Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equalities Initiatives: The Case of UK Local Government

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Structure

- Policy Context

- Local Government Context

- The Sexualities Equalities in Local Government project

- Indicative findings

Policy Context: Key legislation

- Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation) 2007
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003)
- Gender Recognition Act (2004)
- Civil Partnership Act (2004)
- Proposed Single Equality Act
- White Paper *Fairness for All: A New Commission for Equalities and Human Rights*

Local Government Context

- Local government modernisation agenda
  - Equalities Standard
  - Local government White Paper (2006)
  - Development of Local Area Agreements
  - Community Strategies
  - The impact of the Corporate Performance Assessment (Comprehensive Area Assessment from 2009)
  - Other aspects including growth of partnerships, emphasis on increased public participation, and the new localism

Sexualities Equalities in Local Government

- In depth qualitative work with four Local Authorities
  North England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Southern England
- Four Action Learning Sets (one in each area)
  Each set meeting four times over 4-6months
- Focus groups with Councillors
- Interviews with key national players

Key Analytic Themes

- Processes of local authority resistance and compliance re LGBT equalities initiatives (and within LGBT communities, especially regarding different sexual/gender minorities)

- Organisational Cultural Change

- Debates concerning understandings of sexuality, citizenship and democracy

Indicative discussion

- Substantial progress in sexualities equalities in the UK (at strategic level, mainstreaming, different service areas, impact assessments, partnerships, community engagement)

- Implementation deficit in some cases although getting LGBT issues 'on the agenda' is felt to be worthwhile nonetheless

- Considerable variations within and across authorities

- In authorities where work established, tendency for consolidation of higher profile equalities work (race, gender, disability) and some other work (LGBT)

- In authorities where little work is done, there is acknowledgement it is necessary due to statutory drivers

Intersections between Equalities Strands

- Sexualities equalities work in local government demonstrates the complex ways in which sex/gender and other characteristics interact
- The specifics of experience concerning sexualities - and transgender - equality stand out, for example:
  - *'I think embarrassment, as well…about faith, and about sexuality, because they're the only ones [sic] where you might be in a room with somebody, who is of that faith or of that sexuality, and not know it whilst you' re discussing it'* (Officer)
- Absences and processes of marginalisation and/or tensions are evident in certain areas, in particular:
  - Bisexuality Transgender – especially trans other than transsexual, FTM
  - Faith communities and LGBT issues
- There are also ways of using intersections positively (e.g. leverage provided by more established equalities strands)

Intersectionality cont: location

- The importance of familiarity with individuals when countering prejudice in close-knit or parochial settings
  - *it's quite a parochial place, it's a, and it's a little bit inward looking…the link between familiarity and favourability, that the more familiar you are with people who are different and their lives and so on, the more likely you are to be favourably inclined towards them, and, and, and when you have least contact* [Councillor, Northern city]
- Cultures of machismo and homophobia:
  - *to be identified as being gay, or to be suspected of being gay [is]a very powerful insult here, and its not just a throwaway comment, people will get into a fight'* (Officer)
- Lack of voluntary and community sector infrastructure
- Local cultures of homophobia mean more likely that bisexual people 'live as heterosexual' – this also case for some faith communities

Organisational Cultures

- Organisational cultures have a profound impact on LGBT Equalities work in local authorities

- Cultures varied widely, reflecting composition of local population – urban/rural divide perhaps the most pertinent

  - 'Some examples of cultures being positively changed especially via training:

  - *'we try and explain to people "you can be any age and have, it doesn't mean that you are sexually active, but you still have this identity" and we try and get people to understand that we don't just*

    have one label, we are a cocktail of many different things' (Officer)

Democracy and community engagement

- Community engagement is part of local authority remits, associated with processes of local democracy
- Can include consultations, use of outreach workers, conferences, support for public celebrations
- Levels of LGBT community engagement vary widely
  - Location and visibility of LGBT population
  - Political leanings of local communities and elected Members
  - Issue of 'loudest voices' and representation
  - Capacity issues
  - *'some of the groups we need to consult with, particularly the gay community, who've got many little groups, you know, they don't meet in [town], I've got to go to [city] to take a paper there, they need time to mull it over'* (Officer, Welsh Authority).

Normalcy and Citizenship

- The normal citizen is sexualised, as well as gendered and racialised
- New discourses of citizenship incorporates lesbians and gay men through claims to normalcy and sameness – this apparent in local authority equalities work
- The normal gay (and lesbian?) is:
  - '…associated with specific social behaviours. For example, the normal gay is expected to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride (Seidman 2002:133)
- Have the parameters of 'normalcy' shifted, with new boundaries being constructed?