

To: BSO Board

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Title: Consultation Outcomes and final BSO Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28

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1 Introduction

Between April and July 2023, the BSO consulted on its new Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28, in line with its statutory commitments. The BSO Equality Unit coordinated and facilitated the consultation, jointly on behalf of the BSO and 9 client organisations.

This paper presents a summary of the consultation outcomes and sits alongside two documents: (1) the Consultation Report and (2) the final BSO Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28.

The Plans are submitted for Board approval and onward submission to the Equality Commission by 30th September 2023.

The purpose of this paper is twofold:

- 1) to provide an overview of what people told us and
- 2) to outline the consideration of consultation comments, with a particular emphasis on changes/additions made to the BSO Plans as a result.

2 How we consulted and who engaged with us

A range of consultation methods were combined to offer a variety of ways in which consultees could choose to engage. These included

- Survey Mechanics n=19 submissions were received
- Written responses n=9 submissions (5 from organisations, 4 from individuals)
- Events/Meetings n=5 events were held; n=23 individuals participated in these (2 public events, 1 BSO staff event, 2 meetings with the British Deaf Association)
- Discussion with Tapestry members.

Some respondents chose more than one method to engage with the BSO and partner organisations.

Markedly, Section 75 voluntary sector groups were absent from the list of those who provided comments, with the notable exception of the British Deaf Association. Most organisations who engaged with us were professional organisations. This represents a shift compared with previous equality consultations. Most likely, it reflects a drastically reduced capacity in the voluntary sector. At the same time, more staff members participated than in the past. The Equality Commission also provided a detailed response to the BSO and partner organisations.

3 What people told us

The following key themes emerged from the consultation for the BSO:

1. Accessible Communication
2. Accessible IT Systems
3. Equality Data Collection and the Use of Equality Data
4. Performance Indicators and Targets / SMART actions
5. Staff / Human Resources issues including training
6. Mainstreaming and Taking Action at the Strategic Level.

What people liked about the draft Plans

In the main, the following aspects of the draft BSO Plans were highlighted in a positive way:

- The inclusion of actions on neurodiversity.
- The inclusion of actions on ethnicity.
- The recognition of the need to improve the quality of equality data relating to BSO functions and the BSO as an employer.
- The intention to involve people with a disability in the delivery of training and in the review of recruitment processes.
- Actions relating to Tapestry, Disability Awareness Days, and the Disability Placement Scheme.

It is important to acknowledge that some pessimistic views were likewise expressed as to the potential for the Plans to make a difference.

Key messages and what consultees want to see going forward

In sum, the following key messages emerged from the consultation for the BSO. Consultees thought that:

- The BSO needs to do more to ensure that its communication is fully accessible and inclusive.
- The BSO urgently needs to do more to ensure that IT systems that the BSO develops or is involved in developing and procuring are fully accessible.
- The BSO needs to develop its equality evidence base – and to actively use it to identify and address inequalities. The BSO should set itself challenging targets using measurable performance indicators against these inequalities.

- The BSO needs to do more on disability equality training, especially for line managers.
- Coproduction - the BSO needs to take any work forward together with, rather than for, people in the equality groupings.
- Mainstreaming and strategic level actions – The Plans are not representative of the breadth of BSO functions.¹ More service areas should be reflected in the Plans. The BSO should also do more to integrate equality/diversity elements at strategic as well as operational level.

What the BSO will do as a result of the consultation

In response to the issues raised, the Equality Unit engaged with colleagues across a number of BSO service areas. As a result, the final Plans presented for approval include the following key additions:

- new actions by the BSO Communications and Engagement team relating to accessible and inclusive communication across the organisation.²
- new governance actions relating to the mainstreaming of equality considerations in the development and procurement of IT systems.³
- new HR action to analyse and share equality monitoring data with staff on the uptake of flexible working from day 1 and hybrid working by equality category.
- Coproduction - actions to strengthen the role for Tapestry in working with Human Resources and other teams (including on disability equality training; reviewing line manager training and guidance; examining the need for a dedicated carers policy as well as targeted leadership development programmes).

¹ As consultees remarked: “The message that equality and diversity are everyone's business does not come across in the Plans. Some departments do not appear to have contributed any actions at all. This plan does not appear to be organisation-wide.”

² This includes the development of a style guide; website audit and subsequent roll out of changes; and awareness campaign for staff.

³ This includes a checklist for business cases; an accountability matrix and guidance for staff representing the BSO on regional groups; and SMT requiring assurance that evidence thereof has been produced.

Beyond changes to the Plans themselves, the Consultation Report includes the commitment to:

- integrate equality/diversity at the strategic level, including in strategic and corporate plans;
- progressively reflect a broader range of inequalities relating to BSO functions/business areas in the Equality and Disability Action Plans over the five-year span;
- once progress towards more robust baseline data has been made, to set itself challenging targets (where meaningful), and to review progress against these as well as lessons learned when targets are not achieved.

4 Conclusions

BSO Board are asked to

- 1) consider the consultation outcomes and**
- 2) approve the final Equality and Disability Action Plans 2023-28.**

The final Plans need to be submitted to the Equality Commission by 30th September.

Once approved, the Plans and the Consultation Report will be published on the BSO website, in line with statutory commitments. Accessible formats of the Plans will likewise be produced and made available on the BSO website.