

Annual Diversity Update 2006/7

1. Introduction

This report provides a progress update on our diversity work over the last year. Overall it's been our best year yet and this was highlighted by us achieving the LGC's Council of the year award. In fact a substantial amount of the criteria that the judges looked for here related to equality and diversity and we received positive feedback about our work in this area. This included our work on issues surrounding migrant workers and Gypsies and Travellers and also our reaching out to everyone initiative.

This document provides progress updates on the key areas of our diversity work since August 2006 and also in relation to our legislative duties surrounding race, disability and gender. It sets out what we have achieved, where we are now and our plans for the year ahead.

2. Achievements in the last year

Some of our key achievements in the last year include:

- **Gypsy and Traveller scrutiny review**

We successfully completed our Gypsy and Traveller scrutiny review. This was published as a full report and also a summary leaflet, both of which are available on our website. The actions resulting for us from the review have been pinned down in service delivery plans for 2007/8. As Gypsies and Travellers are our largest ethnic minority group the review has been one of the main areas of our race equality work over the last year.

One of the results of the review was to designate a lead officer for Gypsy and Traveller issues. Kath Smith, Housing Services manager has taken on this role which will be really valuable in co-ordinating our approach and ensuring the actions carried out from the review are implemented.

One of the key areas for continued work is engagement with our Gypsy and Traveller communities. The consultation we conducted as part of the review was extremely valuable so we want to continue this dialogue on a more regular basis.

Building awareness and understanding is also an on-going role for us. This has been incorporated into our community outreach work, by using community presentations and citizenship projects to raise awareness about diversity in the district.

- **Worcestershire capacity project**

There is good news for Worcestershire this year as Diversity Officers throughout the County have successfully secured £230,000 from the WMLGA capacity building fund. This is the first time we have worked with our neighbouring authorities to get funding for a county wide diversity project that will enable us to really take our work forward.



The money will be used for:

- Initial mapping of diversity issues in the county.
- Community engagement – through networks and events with community groups.
- Assisting with impact assessments, consultation and feedback.
- Capacity for local authorities working towards level 3 of the Equality Standard.
- Training – by conducting a training needs analysis and a train the trainer programme.
- Evaluation - through formal assessment by DIALOG in relation to the Equality Standard.
- Sharing best practice and learning with other organisations.

We are leading on the communications and marketing strategy for the project. Councillor Mrs Audrey Steel, our Board Member for Equalities and Rural Affairs is chairing the project steering group, consisting of senior officers and members from each authority.

Rukhsana Koser, Equality and Diversity Manager at Worcestershire County Council said “This is a fantastic project and is set to make a real difference to the people of Worcestershire by helping us to work together on equality and diversity issues.”

▪ **Chartermark**

We have obtained the Chartermark customer service standard in even more service areas including strategy & communications, legal and support services and planning. We are now on our way to achieve Chartermark status in all of our service units. This is extremely useful in aiding our diversity work especially in relation to Chartermark criteria such as publicising access to services, meeting the diverse needs of customers and having a positive impact on the community. Chartermark is therefore a useful tool in enabling each service unit to consider diversity issues in relation to our customers and help mainstream the agenda.

3. The new Disability and Gender Equality duties

In the last year two new important duties have come into place, The Disability Discrimination Act (December 2006) and the Gender Equality Duty (April 2007). These have placed new duties on public organisations to work towards gender and disability equality in a similar way that we work towards race equality. This means that we must set out how we are working towards disability and gender equality by producing a disability and gender equality scheme.

On 10 July 2007 our disability and gender equality scheme was agreed at the Executive Board meeting. This followed on from a period of consultation back in autumn 2006 when our disability scheme was first drafted. Due to the new gender equality duty that came into place in April we decided not to publish separate schemes and join them up instead. This meant that we continued the consultation and also asked questions around gender equality as well as disability. The results of the consultation are available on our website along with our disability and gender equality scheme. It is vital to remember that the scheme called ‘Diversity focus – disability and gender equality’ is an add-on document to our overall diversity policy rather than something completely separate. **In the future the schemes will be merged together into one document in light of the new single equalities framework that is coming into place.**

▪ **Migrant workers**

Since the publication of our research in 2006, we have continued to work with local growers and public sector partners. We meet growers on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues relating to migrant workers. In particular, and following a number of Labour Providers losing their licenses, we support growers in understanding the role of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority.

We continue to keep a 'watching brief' on housing issues, and the Primary Care Trust work in a similar way on access to health care. One of the findings of the research was that only 50% of migrant workers register with GPs, which could potentially put pressure on 'out of hours' services. Neither scenario has proved to result in issues at this stage. We have worked with the press to ensure that there is fair and balanced reporting of issues that involve migrant workers. We are also working with a variety of partners to reach out to migrant communities, for instance through the PACT programme.

On a wider scale, we are closely involved with regional research which will influence national policies relating to migration issues. **This research will be published in October this year and will be widely available.**

4. Equalities working group

Our in-house equalities team chaired by Cllr Mrs Audrey Steel have continued to drive our diversity work throughout the organisation. This is essential if we are to mainstream the agenda and ensure everyone is taking equalities into account as part of their work.

In October 2006 the terms of reference for the group were updated and all of the reps are taking a more active involvement in the work of the group. One of the standard items at meetings is 'diversity news' to provide information about the variety of initiatives that are taking place. Examples of these include:

- The group conducted an audit of services provided for people with disabilities
- New website sections on gender and disability equality, with new links and information
- Changes to personnel policies made in light of new Age Discrimination legislation
- Reviewed job vacancy publicity
- Promoting housing adaptation grants for people with disabilities
- Revenues and benefits team working with the third age group to provide visits to over 60's to assist with services.
- Disability awareness training and basic polish language courses at contact centres
- Regular articles on diversity issues in our staff magazine
- Improved multi-media facilities in committee rooms and chamber at the civic centre to help
- Consultation on emerging planning documents and the joint core strategy.
- 'Access champion' designated in planning services to champion inclusive design.
- Equalities working group rep chaired the enforcement sub group on the RTPI's Gypsy and Traveller Task group and produced a good practice note.
- Environmental protection team focusing a project on migrant workers and improving health and safety in the workplace.
- Discussed implications from school citizenship sessions in light of diversity issues raised and future actions.

The meetings also allow the group to monitor progress on the diversity action plan and join up initiatives from different departments. Over the last year more reps have joined the group and the meetings provide a great opportunity for officers to share learning and also discuss current and emerging equalities legislation and implications for us.

5. Impact assessments

Over the last year diversity impact assessments have been completed including assessments on our priorities and promises, licensing policy review and the new community strategy. We have also built a screening mechanism into our forward plan so that assessments are considered and planned out at an early stage.

We still need to increase the momentum of impact assessments taking place though and boost staff confidence in conducting them. In light of the new disability and gender legislation it is also important that assessments focus as equally on gender and disability as they do on race equality. Due to this **we are running impact assessment training sessions for officers to help improve in this area.**

6. The Equality Standard

We self assessed ourselves as being at level 2 of the equality standard for local government in 2006. Level 2 of the standard is about assessment and consultation on our policies and services. We see level two as being a challenging step of the standard to take as we need to conduct impact assessments on more than 70% of our policies to get to level 3. This means that we still have some way to go to reach the next level and by increasing the rate of impact assessments this will help us to go forward.

We also need to be aware of the changes in the equality standard as it has now been revised so there are further actions we need to take to ensure we rigorously meet the updated criteria. As part of the capacity project though **we will undergo a peer review process so that we can get external feedback on our work** and develop actions for us to progress through the standard in the longer term.

7. Diversity action plan and monitoring our progress

We are now using our website to publish more information about our equality and diversity work. This includes information about impact assessments, projects such as our Gypsy and Traveller Scrutiny review and also research and consultation that we are conducting.

Rather than having separate action plans for race, gender and disability we continue to have an overall diversity action plan which covers all of these areas. The actions from this are then also set out in service plans so that they are monitored as part of overall performance management system. Quarterly diversity updates are then provided to members and the performance monitoring scrutiny team through the signals of success performance report.

Our diversity action plan will be updated in light of the new schemes that have been produced. In light of the move towards a single equalities framework we will also review the schemes next year along with other Worcestershire authorities.

8. Promoting race equality

Over the last year we have continued to promote race equality through annual events such as the eastern arts festival. And also through communications such as articles in our magazine right through to community presentations.

As one of our race equality duties we are required to conduct ethnic monitoring of staff. This information is also set out as part of our performance monitoring. We currently employ 339.1 full time members of staff and 1.8% are from ethnic minority communities, which has increased from 1.1% in 2005/6. As the overall BME population in the district is 1.2% this is a positive reflection.

Over the last year two racial incidents were reported to us and actions were taken in liaison with Worcestershire Racial Equality Council.

9. The year ahead

Throughout this report the sections highlighted in bold identify the key areas of work for us over the next year.

Overall since August 2006 we have made a lot of progress on our equality and diversity work. We have received positive feedback on the work we have done from the Audit Commission but it is also an area that has been identified for improvement. Our recent CPA feedback report highlighted that we need to develop a more strategic approach to equality and diversity and build on the good work that has already been undertaken in terms of understanding our communities. More impact assessments will also enable us to move towards level 3 of the Equality Standard.

As already mentioned within this report we have fully taken these comments on board and are taking actions to develop a more strategic approach to our work. This is also being linked into developing a new council strategy with more themes and specific outcome measures, so we can really ensure we are having an impact on our communities. These will also include measures on equality and diversity and will make stronger links between our corporate strategy, Wychavon's community plan and our various equality schemes. Bearing this in mind it is an exciting and challenging year ahead.

A special dedication and thanks to all the officers and members that have driven our equalities work over the last year including our in-house equalities team and Councillor Mrs Audrey Steel, Chairman of our equalities working group. And also key partners who provide valuable help and support such as Ruhksana Koser, Corporate Diversity Manager, Worcestershire County Council and Peter Oteng, Manager, Worcestershire Racial Equality Council.

For more information or for copies of the documents mentioned in this review please contact Rob Mace, Community Outreach Officer, Strategy & Communications Team, Wychavon District Council. Call 01386 565517 or email robin.mace@wychavon.gov.uk

Also see the diversity section on our website <http://wychavon.whub.org.uk/home/wdcindex/wdc-diversity.htm>

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