improve service delivery across the council.

2. Work Club: this monthly session has been run twice in the Customer Service Centre (see section 5)
3. The Museum of Oxford is being redeveloped to display a history of Oxford looking particularly at the industrial history and migration including an appreciation of different communities' history.
4. The Policy and Partnership team is aware of equality issues and cascades information through the central communication mechanisms. All departments are encouraged to use the data to inform service delivery. However, this may need to be more proactively monitored and promoted in order to ensure that all services are using the data.
5. Essential Repairs Grants: this discretionary grant is flexible and can and is being used to respond quickly to requests for repair to criminal damage and graffiti, or for extra security (e.g. for domestic violence situations). This as a result of good relationship with Thames Valley Police.
6. The leisure contract is such that it can focus on issues the council wants to concentrate on such as health and educational attainment. This includes increasing work on providing sporting opportunities for young people, such as a forthcoming national archery tournament in Oxford and increased participation in cycling.
7. There is corporate representation on the county-wide Procurement Hub. There are plans to roll this out across the Thames Valley which would offer challenges as well as opportunities.

Procurement

8. All procurement staff have done equality training, and equality is built into the training that is offered to all staff dealing with tenders over £100,000.
9. There are elements of both achieving equality and valuing diversity included in the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire and throughout the tendering process. Training is offered to smaller organisations.
10. Monthly training sessions are held with suppliers to encourage more local and smaller organisations to bid for tenders. Workshop leaflets also went out to another 500 suppliers. This has led to an increase in local and smaller organisations bidding for contracts, for example, for a recent printing contract, six out of the eight organisations who bid were local firms.

Community & Neighbourhoods Team

11. The Community and Neighbourhoods team was allowed to develop its own structure with support from senior management. This enabled it to develop structures that met the needs of the communities it works in.
12. There has been a move to an open and transparent process of grant allocation. All applicants are asked to demonstrate how they further social inclusion or tackle inequalities. This has led to some difficult decisions about projects that had been traditionally funded, but OCC is now more confident that it is using grants as a method of tackling the inequalities that exist locally.
13. Many community centres across the area are run by community associations. Assistance is given to sustain and support community associations in this role.
14. Tenants' Associations in all areas of the city were involved in last year's tenants' disability conference. Access was a main talking point.

Areas for consideration:

1. Although equality is built into business process (such as contracts with partner providers) and the Corporate Plan has included equality throughout, there was little

evidence of staff and managerial engagement with EqlAs. Published EqlAs were not easy to find and were not consistently at the start of a planning or decision making process. There was also little evidence of involving communities in the EqlA process.

2. The current financial situation and cuts can be stalling partnership working. There was some evidence of partners being reluctant to involve the council because they believe OCC won't have the capacity, when this may not be the case. OCC may need to be more proactive about being involved in decisions and service delivery across partnerships.
3. Although some equality data about service users is collected systematically, there is little or no information given about service users' sexual orientation. There appeared to be a lack of understanding of the benefits of this information and how it can improve service delivery. Acting on the action plan arising out of the Stonewall Champion accreditation could help to improve staff understanding.
4. There was little evidence that relevant voluntary and community sector groups, or members of the local community have been involved in equality processes such as setting targets and achieving on those targets. The team did not meet with any voluntary and community sector groups whilst on-site. Some staff members were able to explain how they work in partnership, but this was not evident across all the different services.
5. While there was strong data collection around mapping communities, little was mentioned about mapping customer needs and identifying gaps. For example are all sections of the community able to access all services? How is this information gathered and shared?

4.5 A modern and diverse workforce

Strengths:

1. Equality training for all staff has moved away from being very prescriptive and directive to being more about awareness and positive reasons for working on equality. The training uses a theatre company to bring to life the issues. A third of staff are trained each year, although the team were not aware of the arrangements for monitoring the impact of this training. Some feedback indicated that the training was not always pitched at the right level, and not always relevant to participants' needs. An impact analysis on this training and an understanding of training needs may help to pitch this at the right level in future. A suggestion could be to provide relevant briefings in team meetings where a more bespoke approach could be taken, as well as continue with the basic equality training to ensure a good baseline knowledge of all staff.
2. Systems are in place first to ensure staff understand equality processes and have developed to ensure that this happens in practice. For example, equality is embedded within the performance framework, and simplified the framework and raised awareness with staff to ensure compliance through appraisals and one to ones with managers. Regular appraisals are completed to look at how staff are performing against a behavioural framework which includes a section on equality. Equality objectives are set and monitored. Managers confirmed that all staff have annual appraisals and six-monthly reviews. There has also been significant investment in developing management skills of middle and senior managers in recent months which has led to increased confidence of managers to use performance management constructively and positively with staff and support them through periods of change and an uncertainty.

3. Key Human Resources initiatives include completing the implementation of equal pay, providing basic equality training to all staff, holding the disability two ticks standard, Investors in People accredited and being a Stonewall champion.
4. OCC held two 'work clubs' with the job centre plus community groups to get people interested in working for the council. The work clubs offered coaching skills building and interview techniques. 30-40 people attended the two sessions, but it is too early to measure the impact that these sessions are having.
5. An annual workforce equalities report breaks down information on staff leavers, new recruitment, grievances, disciplinaries and is used for setting workforce planning and priorities ie recruiting more black and minority ethnic (BAME) staff
6. Total grievances reduced over the last three years from 30-40 to 10-15 suggests that a strong relationship with trade unions and investment in developing staff behavioural framework has worked.
7. There is a commitment to a 'Living Wage' for all OCC staff and contractors. This has recently been increased despite there being a pay increase freeze.
8. Communication works well in OCC with staff feeling that they are kept in touch and also feeling that they have the opportunity to give feedback to the Council and be heard. There is a range of media used including weekly bulletins, monthly staff newsletters, regular team meetings as well as all staff emails. All staff emails are prefaced with an instruction to print the information off to ensure that staff who don't have access to computers or emails get the information.
9. The Community Neighbourhood Team was allowed to develop its own structure and support was given from senior management, not imposed from the top.

Areas for consideration:

1. There is a lack of diversity within the workforce, including a lack of progression of BAME people and disabled people within OCC. However, the Scrutiny committee is looking at this in detail and is planning work around this area. There is an appetite for improving diversity across the whole council, not just at the top 5% of earners, and this is monitored. However, more positive action may be needed in order to encourage and enable people from diverse groups to progress, especially when there are few recruitment opportunities. There is little proactive work to increase the understanding of the importance of monitoring sexual orientation. This may have an effect on staff declaring their sexual orientation. More work may need to be done to increase understanding of the importance of this.
2. There are good examples of flexible working with home working and compressed hours encouraged and supported. However, this is not universally applied. Some directorates (for example Direct Services) don't allow staff to work flexibly. This can lead to dissatisfaction and low morale, and can inhibit service delivery. Managers need to work out how to balance or improve service needs with flexible working as it can prove to widen service accessibility for customers, for example, one council introduced flexible working into its Pest Control service very reluctantly, but discovered that it meant that they could have extended operating hours, and their customer satisfaction ratings improved as a result of providing early morning and evening services as well as normal office hours. This could also help to improve the diversity of staff at different grades.
3. Feedback from Work Club shows that young people see OCC as an 'older people's' employer. Consideration could be given to images used, diversity in ages of frontline staff and increasing student placements in order to break down any potential barriers that may exist for young people looking for work.

4. Improve the image of the council through the website. The website was sometimes difficult to navigate and hard to find information about equality. The website could be used to promote an image of a progressive and diverse workforce, monitoring the images used.
5. Monitor current equality training provided and assess how useful it has been and what the future training needs are. Move to incorporating equality and diversity training into other training programmes like recruitment training for managers on how to encourage diverse applications and interview fairly.
6. Consider establishing clearer structures for quality assurance on equality work. This could involve setting up a staff equality steering group which acknowledges that there are a variety of staff with expertise and knowledge in this area, as well as the directors. Consideration could also be given to how communities are involved in EqlAs, perhaps through a specific external equality advisory group.

5. Examples of innovative projects and initiatives

- Planning and development: There are lots of examples where OCC has used its role as a planning authority to ensure that new developments are appropriate and imaginative. Using its potential to maximise its income from its assets, developments have been or will be self-financing (e.g. the Westgate Shopping Centre development and the development of the new customer service centre on St Aldates). OCC approaches major landowners early in the process of considering developments which helps to ensure that they come on board. Residents are involved when planning new housing developments, and work is done across council boundaries to ensure that the work is beneficial to as wide an audience as possible.
- Barton Housing Development: This is an example where OCC has used its own land, and have got external financial backing whilst maintaining control over the development. OCC has worked with local residents to involve them in the process, and help to think about who will move to the new homes when they are built. This is a large development of 800 homes and could potentially ease some of the issues on other estates. The council is looking at ways to ensure that homes are allocated fairly, but also considering the value of mixed occupancy and ensuring that there is different types of housing for different types of resident (such as owner-occupier, council property, shared ownership).
- Oxfordshire Unlimited – disability lead organisation with 180 members felt that they were engaged with by OCC (one officer in particular). They have been involved in 'Shopmobility' and 'Changing Places'. Also OCC used them to visit restaurants to judge how accessible they were. OCC wrote to ones that needed to improve and gave certificates for good ones.
- Old Fire Station: OCC worked with interested parties to support and help develop this city centre location. It is now a centre for supporting homeless people, as well as a centre supporting art, music, dance and drama. There are public classes, a café, drop-in support sessions and links between the people who use the centre.
- The Partnership Officer role is part paid for by the other districts two days a week she is paid for by Oxfordshire district councils to work on partnership with them and the county council. This gives the officer an Oxfordshire County Council pass, which gives access directly into the county council as well as the District Councils.
- Community & Neighbourhoods team holds workshops with community groups to help them develop business plans which will enable them to bid for more grants. Also encouraging smaller organisations to work with each other to enable them to bid for larger pots of money together to help an area.

- Active Citizens project with Reachability and the British Council: this is giving training and support to individuals who have not traditionally been involved or engaged with the democratic process or with influencing public sector decisions. Involves training and development and capacity building.
- Community led planning in non-regeneration areas – this is working across a variety of neighbourhoods so that the positive impacts of regeneration are shared and the negative impacts are mitigated.
- Low Carbon Oxford: work in West Oxford has led to community cohesion success and is to be replicated in Barton and North Oxford with help from money from central government to work on community based energy saving initiatives.
- Brookes University have funded two Police Community Support Officers to work on their campus and work with any issues or situations that occur on campus, which is within OCC's boundaries.
- Children's Safeguarding is taken seriously by OCC even though it doesn't deliver children's services. There is an OCC officer sitting on the County's Children' and Young People's Board and an OCC Board member with responsibility for children's safeguarding.
- Work Club: OCC has set up monthly work clubs in partnership with the Job Centre and community groups. These include coaching skills and interview practice. Although this is a new initiative, it has already reached around 40 people in just two sessions. There are plans to take it into community areas to reach a more diverse range of people.

6. Signposting to areas of good practice

- Wolverhampton Homes: Good work on resident, tenant and leaseholder involvement
- Preston City Council: equality built into Parks & Open spaces, particularly use of cemeteries
- Diversity in the work place: Leeds City Council have been proactive in improving diversity in a number of work areas, not just as a direct employer but works with other employers to improve their diversity too. This includes supporting the organisation Nari-Ekta who support Asian young women to get work placements in a variety of settings. Leeds City Council also has various leadership and development programmes aimed which help to improve diversity in the workplace.
- Migration impact: research conducted by Leeds University and Nottingham University looked at migrant communities and the impact on the local area. This demonstrated some good work done by Leeds City Council
- Nottingham City Council has worked in partnership with the private sector to assess the impact of the recession on BME communities. This has led to an increase in finding jobs and apprenticeships for young people. Community Development Officers work to find young people who are provided with interview skills and supported to find jobs. The private sector is empowered to employ young people through positive action measures from areas of high employment and social deprivation, primarily BME communities.
- Using customer service data from one service to inform other services: Barrow Borough Council has used its data from Revenues and Benefits to help target support services and improve the lives of local citizens. They also use customer data from Leisure Services to help identify diverse communities. Cheshire West and Chester Council have also good examples of how Benefits data can help to improve the knowledge of local communities.
- Equality mapping: Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council has excellent examples of mapping equality data available to all through its website. This gives very good visual

representations of large amounts of data including equality data to highlight areas of needs on specific issues or services. The Mapping and Data Officer identified variants in colour schemes that improve user compatibility. Barrow BC also ensure that the mapped data is used to facilitate EqIAs.

- Understanding importance and relevance of sexual orientation: Stonewall's "What's it got to do with you" leaflet: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/at_home/3460.asp explains the importance of collecting the information. Leeds City Council have been good at improving support to its LGB staff through a county-wide mentoring scheme and establishing a staff forum.
- Good guidance on Equality Impact Assessments is also available on the Nottingham City website: <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=21374&p=0> . For staff, this guidance is available as interactive web pages; with background information provided at the click of a button should the reader want it. This link takes you to an online word document.
- Use of open source software to improve customer service and equality - Barrow BC uses as much open source (and therefore free) software as it can identify as useful. For example, it uses Google Translate on its website. This allows resident (or other website visitor) access to council information in a whole variety of languages at the click of a mouse. This enables current residents and groups to support migrant workers and visitors to Barrow BC's information which encourages and supports cohesion.
- Sexual orientation monitoring and influence in service delivery: Cumbria County Council supports an Equalities Consortium which comprises county-wide community groups (such as those supporting LG&B people, disability groups and groups supporting older people). This consortium is funded jointly by the County and all six District Councils, who have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with it. Within this, the consortium provides advice as well as an engagement mechanism for councils to use where they may not be able to identify individuals or groups locally to advise them on particular issues. This is particularly useful when considering the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who may not feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation with a council, as a larger group, who works locally, can take on board issues that arise and ensure that their needs are fed into councils' planning processes. This example may be useful in Oxfordshire.

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