

Safer Stronger Communities In-depth Review: How Lewisham Embeds Equalities Across its Service Provision

Summary

This report updates the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on progress being made to implement recommendations from the In-depth Review: How Lewisham Embeds Equalities Across its Service Provision.

It provides an update against each of the recommendations made by the Committee, outlining some of the action the Council has taken in response to these recommendations.

1. **A Fairer Lewisham Duty should be established requiring the Council to consider socio-economic disadvantage in its decision-making process.**
 - a) **All Equality Impact Assessments should consider socio-economic disadvantage on the same basis as the nine statutorily protected characteristics.**

This recommendation has been actioned, and Equality Impact Assessments consider socio-economic disadvantage alongside all other protected characteristics. The EIA toolkit, which is the guidance issued to all staff who are involved in the process of developing an EIA states:

“It is important that your proposal or decision considers the real world challenges and lived experiences of Lewisham residents, particularly those facing the greatest disadvantage. Therefore, to help you to reflect on the potential socio-economic implications that could arise, please refer to the Fairer Lewisham Duty guidance. The Fairer Lewisham Duty includes useful tips, advice and prompts to help you to contextualise your idea, proposal or decision.”

It is important to note that measuring the impact of considering socio-economic disadvantage through the decision-making process is challenging, though the Council can point to evidence of good practice, and EIAs which have effectively considered socio-economic disadvantage. To ensure that this good practice is more effectively replicated across the Council, training is being rolled out for Council’s Senior Leadership Team, covering key information on how to more effectively complete the Council’s Equality Impact Assessments. In addition to this, following the appointment of an Equalities Advisor, similar training will be provided to all Heads of Service, ensuring that Equality Impact Assessments are consistently strong across the organisation.

- b) **Lewisham Council should produce clear guidance for staff, Councillors, partner organisations and the public, explaining the Fairer Lewisham Duty, with reference to the Interim Guidance for Public Bodies produced by the Scottish Government.**

As a result of Covid, communications plans for the Fairer Lewisham Duty were interrupted, and it is clear three years later that this guidance has not been communicated across the organisation as effectively as it should have been. However, recent action has been taken to address this issue, and is outlined below.

An intranet page on equalities went live on 9 June 2023 and was promoted via a “news for you” article and the Acting Chief Executive’s weekly staff update. The page provides information on our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty; the Single Equalities Framework 2020-24; the Corporate Equality Guide; and EAAs. It contains a link to the Equalities Community of Practice site which allows colleagues across the organisation to access a

range of equality related information, all in one place. This includes relevant policy documents, frameworks, presentations, reports and links to data sources both internal and external.

The page will be further developed following the launch of the Council's new intranet.

Over the next few months, the Council's Policy team will be creating two libraries on the Equalities Community of Practice site to highlight good practice – an internal library of completed EAAs and a library of assessments from other local authorities that represent good practice. These will be useful for colleagues to review as a starting point for their own EAA but cannot, of course, be copied, as officers must consider the unique impact service changes or strategies will have on their service user cohorts.

2. Intersectionality should be considered as part of the Equalities process

a) Each department and all project leads should consider issues of intersectionality, and a range of diverse groups and their needs.

Following the external equalities review which has been conducted by DWC Consulting, the Council has committed to creating a series of action plans, specific to each Directorate, focused on tackling equalities issues. These action plans will encompass not just issues related to the service delivery of these directorates, but also any internal equalities issues related to the Directorate's workforce.

In addition to the above, the guidance issues for the Equality Impact Assessments completed by each Directorate are designed to take intersectionality into account, ensuring it is a key part of the process for any major decision. The Council's six equality prisms, outlined in both the EIA guidance and the Single Equality Framework include *"Is intersectionality a factor?"* and ask anyone completing an EIA to consider *"the extent to which the combination of characteristics represented by an individual increases their vulnerability or exposure to risk and whether or not this is reflected in the way in which assessments are made and decisions are reached."*

b) The Council should listen to, include, and meaningfully collaborate with diverse groups. There should be diversity of individuals and diversity of organisations. One voice cannot speak for all.

The new posts for Equalities Advisor and Disability & Co-Production Officer will sit within the Communications and Engagement Division. This placement will ensure that these officers can influence the Council's engagement policy across all services, and provide advice on how best to engage with seldom-heard voices.

In addition to this, the creation of a post which focuses specifically on co-production will ensure that the Council brings in expertise to help develop the skills needed across the organisation for more meaningful collaboration. This builds not only on the recommendations contained within the Disabled People's Commission report, but also on the findings from the Council's 2021 Corporate Peer Challenge, which stated: *"There is widespread recognition of the race equality work internally and externally in Lewisham which has built a coalition of those willing to work with the council on other strategy creation and delivery. This work has set a high bar for what happens next..."*

The Council has undertaken work across a range of service areas to ensure that it meaningfully collaborates with diverse groups. The Disabled People's Commission Report drew on expertise from residents with lived experience of disability to provide recommendations to the Council. The work undertaken to deliver the BLACHIR report was overseen by an advisory board made up of nine members with a range of knowledge, skills and lived experience. The purpose of this board was to

work to marry the scientific evidence with the lived experience of the Black African and Black Caribbean communities in Lewisham and Birmingham.

c) In funding, designing and commissioning services the Council should take an intersectional approach. This could include;

- I. Ensuring diverse organisations closest to the ground take the lead in project design and implementation.
- II. Recognise and trust the expertise and lived experiences of organisations and movements, especially those representing marginalised groups.
- III. Funding diverse organisations and movements to facilitate safe spaces where particularly marginalised communities can feel empowered to speak freely.

Since 2020, the Council has commissioned a large number of services using an intersectional approach and is improving the method through which it brings together diverse organisations to support service design. In Play, the Council utilises the Portage Service to ensure that the voices of deaf and disabled children, as well as their families, are heard in the creation of any new play area. Additionally, the response to the Disabled People's Commission Report commits during any Public Realm consultation, the Council will specify during the tender process that any organisation working with the Council to conduct consultations must seek representations from deaf and disabled people.

d) The Council should build a senior management team with a culture of inclusion that reflects the diversity of communities and overlapping identities in Lewisham.

The Council's Senior Management Team has become more diverse since the creation of these recommendations. Full details of the progress made against this recommendation can be found in the [Council's publicly available Diversity Profiles](#).

Additionally, the Council runs a Management Development Programme for Black, Asian and Other Ethnic Group employees focused on some of the cultural nuances and barriers that can impact progression. Whilst for various reasons there were some drop-outs on the programme there were also success stories, with three staff who have benefitted from the programme achieving promotions within the organisation. All three are on the level five (Operational Manager Apprenticeship) cohort, so this has placed more BAME staff in higher managerial positions. The programme is now open to all staff, and colleagues from Black, Asian and other ethnic groups are actively encouraged, with support from our staff network.

e) The Council should create a culture that celebrates difference by appreciating the contributions that everyone can make.

The Council has launched a Reward and Recognition programme which celebrates the contributions made by staff across the organisation. In 2023, the Council re-launched its staff awards process, culminating in a celebratory event in the Broadway Theatre which recognised the work done by staff at all levels of the organisation. The Council is currently engaged in a process, led by the Change Network, to review the success of this year's Reward and Recognition programme in advance of the 2024 programme being launched in January.

Staff forums have been empowered, and in 2022 Lewisham Council participated in Pride for the first time in an event supported by the LGBTQ+ Forum. Earlier this year, the Council marched in the Pride parade for the second year in a row, and the Council owned Broadway Theatre hosted a range of performances throughout Pride month to celebrate and uplift LGBTQ+ voices.

In addition to this, the Council is also looking externally and celebrating successes from within our communities. The Mayor of Lewisham Business Awards are a yearly opportunity to celebrate our fantastic local businesses and the outstanding contribution they make to the borough. These awards present an annual opportunity to recognise local organisations which boost economic growth and provide opportunities that benefit their local communities and the wider borough.

Lewisham's time as London's Borough of Culture was a year-long celebration of the borough's diversity, with over 350 events taking place. This celebration brought together more than 200 partner organisations and over 1,800 volunteers contributing more than 10,000 hours of their time. The work that took place over this year was designed to leave a lasting legacy, and the four legacy outcomes which were identified to be delivered, including *"We will continue to build upon our partnerships, both formal and informal, to deliver and support diverse and inclusive activities bringing communities together for the benefit of our borough, so that everyone can benefit from creative engagement"*, show the Council's proactive approach to ensuring that everyone's contributions are celebrated.

3. A more proactive approach should be taken to address the Public Sector Equality Duty

- a) **Equality objectives should be specific, achievable and measurable.**
- b) **Equality objectives should be readily understandable to the public.**
- c) **Equality objectives should identify areas of work via which improvements inequality can be made.**
- d) **Progress in these areas of work should be monitored and reported.**

Since the publication of these recommendations, the Council has refreshed the way it [reports on performance data](#) across a wide range of areas. This publicly available information helps both the Council and residents better track and understand progress made against equality objectives.

The Council's equality objectives have not been reviewed since the publication of these recommendations. However, the Single Equality Framework will expire in 2024, and the Council intends to review all of its equality objectives over the next six months. As part of this review, the Council will ensure that any newly published equality objectives meet these recommendations.

4. Staff Diversity Forums should be empowered within the Council.

Since the implementation of these recommendations, a number of actions have been taken to further empower the Council's Staff Forums.

The effectiveness of these actioned is evidenced by the recent application of the Lewisham Women's Bond, which is designed to provide a vital voice and means of connection for female staff and their allies. The creation of this forum showcases the confidence staff have in the Council's model. However, this is an area where there is still more work to be done, and following a review of the Council's approach to Equalities by DWC Consulting, the Council will commit to a full review of the framework for staff forums, aiming to ensure that their voice within the organisation is made stronger, and that staff are provided with even greater opportunities to participate.

- a) **Forums should have a clear remit as to their purpose and how they contribute to the improvement of the Council.**

In April 2021, the operational framework for the staff forums was revised, and outlined a clear remit as to the purposes of the forums and how they would contribute to the Council. This revised framework states that:

“Their main purpose is to provide a means of mutual support on a common theme and share thoughts and ideas through a collective voice that will assist us to achieve our objectives and corporate priorities.”

“We will actively engage with networks/forums because we want them to add value to what we do. Formal negotiation and consultation on collective matters impacting on employees will be facilitated through the trade unions in accordance with our Employee Relations Framework. “

“Together Lewisham” the Council’s staff led improvement programme is another important symbol of the Council’s commitment to engaging its workforce as well as a channel for delivering improvements to how we work. The Programme has five themes which are relevant to the work of all of our networks/forums:

- *Our People*
- *Leadership*
- *Inclusive Workplace*
- *Communication*
- *IT*

Together Lewisham is supported by the Change Network which is open to all members of staff. The Change Network ensures that the programme will always be informed by and accountable to staff who will be involved in every project and empowered and supported to shape the work.”

To complete the application process to become an officially recognised Staff Forum, a forum is required to present a paper to the Council’s Executive Management Team, outlining the group’s aims, objectives and priorities. This process helps ensure that forums have specific remits and a clear set of initiatives to drive their work programmes.

b) Forums should have a set time to meet to discuss, promote and air concerns staff may have affecting equality in the Council. This should be adequately resourced and supported by the Council.

The operational framework for staff forums outlines the Council’s offer to members of the forums, as well as to the Chairs and Vice Chairs:

- Protected paid time off work of up to two days each month for the Chair and Vice Chair of each network/forum we have formally adopted;
- Reasonable paid time off work for network/forum members to attend meetings and other events;
- Accommodation for the purpose of meetings and events;
- A platform through the intranet (and other internal staff communication channels) for each network/forum to engage with staff and share its achievements;
- The support of a member of the Executive Management Team, who will act as a Network/Forum Executive Sponsor;
- The opportunity to work collaboratively with Organisational Development on organisational and cultural change initiatives, including the Together Lewisham programme;
- The opportunity for the Chairs of each network/forum to meet as a group with the Chief Executive twice each year;
- The opportunity for the Chairs of each network/forum to be members of the most appropriate Corporate Board e.g. Corporate Equalities Board.

- c) Forum leads should be given specific time away from their substantive role to plan, prepare and carry out the forums activities. This should be protected time which will not impact on their hours of work.**

As outlined above, Forum leaders are provided with protected time to carry out their roles.

- d) Forum members should be given time to participate in its activities.**

As outlined above, the operational framework does acknowledge the requirement for forum members to be given time to participate in its activities. However, issues have been raised by members of staff forums relating to them not feeling they have the time to participate, and as such the Council will ensure that as part of both its review of the forum's operational framework, the rules around allocated time for forum members will be communicated to all members of staff. This should encourage staff to participate more actively in the work of forums, and help them to understand the Council's policies around participating in forum activities.

- e) Forums should be given the opportunity to meet with senior management and communicate the experiences and needs of staff.**

As stated in the operational framework, all staff forums are regularly given the opportunity to engage with senior staff at meetings of the Corporate Equalities Board. In addition to this, Jennifer Daothong (Acting Chief Executive), has so far met with representatives of all staff forums in 2023, providing them with the opportunity to raise concerns and discuss any issues directly with her. As outlined in the operational framework, these meetings with the Acting Chief Executive will continue.

5. [The Council should adopt an Open Data approach for Equalities.](#)

- a) Data sharing across the organisation should be improved. It should not be a challenge to access data that has already been collated by different teams or departments.**

Since 2020, considerable work has been undertaken to ensure the Council improves its approach to data sharing within Directorates. [The Knowledge Observatory](#) provides a source of information that can be easily accessed by teams across the Council.

In addition to this, in 2022, Extended Leadership Team meetings were scheduled quarterly, providing the opportunity to bring together all Heads of Service to ensure that major updates from across the organisation were effectively communicated. These meetings have continued since their implementation, and items such as the Staff Survey, Census information and Residents Survey have been shared, ensuring that staff are aware of substantial data sources that should impact the way their services are designed and delivered.

A key method of ensuring better data sharing across Directorates has also been to improve internal Communications within the Council. In September 2023, the Council launched its new intranet, which provides a much-improved platform for staff to share information across the organisation.

Increased sharing of EIA's and the guidance accompanying them, which is detailed below, have also provided more opportunities for data sharing across the organisation. Regular Directorate Management Team meetings of Senior Staff will now review EIA's, with the Corporate Equalities Board overseeing the full EIA forward plan on a bi-annual basis. This provides the opportunity for broader organisational oversight of upcoming EIA's, and ensures strong ownership of Equality Impact Assessments as a senior level of the organisation.

b) Guidance for producing Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) should be clear. Equality Impact Assessments should be data driven.

In 2023, the Council revised its guidance for Equality Impact Assessments, ensuring that the requirements for their completion were clearer. This newly revised guidance was published on the Council's intranet and promoted via a News for You Article. The guidance itself stresses the importance of a data driven response and the sections below, taken directly from the EIA guidance, highlight this:

"You need to use information and data to understand the potential impact this work might have. You might have existing information to use, or you may need to consult to gather more information. Information on potential data sources is included within this toolkit. If you are collecting your own data, please see the Equalities Monitoring Toolkit. Once you have the data you need you should consider what the impacts might be and if anybody would be unfairly impacted."

Since 2020, the Council has additionally published a new Corporate Strategy (2022-26). This Strategy highlights the importance of evidence-based decision making across all areas of work. This work is supported by the Council's Data and Insight Team, which provides the organisation with additional capacity to carry out high-level analysis of data sources.

c) Every Equality Impact Assessment should be logged by Corporate Services and published on the Council website making it accessible to all.

Although the Council has published a number of Equality Impact Assessments since these recommendations were made, it has not published or effectively catalogued all of them consistently, or in a single location that is easily accessible to residents. However, in 2023, the Council's Executive Management Team approved a new approach to managing Equality Impact Assessments through the Chief Executive's Directorate.

d) Steps should be made to ensure individuals are confident sharing their data with the Council to help improve services. At the point where individuals share their data agreements should be in place to allow for this to be anonymised and shared where necessary

Through the Race and Equality Working Group of the Lewisham Strategic Partnership, work is currently being undertaken to co-ordinate an effort to increase the number of staff within Lewisham and Greenwich Trust, Lewisham Policy Force and Lewisham Council who register their disability with their organisations. This work is scheduled to be launched in line with International Day of Disability (December 3rd 2023).

In addition to the partnership work which is being undertaken, in May 2022 the Council launched Disability Passports to promote equality and inclusion for employees with disabilities, impairments or long-term health conditions. This new scheme ensures that Council colleagues have a record of agreed, reasonable adjustments, that is held centrally on the HR system and which will follow officers throughout their career with the Council.

The Council provides a standard set of EDI questions, commonly used as best practice, which the Council will use for all EDI consultations to help monitor response rates to any engagement work which is undertaken.

In 2022, the Council carried out an extensive Staff Survey. Although this survey highlighted that in 18 out of 21 benchmarkable indicators since the previous staff survey, the Council had improved its

performance, it did also indicate areas where improvement was required. In response to this survey, an Action Plan was created and is being delivered by the Council People and Organisational Development Division. The delivery of this Action Plan will showcase to staff that the organisation has listened to concerns, and is taking direct action in response, utilising data and information shared by staff to improve its performance and staff wellbeing.