

# Supporting Our Local LGBT+ Communities in Somerset

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018



## **Proposal One – Community Venue**

### **Background**

Equality Officers in Somerset have acknowledged for some time that the support available for LGBT communities in Somerset is patchy. There are social groups that generally cater for the older generation of the LGBT community and a well-regarded support network for 13 – 19 year olds. This leaves a gap of support for those aged between 19 and around 45 to 50. It was acknowledged that some of this social support is being provided by cities within close proximity (but out of county) but any peer support is not available in Somerset. Public sector support is provided through usual sources.

### **Gaps**

To identify these gaps a conversation took place between key LGBT organisations and Equality Officers. During this conversation the following gaps were identified:

- Under 13's
- Parents Group
- 23-50 age range
- Trans women
- Broader issue of resilience and mental health
- Young trans
- Hate crime reporting within the community

### **Proposal**

The following proposal looks to overcome some of the gaps identified above

#### **Office and Front Door Space**

Provide an office space for VCS organisations to use on a drop in basis. This will predominately be for LGBT organisations and will provide a single space to work as well as giving space to work together. It will also provide a single point of contact for the LGBT community in relation to support. Opening times for the space will be led by the community and will most likely be broader than 9 – 5.

#### **Office Manager**

The role will manage the office space, ensuring that maximum usage is made of the space available whilst ensuring that the LGBT community can meet. The manager will provide a single point of contact for LGBT organisations and individuals, liaising with them to manage their use of the space available. The role will manage marketing and promotion of the space as well as bookings.

#### **Community Development worker**

The role will have a role going out and finding LGBT organisations based in Somerset to create a greater understanding of support mechanisms and gaps in this. It will also act as contact for LGBT individuals wanting support in Somerset. The role will use the space as a meeting space for meeting individuals. The role will cover the office manager is their absence.

#### **Meeting/Group space**

Provide a free or cheap space for LGBT (and potentially other VCS groups) to use to meet informally with members of their community. This space will be informal and predominately be available for group get together and informal gatherings. The Office and front door space will provide more formal small meeting space.

### **Connection to existing organisations**

The role and space will work to pull together existing organisations and be a celebration of LGBT and wider equality and diversity. It will provide a space for organisations to interact and work together.

### **Feedback on Proposal One – Community Venue**

- How would we fund it?
  - We are looking at what is an option and then working on how to fund it.
- Could it be a focal point for homophobia?
  - Sometimes it is about working with partners, so it is provided in the same space as something else
  - It could make a statement
  - People would need to make the statement that they are going into it for a reason
  - If it is not in a public space such as hidden down a back street or somewhere without public lighting, then it could make people feel less safe. This would specifically be an issue for someone from the trans community.
    - Lighting and parking would need to be considered
  - Someone thought there was a venue in Bath. The group discussed the fact that there was a café and the Gateway existed in Bath, but these were in other venues and 1 or 2 days a week.
  - Is Taunton ready for this? Is Somerset ready for this? Are there enough people out that would make it worthwhile?
  - Some people want to be out and about, and others are still afraid.
  - It needs to be a balance of access and visibility for the public and being safe for people to get into.
  - It might be a good idea to have it as part of a wider building
  - Is there enough demand for this?
    - Does an out community exist in Somerset for there to be a need?
  - 2BU has always been in another venue. They have members who are not out and like the anonymity to be able to access support and it not being public while they are going there.
  - The group felt that Somerset was not ready for a public space. More support was needed to increase visibility in Somerset and reduce the actual or perceived stigma.

## **Proposal Two – Community Support**

### **Background**

Equality Officers in Somerset have acknowledged for some time that the support available for LGBT communities in Somerset is patchy. There are social groups that generally cater for the older generation of the LGBT community and a well-regarded support network for 13 – 19 year olds. This leaves a gap of support for those aged between 19 and around 45 to 50. It was acknowledged that some of this social support is being provided by cities within close proximity (but out of county) but any peer support is not available in Somerset. Public sector support is provided through usual sources.

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### **Proposal**

The following proposals will fill some of the gaps identified above:

### **Work with organisation specialising in LGBT**

The roles identified below will work in partnership with an organisation already established and working with the LGBT community.

### **Community Support worker**

The role will support members of the LGB community, building relationships with individuals and groups. With support, get them to engage in services already in existence as well as:

1. Run support group sessions
2. Organise activities or events so that individuals can meet other people
3. Will meet individuals referred through helplines or individual referrals to give support and support them through creation of an individual wellbeing plans

### **Co-ordinator**

Working with the Community Support worker, will work to identify groups in Somerset and work to create the connections and openings for the Community Development worker to develop. The role will work to ensure that the local community knows of the support available, creating a central resource such as website and social media coverage. The role will work to develop a practitioners group so that initiatives, issues and concerns are discussed with solutions found.

### **Events and initiatives**

The co-ordinator and support worker will determine the appetite for a Somerset Pride event and where there is appetite for such an event, will organise with the

community, setting up a small working group to get the event off the ground and manage ongoing Pride events over future years.

The co-ordinator and support worker will look at what events and initiatives can be run such as knit and natter lesbian group.

## **Feedback on Proposal 2 - Community Support**

- SARI would be very supportive of this proposal. It fits with the support that they currently provide and would address the gaps they have identified in Somerset
- Dan Bishop is an Avon and Somerset Police lead for LGBT+ it would be good to have someone like this but not affiliated to a public body.
- Bridgwater Pride – one is being arranged for next year.
- Somerset need to have the aspiration of having a Pride event
- It would be good to have some support on this and steer the creation of a Pride event
- A Pride event could start smaller and then grow. Pride in Bath started as a stall on the street (with Amnesty) and the Bath one started as part of the Carnival.
- What else might be needed in this section:
  - Advice on housing and benefits - someone could have to move due to homophobia
  - HIV support already exists
  - Lower level support (no professional counselling) something like peer support with things like advice for coming out and talking to parents about their experiences
  - Providing an advocacy role with organisations
  - Support with hate crime reporting
  - Signposting to services that already exist
  - Looking for hidden communities and groups

## **Proposal Three – Transgender Support and Training**

### **Background**

The Equality Act 2010 for the first time gave trans people explicit protection in their own right (in Great Britain) against discrimination by identifying gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. This has helped in the acceptance of the transgender community in recent years as well as increased visibility of transgender celebrities such as Caitlyn Jenner for one.

The transgender community is a diverse community and come from all walks of life. Some transgender people identify as male or female, and some identify as genderqueer, nonbinary or agender.

### **Challenges facing the community**

There are a number of challenges facing the community including

1. Harassment and stigma
2. Hate crime
3. Barriers to healthcare
4. Identity documentation
5. Lack of understanding and awareness amongst professionals
6. Resilience and mental health
7. Visibility of transgender

### **Proposal**

#### **Work with organisation specialising in LGB and T**

The roles identified below will work in partnership with an organisation already established and working with LGBT community, who has a good understanding of the transgender community.

#### **Support workers x 2**

Develop two roles, one for children, one for adults. The workers will undertake casework for children and their families and adults. They will develop a practitioners group to develop greater links to the work going on with the community. They develop a parent support group as well as general support group for trans people.

#### **Trainer and/or provider**

The person who undertakes the role will ideally come from the transgender community and will work to demystify transgender in schools, GP surgeries, Business and with public sector organisations.

The role will work to support and, if needs be, develop HR policy with the organisations above, giving a consistent message and approach to transgender.

## **Feedback on Proposal 3 – Transgender Support and Training**

- Should there be one support worker for children and one for adults?
- There is a real growing need for this but if you are separating it (from LGB) are you making it weaker?
- Is it worth combining proposals 2 and 3?
- There is definitely a need about raising awareness about Trans
- There is a need for the Trans community to be out and about and working
- Don't forget about it but it needs to be included within something else

- Children and young people's work would be a duplication of what is already being delivered by 2BU Somerset
- There is a 2-year waiting list at The Laurels. It might be that there is need for support for people waiting to go to The Laurels.
- Highest number of Trans related hate crime cases are in Somerset for the Avon and Somerset police area
- There is a lot of learning to be done around trans issues and sometimes leaving in with sexual orientation (LGB) has more impact than it being on its own.
- There is a lot of information online but is not easy to find or always correct.
- Need for education on Transgender in older generations more needed than in younger generations
- Rurality does make this an issue because it is not talked about and people don't see it
- Taunton still cant cope with same-sex couples holding hands
- There are some health surveys and research completed by Diversity Trust. These include feedback from the broad LGBT+ communities
- There was a conversation as to whether or not this was a duplication of services that already existed.
- Schools are having children that are questioning and require support. Social workers and teachers don't have the answers and in some cases don't have the information to meet the needs of these children and young people.
  - Is there a need for training and support for social workers and teachers around this?

## **Proposal 4 – Community Engagement**

### **Background**

Equality Officers in Somerset have acknowledged for some time that the support available for LGBT communities in Somerset is patchy. There are social groups that generally cater for the older generation of the LGBT community and a well-regarded support network for 13 – 19 year olds. This leaves a gap of support for those aged between 19 and around 45 to 50. It was acknowledged that some of this social support is being provided by cities within close proximity (but out of county) but any peer support is not available in Somerset. Public sector support is provided through usual sources.

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#### **Work with organisation specialising in LGBT**

The roles identified below will work in partnership with an organisation already established and working with the LGBT community.

#### **Engagement worker**

Work with existing LGBT communities, to improve the voice of the LGBT community within the public sector and wider community. This will include building relationships with individuals and existing groups. The role will work to ensure that the local community knows of the support available, creating a central resource such as website and social media coverage. The role will work to develop a practitioners group so that initiatives, issues and concerns are discussed with solutions found.

1. Organise engagement and consultation events lead by the community
2. Work with the community to maintain informal engagement and communication links
3. Organise activities or events so that individuals can meet other people
4. Organisation integration events to make the community more present in Somerset

#### **Events and initiatives**

Determine the appetite for a Somerset Pride event. Where there is an appetite for such an event work with the community to organise an event. Setting up a small working group to get the event off the ground and manage ongoing Pride events over future years.

Identify opportunities for other community, interaction and engagement events.

### **Event budget**

Maintain a small engagement budget to support community events and improving the visibility of community groups.

### **Feedback on Proposal 4 – Community Engagement**

- There was a description of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) role that currently works to identify small groups and communities of BME people and work with them to create an infrastructure. This is supported through event organisation and a small grant pot.
- There was a conversation as to whether or not the LGBT+ community feels part of Somerset?
- The group that is starting in Taunton feels like it is beginning to create a community.
- Because there is not a community or centre there could not be the foundation to build on.
- Could this be part of the support role?
  - So could Proposal 2, 3 and 4 be combined
- Drive is key for this.
- People need to come out and take part though.
- Sometimes when people don't come out then they cannot get out and get the support they need and that is out there.
- About looking at how things can work together
  - Smaller groups to work together and have a bigger impact and support one another and get more done.

## Other points

- Nothing is very visible
- Bristol is easier as they have community groups working together and social activities in close proximity
- Could there be the need for support with coming out perhaps through a peer support process
- Walk out – LGBT together
- Directory of what is going on – one point of contact
- Taunton Gay Group has support pages and links to other groups
- Some people feel in fear, sometimes during the day this can be worse
- There are more older people now coming out to their families but there is currently no support available to them around this.
- It would be good to have a single point of contact for this.
- There are other organisations what would want to support this. Could they be brought together to talk about it and how to take it forward?
  - Rethink
  - Counselling services
  - Police
  - Colleges – they already have a partnership arrangement with 2BU Somerset. They also usually have LGBT+ groups and societies on campus.
- Partnership funding to do this – working together to support this.
- It would be good to have a central point of contact for organisations to get support and guidance and access to the community
- There are organisations out there that could contribute to a funding pot:
  - Unions
  - Schools through the Schools Forum
  - Housing Providers
  - EDF
  - NHS
  - Military organisations
  - Hydrographic Office
  - Colleges
- Where are the places for adults to go?
- Young Farmers groups, is there an LGBT+ one?
- Be clear on the role of the worker – visit, help, act as a contact
- Whatever is done has to have longevity as it will take time to deliver
- UK Youth Parliament – working on LGBT rights
- 30+ - change in thinking
- How to get messages out there
- Creation of LGBT champions in certain sectors – visible, raise awareness and acceptance, raise profile
- Impact of GRA

## Feedback from Groups

- **Somerset Libraries -**
  - Somerset Libraries will be hosting an Outing the Past Festival for LGBT History Month on Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb in Taunton Library. We are still accepting application for speakers; however, the deadline is very strictly the 1<sup>st</sup> October. Speakers need to be able to speak for 20 minutes on a topic relating to LGBT history. There will be a nominal fee of £20 plus travel expenses. For more information about this and to apply visit - <http://www.outingthepast.org.uk/>
  - Alternatively, if you are interested in just having a stand on the day or something similar this may also be possible. Please email Alex on [acunninghamscott@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:acunninghamscott@somerset.gov.uk) to enquire. The full timetable of events will be confirmed in late October, and we would really appreciate your help in promoting it. Follow @SomersetLib on Twitter for updates.
- **2BU - <https://www.2bu-somerset.co.uk/>**
  - 13 to 18 youth support every Wednesday in Taunton
  - Supporting in 15 Schools and in colleges
  - Frome YMCA has an affiliated group
  - There is a growing need for support for trans young people under 13
  - Tea Days -
- **Beaumont Society - <https://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/>**
  - National organisation the current President is based in Somerset
  - Mutual support network run by volunteers. There is a subscription that contributes to the running of the organisation and a quarterly newsletter.
  - Somerset currently doesn't have good coverage and the group is not as well attended as other areas.
  - The group in Taunton meets on the Last Thursday of the month at Staplegrove village hall. Mainly attended by trans women.
- **SARI - <https://www.sariweb.org.uk/>**
  - Hate crime charity currently providing support for hate crime victims in Somerset.
  - Not an LGBT specific charity but working with partners that have this knowledge. In Somerset this is Diversity Trust
  - Hate crime can cover anything from verbal abuse to physical violence.
  - SARI need the support of the community leaders and groups to make people realise that they need to report hate crimes.
  - There is an out-of-office service when the offices are closed.
  - Online abuse is on the rise
  - The response of some feminists to the reforms of the Gender Recognition Act and the impact of Brexit. There is lots of misinformation in the media at the moment.
- **Mind Transline - <http://mindtws.org.uk/trans-plus/>**

- Joint pilot project between Taunton and Bristol Mind. Now providing the service for the whole UK. No longer nationally funding so are currently fundraising.
  - All call handlers are from the Trans community or allies
  - The service is currently available Monday and Friday evening 8pm till 12am. It is an emotional support line
  - Callers from age 13 to 83 years old.
  - In need of more Call Handlers
  - Investigating text and webchat options for support.
- **Taunton Gay Group** - <https://tauntongaygroup.weebly.com/>
    - Started April 2018 as a social group in Taunton
    - No funding for the group. Being run voluntarily by the founder and promoted through Facebook and Twitter etc
    - Feels like there is no LGBT community visible in Taunton and Somerset.
    - Created to provide a social group and place for people to keep in touch, talk to people and find support with like minded people
    - It is not a support group.
    - Reaction has been positive about it being in a public space (currently takes place in The Plough pub in Taunton)
    - The group is becoming more diverse and single people are turning up as well.
    - The web page has information about other groups and support that is available. This is being updated as more things come out of the woodwork.
- **Diversity Trust** - <http://www.diversitytrust.org.uk/>
    - Community Interest Company (CIC) founded in 2012 and based in Somerset
    - LGBTQ+ led organisation
    - Deliver training and consultancy on equality, diversity and inclusion across the UK
    - Focussed on the South and West of England
    - Deliver specialist services including LGBTQ+ youth services and LGBTQ voice and influence projects in other areas including South Gloucestershire and Swindon
    - Partners with SARI and Compass Disability in the 'Every Victim Matters' Somerset Hate Crime Service; including North Somerset and Bath & North East Somerset
    - Partners with SARI in hate crime services in South Gloucestershire