BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

Policy/Service under development/review:	Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024
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Date EIA conversation started:	20 December 2019

Background

The primary aim of the BCP Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 is to enable everyone in our diverse communities to be involved in shaping and influencing the design and delivery of council services in their local area. Initial consultations in the first quarter of 2020 by BCP Council sought views from local communities across the BCP area using the draft Community Engagement and Consultation Principles. The draft principles are directly linked to the Connected Communities objective in the Corporate Strategy; empowering our communities so everyone feels safe, engaged, and included.

Unlike usual consultations, the new Council was deliberate not to draft the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy upfront and then consult residents on the content. Instead, it chose to go out with a set of underlying principles, seeking people's views, and gathering further information about the ways in which people were involved with the Council, their preference(s) on engagement and what would encourage them to have their say. This shift in approach was aimed to send a clear message; the BCP Council was setting a new way of working with residents and the community. A path rooted in a passion for its local communities and based on respect, integrity, and pride in what we do.

The pre-consultation focused on the thinking behind the engagement/consultation process and pursued resident's views on how they would like to be engaged and consulted. It sought an understanding of the type, level, frequency, and intentions behind residents' interaction with the Council; mapping contact with councillors and staff, use of social media to comment on local issues, participation in community groups and/or organisations etc. Although the response rate was relatively low it drew attention and underlined high response where/when:
- the issue was/is of interest to them
- they felt the Council was interested in their views/asked them for an opinion
- they received Council feedback on how their response made a difference

When asked whether they can influence decisions in their local area the majority felt they were unable to influence Council decisions. However, when asked "how important it was to be able to influence decisions in the local area?" the majority agreed this was very important/important and wanted to be more involved.

The establishment of the Equality Action Commission and a matrix of staff networks covering all protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act marked another turning point. This has started a process by the Council to transform its relationship with the local community

BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

and help drive the conversation with partners and residents in the community as well as within the Council. The recent community discussions with BCP Chief Executive, Lead Member for Equalities and BCP equality and diversity officers welcomed views from ten different community organisations[1] within the BCP area. The discussion focused on the key issues of concern, including the perception of underrepresented groups with regards to BCP as a Council and identified what is working well and what more could be done to redress the issues of equality and diversity.

In general, the discussion sought to find pragmatic solutions with everyone coming together as communities to help find equity and equal opportunities for all, valuing people for who they are and not the categories they fall into. The importance of open, inclusive debates was emphasised because equality matters to everyone. Much emphasis was placed on the fact that the BCP 'Connected Communities' priority would only be possible if we were a fully inclusive society and community. The possibility of us continuing to have many unconnected communities and not achieving this valued outcome. This has become a major driver across the BCP area especially during Covid-19 pandemic which brought home the importance of living in connected communities.

The work of the Social Mobility Commission (March 2021) highlights a postcode lottery, with gaps in educational outcomes between the most and least deprived families varying by local authority. It reveals significant socio-economic disparities, even between local authorities close by to one another. In North Dorset, a 37percentile difference between education outcomes compares with 48 percentile differences in Poole and Bournemouth. However, the BCP Together We Can programme with its BCP Bulk Food Donations and BCP Shout Out, local Foodbanks operated by all Faiths and the many community delivery services made a significant difference in the lives of people, especially those living alone, homeless and shut in. This lived experience underlines the pivotal importance of our pursuit of 'connected communities' and the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy for 2021-2024 is key to this outcome becoming a way of life.

The following is a summary of research and information by BCP providing background to highlight key vulnerable groups by interest, geographical area, and protected characteristics.

BCP Area Profiles, summary statistics on population, diversity, health and care, inequalities, housing, access & connectivity, economy & skills.
BCP geographical area; Identifies 10 – 20% Deprivation areas across BCP
BCP 2019 Insight to Indices of Multiple Deprivation
Insight report on key geographical areas and issues relevant to strategy
BCP Diversity – shows some of the diverse characteristic of the BCP population.
BCP Mid-Year Population Estimates
UEL/Leeds Beckett University Institute for Health and Human Development - Barriers to Community Engagement (2015)
NHS Implementing phase 3 of the NHS response to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) -

Plans, Policies/Strategies and Contact Points
BCP Council's Big Plan;
Strength Based Engagement Practice;

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[1] For community organisations in attendance see attached; Equality Matters: A conversation with BCP and our Communities: 20 May 2021

BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

Community and Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Strategy Consultation
Adult Social Care Contact Centre?
BCP Early Help, Family Support and Young People's Strategic Framework 2020-2023
BCP Mid-Year Population Estimates
BCP Workforce Diversity

Findings

In the first instance BCP's Corporate Strategic objectives are designed to benefit everyone who live, work, and visit the BCP area. The following are our findings as presented by protected characteristics and council commitments.

Age
With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic most of our engagement have increasingly moved online. This movement have uncovered how different groups of people are affected online. Age UK observed 2 in 5 people (39%) aged 52+ in England say they are using the internet more since the start of the coronavirus. However, usage has increased most among groups already using the internet regularly, and so far, there is little evidence that significant numbers of those previously digitally excluded have been prompted to get online. That apart, while many more people could benefit from digital technology, those who cannot, or do not want to be online should be able to access services and support in a way that suits them. The Community Engagement Strategy consciously retains our offline in person, paper, non-digital approach alongside the digital offer.

Age UK found the factors that most strongly explain the likelihood of older individuals (65+) using the internet or not in order of contribution are income, age, household composition, mobility, and memory/ability to concentrate. These issues when combined with other characteristics of the individual, such as gender, ethnicity, and belief can become barriers to both digital inclusion as well as engagement. It is therefore necessary to enable residents to have a wide range of opportunities to be connected/supported. Hence, 'connected communities' must, of necessity, be more than words and increasingly much more about peoples' lived experiences.

Armed Forces
Dorset is a county with above average military presence, with 6,500 serving personnel across 4 bases: Blandford, Bovington and West Moors in the Dorset Council area and the Royal Marines at Hamworthy in Poole. It is anticipated that serving members and veterans will benefit from the Armed Forces Covenant programme which provides thirteen family information and advice centres in libraries across the BCP area. As a partner to the Covenant, BCP is committed to treating serving members of the Armed Forces, veterans and their families with fairness and equity and to understanding and meeting their needs.

Young People
The BCP Community and Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Strategy Consultation report makes the point that the majority of respondents to consultations (84%) are from the 45 – 65+ age group, with less than 20 percent of the respondents in the 16-44 age group. What is interesting about this is the number of **young people** in the 12-18 and 19+ age groups is expected to grow from 27,900 and 36,600 in 2019 to 33,400 and 40,600 respectively by 2028. This is expected to increase the demand for youth engagement activities and facilities across the BCP area and especially in the wards experiencing significant inequalities and

BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

where pockets of deprivation exist/emerge. More engagement with young people and YP organisations will be crucial to glean the issues and gain an understanding of appropriate community engagement toolkits to engage YP. It is therefore critical to ensure young voices are heard and the resources ringfenced to secure the consultation, engagement, and participation of YP, especially where they are typically less likely to participate in community engagement activities. We are working with the Youth Participation as part of the Communications and engagement with young people workstream group that meet regularly to share information and best practice and to better enable our engagement with this group.

People with disabilities face a range of barriers to participating in community engagement activities. Apart from the financial and physical barriers of getting to the event they often come up against the fact that organisers often lack an understanding of the issues affecting people with a disability may face. These events may require lots of movement, long periods of standing, or participating in uninteresting activities. Retaining a constant contact/support is therefore critical to their overall wellbeing. As part of the Strategy our work with Dots Disability alongside consultation and our extension of the Community Equality Champions Network which will include extending our engagement with e.g. People First Forum to better understand and work to remove barriers to engagement. People First Forum were part of the original consultation for the strategy as seen in Appendix D Consultation Strategy Report.

Mental/learning Disabilities

People with **mental/learning disabilities** are often affected by changes to the support they require and the ways in which they can have their voices heard. In response to the situation, the Scottish Commission for Learning Disabilities (SCLD) identified an opportunity to connect with their members on Facebook through forming a group, having realised that a large number of members were active on the social media platform. It is important to note that familiarity with online platforms is a key factor in choosing how to engage with disabled people. Unfamiliarity may create stressful situations for groups, such as people on the autism spectrum (Zolyomi et al 2019).

Ethnicity

People from different ethnic groups are often affected by cultural and language barriers which restrict their capacity to engage/participate in communities that are different to that of their ethnic origin. BCP workforce data highlights the total number of employees at BCP Council (excluding casual staff) is 4600, with White employees being 3,041 (65%), Other White employees 56 (1%) and BME employees 241 (5%). 1,358 employees indicated ethnicity unknown/preferred not to say. The latter seem to speak volumes with regards to why did they prefer not to say or be unknown.

National Black Police Association says police forces have been too slow in addressing a lack of diversity in their ranks and has called for more action to attract people from minority backgrounds. Figures from the Home Office reveal Dorset Police recruited 45 new officers in the nine months to the end of 2020, but of the 44 new recruits who declared their ethnicity, just two were from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Groups. It leaves Dorset Police with 22 BAME officers overall, accounting for 1.8 percent of the 1,224 officers whose ethnicity was recorded. BAME officers in Dorset Police at the end of March 2021 account for 18.2 per 1,000 officers whose ethnicity was recorded. But a recent analysis by the Government Statistical Service shows that 31.4 per 1,000 of the local population is BAME. So, organisations across Dorset should at least be aiming for BAME composition of 31 per 1,000 membership.

BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

Gender

On gender, women are generally well represented in BCP community engagement activities leading the way in the local online Bulk Food Donations and BCP Shout Out platforms, BCP Together We Can programme, and local Foodbanks operated by all Faiths. Females account for 63% of the 4,600 employees while men are 37%. However, the pandemic has brought with it physical distancing and new home-life situations which increasingly impact on the ability of some women to participate in community engagement activities. More people have reported experiencing isolation and domestic abuse during this time with women being considerably more likely to experience abuse. However the first BCP Council Domestic Abuse Strategy estimated that 53,000 women and 31,333 men residing across the BCP area will or have experienced domestic abuse. In December 2020, an ambitious vision was set that "no resident living within or visiting Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole should live in fear of, or experience domestic abuse."

Sexual Orientation

BCP workforce data indicates 25 (less than 1%) employees identify as bisexual, 89 (2%) as lesbian/gay, 2,285 as heterosexual and 2,297 preferred not to say/unknown. This composition generally follow ONS national distribution for sexual orientation in the UK. However sexual orientation is often under-reported because of prejudice and the safety of 'coming out' in an anonymous questionnaire. Official figures suggest that LGBT people are currently proportionally represented in our work. Physical distancing measures during COVID-19 has resulted in many LGBT people feeling unsafe in their home environments and make it harder for them to engage with/access support services they need. Our recent community discussions also highlight a disproportionate number of LGBT people also experience homelessness. Research by Albert Kennedy Trust has shown that up to 24% of YP at risk of homelessness in the UK also identify as LGBT, and 77% cite familial rejection and abuse as the primary cause. Young LGBT people especially in insecure housing are therefore more likely to face abuse and need access to community services like the Be You project which support and signpost YP to resources to help them to work their way through the many difficulties they experience.

Belief, culture, and religion

As in the case of people with a disability, attempts at engaging people with different beliefs, religion, and culture without a genuine understanding of their belief, cultural systems and world views can be limiting at best and very/more destructive than enabling. Community engagement requires consideration of belief, religious and cultural factors that may limit participation. Prinjha et al. (2020) working in British South Asian communities with type 2 diabetes makes the point that it was necessary to take steps to arrange their focus group sessions on days and times that did not clash with Sikh, Hindu or Muslim religious festivities, prayer times, with Ramadan, or with childcare responsibilities. We have had very similar observations made in the recent community discussions highlighting the point that inviting minority ethnic facilitators can contribute cross-cultural skills and knowledge because of their familiarity with someone's language, culture, religion, and local community organisations. Collaborating with local community organisations supporting people of different ethnic groups and religions is key to addressing underrepresentation in these populations.

BCP Council Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix E)

Conclusion

Being different has increasingly been seen as a problem, barrier, or a threat for as long as the existence of human life. The BCP Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2021-2024 therefore seeks to promote diversity not as a step to tolerance but a path for everyone who live, work, and visit the BCP area to be involved in shaping and influencing the design, operation and delivery of services affecting their daily lives. The action plan emerging from this equality impact assessment is presented using the BCP five engagement and consultation principles in Appendix F.

Central to involved, inclusive and collaborative communities is the provision of clarity on how services can be accessed, entry points identified for the community to share views, ideas and insights and the decision-making process/roles/responsibilities in the council clarified for those who live, work, and visit the area. In response to these limitations the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy will continue (enhance its engagement of) to engage staff, councillors and partners in 'asset and strength-based approaches' to community engagement and development to aid collective understanding of and joint working in/across the BCP area.

Clear actions are also defined for keeping it simple while being transparent with our local communities. They are particularly focused on the way in which changes to support and services are delivered to enable increased access to services and opportunities created for community voices to be heard, acted upon and services monitored to ensure agreed outcomes are realised.