

## Working with Hard to Reach Communities - an update

### Background

1. Members are reminded of the report that appears at Appendix A which committee has previously considered.
2. Committee is reminded that Council adopted, at its last meeting, the following recommendations:
  - a. That as regards engagement with hard to reach communities, council should work via residents groups and user groups where they exist, and
  - b. That, where sufficient data is not already held by partner organizations such as Northumberland County Council, it consider using targeted research intended to identify whether we need to do more to fulfill our duties under the Equalities Act, and
  - c. That Council delegate to the Town Clerk authority to commission such research provided it does not cost more than £1000, to be allocated from existing underspends or general reserves.
3. Since the last meeting of the council your clerk and his staff have reached out to Northumberland County Council, Northumberland Voluntary Forum and local NHS groups seeking information and background data as to the profile of the LGBTQ+ community in north Northumberland.
4. In general the response has been supportive, but opaque; organizations have recognized that there is a paucity of data, and a limited number of VCS organizations focused on the LGBTQ+ community operating in north Northumberland, but have been unable to provide robust data as to demand for services, experiences or outcomes.
5. The issue is not simple; by way of example the Office for National Statistics paper on the design of questions on Sexual Identity for the Integrated Household Survey runs to 14 pages, and the resulting question, and the questioning process is itself controversial.
6. We would add one further point; the Integrated Household Survey showed a significant increase in the number of people identifying as lesbian or gay between 2015 and 2016; this begs a question as to whether there was a significant increase in the number of people who identify as gay or lesbian, or a change in their willingness to self-identify.
7. We make these points not to encourage speculation, but to illustrate the need to have specialist knowledge both of research and the LGBTQ+ community.

8. In order to take forward council's decision therefore, it is proposed that we will invite local organization(s) with significant research competencies to undertake an online survey using our systems to enable us to better understand the following themes;
  - a. Demand for services for the LGBTQ+ community in Berwick,
  - b. Organizations that the LGBTQ+ community currently uses for services in Berwick,
  - c. Levels of satisfaction with existing services,
  - d. Demographics of the LGBTQ+ community in Berwick, and
  - e. Levels of satisfaction with our consultative processes / awareness of the services of the Town Council.
9. The themes are chosen not just for our purposes, but so that the data can be shared with other organizations, both involved in service delivery and VCS support.

Recommendation

1. That committee note the report.

## Appendix A

### Working with Hard to Reach Communities

#### Background

1. Part of becoming an effective and successful council is securing democratic legitimacy through effective engagement with all of the community.
2. Council is already working hard at this; meetings are held in public, as required by law, the recordings of meetings are published on the website, and the council has a robust approach to publication of documents.
3. Nevertheless it remains an important part of the council's work to periodically check how effective our engagement is, and to review the chosen methods. This is also part of fulfilling our duties under the Equality Act.
4. The public sector Equality Duty came into force across Great Britain on 5 April 2011. It means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It also requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate discrimination
  - advance equality of opportunity
  - foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities
5. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 came into force on 10 September 2011. The specific duties require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives.
6. Some disadvantaged groups have a greater need for council services while also experiencing greater barriers to accessing them. Local knowledge and understanding the diversity of the community are essential, as is understanding the way different groups like to communicate. Some people will prefer direct contact with the council, either face-to-face or over the phone. Others may prefer communicating through the web, text messaging, blogs and podcasts. Some may need very directly targeted communication because of disability, culture, language or literacy factors. Community centres and residents' organisations can be particularly effective channels for two-way communication.
7. As a council we have access to large amounts of data, not all of it well used. We know that 98% of our population is white, and that there are only small numbers of people from a BAME background who live in Berwick. This does not mean we can ignore their needs; quite the opposite, but our approach must be, in the language of the act, proportionate.
8. We know that we have significant areas of deprivation within the town, and we work with residents associations to deliver community cohesion and better services in those areas. We are developing a productive relationship with the Youth Project and other youth groups in the town to improve our work with young people.

9. We know we are overly dependent on the local newspaper to report the council's activities, and on our website, which we have already decided to re-vamp.
10. The one traditionally hard to reach group about which we appear to know very little is the LGBTQI community. Traditionally under representation of the LGBTQI community in rural locations has been an issue for all local authorities. We have no knowledge of the scope of the LGBTQI community, its networks, or the services it desires or how it views the Town Council.

#### Issues

1. The committee is invited to consider whether it wishes to make recommendation to council as regards engagement with hard to reach communities, either via residents groups and user groups, or via targeted research intended to identify whether we need to do more to fulfill our duties under the Equalities Act, such as with the LGBTQI community.