

Diversity Peer Challenge
20th and 21st January 2010

Wychavon District Council



1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and carried out by its trained peers. The report satisfies the requirements of the Equality Framework for Local Government for an external assessment at the Achieving level. The Peer Challenge is designed to validate a council's own self-assessment at the Achieving Level by considering documentary evidence and by carrying out a series of interviews and focus groups with employees and other stakeholders.

The basis for the Peer Challenge is a benchmark against five areas of performance. They are:

- Knowing your communities and equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern and diverse workforce

The Peer Challenge is not an inspection; rather it offers an external assessment of a council's own judgement of itself against the Equality Framework benchmark, by critical friends who have experience of delivering an equality/diversity agenda in their own councils.

Peers were:

Katherine Richards – Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Sally Atueyi – Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Councillor Mike Quigley – Leader Bassetlaw District Council

The team appreciates the welcome and hospitality provided by the council and would like to thank everybody that they met during the process for their time and contributions.

2. Overall conclusion

Following this Diversity Peer Challenge, we have reached the following conclusion:

Wychavon District Council has completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for the Achieving level of the Equality Framework.

Strengths and areas for consideration identified by peers are highlighted in paragraph 3.

3. Detailed findings

3.1 Knowing your communities and equality mapping

Strengths:

- The Council is using all available data to inform their service delivery.
- A computer programme called Mosaic has recently been purchased and will be used for data mapping across the Council.
- The Council is using customer insight information effectively to target vulnerable groups (e.g. Mortgage Rescue Scheme).
- There are examples of good practice of Members being proactive within their wards to understand the needs their citizens.
- The Council is aware of the needs of the majority of its' vulnerable groups and special mention is made of the work carried out with migrant workers and young people.

Areas for consideration:

- Data mapping and sharing of data with partners could be improved.
- The Council needs to ensure that all staff are aware of the breakdown of the population by ethnicity and that the focus is not just on the Polish but all ethnic groups across the district.
- The Council should improve equality monitoring of service take up, including the take up by ethnic groups. This information would be useful for diversity impact assessments.
- The managers need to use customer insight information more intelligently in the development of their services

3.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strengths:

- The Leader of the Council and the Managing Director have a clear commitment to equality and diversity and they are working closely together.
- The Portfolio holder for Community Engagement Rural Affairs is responsible for equality and diversity and also chairs the LSP. She has a strong and clear commitment to engage with equality and diversity issues.

- The Council has effective relationships with the County and neighbouring Districts support the equality and diversity agenda.
- Partners are aiming to develop a County-wide Equality scheme. There is a shared understanding of the main equality and cohesion issues facing Wychavon and area across partners e.g. Young People, Migrants, Gypsies and Travellers etc
- The Council's resources are pooled with their Partners to ensure maximum impact is achieved for example research into migrant workers needs and developing the migrant worker panel.
- The equality agenda at the Council is jointly led by the Middle Managers Team who shows strong commitment.
- Wychavon staff make equality part of 'the day job'.
- The Member Scrutiny group addresses equality and diversity issues effectively through the Scrutiny panels.
- There are good Member / Officer relationships within the Council which in turn leads to a joint understanding of the Council's commitment to equality and diversity cohesion.
- There is evidence of strong leadership which encourages challenge of equality and diversity issues throughout the Council
- The Council is clearly demonstrates that one size does not fit all and tailors its services according to the need of its customers.
- The local press is effectively challenged by the Council regarding unfair portrayal of vulnerable groups.
- Partners, Priorities, People and Places event is a successful event where partners and stakeholders inform the Council strategy and service priorities.
- The Equality and Diversity Group comprising officers and Members proactively support the equality agenda.

Quote

- Wychavon feels like a family. 'We are all working together'

Areas for consideration:

- There is room for improvement on working with partners on equality impact assessments.
- There is no equality impact assessment of the procurement process. The Council recognises this as a gap.

- Equality impact assessments could be better utilised in driving service delivery.
- Scrutiny could be used more effectively to support the equality agenda and in monitoring equality impact assessments.

3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction

Strengths:

- The Council does not have a one size fits all approach but is tailoring its services to the needs of the customers, e.g. the introduction of the wheeled bin waste collection service according to need.
- The Council has taken a proactive approach to ensure as many people as possible are on the electoral register. For example, there has been an increase in Eastern Europeans registering to vote and there is a database for people with special needs to ensure they receive support.
- The Council has strong volunteering networks. Volunteers feel involved in development of services from the start and see results. This in turn leads to enhanced commitment.
- The Council commissioned research on the needs of migrants. The results of this research have led to the establishment of a Polish Association.
- The Council has actively engaged with district groups. Examples are the Community Sports Network and the Droitwich Spa Art Network.
- There are good examples of effective engagement with young people. Wychavon is proactive in supporting youth from deprived areas and those that are rurally isolated. They have established the Youth Zone and are currently developing a youth bus to visit rural communities. These are normally seen as county responsibilities
- There is strong evidence of community engagement through the Citizens Panel and the SIMALTO (SIMultaneous Multi Attribute Level Trade-Off)
- budgetary consultation
- Discussions are taking place at County level to consult with ‘seldom heard’ or ‘hard to reach’ groups
- The Council encourages small traders to tender as suppliers, e.g. Selling to the Council Guide, help with policies, meet-the-buyer events

Areas for consideration:

- Partners recognise that a challenge for Wychavon is reaching out to ‘ those referred to as ‘less popular groups’ by those we met...’ e.g. Gypsies and Travellers, migrants, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community
- Hard to reach groups are not always represented in volunteer organisations
- Could Wychavon be more proactive in promoting equalities and diversity issues amongst communities?

3.4 Responsive services and customer care

Strengths:

- There is a strong County Equalities and Diversity group. The ‘Being Different Together’ project has resulted in plans for joint training (e-learning and ‘Changing Faces’) and joint interpretation & translation arrangements
- An impact assessment has been done on the budget consultation options. A ‘your budget: your choice’ survey was run to give as many residents as possible the opportunity to express their views. The results of the impact assessment is informing this year’s budget
- Innovative practices e.g. the building of a community hospital to retain local services
- The Council involved disability groups in providing accessible leisure facilities
- The Council is building a playground between a gypsy and traveller site and a housing estate
- All public buildings are 100% DDA compliant
- There are accessible parks and award-winning toilets
- A wide range of formats is used to communicate with customers and residents, e.g. translation and interpretation

Areas for consideration:

- Need to develop a greater understanding of how equality performance monitoring can benefit service development
- Equality impact assessment programme not fully embedded
- The Council website needs updating to ensure it is accessible to everyone. Easy to read guidance is not available

3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

Strengths:

- There is a Council Apprenticeship Programme which works very well. A number of apprenticeships have been appointed. The Council receives good feedback from the apprentices after their placement has ended.
- An Equal Pay review has been successfully implemented. It was supported by a good communication strategy
- LSC capacity funding has been used to develop a Leadership Development Programme for council staff
- The workforce has an open culture and share information easily
- Member Induction includes Equality and Diversity and all Members have 'exposure' to Equality and Diversity training
- The Council is working towards Member Charter status and introducing Member personal development plans
- Wychavon District Council was voted the Times Best Council to work for in 2008. This award was assessed using anonymous feedback direct from their employees.
- The Council is using the 'Two Ticks' logo and makes reasonable adjustments where necessary
- The Council received an award for its training and development
- Staff say Wychavon is a good place to work and there is low staff turnover
- There is good employee involvement (staff briefings, staff sounding board). The Managing Director has an 'open door' policy
- The Council has an effective flexible working policy

Areas for consideration:

- Uptake of training by Members could be improved
- There needs to be ongoing monitoring of changing demographics to ensure that the workforce is representative of the district
- Need to further develop the monitoring of statistics on training, personal development plans, applications from disabled people and those called for interview and those appointed

- Could the Council attract Elected Members from the diverse communities they serve?
- Some employee groups we have spoken to feels that the Council needs to improve communication between departments including from the top down. Whilst we realise that the Council does already engage considerably with its staff, it needs to ensure that a consistent message is carried from top management to all employee groups.
- Staff need to feel able to communicate issues both upwards and across service areas and receive the appropriate support

3.6 Key Challenges

- Introduce equality impact assessments consistently across the council.
- Develop further developing data mapping and customer insight
- Introduce and implement an ongoing programme of training for staff and Members
- Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme
- Consistent monitoring of workforce diversity and working towards a more representative workforce

IDeA February 2010

Welna Bowden
Improvement Adviser
07766 251 639
Welna.bowden@idea.gov.uk

Improvement and Development Agency