



The LGBT Health and Inclusion Project

Consultation on Brighton and Hove Council's Equality & Inclusion Policy 2012-2015

Background

NHS Brighton and Hove and Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC), has commissioned a consortium of organisations providing services to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) people in the city to conduct a series of consultations with local LGBT people. The aim is to use the information gathered to feed into local service commissioning, planning and delivery.

The partner agencies are: Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard, THT South, MindOut, Allsorts Youth Project, Brighton Bothways and the Clare Project. The consortium has employed a worker to coordinate the project, known as the LGBT Health and Inclusion Project (LGBT HIP).

The BHCC Equality & Inclusion Policy 2012-2015 Consultation

LGBT HIP was contracted by BHCC to carry out consultation work with local LGBT people regarding its draft Equality and Inclusion Policy 2012-2015. To progress this, LGBT HIP undertook the following activities:

- Signposting to the Council's online consultation questionnaire through emails to LGBT HIP members.
- A two-hour roundtable discussion conducted with the partner agencies comprising the LGBT HIP consortium.
- An open two-hour group discussion with local LGBT people.

Two methods of recruitment were used for the open session: 1) LGBT HIP members were invited to register for the session via an email, 2) information about the session was posted on social networking sites and via emails to the local LGBT community and voluntary sector to ensure that the session was open to LGBT people who were not members of HIP. Participants were provided with refreshments and a £20 payment to cover their expenses. Further detail about those who attended is provided below. The discussions were audio-recorded with permission.

In total, 11 people took part in the session. The following demographic data was available. 5 women and 5 men attended, 1 person said they were 'other' gender. 4 participants identified as trans. All participants were white British, with the exception of 5 people, three of whom were White and held another nationality. Two participants were from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Participants ranged in age from 20s to 70s, although most were concentrated in the 30s age group. 11 participants gave sexual identity data as follows: lesbian/gay woman = 3, gay man = 3, queer = 2, bisexual = 1, pansexual = 1, heterosexual = 1. Three people were living with a long-term health condition/disability and one person was a carer.

About This Report

Part one of the report summarises the key issues identified in the LGBT HIP Consortium roundtable, part two focuses on the open session. Conclusions and recommendations are offered to support the Council's development of the policy. Quotations from participants

are used to illustrate some of the themes identified. The report should be read in conjunction with the Brighton & Hove City Council Equality & Inclusion Policy 2012-2015 Consultation Document.

Please note, the following report presents information about the consultation work conducted by LGBT HIP and should not be taken as a position statement of any of LGBT HIP; Consortium partners.

Part One: The LGBT HIP Consortia Roundtable

The session was a lively discussion with participants reflecting on the document from their perspective as providers of services and interventions for LGBT people in the city. Participants emphasised the issue of multi-sectionality, i.e. that many LGBT people have more than one 'protected characteristic' but the meeting generally focused on discussion of the implications of the policy in relation to LGBT issues and concerns.

1) The Consultation Process

- a. Participants were concerned that the online exercise would not be seen as accessible or engaging for some LGBT service users (e.g. young people, older people, those with lower literacy levels or IT skills/access). It was noted that there was a wide range of comfort with 'form-filling' exercises and that some service users would find this daunting. Some of the language was also thought to be inaccessible, using terms that would not necessarily be widely understood (e.g. many people would not know what an equality impact assessment was). Participants perceived that the exercise would be more accessible to those with policy development or strategic experience. More accessible language and concrete examples as to how the policy might affect day-to-day living were recommended.
- b. It was welcomed that additional steps were being taken to consult with 'communities of interest' and the use of focus groups in addition to the online consultation was supported as potentially reducing barriers, as well as allowing discussion and clarification of issues. More information about the other 'communities of interest' being consulted would have been helpful.
- c. Participants would have liked an opportunity to pose questions and discuss the policy face-to-face with Councillors and Council officials, as had been done with other consultations such as neighbourhood councils.
- d. Participants suggested that there needed to be ways for individuals to give more nuanced feedback, as some Council services may be perceived as operating in ways that are more inclusive and aware of equalities issues than others; opportunities to feed in this type of detail was suggested.

2) General Feedback

- a. In general terms, participants were keen to express support for the policy as a positive statement of intent about the Council's equalities objectives. As a result, the main body of the discussion focused on constructively critical feedback that might be offered to the Council, taking account of the generally positive views on the document overall.

"I want to be encouraging. So I have said throughout that the principles sound excellent. I would like the HIP to be positive about the principles (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

"As we said in the beginning, in a general sense, I think it's a good statement of intent. It's not wildly off the mark, it's definitely pointing in the right direction (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

General issues that emerged were as follows:

- b. A philosophical point was raised in relation to the conceptual language used in the document: it was noted that the policy was one for 'equality and inclusion' but that the term 'diversity' was largely missing. Participants were strongly supportive of the goals of equality and inclusion for LGBT people but indicated that the promotion of respect for diversity was also crucial. Participants were keen to promote understanding that achieving equality did not mean 'treating everyone the same', and that recognizing and promoting respect for difference and distinctiveness should also be enshrined in the policy. They were keen to guard against 'inclusion' being taken to mean 'assimilation'.
- c. The point was also made that promoting fairness and equality for LGBT people may in fact mean recognising differences and prioritising needs. The example was given of community safety where it is necessary for the Council to take special steps for LGBT people in order to reduce the heightened risk of abuse and violence that they face. With funding pressures, participants argued that prioritising those with greatest need, including LGBT people where appropriate, was even more necessary.
- d. It was suggested that the exercise might have been improved by linking the proposed new policy more explicitly with the previous one, identifying what had been achieved, what problems or gaps remained and how the new policy was designed to address the issues.
- e. Although, it was stated that the policy was a pre-cursor to an action plan, a major limitation was the lack of specific detail about how it would be implemented, which limited participants' ability to provide feedback on the merits of the policy. Participants speculated on whether it would have been advantageous to consult on a combined policy and action plan or at a later stage of policy development. They were keen to also be consulted on the resulting plan.
- f. In addition, further detail was requested about how progress against the policy would be evaluated and judgements made about whether it had been effective.
- g. Participants understood that extended references to all of the 'protected characteristics' groups would have made for an unwieldy document. However, they would have appreciated some references and examples of how the policy might apply in practice specifically to LGBT people, so that its implications and relevance would be clearer.

"There's all those questions: how, when, why, what, how are you going to implement it? How are you going to ensure this? We can't go any further than that until they come up with an action plan and start laying out some of the processes that are going to back this up and that's when community consultation, and LGBT community consultation, will be crucial (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

"If they have no intention of consulting on the action plan, then their consultation is massively flawed (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

Specific Objectives

The roundtable also considered the specific objectives presented in the consultation document in detail. The key issues that emerged are summarised as follows.

3) Objective One: Promoting equality and inclusion through improved involvement and collaboration between the Council and communities

- a. The reference to giving 'communities of interest' a voice was a welcome positive commitment to engaging LGBT (and other) communities.

- b. The statement on ensuring that staff have the skills and confidence to engage effectively with all communities in the city was especially welcome, as this is something that can be assessed and monitored. However, participants wanted the statement to go further and to give a commitment to ensuring that all Council services and premises were welcoming and accessible for LGBT people.
- c. Participants also wanted to emphasise that Council staff needed to understand that there are at least four 'strands' to the LGBT 'umbrella', with overlapping but sometimes distinct issues, needs and experiences and that staff need to be able to work with the range of LGBT people.

"Somebody should be able to deal with a client who comes in and know how to recognize their group needs: 'I'm dealing with a lesbian, I need to think about these issues that this person might be interested in' but also not suddenly to go 'ooh lesbians! I know everything about these people. This means you're like this.' That comes down to sensitivity training (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

"It's about having an understanding of the group and being able to recognize individual needs (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

4) Objective Two: Promoting equality and inclusion through improving the quality and breadth on information held and used by the Council

- a. Participants argued that resources needed to be devoted by the Council to the collection of robust local information about the size and composition of the LGBT community. This would allow baseline data to be gathered so that: 1) evidence about inequalities could be collected, 2) needs could be identified and services planned appropriately, 3) progress in reducing inequalities could be measured. An example was given in relation to employment, where it was argued that the Council would struggle to show that its workforce was reflective of the local LGBT population without good data about the LGBT population as a whole. Participants suggested that the Council consider a citywide LGBT census.
- b. Participants wanted a more strongly worded statement in relation to monitoring and analysis systems, arguing that there needed to be a solid commitment to collecting monitoring and evaluation data regarding sexual orientation and trans status, and to do so in ways that are appropriate for LGBT people. Underpinning this, participants wanted a strong commitment that services would be safe, welcoming and affirmative for LGBT people when disclosing their LGBT status.
- c. Regarding monitoring questions about sexual orientation and gender identity specifically, two key observations were made. Firstly, reluctance was reported among some Council staff and services about asking about sexual orientation. Secondly, regarding transgender status, there appeared to be lack of certainty about how best to gather this data. For example, Council forms often asked about trans status in a number of different ways, which potentially made comparability problematic. Participants advocated standardized wording on all council forms, with guidance for staff.
- d. Participants welcomed a commitment from the Council to publish data on the diversity of its workforce and noted that this should include a breakdown of data for gay men, lesbians/gay women, bisexual men and women and trans people.

"How are they going to say, well actually, we are pretty representative in the number of bisexual people we employ when they don't know how many bisexuals there are (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"

"They don't mind asking about age, they don't mind asking about ethnicity but you try to get them to ask about sexual orientation and it all falls apart (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

5) Objective Three: Promoting equality and inclusion through more effective partnership working

- a. The phrase “we will work to ensure that there is improvement in relations between different communities” appeared to contain an in-built assumption that community relations were poor, which did not reflect the experience of participants. Participants also questioned whether the phrasing inadvertently suggested a form of ‘big-brother’ style social engineering on the part of the Council, which was regarded as undesirable. Rewording of this statement was proposed.
- b. Participants strongly welcomed explicit reference to a commitment to address bullying, harassment, discrimination and hate crime/incidents, as these remain particular concerns for LGBT people.
- c. Participants also welcomed the positive references to early intervention and prevention work to address barriers and disadvantage, which they hoped would translate into an on-going commitment to greater investment in LGBT schools and youth work, mental health promotion and gay and bisexual men’s HIV prevention and sexual health work.
- d. There was some confusion about the meaning of the phrase “build[ing] confidence” in working with the voluntary sector. Did this mean that the Council lacked confidence in the voluntary sector or that the voluntary sector lacked confidence to work with the Council? Participants requested further clarification on this statement.

“At the end of the day, the council is there to serve communities and challenge inequalities, not tell us who we have to be friends with (LGBT HIP Roundtable).”

6) Objective Four: Promoting equality and inclusion through our employment and procurement practices

- a. As discussed above, participants noted that the Council would find it difficult to state confidently that its workforce was reflective of the wider LGBT population without good data on the size and composition of the LGBT population locally.
- b. Participants welcomed the commitment to reduce pay gaps for men and women and between the highest and lowest paid workers. They added that there was also employment inequality and economic marginalization of certain sectors within the LGBT population (e.g. younger people, trans people, people with mental health problems, people living with HIV). They suggested that the Council should identify what it can do within the confines of employment law to promote employment and income equality for the most economically marginalized LGBT people.
- c. Participants also strongly welcomed the commitment to improving physical access for staff with disabilities. They argued that the commitment to removing employment barriers should be extended beyond concerns about physical access (important as this is) to other workplace barriers and should encompass LGBT staff as well as those with other ‘protected characteristics’.
- d. Participants supported the commitment to building the skills and confidence of staff to work with diverse communities. However, questions were raised about how this would be done and who was best placed to undertake this work in relation to LGBT people. Participants argued that LGBT organisations were best placed to contribute the experience and expertise necessary to inform staff development in this area but that this would require resources to facilitate the involvement of LGBT organisations and community groups.

7) Objective Five: Promoting equality and inclusion through fair and accessible services

- a. The commitment to targeting services to those “most in need and who face additional barriers” was welcomed. However, participants wanted clarification on how it would be determined who is “most in need”? Would this include only those with ‘protected characteristics’ or would other criteria come into play and who would be responsible for making these judgements?
- b. In relation to the statement about meeting the needs of “individual users”, participants welcomed the personalised approach that this implied. However, they were keen to guard against a potential weakening of the commitment to targeted services for groups with a shared characteristic. For example, targeted sexual health services for gay and bisexual men or mental health services for LGBT people are important to respond to higher levels of sexual and mental ill health reported among these groups. They argued that the objective might be better phrased as “meeting the needs of individuals through appropriately targeted services”.
- c. The meeting speculated on the puzzling reference to not “favour[ing] a particular equality strand”. Participants discussed whether this was a veiled reference to a commonly reported misperception that LGBT groups were especially favoured by the Council. Several points were raised: 1) the perception was inaccurate, 2) it was often informed by ignorant stereotypes about the LGBT community in Brighton and Hove as largely formed of white, affluent gay men, who were not in need of Council resources, which obscured the real diversity and social and economic marginalisation experienced by many within the local LGBT community 3) as the largest minority group in Brighton, it was fair that the Council devote proportionate attention and resources to the LGBT community. Participants agreed that there were times when it was legitimate to pursuing equalities objectives to privilege the needs of certain groups and suggested that this be rephrased.

“They are having a policy because they want to protect those people who are covered by the ‘protected characteristics’ [...] If you’re doing that, then you are saying, we are going to prioritise work with these groups and that has to be at the expense of somebody, the expense of these groups who are not part of our prioritized groups (LGBT HIP Roundtable).”

“Might you want to differentiate? Like, say you were running a family service in Moulsecoomb and you realized that you had no LGBT clients at all. Maybe in your strategic plan for the year about how to make your services more accessible, equal and fair you might decide that you will prioritise LGBT clients and do something about it [...] It might equally apply to young people, disabled people, older people (LGBT HIP Roundtable)”

8) Additional Issues

In addition to the content of the document, the meeting considered additional issues or ‘gaps’ in the policy. Participants were keen to stress that their discussion could have generated a wide range of recommended specific actions arising from the policy. However, the meeting did not want to pre-empt the action plan that is to be produced following the consultation exercise. The following points were raised as general issues for further consideration.

- a. The policy would be strengthened by a commitment to building and investing in local LGBT civil society in order to contribute to meeting equalities and inclusion objectives. It was noted that some sectors within the LGBT ‘umbrella’ were better resourced and able to participate in equalities and inclusion work than others – with organisations for bisexual and trans people needing particular support. Investment in LGBT HIP was seen as an encouraging example of facilitating capacity building within the LGBT

voluntary sector that could be usefully extended, with positive potential outcomes for promoting equality and inclusion in the city.

- b. Reference to engagement with the commercial and business sectors would be valuable. This was especially relevant given the importance of the LGBT commercial sector in Brighton and Hove. Participants wanted clarification as to whether the policy would be adopted by the various business/commercial sector fora operating in the city that had links with the Council.

“The work that we do with commercial enterprises in terms of public health and health promotion is absolutely vital and their buy-in and partnership in terms of being able to deliver the work is absolutely crucial. To just assume that they are going to be following legislation and in line with the wider goals of the city, whether it is be public health or whether it be equalities in this case...I don't think they can be ignored (LGBT HIP Roundtable).”

Part Two: The LGBT HIP Open Discussion Group

The meeting contained a diverse group of local LGBT people focussing on in-depth discussion of the policy document and the resulting issues, with participants engaging in thoughtful and constructively critical dialogue on their observations and concerns.

9) The Consultation

The meeting began by discussing a range of issues concerning the consultation process. The following issues were identified.

- a. The Council's online consultation portal was difficult for some participants to navigate to. Participants said that they would not have found it easily without sign posting from LGBT HIP.
- b. Participants were concerned that the online process may not be accessible to all sectors of the community and perceived and that it would be unlikely to engage those who did not have an interest in policy and strategy development.
- c. There were also concerns about anonymity and that respondents may be identified by their IP address. This was a particular issue for those who had links with the Council. Stressing that the online questionnaire could be completed anonymously would have helped to allay fears.
- d. The consultation questions were regarded as being phrased in such a way as inviting respondents to agree with the objectives rather than being more neutrally stated. This was linked to a query about whether the outcome of the exercise had been pre-decided so that participants were being asked to 'rubber-stamp' the policy. The fact that LGBT people were being consulted on the policy before an action plan had been decided was welcomed but participants wanted assurances that there would be consultation on the action plan also.
- e. Previous experience of other consultation exercises where views had not been meaningfully taken on board had negatively influenced some participants' experiences of public consultation. They were therefore keen for the Council to respond to identify how their feedback had been taken into account.

“Otherwise it just feels like a tick-box exercise. They've already got their own agenda; they've already got it written out. We'll do a consultation because that's what we're supposed to do. Regardless of what they say, this is the direction that we're headed in (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“The usual way they do it, is they look around at other Council’s and see what they have produced, find one they like, copy it, shove it out and say do you agree with this? It’s so dead easy to do this; they have taken the easy way out. Frankly, some of the work done by Councils on these things is quite good and it’s silly to duplicate it too much but as you say, it puts words in your mouth and it doesn’t give you the opportunity to, while you’re doing it, to start thinking about what you really want (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“When you went to the questionnaire, there was a link to their policies and things so I went and had a look at them but I was in the fortunate position to spend an hour reading through it and it was quite heavy and I’m quite familiar with that sort of thing and interested but just for your general person [...] it was quite ‘meaty’ and not very inclusive for anybody to have a look and get a bit of background knowledge about where they’re coming from and what they’re doing (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“The feedback, how much of that is really going to be looked at and read? If they’re getting people to write their own opinions, that takes a lot of time to digest and it’s qualitative [...] They could have loads of really important information but it’s about how much they are committed to going through that (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“We are being given a voice here. Are they going to listen to it though? (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

10) General Feedback

Overall, participants found much in the policy document that they were in agreement with as a set of broad intentions. Overall, they welcomed the policy aspirations identified but repeatedly emphasised their frustration with the lack of detail about implementation. They indicated that this missing detail was crucial to enable them to make a well-informed judgement about their support for the policy. This formed the backdrop to much of the discussion. Other issues that emerged were as follows.

- a. There was considerable cynicism expressed about equalities (and other) policies that made expansive claims ‘on paper’ that did not translate into tangible actions and outcomes. Participants wanted reassurance that the draft policy did not represent such an exercise. They also wanted greater clarity on the implications of the policy specifically for LGBT people. Information and examples of how the policy ‘on paper’ would translate into positive action was requested. They wanted a commitment to concrete initiatives such as awareness training for staff on LGBT issues, including content on the legal duties owed.
- b. Participants also wanted more detail about progress made in achieving the previous policy objectives, an analysis of barriers and information about proposals for overcoming them.
- c. Participants also questioned how the policy would be monitored and evaluated. There was some concern about how the achievement of the objectives would be measured, as many of the broad ambitions were not thought quantifiable.
- d. The references to equalities legal duties were thought positive but were seen as the minimum standards that should apply. Participants wanted the Council to seek to improve on the minimum standard in promoting equality and inclusion for LGBT people rather than being limited by it.
- e. Participants wanted more information about how the policy linked to other significant strategies and documents such as the Joint Specific Needs Assessment for example.

“Nearly all of the things that were bullet-pointed, I thought, that sounds alright, that sounds like a good thing isn’t it? There wasn’t any that I went [sharp intake of breath], that’s absolutely outrageous (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)!”

"I'd say with a lot of these objectives, they're all bloody wonderful, to put a positive thing on it. I don't think too many people, as a set of objectives would have a problem with it. It doesn't fit Brighton and Hove specifically. It could be an objective from any Council in any part of the country but if they manage to address all these and fill in all the hows, that would be bloody fantastic! But I don't know, I want to know how they are going to do it (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"It felt like loads and loads of promises and expectations and all of my comments were how? and is this really happening? and what about all the good stuff that is going on and in reality it sounded like very big commitments but how are they going to do it (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

"These could have been written ten years ago and they could have been written four years ago and they could have been written two years ago and they would have been the same (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"It would be better to say, we know this is the law but we want Brighton to be an exemplary Council, showing other Councils how it really can make a difference. If they had that emphasis, I would be enthusiastic [...] There's no reason why Brighton of all places with LGBT can't be the Council that shows the rest of them how it can be done (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I think there is a disconnect between these sort of documents and the general life of the Council on a day-to-day basis (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"A very cynical way to look at this, and I don't want to look at it that way but I need to express it, is that there's no way to assess whether we're ever achieving this. You can never measure success on this type of objective as defined, which means you can keep getting your salary without ever needing to do your job in the worst case. I find that possibility quite offensive and I want key performance indicators. For each of these objectives, how will you measure how you're doing your job (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

Specific Objectives

The group reviewed each of the objectives set in the document. The following issues were identified.

11) Objective One: Promoting equality and inclusion through improved involvement and collaboration between the Council and communities

- a. There was strong support for the Council's commitment to undertake Equality Impact Assessments although it was no longer legally required to do so.
- b. Participants questioned whether there was evidence that effort was needed by the Council to improve community cohesion.
- c. The sub-heading on equipping staff with "the skills and confidence to engage appropriately and effectively with all communities in the city" generated significant discussion. It was regarded as of such importance that it should be a heading in its own right since it underpinned all of the other equalities objectives set. References were made to locally publicised cases where the Council had reportedly not responded well to the needs of LGBT people (for example, a recent case where a gay man's experience of domestic violence was apparently dismissed when assessing his housing needs). Such cases undermined confidence in the ability of the Council to equip its staff to be responsive to the needs of LGBT people, as claimed in the policy document. While the Council was regarded as well placed to equip its staff regarding general equality and diversity issues, questions were raised about the capacity of the Council to release staff to undertake LGBT awareness training. Participants were sceptical about the use of e-

learning to equip staff with knowledge and experience regarding the needs of LGBT communities.

“Coming from my point of view, from the T community, if you’re trans, I mean yes it might be easier for me because I ‘pass’ and I’ve had all the surgery and everything but for someone who is maybe just transitioning, they don’t want to be upset and insulted by someone using the wrong pronouns or anything like that and I just think it’s so important that the staff have the right training and support (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“This is all well and good this paperwork but they don’t really need to bother to write this stuff because it’s all out there. It’s about a lack of implementation, lack of training, lack of monitoring of how people who have gone through certain trainings are actually doing. Do they understand, do they apply it? It’s all there already but nobody bothers to pull it together and to show us you are actually doing what you say you are doing (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“If someone is doing desktop education, that’s BS! Because there’s no amount of education...no piece of desk-top software is going to prep a hetero-normative person to receive a trans woman who maybe doesn’t pass terribly well or whatever (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

12) Objective Two: Promoting equality and inclusion through improving the quality and breadth of information held and used by the Council

- a. There was some lack of clarity on the specific actions to be taken to achieve the objective. Participants wanted further detail in relation to LGBT people on: 1) what information gaps currently existed, 2) how it was determined that a knowledge gap existed (in other words, how does the Council know what it doesn’t know) 3) how were knowledge gaps going to be filled.
- b. Participants said they would find it difficult to know about the quality of the information held about LGBT people by the Council in order to know whether this was adequate. Greater transparency about the sources of information used by the Council to assess the needs of LGBT people was called for. Participants noted that the decision not to include questions on sexual orientation in the national census was a missed opportunity.
- c. Participants wanted specific detail about how information gathered about sexual orientation and trans status would support the development of targeted and dedicated services. There was a concern that even when data was available about sexual orientation and trans status this did not always translate into designated services being provided.
- d. When asked about providing information about sexual orientation on Council forms for example, participants were generally comfortable to do so and did not report any negative consequences of having done so previously. Some said that they might choose to withhold the information if they wished as a personal matter. When asked for such information in a personal capacity participants wanted to know why they were being asked, what information was being collected, how it was relevant to the issue at hand and how it would be used.

“I don’t think Brighton and Hove Council have ever looked at the fact of why they have a reputation for being the LGBT capital of Britain. People come here for a reason who are LGBT. They live here for a reason. Does the Council actually know why? What makes it [the LGBT community] tick and how it can be made to tick better and how they can be proud of it (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?”

"I'm more concerned about [where] they say here "we will address gaps in our knowledge." Well how do we know what gaps they have in their knowledge and how do they themselves identify those gaps if they don't know what those gaps are in the first place (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

"I actually do feel comfortable every time I get a form around Brighton and Hove filling it in about my sexuality. I've never had any negative feedback, when I've gone for jobs and stuff and have to fill it out. I've never been judged on my sexuality in Brighton and Hove. From my experience, it's been very good with this Council (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

13) Objective Three: Promoting equality and inclusion through more effective partnership working

- a) Participants questioned the desirability of the Council intervening to improve relations between different communities. One participant raised the issue of relations between the Roman Catholic community and the LGBT community as an example. Noting the historic antipathy, the question was raised as to whether either community would especially welcome intervention in its affairs by the Council to promote closer relations. However, it was suggested that there might be a role for the Council to promote better relations within communities. The example was given of efforts within the LGBT community to tackle racism or discrimination against trans people or those living with HIV as potentially positive interventions.
- b) Participants welcomed the commitment to the community and voluntary sector and wanted this to be reflected in funding decisions made by the Council for further investment in LGBT community and voluntary groups. With appropriate support from the Council, they saw community and voluntary groups as playing an important role in helping to overcome the isolation and marginalization that some LGBT people experience (e.g. older LGBT people, LGBT people with disabilities or HIV). The point was made that such groups wanted to retain their autonomy but often needed help and support to get established and operate. Facilitating this was seen as a legitimate role for the Council in promoting equality and inclusion.

I don't think there is a need to improve relations between communities. I think there is a need to improve relations within the LGBT community. That's actually a really pressing need. As a community, we are not so good perhaps at reflecting on ourselves because we've spent so much time striving against oppression. I'm very aware from my own experience of sexual racism [...] guys who are HIV positive, there's an extreme amount of negative sentiment directed at them, people in the trans community. There's a need to improve sensibility and sensitivity within our community (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

The Council could actively overcome isolation, especially of HIV, which it tends to be very very isolated by allowing these people to have sort of groups or activities that draw them together or draw them into other parts of the community (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

14) Objective Four: Promoting equality and inclusion through our employment and procurement practices

- a. Participants welcomed the commitment to improve the diversity of the Council's workforce and wanted a strong commitment and tangible action to promote equality of opportunity for LGBT people. However, they did not want this be interpreted as support for positive discrimination; i.e. posts should be filled according to merit and not tokenism.
- b. Participants noted the reference to the LGBT Workers Forum and were interested to know more about it. Those with experience perceived that the links with the Forum were good, with the Council making considerable use of the Forum as a consultative body in its policy development work.

- c. Participants wanted clarity on what was meant by the term “living wage” and wanted more detail on the scale of the pay gaps between the highest and lowest paid workers. Reference was also made to the income disparities faced by other groups such as people with disabilities, which were also thought deserving of attention.
- d. There was some scepticism about the extent to which Council procurement processes scrutinised to a significant degree the equalities policies and practices of its contractors. A recommendation was made that Equality Impact Assessments should be undertaken of significant procurement relationships entered into by the Council. Participants also reported experience in other contexts of taking part in exercises to decide the awarding of contracts to ensure that people with ‘protected characteristics’ were involved and consulted. They suggested that a commitment to this would have been welcomed.

“My concern is that posts will be filled just to tick boxes so that the Council can say ‘look we’ve got a gay man who organises our weddings, we’ve got a lesbian who does our flowers’ and all this sort of thing. I worry that it’s that reverse PC. Just too far (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“The LGBT Workers Forum is one of the most vocal, the most organised, the most respected, the most listened to, which is a good thing in some ways and they are used very much as a consultative body. The Council very much talks to them, very much links with them, discusses all these policies with them (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“By law they have to do it. They don’t always do it but this is a legal requirement. You cannot establish a procurement relation without ensuring that the people you are going to do it with meet a certain requirement [...] Once again, it’s a very paperwork exercise (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

15) Objective Five: Promoting equality and inclusion through fair and accessible services

- a. Participants strongly welcomed the commitment to equipping staff to plan and deliver services fairly and equally but, as noted above, emphasized the need for more detail about how this would be achieved in practice. Participants wanted to be able to feel confident and safely assume that their LGBT status would not be a barrier when accessing any Council service.
- b. Participants were also puzzled by the reference to favouring a particular equalities strand. As with the LGBT HIP Consortium roundtable, the question was raised about whether this was a veiled reference to a perceived Council bias towards LGBT people. The point was made that there may be times when it was necessary to favour certain groups in the provision of Council services.

“It would be things like knowing if I walked into a housing benefit office I would feel confident that if I said ‘me and my partner, blah blah blah’ it’s going to be smooth running. You wouldn’t have to justify it or explain it. That may be an anxiety and I think if I didn’t have anxieties about walking into services about having to explain my situation...you know, you could land on any desk and you wouldn’t have to justify your personal living circumstances, that would be a solid indicator (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

“I don’t think that’s helpful in this type of document. If you’re going to put something like that in, I think you need to be clear, why are you saying this? What evidence is there that a certain ‘strand’, you know, I’ve never heard that before either, has been disproportionately favoured in the past (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?”

“Brighton, as diverse and wonderful a city as it is, does have certain services that are targeted very necessarily at certain sub-sections of its community [...] There are parts of our city that need, or there are ‘strands’ within our community, that need slightly more attention in certain directions than others (LGBT HIP Discussion Group).”

16) Additional Issues

In addition to the review of the policy document the following topics emerged as issues for further consideration.

- a. There was some scepticism about the use of equalities indices (i.e. the one developed by Stonewall) as a measure of success in meeting LGBT equalities objectives because it appeared to be based on self-assessment and policies 'on paper', without examining implementation and outcomes.
- b. Participants wanted to strongly advocate the inclusion of other groups with 'protected characteristics' in the consultation process, e.g. Black and minority ethnic communities, people with disabilities and people with mental health problems in particular, as there was a perception that engagement with these communities also needed to be prioritised.

The disability community and the BME community really don't get a look in and it's still the case today (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"The people with probably the least voice on Councils are the mentally ill. They get such a poor deal from Council's everywhere (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I can also back up the mental health point. The lack of services is unbelievable. My partner's experience and my own experience within the system is that you don't really have a voice. And when you're in the system, you have even less of a voice because 'you're a bit mental' (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

Conclusions

As with any group-based discussion activity there were differences of opinion and emphasis at times within the groups. However, in general there was considerable convergence about the key issues emerging.

There was some concern that the online consultation process would not be accessible to all sectors of the LGBT community, and that simplifying some of the language used would have been helpful. However, there was recognition that the discussion groups were a helpful adjunct to the online consultation and supported the Council's decision to commission the work as demonstrating a commitment to giving 'communities of interest' a voice. The roundtable in particular would have welcomed this to be extended to an opportunity for dialogue with Councillors and Council officials. There was considerable cynicism about consultations as tick-box exercises among participants in the open session, and feedback from the Council was requested about how the issues they had raised would be taken on board.

There were also important philosophical concerns raised about the conceptual language in the document. Participants supported the drive for 'equality and inclusion' but also wanted a commitment to promoting respect for diversity. Participants wanted the document to reflect an understanding that it may at times be necessary to prioritise the interests of certain groups to achieve equalities objectives and that the reference to not "favouring a particular equalities strand" was unhelpful. They wanted a confident declaration from the Council that it would act to favour particular marginalised or excluded groups, including LGBT people, when it was legitimate and necessary to do so.

There was also a call for more information to set the current draft policy in context. More information about the previous set of objectives, how and to what extent they had been met and what issues or problems were outstanding would have been helpful.

Overall, there was broad support for the general principles outlined in the document. However, there was strongly expressed frustration about the lack of detail on implementation. Participants wanted to know how the objectives would be achieved and how this would be monitored and evaluated so that progress could be measured. Key performance indicators were called for so that assessments could be made as to whether tangible gains were being achieved. Participants also wanted to know about how proposals would translate into actions to promote equality and inclusion for LGBT people specifically. Support and increased funding for the LGBT voluntary and community sector and the provision of targeted and dedicated services were proposed as potential ways in which this could be demonstrated. Participants were therefore keen to be consulted about the resulting action plan, where they felt they would be able to offer more detailed feedback.

On a related point, participants welcomed the Council's commitment to improving its use of information but argued that the commitment needed to be strengthened specifically in relation to information about the local LGBT population. They perceived that without good information about the size and composition of the LGBT population and its needs and experiences of Council services, it would be difficult for the Council to show that it was achieving its equalities aims for this community. Participants were generally comfortable to give personal information about sexual orientation and trans status to the Council in appropriate contexts. Guidance and training for staff to address perceived reluctance in collecting this information was proposed. The commitment to publish workforce data was welcomed and participants wanted assurances that this would provide detail about gay men, lesbians, bisexual and trans people.

The issue of equipping staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to work specifically with LGBT people provoked considerable discussion, and was regarded as underpinning the aims of the policy to such a degree that it was proposed that the issue be a headline objective. Participants recognised that staff needed training and support to work effectively and appropriately with LGBT people and wanted LGBT organisations to have an input into this. E-learning was seen as inadequate to the task of properly equipping staff with the knowledge and skills required.

While participants understood the positive intentions behind the goal of 'community cohesion' they were wary of potentially clumsy interventions on the part of the Council to force together communities with strong divergences of experience and perspective in an artificial and unhelpful way. Instead, there was a perceived role for community development within the LGBT community to address issues of internal exclusion and discrimination.

Participants welcomed commitments on reducing pay inequalities based on gender and seniority but wanted a stronger commitment to reducing economic inequalities based on other criteria, including for those with the range of 'protected characteristics'.

As regards its partnerships, perceptions about interaction with the LGBT Workers Forum were positive. Participants wanted more clarity about the Council strategy for strengthening its partnerships with the LGBT community and voluntary sector and investing in these organisations as part of an effective approach to achieving equality and inclusion for LGBT people. Similarly, more detail would be helpful about how the Council will promote its equality and inclusion objectives with business and commercial enterprises in the city, including through its procurement arrangements.

Both discussion groups stressed the issue of multi-sectionality, pointing out that many LGBT people hold more than one 'protected characteristic'. Naturally, given the focus, LGBT issues were foregrounded in these discussions. However, participants wanted to express strong support for the engagement of other 'communities of interest' groups affected by the policy and wanted to know more about their involvement and perspectives.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to the Council as proposals to facilitate the next phase of development of the equality and inclusion policy.

1. Improve sign posting on the Council's website to the online consultation pages.
2. Undertake on-going consultation regarding the resulting equality and inclusion action plan. This should include opportunities for LGBT people to discuss the action plan face-to-face with Councillors and Council officials.
3. Ensure that the resulting equality and inclusion action plan contains key performance indicators so that achievement of objectives is measurable. Information about how the action plan will be monitored and evaluated should also be provided.
4. Ensure that the resulting equality and inclusion action plan aims to promote respect for diversity as well as equality and inclusion. The action plan should also identify examples of the particular actions to be taken to promote equality and inclusion for LGBT people, and a commitment to prioritise their needs where necessary and appropriate.
5. Ensure that the resulting equality and inclusion action plan includes a commitment to produce a professional development strategy for the Council's workforce, which includes detail on how its staff will be equipped specifically to work fairly and respectfully with LGBT people.
6. Ensure that the resulting equality and inclusion action plan includes a commitment to produce a research and development plan that includes detail on how information will be gathered about the size, composition and needs of the LGBT population in Brighton and Hove. Also, that a commitment is made to provide advice and guidance to all appropriate Council staff about collecting monitoring information on sexual orientation and trans status.
7. Ensure that the resulting equality and inclusion action plan includes detail on engagement with the business and commercial sector in the pursuance of the Council's equality and inclusion objectives.
8. Develop a separate strategy on the Council's actions to promote LGBT community and voluntary sector development, including a budgeted commitment to invest Council resources.
9. Provide published written feedback in response to this report.

In summary, this was a successful consultation process that enabled detailed analysis by local LGBT people of the Council's draft equality and inclusion policy for 2012-2015. The final words are left to two participants from the open group about what LGBT people ideally want from the Council to achieve equality and inclusion for local LGBT people: action and collaboration.

"I want to see action rather than words. This PC stuff is ok; we can all dance the dance, without caring about the dance if you know what I mean. We need to have actions rather than pretty words looking like its equal opportunities (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Consulting is almost a dirty word because it implies that they make up their minds first and they say, do you like this? That's consultation. Inclusion means when they make it all up, we've got one of you on board. And celebration means we have achieved something with the cooperation of you people and we've formed something with real cooperation and we've celebrated the fact that we've made a step forward. We want the last one. We want more than inclusion. We actually want collaboration (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

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Key Contacts

LGBT HIP Project Coordinator

Nick Douglas

Email: nicolas.douglas@tht.org.uk.

LGBT HIP Project Commissioners

Nicky Cambridge, People and Place Coordinator, Equalities & Communities Team,
Brighton and Hove City Council

Email: nicky.cambridge@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Phil Seddon, Equality and Diversity Manager, NHS Brighton and Hove

Email: Phil.Seddon@BHCPCT.nhs.uk.