

Reaching out to everyone

Wychavon's diversity policy

2005-2008

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If you require a large print copy please contact Rob Mace on 01386 565517.

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Our vision for Wychavon is of healthy, safe, vibrant and diverse communities living in a clean and green environment

1. Introduction

This policy sets out our aspirations and is a high-level statement reflecting the importance of equality and diversity for us. The aim of this document is therefore to set out our approach to diversity. Not only in terms of promoting equality of opportunity but also how we will seek to ensure our services meet the diverse needs of our communities. We have already had external feedback on our work from the Audit Commission as part of our Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The feedback was both positive and constructive but we are certainly not complacent and aim to continually improve our work.

“The Council has a competent and coherent approach to diversity, social inclusion and the needs of vulnerable people living in the community. It has raised the profile of these issues across services during the last two years. The Council carried out a social inclusion review and used census data and other information to set out priorities, promises and actions for the future”

(Audit Commission Housing Inspection Report 2005)

2. Our policy on equality and diversity

This document is part of our continuing approach to address equality and diversity in Wychavon. Rather than viewing ‘equality’ issues as separate strands we are now taking a single approach as so many of the issues overlap we need to look at the whole picture of ‘diversity’ in the district.

We want to continue to mainstream our approach to equality and diversity into our service planning and delivery activities. And most importantly to recognise and value the diversity of our communities in our work.

Not only do we aim to carry out all of our legislative duties but we also want to go beyond what is required of us. **This means that we will not discriminate in any way according to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion or faith. We recognise that everyone is different but this doesn’t mean that people should be disadvantaged as a result.**

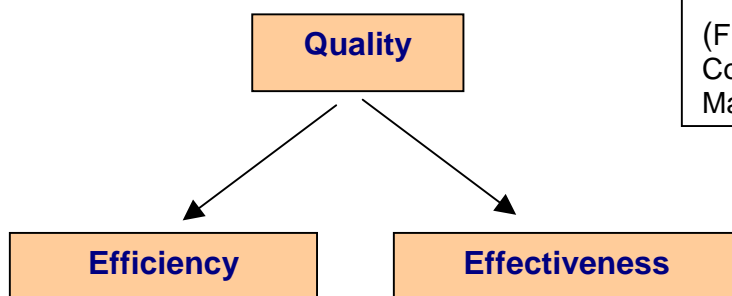
▪ Celebrating Wychavon’s diversity

Diversity is all about recognising and valuing difference so it’s important to ask what makes Wychavon unique? Although we don’t have a large number of different ethnic minority communities (currently 1.2% of the population) in Wychavon, there are many other factors that make our communities diverse. These include:

- the higher than average number of elderly people in the district
- the large number of families who settle here and the general affluence of the area
- the hotspots of deprivation that exist as well as rural isolation,
- the presence of travellers
- Issues regarding casual labour and migrant workers
- lack of transport and the social exclusion of community groups.

To tackle these issues we need to be aware of the problems facing our communities and look at how we can address these through our service delivery and working with others.

In order to deliver quality services we need to ensure we are both efficient, by providing value for money and effective as we are looking at the needs of all of our community groups.



“It’s really about diversity not equality, as people aren’t the same”

(F.Narburgh Head of Strategy & Communications, Senior Management lead on equality and

3. Equality and diversity – making it real

In the past equalities work has focused strongly on race relations but a good equalities framework is more comprehensive than just looking at a single issue. The equality agenda now has six distinct strands: gender, ethnicity, religion and faith, sexual orientation, age and disability. At the same time many of these issues are often inter-related and it’s important to consider the combination of these factors which can lead to social exclusion.

Diversity is about recognising and embracing differences. People are not the same and by recognising this we can start to look at the specific needs of individuals and social groups. This policy is therefore really an **equity policy** as it’s about **treating people fairly and recognising their differences**. This works at three levels:

- Internally - how we work throughout all of our personnel policies and our attitudes and differences in the work place
- Community relations - how we engage with and understand the needs of our communities
- Service delivery – taking into account differences by providing a choice of services

This policy applies to both our internal and external operations. It is comprehensive as it covers all aspects of our work and applies to officers, councillors, partner organisations, contractors and anyone we are working with. It states our position as an organisation and our high-level commitment to recognising and promoting equality and diversity.

4. Leadership and commitment

In January 2005 we expressed our commitment to the equalities agenda and achieved level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ref1). The Equality Standard is an improvement tool which local authorities use to put a framework in place to progress work on diversity. The main themes of the standard are covered within this policy and **we will also produce an annual progress report to monitor our work**.

“Community cohesion is not about eliminating conflict and disagreement. These are inherent in any complex and diverse society, especially one still riven with inequalities. **Cohesion reflects a shared capacity to address grievances, challenge unfair discrimination and manage differences**”

(A Gilchrist 2005 Community Cohesion and Development, www.cdf.org)

We have already made substantial progress on the Equality Standard and this policy sets out our overall objectives and action planning procedures. This will enable us to progress through the levels of the standard as it will document our approach and set out how we will take the agenda forward. The main policies this document incorporates are our Race Equality Scheme (ref2) and our Social Inclusion Review (ref3). Our Race Equality Scheme was reviewed as part of our Equality Standard audit and an updated document can be found on our website. When our initial audit against the Equality Standard took place we identified gaps and set out what we need to do to fill them. Subsequently our Corporate Equalities Action Plan (ref4) put together the areas that we will do more on. The implementation timetable can be found in the appendices.

A good equalities framework starts with a strong commitment from senior managers and our Executive Board. Although diversity is addressed within all service units the specific responsibility sits within the Strategy & Communications Unit.

▪ **Member involvement and our Equalities group**

In order to mainstream diversity through all service departments our in house equalities team is driving the process lead by the Strategy and Communications Unit. In order to respond to new issues as they emerge our in house team meets every 4-6 weeks to provide a springboard for equality issues. Cllr Mrs Audrey Steel is currently the chair of this group in her role as our Board member with responsibility for equality issues.

Equality is about **creating a fairer society** where everyone can participate and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. It is backed by legislation designed to address unfair discrimination based on membership of a particular group.

(Definition courtesy of Pan'Ash Consultancy 2005)

▪ **Our priorities & objectives**

We made a clear commitment to equalities when our third priority was changed to 'reaching out to everyone' in 2003. This is **our overall equality and diversity objective to 'reach out to everyone' in our communities**. This is also vital for us to work towards our vision and for us to fulfil our overall aim 'to deliver excellent services and work with partners to improve quality of life in Wychavon for everyone'. By working towards the Equality Standard we will build on our current work and as a good/nearly excellent rated Council, it will help us to identify any gaps where we need to improve.

Equalities is already embedded within our plans and strategies. Our plans review in 2003 showed that the majority of the plans we produce address cross-cutting themes of social inclusion and equalities.

5. Consultation, community development and scrutiny

Consultation is an invaluable resource to involve the community in our work and get feedback on our services. As well as specific research about key services we also have a variety of information about how our communities feel about their area and the services we provide. The majority of our plans and strategies and policy decisions are based on consultation including our MORI residents survey, general satisfaction surveys, Healthchecks, Simalto budget

Diversity is about the recognition and valuing of difference in its broadest sense. It is about creating a working culture and practices that recognise respect, value and harness difference for the benefit of the organisation and the individual, including tenants, residents, clients etc.

(Definition courtesy of Pan'Ash Consultancy 2005)

consultation, community plan consultation and fear of crime surveys to name but a few.

Community engagement is a key part of effective consultation and our 'reaching out to everyone' initiative has allowed communities to give us feedback on our services. This was launched in April 2004 and we now have a dedicated outreach officer to work with community groups to provide information about our services, get peoples views and encourage them to get involved. This will be a useful tool to help us consult with minority groups.

▪ **Equality through partnerships and community development**

Our first community plan called 'Making life sweeter for you' was published in March 2003. Its overall approach to equalities is clearly set out within the aim '**to improve quality of life in Wychavon for everyone**'.

In order to tackle inequalities in the district, partnership working is essential. Our community plan is action focused and has enabled partnership work to focus on the distinct needs of our three towns and surrounding villages by using three Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).

▪ **Impact assessments**

An impact assessment is a way of assessing and consulting on the effect a policy is likely to have on community groups. This also includes monitoring a policy once it's been implemented to find out how well it is working. We currently assess our policies in two different ways. Firstly, all policies and reports are screened when they go to Executive Board or Full Council. This means that implications of the policy are considered in relation to our priorities and promises and the impact they will have on our communities. Our guidance on screening policies has been developed from the Commission for Race Equality (CRE) impact assessment toolkit. The second phase of our assessment takes place as part of our service unit diversity best practice sessions to focus on continual improvement. This is a time where the impact of services is looked at including issues such as:

- Do we have adequate information about the impact of our services?
- What consultation have we conducted to ensure they are meeting residents needs?
- Have any complaints arisen where we can take action on or learn from?

The actions arising from the sessions will form part of our diversity action plan and will then be embedded with our annual service delivery plans.

The consultation element of impact assessments is something we already have a good track record of. Out of the 28 plans we currently produce, 70% of them were consulted on via external bodies. The need for targeted consultation with specific community groups may arise though as part of the assessment process. Our overall approach to consultation can be found on our website. This includes the current consultation methods we use to get feedback on our services and establish community priorities to direct our work.

▪ **Monitoring arrangements**

The development of improvement sessions mean we will be in a position to set equality targets in order to progress our work. **We will monitor progress as part of our Signals of Success (SoS) quarterly performance reports** including both equality actions as well as Best Value performance indicator's. **We will publish an annual equalities update to**

provide a snapshot of our work over a year. The policy will also updated in light of our progress and any key organisational changes that occur.

6. Service delivery and customer care

We are committed to providing **high standards of service delivery and customer care** and Chartermark provides a means by which this can be assessed. The criteria for this assessment also covers key diversity issues similar to those set out in the Equality Standard so this is an important part of our equalities framework. Our corporate Chartermark submission was made in November 2004 and now each of our service units are working towards Chartermark status. This means that the level of customer care will be assessed on standards set in relation to fairness, accessibility and choice.

Chartermark challenges organisations to set and publish standards and then be accountable to customers for those standards. It encourages innovation and service improvements as well as choice and flexibility to service users as it takes into account their views and opinions.

(Guide to the Charter Mark Criteria 2003, Cabinet Office)

We also have service charters available for each of our service units. These set out both the standards that customers can expect from us and how they will be treated in the process.

Providing **equal access to services** is essential to make our services as inclusive as is reasonably possible. Access to services is also a more predominant issue in rural areas like Wychavon (highlighted by the Index Multiple Deprivation 2004) so providing customer choice is vital. The development of our community contact centres has provided increased opportunities for residents to contact us. E-government also means that over time more of our services are accessible via the Internet.

We are aiming to provide high quality services and welcome feedback as a means to improve our work. We already have a **complaints, compliments and suggestions procedure (ref5)** in place and we encourage feedback about our services.

▪ Reporting procedures

Any incident of harassment can be reported to us, as it's important for us to know if any incidents have taken place. If the incident is in relation to our services then we will respond to it. If it is not directly in relation to our services or our organisation we will try and offer advice to residents about how to deal with the incident. A list of useful contact organisations is available on our website or can be sent out on request.

Reports can be made via our community contact centres, email, telephone or in writing to our legal services team. Any report will be treated sensitively and notification to other organisations and bodies will be made as necessary. The main organisation we pass on information to regarding any reported racial incident is the Worcestershire Racial Equality Council. With regard to wider issues of harassment (e.g. disability discrimination) we can advice and signpost you to the appropriate body to deal with the incident.

7. Employment and training

We are committed to providing fair employment and equal opportunities.

Equality and diversity is an embedded theme within all of our personnel related matters. Our commitment to fair employment is set out within our recruitment and selection policy. Our equal pay policy is administered through a job evaluation scheme and we are currently working towards completing a workforce profile and an equal pay review.

Monitoring takes place as part of our overall recruitment processes. This involves monitoring information and statistics regarding the profile of applicants entering into the recruitment process.

We are committed to developing our employees and providing equal access to both training and development opportunities. The Investors in people (IiP) standard provides us with a framework for this. By developing our people this has a positive impact on our services and performance. And we are committed to the business case for diversity.

Training is a key part of our approach to diversity. **We will run an annual training programme** including diversity training for both our staff and councillors. This aims to address diversity issues and raise awareness. All of our diversity training incorporates links to our equality objectives and details set out in this policy.

As well as with our own staff it is important that we also consider diversity issues in relation to our partners and key contractors. All staff who are involved in procurement and contracting related activity are required to consider diversity issues. Similarly, all partners, contractors and consultants are required to comply in all respects with our policies, contract procedure rules and financial regulations where appropriate.

“Understanding the diverse needs of our communities is a vital so that Councillors can develop their community leadership role. Awareness of diversity issues is the first step to ensure we really are reaching out to everyone”

(Councillor Mrs Audrey Steel, Executive Board Member for Equalities)

More information

Copies of all key documents mentioned in this policy including our CPA reports, Community Plan and Race Equality Scheme and annual report are available on our website at www.wychavon.gov.uk.

If you wish to discuss this policy or have any questions please contact Rob Mace, Community Outreach Officer on 01386 565517 or email robin.mace@wychavon.gov.uk

References - All supporting documents are available on request and some are also on our website

1. Equality Standard for Local Government – Audit documents and Board papers
2. Race Equality Scheme – the original and the updated version in 2005.
3. Social Inclusion Review – conducted in 2003
4. Corporate Equalities Action Plan
5. Complaints, compliments and suggestions procedure