



**Executive  
23 June 2010**

**Report from the Director of  
Communication and Diversity**

Wards Affected:  
ALL

**Brent Council Becoming a National Beacon of Diversity  
Best Practice**

**1.0 Summary**

1.1 This report has three main sections;

1.2 Section 1: is an introduction outlining Brent Council's aspiration to become a national beacon of diversity best practice and some of our achievements to date.

1.2 Section 2: identifies the eight key indicators to achieving our aspiration, these are:

1. Monitoring performance, understanding and knowing
2. Involvement, engagement and consultation
3. Focusing on outcomes
4. Exploiting the business benefits of equality and diversity
5. Delivering quality services for all
6. Investing in all our communities
7. Progressing outcomes through partnerships
8. Best and next practice

1.3 Section 3: focuses on the main priority for this year, achieving the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

The Corporate Diversity Team have adopted a five staged approach to the EFLG Assessment (see appendix 2):

- Stage 1 Gap analysis
- Stage 2 Initial Self Assessment
- Stage 3 Development of Improvement Plan
- Stage 4 Full Self Assessment
- Stage 5 Peer Challenge

Although we are still at stage 1 of preparing for the EFLG assessment, early indications are that there are significant gaps in our evidence base that would have a negative impact on our ability to achieve the Excellence level. These gaps have been identified in the areas of:

- The use of Equality Impact Assessments to inform policy and strategic decisions
- The analysis and use of equality monitoring data to strengthen equality objectives relating to service delivery and employment
- Consistent levels of baseline equality data for all diversity strands

Currently, Brent Council is at level 4 of the old Equality Standard for Local Government which equates to 'moving towards excellence' in the new EFLG. However, from April 2009, the council has two years in which it must undertake a peer challenge or they will be down graded to Achieving status. (See appendix 1 for further details).

## **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 Members of the Executive are asked to note this report.

2.2 Members of the Executive are asked to endorse the eight key indicators which will ensure that Brent Council becomes a national beacon of diversity best practice.

2.3 As part of achieving our aspiration for Brent Council to become a national beacon of diversity best practice, Members of the Executive are asked to endorse the five stage approach to meeting the EFLG assessment.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As part of the One Council transformation programme, one of the key objectives for Brent Council is to become a national beacon of diversity best practice.

The equality and diversity agenda presents enormous challenges, but also extraordinary opportunities to tap into underused talent in the workforce and to

focus on all users and their experiences in order to enhance and improve the quality and the effectiveness of our services.

Within Brent, equality and diversity is not a minority issue, without listing all our achievements in relation to equality and diversity, Brent is the most diverse council in the country. Brent has a BME majority resident and staff base, we have already been recognised for our diversity achievements – we were listed in The Times Top 50 Places Where Women Want to Work in 2006 and in 2007 and won the Opportunity Now public sector award for gender equality. Also, our Work Life Balance initiative won an Employee Benefits award in 2005. In March 2009 we achieved level four of the five level Equality Standard for Local Government and we have a good track record in mainstreaming equality and diversity into our service provision. Therefore we are in a good position to achieve the aim of becoming a national beacon of diversity best practice.

### **3.2 What next? - The Eight Key Indicators for Success**

First of all we need to unpick what we actually mean by a national beacon of diversity best practice, before identifying our next steps. For if there is no clear discernible picture of what a national beacon of diversity best practice looks like, how do we know whether we have achieved it?

A key element of being a national beacon of diversity best practice is to lead from the front, to take an active role in dismantling inequality and disadvantage and in a real sense promote the benefits of diversity and inclusivity. That is not to say that there are no challenges to being the most diverse borough in the country and arguably in the world. For example, how do you satisfy so many different community groups, when their ideas of satisfaction are at polar opposites? On a Brent scale of diversity, this is dilemma that for most boroughs is outside of their experience. So with regards to diversity, there is a lot to be learnt from this densely populated North West London borough with its significant levels of deprivation and migration, but high levels of cohesion. Brent is a lesson in diversity which needs to be heard because we are already a success story.

This is not to say that there isn't any more for us to do. In fact the more ahead we are, the more we need to do and our challenges are unique and unparalleled. Therefore, to truly achieve the status of a national beacon of diversity best practice we need to take an inclusive leadership approach, shaping the best practice, going beyond thinking outside of the box to defining the box. We have more than ample resources in terms of the range of our diverse communities and the challenges that each particular community faces, to identify different opportunities to be a national beacon in our actions and approaches. However, this hinges on everyone, but in particular the leadership being signed up to following key indicators;

#### **1. Monitoring performance, understanding and knowing**

Monitoring performance, satisfaction, understanding, knowing and mapping our diverse communities particularly in relation to inequalities which affect life chances i.e. educational attainment.

## **2. Involvement, engagement and consultation**

Ensuring that there is active involvement by the communities in the work and responsibilities of the council. That there is positive and proactive consultation and engagement by the council so that our communities are at the very heart of decision- making.

## **3. Focusing on outcomes**

Dismantling and challenging discrimination and barriers with a focus on sustainable priority targeting of outcomes and delivering change.

## **4. Exploiting the business benefits of equality and diversity**

Ensuring that the business benefits of diversity translate into organisational benefits and that the benefits of a modern, representative and diverse workforce are seen as key to delivering a quality service to our diverse communities.

## **5. Delivering quality services for all**

Ensuring that the services which we provide are responsive and take account of the diverse needs of our diverse community, and recognise multiple disadvantage and discrimination.

## **6. Investing in all our communities**

Ensuring that there is a strategy of inward investment into the borough, to gain economic benefits and build capacity for disadvantaged communities, this includes procurement and commissioning exercises by the council.

## **7. Progressing outcomes through partnerships**

Developing partnerships and relationships with key stakeholders and public bodies to ensure that there is a joined-up approach to progressing equality and diversity targets and outcomes.

## **8. Best and next practice**

Ensuring that we go beyond compliance in our equality legislative duties and instead focusing on 'best and next practice', taking the opportunity to obtain the maximum benefit of the legislation.

We are already engaged in many of the above activities, but, it is important to both map out the journey to national beacon status and to assess and review our performance. However, in equality and diversity one size does not fit all and so it is recommended that we use a number of mechanisms. The Equality Framework for Local government (previously the Equality Standard) will ensure our focus is on performance, improvement and outcome and will give us a strategic approach.

To get a more detailed national analysis of equality strands, what we have achieved and where we should focus and target, we should utilise the external assessment process of Race for Opportunity, Opportunity Now, the Stonewall Index, the Disability Standard Assessment and the Disability Two Ticks Symbol assessments.

For a Service Area equality and diversity assessment we should utilise the CAA framework of assessment, in particular the Key Lines of Enquiry i.e. in Housing one of the KLOE's is specifically on diversity.

See the appendices of this report for more details on the above assessment processes.

### **3.3 Next Steps and Actions – The Equality Framework for Local Government**

Our main priority for this year is to achieve the Equality Framework for Local Government Excellence level (see appendix 1). This is a considerable as Brent council will need to provide evidence around five key performance areas (see appendix 3):

- 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

For each of the performance areas Brent Council will need to demonstrate:

- How the evidence was developed and what the evidence is
- What stakeholders and community members say
- Evidence outcomes

The Corporate Diversity Team have adopted a five staged approach to the assessment, (see appendix 2)

- Stage 1 Gap analysis
- Stage 2 Initial Self Assessment
- Stage 3 Development of Improvement Plan
- Stage 4 Full Self Assessment
- Stage 5 Peer Challenge

## **4.0 Financial Implications**

4.1 The cost of the assessment is £4,000.00 plus vat. We will also be required to pay the cost of the expenses for the assessors such as for example, hotel costs or travel expenses.

4.2 There may also be additional costs associated with achieving certain targets set out in the Improvement Plan, such as for example, the cost of providing specific training to meet an identified gap. This cost will need to be met from specific Directorate budgets.

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The EFLG is a mechanism to support and provide the evidence base that Local Councils are fulfilling their equality legislative duties.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 A positive impact on Equality and Diversity for Brent Council.

## **7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

- 7.1 The corporate Diversity Team will be co-ordinating the EFLG Peer Assessment. Members of the Diversity Reference Group will be responsible for gathering the evidence from their respective directorates and carrying out the self assessment process, which will then be signed off by the Leadership Group on Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion.
- 7.2 Additional rooms, PC's and equipment will be needed by the external Peer Assessment Team.

## **Background Papers**

Appendix 1: The Equality Framework for Local Government

Appendix 2: A Five Staged Approach to Meeting the EFLG Excellence Level Assessment

Appendix 3: Example of Template for Delivering Excellence Improvement Plan

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## The Equality Framework for Local Government

### Background

The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) is a performance and improvement framework which enables local authorities to mainstream equality and diversity. However, since its introduction in 2001, the weaknesses of the then Equality Standard have become clear. In particular it's over emphasis on process rather than outcomes. The new framework builds on and recognises the work that councils have already undertaken under the old standard, but contains many new features and aspires to be:

- simpler
- smarter
- proportional and relevant

### The Three Levels of Achievement and Assessment

The Framework is based on three levels of achievement; **developing**, **achieving** and **excellent** rather than the five levels of the old standard. This reduces the actions from 167 to 88, which authorities can implement in ways that are relevant and proportionate to their needs.

Authorities that have reached levels 1 and 2 will be treated as 'developing'. Those at level 3 will be treated as 'achieving'. Those at level 4 will be classified as 'moving towards excellence' and those at level 5 as 'excellent'. The 'moving towards excellence' classification is intended to recognise the achievements of level 4, but it is not a level under the new framework. It is a transitional stage that will be phased out within two years and authorities like Bent Council, currently at level 4, will be expected to start working towards the 'excellent' stage of the Framework.

The Diversity Peer Challenge that is already working for level 3 of the old standard has been revised to provide a means of benchmarking achievements under the Framework. It will consist of two parts:

- a review by peers of the authority's own self-assessment, including appropriate supporting evidence
- an on-site visit by peers to conduct interviews and focus groups with employees, councillors and other stakeholders

Self-assessments at the 'achieving' and 'excellent' levels will be validated by the peer challenge. Authorities will be given a framework recognition award for reaching the achieving and excellent levels. It is expected that all local authorities will be reassessed every three years, or in line with their business cycle if that is earlier.

From April 2009, those claiming to be either 'achieving' or 'excellent', but have not had any external assessment to date will have two years before they will be expected to undertake a peer challenge.

## The Definition of Equality

The Framework uses a wider definition of equality, which was originally set out in 'The Equalities Review', based on the idea of equal life chances.

*“An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and opportunity to live in the way people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be.”*

This definition is more aspirational than the formal legal definitions of equality. It is about what we can do to create a fairer society and recognises that:

- equality is an issue for us all
- we don't all start from the same place
- to create a fairer society we need to recognise different needs

This definition includes the groups that are protected by discrimination law. Local authorities will therefore need to continue to consider the impact that race, gender, gender reassignment, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion and or belief may have on the life chances of members of their communities. But the definition encourages councils to understand the relationship between these characteristics and socio-economic status and the experience of other vulnerable groups. This definition is similar to the way inequality and vulnerability is defined by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates for the purposes of the CAA.

'The Equalities Review' also suggested that the life chances of different groups could be measured against ten 'domains' or outcomes. These are very similar to the outcome approach of 'Every Child Matters', they are;

- **Longevity** – including avoiding premature mortality
- **Physical security** – including freedom from violence and physical and or sexual abuse
- **Health** – including wellbeing and access to high-quality healthcare
- **Education** – including being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications and having access to training and lifelong learning
- **Standard of living** – including being able to live with independence and security and covering: nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth, utilities, social services and transport
- **Productive and valued activities** – such as access to employment, a positive experience in the workplace, work-life balance, and being able to care for others
- **Individual, family and social life** – including self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage
- **Participation, influence and voice** – including participation in decision-making and democratic life
- **Identity, expression and self-respect** – including freedom of belief and religion
- **Legal security** – including equality and non discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system



### **A Five Staged Approach to Meeting the EFLG Excellence Level Assessment**

#### **Stage 1 gap analysis:**

The first part of this work began in March 2010. The Diversity Team looked at the 34 criteria of the Eflg and identified sources of evidence from across the organisation that could be used as suitable evidence of meeting the criteria. This information was presented to the Diversity Reference Group on 27 April 2010.

The second part of the gap analysis involved members of the DRG being tasked with building upon the initial evidence base by providing more detailed information to support our achievements against the criteria. Particular attention has been given to identifying evidence in diversity areas that are already known to be challenging for Brent such as Disability. The DRG leads have also been asked to highlight any activities that could be considered as examples of good practice suitable for development into case studies. This stage will be completed by 31 May 2010.

#### **Stage 2 Initial Self Assessment:**

This stage will involve the evidence being viewed by a group consisting of representatives from the Diversity Team, DRG members, Directorate Equality Leads and other key stakeholders.

This initial self assessment will allow us to scrutinise the returns from each Directorate and assess our progress against the 34 criteria. It will inform the Improvement Plan for achieving the 'Excellent' level and will determine the timing of the Peer Challenge. This stage will take place week commencing 11 June 2010.

#### **Stage 3 Development of Improvement Plan**

The purpose of the Improvement Plan is to target areas where gaps have been identified or where issues need to be resolved. The Improvement Plan will also contain long term targeted activities that will extend beyond the date of the Peer Challenge and these will be monitored through the Equality Scheme Action Plan. The action plan will be presented to the Leadership Group on 22 June. DRG members will be required to report back on progress against the Improvement Plan targets and the Improvement Plan will be monitored monthly by the Diversity Team.

#### **Stage 4 Full Self Assessment:**

This process will involve Brent Council conducting its own form of Peer challenge by looking at all the evidence submitted including case studies and the 'Excellence' narrative that has been developed to establish whether or not we are ready for the Peer Challenge. It will provide a final opportunity to decide whether or not any further activity will be needed before the Peer Challenge. This assessment will take place in September / October 2010.

#### **Stage 5 Peer Challenge**

The Peer Challenge process involves Brent Council undergoing an external assessment by representatives from the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA) accompanied by representatives from other councils. The Peer Challenge must be booked with the I&DeA 12 weeks ahead of the

required date. At this point in time it is anticipated that the Peer Challenge will take place in January 2011.

Prior to the assessment Brent council must submit its evidence portfolio to the I&DeA for scrutiny. Upon receipt of the evidence the council may be contacted by the I&DeA and asked questions based on the evidence submitted.

The actual assessment will take place over three days and the assessors will be on site. The process will involve looking at evidence and interviewing key stakeholders and leads such as the Chief Executive, Chief Officers and Members.

Appendix 3:

**Example of Template for Delivering Excellence Improvement Plan**

(Please note that there may be more than one target for each criterion)

Area identified for improvement	Priority 1-10 (1 is high)	Who does this improvement activity relate to? (individual or team)	Resources needed	Potential barriers	Potential Solutions	If appropriate, how are we planning to involve stakeholders and community members
EFLG criteria <b>Knowing your community and Equality Mapping</b>						
Description of target 1.						
EFLG criteria <b>Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment</b>						
Description of target 2.						
EFLG criteria <b>Community Engagement and Satisfaction</b>						
Description of target 3.						
EFLG criteria <b>Responsive Services and customer care</b>						
Description of target 4.						
EFLG criteria <b>Modern and Diverse Workforce</b>						
Description of target 5.						