

Transforming race and equality at BCC
Conclusions and recommendations

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report summarises the main conclusions and final recommendations resulting from an organisational development / change management intervention by DWC Consulting. Led by David Weaver, senior partner (and author of this report), the main role was to operate as a 'critical friend, sounding board and change catalyst' for the council to enable material progress on issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) - with an emphasis on race issues. The overall purpose of the work was to ensure that the council makes marked improvements and material changes to its approach to race equality and in a way that addresses the legitimate issue of institutional racism. The intervention commenced in July 2019 and concluded in May 2020.
- 1.2 Racism is a structural problem across the country and around the world. It is difficult to tackle and even to discuss within institutions, and it exists in nearly all major organisations and societal structures. There is no quick fix, but commitment, urgency and transparency are the first steps.
- 1.3 A key rationale for this work was the organisation's desire to fast-forward key commitments made in the areas of equality and inclusion, HR and organisational development. It was also deemed important to ensure that the council's strategic planning and delivery sought to more purposefully mainstream equality and diversity issues. Due regard was therefore given to previous issues and interventions in this area for example, the independent reports that followed the tragic murder of Bijan Ebrahimi in 2013, the council's relaunch of its Staff Led equalities groups following its change of political administration in 2016, the independent report produced by Kamaljit Poonia in June 2018 which helped inform the council's Equality and Inclusion Policy and Strategy, and the outcomes of a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in 2018.
- 1.4 Further, this work looked at policy commitments and initiatives on EDI and examined the extent to which EDI was successfully reflected in the council's Corporate Strategy 2018 - 2023.

2. Scope of the intervention / our approach

2.1 DWC's brief was:

- a) To provide an honest, impartial perspective on the council's culture and performance around race equality and other equalities issues as part of its efforts to enact widespread organisational culture change first initiated in 2016.
- b) To recommend policy and practice changes; and where necessary to be involved in decision making on issues material to the core aims of this work.
- c) To work with Staff Led Groups to address and resolve key operational / strategic issues; and to make recommendations to the council on appropriate corporate governance frameworks for these groups.
- d) To recommend 'ways forward' in relation to outstanding employee complaints viewed as intractable by the employee(s) or managers.
- e) To work with and provide specialist advice to the council on its approach to important senior recruitment campaigns - the aim being to achieve high quality diverse shortlists that result in increased BAME successful appointments.
- f) Mediation / conflict management interventions in cases regarded as intractable and as such requiring independent specialist support.
- g) Facilitation of management investigations where appropriate to the aims of this intervention.
- h) Review of key HR policy documents.
- i) 'Surgery meetings' / roundtables with cross-sections of staff (scheduled and ad-hoc) to enable qualitative insights into the views of BAME staff and other under-represented groups within the organisation.
- j) Analysis of key data to determine the council's 'equality performance' on various indices.
- k) Analysis of organisational culture and its relationship to the issues in question.
- l) To recommend policy changes and support decision making throughout the tenure of the assignment where necessary.
- m) Strategic and / or 'hands-on support' to directorates in line with the aims of this intervention.

2.2 Our approach to this work

The main elements of our approach were (not exhaustive):

- Analysis of a wide range of council official documentation including official / committee reports, internal datasets etc.
- Testing of various hypotheses with cross sectional groups in the council from front-line staff to senior management; trade unions, all staff led groups, human resources, learning and development staff and elected members
- Quantitative analysis based on council data e.g. Analysis of Workforce Diversity Report 2019 and a range of other datasets provided by the HR Reward and Analytics Team.
- Attendance and presentations to the Council's Corporate Leadership Board (CLB), Extended Leadership Meeting (ELM), directorate management teams and HR Committee. Attendance at the Strategic Leaders Forum, and contributions at numerous fora both within and external to the council whose remit focused on race equality and / or other wider equality / diversity themes.
- Advice, support, challenge and work alongside Head of HR and Head of OD including presentations / work alongside HR Business partners and L&D staff.
- 1:1 meetings with each director and where requested 1:1 meetings with middle managers.
- Presentation / discussions at team meetings on request.
- 1:1 meetings with various elected members via suggestions from the Head of Paid Service, mayor and deputy mayors.
- Facilitation of structured focus groups, ad-hoc small group meetings and 1:1 meetings. A significant number of these were designated 'strictly confidential' to encourage confidence in being open, honest and frank in sharing views..
- Ongoing dialogue with the trade unions throughout the tenure of the assignment in addition to scheduled 1:1 meetings.
- Ad-hoc meetings / discussions with staff who had become aware of the work via impromptu referrals or introductions.
- Regular mediation, conflict management and consensus building interventions where deemed essential to moving the agenda forward.

We purposefully engaged and forged effective ongoing relationships with staff who 'on the surface' may be viewed as not having an active interest in these issues - colloquially speaking - 'not the usual suspects.' This enabled useful insights into the culture of the organisation as well as perspectives of white staff and others who do not have 'lived experience' of racism or other discrimination within the context of legally defined 'protected characteristics'.

3. Observations and conclusions - where should BCC focus its attention?

- 3.1 Our intensive and 'deep-dive' intervention has highlighted a significant amount of information and clues about the culture of the council and staff's views in relation to this. Certain elements of the culture were already known and has served to reinforce the need for ongoing review and action. Other elements were not as widely known or certainly not with the level of analysis or detail that has emerged. In summary, many staff feel that structural racism manifests itself in various ways, including recruitment, representation, seniority, promotions, over-representation in grievance and disciplinary processes and more. These issues are common manifestations of institutional racism and are very often present in organisations across all sectors.
- 3.2 Consistent themes that came to the fore are being fed back in detail to the council. As part of this process, specific interventions are being convened for me to have detailed conversations with the senior leadership team, and lead officers with Policy, HR, Equalities and organisational development portfolios about 'best practice' ways of implementing and embedding the outcomes / recommendations from this work.
- 3.3 I recognise that the council's political leadership has made equality, diversity and inclusion a core organisational aim and I am satisfied that much of the current strategic planning at corporate leadership level is giving serious consideration to these issues. It is also thinking about what needs to be put in place in terms of 'leadership support' and it recognises the importance of a 'race specificity' approach to the learning and developmental needs of managers and leaders.
- 3.4 Strong, visible, strategic leadership and leaders will be fundamental to addressing the issues raised. Indeed my current involvement with the council and ongoing interface with staff across all ethnicities informs that staff (particular BAME staff)

will be looking for signs of real change and a sense that there is 'leadership from the top' on these issues. In this regard, I am pleased that that the council has implemented in full the recommendations of our report relating to the functions and governance of the Staff Led Groups. This is already proving beneficial in that closer and more trusting working relationships are being established with senior managers; and if continued will augur well for the council's delivery on issues important to BAME, LGBT+, disabled and young employees and its representation in the city.

3.5 The 2019 staff survey highlighted key themes relating to leadership. I am advised that these elements are informing discussions about the leadership approach and development programmes for senior and middle managers. My discussions with the Head of Organisational Development informs that issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and in specific terms 'race', will be a critical and specific aspect of the learning and development programmes as well as the overall OD policy and organisational improvement framework.

3.6 The CLB has already discussed and asserted the need for a holistic and systems - based approach - one that looks at the whole organisation and the system within which it sits. A purposeful approach to this will mean that legitimate concerns about institutional racism can begin to be addressed in a purposeful way. I would state that this issue is not unique to Bristol City Council. It is an issue for all local authorities and one which the Local Government Association has highlighted as a theme which all councils need to address.

3.7 Impact of Covid-19

It is important to note that the main part of this intervention took place prior to the breakout of the coronavirus. With black people and communities being disproportionately affected in terms of contracting and dying from the disease, the virus has ruthlessly laid bare historic and present truths about the endemic and structural racism, discrimination and inequalities that exist in the UK. The impacts of this are being felt within Bristol, and the nature and extent of this trauma will become increasingly evident over the next few years. All of this has implications for the way in which the council delivers its services and the kind of knowledge, experience and skills required of leaders moving forward.

- 3.8 Added to this and just as poignant, is the reaction of people of all racial backgrounds across the globe to the horrific murder of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 at the hands of a policeman in the USA. The fact that it took place in broad daylight has caused serious levels of trauma and feelings of despair amongst BAME people globally. This will become increasingly manifest at local levels as the council re-adjusts to the 'new normal' and transitions out of the lockdown.
- 3.9 Societal reflections of this are currently centre stage in the media and council employees (like everyone in the UK) are witnessing narratives in the mainstream and social media about the responsibilities that white people (and within the context of this report, white leaders) have in terms of their own personal racism (unconscious or otherwise) and that of the institutions in which they play a leadership role.
- 3.10 I will state that whilst progress is clearly being made, much work is still required. And although these are difficult issues, many of the BAME respondents were still optimistic about the future. Some of the reasons given for this point to there being a black mayor and deputy mayor who are open about their own lived experiences of racism, vocal on the issue of racism and are viewed to have taken positive leadership stands in this regard.
- 3.11 The reintroduction and increased support for the Staff Led Groups and increasing awareness of instances where HR processes have been scrutinised to ensure that BAME staff are being treated fairly, has also been frequently cited as a positive indicator of progress.
- 3.12 Making Positive Action a central component of the Corporate Strategy
- 3.12.1 The recommendations outlined in section 4 are informed by the ELM's agreement that positive action principles and strategies should underpin the council's Corporate Strategy.
- 3.12.2 The rationale for this comes from careful examination of the council's performance on EDI issues over the past three years, a robust analysis of current plans and strategies; and a correlating 'forecasting of the future' based on the outcomes of this process.

3.12.3 My discussions with staff and senior managers lead me to conclude that even if the organisation successfully implements all its existing strategies / intentions, the progress made, whilst important and beneficial, will not be sufficiently material. Using recruitment as an example, I would state that unless positive action is adopted (or an engagement of its principles), the organisation will remain under-represented in terms of BAME professionals at senior levels. The business case for pursuing this approach is clear. The unprecedented challenges for BAME communities resulting from Covid-19 alongside the new global thinking and sensitivities around race and racism requires the council to have a leadership presence characterised by authentic and relatable levels of knowledge, experience and skills. This will be essential to ensuring that the council has the organisational capability to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse city.

4. Recommendations

There are many suggestions or recommendations that could be proposed at this stage. I however feel that it is important to land those that could have the most impact in the short and medium term. The recommendations below build on the conclusions and recommendations that I presented to the ELM in March 2020. All of these received in-principle agreement. We understand that the council will consider the recommendations outlined below and prepare an implementation plan accordingly.

4.1 Corporate Leadership

- a) That CLB affords the issue of race equality, 'high priority / high ambition' status as part of its overall approach to transforming equality and diversity; and as such the council should ensure that this issue receives the required organisational attention and resource allocation.
- b) That the council completes its planned review of its Equality and Inclusion Strategy to further increase ambitions, reflect learning since its launch and respond to the current context of Covid-19 recovery and the Black Lives matter movement.
- c) That CLB endorses its previous commitment to adopting the principle of positive action to address the issue of under-representation of BME people at senior levels and other key positions.

- d) That the organisation agrees to the principle of setting equality targets at corporate and departmental levels and agrees a framework and rationale for this.
- e) That in the light of this intervention and ongoing discussions, CLB / ELM continue to discuss on an ongoing basis the issues emanating from this intervention; and also convene a specific intervention to critically discuss the new leadership approach / strategies required to address the key race and EDI issues highlighted in this report. I would recommend that this involves the Mayor and deputy mayors given their profiled commitments and involvement with these issues.
- f) Continued prioritised consideration should be given to the issue of 'how we show up as leaders', our approach, our presence in advance of the emergence of staff from the lockdown. Specific consideration should be given to the issue of race within this context. (There will be a lot of expectation and leaders and managers will be subject to a considerable level of scrutiny).
- g) Purposeful / focused learning and development interventions of an 'action learning' type should be put in place at both CLB and ELM levels that addresses issues of race from a personal and organisational leadership perspective. It is recommended that 1:1 coaching elements should incorporate leadership on race equality and other diversity issues within the context of their roles at BCC.
- h) An outcomes-based leadership discussion should be convened to consider the ethnic breakdown of the top 100 senior and middle managers and the impact that having a predominantly white senior team has in terms of the shaping of the leadership, organisational effectiveness and 'place leadership' agenda. This strategic discussion should aim to establish what might be done to mitigate against the downsides of this situation, whilst reinforcing the importance of positive action principles for further recruitment exercises.
- i) That a discussion takes place about the quality of data evaluation / analysis on issues relating to EDI and the need for a holistic, joined up approach is taken forward.
- j) That the council ensures that robust equality impact assessments are completed prior to the finalisation or agreement of any organisational or departmental restructuring exercises. In the event of there being likely disproportionalities in relation to BAME staff, a corporately agreed mechanism

should be established to explore the reasons; and to determine whether there may be ways of mitigating against this.

Departmental leadership

- a) That each department builds on their existing Equality Action Plans to ensure they have a strategic approach to race-equality strategy within it. This plan should adopt SMART principles.
- b) That departmental management teams should set equality targets in relation to internal organisational themes - with specific targets covering race equality.
- c) That in relation to the above, that discussion takes place about the appropriateness of setting target relating to service delivery. This might involve initial support from the Equalities team.
- d) That each department puts in place a mechanism for 'leaning / zoning-into' the issues / problems in a focused way. This should include a focus on issues particular to divisions but should form part of a departmental strategy. It is recommended that a 'task and finish' group is established for this purpose and that it is 'led from the top' with the Director being ultimately accountable for the outcomes. It is recommended that HR and L&OD are engaged where appropriate as part of an early intervention, solutions focused approach. Key issues that should be looked at include:
 - Grievances, complaints (even when not formalised but it is known that there are issues).
 - Recruitment: proactively establishing the pipeline of vacancies and development of strategies to redress departmental under-representation of BAME staff. This should give attention to positive action.
 - Internal Talent management strategies that gives specific attention to developing internal BAME staff.

4.2 Strategic corporate Human Resource (HR) delivery

- a) That ways of working within the HR function are reviewed to ensure delivery of an updated and fit for purpose Workforce Plan that delivers EDI for the council and is in line with the aspirations of the Corporate Strategy and One City Plan.
- b) Building on discussions that have taken place with the Head of HR, that purposeful discussions continue about the development of a new HR operating model which supports the desired change for HR to move from a focus on the organisation towards a focus on 'people'.

- c) That senior leadership and HR consider ways of addressing the negative perceptions that many BAME staff have about HR. There are signs that this may be changing but HR needs to establish why this is the case and how this might be rectified.
- d) That the HR function puts in place a proactive strategy, informed by positive action principles, to increase the representation of BAME people in the division.
- e) Development of an HR strategy and procedural guidelines that address BAME and other protected characteristic disproportionalities in relation to grievances, disciplinaries, performance appraisals, shadowing, acting-up opportunities, special project allocation, re-organisations, restructures, redundancies and recruitment and selection.
- f) Establishment of a diverse team (including BAME) of trusted internal and external workplace mediators to deal with complex disputes including on race equality related issues that are amenable to resolution.

4.3 Recruitment and Selection

- a) Meaningful corporate and departmental targets should be set for the recruitment of BAME staff to senior positions. The definition of 'senior positions' within this context should be discussed and agreed by ELT. Separately targets should be set to address any under-representation of BAME staff at corporate and departmental management levels. It is proposed that early discussions take place about the framework for this approach.
- b) That at a corporate level, the aspiration should be that there is an annual increase of BAME representation at senior management levels with formal reporting and regular audits of data to increase transparency and confidence. There will need to be agreement about the levels defined as 'senior management' for this purpose, but the principle is that the aspiration is that there should be an annual increase over an agreed period.
- c) That a process is agreed for a thorough review of advertisement methods, job descriptions, person specifications and assessment methods to ensure that criteria used relates to the ability to do the job. Research shows that decisions are often made based on previous role definitions and on specifications that fail to consider business-critical issues such as diversity, inclusion and working within increasingly complex and challenging social and economic environments. DWC believes, having undertaken a rapid sample review of

several role profiles, that decisions may be being made that inadvertently limit the possibility of BAME and other candidates from under-represented groups demonstrating their ability to undertake the functions required. In other words, the roles are not being correctly defined.

- d) That the policy for revealing the protected characteristics of candidates is changed to allow for this information to be revealed at shortlisting stage for senior appointments. This would enable decisions to be made about whether other actions should be taken to attract diverse shortlists if this is not evident at the shortlisting stage. (This was previously agreed in principle at the March ELM).
- e) That the default position in all cases should be diverse shortlists. Non-diverse shortlists should only progress to the interview stage with the approval of a nominated senior manager based on agreed criteria if this is the case. These reasons should be formally reported to increase transparency and confidence.
- f) Curation of external BAME panel members to serve on interview panels for senior posts.
- g) That consideration should be given as part of the recruitment planning process to undertaking a targeted search (headhunt) process for BAME candidates for all senior posts.
- h) That the procurement arrangements for independent recruitment firms are amended to incentivise generation of high-quality diverse shortlists. The ELM has previously agreed this recommendation and I have since spoken to the third-party provider company further to a request by the Head of HR. This recommendation is therefore to check progress on its implementation.
- i) In recognition of the disproportionate impacts of the coronavirus on BAME communities, it is recommended that procurement arrangements for the Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) incorporates a requirement for there to be BAME counsellors within their teams. This is essential as there will be an urgent need for culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions to cater for the needs of BAME employees.

4.4 Learning and Organisational Development

- a) An assurance that the leadership programme being developed for middle managers on EDI focuses on the BCC context, their role as managers with a focus on issues of self within the context of race issues. Ideally, the programme should enable participants to look at their behaviours and

managerial approach in relation to real challenges or scenarios in the workplace. Given the current and emerging climate, I believe it is important that the programmes allow space for exploration of issues relating to race within the overall context of 'managing difference'.

- b) That consideration should be given for training interventions for all staff to cater for the 'not the usual suspects' dimension referred to in the body of this report.
- c) That the internal talent management strategy should adopt a 'direct approach' for specifically identifying and developing BAME talent.
- d) In collaboration with HR, that a diverse talent pool mechanism is established and that opportunities for promotion, secondments, work shadowing and acting-ups arrangements should consider selection from this resource.
- e) An urgent review of generic L&D programmes to ensure that there is explicit mainstreaming of EDI, specifically in the current context of Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement.
- f) That a review of external L&D contractors takes place to ensure supplier diversity across the whole range of L&OD disciplines - not just EDI.

5. Summary

- 5.1 There has undoubtedly been progress over the last year, with roots tracing back several years. However, our intervention and engagement with the organisation and in particular with senior managers, determines that the existing approach and strategies will not materially advance the council's ambitions in the area of race equality and equalities in general.
- 5.2 It could be argued that we are in two main crises - an economic crisis and a people crisis. Organisations that acknowledge only one risk, exacerbate the other. Placing equality and diversity as centre stage of the leadership endeavour can be a powerful solution to both challenges.
- 5.3 To make a difference, the definition of EDI work needs to change. It must be properly incorporated into the repertoire of knowledge and skills required by senior leaders (officers and elected) within local government. Only by doing so can the organisation capture the challenges of working amid and post this pandemic and develop approaches that focus on solving real problems rather than maintaining appearances.

- 5.4 Giving focused attention to race equality at this time, and as part of an overall equality framework does not diminish the other issues. Conversely, it can enhance it. And there are already good and current examples of the SLGs working within an intersectionality framework to highlight the plight, hopes and aspirations of black people across the world. This is being done alongside the highlighting of equality issues in general.
- 5.5 It is our view that the conclusions and recommendations outlined in this report should, if implemented, make a material and positive difference.
- 5.6 Bristol City Council should be applauded for opening itself up to independent scrutiny and support. Choosing to do this brings risk, not least because observations I have made could be taken out of context and used in attempts to undermine the council and its efforts to tackle racism and inequality. This would not only be inappropriate, it would be counter-productive and would risk deterring other organisations from being so open and making visible attempts to tackle racism. I would ask that all readers consider this carefully in choosing how to treat this report.

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