



Fairness, Respect Equality Shropshire Ltd

Human Rights Strategy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Human Rights are often seen as something imposed from Europe or the UN that apply only to issues like immigration, developing nations' regimes and the treatment of civilians in war zones. They are seen as irrelevant to life in Shropshire, and as a bureaucratic burden without day-to-day benefits. A useful comparison is with health and safety legislation, which is often dismissed as burdensome and over-protective, without recognising the thousands of lives it has saved and the protection it gives for employees and the wider public.
- 1.2. On 22 October 2014 FRESH hosted a one-day Human Rights workshop as part of the British Institute of Human Rights annual Human Rights tour. The workshop had highlighted both the importance of Human Rights in our daily lives, and the threats to its future political legitimacy in the UK. Participants identified a wide range of local Human Rights issues, and suggested possible responses to many of them.
- 1.3 FRESH devoted its January Equality Forum workshops to developing the basis of a local Human Rights action plan. Participants explored the relevance of Human Rights work in Shropshire, identified the key threats to its future political legitimacy here, possible responses to these threats, and suggested the elements of a Shropshire educational and campaigning response leading up to the General Election on 7th May 2015.

2. Local Human Rights issues, responses and challenges

- 2.1. Both events had highlighted local Human Rights issues, among which were:
 - Media reporting (bias and ignorance)
 - Modern slavery and human trafficking
 - Social tensions exploited by UKIP
 - Domestic violence
 - Discrimination against disabled people:
 - By SMEs - lack of employers' HR awareness
 - Reductions in services
 - Disempowerment
 - Lack of frontline support (e.g. reception at Guildhall)
 - Commissioning services – need to safeguard quality of services
 - Bedroom tax
 - Shortage of carers
 - The tests on eligibility for welfare benefits
 - Poor public transport provision



- Discrimination against people with mental health issues:
 - Lack of mental health services
 - Lack of awareness of people's rights
 - The impact the 'bedroom tax'
 - The tests on eligibility for welfare benefits
- Lack of appropriate housing for vulnerable people
- Ignorance among young people of HR and its relevance to them
- Lack of sharing good HR practice
- Lack of awareness of Human Rights in social care for LGBT people, women, children, homeless people – different issues impact on different people
- Disparate rural communities who feel they don't have a voice
- Young women being groomed in Telford
- Many older people in Shropshire experience discrimination, affecting their right to family life
- Cutbacks in services e.g. universal provision of fire alarms – right to life – and police cutbacks – less time to investigate cases
- Freedom of expression vs right to religion – protest against local Muslim prayer room
- Cuts in Legal Aid provision and access, especially for women experiencing domestic violence
- The impact the 'bedroom tax' on tenants for whom no alternative accommodation is available
- The lack of hostel accommodation for homeless people
- The impact on cultural and family life for Gypsies and Travellers faced with no alternative other than bricks and mortar accommodation
- The impact on access to services and community resources of poor public transport provision; of particular relevance for access to A & E services.
- Fuel poverty for people on low incomes

2.2. Similarly, a range of possible responses and challenges had been identified:

- Talking to young people about HR
- Locating stories giving everyday examples of HR
- Media – information/education to voters – what Human Rights do for us
- Raise awareness, change attitudes. get people involved through:
 - Meetings
 - Road shows
 - Promoting BIHR
 - Political lobbying
 - Local campaigns
 - Letters to media
 - More workshop days – looking at particular HR issues and local case studies
 - Training/challenging/sharing events
 - HR lists in council meeting rooms
 - Take through Youth Parliament campaign for 'civics' lessons
 - HR Day events
 - Schools competitions and assemblies
 - Feed into Age UK 'The Bigger Picture' events



- Networking:
 - Link with job fairs and Chamber of Commerce
 - NHS Health Trust constituency meetings
 - Politics students at Shrewsbury College
 - Set up Shropshire HR support network
 - Different agencies working together – advocacy
 - Various groups affected working together
 - SAND could interpret examples maybe
 - Local clergy
 - Local community groups
 - Local Amnesty groups
 - Local organisations and groups representing sections of the wider community which face economic and/or social disadvantage, such as farmers, young people, older people, and people in fuel poverty
- Individual challenges
- Report cases or/and ask FRESH
- Remind people about the long history of Human Rights, and where the concept came from, especially the Holocaust in the Second World War
- Highlight Human Rights aspects of local issues and actions proposed or taken by statutory service providers.
- Collect local examples of potential Human Rights issues, especially those likely to have resonance with mainstream communities
- Develop a strategy for engaging with a largely hostile press and media on local Human Rights stories and issues
- Engage and work with the BIHR Human Rights day participants who identified a willingness to become Human Rights ‘champions’

3. **Strategy**

FRESH intends to raise the profile of Human Rights, within its own areas of influence and activity and also in the wider public sphere. It will do this by working with other organisations and individuals to identify key Human Rights outcomes and develop collective action plans in the following areas:

3.1. **Press and media**

We will seek to raise press and media understanding of and engagement with the importance of Human Rights to individuals, communities and organisations in Shropshire, through:

- Letters to the local papers
- Appearances on local; radio and television
- Ensuring consistent engagement with local press and media to publicise local Human Rights issues and events

3.2. **Public sector organisations**

Public sector organisations have important Human Rights responsibilities in the way they decide on their service priorities and deliver services. They are subject to challenge over breaches of the Human Rights Act in ways not applicable to other organisations.



However, Human Rights are often relatively low on the public sector agenda, and are not widely understood by employees or managing bodies.

FRESH will therefore seek to work with public sector organisations to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of Human Rights in public sector work
- Highlight the Human Rights implications of decisions about public services, especially in respect of those made about cutbacks or changed service delivery methods.
- Support public sector organisations to develop robust Human Rights assessments as part of or in parallel with their Equality Impact Assessment processes
- Challenge poor public sector Human Rights practice, and support individuals who are subjected to breaches of their Human Rights
- Work with public sector employees with responsibility for Equality and Diversity, to enable them to give appropriate attention to Human Rights issues in their work

3.3. **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**

Discrimination against disabled people by some SMEs had been identified as an issue in discussions at BIHR Human Rights day. Local employers are likely to be no different to the general public – and many participants in the BIHR event – in their lack of awareness of Human Rights law and its relevance to their activities and lives.

FRESH will seek discussions with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and local small business networks about:

- The UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
- The perceived relevance of Human Rights to Shropshire small businesses
- The need for training and/or information about Human Rights for people running such organisations
- The availability of resources and provision to meet those needs
- FRESH's possible role in this process

3.4. **Voluntary and community sector organisations**

Both events have highlighted the need for greater awareness and understanding of Human Rights issues among voluntary and community sector organisations and groups, both in their role as employers of staff and users of volunteers, and in their wider engagement with their local communities.

FRESH will seek discussions with Shropshire VCSA about:

- Analysing current levels of Human Rights knowledge among their members
- Raising the knowledge and profile of Human Rights among their members
- Sourcing and resourcing Human Rights information and support for their members



3.5. Information, training and advocacy

Another issue emphasised by participants at both events was the need for accessible Human Rights information, training and advocacy.

FRESH will discuss with different organisations and partners, including BIHR, local Amnesty groups, Shropshire Council and other statutory agencies, how to resource and deliver geographically, economically and culturally accessible Human Rights information, training and advocacy to meet local needs.

3.6. Networking and collective working

The potential agenda for Human Rights work across Shropshire is huge, especially taking account of the particular impact of rurality on both perceptions of Human Rights and the logistics of providing information and support..

FRESH will:

- Use its existing networks and partnerships to seek collective responses to this need, and to securing the necessary resources to do the work
- Seek appropriate new partnerships to enable greater Human Rights expertise and commitment to be brought into the county
- Seek to develop new networks of support, enthusiasm and expertise to develop and implement the work across the county

3.7. Campaigning

As suggested above, one of the key restraints on implementing a coherent Human Rights strategy in Shropshire is the very low level of Human Rights awareness in the county. This implies the need for a lively campaign, both to raise general awareness of the legal, community and individual relevance of Human Rights, and to encourage wide involvement in the work needed to provide the resources needed to provide the necessary support.

Such a campaign should be s a staged process, based on:

- **Short-term campaigning actions**
Before 27th March 2015 during the lead-up to the General Election on 7th May, FRESH should:
 - Write to all Shropshire candidates asking for their views on the relevance, importance of Human Rights, and the future of the UK Human Rights Act
 - Write to local press and media to publicise the campaign
 - Attempt to have candidates questioned at local hustings about' views on Human Rights.
 - Explore the costs and feasibility of placing a full-page advertisement in the Shropshire Star about the Human Rights campaign and its relevance to Shropshire people's everyday lives
- **Longer-term campaigning actions**
Of particular importance to Forum participants was the need for FRESH to work with
 - Tenants, social housing providers and other relevant agencies on housing-related Human Rights issues



- Homeless people and those at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, and with groups and agencies connected with these issues
- Claimants and claimant support organisations on Housing Benefit rules and sanctions and their impact on different groups and communities
- Public agencies on the need for them to carry out Human Rights Impact Assessments as well as Equality Impact Assessments on their policies and working processes, including the development of a pro-forma assessment process

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4. FRESH Human Rights Action Plan: 2015-16

This action plan is for FRESH, but it will be impossible to turn it into reality unless we form successful alliances and partnerships and work collectively. It will depend on action-centred networks, with a shared agenda and an understanding of the issues and process involved. This also means that the action plan is itself a live and flexible framework for the work that is needed.

Issues and Outcomes

	Issue	Outcome(s)
P&M	Press and media	Increased press and media understanding of and engagement with the importance of Human Rights to individuals, communities and organisations in Shropshire
PSOs	Public sector organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of relevance and importance of Human Rights in policy decisions, resource allocation, employment and service delivery • Increased use of Human Rights impact assessments by PSOs • Poor Human Rights practice identified, challenged and modified • Greater recognition and integration of Human Rights perspectives in Equality and Diversity policy and practice
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater Shropshire SME awareness of and engagement with the importance and relevance of Human Rights to their employees, services, customers or clients, and communities • Improved availability of Human Rights training, information and support for Shropshire SMEs
VCOs	Voluntary and community sector organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of levels of Human Rights knowledge in Shropshire VCS • Improved awareness of and engagement with Human Rights issues by Shropshire VCS organisations • Improved Human Rights information and support for Shropshire VCS organisations
ITA	Information, training and advocacy	Improved availability of Human Rights information, training and advocacy across Shropshire



NCW	Networking and collective working	Organisations and individuals with a shared Human Rights agenda for Shropshire and a shared commitment to work on the issues.
STCA	Short-term campaigning actions	Human Rights to be an issue discussed in Shropshire during the 2015 General Election campaign
LTCA	Longer-term campaigning actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Rights to feature regularly in public sphere; press and media, public sector discussion, etc • Greater awareness of and engagement with Human Rights issues by groups, organisations and individuals in Shropshire

Action plan

No.		Action(s)	By when	By whom
1.	NCW	Liaise with Human Rights groups and organisations to identify likely organisations and individuals in the county (see press and Media (1))	Mid February 2015	FRESh
2.	NCW	Ensure that BIHR event Human Rights 'ambassadors' and local Amnesty groups are informed and engaged in the work	End February 2015 and ongoing	FRESh
3.	P&M	Discuss Human Rights issues in Shropshire with relevant journalists in local press and media	End February 2015	FRESh and others (Equality Forum members, Amnesty group members, etc)
4.	STCA	Identify all Shropshire candidates in General Election to be held on 07/05/15	End February 2015	FRESh



No.		Action(s)	By when	By whom
5.	NCW	Convene a half-day consultation and action planning workshop to share experiences, priorities and ideas, and agree the basis for a shared work programme	Mid March 2015	FRESH
6.	STCA	Write to all candidates seeking their views on the importance and relevance of Human Rights to Shropshire people	Mid March 2015	FRESH and others (Equality Forum members, Amnesty group members, etc)
7.	STCA	Arrange for questions to be asked of candidates at hustings in Shropshire, either via hustings chairs or by people attending.	Plans by Mid March 2015	FRESH and others (Equality Forum members, Amnesty group members, etc)
8.	P&M	Set up programme of letter writing, requests to discuss issues on local radio	Plans by Mid March 2015	FRESH and others (Equality Forum members, Amnesty group members, etc)
9.	P&M	Monitor programme of letter writing, requests to discuss issues on local radio	Plans by Mid March 2015	FRESH
10.	P&M	Set up and co-ordinate press conferences following hustings events	Plans by Mid March 2015	FRESH to arrange in advance for individuals to attend
11.	NCW	Prepare a draft collective work programme and circulate to workshop participants and beyond and invite responses	End March 2015	FRESH
12.	STCA	Find out dates and location of General Election hustings across the county	End March 2015	FRESH



No.	Action(s)	By when	By whom
13.	STCA Ensure press releases issued to highlight candidates' responses and importance of Human Rights to the everyday lives of Shropshire people	End March onwards	Individual FRESH and Forum members and people attending hustings
14.	LTCA Contact public agencies about their approach to Human Rights Impact Assessments on their policies and working processes, and the need for and framework of a pro-forma assessment process	April – June 2015	FRESH and Forum partners
15.	P&M Set up regular press releases and articles on Human Rights, and follow up	From June 2015	FRESH and others (Equality Forum members, Amnesty group members, etc)
16.	ITA Explore availability of Human Rights information, training and advocacy across Shropshire	June – August 2015	FRESH and Forum partners
17.	LTCA Set up a half-day information and consultation event for Shropshire social housing providers, tenants' organisations and groups, and housing information and advice agencies to explore possibility of a housing Human Rights information and support campaign	June 2015	FRESH and Forum partners
18.	LTCA Set up a half-day information and consultation event for Shropshire homeless and benefit claimant support agencies and organisations and (if possible) homeless people and claimants to explore possibility of a benefits and homelessness Human Rights information and support campaign	June - July 2015	FRESH and Forum partners
19.	ITA With service providers, identify priority needs for Human Rights training and advocacy provision in Shropshire, and develop action plan to find the necessary resources.	August - October 2015	FRESH and Forum partners

