



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

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Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Planning and Improvement)

Executive Board

Date: 15 December 2010

Subject: Response to Deputation to Council from Leeds Youth Council Regarding the Equality and Diversity Plan

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 15 September 2010 the Council received a deputation from the Leeds Youth Council regarding their equality and diversity plan. The plan was produced as part of a piece of work they had been undertaking with The Fairplay Partnership.

The report provides a response to this deputation and seeks to address the issues raised.

1.0 Purpose of this Report

1.1 To respond to the deputation from Leeds Youth Council on the 15 September 2010.

1.2 This report outlines some of the work that has been undertaken to address the issues raised by the delegation and proposes actions to be considered by Executive Board.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Leeds City Council was one of only two local authorities who were invited to take part in a Fairplay Partnership Project. Fairplay is a not for profit company who received funding from Yorkshire Forward for this piece of work. The purpose of the project was to work with elected members to develop their knowledge, understanding and future role in driving forward the equality and diversity agenda.

2.2 This invitation was considered and approved by Central and Corporate Scrutiny Board as part of work they were undertaking on embedding equality, diversity, cohesion and integration.

2.2 It was agreed that Fairplay would work with two groups of elected members to carry out an equality and diversity audit using their 'Diversity Driver' toolkit. An action plan was then developed to progress the key priorities that were identified.

2.3 One of the specific actions that was identified was that 'Councillors consider the demographics of the current council chamber and the barriers that some groups might experience in becoming elected members and that work be undertaken to involve young people to analyse barriers and propose solutions to overcome them.'

2.4 As a result of this, it was agreed that Fairplay would work with members of the Leeds Youth Council to deliver a workshop for young people to consider some of the potential barriers that different people might face in becoming elected members in the future and to identify some possible solutions to such barriers.

2.5 The work has been supported by officers from the Member Development and the Equality Teams.

2.6 Over a 6 month period in 2009 work was undertaken to progress this involving young people. It considered who might want to become an elected representative; the potential barriers that might be based on various equality 'characteristics'; and what could be done to overcome any identified barriers.

2.7 A session involving young people and elected members provided an opportunity to share their experiences including getting selected, standing for election and developing their political careers.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 There were a range of findings that the young people identified:

- a) That information is not readily available on the equality 'profile' of elected members in Leeds making it difficult to determine which groups were and were not represented.

- b) A lack of political education for people of all ages.
- c) That the cost of becoming an elected member may be a barrier to some people.
- d) There seemed to be more obvious barriers for women becoming elected members such as, personal safety when out campaigning and access to childcare.
- e) The council chamber appears to some as inaccessible, especially to those with mobility impairments.
- f) Members of the Youth Council made a series of recommendations which can be grouped into three areas:
 - Information to be made available on the 'equality' make up of the Council
 - Improved education on local politics
 - improved accessibility of the Council Chamber

3.2 Members of the Youth Council also concluded that they too needed to reflect on their own diversity and address similar representation issues

4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1 There are no immediate implications arising from this report.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

5.1 There are no immediate implications arising from this report.

6.0 Conclusions and Next Steps

6.1 There are a range of current actions and interventions being delivered and planned by the council and its partners to address the issues highlighted in the deputation. This includes a "Mayor for A Day" programme and the recent 'speed dating' sessions where young people were able to meet with and question elected members on a range of issues This work already considers the majority of the recommendations raised by the Leeds Youth Council and is incorporated into the Member Development Programme.

6.2 Consideration is given to the development of an equality monitoring exercise for elected members using existing member engagement processes.

6.3 In order to address the specific issue of access to the Council Chamber, it is proposed that an access audit is undertaken by the Council's Access Officer.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Executive Board is asked to note the actions being taken in response to the deputation.

Background Papers:

Fairplay Action Plan June 2010

Appendix 1: Minutes of Leeds Youth Council Deputation Full Council – 15 September 2010

Appendix 1.

DEPUTATION ONE – LEEDS YOUTH COUNCIL

A STUDY OF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon, and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing your deputation.

MR T RYAN: Good afternoon Lord Mayor, members of Council. My name is Thomas Ryan and this is Peter Brockeridge. We are from the Leeds Youth Council. I am going to give you a bit of background about the Leeds Youth Council now.

In October 2009 Leeds Youth Council was approached with an invitation to participate in a programme of work being undertaken by Leeds City Council Equality Team. More specifically, the work formed part of the department's Diversity Action Plan and would be undertaken in partnership with, and supported by, the following:

Geoff Turnbull – Senior Project Officer, Equality Team

Anne McMaster – Strategic Equality Manager, Equality Team

Daniel Hardy – Deputy Labour Group Support Manager
Liz Bavidge – Fair Play Partnership

Lesley Reed – Senior Youth Worker, Youth Service.

I am just going to tell you about what the LYC, which is the Leeds Youth Council, has found.

Information does not appear to be readily available around such issues as disability, ethnicity, religion/belief, sexual orientation, or social class – the latter being perhaps more difficult to capture as would be largely self-defined. This probably leads to people forming their own conclusions through visual observation which in turn could lead to misconceptions. The diversity or lack of it, of the Leeds City Council cannot easily be ascertained because of this lack of information.

Based on conversations with other young people and some adults plus their conversation and discussions with Elected Members, the group felt that there was a

real lack of political education at local level. Many people, young people and older, are not fully aware of what the role of a Councillor entails. This is probably one of the main reasons why local elections do not attract more diversity of potential candidates.

Finance was highlighted as a possible barrier for prospective candidates as Elected Members in general, i.e. excluding those who perhaps hold an Executive post, do not receive a high salary and often work long hours. It is often the case that Councillors need to supplement the salary through other sources of income e.g. having a part of full time job as well as being a Councillor; being in receipt of a pension.

It was felt that there was a practical issues that created barriers – possibly more so for females than males – e.g. safety concerns when out campaigning for votes; child care considerations.

In undertaking this programme of work the group also reflected on their own equality and diversity as the larger group of Leeds Youth Council and realised that they too needed to address the issue of being more representative of the young people of Leeds.

I am just going to say about some recommendations that they said.

On joining Leeds Youth Council, members complete a registration form which includes questions about disability, gender, ethnicity, other activities and organisations we belong to. This information is saved on a database and can be provided, with respect to members' rights to anonymity, to Leeds City Council, funders etc as and when needed. Perhaps if such information were also obtained from Elected Members and made available to the public, via the Leeds City Council website, in an anonymous, purely statistical manner, equality and diversity could be more openly demonstrated. This is an exercise that could be undertaken on an individual and ward basis and may also aid the selection process of potential candidates.

Education on local politics should be included in school curriculums and delivered more to the wider community. These are our suggestions on how this could be achieved. (Applause)