



## **Manchester City Council – Local Government Equality Framework Re-accreditation Peer Challenge June 27/28 2018**

Thank you again for inviting the Local Government Association to undertake a peer challenge to reassess your organisation against the “Excellent” level of the Local Government Equality Framework. I am pleased to confirm that the peer team were unanimous in concluding that Manchester City Council could be re-accredited at the “Excellent” level of the framework. Your new award will be valid for a further three years.

The team undertook a desktop analysis of your self-assessment and supporting documents. This was followed up by a two day site visit during which we met with managers, staff and other stakeholders. We really appreciated the welcome and hospitality provided by the Council and we would like to thank everybody that we met during the process for their time and contributions. The peers were:

- Councillor Ross Willmott – Leicester City Council
- Paul Peng – Head of Equality and Cohesion, Knowsley Borough Council
- Shammi Jalota – Head of Profession, Equalities & Partnerships Essex County Council
- Sonia Khan – Head of Policy and Partnerships, London Borough of Hackney
- Gill Elliott – Review Manager LGA

The basis for the peer challenge is an assessment against the five areas of the Equality Framework for Local Government which are:

- Knowing your customers
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Involving your customers
- Responsive services, access and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

The peer team was very pleased to see that the Council has addressed the recommendations of the peer challenge team in 2015 and that it has maintained and even increased its strong focus on equalities within the community since it first gained the Excellent level award in 2015. This is in part a result of its new city strategy “Our Manchester 2015-2025” which has driven a significant culture change in the organisation. The strategy’s four principle themes of People, Listening, Strength in the Community and Working Together were evident throughout the peer challenge in the conversations with staff, members and partners and other stakeholders. “Our Manchester” was also evident in the Council’s approach to neighbourhood based services, its

work with health and voluntary sector partners and in its response to the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in 2017.

This letter sets out what we think are some of the many strengths that the Council has with regard to equality and diversity, along with some areas you might wish to consider taking forward. Our comments are grouped under the Framework's five main areas.

### **Knowing Your Communities**

The Council has a good understanding of its communities. It recognises that there are changing dynamics in the city as new communities emerge, and existing communities grow and change. However it also acknowledges that it could be better at understanding the changing profiles and needs of these newer communities. Some interviewees talked about needing to better understand newer communities such as the West African community.

The Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) is mature and a JSNA around the social model of disability is also being developed. Whilst a data hub exists, the Council could gain even more and richer information about emerging communities by carrying out some "deep dive" data and intelligence gathering exercises which will help to discover what the up and coming challenges are e.g. gang violence and mental health.

There is good analysis of data as seen in the Communities of Interest Report and the review into cohesion in the city which was one of the responses to the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena in 2017. Good use is made of Insight to enrich data. The Manchester Active Card and the Living Library are good examples of how the Council is finding new ways to gather information about customers who use Council facilities.

The Council's collaboration with partners is enriching its knowledge and enabling it to gain a deeper understanding of residents. An example of this is its work with higher education institutions to generate an ethnographic study of Manchester and an external study of the Health and Wellbeing system. Another example is the work being done by the new Local Care Organisation (LCO). Data is being provided by a range of partners including police, fire, the ambulance service and housing providers. Mental Health Trusts are also involved. Sharing data sets is still an issue but all the partners seem determined to find ways to overcome problems with sharing data.

Member Champions were strongly committed to driving change for each of the protected characteristics. It is also a good way of giving responsibility to non- executive as well as executive members which in itself is an inclusive way of working. The Member Equality Leads actually have good knowledge about emerging communities which may be very small, such as the growing Nigerian community.

The Senior Leadership team does receive equality and diversity data but peers felt that it could look at some data in more depth when determining priorities, such as around work and skills. There is also a case for greater integration of equalities into performance management. Focusing on addressing the barriers that people face from those groups of people who

disproportionately experience inequalities (such as in health or education) is more likely to drive up performance.

### **Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment**

The Council's commitment to its equality agenda is clearly driven by its elected Members. Equality is key to the Council's Labour Group manifesto. Members themselves are a very diverse group and very active as leaders in their own wards and communities. The Member Equality leads are a real strength. They have their own plans and work is underway to strengthen links between these plans and corporate objectives. Whilst closer alignment to the corporate objectives is admirable, having some tension between them rather than complete alignment can also help "push the envelope" on equality. Peers did think that all Members might benefit from an annual refresher training course on equalities and making this mandatory should be considered. The training could be thematic, addressing newer issues like mental health and transgender rights.

The Chief Executive is very clear about the equality priorities of the Council. She is keen to ensure that council services make an impact on poverty in the city. Her own style is very inclusive and open as demonstrated by her meetings with front line staff at outlying depots and offices and the Listening in Action sessions which she attends with other senior managers as well as the Leader. Staff clearly appreciate this approach.

The Commitment to equality is evident from the fact that the Council has retained its equality team in the face of considerable budget cuts and restructuring in the organisation since 2010. There is now an opportunity to integrate the work of the equality team more into service development and public sector transformation by involving it in service design and strategy earlier.

"Our Manchester" is well understood by staff and it is driving a change of culture to one that is about listening and empowering staff. Partners have also recognised this. All the voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations that peers spoke to were complementary about the co-design of the new grant system which they feel allowed them to have greater input and to really influence the system that was introduced. The Council now has an opportunity to build on this success by reviewing the ways VCS organisations can continue to be involved in working with the council in the design and development of services. They would like to see opportunities for their involvement with the council streamlined in some way. They acknowledge the fast pace of change and recognise that they can't always keep up with all the meetings they are asked to attend.

Budget and business planning is well integrated and there are service based equality delivery plans. Going forward the Council needs to consider how it can better align its equality objectives to its corporate objectives and make the connection more explicit. There needs to be a dual focus with "Our Manchester" mainstreaming the way inequalities are tackled, alongside a focus on specific inequalities with key equality performance indicators (KPIs) that are really stretching. The Equality Delivery Plans are a good start but they largely "playback" the generic high level ambitions of "Our Manchester" rather than focussing on the key inequalities and

ways of delivering on these specific KPIs.

The City Council has adopted Inclusive Growth as a very explicit goal to help ensure that all residents can benefit from the considerable economic growth of the last twenty years. Whilst inclusive growth as a concept is positive, strategies are needed to ensure that the prosperity is shared by everyone, including disadvantaged groups and communities. Going forward the Council also needs to ensure that the strategy has a strong connection to both the corporate and the equality objectives.

The Council could make better use of the Public Sector Equality Duties (PSEDs) to be more confident about tackling specific inequalities. Disability is one issue that needs to be a more specific priority for the Council. Staff seem rather shy of stating which groups are actually affected by inequality and the use of equalities language is rather old fashioned with references in documents to “equal opportunities” as opposed to “Equality and Diversity”. Several people we met gave the impression that equality considerations only covered minority groups or groups more likely to be oppressed by society, whereas the Equality Duty encourages a forensic examination of specific groups that are disadvantaged, because of a characteristic, and so protects the whole population. The Council has a good evidence base of data to identify gaps and trends to support its actions and adopting a more evidence based approach to talking about equalities should give people the confidence to be specific about the equalities in specific groups. To avoid generalising or stereotyping they can talk about "risks," "disproportionately worse outcomes" etc. The Council might want to look at cultural competency tools as a way to build confidence about talking about equality issues.

### **Involving Your Communities**

The resident and stakeholder engagement that took place for the development of “Our Manchester” was impressive. However, the move to online survey methods is not securing a balanced perspective and therefore the credibility of any resident views collected could be undermined. Certain groups such as women and white British appear to be over represented. Some alternative statistically sampled surveys by telephone or face to face might be needed to allow those who are less digitally able to have their say. The Council might consider setting up some sort of sampled representative citizen panel although we appreciate that these do take time and resources to set up and maintain. Supplementing this with qualitative research through focus groups would help to capture the voices of people from some under-represented groups.

There are some really good examples of engagement with communities:

- The Older Peoples Board and Forum has strong and diverse representation. It influenced the Employers Network’s introduction of a good practice guide for employing older people.
- The All Age Disability Plan is well understood by the VCS and the Council’s Work and Skills Team. It has led to good positive action to prepare disabled people for work via work tasters sessions and visits to the council.
- The Council has very strong relationships with the local LGBT community. A strong strategic partnership and engagement framework exists between the council and the LGBT Foundation.
- Work done to encourage a local small business private sector provider to recruit new

employees from the area where they operate their business.

The Ward Improvement Partnerships seem to be a good way to intervene early to tackle cohesion issues, focusing on the problem (such as fly-tipping) rather than different communities blaming each other. However, the funding process for neighbourhood investment needs to be more open. There is a risk that the money is only going to those who understand the system and who may come back in successive years. A way needs to be found to widen the participation of community groups. This will increase the diversity of access to these funds and so widen its impact. There is also no evaluation of how the £20k fund is spent and the potential for savings by avoiding duplication with council services. It is important for the council to be engaging with the people in diverse communities themselves rather than community leaders who may not represent their views.

### **Responsive Services and Customer Care**

There were many good examples of responsive service delivery to diverse communities including:

- Extra care for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT) elder residents which is part of an effort to improve residential care delivery for this protected characteristic group. The provision was designed with input from an LGBT elder reference group.
- The All Age Disability Plan which is an example of co-design with disabled people. It enables people to self-assess and order their own disability aids. The service will also be tested with people with a learning disability.
- The neighbourhood based approach to service delivery which allows the council to look at specific issues at ground level and to focus on where specific inequalities persist. Ward meetings in local areas direct activities such as rubbish clearing and street cleaning.

The Local Care Organisation (LCO) is an example of a strength based approach that has the potential to really make a difference to health outcomes in the city. It brings together hospital community services and primary GP care services with adult social care and other voluntary and community services at a local level. It will establish 12 neighbourhood teams which will each determine its own health priorities. The LCO is still in its infancy. It aims to focus on prevention and early intervention but this needs to be done in a way that understands the key drivers of inequality and maintains focus on dealing with borough wide cross cutting issues.

Since 2015 the Council has worked hard to increase the use of the Social Value Act to drive conversations with suppliers. It has increased the weighting given to social value considerations in the tendering process from 10% to 20%. Outcomes from this approach include suppliers creating 423 employment opportunities for hard to reach individuals, 705 apprenticeships and 1,160 jobs and nearly 69,000 hours of support to the VCS. Although spend with small and medium enterprises has increased from 46.6% to 59.4% since 2014/15, some representatives from the VCS still felt that the procurement process hampered opportunities for small companies. They felt that lessons could be learned from the co-design of grant funding process to reconsider procurement.

As prosperity in the City is increasing there needs to be some new thinking to address the lack of housing in the city. This includes exploring the issue of equal access to private sector housing. The private rented market is no longer meeting housing needs and the Council will need to be bold in the ways they intervene in the market. The issue may be a lack of housing or a lack of housing that the population on lower wages can afford. We heard concerns about the destitution and homelessness in the city, despite growing prosperity, and welcome the focus the Council is giving this by having a senior post with leadership responsibility for homelessness. The Council could consider adopting a private sector landlord charter wherein a key factor is that landlords sign up to providing fit for purpose and affordable rented accommodation. A number of local authorities across the northwest and wider regions have established similar private sector landlord charters. The benefits have been far reaching not just for the potential tenants but also the private sector landlords who can advertise the fact that they are signatories.

### **Skilled and Committed Workforce**

There are many strengths within the Council under this theme of the framework. The Council's focus on culture change is impressive and seemed to be understood by all levels of the organisation, partners and the voluntary sector. The values and behaviours they are describing are also closely aligned with Inclusive Leadership. "Our Manchester" has led to the adoption of new values such as more listening to and empowering of staff. The Council may want to explore this further and make the link between organisational culture and equalities and inclusion more explicit.

Staff said that they now feel more encouraged to be innovative and change how things are done, knowing they will be supported by their manager and will be able to learn from any mistakes that are. The Council has a new People Strategy with a new approach. It pays the national Living Wage to all its staff including care staff. There are opportunities for staff to get involved in services in other parts of the Council. They can have up to three days paid leave to volunteer. Flexible working is promoted across the organisation and the Timewise Accreditation is being worked towards. A new "strengths based" appraisal process has been adopted called "About You" which includes 1:1 conversations between staff and managers. The response from staff has been positive.

The Council is well represented by women at senior management level with 75% of the senior management team being female. The appointment of the new Chief Executive is clearly having a positive impact on the workforce. Staff appreciate her background and personal style.

There are now more ways for front line staff to engage with senior leaders of the organisation. These include Listening in Action sessions at outlying offices and depots as well as staff conferences. Staff feel that the Council is now more open to challenge and criticism and receptive to change.

The Council appears to have a much more open approach to mental health. Although our observation was limited and mainly anecdotal, it is a positive story. People feel safe discussing their mental health.

The Council recognises that it has to do more to increase the representation of BAME people at a senior level in the organisation. There are more BAME people in the workforce overall than in 2015 but the percentage at a senior level has not increased. BAME people make up less than 10% of grades 10 and above. The peer team feel that the Council could take a bolder approach to this issue. It is introducing a coaching and mentoring scheme and has reserved some places for BME staff. The response from BAME staff was they would either want to have senior BAME role models in the organisation, and be mentored by senior BAME staff, or have some form of external support to address this issue. A suggestion from peers is the North West Employers Inclusive Cultures Programme, which could possibly provide this for the Council. There was little other evidence of positive action to increase the numbers of BAME staff who could progress to senior posts. The organisation needs to consider urgently what type of positive action it could put in place to address this issue and maybe even consider having targets. We heard that apprentices are very diverse and that in time some should progress into more senior roles. Clearly this is a long term strategy. A quicker strategy could be affected by ring-fencing some of the graduate trainee roles for BAME trainees and using positive action to recruit to them.

The Council needs to consider how it can support staff equality networks to develop in terms of their structure, function and role within the organisation. Previously there were three networks: Disability; LGBT and BAME. The corporate BAME group no longer meets, although a directorate based network has started in Adults which may be replicated in Children's. Members of the corporate group suggest that a lack of capacity and support for attendees was a problem.

Reasonable adjustments are not consistently understood by managers. The organisation could consider developing a disability passport which staff could take with them when changing roles to help their new manager understand their condition and their needs for reasonable adjustments.

The Council needs to consider how it can refresh its equality training offer. "Our Manchester" should be linked to training especially for new starters. Although equality e-learning is mandatory for staff, more needs to be done to enforce this more robustly. It can also be several years since some staff received any training. We feel that some refresher training for all staff should be provided. Unconscious Bias training is being introduced for staff who are involved in recruitment and selection. We welcome this and would suggest that it is extended to anyone who manages staff.

The Trade Unions overall were very positive about relationships with managers in the Council. They are concerned about a lack of consistency around issues like reasonable adjustments and flexible working. They also want to be involved in developing new proposals for staff much earlier.

Finally, once again, we would like to thank Manchester City Council for commissioning this peer challenge and to everyone involved for their participation. The team are particularly grateful for the support provided both in the preparation for the Peer Challenge and during the on-site phase and for the way people we met engaged with the process.

All of us connected with the Peer Challenge would like to wish Manchester City Council every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

**Gill Elliott**

**Peer Support Adviser**

**Local Government Association**