

Equality Framework Appendix A

Sent: 21 January 2016 09:45

Subject: Leeds City Council Re-validation of the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government

Dear Leeds City Council

We are pleased to re-accredit you at the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). A team of peers assessed your self-assessment, narrative, and supporting documents, as well as meeting with many members of staff, councillors, partners and community organisations to hear about the outcomes Leeds City Council is achieving for its residents, customers, partners and businesses.

Summary of findings:

- Without a doubt Leeds City Council is an 'Excellent' authority, no moderation of this decision was required
- Staff expressed their pride working for the council and how much they enjoyed being ambassadors for the city
- The organisation of the challenge was viewed as a positive experience by the Peers and the approach (which was seen as excellent practice) will be recommended to other local authorities
- The peer assessors have confidence that Leeds is able to sustain their approach due to having strong foundations, with strong and committed leadership at both officer and member levels.
- The city benefits from effective partnerships and good practice.

Notable strengths included:

- The vision of a compassionate City and Council in that city is much more than rhetoric, and was seen in the behaviour of officers and members. The team felt that this is quite rare and other councils could learn from this.
- The organisational culture and ethos of the council was very positive and constructive.
- A strong focus on communities and addressing inequalities
- Development of community hubs which helps to ensure diverse needs are met, as well as empowering communities
- The embedded nature of equality which was expressed throughout the organisation (from the top to the front line staff)

By focussing on the needs of individuals, the council has improved service provision whilst at the same time achieving its budget target.

The team was impressed by what it saw and had no hesitation about awarding the 'Excellent' level to Leeds City Council and looks forward to working with the council in future to help the rest of the sector continue to meet diverse needs and address inequalities.

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Equality Peer Challenge

Leeds City Council

November 2015



1. Introduction

Leeds City Council (LCC) was validated at the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government in 2011 by a team of peers from local government with a full report and feedback presentation.

This is the written feedback of the light-touch peer challenge re-validating Leeds City Council at this level.

The team was made up of peers from local government:
Councillor Ross Willmott - Leicester City Council
Carol Trachonitis – Herefordshire Council
Kirsty Hopkins – Newcastle City Council
Becca Singh – Local Government Association.

LCC provided evidence to support their application, including a self-assessment, background documents and case studies. The team were on site for two days and spoke to a wide range of staff, councillors, partners and service users. The team were very happy to re-validate Leeds City Council's self-assessment at the 'Excellent' level of the revised Equality Framework for Local Government.

2. Key messages

There is a clear commitment from politicians, senior officers and throughout the organisation to be the best council, and for Leeds to be the best city. In order to achieve this, LCC rightly believes that it needs to be providing support and services to all of its citizens and communities, and therefore it is committed to being a wholly inclusive council. Where LCC does not provide services or infrastructure, it uses its influence to encourage others (for example developers) to think broadly about accessibility, and inclusion.

LCC is a council that knows and understands its communities by working with them. It is an organisation strongly committed to supporting its communities, delivering appropriate services in the right location, and by the right people. After years of change, particularly in light of the economic climate, LCC has developed into a confident, stable and yet flexible organisation, with empowered, capable and committed staff who are knowledgeable and skilled, encouraged to continue to develop and explore creative ways to deliver services.

This means that, through working with its partners, it is setting up Community Hubs which are delivering a variety of services from across the public and voluntary sector. These are in locations identified using data from processes such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and existing assets, such as buildings. These provide residents and customers with a local tailored service including job seeking, debt and benefit advice, libraries and health and wellbeing services.

There is a culture of constructive challenge in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for people who live and work in the city, including the Equality Member Champions (holding regular challenge sessions with directors), Scrutiny (with its own programme of activity) and unions (meeting regularly with senior officers and members to foster good working relations).

LCC is aware of its successes but is far from complacent, being very aware of its challenges as well as its achievements.

3. Findings

3.1 Knowing Your Communities

LCC has a wealth of data and analysed information which is regularly updated and refreshed. This is joint work with partners, collating and sharing information in order to ensure they can all work with accurate data when planning services. Data is in publicly accessible websites such as the Data Mill.

Over the last few years, the council has changed its relationship with citizens, listening more with proactive dialogue by both elected members and officers. This information helps to shape services.

LCC is able to pull together data locally, giving a very rich picture of what is happening.

All levels of the organisation are able to articulate what Leeds is like and key issues such as poverty, racial inequalities, and religious tensions and are able to articulate how this information is used. There was evidence from staff that data was used as a management tool to help make decisions.

3.2 Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

Political leadership over the last ten years has been crucial to the council's success on equality. There has been a small core of people leading on equality and diversity, who have worked particularly well with elected members, but also across the whole council. This has ensured that tackling inequalities is high on all departments' agenda, as well as on the Council's agenda, and in work with partners. Officers and members alike have enabled embedded approach to equality.

There is strong, clear vision led by the Chief Executive, senior officers and elected members where the city prospers to the benefit of all citizens and communities. The 2015/16 Council Plan demonstrates a clear understanding of equality and officers and members alike are clear that addressing inequalities underpins all that the council tries to do.

Members and officers lead by example and behaviour. All senior officers have equality objectives that they are assessed against in their appraisal, and Members see themselves as ambassadors for their communities, for the council and for Leeds. The Equality Member Champions are all senior long-serving councillors, with a wide range of experience and knowledge about Leeds, its communities, being in opposition and being in the administration. This means that although there are political differences between the four major parties, there is a strong political consensus about equality impacts, and an understanding of the pressures and constraints of being in the administration.

There is a high level of awareness amongst officers and members about both service specific and broad-reaching strategic issues which have an impact on

addressing inequalities. However, the peer team heard that sometimes messages and commitments from senior officers, and frontline experience and actions get stuck in middle management. It was not possible to determine what level of management this is, but LCC may want to explore how internal communication can be improved in these roles.

Although there is widespread understanding of what equality means, and the impact that specific projects have, the team recommends that LCC is more explicit about how it evaluates and explains the impacts of its work, for example a small set of high level indicators. Newcastle City Council has system of indicators that LCC might want to adapt for its own use¹. These are selected to report progress towards the ambitions for the city. They are reported to Cabinet each quarter and published on the Council Plan webpages for each of the Council's four strategic priorities

Leeds City Council is a trusted brand and there is a strong sense of civic pride. This was clear from staff, members, partners and service users. LCC is clear that in future, it may be a smaller council, but it will continue to have a big influence. Work with developers demonstrate how it is influencing businesses to support all its citizens, working with them to understand the value of addressing inequalities by employing local citizens in construction, ensuring their developments are sited appropriately, and are built to the Leeds Standard to ensure they are accessible to a wide range of people. People want to work for and with the council to do the best for the city.

There is a clear sense that addressing inequalities is less about documents and strategies, and more about real work with partners on the ground. Partners report that they want to work with LCC. They feel valued, engaged and listened to. There are many examples of joint work, but most notably, LCC's decision to devolve services to Community Hubs demonstrates successful partnership working and empowering staff from different agencies to provide appropriate services locally.

The peer team felt that Leeds City Council is a confident and secure organisation, with political and managerial consensus to empower individual staff, and partners, to deliver the services that its residents need.

¹Newcastle upon Tyne's indicator reports

- Working city: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/policies-plans-and-performance/our-policies-and-plans/council-plan/delivering-our-priorities/a-workin>
- Decent neighbourhoods: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/policies-plans-and-performance/our-policies-and-plans/council-plan/delivering-our-priorities/decent-n>
- Tackling inequalities: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/policies-plans-and-performance/our-policies-and-plans/council-plan/delivering-our-priorities/tackling>
- Fit for purpose council: <http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/policies-plans-and-performance/our-policies-and-plans/council-plan/delivering-our-priorities/fit-purp>

3.3 Involving Your Communities

The peer team felt that the way LCC involves its communities in order to deliver responsive services is so well embedded that these two sections should be reported together.

3.4 Responsive Services and Customer Care

LCC has harnessed the energy of its committed workforce by empowering them to deliver appropriate services in the appropriate way. It holds lists of internal and external funding that it shares with its partners in order to maximise the possibilities of providing services where they are most needed.

It is clear that LCC uses its varied methods of engaging and involving local communities to ensure that it delivers responsive services, including social media. It commissions a third sector organisation to deliver its formal engagement mechanisms.

The peer team saw many examples of how public and partner engagement led to changes in policy or service design, using different consultation, engagement and involvement methods. Examples include:

1. Trinity Square development: The EIA involved disabled people and identified a number of issues which were resolved. However, once work started, more issues came to light and the developer then worked with disabled people on site to minimise any access problems. This has now become standard practice for future work with developers in Leeds.
2. Community Hub: One of the pilot community hubs worked with a new retail developer to identify what skills it needed from its future employees. The hub then provided job skills support and advice and as a result, the retailer was able to appoint a very high percentage of local people into its workforce.
3. Prevent: LCC worked with local community organisations to deliver a tailored programme of activity as part of the Prevent agenda. It has multi-agency buy-in and an illustration of its success is the lack of riots or disturbances when other cities experienced them recently.
4. Commissioning: LCC involves service users in commissioning its services for disabled people. This has involved investment in time and training, but has resulted in high quality services providing the right support for disabled people.

3.5 A Skilled and Committed Workforce

Staff see LCC as a good employer and they like working for the council. They feel valued and listened to, and encouraged to find creative solutions to the challenges the council faces.

Open conversations are at the heart of internal communications and the culture and change programme: regular blogs by senior officers, formal engagement mechanisms, senior officers walking the floor and being generally visible, and managers having honest conversations with their teams and departments.

There is a very constructive and creative working environment. The Breakthrough projects have enabled staff to work with others from different departments and organisation to find innovative solutions to key challenges for the city. There is a

high trust culture, for example there has been a significant devolution of budgets to Community Hubs for service provision.

There is a good working relationship between unions and senior management and elected members. Early engagement of trade unions means that managers and unions can work together to iron out difficulties and find solutions. For example, there is a summit planned for unions, managers and elected members to discuss the implications of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

Appraisals are universal and valued, although there are some practical difficulties for dispersed staff. They generally lead to positive change or development, and include a 360 degree element. However, there is scope to develop this further in order to reduce the apparent communication blockage at middle management level. Training needs are identified, and there is a record of drawing down funding from Unions' learning funds to deliver training. The leadership conference and managers' challenge all help to develop leaders and managers for the future. However, the peer team did not see how HR collate staff feedback, training and development needs and sickness records in order to develop a programme of training and development for the following year. The team recommend that this link is made more explicit.

Members and officers recognise the importance of good working relationships and have fostered these. Equality member champions regularly constructively challenge directors over services, using their casework to illustrate, for example the impact of street furniture design. There is a widespread understanding of the impact of the reduction of central government funding, and a desire to work together to find ways to overcome challenges and ensure that Leeds prospers in the new local government environment.

4. Notable Practice

Prevent work – many councils are working on this agenda to counter extremism. LCC works with local voluntary sector partners to identify the most appropriate methods. These are specific to the areas that LCC works in, using local knowledge, contacts and communities rather than strictly following a centrally determined national process.

Adult Social Care – neighbourhood networks were set up to support local areas and citizens support themselves. These are small local committees of older people and volunteers carrying out over 20,000 visits a year helping to prevent loneliness and isolation amongst older people. This has a knock on effect of preventing a number of expensive interventions.

Member Champions group and process – this is a group of experienced, knowledgeable and respected councillors. The group acts as a panel, challenging Chief Officers and Directors on the work that they and their staff do, and the positive and negative impacts this may have on different communities. These are lively debates, with open discussion and real influence. Officers report that these sessions ensure that they consider all citizens (including different communities) and recognise

complexities of identity, rather than just consider the majority of citizens, and that tackling inequalities is embedded in all the services it provides.

LCC has harnessed the capability of staff, trusted them with appropriate budgets and decision making, and empowered them to deliver appropriate services. There are numerous examples of this, including work in Community Hubs, Commissioning, Domestic Violence and social care.

Political leadership – there is effective political leadership on equality, which empowers staff, at the same time as challenging staff. Although there have been changes in administration, there is a high degree of cross-party consensus and working. Good member officer relations foster positive behaviours. eg chief officers are seen out and about engaging in events beyond their professional role.

Breakthrough projects – there are seven cross-cutting projects that work across departmental boundaries and involve partners and communities to explore creative solutions to challenges that Leeds faces. They are wide-ranging and varied, for example: Domestic violence and abuse; making Leeds the best place to grow old; and hosting world class events on a global stage as a Smart city.

Commissioning – including service users in preparing to commission adults services. Service users were involved in identifying what services were needed, how best to deliver them, and throughout the tender process. The Commissioning Team is now looking at ways to involve service users in contract management. Wiltshire Council is doing something similar with its *Help to Live at Home* Service and it could be helpful to both LCC and Wiltshire Council to share experiences.

Growing the economy – LCC is clear that it wants the local economy to grow and is working with existing business and developers to do this. However, its commitment to all its local citizens means that it is influencing companies to take on the values of the council and become inclusive employers. It is working hard to successfully attract new business which share its values (such as Burberry and John Lewis who are opening new premises and shops in Leeds shortly), and requiring developers to use high proportions of local people in construction and local businesses in the supply chain, as well as taking on apprentices and other ways to help boost the local economy and the skills of its residents.

5. Conclusion

The peer team were very happy to re-validate Leeds City Council's self-assessment at the 'Excellent' level of the revised Equality Framework for Local Government.