Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) Review: Call for Evidence

A submission by Cambridge City Council

Cambridge City Council ("the Council") welcomes the opportunity of providing its views about the use of the ***specific duties*** as a part of the Steering Group's review of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Summary

Cambridge is becoming an increasingly diverse place with a growing population. The recent 2011 Census showed that nearly one person in three living in the City was born outside of the UK. Our total "non-white" population is 21,000 people or 17.5% of our total population, which is an increase of 10,166 or 88% for this group since 2001.

The Council takes its responsibilities for complying with the Equality Duty seriously. A key part of the Council's vision for Cambridge is for a City that it is diverse and tolerant place, values activities that bring people together and where everyone feels they have a stake in the community.

The Council believes that as a minimum the specific duties should be retained as they are presently constituted, so that information is readily available and accessible about what a public body wants to achieve (its equalities objectives), what it wants to do (its equalities action plan), what it has done (shown in a review) and how it takes into account equalities in its decision-making (equalities impacts). This openness and transparency has helped build trust and enhanced the reputation of the public sector and is one of the key benefits of the PSED.

The Council does not feel that the present specific duties have led to excessive costs or an inappropriate bureaucratic burden being imposed – in fact the very opposite, helping to coordinate equalities work across the Council and leading to enhanced benefits for our local communities and the way we work.

Our Approach

The Council delivers and supports a wide range of services that help respond to the needs of Cambridge's growing and increasingly diverse and communities. The range of our work includes providing a varied programme of activities in our community centres for local communities, grant funding for local equality and diversity activities and delivering with local community groups celebratory activities and events such as Black History Month and a Cambridge Mela.

look at issues in more depth. The findings of these Forums are considered in Panel meetings and recommendations made to the Council.

Overall, the Council believes the specific duties of the PSED have led to beneficial outcomes for local people, some of which are illustrated in this response and our supporting material, and that they have not led to an overly bureaucratic, heavy handed process.

Our Single Equality Scheme (SES)

The Council published its Equalities Objectives, in its Single Equality Scheme 2012-2015 ("the Scheme") in March 2012. This set out our priority areas for action over the next 3 years. The Scheme is concerned with addressing discrimination in all its forms. It does not attempt to capture everything the Council does to advance equalities and diversity but shows where will be looking to make a difference. Our Scheme is appended to this response (AP2).

The Council chose to develop a new Scheme, incorporating its equalities objectives, because it felt that this was the best way of demonstrating that it complies with its Duty to assist in promoting community cohesion and improving its knowledge and awareness of equality and diversity issues in Cambridge. This Scheme was not developed in isolation and followed an extensive consultation with a wide range of voluntary and community groups in the City. The results of the consultation informed the selection of six objectives and broad areas of action to deliver these objectives.

The Scheme was published in March 2012. It covers all the protected characteristics of Race, Disability, Gender, Gender Reassignment, Age, Sexual Orientation, Religion & Belief, Pregnancy & Maternity, Marriage and Civil Partnership. It makes reference to the Council's vision for Cambridge, which is a City that is diverse and tolerant, values activities that bring people together and where everyone feels they have a stake in the community and provides an overview of the Council's activities.

Our Achievements in the first year of our SES

As referred to earlier, our first review looked back at our achievements and learning over the first year of the SES and sets out information about progress in meeting our equalities objectives. We feel it shows we have made good progress in bringing people from our diverse communities together and advancing equality of opportunity between local people who share a protected characteristic and those that don't.

More generally the Council has, during the year, improved the experience of all its customers through developing and implementing a Customer Access Strategy for its Customer Access Centre and improvements to our City Homes service. Both of these services have been accredited with national Customer Excellence Awards.

The Council's Equalities Panel has also provided quality assurance for a number of key EQIAs and we have used a Diversity Forum, which involves a wide range of local stakeholders with an interest in equality, to consider in greater depth the implications of major decisions. This has led to better assessments and an improvement to policies.

The Council's SES included a number of actions in its first year that were intended to improve corporate processes for assessing the equality impacts of its decisions. A more user-friendly corporate impact assessment template has now been developed, which allows officers to think about decisions in a more structured and evidenced manner. The template also provides an opportunity to highlight positive impacts as well as negative ones. The template has been promoted widely to officers and a programme of training has been commissioned to help Council officers carry out effective impact assessments.

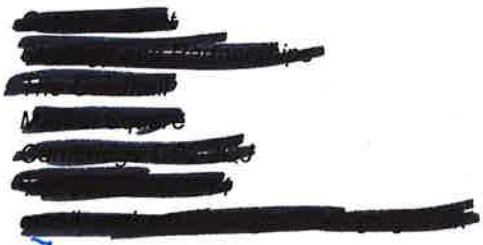
Carrying out equality impact assessments has also led to a more joined-up approach in the Council in considering equalities. For example, during the course of the past year, the Council developed its local Council Tax Support Scheme, which aimed to protect the most vulnerable. In developing the scheme the action plan that accompanied an initial impact assessment helped guide consultation with a wide range of stakeholders to help understand how it could affect local people, especially vulnerable people of a working age. A number of different departments and functions across the Council became involved in "reaching out" to different communities and groups of people. The Council also convened a Diversity Forum to bring together representatives of different voluntary and community sector groups, including Age UK and Cambridge Citizens' Advice Bureau, to look at the matter in depth. As a result of the consultations a more robust impact assessment was prepared that resulted in several changes being made to the final scheme that was taken forward, including additional allowances for backdating and extended disability criteria.

Conclusion

The Council hopes that Steering Group will take its experience of providing open and transparent information about how it demonstrates its compliance with the Equality Duty and the value of retaining the present specific duties as they are presently constituted.

This submission has been made by the Leader of the Council, Tim Bick.

To discuss the submission please contact:



[Supporting documentation supplied separately to GEO]