

## **BME Recruitment Focus Groups – Council Response**

### **1 Introduction**

A priority area of work under the Council's Workforce Equalities Action Plan (WEAP) is to engage with the city's BME communities. The Council commissioned the Trust for Developing Communities (TDC) since they are already working in the City on BME Engagement to organise, invite to and facilitate 5 or 6 focus groups with a maximum of 10 participants drawn from different BME communities and across a range of age groups, gender, sexuality, ability and to include individuals who are economically active.

It was agreed that TDC would analyse the key findings from the focus groups and provide recommendations that the council could consider and then use to develop actions. There will be an event later in 2015 for the council to update focus group participants and the wider local BME communities on the progress the council has made against these actions.

We really appreciated being able to attend the sessions and meet those who gave up their time to meet with us. We welcomed the opportunity to listen to people's experiences and to hear their views on the council as an employer, our recruitment and selection processes and their thoughts on how we could improve. These discussions gave us a better insight into the issues facing people looking for work within BME communities locally and will be helpful in our review of both the policy and the process.

We have provided a response to each of the formal recommendations contained in the TDC report. This sets out the actions we will be taking forward, those which are already part of our Year 3 WEAP and those which have already been completed. In addition, because we didn't want to lose the detail of the direct feedback we heard when attending the focus groups we have also included this at Appendix 1.

### **Recommendation 1**

When asked what was needed to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of staff and other ethnic monitoring data requirements, participants suggested:

- More encouragement from senior staff and leaders to ensure Equality & Diversity (E&D) were not just policy but formed part of 'living our values';
- More training and communication of the understanding of why the data has to be collected and how it was going to be used in a "*positive*" way.

### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

Our culture change approach, ‘Living our values, every day’ features a mandatory development programme for all our managers and covers managing equality and diversity. To date 700 managers including all the most senior managers have completed the programme.

We have encouraged existing staff to complete equality monitoring forms and recently undertook exercises with schools and some front-line services. We explained why collecting equality data is important and how it will be used and stored. This work was supported via joint communications from staff workers forums and trade unions as well as being personally endorsed by the Chief Executive in her Blog and the senior management team briefing that gets cascaded throughout the whole organisation.

Our on-line job application form explains why we want to collect personal equality data and how it will be used and stored. The council’s workforce profile data is published on our website <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/equality>.

The council has a corporate workforce equalities group (WEG) which includes representatives of the four Staff Workers Forums, trade unions, HR and the Communities and Equality team. This group together with departmental equalities groups meet quarterly to monitor progress, better understand how this data is used and to learn about the equality work actions being carried out.

### **What are we planning to do?**

We are planning to develop our performance management framework so that managers will be assessed not only on ‘what’ they achieve, but also on ‘how’ they achieve it in terms of their behaviour and how they relate to and treat others.

We are also reviewing the equalities and diversity content of all our learning and development programmes.

### **Recommendation 2**

It was recommended by participants that the most common steps that the council can take to attract and recruit BME staff are:

- Having a standard statement in all advertisements welcoming applications from ethnic minorities
- Including positive messages about diversity in council mission statements, recruitment packs and other promotional literature

### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

Our new recruitment website links through to the council’s values and behaviours and our equalities action plan to ensure these have a high profile with job applicants.

## **What are we planning to do?**

This year we will review our recruitment strategy, policy and process to ensure:

- job opportunities are more accessible to those from all under-represented groups
- adverts for jobs are reflective of diversity and convey positive messages to applicants
- branding on the council's website includes images that more appropriately reflect the diversity of local communities and include positive images of people with different protected characteristics
- success stories/testimonials from BME staff are publicised on the intranet and our external jobs site
- positive BME role models within the organisation are identified and are used to actively promote an inclusive work environment

## **Recommendation 3**

HR teams should continue to be trained and briefed on the importance of collecting equality & diversity data and details from employees. HR should make time to talk to all staff about the benefits of disclosing equality data, clearly explaining issues such as confidentiality and how the data will be stored. They should be transparent about staff profiles to encourage under-represented groups to apply for vacancies.

## **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

Please see response to recommendation 1 above

## **What are we planning to do?**

We will continue to work with teams and schools where there are low declaration rates to encourage individuals to complete their personal equality data.

We will publish our first annual Workforce Equalities Report in October 2015. This report will present a wide range of workforce data along with analysis highlighting key changes and equality issues that need to be addressed.

## **Recommendation 4**

HR should develop appropriate methods to collect and monitor equality data accurately (data monitoring should include recruitment, promotion, training and staff leaving).

## **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

We already collect, analyse and report on a range of recruitment and workforce equality data. Job applicants are asked to complete confidential monitoring forms and this data is held securely in HR (it is not passed to recruiting managers).

### **What are we planning to do?**

We will continue to expand, improve the quality of and better publicise the range of data we collect and analyse, in particular data around promotions and leavers.

### **Recommendation 5**

HR should take the lead in ensuring that:

- Systematic action planning takes place that is based on the effective use of race-related data on staff recruitment and staff progress
- Target setting in relation to all aspects of staffing is established and monitored
- Methods for assessing and monitoring the impact of policies on the diversity of staff recruitment and selection are established.

### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

We have improved the quality of our recruitment data by redesigning our equalities monitoring form and guidance. Recruitment data is analysed and reported to the Workforce Equalities Group. We have identified from the data the adverse patterns/trends that need to be addressed.

In August 2013, we set new workforce targets in line with the profile of the economically active population within the City of Brighton & Hove in accordance with the data from the 2011 Census. These targets are incorporated as Performance Indicators within the council's Performance Management Framework and progress towards achieving them is monitored annually by the Council's Policy & Resources Committee.

The targets are as follows:

BME 9.1%

White Other 8.8%

White Irish 1.6%

### **What are we planning to do?**

Our annual Workforce Equalities Report will contain data and analysis that will enable departments to see how they are performing against the council's workforce targets and to develop action plans to increase diversity at all levels of the council.

We will continue to monitor the composition of the local economically active population and will revise our workforce targets as necessary.

We will review our recruitment and selection policy and processes taking into account:

- our recruitment data
- the feedback we have gathered from this engagement exercise
- the outcome of random sampling of recruitment exercises looking at possible barriers for BME applicants
- feedback from our workers forums and of course
- the findings from undertaking an equality impact assessment (EIA)

## **Recommendation 6**

HR should constantly review council recruitment policies and marketing materials, explore and try out innovative and cost-effective approaches to attract people who are under-represented.

### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

We have used [www.diversityjobs.co.uk](http://www.diversityjobs.co.uk) for just over a year to advertise all our vacancies.

### **What are we planning to do?**

Please see response to recommendations 2 and 5 above

## **Recommendation 7**

HR and council department heads should develop strategies that will enable closer working with local communities at all levels of the organisation.

This should include developing partnerships and collaborative activities with under-represented groups and key organisations to attract staff from diverse backgrounds.

### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

We commissioned the Trust for Developing Communities to facilitate these focus groups as part of our desire to develop an on-going relationship with BME communities in the city.

### **What are we planning to do?**

We will work with our Communities, Equality & Third Sector team and Third Sector organisations to develop an approach to raise the profile of council officers and services within local communities.

### **Recommendation 8**

HR and Heads of council departments should promote an organisational culture that encourages staff to value diversity; acknowledging and supporting the celebration of cultural events even where the staff population does not necessarily reflect that culture or ethnicity.

#### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

We publish information about religious festivals on the intranet and in the Chief Executive's blog. We have also supported Black History Month.

Our Flexible Working and Leave Policy both reflect the ability for different religious festivals to be celebrated.

We have a prayer room at one of our main council buildings

We have commissioned two new equality and diversity workshops aimed at:

- supporting staff's understanding and skills in relation to diversity and its importance in service design and delivery
- supporting staff to develop the skills and confidence to challenge inappropriate behaviour in the workplace

#### **What are we planning to do?**

We will introduce new equality & diversity e-Learning and workshops. We will work with colleagues in other areas of the council to publish information about local cultural events and general information to raise awareness and promote an inclusive culture.

### **Recommendation 9**

In order to demonstrate a commitment to diversifying the staff workforce at all levels, HR and Department Heads should provide professional development opportunities and positive action initiatives including mentoring, coaching, job-shadowing through organisations such as the Black Leadership Initiative and NCBI positive Action programmes.

#### **What we have done recently/What is already in place?**

Coaching, mentoring and job shadowing opportunities are available to all staff.

The Schools' Workforce Equality Action Plan sets out work the council is undertaking with schools and the University regarding encouraging diversity in leadership and governance

### **What are we planning to do?**

We will work with local schools, colleges and universities to promote the council as a potential employer. We will examine how we can attract BME candidates onto apprenticeships and work placements.

We will look at how we can better develop our BME staff to enable them to fulfil their potential.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Detailed Feedback heard by HR officers from the Council April? 2015**

#### **Council image – You Said**

- Council only ever engages over issues but doesn't bother raising awareness
- Lack of BME representation in senior roles
- Request to have job fairs with BME people from services representing the council
- Provide more visible career paths
- What training and mentoring is available to BME staff
- Don't know what your recruitment policy and process is
- Perception that recruiters want people who look like them
- Even if people are qualified in professional roles they are offered lower level roles
- Not treated as equals
- Request to provide support to integrate into culture at work and socially

#### **Our Response**

We will publish our current recruitment policy on our website. We are reviewing our policy and processes this year and the feedback provided through these focus groups will help to inform the new policy and processes. Two out of seven of the council's senior management team are BME but we know that we have a lot of work to do to achieve a diverse workforce that reflects the composition of our community.

#### **Advertising – You Said**

- Positive statement on adverts – to counteract views that council isn't welcoming to BME people
- Why doesn't the council advertise in community magazines, websites and Facebook?
- Why doesn't the council use Gumtree, Friday ad, the Argus and corner shops
- Send instructions on how to sign up for e-alerts to BMECP
- You should publicise your flexibility around working week/hours
- Jobs available at the council aren't jobs people want to do
- Advertise all your jobs on school noticeboards so parents see them
- Have diverse images on council website, recruitment and publicity materials
- Publicise information on senior BME people so communities are aware
- Have case studies from BME staff on what it is like working for the council

- Can the council produce some general recruitment literature in different languages? (but others said be careful as people will think that that language is spoken in the workplace)
- Put information in other languages but explain that English is required for the work/job
- Not aware of how council advertises and recruits to permanent and temporary roles

## **Our Response**

The council currently advertises all its permanent and temporary vacancies on its own job website [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/jobs](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/jobs), [www.jobspublic.com](http://www.jobspublic.com) and [www.diversityjobs.co.uk](http://www.diversityjobs.co.uk). However, we acknowledge that this approach should be reviewed to see how we can reach as diverse an audience as possible for our job opportunities. We also engage agency workers using a variety of local job agencies and also use the above websites to recruit to our two internal casual pools – one for care workers called “care crew” and one for administrative workers called “Admin All Areas”. To advertise in traditional publications is much more expensive but we will consider advertising our website in the local press. We are also looking at how to use social media to encourage a diverse range of applicants.

We will put positive statements on our adverts/website and ensure that information about our terms and conditions of employment and staff benefits are accessible. We will publish some welcome messages in other languages and review the images we are using in our recruitment material and on our website, including case studies from BME employees.

## **Application Process – You Said**

- Application form is too long, long words, not accessible
- Applicants can't access support to complete specific applications
- Simplify language in the guidance -Can you get crystal mark for your application form and guidance?
- Use icons in forms
- Make them easy to read
- Provide an example of a completed application form
- If you haven't had paid employment not clear how you complete that section of the form – seems to exclude voluntary work/studies
- Don't like on-line forms
- More flexibility in your forms
- A lot of organisations provide a contact number to ring up for guidance on filling out the form
- Medical information paragraph needs simplifying

## **Our Response**

We are going to review our application process to make it simpler and reflect the feedback we have received. We will look at participating in a local job fair in the next year and ensure that we have diverse representation of staff attending. We will also arrange a workshop for individuals to drop in for help in completing an application and setting up e-job alerts. The guidance for setting up e-job alerts can be found on our website [www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/jobs](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/jobs). We will work with job centre plus to see what assistance they could provide.

### **Selection process – You Said**

- Look at how recruitment is carried out in other countries – don't stick with archaic interview system where applicants are interrogated
- Applicants don't often know what the culture/sub-culture is when they attend interviews
- At recruitment stage it is not just about speaking the language but about nuances of language and culture.
- No feedback on your application is given
- Lack of response when people apply for jobs
- Would like to have essential and desirable elements on person specifications
- Experience and qualifications from abroad are not accepted
- Lack of opportunity to convert qualifications at no cost if gained outside Europe
- References - change wording to clarify they are part of the "assessment" process

### **Our Response**

Our new recruitment system went live in April and it does inform candidates if they are not selected for interview. The council's policy is that all applicants should be offered appropriate feedback, if requested. In most cases this should be brief and simple, but where an applicant has reached a final interview feedback should be more detailed. Feedback should not include comments about the specific performance or behaviour of other applicants.

### **Equalities Monitoring – You Said**

- Where are your statistics?
- Concern that equalities monitoring information is used against them or impacts on services delivered to their community.
- Exit questionnaires and data – what are the reasons people leave?

### **Our Response**

Equalities monitoring information is held within our HR system. It is not provided to recruiting managers. It is used solely for statistical analysis to help

us monitor whether the work we are doing is helping us to increase the diversity of applicants, individuals interviewed and those offered jobs.

All workforce and recruitment data can be found on our website at <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/council-and-democracy/equality>. Further work is underway to widen the scope of the data that is collected. Our first annual Workforce Equalities Report will be published in October and will set out the findings of our analysis and key changes.

We record reasons for staff leaving under a number of broad categories on our HR system e.g. voluntary resignation, retirement, redundancy. However, in order to gather more detailed information on why staff leave our employment and what their experience has been of working for the council, HR also sends out an exit questionnaire for staff to complete. Although the rate of return is quite low, historically the main reasons for leaving have been career change and career progression. We will publish information on this as part of our annual equalities report.