

THE EXECUTIVE

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JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND LIBRARIES

'BREAKING THE SILENCE' REPORT - THE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN, GAY MEN, BISEXUALS AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PEOPLE IN BARKING AND DAGENHAM: ISSUES FOR THE COUNCIL AND OTHER PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS	FOR DECISION
<i>This report is submitted to inform TMT of the findings of the 'Breaking the Silence' Report in to experiences of LGBT people in Barking and Dagenham and issues arising for the Council and its strategic Partners organisations. It seeks approval to refer the report to the Council's Executive and the Barking & Dagenham Partnership for further action.</i>	
<u>Summary</u>	
<p>This report conveys the findings of a survey in 2002/03 in the London borough of Barking & Dagenham. The survey sought to explore the experiences of LGBT people living and working in the borough and identify their key issues and concerns to inform policy and service planning.</p>	
<p>The imperative for this project came from two interrelated sources: one national and the other local. Firstly, the need for Public Authorities to address LGBT issues is increasingly prominent on the Government's agenda, with the implementation of the EU Directive on Sexual Orientation and recent proposals on gender recognition, partnership rights and tackling homophobic crime Secondly, within this national policy context, the Council, and its strategic partners, are aware of their lack of contact with and real knowledge of this highly marginalised section of the local community. There is a general recognition that LGBT people are one of the most difficult of the 'hard to reach' groups, where there are specific barriers to making effective contact and there is the very real threat of homophobic harassment and violence.</p>	
<p>The report was prepared through the active participation of 42 local lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people and professionals working in the field of LGBT support The issues of concern to LGBT people are deeply personal being based upon on sexuality, emotion, on their own bodies and on their treatment by family, friends, work colleagues and society in general.</p>	
<p>To comprehensively chart the needs of the LGBT communities will be a longer term process, involving more extensive trust building and accessing friendship and social networks locally. However, this report and its contents represent a rare glimpse in to the lives and concerns of Barking and Dagenham people that are usually hidden from the mainstream.</p>	

One of the major bonuses arising from the project is that it has drawn together a significant number of local LGBT people who wish to establish a consultative mechanism to facilitate further engagement with the Council and other strategic partners on their concerns and service needs. This is a development which the Corporate Equalities and Diversity Team have sought to facilitate and support and there has also been strong interest by other local agencies, such as the Police and the PCT, to access such a structure.

Recommendations

The Executive is asked to:

1. Approve the contents of the Report;
2. Agree the LGBT Strategic Statement of Intent; based upon the recommendations contained in the 'Breaking the Silence' Report, and refer it to services for action;
3. Endorse the establishment of an LGBT consultative mechanism and proposals to continue work with the local LGBT communities through the Council and the Partnership; and
4. That the full Report and its Executive Summary be formally launched through the Barking & Dagenham Partnership.

Reason

The Council should agree this report in order to respond proactively to the EU Directive on sexual orientation, forthcoming legislative changes and, in doing so, deliver on existing policy commitments in the Council's Corporate Equalities & Diversity Policy Framework.

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1. Background

1.1 In June 2002, the Assembly agreed the Council's Corporate Equalities and Diversity Policy Framework, which included a Corporate Equalities and Diversity Policy Statement and 5 specific policy statements covering the following areas:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexuality
- Older People

- 1.2 The policy statement on sexuality recognises the effects of heterosexism and homophobia in Society and the discrimination and repression lesbians and gay men experience in their daily lives. In addition, it makes the following specific commitments:
- *'To strive for the provision of equal access to its services and equal treatment of people who use its services and its employees who are lesbian and gay'*
 - *To meet the specific needs of lesbians and gay men arising from the discrimination that they face. The Council recognises that lesbians and gay men have a range of different needs and concerns. It accepts its responsibility to identify these concerns and needs through consultation and research.'*
- 1.3 In order to implement these policy commitments, the Council needs to engage with local LGBT people and become aware of their needs and concerns. The 'Breaking the Silence' report was commissioned by the Council's Corporate Equalities and Diversity Team to enable the Council to establish contact and build up a knowledge of the views of these particular hard to reach communities and, in doing so, begin to fulfil its agreed policy commitments.
- 1.4 The production of a study into the concerns and service needs of the local LGBT communities was also included as a target in the generic equalities and diversity strategic objectives in the Race Equality Scheme Year Two (Community Involvement) Action Plan. The establishment of a borough consultative mechanism with the LGBT communities is a commitment in the Partnership's Community Cohesion Strategy, 'One Community, Many Communities' (2004/07)
- 1.5 The inclusion of the policy statement on sexuality in the Council's Equalities and Diversity Policy Framework anticipated that these issues would form an increasingly prominent element in the Government's equalities agenda. That prediction has proven correct with the implementation of the EU Directive on Sexual Orientation and the launching of recent proposals on gender recognition and partnership rights; as well as establishing a higher profile for issues such as homophobic bullying in schools and homophobic and transphobic crime.
- 1.6 It should be noted that the introduction of the EU Directive on Sexual Orientation has created a new legislative imperative to address LGBT issues. Local authorities need to be proactive in responding to new legal obligations and, in doing so, protect themselves against possible discrimination cases.
- 1.6 This report provides an excellent starting point to respond to the Government's agenda and, in doing so, begin taking forward proactive engagement with the local LGBT communities in Barking & Dagenham and consider their concerns and needs as part of the Council and Partnership's policy and service planning process.

2. The Methodology

- 2.1 This report is the result of consultation with a sample of 42 lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people living or working in the borough and targeted professionals working in the field of LGBT support.

- 2.2 92 local lesbians and gay men were initially contacted through the internet, a local support group, a lesbian and gay youth group based in Romford, a transgender support group based in Dagenham and friendship and personal contacts. Most participants were asked to complete an 81 question survey (35 responded) or (7) were interviewed face to face.
- 2.3 Gay men were over-represented in the research. Gay men's usage of the internet allowed a much deeper and faster access in to that part of the community. Although there are lesbian websites for chat/meeting people, these are not so widely used and it is more difficult to identify locality.
- 2.4 The internet is developing as a crucial tool for contacting and interviewing lesbians and gay men, especially those who do not access lesbian and gay venues and those who treat internet usage as part of their regular life. It also guarantees the safety of consultees in that it maintains confidentiality and interviews can be carried out in real time.
- 2.5 One of the lessons raising from the project is that the Council needs to develop the use of the Internet as one of the tools in engaging with the local LGBT communities. The advantage being that it will facilitate contact with those people who wish to engage with the Council, but want to maintain confidentiality and do not wish to participate in a face to face consultative meeting.

3. What Kind of Population?

- 3.1 The report estimates that approximately 10,000 residents in Barking and Dagenham are lesbian or gay (an estimated 5,030 gay/bisexual men and 4,700 lesbian/bisexual women)
- 3.2 The transgendered community is far more difficult to estimate. However, working on the commonly quoted basis of 5,000 post-operative transgendered people nationwide, it has been estimated that London boroughs each have between 15-20 residents.
- 3.3 The Report suggested that the local LGBT communities appear isolated and most social activities and friendships networks are based outside of the borough. Only 18% of those surveyed had six or more had LGBT friends in the area and more than half had no or just one LGBT friend in the borough.
- 3.4 The absence of a strong LGBT infrastructure and social scene in Barking & Dagenham is a contributing factor to the isolation and exclusion of LGBT people in the borough. It is likely that most people socialise at venues in Newham, Tower Hamlets or central London.
- 3.5 The Project Co-ordinator of Caress (a local HIV/AIDS support organisation that also hosted a LGB support group at the time of the survey – 'People R People) described the situation locally as: *'a lonely community. When people attend the gay support group for the first time they are incredibly nervous, but slowly come out of their shells.'*

4. Follow up Work with the LGBT Communities

- 4.1 This report and its contents represent a rare glimpse in to the lives and concerns of Barking and Dagenham people that are usually hidden from the mainstream. It is also constitutes an excellent starting point to continue working with these communities and secure a fully comprehensive picture of the concerns and service needs of this section of the local community.
- 4.2 Indeed, it is clear that there are a number of key services where the Council do not currently have the views of LGBT people. An example of this is the accessibility of leisure facilities and the use of parks and open spaces. These are issues that are not covered in the 'Breaking the Silence' Report and needs to be the subject of further consultation.
- 4.3 To comprehensively chart the needs of the LGBT communities will be a longer term process, involving more extensive trust building and accessing friendship and social networks locally. It is clear that there are real service needs relating to the local LGBT communities to the Council and its strategic Partners need to be aware.
- 4.4 One of the major bonuses arising from the project is that it has drawn together a significant number of local LGBT people who wish to establish a consultative mechanism to facilitate further engagement with the Council and other strategic partners on their concerns and service needs. This is a development which the Corporate Equalities and Diversity Team have sought to facilitate and support and there has also been strong interest by other local agencies, such as the Police and the PCT, to access such a structure.
- 4.5 In working with the local LGBT communities on the survey we have secured a very positive response. In doing so we have began the vital process of building up trust and establishing a relationship with these communities. It is important that the momentum of this process is continued if we are to continue to benefit from this initial work.

5. The Twelve Areas of LGBT Inclusion Identified in the Report - A Strategic Statement of Intent

- 5.1 The report identifies 12 key areas of LGBT inclusion. These are the areas where local authorities and other public sector bodies impact most upon the lives of LGBT people
- 5.2 These 12 key areas provide the overall framework for the detailed list of recommendations put forward in the Report. In adopting the recommendations, the Council and the Partnership are also requested to endorse the following Strategic Statement of Intent:

'Breaking the Silence' Report – Strategic Statement of Intent

Barking & Dagenham needs to become a place where the voices, experiences, needs and concerns of lesbian, gay men, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people are heard and responded to. In particular, the Council and its strategic partners need to ensure that the concerns and needs of the LGBT communities are fed in to and inform its policy and service planning.

Following initial consultation with local LGBT people it is intended that action be prioritised in the following areas:

1. Improving Community Safety

- We need to mainstream action on homophobia in to all local crime and disorder work
- We need to encourage the reporting of homophobic and transphobic crime, including same sex domestic violence
- The Council needs to respond to homophobic and transphobic incidents in the same way as all other incidents involving harassment and violence
- We need to build and support relationships between local lesbian, gay and transgender communities to encourage communication and build trust in local public services

2. Overcoming parenting discrimination

- We must ensure that staff training in all agencies, dealing with children locally, should ensure issues of LGBT discrimination and challenging homophobia are actively included
- The Council can encourage local LGBT people to become adoptive and foster parents.
- LGBT parents and their children can experience discrimination which impacts upon their external perceptions of their parenting ability
- We need to encourage and build capacity at a local community level to support these families.

3. Overcoming financial discrimination

- The Council should continue to encourage proposed changes to Local Government Pension Scheme to recognise same sex relationships and be flexible in recognising same sex couples
- The Council can play a positive role in contributing to the debate on civil partnerships, and gender re-assignment for local people.

4. Overcoming employment discrimination

- The impact of homophobic harassment and bullying needs to be considered in Local Authority Policies and Procedures
- The Council can respond positively to the EU Equal Treatment Directive which came into force in December 2003. This makes it illegal to discriminate against workers because of their sexual orientation.
- Organisational policies, procedures and systems need to reflect this legislative change.

5. Equality and Service Provision

- LGBT people are often invisible. The voices and experiences of LGBT people are to be reflected in internal and external communications, such as People Matters and the Citizen.
- The Council should utilize information from the Census to establish a clear baseline of information of co-habiting same sex relationships within the Borough.
- The Council and other agencies should consult with LGBT communities and feed the results in to policy and service planning
- LGBT issues should be tackled in all equalities and diversity work/action plans and publications and celebrate/commemorate specific events, to tackle invisibility

6. Promoting Health and Wellbeing

- The Council needs to work closely with external partners to promote the sexual and other health needs of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people and secure sufficient resources to promote health.
- The Council needs to ensure that LGBT people are not invisible in Health Services and that organisational policy in relation to mental health and other health needs reflect these communities.

7. Growing up Safe and Secure

- Schools and colleges play a critical role in determining the experience of LGBT young people. Local counselling, support and Youth Services need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of LGBT young people
- The LEA and local college and university authorities should issue guidance on preventing and dealing with homophobic harassment and bullying, and consider a range of issues affecting LGBT students
- The guidance should include the issue of schools and colleges working with LGBT parents and dealing with the potential homophobia that affects them
- LGBT young people should be consulted to identify adverse impact of policies, services and procedures

8. Greater Security in Housing

- Housing policies and procedures within the Local Authority and RSL Accommodation need to be assessed to ensure they are not inadvertently discriminating against same sex couples.
- The experience of discrimination for young people needs to be considered by staff working within Homelessness Services, and appropriate training needs to be in place to address this positively.

9. Inclusion and Regeneration

- The social regeneration agenda needs to include the needs and experiences of LGBT people.
- Economic skills and development should encourage diverse and inclusive community for the future of Barking & Dagenham

10. Celebrating Diversity, promoting Culture

- Arts, Sports and Cultural policies, strategies and events need to reflect positively the experiences and needs of LGBT people.

11. Supporting Stronger Communities

- The Council needs to support and build LGBT capacity within the Local Voluntary Sector and Community Groups wherever possible
- Homophobia in service delivery should be challenged through the voluntary and community sector contracting process.

12. Establishing Partnership Rights

- The Council and other local agencies should support the GLA's Partnership Register and encourage local use where appropriate
- The Council should encourage the support and development of Civil Partnerships of the same sex couples and ensure that the community priority of "increasing rights and responsibilities" fully reflects the needs and aspirations
- There needs to be a recognition that stable partnerships in the borough requires a stable LGBT infrastructure

Background Papers

- 'Breaking the Silence' Report - The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay Men, Bisexuals and Transgender (LGBT) people in Barking and Dagenham: Issues for the Council and other Public Service Providers (Circulated Separately)
- Barking & Dagenham Council - Corporate Equalities & Diversity Policy Framework
- Barking & Dagenham Council - Race Equality Scheme (Year 2) Action Plan