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Challenges for Anti-Homophobia Policies

Dr Surya Monro and Professor
Diane Richardson



The situation for LGBT people in the UK

- A recent survey of 450,000 people in the UK found 1% identified as gay or lesbian, .5% as bisexual (but 3.2% said they did not know or refused to answer) (British Household Survey 2010)
- The British Social Attitude Survey showed that 75% of the population thought that homosexuality was 'always or mostly wrong' in 1987, this had lowered to 32% by 2008 (Ward and Carvel 2008)



The situation cont.

- There are particular issues for the following groups:
 - Asylum seekers and refugees
 - Those experiencing intersectional disadvantage (for example disabled gay people)
- ‘You have those who are probably on Sickness Benefit, live in a flat, so economically they’re not well off, you know they can’t afford, they don’t have transport, so they may feel very lonely and isolated and excluded (Gay community activist)’*



Local Level: Overview

- There has been a normalisation of the LGBT equalities agenda
- There is inconsistency – in development of work, and in implementation of legislation
- LGBT equalities is often ‘bottom of the equalities hierarchy’
- The current economic and political situation is a huge challenge



Aims of this talk

- To look at homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in the context of UK local government work
- To focus on the processes and practices taking place regarding the implementation of public policies
- To identify obstacles as well as areas of progress



Methodology

- Large ESRC funded study of local authorities in Northern Ireland, England and Wales
- Interviews with stakeholders (4 Local Authorities, national stakeholders, councillors)
- Participative Action Research



Conceptual framework

- The changing nature of citizenship
- Organisational and institutional processes
- Democracy and participation
- Intersectionality





Local LGBT equalities work: 1980s-1997

- Work began in the 1980s in a few left wing local authorities
- *'UK lesbian and gay local government equality initiatives of the 1980s were both progressive and controversial'* (Carabine and Monro 2004: 314).
- There was a right wing backlash in the 1980s and work started again only slowly, with some differences



Local government LGBT equalities work 1997-2010

- A shift to an administrative, managerialist framework for LGBT equalities work
- The Local Government Modernisation Agenda emphasised participation and engagement
- Local authorities were audited in ways that supported the agenda (especially the Comprehensive Area Assessment from 2008 – now scrapped)



Legislative changes

- Range of LGBT equalities legislation introduced since 1999, including:
 - Adoption and Children Act, 2002
 - Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, 2003
 - Gender Recognition Act, 2004
 - Civil Partnerships Act, 2004
 - Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation), 2007
 - Single Equality Act 2010



Legislation as a driver

- Legislation has been a very important driver
- The legislative drivers have been broadly welcomed both by the statutory sector and the LGBT communities, although some LGBT people's rights are more supported than others



Illustrative Quote

- *‘The primary driver has to be legislation, because that’s your foot in the door, with everybody, with justifying it, the work, with everyone, when you produce a scheme and slamming it down people’s throats, its to say “we’re legally required to do this you know”’ (ALS member)*





Implementation mechanisms

- Mainstreaming
- Impact Assessments and Equality Frameworks
- The Equalities Standard
- Stonewall's Diversity Champions



Quote

- Community members in a Welsh town presented a petition to a local authority asking for it to support the notion that heterosexual marriage was the ‘only safe environment to bring up a child’
- *‘The moment this was received it was sent to the equalities department for an equality impact assessment to prove by a proper audit, going through the proper equality impact procedures, that this was in its nature offensive to LGB people. But instead of just saying “oh this is offensive on sexual orientation grounds” they actually went through the whole process and that was publicised’*



The implementation gap

- Implementing legislation is a challenge generally, and especially regarding LGBT equality because of factors such as:
 - Perceived sensitivity of the issues
 - Issues concerning resourcing
 - Initiative overload and LGBT issues not being seen as a priority



Illustrative quote

- *And so what they (schools) do is they'll comply, but they simply can't go beyond that and, you know, compliance is just the beginning of it. In fact, you can be very effective in complying with something and do quite negative practice.*



Structures

- Structures vary across Local Authorities
- Stronger structures include a corporate centre and mainstreaming mechanisms
- There are also some professional structures (such as social work) which are proactive
- Some work has been done around contracting out services



Structures and challenges

- Restructuring can be a major issue
- Current climate of cuts
- It is very hard to ensure compliance with legislation when services are contracted out
- The situation is especially problematic when contracts go to faith-related community and voluntary sector organisations



Leadership

- Positive, proactive leadership is very important:

‘The whole equalities agenda would feature very heavily in that performance report. It’s a regular item on my management team agenda and as a result that issue will cascade into other management teams and service specific management teams agendas, and there will be a constant reporting format on how we’re doing, “Well, we didn’t get that right” or “You need to improve on that” or “We need to look at that as an example of best practice”.’



Challenges concerning leadership

- Weak or absent leadership
- Poor management generally
- Actively homophobic leaders (political or administrative leaders)



Quote

'Initiatives were blocked, basically stopped above my head and didn't go any further within the Council. I just remember sitting down with them (local voluntary sector organisation) and making a note of all their suggestions and then sending the memo to line management and it didn't go any further ... politically handcuffed.'



- Well-designed training is important for the LGBT equalities agenda
- *'we talk about social constructs and we do exercises around how to programme the robot, and it's talks really, that's about childhood, social programming... I cover sexual orientation, em, we do a lot of myth busting in that, on different groups, and we try and explain to people, "you can be any ages and have, it doesn't mean you have to be 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'*



Challenges concerning training

- Resource limitations
- Limited HR units
- Discomfort and embarrassment:
- ‘...you could see people squirming in their seats, you know it was something that I’ve, you know, “do we really need?” [laughs], “do we really need to discuss this?” sort of thing [laughs], without saying it...’



Monitoring

- Very contentious historically
- The unions still largely opposed
- Some mechanisms developed which are sensitive and appropriate



Challenges concerning monitoring

- Opposition from LGBT people, the unions, and Local Authority players
- (X): *So they don't want it [monitoring] done on religion, belief or sexual orientation?*
- (Y): *This was [Chief Executive's] take on it yesterday*
- (X): *He wants to do the minimum?*
- (Y): *He wants to do the absolute minimum...he doesn't want, sort of offices overburdened, because obviously there's sustainability impact assessments and all sorts of things that have also got to be done....he thinks that we should be doing the bare minimum just to, just to get away with it...*





Organisational cultures and processes

- Organisational cultures vary widely within Local Authorities, depending on:
 - History of work in the authority
 - Political allegiances
 - Locality
 - LGBT activism
 - Key actors and leadership



Challenges to changing organizational cultures and processes

- Affective factors
- Overt and institutional homophobia, biphobia and transphobia
- Prejudice against bisexuals more pronounced
- Cultures of heteronormativity
- Wider organisational inertia



Partnership work and community engagement

- There has been a push towards partnership work over the last decade
- This includes representation of LGBT people on partnerships such as Local Strategic Partnerships
- And a wide range of consultation mechanisms



Quote

- *‘it was the local Forum and they had, em, and also members of the transgender community were there as well, speaking, and that was really interesting to sort of see, you know speak to people who are on the receiving end of the services that you do supply, but that was really quite good, it brings it home, it becomes more interactive then, it doesn’t just become a piece of paper’*



Challenges concerning partnership work and community engagement

- Capacity
- Complexity
- Loudest voices
- Conflicting agendas and nepotism
- Cuts



Local politicians –role and challenges

- Important role as champions
- Override officers – but widely seen as obstructive
- *‘I went to my boss and said “we need to set something up, we need some sort of confidential helpline” and she just said straight to me, “look, the Councillors ain’t going to be able to get their heads around this at the moment”’*



The biggest obstacles in the UK

- Current climate e.g. threat to Equality and Human Rights
- Commission, public sector cuts
- Possible related political backlash
- Fragmented nature of progress so far
- Ongoing cultures of prejudice



Causes for optimism

- Wider Human Rights frameworks and obligations
- Legislation in place and new government appears supportive
- Public mood is tolerant and ‘Gay’ is a symbol of cosmopolitanism in some circles
- Committed activists, politicians and statutory sector workers



Further Information

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