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Diversity peer challenge

Self-assessment

This document first sets out our context and our equalities journey. It then looks at what we are doing to address each of the five themes of the Equalities Framework for Local Government, to complement the more detailed tables of evidence.

1. Context & scene setting

- **About the district**

Wychavon is in the south of the county of Worcestershire in the West Midlands. The district covers 260 square miles and is the largest of six districts in Worcestershire. It has a population of around 118,000, which is predicted to increase at a faster rate than the national average. The district is made up of the three towns of Droitwich Spa, Evesham and Pershore, and nearly 100 villages.

There are over 50,000 homes in Wychavon. 76% are owned outright compared with 68.2% nationally. House prices are higher than average, however, within the county, Wychavon has experienced the greatest fall in house prices over the past year. There is an annual shortfall in availability of affordable housing.

The district is home to over 5,000 businesses. A significant percentage of the workforce is employed in manufacturing, hotels and restaurants, agriculture, food distribution and the public sector. Unemployment levels were significantly below national and regional averages at 1.5%; however they are now around 6%. There has been a 96% rise in Job Seekers' Allowance claimants. The average mean weekly wage is £565.10¹. In recent years there has been a noticeable rise in the local migrant worker population, as a result of agriculture and food processing employers targeting recruitment at Eastern European and South African workers for jobs that they are unable to attract UK residents to.

The area is relatively well-off and lies in the bottom third of most deprived local authorities. It has no super output areas either in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation² top 10% or the top 20% nationally. The district's overall ranking in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation is 261 out of 354. However, there are localised pockets of deprivation in some parts of the district. We are focusing on eleven of these through our 'Areas of Highest Need' project, one of our case studies included in our evidence.

Wychavon is located close to national transport networks. However, the nature of the district means that some residents experience isolation, as there are few public transport options available in some rural areas and poor access to services.

Crime levels are low and the rate of violent crime is significantly lower than the national figure. Despite this surveys show that crime and community safety issues remain a high priority for Wychavon residents for what makes somewhere a good place to live, although this is now not an area seen as needing improvement. People in Wychavon are healthier than the England average. However, rates of road injury and deaths and estimated rates of adult obesity and type two diabetes are higher than average.

¹ Annual survey of hours and earnings 2006

² Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (revised)

The district has suffered several major flooding events during the last decade: in April 1998, June 1999 and the most severe in July 2007. Over 1,500 homes, 220 businesses, parks, open spaces and other public amenities were badly affected by the 2007 floods. The impact was felt across most of the district, with Droitwich High Street, Port Street and Waterside in Evesham, Hampton, Sedgeberrow, Cropthorne, Broadway and Pershore amongst the worst affected.

- **Who lives in Wychavon?**

There is a large older population compared to the regional and national average. 22.8% of the population is aged between 0 and 19 years, 58.8% falls into the 20 – 64 age range and 18.5% are 65 or over.

Only 2.6% of the district's population is from an ethnic minority³. Most local people are from a White British background, although the proportion of Non-British White residents is relatively high for the region. This is related to the high number of migrant workers in the district, which is the same as the West Midlands average. There are an estimated 700 to 800⁴ Gypsies and Travellers, the district's largest ethnic minority. The latest register of electors shows that - while the White British nationality makes up the significant majority of respondents, there is a significant number of eastern Europeans in the district.

Health surveys estimate that there are 15,007 – 16,922 adults with disabilities in the district, which is around 14% of the population 5% of residents claim incapacity benefit.

- **About the council**

Wychavon District Council was formed in 1974. Our headquarters are at the Civic Centre in Pershore, where most of our 425 staff are based. We also have Community Contact Centres in Droitwich, where residents can access district and Worcestershire County Council services, and at Evesham, where this is further enhanced with Job Centre Plus and Police services under one roof.

We have 45 councillors representing 32 wards. The Conservative group controls the council with 34 seats, the Liberal Democrats have 11 seats. We've operated a cabinet style of governance since 2002. Our Leader, Paul Middlebrough, chairs our Executive Board of five other councillors:

Community Engagement and Rural Affairs	Audrey Steel
Environment and Contracted Services	Anna Mackison
Leisure, Culture and Regeneration	Tom McDonald
Planning, Housing, Health	Judy Pearce (deputy leader)
Resources	Bob Banks

The Board meets monthly and makes decisions on key issues, on services and the future direction of the council. Cllr Audrey Steel is responsible for equalities and diversity issues, she chairs our Equalities Working Group, which comprises representatives from service units.

Our Managing Director, Jack Hegarty, and our seven heads of service make up our Senior Management Team, which leads the organisation and manages and makes decisions on corporate issues. Fiona Narburgh, Head of Strategy and Communications is the management team lead on equality and diversity, however our style is to make

³ Mid year estimates, 2007.

⁴ Based on the most recent bi-annual count of Gypsy caravans

equalities 'part of the day job' as far as possible. Our Middle Management Team has a corporate role as well as driving delivery of our services.

Our five year strategy (2008-2013) gives us a clear direction and helps us prioritise, deliver on local priorities and meet the national agenda. It sets out our vision of the district and our aim, which are:

Our vision: a safe, green, healthy and beautiful district that is a vibrant and creative place for everyone to live, work and visit.

Our aim: to deliver excellent services and make life better for everyone.

We've structured our strategy around five priorities and for each one set out how we want Wychavon to look and feel in five years' time. These priorities are underpinned by five-year goals and annual promises, many with an equalities focus.

Our priorities are:

Safer: Communities that are safe and feel safe.

Greener: A better environment – for today and tomorrow.

Healthier: Improving health and well-being.

Stronger: Vibrant and inclusive communities with a strong economy.

Successful: Delivering excellent and value for money services.

Our priorities support the themes of Wychavon's Community Strategy, Worcestershire's Sustainable Community Strategy and Worcestershire's Local Area Agreement (LAA).

We have five values that residents can expect from us and that we in turn expect from our staff. These were developed through our Staff Sounding Board and articulate what we stand for. These are:

Brilliant customer service
Great services, every time
Value for money
Fun, motivated and positive
Innovative, always improving

These values are translated into management principles in our Way Forward report setting out the people and service challenges we face for the future.

We provide a range of services ourselves or working in partnership with others, these include housing, planning, benefits, community safety, environmental health, waste and recycling, sports and arts development, parks and leisure centres.

Following a voluntary stock transfer in October 1994, social housing in the district is primarily run by two housing associations: Festival Housing and Rooftop. We retain our strategic housing role, including advice, strategy, enabling and homelessness roles. Our three leisure centres and recently opened Lido in Droitwich Spa are run by Wychavon Leisure Community Association Ltd, a charitable organisation working on a 'not for profit' basis. We have contracted out refuse collection, street cleaning and grounds maintenance, but in 2005 we took on parking enforcement from the Police. We now run decriminalised parking services for Wyre Forest District and Redditch Borough Councils.

We host the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, which provides council tax and benefits services for residents in the Malvern Hills district and Worcester city as well as Wychavon areas. We are also working with Malvern Hills

Districts and Worcester City Councils on the South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy to ensure future development meets local needs across boundary lines

- **Our performance – auditor, resident and staff satisfaction**

“The Council scores 4 out of 4 for managing performance. It has a good track record of leadership, capacity and capability. Robust improvement plans are in place. There is good performance reporting and a track record of delivering against its plans. Satisfaction with the way the council runs things is amongst the highest in the country.” Organisational Assessment, Audit Commission, Dec 09.

In the previous regime of CPA, inspectors acknowledged our work on diversity:

“The Council has a good understanding of the scale of the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the area, particularly in relation to diversity and inclusion.” Audit Commission CPA report

Auditor satisfaction - We exceed our brand promise of ‘good services, good value’. We are excellently rated by the Audit Commission and are the only district to score top marks in use of resources assessments for the last 4 years.

Resident Satisfaction - Our service satisfaction is one of the best nationally – overall satisfaction with the council ranks us as the 4th best district and 11th best council nationally. For resident satisfaction with value for money we are the 5th best district and the 9th best council nationally. Service performance is generally top quartile too. On the cohesion measures on volunteering and people getting on well together we also come out well compared to others.

Staff Satisfaction – We are very aware that our performance is all down to the motivation and quality of our people. Even in the tough financial climate levels of motivation, enjoyment and pride continue to remain strong at Wychavon. Since we started tracking staff opinion in 2002 levels of pride have nearly doubled. We do staff surveys every 2 years and in between use the Best Companies external survey to provide a further check on the health of the organisation, achieving the number one position in the Times Best Council to Work for survey 2008.

Our **Way Forward report** looks at the future of the council, the capacity required to face the future challenges and reaffirms our commitment to remain a leading edge district. Since then the financial context has changed and we, like all councils, are having to reduce expenditure. We see open communication with staff as crucial to keep people informed and reassured where possible. We also want residents to be involved in the choices of services using consultation tools to do this robustly.

- **Using peer and external review to improve performance**

Our improvement over the years has very much been **helped by peer review** and we see it as an opportunity to get feedback and learn from others. We volunteered for the free **IDEA Healthy Communities peer review** (funded by the Department of Health) to help us get a handle on the health agenda and share the work we were doing across the council more widely – indeed there are some common areas with this equalities peer review.

We volunteered for the Audit Commission’s use of information study involving 2 days of interviews with staff and members. We had a Work Foundation visit which looked at high performance working, benchmarking us with a range of private and public organisations.

Another example is the accreditation with **Customer Service Chartermark**, 2 years ago we were the second council in the country to achieve this across all services. This helped remind people we all have customers and need to aim to meet their differing needs so this really links with the equality and diversity dimension. All service units had to identify their individual customer then assess the standard in relations to fairness, accessibility and choice. The real challenge for the council was that all service units had to go through the same detailed review. We are now looking at how we met the new requirements of Customer Service Excellence.

- **Wychavon's Community Strategy and LSPs**

Wychavon's Community Strategy, 'Shaping the future together', was launched in October 2007. The strategy sets out the vision and priorities for the district between 2007 and 2010 and how key organisations and agencies will work together to deliver them. The plan is structured around the following themes, which mirror those of Worcestershire's Local Area Agreement (LAA):

- Communities that are safe and feel safe
- A better environment – for today and tomorrow
- Economic success that is shared by all
- Improving health and well-being
- Meeting the needs of children and young people
- Stronger communities

We've taken an innovative approach to Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) in Wychavon because we recognise that a 'one size fits all' single LSP for the whole of the district would not work here. Our three area based partnerships are each centred around one of the main towns and the surrounding rural areas. They bring together public, private, community and voluntary organisations at a local level to deliver visible and lasting improvements for people living, working or visiting the areas that they cover. All three partnerships have a strong track record of delivering projects that improve quality of life for residents. Priorities and actions from their action plans feed into the Community Strategy. We give the three local partnerships £30K each a year to pump prime projects based on local priorities.

With the primary focus of the area-based partnerships on local delivery, the Wychavon Strategic Partnership takes a more strategic role. It is responsible for preparing the Wychavon Community Strategy and managing progress against the actions in it. It provides a vehicle for partners to discuss joint approaches to more strategic issues and build links with the county LSP, the Worcestershire Partnership. The Chairman of the LSP, along with our Leader and Managing Director, are on the Worcestershire Partnership Board, ensuring the local voice has an influence at a strategic level.

The Wychavon Strategic Partnership is currently working on an exciting project to improve health and skills and reduce fuel poverty in some of the district's areas of highest need using LAA reward funding.

2. Our equalities journey

This section summaries how we have progressed equalities over the last 5 years, taking equality and diversity from a fairly low key issue in the council to the position now where we see diversity as a mainstream part of how we work.

- **Developing our focus**

Our initial focus on equalities work was predominantly surrounding race equality, due to the race equality legislation and meeting our legal duties.

A turning point for us was in 2004 when we became a pathfinder for the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). We worked with the Audit Commission to pilot the assessment and also give our feedback on the review. Equalities emerged as a key theme, particularly from the angle of 'social inclusion'. Inspectors suggested we needed to 'upstream' our work in this area and they offered to work with us on a social inclusion review.

The **Social Inclusion Review** identified barriers to inclusion in the district, what the issues were for Wychavon, highlighted groups and areas most at risk, examined what initiatives we were currently involved in and also set new actions for the future. The review sharpened our focus on our communities and also highlighted the many great initiatives we were already involved in such as flexible council tax payment schemes, commitment to low council tax, affordable housing, concessionary travel schemes and welfare and benefits advice. It also highlighted areas of deprivation (based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation) and so became a useful tool for us to further our work and look at the impact of our services in areas most in need. One of the main resulting improvements of the review was to feature equalities and inclusion specifically within our overall council priorities and strategy. This led to our third priority of our previous strategy changing to '**Reaching out to everyone**' which meant a subsequent set of actions were set each year to work towards this goal.

Another improvement was to put in place a 'Reaching out to everyone' community engagement initiative which has provided a range of support and information to over 250 community groups including schools, youth centres and cubs groups right through to WIs, Older Persons Forums and religious groups – see our case study on this for further information.

- **Moving from equality to diversity**

A major emphasis at this stage was also on communicating to staff the need to **embrace equality and inclusion within all areas of our work**. To do this we ran a series of training sessions for staff using the Theatre In Company. These were theatre based sessions where attendees watched various stories relating to equalities and then interacted with the stories and characters. The training sessions were based around diverse groups in Wychavon and also provided a good explanation of what we mean by equality and diversity. Both staff and members who attended these found them both informative and entertaining and most commented that they never thought equality training could be so interesting! We marketed them in an upfront manner which helped with posters advertising the sessions branded 'we all have prejudices.'

It soon became apparent that staff and members found the concept of 'diversity' much more user friendly than 'equality'. This was mainly because there was a tendency for equality to be predominately focused on race whereas diversity is far more encompassing, especially when considering the community profile of Wychavon where key issues relate **to age, income and rural isolation rather than race equality**.

Further changes in legislation also supported our approach to embrace diversity so when our Race Equality Scheme was updated this went alongside our new Gender and Disability Schemes. We also began to launch more detailed enquiries into key equality groups such as our Gypsy and Traveller Scrutiny Review and also research on issues regarding Migrant Workers.

The content of the 'Reaching out to everyone' sessions also expanded alongside our equalities work to feature a range of topics based around diversity in the district. The reaching out initiative was subsequently noted as good practice by the Audit Commission and has also led on to running democracy events, working with the voluntary sector on rural projects and also engaging young people in consultation to involve them in decision making processes.

- **Our single scheme, new strands and community cohesion**

The move towards a single equalities framework and the new Commission for Equalities and Human Rights came at a good time for us. We updated our equality schemes and merged them together to form a more **comprehensive single equality scheme** covering all of the strands and also considering inclusion and community cohesion as well as incorporating a new corporate equalities action plan.

In the last few years, we have taken an even more pro-active stance on equality and diversity. This enabled us to work with partners to achieve capacity funding for the **Being Different Together** project, which has brought in £250k to Worcestershire. We have benefited from funding for our peer challenge, and support the creation of a Polish Community Association, again case studies include more detail.

We now have **diversity across all council priorities in our 5 year strategy** although it is most explicit in 'Stronger Communities' which includes cohesion as well as diversity. We have also **challenged the media** on race equality issues and reminded them of their legal responsibilities after they featured negative stories towards migrant workers.

- **How we manage diversity**

Whilst our Community Outreach Officer, whose role includes equalities, has been on secondment to manage the Youth Zone and Youth Bus, we have had to manage equalities differently. We have shared the work which may have had some benefits in terms of reminding managers that diversity is of course part of the day job. We have set up a stronger team at middle management level under the leadership of Cllr Audrey Steel with wider ownership across all services including the Revenues and Benefit Shared Service. The team have all contributed to the case studies and the evidence tables that form the detail to our self-assessment.

3. Our progress against the five framework themes

1. Knowing your community and equality mapping

This is about how we collect, analyse and use data to inform service delivery and our council and community strategy, the LAA and how we use this to set equality objectives.

We collect and analyse information from a wide range of sources including local intelligence, needs analysis, market research, consultation and customer feedback. We use this to help us identify community needs, inform our strategies and set objectives.

We developed the priorities and goals in our [five-year corporate strategy](#) using information from the [Wychavon health profile](#), South Worcestershire crime and disorder audit, housing needs assessments, [Best Value User Satisfaction Surveys](#), [SIMALTO budget consultation](#) and [Parish Plans](#). We integrate equalities objectives into our strategies and Service Delivery Plans, rather than setting them separately. For

example, our three priority goals this year are all relevant to tackling disadvantage and reducing inequalities. These are **reducing health inequalities, supporting local business and residents through the recession and increasing the availability of affordable housing**. Our corporate strategy also includes goals on:

- Improving activities/facilities for young people
- Building vibrant and tolerant communities where people get on well together
- Providing high performing services that meet customers' needs.

Each year we set specific actions under each of our goals. The following are examples of some of this year's promises which have a clear diversity focus:

- Use the results of the Warmer Worcestershire thermal imaging survey to target energy efficiency advice and grants to help residents, particularly vulnerable households, reduce heat loss from their homes. (See case study 7)
- Open a youth zone in Droitwich and take our new youth bus out to villages to provide activities for young people. (See case study 16)
- Implement the recommendations contained in the council's approved Agriculture and Migrant Workers report. (See case study 20).

We are currently awaiting the results of a budget consultation exercise using the SIMALTO modelling approach. This method asks 250 residents to select priorities from a choice of alternative levels for a range of services. The results will feed into this year's budget process if necessary, and will also help us plan for future spending and potential service reductions over the next few years in view of likely public sector spending cuts and other economic constraints. We have carried out an impact assessment of the 21 services and associated options covered by the consultation exercise. This looked at the potential impacts of service cuts on residents, particularly vulnerable groups, and also the impact on our corporate priorities, goals and agreed LAA targets. We have used customer profiling information, where it is available, to help assess the impact of some of the service changes on residents.

We also use information to inform strategic partnership plans, including [Wychavon's Community Strategy](#) and the [South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy](#). With our partners on the Wychavon Strategic Partnership, we developed the shared priorities in [Wychavon's Community Strategy](#) from an in-depth analysis of information about the district. Sources included Worcestershire Citizens' Panel surveys; completed Parish Plans; the Wychavon health profile; research commissioned by us and the South Worcestershire Crime and Disorder Partnership. The strategy's shared priorities include:

- Building understanding about and increasing involvement of migrant workers
- Improving access to education and learning for all
- Improving the care and quality of life of older people
- Improving activities/facilities for young people
- Reducing fuel poverty.

We also have **comprehensive service delivery plans** that again include equality targets throughout – we have mapped how they directly and indirectly relate to equalities as part of our evidence for this peer review.

We have shared the results of the [2008 Place Survey](#) widely across, for example at our 'People, Place, Partners and Priorities' event on 10th September and invited members, managers and partners to hear the findings and discuss the implications. We play back results to staff too. That means they hear the positive impact of their work on delivering services, where residents feel we can improve and what the top issues are for quality of life (ie, low crime, health services, affordable housing and clean streets.)

The survey provides a rich source of information about local priorities and perceptions about the area and public agencies. We have disaggregated the Place Survey results into the three areas covered by our local area-based partnerships. We will be presenting these to members of the partnerships on 15 December and asking them to use them to help develop their action plans.

We will use the results of the 2008 Place Survey and the budget consultation, to inform the development of our 2010/11 annual promises and Service Delivery Plans. Services also use relevant data to develop projects, such as the Youth Zone and youth bus, and to support funding bids.

The Wychavon Strategic Partnership is currently working on an ambitious project to improve health and skills and reduce fuel poverty in some of the district's most deprived areas using LAA reward funding. The **Areas of Highest Need project** is targeted at communities living in eleven Output Areas⁵ in the rural wards of Badsey, Broadway and Wickhamford, Harvington and Norton, plus parts of central Evesham. We used the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, the ACORN information system⁶ and other data, such as annual household incomes, levels of fuel poverty and health mapping to identify the target areas for this project and identify a range of support and interventions. (See case study 18).

We were a case study for the **Audit Commission study 'In the know'** which shows how we used data and community intelligence to inform the roll out of our new waste service, free swimming implementation and any other examples. We hold the license to use Mosaic segmentation data and while we need to make better use of this, we have good examples where targeting people for specific services (eg, mortgage rescue) makes sense rather than blanket approaches. Indeed we see lots of parallels between customer service, customer insight and the diversity agenda and will use the review process to show the links.

We have used data about Disabled Facilities Grants to review the service to ensure we are targeting all communities. (See case study 14)

In summary, we use a good range of information to base our plans on. Equality objectives are integrated into both the council and community plans, rather than being a separate add on activity. However, we do have gaps in our knowledge, for example on some specific equality groups.

2. Place Shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

This is about how we place equality at the heart of our work with our partners and how we monitor our progress and communicate what we do with our communities.

"The Council has a history of taking bold decisions for the local community. The community hospital and medical centre in Pershore not only provided a valuable local resource, but the financing arrangements have provided the Council with a valuable and

⁵ Output Areas (OAs) were developed for the 2001 Census 2001 as the basic geographical building block. They typically comprise around 125 households and usually contain whole unit postcodes. There are 393 OAs in Wychavon.

⁶ ACORN is a geodemographic information system, which categorises all UK postcodes into various types based upon census data and other information such as lifestyle surveys.

secure source of income. The council has set up a centre for young people in Droitwich Spa, the Spa Youth Zone, in the face of strong local opposition. This is proving to be a successful venture, with around 50 young people using the centre and the facilities each evening."

Organisational Assessment, Audit Commission, December 2009

Our **Community Strategy 2007-10** sets out what we, and partners, will deliver to improve local priorities. Equality and diversity issues are fully integrated. Examples include improving the care and life for older people, reducing fuel poverty and increasing activities for younger people. There are specific action plans for the 3 area based partnerships – again with equality targets throughout such as breast feeding support, encouragement of healthier lifestyles for those needing support and community transport schemes for those in rural areas.

Equality runs throughout our council strategy starting with the overall vision and our aim to deliver excellent services and make life better for everyone. It is explicitly included too in the goal under 'stronger' on building vibrant and tolerant communities and this year's promise is to implement the recommendations of the migrant workers study. Other priorities and goals are very relevant, including hate crime/ bullying, youth initiatives, reduction in fear of crime and health inequalities schemes such as MEND programmes.

We monitor progress on our **strategy through our Signals of Success performance management** reporting quarterly. We track progress on our **single equalities scheme** that brings together the race, disability and gender schemes into one and sets out our equality challenges and context. We report annually with an equalities update in our **Annual report**. We do need a proper review of the scheme. Next year we will see if we can pin down the relevant actions into service delivery plans so it's mainstreamed (and monitored) as part of our routine business - it's a shame that the legislation requires it to be separate!

We are very clear that **migrant workers** are a priority group for us and so we worked with local employers to improve living and working conditions. We have run events with partners and employers and recently increased capacity to support this work through a new county wide post, based at Wychavon, to work closely with employers and a project to tackle low levels of sports take up amongst this community – see case study 4.

We have addressed our **Gypsy and traveller community** – through a member scrutiny exercise, including face to face consultation to find out travellers' views about life and services. This was interesting in that service satisfaction was often higher for this group than settled residents. This scrutiny review resulted in improved services at sites (eg, recycling services), a liaison post being formalised to help travellers through the planning system and other benefits. There are some really practical outcomes, for example granting planning permission for gypsy pitches in the district. We have the Scrutiny team coming back together on the 15th December to review progress on all the recommendations.

Members have also shown community leadership on equalities in other ways – Cllr Audrey Steel is our champion from the Executive Board and leads our **equalities group** that oversees progress across the council and the **Agricultural & Migrant Workers Policy Panel**. Members have also reviewed our **Disabled Facilities Grants** programme of aids and adaptations to enable elderly and disabled residents to adapt their homes – see case study 14. We continue to fund the scheme in excess of our statutory requirements as we know how valued it is by people. Members also took the lead on securing the Youth bus (Audrey Steel found the bus!) and our **community grants programme** means we support local projects that benefit specific groups: see

case study 2. We have contributed to the early work led by Worcestershire Partnership on developing a Worcestershire Community Cohesion Strategy. We are keen to make sure this complements, rather than duplicates efforts on equalities and community planning.

Our Place Survey results show people have high levels of satisfaction with Wychavon as a place to live. 79% of residents think their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together, compared to 67% in 2006/07. Despite this increase, surprisingly our results are only just above the national average and in the third quartile for districts. 67% of residents feel they belong to their immediate neighbourhood very or fairly strongly. Respect and consideration has improved over the last two years, with just over one in five people (22%) thinking that a lack of respect and consideration is a problem locally.

Volunteering levels in Wychavon are higher than the rest of Worcestershire and significantly higher than the national average, with three in ten residents (31%) volunteering regularly.

We use **appropriate communications** to target the work we do for particular groups and raise awareness of services to key groups eg, face book pages for party in the parks and the youth zone and bus, and our magazine to promote the safe and sound security scheme for vulnerable residents. During the recession we have, through all communications, been proactive about the support the council and partners can offer to those affected.

In summary while we have excellent leadership examples in the community from both officer and members on specific equality groups and have used scrutiny well, we can do more to update our equalities scheme and embed actions into routine performance management, however, without creating an industry!

3. Community engagement and satisfaction

This is about how we seek feedback from diverse groups and how we involve those groups in decision making.

"Local people think this is a well run council. Only three other districts in the country do better than Wychavon for overall satisfaction, and only 11 other councils overall. This is a really good reflection on the way the council is run."
Organisational Assessment report, Audit Commission, Dec 09

We have agreed in principle to sign up to the Joint Worcestershire Community Leadership and Engagement Framework. This sets out some common definitions around community leadership and engagement.

Our engagement with the community takes many forms ranging from one-off events to targeted consultation. We tend to use targeted consultation when dealing with particular equalities issues, for example the Migrant Workers consultation provided us with very valuable insight into the lives of the district's newest community group (see case study 20). As a result of this work we now have a Polish Community Group in Evesham which will help encourage integration and support the wider community.

We have a good track record of face to face consultation such as the reaching out to everyone programme, citizenship work in schools, waste focus groups. Our **reaching out to everyone initiative** is a comprehensive outreach programme for those so called

'hard to reach' groups and we went to hundreds of community groups with a presentation about the council's involvement community projects, see case study 10.

As already explained, we analyse information and data from a wide range of sources to help identify community needs and inform our strategies (such as our five-year strategy) and set objectives, which include equality objectives. We try to ensure that feedback is given to those who were consulted either directly or through publishing results on the website, press releases and articles in the Wychavon magazine.

The recent Youth Bus and Youth Zone initiatives are good examples of ongoing engagement with particular groups. Here young people are encouraged to shape the facilities available as well as the future of the services, see case study 16: Spa Youth Zone.

The Place Survey results and other consultation shows that younger, home renting males are far less satisfied with the council and services than more affluent, older home owners. So there's some work to be done so we can break down by income, status, disability, ethnicity and then overlay this with our Mosaic segmentation. We are working with the County Council on a new **Citizens Panel** (Worcestershire Viewpoint), which will enable us to track progress in between Place Surveys and canvas views from a panel of residents at least twice a year.

We also get feedback in other less structured ways – a **recent homelessness/ housing conference** brought providers and users together in October to plan ahead and address issues of affordable homes. **Walkabouts with MPs and partners** in town centres mean that literally on the street concerns can be addressed. We have a range of other methods on consultation and feedback including Govmetric responses to our services and customer service, PACT meetings, attending parish councils, party in the park events, face book groups, and whole host of mechanisms.

If we do plan to change or reduce a service significantly then we will consult people about the implications. **Simalto** is a current example already outlined. Another example was last year when we changed the waste service from a weekly bag collection to fortnightly wheeled bins. We added a food waste collection and extra concessions as a result of the representative focus groups that Mori ran for us. We have a track record of **feeding back results after consultation** usually through our resident magazine in 'you said, we did' type article so people can see we act on feedback, and if we can't we'll at least explain why. We take the same approach with our staff surveys.

In summary while we have numerous examples of community engagement and a culture of actively seeking views, we can do more to link this to our mosaic segmentation data so we target resources better on the people and places most needing support.

4. Responsive Services and Customer Care

This is how we respond to feedback and provide personalised services and set specific equality objectives that meet the needs of people from differing backgrounds.

"Making sure the Council remembers that not everyone is the same and has services which everyone can use is equally important....The Council is making sure it understands and can respond to the needs of migrant workers. It is helping to set up a Polish

Community Organisation and is co-ordinating a project across Herefordshire and Worcestershire looking at the impact of migration and the needs of communities" Organisational Assessment, Audit Commission, Dec 09.

We have already set out how equality objectives are integrated into our council strategy rather than being a separate activity.

We set out what customers can expect in our Customer Charter that expands on the 'great service, every time' theme of our values. This includes the pledges to make special arrangements in meeting specific needs where necessary and to provide translation services. We pride ourselves on our ability and willingness to go "Above and Beyond" (see examples in 2.21). The Customer Charter also sets out our commitment to actively asking for customer feedback and we use Govmetric to monitor the responses.

There is plenty of innovative work to ensure customer service levels are high, for example:

- The health of the community is an important part of our strategy to the extent that we were the first District Council to build a hospital - see case study 6: Pershore Health Centre.
- Initiatives such as the Warmer Worcestershire project which has developed from earlier work done by Wychavon – see case study 7: Warmer Worcestershire

There are three council access points in the district. These community contact centres or 'shops' in the main towns, Pershore, Evesham and Droitwich, provide face to face support. The Evesham contact centre, in particular, has a strong partnership approach as the Police and Job Centre plus are on the front desk. This joining of services makes dealing with issues needing input from partners easier and allows the public to access multiple services in one place. Frontline services, such as housing are also available in the contact centres. See case study 17: Community Contact Centres

A key challenge at this time is processing the significant increase in benefit claims following the recession. Face to face services makes this easier for some groups. While costly we still let people pay council tax by cheque and cash in whatever instalments they wish, which helps those on low incomes manage their finances. And the elderly who may be more comfortable dealing with their finances in this way.

In line with our pledge to provide translation services, Polish lessons have been arranged for all front-line staff at Evesham Community Contact Centre and the Welcome to Worcestershire pages for emerging communities is published in different languages. Staff are also trained to sign for the deaf community.

We have completed impact assessments on all service areas although some of these have been retrospective rather than being involved at the front end of planning services. As a result some of these paper-based assessments have not always resulted in improvements to actual delivery. However, we are aware of the need to improve their relevance and meaning and have used the Peer Challenge as an opportunity to review and revise our impact assessment pro-forma documents and guidance. These have been agreed and successfully piloted in the new shared-service for revenues. We are also looking at implementing new training in 2010.

We have used impact assessments when developing new services e.g. new Evesham Leisure centre and indeed as we develop our annual promises, so we are now thinking about equality impacts at the planning stage of services. An important difference came

from the DIA for concessionary travel that we are committed to deliver this year. The DIA led to us also providing concessions to companions of disabled people.

There are many other examples of how we have considered equalities in our decision making. These include; considering opening hours in our shops, tokens for over 80s and the disabled, our programme of Disabled Facilities Grants, our Mend programme with overweight parents and kids trying to break unhealthy habits, work in housing, DDA and reaching out work to take messages to over 200 community groups. All these have come about because we know there is a community and equality need to be met.

When we were considering changes in the waste collection services we worked with resident groups, other local authorities, Housing Associations and our refuse contractor to target key groups and ensure the service level reflected the needs of the community. As a result the service has increased flexibility and can accommodate those who cannot use the wheelie bins or need assisted collections.

Park surveys are carried out bi-annually which identify where possible gaps in service are, which helps to shape objectives and outcomes. Three of our parks currently have green flag status, which recognises that we do maintain standards and consult/involve users and potential users.

In summary the importance we place on customer care and excellent service have meant that many equalities issues have been thought of and included in service delivery. However, we have more to do to make sure we deliver improved equality outcomes through robust impact assessments.

5.A modern, diverse workforce.

How our workforce reflects our community and how we make sure we get the very best out of our people through the benefits and culture we offer.

"The Council manages its workforce well because it has a flexible workforce that rises to the challenges when they appear. This is helping it to achieve its strategic priorities. In 2008 it won Top Leader, Best Small Council, Best Training and Development and Best Council overall in the Times Best Council to Work for Awards"
Organisational Assessment, Audit Commission, Dec 09

Levels of staff satisfaction are high despite the uncertain financial climate. Our 2009 staff survey results show that 97% of staff enjoy their job all or most of the time. We have a good working culture and whilst we have policies in place for grievances and bullying these are very seldom needed.

We set a clear direction for the organisation through our strategy. Staff have the opportunity to contribute to this through staff briefings. 97% of staff are aware of the council's strategy. People are clear what's expected of them in their work and most have a formal conversation with their line manager 3 times year (through the PDR process) to maintain focus.

As the 2nd council to get council wide chartermark, the customer ethos is a very strong driver for our staff. We are pulling stories from the frontline on the difference we make to residents through our "above and beyond tales of excellent customer service" and communicating these through our ASPIRE staff newsletter and through staff briefings, see case studies 21 & 22: Internal and External Communications.

We have lots of ways staff can give feedback and shape services from ideas schemes such as ideas for savings, our "better not busier" improvement and efficiency

programme, quarterly staff briefings, the Staff Sounding Board to team meetings and mainstream management. Our Way Forward report shows our challenges ahead and capacity issues needed to address new issues on the horizon for all teams.

We do track staff opinion through a staff survey and ask for feedback on specific issues. There's a strong commitment to **internal communication and building pride** through celebrating success and sharing information across teams. We understand what motivates our staff and do act on survey findings. For example, the health MOTs, our café and expansion of flexible working hours for all have come out of staff surveys

We have implemented a **pay and grading review** across the council to ensure equality in pay. We employ apprentices from the local community. Our workforce plan is comprehensive and we track progress.

Our management team of 7 includes 3 women so is better balanced than many in local government and would be seen as relatively young with quite a few in their 40s. We do lots of flexible working – highly valued to help fit with people's outside demands.

We include **diversity issues in our training for members and new starters**. Cllr Audrey Steel as our member champion helps get members involved. A few years ago we ran some really innovative role playing with "Theatre in" which was badged "we all have prejudices – come and explore yours". The open approach worked well with officers and members and avoided the 'pc gone mad' approach.

The Being Different Together project will fund some local training called the 'Changing Face of Worcestershire' and will be good news and well needed as it's an area we do need to progress more. In the meantime we funded some much needed training and development with trainer Liz Gate in October and have another session planned to remind Members and managers of our legal obligations in January.

In summary, while we have a motivated and customer focused workforce, we need to roll out training on equality and diversity issues so that people understand the roles we play in improving life for all sections of our communities.

So how do we measure up against the 'achieving' authority characteristics?

Characteristic	Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p>Councillors and officers take direct and personal responsibility for promoting greater equality and test themselves on progress by the outcomes they achieve.</p>	<p>Good local member leadership on equality issues eg, Cllr Audrey Steel on the Youth Bus and Migrant workers panel and Cllr Hardman on Gypsies and Travellers, supported by officers.</p> <p>Scrutiny into young people, DFGs too.</p> <p>SOS reporting on outcomes and performance monitoring is very active with Board members presenting results and active challenge by O and S.</p> <p>Clear evidence of leadership across the organisation at officer and Member level.</p>	<p>Not all members are as active in their communities, and not all on equality issues.</p>
<p>It has undertaken equality mapping and has a good understanding of its communities, including the extent of inequality and disadvantage. It has used the information to inform corporate and service priorities.</p>	<p>An excellent understanding of the community, its needs and aspirations.</p> <p>Good examples of prioritising equalities in the community, Polish, migrant workers.</p> <p>Areas of Greatest Need project pinpoints those most in need of extra support from public agencies.</p> <p>A range of methodologies are used to ensure all sections of the community, including newer communities' needs are identified.</p> <p>Good quality consultation with communities across all groups, including those who may be vulnerable and marginalised as a result of their circumstances, using a range of methodologies.</p>	<p>Have gaps in our knowledge in terms of the gender identity and sexual orientation and the implications for service delivery (if there are any.)</p>
<p>It has set stretching equality priorities in consultation with partners in the public, voluntary and community sectors and these are reflected in its sustainable community and other relevant strategies, local and multi-area agreements, and local targets.</p>	<p>Priorities take account of local needs and a good range of sources of information and intelligence are drawn on when developing council and community plans and LAA targets.</p>	<p>Can we do more to show case the wider dimensions of equality beyond ethnicity?</p>
<p>It works with partners in the public, voluntary</p>	<p>Evidence of good partnership working with our</p>	<p>We have integrated our community work to</p>

and community sectors to develop joint equality strategies.	<p>area based LSPs and actions contain very practical local measures to address issues of equality eg, breastfeeding in Pershore take-up, Agender the women's business network.</p> <p>At County through Worcestershire Partnership on LAA especially.</p>	<p>the point where we wouldn't badge our partnership working as "joint equality Strategy"</p> <p>Local councils have not worked together on equality strategies, other than through the Being Different Together project eg, we all do our own DIAs.</p>
It uses equality impact assessments (EqIAs) to review all major corporate and service changes in policy and regularly conducts service and employment EqIAs.	<p>Have made good progress on our programme of DIAs and these are now recognised as a useful means to review and develop policies and services.</p> <p>Recently revamped the guidance and implemented training too.</p>	<p>The impact of the assessments can still be improved – we would like them to help us implement policy and services differently as a result of the equalities "lens".</p>
It has set appropriate corporate and service and or unit objectives to address persistent inequalities and to narrow the gap related to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion and or belief, or other areas of inequality for service delivery based on impact assessments and consultation with internal and external stakeholders and partners.	<p>Objectives and actions on equalities are part of our priorities and promises so integrated into mainstream business and performance management and cover many of the strands, albeit not all.</p> <p>Using Impact assessment process used to identify persistent inequalities and improve delivery especially for important issues like future cuts eg, review of impact of budget/ service cuts through the Simalto DIA.</p>	<p>We do not set targets for narrowing the gaps for some groups as the community profile for Wychavon doesn't suggest there are reasons to do so. Eg, issues are not being flagged up through our intelligence on strands like sexual orientation or religion.</p>
It has set appropriate corporate and service and or unit employment and pay-related objectives for race, gender, disability and age, religion and or belief and sexual orientation.	<p>Implemented a council wide equality proofed job evaluation scheme. Do not see the need to monitor the workforce as set out.</p>	<p>Do we need longer term employment related objectives for the equality strands on top of our workforce strategy objectives?</p>
Equality objectives are integrated into the local authority's business and service planning processes.	<p>Objectives are part of strategy not separate with SDPs including objectives throughout – direct and indirect equality objectives.</p> <p>The Equalities scheme is reported through annual report in summary.</p>	<p>Actions in the equality scheme need to be linked to performance management so they get monitored more frequently.</p>
All relevant data on service access is monitored against the equality strands.	<p>Monitoring takes place in some service areas were relevant eg, through housing services on the full range, other services are pragmatic</p>	<p>While we have good mechanisms for feedback should we be breaking this down into equality groups? Can we do this cost effectively and</p>

	<p>after discussion with members and officers.</p> <p>Review all relevant data eg, customer feedback through variety of methods through contact centres, Chartermark, Gov Metric web and phone</p>	more user friendly?
<p>There are good practices of delivery in all the sections of the council, with few adverse impacts found in impact assessments. Where adverse impacts have been found these have been mitigated.</p>	<p>Good examples across the authority and few adverse impacts found in impact assessments – the simalto DIA is a good example of the impacts being explicitly set out before members make decisions on potential cuts and indeed helps aid those decision.</p>	<p>Some impact assessments have been paper exercises. Is this to be expected or should we set the bar higher?</p>
<p>Key stakeholders and community members, including those who are vulnerable and marginalised, are able to scrutinise and challenge performance on equalities issues.</p>	<p>Open consultative culture means we actively seek feedback, Current examples are through resident response to potential budget cuts. Areas of greatest need feedback.</p> <p>Housing forum brought current users together to challenge and improve performance</p> <p>Polish consultation in Evesham</p>	<p>Should we be engaging vulnerable groups in performance on an ongoing basis through a special forum, or continue with our adhoc but pragmatic approach?</p>
<p>It has developed information and monitoring systems that allow it to disaggregate data where appropriate and to assess progress in achieving objectives and targets. It reviews them in the light of changing needs, when necessary.</p>	<p>We do this where useful eg, Place survey results have been broken down into areas for action planning locally.</p> <p>See also community intelligence gathering eg, Health profile, crime assessment.</p>	<p>While we are proficient at using community information to develop services, we don't have enough ways to feedback local intelligence from grassroots, eg, frontline staff having mechanisms to feed into and highlight changing needs in the community?</p>