

People and Communities Committee

Report of the Town Clerk

LGBT Research

Background

1. Council undertook to commission research into the experiences of the LGBT community in Berwick in order to fulfill its duties under the Equalities Act, and to inform the preparation of a Town Plan.
2. The draft Executive Summary of the research is attached.
3. As is common practice no recommendations are made at this stage, and the consultant is awaiting feedback from us as regards the outcomes of the survey outlined in the Executive Summary.
4. As part of the background work associated with this research we have already improved the management of the council's social media portfolio, a matter which will be reported separately.
5. During our work with the consultant three issues have become clear in relation to our work as a council that affects LGBT community; the first being the language adopted to describe the community, the second being the state of our existing policies, and the third being whether our practice is always inclusive. The advice of committee members on these issues is required.
6. With regard to language, we are in an invidious and yet necessary position. The right of a community to define itself is, in essence defined and made clear by the Equalities Act, and debating within the council which 'label' it should use (such as LGBT, or LGBTQI) is a potential act of discrimination if it excludes anyone who feels excluded and has, within the act, a protected characteristic. We are attracted as officers to the idea of using the acronym GSRD to refer to Gender, Sexuality and Relationship Diverse communities, which to us appears to have less potential for excluding those who do not feel included by the individual labels that make up LGBT, LGBTQI or other variants.
7. With regard to equalities, our existing equalities policy, as adopted by council, is simply a cut and paste of a previous NCC policy, and council needs a new policy to replace it. There is space within the budget allocated to the current work to ask the consultant engaged to advise on this piece of work to ensure we have a fit for purpose policy.
8. With regard to practice, it is suggested that we ask the consultant to include in their final report recommendations about how the small number of forms and standard communications we use may be equalities proofed, particularly with regard to the range of pronouns and titles included and the avoidance of other forms of discrimination such as 'dead naming' (the practice of needlessly requiring the former names of trans people on documents or forms).

9. Members may also wish to consider the extent to which they wish to share the outcomes of the research with other organizations. This may include voluntary organizations and other bodies (such as Northumbria Police and Pubwatch) who may contribute to addressing some of the behaviours addressed in the report.

Recommendation

1. To provide feedback to officers and the consultant as to the areas on which recommendations would be helpful.