

AGENDA ITEM 7

<p>Bishopston, Cotham and Redland Neighbourhood Partnership (BCR NP) Equalities briefing paper for decision</p>

Decision required:

That BCR NP adopt a statement of commitment to working for the benefit of all members of our community, which will act as a benchmark for NP activities – policies, actions and funding.

Why this is needed:

The Bishopston, Redland and Cotham area enjoys a higher standard of living and income than many other areas of Bristol. However, this generalisation hides both pockets of deprivation and inequality of opportunity through discrimination.

For example, local families using food banks, homophobic attacks on local residents, racist assumptions about and actions against BCR residents, old people and disabled people unable to participate fully in local life due to inaccessibility (including non-use of the internet); local women sexually harassed in public and in local and citywide bars and experiencing domestic violence and abuse. Services accessed by people in need are often outside the BCR area, so that use by BCR residents is less visible. Reports to the police of domestic violence and abuse are far lower in BCR than in poorer areas of Bristol¹, but are well known to voluntary sector agencies and the health service.

This lower level of visibility of need can make it even harder for local people in need to ask for support to meet their needs. This can result in the limitation of basic human rights, such as respect for privacy and family life, protection against slavery and forced labour and the right against discrimination².

Bristol City Council states that “equality representatives will contribute to the NP by making sure that NP members are aware of and fulfil their responsibilities regarding access and involvement of all equalities communities”³.

In a nutshell, BCR NP needs to agree that the impact of inequality should be part of every debate and activity by the NP, for the wellbeing and integration of our community –

- To enable full participation to community life and wellbeing in all its aspects of all members of our community;
- To avoid “democratic deficiency”⁴;
- To prevent discrimination, including vulnerability to crime;

¹ Reasons for lower reporting rates are debated, but are likely to include lesser involvement in statutory agencies (such as Children’s Social Care) in general, fear of loss of social status and greater distance from neighbours who may call police on behalf of victims/survivors.

² A clear and brief explanation at <http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/human-rights/human-rights/the-human-rights-act/>

³ <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/council-and-democracy/equalities-representatives-neighbourhood-partnerships>.

⁴ When people are prevented or discouraged from participating in community life, including voting and dialogue with elected representatives, because of discrimination, disadvantage and prejudice.

- To support Bristol City council's vision to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups and foster good relations between people from different groups; and
- To comply with equalities legislation. The Equality Act 2010 refers to different equality groups, or "protected characteristics" -
 - Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Sex, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Sexual Orientation, Religion and Belief.

What needs to be done:

- Bishopston, Cotham and Redland Neighbourhood Partnership to make a commitment that will enable them to integrate equalities considerations into all of their activities.
- A 'checklist' to be drawn up as a working document, that will be amended from time to time as understanding of needs and rights increases, which will help the NP to assess whether their activities promote equality. This will include, for example –
 - All meetings should be held in accessible venues, ie. which have lifts as well as stairs, doors wide enough to take wheelchairs, loop systems with all speakers using the microphone, clearly labelled signs and directions into and out of the building for safety.
 - Timing of meetings should not exclude parents/carers with young children or people with free or reduced cost of travel on public transport (bus passes).
 - Meeting papers should be made available and posted where needed in hard copy.
 - Policies, activities and funding decisions should incorporate consideration of impact on equalities as a matter of course.
 - Discussions and written documents should be in 'easy English', with minimal use of initials and references that may limit understanding to 'people in the know'.
- To be effective, commitment to equalities needs to be made by every member of the Neighbourhood Partnership and be visible beyond the role of the NP Equalities Rep.

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