

update

FEB 2016

What happened?

Councils in Somerset asked the Diversity Trust to report on living as a gay and bisexual man in Somerset. We researched during 2014 and 2015 and then wrote our report in February 2015. To read the report [click here](#).

Since publishing our report councils have taken action. They asked us to share what they've done. Inside is the progress so far.





Progress so far



Using the Right Language

Councils asked what language they should use when talking about us or to us. You said they should say 'gay', 'gay man' or 'bisexual' instead of using old-fashioned words like 'homosexual', because some people don't like that word. So, your councils now say 'gay men', 'gay man', 'gay' or 'bisexual' on their surveys and equality monitoring forms.

Getting Trained

You said training staff on equality

and diversity would help, especially to prevent staff from assuming our gender or sexual orientation. Our Councils support staff by training them in using the right language to guarantee good equality and diversity practice. For instance:

- since 2014 **Somerset County Council** has trained staff by using their communications manual. This manual covers not discriminating against gay and bisexual men.
- at **Somerset District Council** managers are trained to look at every aspect of their service so gay and bisexual men are not disadvantaged.
- **Weston-Super-Mare Council** has equality training and its staff continues reading the materials both online and offline after this training.

“Our Councils support staff by training them in using the right language to guarantee good equality and diversity practice”

Using images

You felt we needed positive images of gay and bisexual men in posters and public displays. You said if you're not represented then you feel alienated by the service or organisation. You may feel it's not for you or something you could use. Councils could fix this by making sure there's positive images, pictures and words about gay and bisexual men displayed on Council and other organisations' websites, newsletters and so on. You said gay and bisexual men use social media a lot. Councils should also use social media to reach gay and bisexual men in Somerset.

Get Social

Your local councils already use social media and websites to tell us what they're doing. It's perfect for announcing events, public consultations, sending out general information and encouraging people to sign up for regular updates. However, the positive images and materials already used by councils outside Somerset should also benefit gay and bisexual men in Somerset. We could do this by:

- creating website links to other relevant, useful, interesting and positive websites and web pages.
- Suggesting that local services encourage local online chats, for example, by sharing experiences, knowledge, ideas and other useful information.

Following **Somerset County Council's** lead we'll make sure all services have communication manuals that don't discriminate against gay and bisexual men. In Somerset we have a local group called the Somerset Equalities Officer Group. It can support creating these communication

manuals as it defines the terms for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT+) and so on.

Dignity and Respect

You told us that dignity and respect are really important to you when receiving services. Sexual orientation should not be assumed or be a barrier for you when seeking support or a service. Assuming you and everyone else is heterosexual is called 'heterosexism'. By assuming everyone is heterosexual, and not considering those who are gay or bisexual when planning or arranging their services, the wrong care and support package may be provided. Services embracing the inclusion of gay and bisexual people appear more welcoming for everyone from all backgrounds. So, we must challenge homophobic and biphobic attitudes and behaviours. In this case, it's good practice to use the right language, for example; saying 'partner' when the person's gender and / or sexual orientation aren't known.

Councils in Somerset also tackle inappropriate language and behaviour. For instance, **Somerset County Council** has guidelines, which are updated every few months. This includes using appropriate language and images. **Somerset District Councils** also have guidelines in using the right language.

Getting Satisfaction

Councils use customer and staff surveys to see if there's any bullying, harassment or inappropriate language and behaviour. At **Somerset County Council** staff are surveyed every couple of years. It asks how confident they feel in challenging inappropriate language

“Councils should also use social media to reach gay and bisexual men in Somerset”



“We’ll make sure all services have communication manuals that don’t discriminate against gay and bisexual men”

and behaviour, while testing if they respect individual differences.

In 2015 the survey showed 95 percent (almost everybody) agreeing their work colleagues treat them with dignity and respect. They’re asked how confident they feel in reporting bullying and harassment incidents as well as being able to challenge inappropriate language and behaviour. 84 per cent (most people) said they could report an incident and 74 per cent would challenge inappropriate language and behaviour. It’s hoped the survey may help staff in following and understanding their council’s bullying and harassment guidelines to increase their confidence. These surveys are supported by **Somerset County Council** guidelines in how to monitor equality and diversity, which covers language, despite already having guidelines in

using language that doesn’t offend.

Nevertheless, **Somerset County Council** will still train its staff in using the right language when dealing with the public. **Taunton Dean Borough Council** has ‘Customer Contact’ training for its staff. It’s about using appropriate language, including not assuming the customer’s gender identity or sexual orientation.

Other local authorities, such as **Somerset County Council**, **Taunton Dean Borough Council** and **Weston-Super-Mare Council** have Bullying and Harassment Guidelines for staff and customers in case they experience discrimination. **Somerset County Council** and **Mendip District Council** share best practice between them and will update their Access Guidance for staff. **Somerset County Council** is also happy for other councils in Somerset to use and reproduce its Access to services Guidelines.

Equality Monitoring

You told us that you’re happy to see questions asking about sexual orientation on equality monitoring forms. So, when monitoring local services, councils must include a question on improving your access to them.

When **Somerset District Councils** monitor equality in their services they use existing guidelines to create questionnaires. The guidelines include how and when to ask about sexual orientation. The same councils also run an Equal Opportunities staff survey each year to measure the councils’ diversity, and sexual orientation questions are included.

Taunton Dean Borough Council uses

data from its staff monitoring forms to show how diverse its workforce is on its website. There’s an equality monitoring form with each job application pack, which **Weston-Super-Mare Council** will introduce for its job applicants.

Safe Meeting Spaces

You told us that being able to go to affordable, safe, ‘gay friendly’ meeting places was important. You told us that gay and bisexual men can risk feeling isolated owing to age, location and because of travel restrictions in Somerset. So we should identify spaces for gay and bisexual men to meet.

Somerset County Councils says there’s a service called ‘2BU Somerset’ which supports young LGBT+ people. The council will look into transport should further cuts in transport services happen. Our local councils will continue to explore opportunities where gay and bisexual men can meet for support and friendship in safe environments.

Hate Crime

You told us that there’s some unreported hate crime against gay and bisexual men in Somerset. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has invested money in tackling hate crime across the Avon and Somerset police area. These projects include:

1. Supporting young people.
2. Supporting vulnerable adults and people with mental health issues.
3. Supporting victims of crime who have enhanced needs because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief.

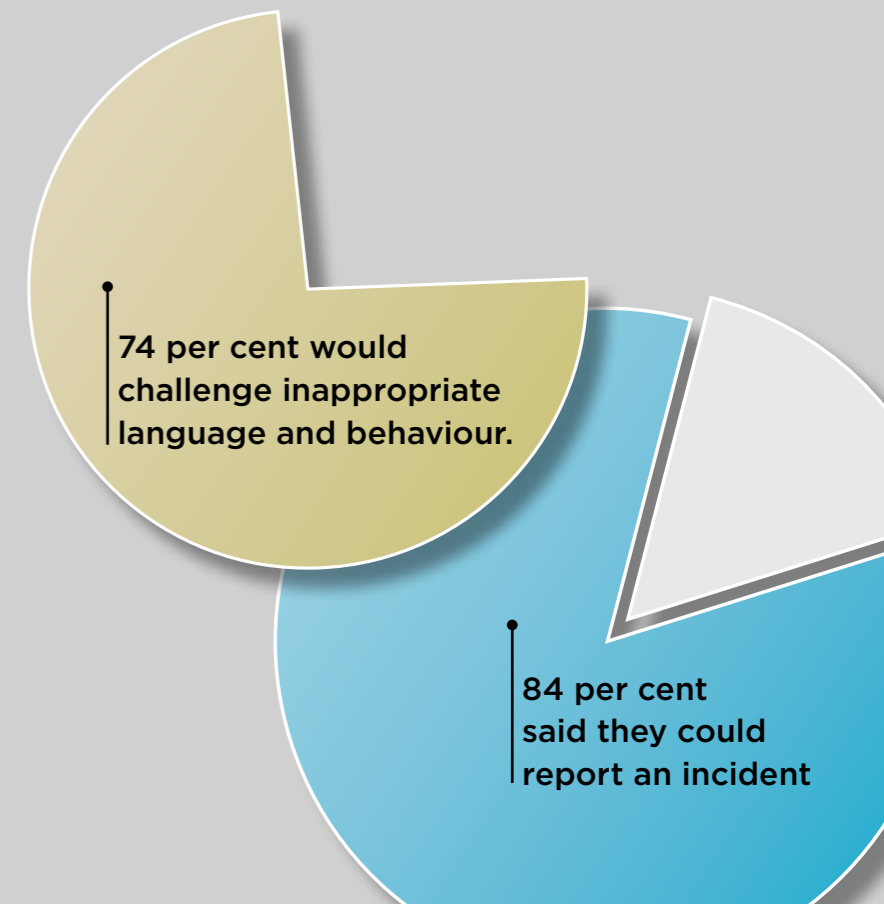
These projects pick-up hate crime

cases and therefore support is offered through our criminal justice system. **Somerset County Council** supported the police by paying a support worker for one year in Somerset to help victims of hate crime while they raise hate crime awareness in our communities.

Our Somerset Equalities Officer Group are working with a hate crime service called Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI). This means they can explore how local services will work after 2016 while encouraging hate crime reporting. In the meantime, both **Taunton Dean Borough Council** and **Weston-Super-Mare Council** have reception staff who will use a non-emergency telephone number to report hate crimes. Our local services will continue finding further opportunities to support you in reporting hate crime.

“You told us that gay and bisexual men can risk feeling isolated”

Bullying and harassment in the workplace



Residential Care and Later Life

You said that staff attitudes and assumptions in residential care may put some gay and bisexual men back into the closet if they use these services in later life. **Somerset County Council** recognises this and will look at work contracts, so everyone's protected regardless of their sexual orientation.

Equality and diversity training will be offered after reviewing all employment contracts. But, to improve your access to all Health and Social Care services **Somerset County Council** will arrange training for all staff. Luckily, equalities training is already offered in the county by organisations like 2BU Somerset, the Diversity Trust and the education teams in schools covered by **Somerset County Council**.

Person Centred Support is practiced at Taunton Dean Borough Council. This is what it says on the tin – “putting you at the centre of your care”. We may have complex needs when we're older and in residential care. The council's Person Centred Support training for staff is revised each year. It includes guidance on not assuming sexual orientation and motivational interviewing to pinpoint each person's individual needs. This leads to more effective sign-posting if further support is needed.



What Next

We'll continue working with the local Councils and with other services in Somerset to improve access to your local services. We'll make sure your voice is heard at every level. We'll keep advocating, working with other organisations and services, doing research, getting evidence and implementing Equality and Diversity training. We hope this will help ensure the service needs for gay and bisexual men in Somerset are met.

Contact

Diversity Trust – engagement, research and training

[Website](#)

[Twitter](#)



2BU Somerset – support for LGBT young people

[Website](#)

[Twitter](#)



AVoice – support for vulnerable victims of crime

[Website](#)



Eddystone Trust – HIV and sexual health provision in the South West

[Website](#)

[Twitter](#)



Somerset County Council

[Website](#)

[Twitter](#)



Stand Against Racism & Inequality – support for victims of hate crime

[Website](#)



Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) – the HIV and sexual health charity

[Website](#)

[Twitter](#)

