

# Equality and Strategic Planning – Leeds City Council

## Background

Leeds City Council has a leading role in the city to promote equality and value diversity. This is outlined at the highest level within 'Leeds 2030: Vision for Leeds'. This is where our city partnership demonstrates clear commitment to be the best city and to improve the lives of everyone within it. Considerable work has taken place to make equality an integral part of our work. This includes work to strengthen and enhance equality considerations in the policy, planning and performance management framework, the scrutiny process, employment policies and procedures, service planning and the regulatory framework.

The Leeds Metropolitan District covers 552 square kilometers and is the second largest metropolitan district in England. It is recognised as one of Britain's most successful cities having transformed itself from a mainly industrial city into a broadly-based commercial centre regarded as the most important financial, legal and business service centre in the country outside London.

Geographically, the local authority area is one of contrast with a busy, thriving and densely-populated city centre and suburban inner ring, surrounded by a huge, sparsely populated rural hinterland with market towns of distinct character.

The population of Leeds has grown and changed over the last 20 years due to more people coming to live and work in our city, more children being born and people living longer. The 2011 Census shows that Leeds' population has increased to 751,500. The black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) population has increased from 77,900 in 2001 to 137,200 in 2009, that is, 17.4 per cent of the resident population (from 10.8 per cent in 2001) and the largest BAME groups in the city are the Pakistani and Indian communities with 22,500 and 20,700 people respectively. The proportion of pupils in Leeds schools that are of BAME heritage has increased since 2005 to 22.5 per cent of pupils and there are now more than 170 different first languages spoken by pupils in Leeds schools

## Summary

As can be seen from the ethnicity 'snapshot' above, Leeds is a very diverse city. Further information about other equality characteristics is available and confirms the picture of diversity. Leeds has a well-established approach to equality and diversity and the equality framework has provided a mechanism for further embedding this. However, in recognition of the need to continually develop and improve in this area and to respond to the changing statutory requirements in 2010 consideration was given to the best way for Leeds to continue to strengthen its approach to equality. It was agreed that this would take place within a whole systems approach, and that equality would be further embedded in the planning and performance framework for the council and for the city

## Who is involved?

The process was led by the head of partnerships and developed by a working group which included leads on:

- partnerships
- equality
- consultation
- research and intelligence
- performance
- communication.

A very wide engagement strategy was approved and was key in ensuring the success and buy-in for the approach and outcome. At all stages the senior management team and members were kept informed, endorsed the approach, and were the accountable people for the final process and outcome

### **The challenges for us**

In 2010, recognising that there had been considerable changes taking place within the city and the wider economy it was agreed to review and update 'Vision for Leeds', which had originally been published in 2004. The vision document sets the context and provides the direction for the city, working with partners, until 2030. The review included consideration of the partnership structures, strategic plans and performance management arrangements and resulted in a whole system approach being taken forward. As part of this, it was agreed that equality should be embedded at the heart of the work in a visible but coherent fashion. As a result, the following suite of plans were developed:

- Vision for Leeds 2011 to 2030
- City Priority Plan 2011 to 2015
- Council Business Plan 2011 to 2015.

Each of these reflected the views of those who had been engaged with the process, and the commitment the council and the city has to equality and diversity. In developing these there were a number of challenges in relation to equality as outlined below:

**Reaching all citizens** – the three-month public consultation phase for the new 'Vision for Leeds' encouraged people who live and work in Leeds to respond on proposed short-term and long-term priorities. In addition to the traditional methods of engagement, new or enhanced consultation activity included:

- a double-page spread and survey in the council's 'About Leeds' November edition issued to 330,000 households
- joint activities and blogs with [www.guardian.co.uk/leeds](http://www.guardian.co.uk/leeds)
- a bespoke, time-limited website – [www.whatifleeds.org](http://www.whatifleeds.org) – inviting people to get involved in a debate about the kind of city they want Leeds to be and their ideas for how to make it happen
- 'Whatifleeds' Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter accounts
- emarketing – bulk distribution lists to specific groups
- facebook advertising, and
- more than 100 consultation activities with specific interest groups at events across the city.

Although very time intensive, it was recognised as a useful process and anecdotally communities who had not normally been involved in such activities expressed appreciation for the time taken in doing so

**Impact assessing city priorities** – in addition to impact assessing the process to develop the vision and the priorities, partners were engaged in assessing the city priorities. An iterative process was then undertaken which has helped to establish the right level at which to conduct the assessments. For most of the priorities this is taking place below the City Priority Plan level and as part of the delivery plans underpinning each priority

**Equality Analysis** – it was recognised that although there was considerable information available about all protected characteristics, this information was not gathered comprehensively in one place and was therefore not very accessible. As part of the move towards establishing a formal city-wide evidence base it was agreed that an equality analysis would also take place. This followed the same format of the State of the

City Report, that is, by City Priority Plan theme. Considerable discussion took place to establish the best way of articulating this and there was considerable appeal in having one document. However, it was recognised that some of the equality analysis was council specific rather than in relation to the city and it was therefore appropriate to have a separate equality statement. This presents an ongoing challenge. A further challenge is to continually promote the Equality Statement and ensure it is fully used, updated and maintained

**Visibility versus embedded** – there is a constant tension between fully embedding equality in the work and ethos of an organisation and ensuring that it is visible and does not become marginalised. At various times of the process there has been a need to revisit this and ensure that there is sufficient balance on both sides. In order to meet statutory requirements the council developed equality improvement priorities based on the consultation which had taken place and on the priorities which had been established as a result of this. These are now in a stand-alone format, although they clearly fit with the council and city priorities.

## **Outcomes**

There is a strengthened approach to equality which is agreed at all levels throughout the council. It has also elevated the position of equality, particularly as one of the key themes from the consultation included encouraging inclusion of all social groups and reducing the gap between the rich and poor. The equality analysis explicitly shows the relationship between different protected characteristics and poverty, and again this puts the area firmly on the agenda.

All work of the council is focussed on achieving the city and council priorities which have clear explicit as well as underlying philosophy around equality and diversity.

The Equality Statement will be reviewed annually and this will show progress for the equality characteristics. In addition, each Strategic Partnership Board has been asked to explicitly focus on one area where they will make a difference which impacts on poverty and inequality. This will be followed through the normal performance management route and reported to all accordingly.

## **What we learnt**

Scope of the project was established early on and the fundamentals of project management were used to ensure that the project kept to time and so on. Activities were formally agreed, recorded and managed. Right from the outset, the need to conduct impact assessments, both of the process and the final documents/outcomes were agreed and the early agreement ensured that this was revisited and acted upon.

There was continual engagement with key decision makers who were kept up to date with developments and were therefore in a better position to own the final outcome. This ownership has been central to ensuring progress has been made in including equality and diversity within each of the key strategic documents, although it is recognised that this is more visible in some areas than in others. Although a working group established the process and undertook the work, there was a fairly clear delineation of work which would have benefited from more ownership across the team, for example, the equality impact assessments (EqIAs) did take place but they were heavily pushed and supported by the equality lead. While this is understandable, thought needs to be given to ensure wider ownership across a whole team, rather than reliance on one individual. It must also be recognised that the same could be said in relation to engagement – the engagement lead owned this area, rather than the team, although there were a range of people in the team also involved in the engagement activities.

The equality position statement provides a relatively comprehensive picture around each protected characteristic. However it does highlight where there is limited city level information. There is currently no capacity to undertake further research in these areas, and so there is a need to be more creative in understanding the picture. At the time of producing the statement this was not possible due to the tight timescales involved. One main next step for Leeds is to provide a city-wide equality perspective, and to

focus on sharing information between partners so that there is a comprehensive picture. The Strategic Partnership Boards have all identified one focus on poverty and inequality that they can focus on, and these need to continue to be supported and highlighted so that they remain centre stage. It is hoped that there can be a more formal adoption of city-wide equality improvement priorities in the future.

## **Contact**

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