

Annual Diversity update 2005/6

August 2006

1. Introduction

This report provides a progress update on our diversity work over the last year. This includes progress against the duties set out on our Race Equality Scheme and also our Diversity policy. It sets out what we have achieved, where we are now and our plans for the year ahead.

2. Summary of key achievements in the last year

There have been many notable achievements over the last year that have helped to drive the diversity agenda forward. These include:

- **Diversity training**

So far a total of 181 staff and councillors have attended equality and diversity training. All of the feedback has been really positive with 93% of those who attended rating it as good/excellent. Feedback also showed that it has not only increased awareness of what we mean by equality and diversity but it's made people think about the important role they play in recognising this within their work. Participants were asked what they would do differently as a result of the training. Comments included:

'Try and be more understanding and see others points of view'

'Everyone is different from each other and you should make allowances'

'Now much more aware of how people think and react'

'Challenge people, don't just sit quietly'

'Maintain awareness and try to be more pro-active'

'To look deeper into situations'

A drama based training company called Theatre In provided the training. We decided to use a theatre style approach as it is more interesting and has a greater impact on the audience as it really brings the issues to life. We've arranged more sessions for September so that all remaining staff can attend. We also arranged the training working in partnership with Bromsgrove District Council. For more information about the training company go to <http://www.theatrein.com>

- **Research into migrant workers**

With support from the Worcestershire Diocese, we commissioned Mercia Research & Strategy to undertake a small-scale project regarding migrant workers. This was to find out the size of the migrant workforce working primarily in the agriculture and food processing sector and who may also be living in the Vale of Evesham, as well as providing supporting information regarding their housing, travel patterns, employment terms, and overall contribution to the economy.

In conjunction with South Worcestershire Primary Health Care Trust we later requested an additional small-scale piece of research to review the current impacts of migrant workers on primary healthcare in Evesham.

The report was launched in April 2006 and a range of representatives from were present from organisations including Ethnic Access Link, Evesham Citizens Advice Bureau, Evesham Vale Growers Ltd, Gangmaster Licensing Agency and Worcestershire Racial Equality Council. Workshops were held to consider questions such as 'how can the public, private and voluntary sectors work together to ensure positive relationships exist between migrant workers and local communities?' And 'what actions can be taken to improve access to healthcare and training for migrant workers?'. Following on from this an action plan is being formed to set out how we can work with partners to address issues surrounding migrant workers in the district.

The research report on 'The extent, size and characteristics of the Migrant Workforce in the Vale of Evesham' is available to view on our website.

- **Gypsy & Traveller Scrutiny review**

In January 2006 we set up a Gypsy and Traveller scrutiny team to review and improve on our approach to our Gypsy and Traveller communities. A task and finish team means that we can focus on the issues, review current practice in Wychavon and what happens elsewhere and put in a plan of improvements for the future. The Scrutiny review will help us to achieve our corporate promise for 2006/07 - To increase understanding and develop a new approach and policy for our Gypsy community.

The review has looked at wide range of issues including definitions, site provision, roles of different departments, legislation and other research reports.

The terms of reference of the review can be summarised into three main outcomes:

- Better relationships between the Council (in its various roles) and Gypsy communities
- Breaking down barriers and building understanding between settled residents and the Gypsy communities
- Balancing supply of sites and demand for the future - helping to inform the planning process

The final scrutiny report will be available in autumn 2006.

- **Targeted consultation**

The Scrutiny review has also provided us with an opportunity to conduct targeted consultation with our Gypsy and Traveller Communities. We commissioned Research for Today to conduct on-site research to find out about quality of life issues, our services and information provision within their communities. The survey consisted of face-to-face, in-home interviews with 50 Gypsy and Travellers during July 2006.

This is the first time we have conducted specific consultation with an ethnic minority group. It has not only provided valuable data for the review but the information obtained can be used within impact assessments and equality action planning.

The results of the Gypsy and Traveller consultation will be available in the final scrutiny report.

- **Access to services via our website**

Over the last year we have made lots of improvements to our website to enhance access to services. This has included improving the design of the layout and making it easier to navigate, providing more services online, enhancing the Ethnic Access Link sign posting and also offering a browse aloud facility for people with visual impairments.

3. Progress on the Equality Standard for Local Government

We made a formal commitment to the diversity agenda in 2005 and in doing so achieved Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. As part of this we developed a new diversity policy to show how we are embedding equality and diversity in the way that we work.

We regularly audit our work against the criteria of the Equality Standard for Local Government in order to highlighted where we are at and set out what we need to do to progress to the next level. We also felt it was vital to get feedback on our approach so we worked with Pan Ash Consultancy to do this. Pan Ash provided us with some feedback on our policies and also some suggestions about what we need to do to reach the next level of the Equality Standard.

Level 2 of the standard is about assessment and consultation in relation to equality impact assessments. As we have begun to develop a process for this and are committed to continue this over the next year we audited our work as being sufficient to obtain level 2 of the standard at the end of March 2006. This means that one of our main objectives for 2006/7 is to develop an impact assessment process that is a useful tool for service improvements. This will be used to ensure our policies and services are having the best possible impact on our communities. More information on our approach to impact assessments is outlined in the section 4.

The revised Equality Standard was launched this year, and a Wychavon representative attended the launch event. The principles of the standard remain but there are some new challenges, including:

- Councils at level 2 or above must incorporate all six strands of equalities by 2008.
- Validation scheme -required at level 3 and above to ensure consistency between councils. The assessment must be carried out by approved Dialog consultants
- Evidence of more community input - 'Participation schemes' can be set up to provide input for impact assessments and continuous involvement in the councils work

We will continue to use the equalities standard as an improvement tool to help develop our work.

4. Impact assessment

A large proportion of our legislative duties regarding equality and diversity relate to conducting impact assessments. An impact assessment is a way of systematically assessing and consulting on the effects that a proposed service or policy is likely to have on people. This is to ensure that services or policies do not discriminate against any particular group of people, for example because of their age, gender or ethnicity.

To develop our approach to impact assessments we ran 'best practice improvement sessions' with each service unit during 2005. These involved officers breaking down the services they provide and looking at the impact they are having on the community. This raised questions about consultation, access to services, customer feedback and monitoring arrangements. The actions arising from the sessions helped to shape the service delivery plan actions for 2006/7.

Following on from the sessions it became apparent that individual services and policies need to be examined in more detail. In order to do this we established an impact assessment sub group to develop a pragmatic process where we can show what improvements have emerged as a result of the assessment. It was agreed that we would assess our Priorities and Promises for 2006/7 to develop a model for future assessments. As a result of this we have developed an impact assessment template and toolkit. The toolkit also incorporates guidance from the Commission for Race Equality and other authorities.

We are now using the toolkit to carry out an assessment of the proposed new leisure centre for Evesham. This will demonstrate to managers and members not only the process but also the benefits. All details of our impact assessments will be available on our website under the diversity section.

5. Monitoring our progress

We have monitored and reported on our diversity work to our Executive Board on a quarterly basis as part of our Signals of Success performance reporting. This has generated a strong awareness of how our work is being progressed and Members are also given the opportunity to scrutinise any progress or lack of progress made.

The latest performance reports are posted on our website on the performance pages.

6. Our In house equalities team

Our in house Equalities Working Group have continued to meet every six weeks. The meetings consist of information updates from each department, monitoring progress of equality actions, discussion of ideas on developing new diversity actions and monitoring of how we are meeting our duties and making progress on the equality standard criteria. We are currently updating the terms of reference to include stronger roles and responsibilities for the team. The group is chaired by Cllr Mrs Audrey Steel, Executive Board Member for planning policy and rural affairs.

7. New Disability Duty

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) is an important new duty aimed at promoting disability equality across the public sector. The DED, also referred to as the general duty, sets out what public authorities must have due regard to in order to promote equality of opportunity.

Most public authorities are also covered by specific duties, which set out a framework to assist authorities in meeting their general duty. All public authorities covered by the specific duties must:

- publish a Disability Equality Scheme (including within it an Action Plan)
- involve disabled people in producing the Scheme and Action Plan
- demonstrate they have taken actions in the Scheme and achieved appropriate outcomes
- report on progress
- review and revise the Scheme.

We are currently developing our Disability Equality Scheme (DES) in order to meet all of the duties that are set out in the legislation. The duties that we need to follow are similar to those set out in race equality legislation e.g. consultation, impact assessments, action planning etc but focus specifically on people with disabilities. As we updated our Race Equality Scheme and launched a new Diversity Policy in 2005 it is vital that the DES sits within this framework. We will be following the DRC guidance saying that:

'Some authorities have produced combined schemes and there is nothing within the legislation to prevent this. However, the Disability Equality Scheme must be clearly identifiable and presented in such a way as to enable all interested stakeholders to readily access it.'

Bearing this in mind our DES will set out the duties within the legislation, provide a scope of the services we currently provide for people with disabilities, identify how disability issues will be considered in service planning and policy assessment and show how this links to our Diversity policy. A resulting action plan will also set out the steps we will be taking to promote disability equality over the period of the scheme.

Our disability equality scheme will be available by the end of 2006.

8. Promoting Race Equality

We have continued to promote good race relations as part of our on going race equality work. Our Eastern Arts festival proved to be extremely popular this year and hosted an even wider selection of arts, performances, food stalls and traders.

We have also continued to use both internal and external communications to raise awareness about diversity issues. Examples include promoting Ethnic Access link in our staff newsletter (Aspire) and discussed feedback on the training. The Wychavon magazine has also featured articles on Migrant workers and Gypsies and Travellers.

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 340 Full time members of staff and 1.1% are from ethnic minority communities. This has increased from 2003/4.

Over the last year no racial incidents have been reported to us.

9. Working in partnership

Over the last year we have continued to support the work of the Worcestershire Equalities Group. The group meets four times a year and provides a network for information exchange between public sector organisations across the county. One of the areas of work we have assisted with helping to develop is a county-wide point of contact for reporting racist incidents. The system hasn't yet been set up but we have been helping to develop an electronic reporting system via the Worcestershire Hub and encouraging support from other partners.

We have also been working more closely with our neighbouring councils and a local authorities sub group has been formed. This has proved to be useful as all councils in the county face similar challenges in their work so by working together we can potentially achieve more. We have shared information regarding the equality standard, approaches to training and funding opportunities.

11. The year ahead

As we progress our equality and diversity work over the next year, we face various challenges. These include:

- **Mainstreaming the impact assessment process** – so there is greater awareness and ownership of the need for and methodology of impact assessments across the organisation. And making sure the assessment process is robust enough to ensure our services and policies have the best possible impact on our communities.
- **Maintaining awareness about equality and diversity** throughout the organisation – this is an on-going part of our work as maintaining a commitment for equalities and diversity is something that needs to be a continual process. This will be done by further staff training and awareness raising through our internal and external communications.
- **Implementing the revised Equality Standard** – As mentioned earlier on in the report the revised standard sets out further requirements for local authorities to be able to progress through the levels. There have also been discussions that the standard may also be revised further still which means we need to take a flexible approach to our work.

- **Preparing for the single equalities framework** – although this will not be introduced until 2008 this will bring about more implications for us. It's vital that we work collectively across the county to prepare for this.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion we have made good progress on all aspects of our equality and diversity work over the last year. Not only in certain areas such as scrutiny or impact assessment but also by raising awareness through all levels of the organisation. We are certainly not complacent though, as there is lots more work to do to fully embrace diversity. One of the biggest challenges in implementing the equality and diversity agenda is a lack of understanding about the subject. In order to overcome this we have focused on letting people know how taking into account diversity issues is part of the way we work and it's not an add-on activity. And in doing so making the agenda relevant and meaningful for our organisation. This is something that we will continue to do over the next year as in order to provide good services for all our residents it's essential that we take into account the diverse needs of all of our communities.

We have also received valuable assistance and feedback over the last year from the Worcestershire Racial Equality Council. So would like to thank Peter Oteng, Interim Manager and we look forward to continuing to build this working relationship between our organisations in the future.

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>