

Community Engagement Policy and Strategy

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*A copy of this policy must be made available to all employees
and permanently displayed in the workplace*

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1. Basis of this policy

The Intercom Trust is committed to being community-led and community-responsive, within its Constitution and its human-rights-based operational and strategic framework.

1.1.

This means that the Trust actively works to be inclusive of all who are LGB and/or Trans, and those others who are potentially vulnerable to homophobic or transphobic prejudice, including those who...

- identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual, or
- identify as Transgendered, Transsexual or Formerly Transsexual, or
- identify as Intersex or Third Sex, or
- identify as, or live a life that includes being, Transvestite or Cross-dressing, or
- identify as Queer, or
- are emotionally or physically attracted to or have sex with people of their own gender, or
- are perceived as having any of these identities or being affected by these issues, or
- have friends or family members who are affected by these issues,

...whatever their age; citizenship, nationality, refugee or asylum-seeking status; physical or mental ability, disability or impairment or lack of impairment; mental health and wellbeing status; sex, gender, gender identity, and marital or partnership status; racial or ethnic

origin or cultural identity; religion, belief or unbelief; social, economic and employment status; and any other characteristic.

1.2.

The Trust has therefore a very wide remit indeed, and this includes many, often very complex, cross-cutting issues.

1.3.

At all times the Trust must be actively engaged in deepening its understanding of the breadth of individual needs and experiences within these LGBT communities, paying particular attention to the complex issues that can affect members of minorities within minorities.

1.4.

The Trust must also aim to achieve expertise and understanding in respect of all the other diversity strands and minorities, so that those LGBT people who are potentially vulnerable to multiple disadvantage can be confident that the Trust will bring an informed, 360 degree, human-rights-based perspective to their needs and life circumstances.

1.5.

Effective and inclusive community engagement (see section 2 below) is essential for realising the Trust's commitments under paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 above.

1.6.

However, the Trust recognises that LGBT people and communities have unique profiles of need in respect of confidentiality and invisibility. This presents challenges in respect of community consultation and user-involvement. Within these overriding constraints the Trust must nevertheless find appropriate methods of taking into account the views of all possible LGBT people, whether or not they are in a position to be part of formal consultations. (See section 8 below.)

1.7.

The content and approach of the Trust's policies, strategic planning, operations, consultancy and training must all reflect high-quality knowledge shared across the Trust's operational team (Staff, Trustees, and other volunteers) about the issues, needs and concerns of the broadest range possible of LGB people and Trans people across the Trust's area of benefit.

1.8.

When providing skills, training or strategic consultancy for external organisations, employees, trustees, and other volunteers of the Trust have a responsibility to ensure that they are informed about the issues and needs (including cross-cutting needs) of the fullest possible range of these LGBT communities, and carefully reflect this knowledge to our stakeholders in all sectors.

1.9.

The Trust does not claim formally to represent LGB or Trans people. However, it needs to be able to demonstrate that Trust employees and volunteers have a sound relevant and inclusive knowledge-base of the different issues that affect the many and various LGB

and Trans people and communities in the South West and to have corporate skills for working with stakeholders in all sectors to mainstream truly inclusive approaches to equality effectively into their work.

1.10.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Trust's Human Rights Policy, Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Policy, and Protection Policy.

1.11.

In the event of any conflict between this Policy and the Protection Policy, the Protection Policy must take precedence.

2. Community Engagement

2.1.

Within the Trust's geographical area of benefit, the Trust will at all times take all practicable steps to engage with the widest possible range of identifiable LGB and Trans individuals and communities focusing particularly on those cross-cutting minorities who are vulnerable to multiple disadvantage, with the aim of improving the Trust's corporate understanding of the widest possible range of community issues, needs and concerns.

2.2.

To ensure the Trust earns and retains its standards of excellence, and also to develop and consolidate community confidence, the Trust must ensure that all possible doors are open and accessible to enable the widest possible range of LGBT people to practically and effectively influence the Trust's development, policies and operational practice, and structures for delivering services.

2.3.

This means taking care to use plain and appropriate language and to ensure that those involved are fully and clearly informed about the relevant issues, and about the Trust's specific aims and objectives (e.g. in conducting a community consultation). All possible steps must be taken to ensure that no-one is unfairly excluded from engagement in the Trust's work, whether by rural or social isolation, or by physical or other impairment, or by any other minority issue or social disadvantage.

3. User Involvement

3.1.

All Trust operations must mainstream the requirement under this Policy to gather information about LGBT people's needs and issues, so as to better inform the Trust's team for the present and future planning and delivery of services.

3.2.

Wherever possible this requirement will be formalised by setting up internal appropriate anonymised information-gathering systems to support this learning purpose.

3.3.

Wherever possible this requirement will be made real through open and structured community consultations, appropriate to the needs and access issues of the communities involved.

3.4.

Wherever possible the Trust will set up formal and reliable mechanisms for external independent scrutiny and evaluation of Trust operations and projects, involving LGBT people and communities and our stakeholders across the sectors as appropriate.

3.5.

The primary routes of engagement and user involvement are:

- a. direct contact, leadership and feedback from LGBT/T individuals across the peninsula;
- b. direct learning from other community-led LGBT/T groups across the peninsula;
- c. assessment of the topics and concerns raised by members of the public through our helpline calls and advocacy activities, and by the staff and volunteers responsible for those services;
- d. input from our professional colleagues across the sectors, including sexual, mental and other health providers, BME community groups and service-providers, refugee and asylum-seeker groups and services, anti-racism workers and service-providers, disability projects and community groups, older and young people's projects and community groups, religious and other groups and projects, and all others with whom we can make contact;
- e. research and structured consultation on specific issues using a wide range of appropriate and inclusive methods;
- f. the results of formal external evaluation wherever this is possible and appropriate;
- g. the results of internal evaluation processes.

3.6.

Trust workers must bear all these routes in mind and apply them as appropriate in the day-to-day operations, and strategic development, of the Trust.

4. Community Responsiveness

4.1.

The Trust is committed to paying full and positive attention to all input received, whether formally or informally, from LGBT people and communities and from our stakeholders across the sectors, and to learning lessons and mainstreaming change and development into the Trust's ongoing work, so as to improve the Trust's delivery of services and to ensure that those services continue to be targeted where they are most needed within the Trust's capacity.

4.2.

The Trust team shall ensure at all times that the Trust's work is fully inclusive, and that attention given to any one interest or community cohort is fair and proportionate within the overall demographic and local needs of the LGBT communities as a whole.

5. User-focused evaluation and monitoring

Evaluation is a method of monitoring and assessing the quality of service provided, with the aim of improving performance. We distinguish between activity monitoring and social monitoring.

5.1.

Activity monitoring relates to outcomes and compliance with funders' requirements and expectations. This should be conducted according to the Quality Monitoring Policy.

5.2.

Social monitoring is a method of assessing the social and other characteristics of service-users, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that barriers to access are not being perceived or experienced disproportionately by any particular social group. This can be a general on-going process, or a specific process related to one particular project or service-area.

"Social group" in this context means any of the diversity strands, anyone who experiences cross-cutting issues or multiple disadvantage across or between different diversity strands, and those who are of a particular economic, marital, domestic or other status whether or not related to one of the seven diversity strands.

5.3.

The Trust aims to mainstream both Activity Monitoring and Social Monitoring into all aspects of its operations.

6. Strategy for community engagement, evaluation and responsiveness

Structures and mechanisms for engagement, evaluation and monitoring should always be the best available that are also appropriate both to the service-user individuals, and to the nature of the Intercom services which they use. (See sections 2.2 and 2.3 above.)

6.1.

All the Trust's service-areas and on-going operations will be tested for compliance with this Policy at the least on an annual basis.

Responsible officer: the Executive Director

6.2.

All proposals for new projects will be developed in compliance with this Policy, and funding applications will demonstrate that this has been done.

Responsible officers: Executive Director and senior staff

6.3.

All staff and volunteers are responsible for ensuring they are familiar with this Policy and Strategy, and for mainstreaming its principles into their part in the Trust's operations.

Responsible officers: all Staff and Volunteers

6.4.

Both external and internal systems for evaluation and monitoring of Trust operations should be based on a broad range of user feedback wherever possible.

Responsible officers: all Staff and Volunteers

7. Conflicts

Wherever a conflict of rights, needs, opportunities or priorities is identified between different cohorts of the communities to which the Trust needs to be able to respond, the Trust team will take a human-rights-based approach to its decision-making. This will be based on an evaluation of social needs and of relative disadvantage, and will then take account of the Trust's capacity. Any final decision must be documented and must demonstrate that it is firmly founded on a rigorous application of the principles of fairness and proportionality.

8. Confidentiality

Nothing in this Policy and Strategy must be allowed to compromise the confidentiality of any of the Trust's service-user or stakeholders. This applies particularly to the Helpline and Advocacy service.

8.1.

There are very strong reasons, usually related either to our service-users' need for confidentiality and privacy, or to the expectations of people who have used such a

helpline before, why direct user-feedback may in many cases be impossible or inappropriate. In these cases we have to rely on internal evaluation, which must be backed up by a corporate environment of determination to improve performance, which itself depends on a rigorous, secure and unbiased system of analysis and evaluation. This should be separated as far as possible from formal staff appraisal systems and must operate within a positive and supportive learning environment maintained within the Trust team by the Executive Director and the Trustees.

8.2.

In those advocacy-cases where it is possible to ask for feedback, such feedback should always be sought, offering a variety of methods: oral, written, e-mails, web-based forms, direct contact with the Executive Director or a Trustee, etc, responding as far as possible to the access needs of the individual.

9. Responsible officer

The officer responsible for the implementation of this Policy and Strategy is the Executive Director, who shall review it annually in consultation with all staff and then report to the Trustees.