The LGBT Health and Inclusion Project

Brighton and Hove Council Neighbourhood Councils Pilot Consultation

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 Neighbourhood Councils Pilot Consultation

LGBT HIP was contracted by BHCC to carry out consultation work with local LGBT people regarding its proposals to pilot the development of neighbourhood councils (NCs) in the city. 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, 18 people took part in the session. Not all participants provided monitoring data on each characteristic. The following data was available. 12 women and 6 men attended, 4 participants identified as trans. All participants were white British, with the exception of 5 people, two of whom were White and held another nationality. Three participants were from other minority ethnic backgrounds. Participants ranged in age from 20s to 70s, although most were concentrated in the 30-40 age group. 11 participants gave sexual identity data, which included five lesbians/gay women, three gay men, one person who was heterosexual and two people who were queer/pansexual. Two people were living with a long-term health condition/disability and two people were carers.

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.

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 HIPs Consortium partners.

Part One: The LGBT HIP Consortia Roundtable

The session was a lively discussion with participants reflecting on the proposals 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 proposals in relation to LGBT issues and concerns.

1) The Consultation Process

a. Participants were concerned that the online exercise would not been 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. There was some comment that the survey was easier to complete from the perspective of individuals rather than for those representing voluntary and community organisations. Participants also felt that the proposals lacked important details about how NCs were intended to operate that made participation in the consultation difficult. However, the form used was regarded as clear and straightforward.

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.

> "It didn't just launch you straight into lots of jargon. I found it a bit more accessible, the questions they were asking, what was expected of you and tick-box answers, which is always good. There were more specific questions and less generalist, so for me, I found it superficially a much quicker, easier and more engaging survey to fill out (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "I kind of got the principle of it. What I didn't get is the specific detail about how it will work [...] I didn't get the detail about how it will be structured. They ask, will this be effective, will this be effective, will this be effective? Well I can't say because I don't know who the people are who will be making the decisions (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "I thought some of the questions were again, a little bit meaningless because: 'should local people have more decision-making powers'? for instance. Well it depends who they are. I kept saying that throughout (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

2) General Comments

a) In general terms, participants were not supportive of the concept of NCs. The following issues emerged:

- Concerns about how NCs would operate in practice.
- Concerns about financial issues.
- Concerns about implications for local democracy.
- Concerns about the engagement and participation of LGBT people.

These issues are explored in greater detail as follows.

3) Operational Issues

a) Participants assumed that the operation of NCs would be reliant on the involvement of individuals on a voluntary basis. Participants were concerned that volunteers may not want to take on a significant level of responsibility or would not necessarily have the knowledge, skills and experience to manage the demands of running an NC, so that equipping them for the role might prove costly. In addition, at a time of austerity, when the voluntary and community sector was being asked to do more with fewer resources, this was perceived as potentially placing an undue burden on local volunteer capacity.

b) Participants also wanted further information about how the Council would have oversight of the work of the NCs and monitor its compliance with key policy and practice requirements, including equalities law and policy. An important solution posed was to have very clear limits on the scope of activity that NCs would be responsible for.

c) Participants wanted clarity about what would happen if there was a conflict between an NC and important city-wide Council objectives or between groups within an NC area. They questioned whether it would be the role of the Council in such contexts to mediate between groups in conflict. They speculated that NCs could have the unintended consequence of weakening community cohesion rather than strengthening it.

d) Participation of LGBT people is discussed in more detail below. However, it was noted that some involvement and consultation mechanisms proposed might be more accessible for LGBT people than others. For example, questionnaires were noted to be potentially anonymous whereas public meetings would require people to disclose their LGBT status in order to raise LGBT-related issues of concern. As discussed below, issues of disclosure and public visibility were significant concerns for some participants.

e) Participants noted that the proposals were for a pilot of NCs. They therefore asked for more detail on how the pilot would be evaluated and the criteria to be applied about whether it had been a success or failure.

"It's a huge amount of work. Where's the quality assurance as to what decisions and work is being done to what quality? Who is monitoring that? Who is ensuring equalities and diversity and inclusion? Who is ensuring all of these things that naturally the Council has to do [...] Why on earth do you think that anybody off the street who chooses to go to a local space and make decisions is going to have any of the skills or knowledge (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"

"There should be quality assurance to make sure that things like transport, refuse collection are uniform across the city because there should be equality about the delivery of those services across the city (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

"You want the Council to come to you and say 'what do you want to do about the local park up the road, an allotment or a playground?' and you can say 'oh a playground.' Great! You've given your opinion. But you don't want to have to go then oh, I have to build it! And handle the money (LGBT HIP Roundtable)!"

"They've got this quaint notion of neighbourhoods where everybody gets on. They don't! There are different requirements and different needs. What one person wants is another's worst nightmare. People famously do not get on with their neighbours (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

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> "If Preston Park [NC] decides we don't want Pride, isn't the Council going to take one look at Preston Park's neighbourhood council decision and say 'oh for goodness sake, of course you're having Pride!' and just overrule it (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

4) Financial Concerns

a) Participants were concerned that the proposals appeared potentially costly. They were concerned that the pilot was an experiment that the city could ill-afford in a time of cuts in public expenditure. It was suggested that the resources might be better used to recruit more community development workers or improve existing processes for consultation and engagement.

b) The point was made that in order to make good decisions about the allocation of resources, it was necessary to have a broader overview of issues and problems (e.g. a city-wide perspective), which may be lacking at the neighbourhood level. The example of funding for schools was given whereby a Council-level decision about education funding was needed to ensure that disparities in spending and quality did not emerge, therefore impacting upon equity.

c) In a related point, the meeting asked for more clarity about what decisions would be made locally by NCs about spending and what would be retained under central Council control.

d) As noted above, participants argued that it was an assumption that the desire to manage budgets locally and the skills to do so would be available.

e) However, participants did potentially see that it might be possible to allocate relatively small sums of money and enable NCs to prioritise how it might be spent.

> "That's where the waste of money comes in to my mind because it's putting in place a whole new tier underneath the [local] government that's going to cost a fortune (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Maybe this is a bit simplistic but why can't they just invest the money on consulting better on an ad hoc basis whenever a decision has to be made in a particular area (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"
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> "How can you decide what money should be spent locally if you haven't got a broader picture of what's needed all around you because so much of what you need isn't local (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Managing budgets is a tricky business [...] It's hard. Why would we assume that your average punter would be able to quite easily and happily manage that sort of stuff (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"
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> "Is it every bit of money that is going into that neighbourhood council, or only certain pots of money related to parks in the area or parking in the area? I didn't get the detail about that and I get the sense that they don't know this themselves yet (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "I think it's absolutely full of holes, the whole thing. I think it's a really bad idea. The only bit of it that I could see that would work is having little pots of money that we're going to give to this area – and they can't even decide what area. They're talking about wards. Of course it shouldn't be wards, wards are massive and you can't possibly address the needs of all the people living in that ward I don't think. It needs to be more localised to local neighbourhoods. So, smaller pots of money where people say, look we're going to spend a bit of money in your neighbourhood, how do you feel that it could best be spent (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

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5) Concerns About Local Democracy

a) Participants suggested that the proposals lacked detail on how the NCs would be constructed and their composition. A major concern was that unelected, unrepresentative individuals would be able to impose their political agendas.

b) There was a particular concern about the risk of populist, 'fringe' or single issue agendas being promoted at the expense of broader concerns. Participants wanted to know how it would be determined whether the individuals in control of NCs had the right aptitudes, skills and qualities to take on roles of responsibility.

c) Individuals were especially concerned about issues of accountability, i.e. if the individuals were unelected how could they be held to account if their conduct or decisions were unacceptable? Participants were concerned to know how individuals involved could be removed or NCs disbanded if they were incompetent, corrupt or discriminatory.

d) There were also concerns about duplicating or undermining existing neighbourhood-based activities.

> "Sorry I'm not seeing this as a democracy because these people are not elected. Love them or loath them, whoever is in office has been democratically elected. They've kind of broken that down and said people are not engaging with elections, the turn-out is poor, so we need to give people some money to shut them up and then they can do what they want with it but who are those people (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"
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> "This is how hit and miss it could be. It could be a massive waste of money to be honest because with the right people it could achieve all of those things [inclusion, improvement in Council services] but with the wrong people it could not only achieve none of those things, it could even make it worse than the current state of play. And there doesn't seem to be any structures in place to make sure that the right sort of people have that power. Because that's an awful lot of power to hand people who haven't been elected (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Presumably, if they are elected, part of what you are going to get is people elected on really sort of single-issue vote winning things like 'no immigrants in this area, we're going to stop them all coming in' and stuff like that (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Who are they accountable to? How are their opinions supported or endorsed by the other people who live in their area (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"
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> "There already are geographical structures, you know, things like LATS, residents associations so what is this adding (LGBT HIP Roundtable)?"

6) Barriers for LGBT People

a) Concerns about inclusion manifested themselves in strongly expressed views about barriers to participation for LGBT people. There was a perception that participation in NCs would be biased towards more affluent, advantaged groups and it could not be assumed that they would have an understanding of issues for LGBT people.

b) A central concern was that in order to raise LGBT-related issues and problems, individuals would need to disclose their LGBT status. While Brighton and Hove's reputation as an inclusive city for LGBT people was alluded to, it was noted that there was still discrimination and exclusion experienced by LGBT people and that there may be real reluctance to disclose LGBT status. This was thought potentially relevant for all LGBT people but was especially acute for marginalised groups within the LGBT community, such as people living with HIV and trans people.

c) Participants were also concerned about issues of tokenism, i.e. that if LGBT people did feel able to participate, an individual or small number of LGBT people on an NC might experience an unreasonable burden of representation.

> "Who is going to engage in these councils? It's going to be the usual suspects, the busy-bodies, the people with too much time on their hands, it's going to be the people who are least positioned... the people who are most disadvantaged are not going to get represented and their needs are going to get overlooked or washed over and it will be the needs of the majority of people who engage in that process who force things through and it will be a tick-box kind of democracy (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "You are not necessarily going to want to go into a room with your next-door neighbour or the people round the corner and say 'oh, hi as a lesbian' or 'hi, as gay man living with HIV I would like this'. You don't necessarily feel that you want that level of disclosure around you or your needs or how you perceive friends and other neighbours and what their needs are because you are putting yourself out there [...] Ideally you should be able to walk into that space and 'own' whoever you are, but there is stigma (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "It might be different in part of the town where there is a large LGBT presence. I can imagine feeling safer about being out in an environment say Kemptown, and that's only a maybe, who knows, but not where I live. I'm not going along and coming out thank you very much, stuff that (LGBT HIP Roundtable)!"
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> "Even if I did [come out in the local neighbourhood council] what would I be representing about LGBT concerns in my neighbourhood? Apart from my friends who live nearby, I don't know. I don't know what it's like for the young gay men from the flats up the road. I've no idea. And how am I going to find out? I couldn't even say I was representative in any way (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "I can't see this working in the interests of LGBT people, let alone the most marginalised and disadvantaged LGBT people. They are probably going to be the big losers in this one (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

7) Promoting LGBT Participation

a) Acknowledging the concerns that were raised, participants were asked to speculate on measures that could be put in place to overcome barriers to participation. Overall, participants perceived inherent barriers so that identifying initiatives that would help to make NCs more inclusive was difficult. However, it was possible to generate some suggestions as follows.

- Limit the scope of activities that NCs are empowered to engage in to exclude issues with significant equalities implications.
- Explore the feasibility of city-wide councils to run alongside NCs for 'communities of interest' groups, including LGBT people.
- Introduce a requirement that NCs must demonstrate meaningful involvement and engagement by LGBT people and other 'communities of interest' (using appropriately collected monitoring data) to receive funding.
- Introduce mandatory LGBT awareness training for those holding positions of responsibility on NCs, provided by LGBT organisations. This should be publicised to provide reassurance for LGBT people who may want to participate.
- Provide mandatory operating procedures that include equality and diversity safeguards.
- Introduce minimum standards for acceptable consultation or engagement (e.g. membership criteria, quorate meetings, response rates for questionnaires, provision of information for residents etc).

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- Introduce robust and well-publicised mechanisms to challenge the decisions of NCs and investigate and address complaints, with procedures to remove individuals or disband NCs where there are significant concerns.

> "I don't even know what we could recommend to break down those barriers (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Exactly what services are we talking about? Because if it's only rubbish collection and how often the grass is mown, that's got nothing to do with LGBT identities at all. As a lesbian, I don't have a different requirement for my rubbish to be collected (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "Do you really want the neighbourhood council for Preston Park deciding whether or not we have Pride? I don't. It would be off; it just wouldn't happen (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "I think they are going to really struggle with it because I think there are naturally a lot of barriers to minorities, let alone LGBT people. We are the biggest [minority] community and surely there are so many LGBT people that it shouldn't be a barrier to walk into a neighbourhood council and say, 'hey, shock horror, I'm an LGBT person' or whatever but nevertheless, I think there is. Let alone people who are even more marginalised and less likely to engage with anything like this (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."
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> "It's a bit like setting them up to fail isn't it by saying you must have the involvement of LGBT people but they're not going to. The underlying premise doesn't lend itself to that (LGBT HIP Roundtable)."

Part Two: The LGBT HIP Open Discussion Group

The group focussed on a wide-ranging discussion characterised by thoughtful and in-depth dialogue concerning the issues. The diversity of the group allowed a broad set of viewpoints to be explored. The following topics emerged as significant issues.

8) The Consultation Process

a) Overall, participants generally found the process of participating in the online consultation fairly straightforward, with survey questions that were relatively easy to understand. However, they reportedly felt significantly hindered in giving a fully considered response because of a perceived lack of detail about the implementation of the pilot.

b) There were concerns about how widely publicised the consultation had been, with participants noting that they would not have ordinarily known about it without their involvement in LGBT HIP or some other online forum.

c) There were related concerns that the use of online consultation methods may have excluded certain groups such as those without internet access, including young people and older people. Having the LGBT HIP discussion group was therefore an important way to enable LGBT people to participate who may not ordinarily be able to do so.

d) Participants requested information about how their contributions were going to be used to shape policy and made a strong request for feedback from the Council on the LGBT HIP consultation.

> "I found the actual experience of it was ok. The only reason that I knew it was around was because of a work network. I got an email, which indicated that there's this survey online. I'm not quite sure how accessible that would have been to me otherwise if I wasn't linked into that because I've not seen it anywhere else that I might go (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

> "I work with a lot of young people who don't have access to the internet so I don't know how they would have been able to take part. I don't necessarily see how if they are from a 'communities of interest group'... I mean I tried to fill the form in with my 'communities of interest' hat on and it was really really difficult (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
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> "There didn't seem to be much angling to make sure that older people were included in this sort of thing. It made assumptions that older people wouldn't even read it (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
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> I found it a little bit vague. There wasn't an introduction to give more context about it, but equally, asking me 'do you agree or disagree that people in your community should take decisions', there's nothing about what level of decisions, what these decisions are about, so you can't agree or disagree with that sweeping statement. I found it quite frustrating (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
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> "The other thing that's so important about consultations is that there's absolute direct focussed feedback to the people who participate in these things because I know for me that if I don't get that feedback, well what was the point of that? It's not just I'll read it in the Argus at some point, I would like very direct feedback from what gets written up from what gets said here, to how it's used by the Council to make decisions (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

9) General Comments

a) As noted, participants primarily expressed frustration about a lack of detail on the composition of NCs, how individuals would be selected to participate in them and the geographical areas that they would be expected to cover. However, it was also noted that lack of pre-determination allowed for openness and flexibility regarding the consultation.

b) Overall, there were mixed views about the concept of NCs among the group. Where individuals had some experience of locality based community development and involvement activity there was support for the concept. However, the more dominant view was that there were significant concerns about the NCs at the conceptual level and about how they might operate in practice.

> "I might be unusual, I come from a group and to keep our community group going, we fundraise amongst our residents and our neighbours [...] I filled out this form and I did go through it quite positively because I thought they were asking are you more prepared to take part in society and by that I mean have a stronger voice in your local community and I'm all for that (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
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> "I got the impression that there was a proposal to decentralise funding to local people who are perhaps more aware of what's needed, and in principle that kind of makes sense but I didn't want to commit because there was no clarity on what areas and what authority individuals would have, who would nominate these individuals, can you show me an example of this working? Without that, I found myself responding quite conservatively which I perhaps wouldn't have if it was delineated a bit more (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
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> "I'm quite pleased that there's not too much rigidity before a consultation, because a consultation is about getting information, how this could look, so the fact that it's a little bit vague, there might be a general idea but actually I'd rather be involved in shaping it rather than thinking there is already a structure [...] I'm a little bit torn because I want to feel like our views will shape what happens but I also think they need to have a 'clearish' idea (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

c) Given the uncertainties expressed, much of the discussion focussed on perceived problems, barriers and feelings of ambivalence about the concept of NCs. As with the LGBT HIP roundtable, concerns could be grouped as follows:

- About how NCs would operate in practice.
- About financial issues.
- About implications for local democracy.
- About the engagement and participation of LGBT people.

10) Operational Issues

a) Participants were concerned to know about how the proposals for a new tier of local democracy and engagement would fit with existing community-based initiatives. They were concerned to know whether this would replace the existing structures or run alongside them. There was a perception that this would either mean duplicating existing work or potentially losing initiatives that may be operating successfully.

b) Participants were also concerned to know more about level of responsibility that would be granted to such groups and what safeguards would be put in place to ensure that this was commensurate and appropriate. They also wanted to know what services NCs would be allowed to have responsibility for. There was a perception that some services were relatively uncontroversial (e.g. rubbish collection) that had no particular implications for LGBT people but that there were areas of Council activity that were specific concerns for LGBT communities (e.g. community safety) where participants did not want NCs to have control.

c) Participants also questioned the relationship between NCs and the Council. They were concerned about maintaining a strategic overview for city-wide services if power and authority were inappropriately devolved to NCs.

d) The issue was raised that it was likely that different priorities or outright conflict were likely to emerge. Participants argued that it was important to understand how such tensions would be mediated and who would have ultimate authority.

e) Participants assumed that NCs would be run on a voluntary basis and perceived that this was a considerable undertaking to ask of volunteers. They were further concerned that volunteers may not have the necessary skills and experience to ensure that the groups were run in such a way to ensure fair and equal participation.

"One of the things that I would have found useful is that currently there are a whole heap of local action teams across the city and lots of neighbourhood forums already there, and it's a new Council and a new administration, [so] why the thinking to do this differently, what has worked and not worked with the current ones and how is this going to enhance the potential of local people to make decisions (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

"The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum has a myriad of bodies that focus on older people, young people, blah, blah blah, build on what's already there (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I was just looking at the list of things that they're talking about and I don't know what the LGBT aspect of a litter bin is. All I can see is that there are certain things where there is an LGBT aspect like community centres, community safety, crime reduction (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Things have to be coordinated city-wide. If the people in your streets said Tuesdays and Thursdays [for bin collection] and the people in my street said Tuesdays and Thursdays then we'd have a truck going from your street to mine and we need to have some strategic vision of how services are run across the city. How do the decisions that these

neighbourhood councils make get integrated into the strategic thinking across the city because that seems fundamental (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"What happens when two neighbouring groups want diametrically opposing things? Who decides? (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I don't think that I or the people in my street have got enough knowledge to say the hospital at the end of the road needs another four million pound machine. I think that's a little bit too much. So I think what these groups have an influence or interest in is quite important (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Including LGBT but for anyone who feels vulnerable, my anxiety about the new councils is the support for anybody...it's a massive job taking on a community group and there should be a way of instilling everyone's safety who comes and privacy and if it's just left [...] how is that going to be managed and that is quite a task I think, and that feels like it could be a full-time job for somebody and they're asking people to do it voluntarily and unpaid (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

11) Financial Concerns

a) Participants were concerned about how resources were going to be found to support NCs and that in a time of austerity, funding for NCs may be diverting money away from existing voluntary and community groups with detrimental effect.

b) The question in the online survey about whether participants would be willing to give £20 to support their local NC provoked significant debate. When asked, 4 participants said they definitely would be willing to do so, 6 definitely would not and 8 said they were unsure. Participants were concerned that the issue could be divisive and lead to the exclusion of those who could not or would not pay.

"One of the things that's frustrating about new initiatives is that we can sometimes forget all the good stuff that's already going on. We're not building on that, we're not making use of that and then these [existing] groups are losing money, losing funding and there are things dying that have been alive and thriving. They may not be perfect but we're reinventing the wheel where it doesn't have to be, so that's frustrating for me (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I started to think well where's the money going to come from for this? And then I saw this thing about people being asked to donate £20! Is that where they think the money is going to come from (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

"It would worry me I think, if I didn't pay the money and it became known that I hadn't paid the money and other people had paid the money. I already feel very different in my neighbourhood compared to everyone else (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Do you not get a say if you can't afford the £20 (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

12) Concerns About Local Democracy

a) Those who were supportive of the idea of NCs felt that there could be advantages for local democracy in that local people were thought best placed to know about issues and problems in their neighbourhood.

b) However, it was noted that it was an assumption that people wanted a greater part in local decision-making. It was suggested that some people are not dissatisfied with the existing arrangements, preferring to place their trust in elected officials.

c) The broader focus of the meeting was on some of the challenges and potentially detrimental impacts that NCs might have. The primary concern was that NCs would be

dominated by unrepresentative individuals and cliques. Even if NCs could be shown to be representative of a local geographical community, there was anxiety that issues raised by LGBT people would be ignored or marginalised as the concerns of a minority group.

d) There were also specific concerns about issues of accountability. Where a role for NCs could be envisaged, this was more at the level of consultative body with decision-making retained by those who could be held to account.

"Nobody knows their area better than local residents, so local residents can come in and champion going against a particular planning application, which I have seen done regularly in Brighton (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"The reason that I vote for a counsellor and the reason that I vote for an MP is precisely so I don't have to do all the day-to-day running around and lobbying and organising of these things. So I'm quite happy to participate in 'oh yeah, I think that would be a really good idea' but [otherwise] why am I voting for all these people? And if they don't do it the way I want to then, fingers crossed, the next person that I vote for will win and will (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"About the demographics of these community groups, what I'd want to see is a lot of work put in so that they are representative because sometimes it's naturally easier for those who are more confident or have got good vocabulary who would go to such a group and would by default be dominant, and when you're thinking about parks and leisure or all of the issues, how is the rest of the population going to be consulted (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?

"What is the accountability of these groups? Are they there just to advise, 'oh we'd really like [bin collection] on a Tuesday if that's possible' or are they going to say, 'oh we've got the money, we're going to do it on a Tuesday'; it could be three people on the street who have got the biggest voices who are getting to say that. I've got a question about the accountability, who's going to run it [...] If you're in that neighbourhood, that street, that community, whatever it's going to be and you're not sitting there, what voice do you have, who can you go to and say, 'I'm not agreeing with what's being said' (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)?"

"I would be far more in favour of them if they sort of legitimised the consultation and representation system that they have just now. I have sat on some of these groups where they get representatives along, representatives of LGBT to come and sit but it's not actually the people themselves, there's a representative there on their behalf supposedly to influence what happens. Now I'm not convinced that that actually happens. I don't think it's a legitimate process, it's more a ticking the box process (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"The whole notion of representativeness is really dubious for LGBT people because if it's properly representative we are probably going to be a minority and probably ignored. The reason we have equalities laws is to stop that happening. I would be in favour of some sort of local consultation neighbourhood committee but one that didn't have any powers, simply because even if it were representative (and even if weren't) we're going to be in a lot of trouble (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Ultimate decision-making does need to be at a much higher level because they will be accountable. They are more visible and will have to make decisions that are ideally pro-social and inclusive (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

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13) Barriers for LGBT People

a) Some individuals strongly expressed the view that it was manifestly obvious that NCs would be inherently problematic in terms of participation for LGBT people. This was primarily linked to the perception that NCs would not be safe spaces for them to disclose their LGBT status or raise issues of concern to LGBT people.

b) However, this was not universally the case. Some participants said they felt relatively unconcerned about disclosing their LGBT status in such a context and suggested that other groups may experience greater barriers. Others argued that although it might be difficult, it would simply be necessary if LGBT people were going to have a voice within NCs.

c) However, this was not an uncontested perspective and others took the position that NCs would particularly exclude those with more marginalised identities within the LGBT community, particularly trans participants, who argued that they simply did not have the same scope to be open about their trans status without fear of discrimination or violence.

d) Participants also highlighted issues related to multi-sectionality, so that it may not be possible to regard LGBT status as their sole identity marker and that other concerns in relation to participation in NCs may also be relevant.

> "I know a lot of this looks like it's going to have nothing to do with LGBT but if you take for example, Pride, if the residents of Preston Park have control over what happens in Preston Park we're all screwed! Or St James' Street [...] All these things that are supposedly not relevant to us would suddenly become really relevant... and if you're paying £20 then you definitely have a voice to keep those gays out. So we really need to think, giving power at that level is really a dangerous moment for us (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
>
> "If you're talking about becoming involved in these sorts of things I'm not sure how willing I would be. That would probably stop me from wanting to have any kind of sense to participate if I didn't feel safe [...] It's the coming out aspect. Are you going to be having to fight against the people that you're supposed to be working with? I guess it can also be quite isolating if you are the only [LGBT] person and you are having to be maybe the representative. It could feel like it's a big responsibility (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
>
> "I did not feel any hesitancy being LGBT, being G, about getting involved in this [type of] group. That wouldn't be the reason I wouldn't and I was thinking why, given some of the other contributions and I think it's because I am very aware that there are lots of LGBT people in my neighbourhood so it didn't strike me as something that would stop me (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
>
> "Brighton is obviously known for having this large LGBT, more L&G I would say, community and strong voice. And that's fine in parts of Brighton. I come under a BN post code but I live in [outer lying area], now I would not want to out myself as a trans guy in [outer lying area] because I would be shot [...] Wherever you are physically based can affect how much you want to say, whether you want to say anything at all, whether you'd want to be a representative (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."
>
> "If I was to look at the things that I want, that would be my agenda for my neighbourhood, I think they would be totally different to the people that I find living very close to me. And I can't imagine that my voice would hold much weight in their group because it doesn't hold much weight already in the buildings that I live in because I'm just totally different. I'm a different age group, I'm a council tenant, they're not, it's different things, LGBT, the kind of people I have coming and going. I have carers going to my flat and already that causes problems and I don't want to make myself more different (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

14) Promoting LGBT Participation

a) Participants were asked to consider what protections or safeguards might be put in place that would support participation in NCs by LGBT people to help overcome the barriers and problems identified. Some of the ideas that were generated were as follows:

- A city-wide LGBT council, with the additional suggestion that this might play a scrutiny function of NCs.
- Participation in NCs by LGBT community and voluntary sector groups.
- Mandatory LGBT representative positions.
- Mandatory LGBT awareness training for all those holding positions of responsibility within NCs.
- Robust scrutiny to ensure compliance with equalities policy and legislation.
- An anonymous system to enable individuals to report concerns about the operation of NCs.
- A transparent complaints system.
- Experimenting with virtual methods of engagement to elicit involvement in the work of NCs.

b) However, these were not all uncontested ideas. For example, some regarded the idea of a separate LGBT council as divisive. Others were concerned that virtual methods might be used dishonestly in a manipulative way.

c) It was also noted that the introduction of NCs should not divert attention away from lack of involvement in traditional forms of political participation and engagement for LGBT people.

"I wonder whether the Council would entertain an LGBT council so that LGBT people would have their own separate voice and they can feedback from their own communities? And then, that can be brought in on an unbiased level into the Council's decision-making so that you don't have our communities being diluted by the mainstream population not taking our concerns seriously (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Drawing on our existing strengths and the things that are in place at the moment, which are our community groups. Having the community groups involved in some way, it wouldn't be that that LGBT person would have to speak out for their own issues, the community groups that represent them could be involved in this forum in some way (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"If there was a good cross-section of people and you had representatives from those subgroups then that would be great. I would be happy to be the LGBT representative. If it was an official position, that would be great. And likewise if they had a BME place and a disabled place and a carers place so that there was each community represented (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I wouldn't be 100% keen on that [LGBT council] because you're already separating yourself from the general population anyway and do you want to continue to do that? There's BME, there's disabled groups and if there's separate groups from the mainstream groups, it's just going to create divisions; it's not a neighbourhood any more. You've got this group, you've got that group (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I don't just have one identity I don't just belong to one group and so it's always a challenge for me around this kind of thinking because I can't split off parts of myself because I would have to go to lots of those different groups. I'd have to try and be a member of five or something and that just doesn't work [...] I don't just always see through my lesbian identity (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I'd want it [LGBT awareness training] to be compulsory and if they didn't they couldn't have any say on anything. You can set up all those lovely training sessions and nobody turns up, they don't care or whatever, and they're volunteers so you're asking them to do it in their own time... (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"What I would want is an overview. Adherence to the legislation that makes sure that we are catered for and that this is responsible and accountable to that legislation. We have this amazing legislation in place that we can hold people to but we won't be able to hold these neighbourhood councils to them because they are volunteers (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"I'm thinking virtual groups, and I'm very conscious that not everyone has internet access but a way of participating that's a bit more innovative than just you go to a meeting. There's multiple ways that you could participate that isn't about sitting in a room and having a discussion (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

"Our job really should be to get the Council to listen to what we have to say and get a representative from here onto Council committees so that we can actually participate, even up to the point of budgeting (LGBT HIP Discussion Group)."

Conclusions

Overall, this was an effective consultation, enabling a wide range of viewpoints and issues to be discussed and explored. Naturally, there were differences of opinion and emphasis at times within the groups. However, it is possible to draw some broad conclusions as follows.

The online questionnaire was reported to be fairly straightforward and easy to understand, although there was some concern that online consultation processes were not accessible to all sectors of the LGBT community. However, there was recognition that the discussion group provided an additional way to participate.

A major limitation that hindered participants in giving feedback was a lack of detail in the policy proposals. Participants reported that they wanted information about how NCs would operate, who would run them, how individuals would be selected, how they would be funded and how they would be held accountable, and that without such detail, many questions remained.

As a result, the prevailing view was that participants had significant reservations about the concept of NCs. Participants had concerns about how NCs would operate in practice, how they would be funded and whether this was even advisable given the current economic situation. There were also concerns that NCs could be dominated by unelected, unrepresentative cliques who would have little understanding or intention to address LGBT issues and concerns. Also, that LGBT people would not feel safe to participate or raise LGBT issues in their own right, especially those most marginalised within the LGBT community. Indeed, the issue of specific barriers for LGBT people took a central place in discussions and participants seemed to struggle to understand why such barriers were seemingly not apparent to policy-makers. However, although they were minority views, it was important to note that there were also individuals who were enthusiastic or had an open mind about the policy.

Suggestions were put forward for ways that could be investigated to remove some of the barriers identified, such as mandatory LGBT awareness training for those holding positions of responsibility, robust scrutiny of compliance with equalities policy and legislation and a parallel city-wide LGBT council being just some of the solutions proposed.

If a central theme could be said to have emerged from the consultation it was that LGBT people who took part generally remained to be convinced that NCs would represent a route to improved local democracy, and may indeed, if worse predictions were realised, lead to further exclusion and marginalisation of LGBT people.

Final Draft: February 2012

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for further consideration by the Council.

1. Written feedback on this report be provided to identify how and to what extent the issues raised in this consultation have informed the Council's policy decision about the NC pilot.
2. In the event that the pilot goes ahead, specific policy and practice measures be developed by the Council on mandatory safeguards to ensure the inclusion and participation of 'communities of interest groups' including LGBT people. This should include review of the ideas generated by this consultation exercise.
3. NCs pilot projects should only receive Council funding where they can show plans for meaningful participation and involvement of 'communities of interest groups', specifically to include LGBT people.
4. Proposals are published for monitoring and evaluation of the NC pilot, to include scrutiny of equality and diversity issues. LGBT people should be included as part of the evaluation activities conducted.

In conclusion, some of those taking part had profound concerns about the potential implications of NCs. This exercise has sought to enable participant's views to be expressed so that their concerns and hopes for NCs might be heeded and acted upon.

Acknowledgements

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