

Diversity Peer Challenge  
3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> February 2010

South Derbyshire District Council

Report



## 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:

Pauline Ellis – Leeds City Council
Mark Farmer – Luton Borough Council
Councillor Alan Melton (Leader) - Fenland 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:

South Derbyshire 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 Equality and Fairness Scheme comprehensively identifies and considers all the six equality strands and enables other areas of inequality to be understood and addressed.
- There is a real desire to engage and understand community needs, working towards this and exploring opportunities and ways to do this that build upon previous success. For example, Parish Planning has been undertaken to understand and address community needs and aspirations.

##### *Evidence gathering*

- A range of techniques is used to gather local and national data. Examples of effective evidence gathering include, the South Derbyshire evidence base, the place survey, census information and specific research with communities.
- Information is gathered and analysed corporately. It has been used to develop the vision for the area, which in turn has been used to inform the organisational value statement for employees and customers.
- The Council works well with its partners to understand and interpret information; as a result of this, needs are jointly targeted and addressed. For example, there is an agreed outcome to support people to live independently; the 'Telecare' project is one of a number of successful initiatives that has enabled older and disabled people to live at home.

##### **Areas for consideration:**

- Need to ensure that there is robust evidence gathering across all the equality strands. For example there needs to be more detailed analysis around sexual orientation.
- The Council's equality monitoring guidance needs updating to ensure that there is a consistent corporate approach to data gathering. Need to ensure the language used in the guidance is clear, meets best practice guidance and states why the organisation collects the data and what it does with it.

Try to harness the potential of internal as well as external partnerships. Value the benefits of shared skills, resources and information intelligence. Work to challenge the perception that internal partnerships are not encouraged

## 3.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

### Strengths:

#### Leadership, influence and partnership

- The Leader of the Council (Councillor Heather Wheeler) is very focused and aware of the issues around equality and fairness having a wide knowledge of the issues and taking a pro-active approach to community relationships.
- The Council works well with partners e.g. Derbyshire Community Cohesion panel and through this joint initiatives are undertaken which has led to improvements in services for the public. There is a realisation that there is scope for further improvement, although the trend is positive..
- South Derbyshire is proactive in attracting inward investment from within this country and from abroad. Examples of this include the investment made by Toyota and Lecky Metals which has had the beneficial effect of creating new jobs. Working with these partners the Council has encouraged them to embed equality within their practices. It has also enabled the Council to broaden their knowledge and understanding of different cultures.
- The Council demonstrates senior management engagement with different communities and this shows commitment to other staff about the high priority placed by senior managers on equality and fairness.

#### Member involvement

- There is an Equality and Diversity training event held on an annual basis, for all members of the Council. These sessions are to identify and discuss any new issues that are arising, and to review and assess progress made by the Council in the previous year. Any lessons learned are evaluated and used for policy development. This training is also extended to outside bodies, which are allied to the Council.
- Members on the whole have been very supportive of the equality and fairness agenda. The Council has committed resources through the employment of an equality officer and also supports voluntary and community sector organisations.
- There is also a Member who has been appointed as an equality champion and who provides political leadership around the Councils equality and fairness agenda.

*"We feel that we are doing ok although we could improve further. Its about changing hearts and minds and this takes longer to embed"*

### **Areas for consideration:**

- Continue to improve the representation of Members from diverse backgrounds.
- Consider the need to work more closely with external partners such as Derbyshire County Council and Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service, in terms of sharing and developing good practice around equality and fairness.
- The Equality and Fairness scheme needs to address more clearly how the Council plans to meet the high level outcomes outlined in the Corporate Plan and the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- The Scrutiny function could be used more effectively in its performance management role in the delivery of equality and diversity objectives.

### **3.3 Community engagement and satisfaction**

#### **Strengths:**

- Community engagement is strong. The Council engages with the community when setting corporate and financial priorities. This is done through a range of innovative methods to comprehensively engage with residents, community and voluntary sector organisations. Policies and plans are altered to reflect the feedback given. An example of this is when the Council engaged, to best effect, with different organisations in the re-design of its customer service centre and town centre redevelopment.
- There are strong working relationships between the Council and its partners to understand and address health inequalities. Recent, comprehensive consultation with older people highlighted that a number of older people were feeling isolated and that activity levels were low. This led the Council to work with partners to focus the Community Strategy on addressing this and on developing services that enable older people to socialise and exercise; examples of this include the Liberation Day and the Active in Age project.
- Through a number of projects and initiatives, the Council has worked to promote culture awareness and understanding between its diverse communities. For example, it supported a successful project to promote Chinese New Year, at which people from across all South Derbyshire communities attended and led a celebration of leisure event to encourage socialisation between people of different ages.
- The Council and Members work very closely with voluntary and focus groups, taking the lead in policy formation.
- There is an excellent approach to ensuring that feedback is given to groups and individuals that have engaged with the Council. This has contributed to a positive feeling that the Council empowers people to make a contribution to their local area.

### **Areas for consideration:**

- While there has been work undertaken to understand and promote community cohesion, the number of people in the place survey saying that they get on well together, is lower than the national average. It is therefore essential that the Council build on the understanding that it has of its communities and engages with them to further strengthen relationships between people from different cultural and social backgrounds.
- There is some evidence that the needs of Gypsy and Travellers communities are not being met. The Council needs to recognise and respond to the varying needs of the different Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- The Council needs to give further consideration to how it will engage the wider community in deciding how limited resources are used to meet sometimes-conflicting needs and interests

### **3.4 Responsive services and customer care**

#### **Strengths:**

- There are a number of examples of where the Council has engaged the community, staff and partners to help shape strategic priorities, for example the Corporate Plan, the Equality and Fairness Scheme and the Sustainable Community Strategy. Mechanisms are in place, including customer feedback, equality monitoring data and research, which continue to seek the views of traditionally unheard or understood individuals and communities. Progress on meeting objectives is reported to communities on a regular basis.
- Customer service standards are in place which are underpinned with clear guidance for staff and clear summary for customers to help them understand what they can expect from services in the way they are treated.
- There are effective tools, guidance and advice in place to facilitate the procurement process, which helps both services and businesses to engage. Small businesses are provided with a range of opportunities to both understand the procurement process, apply for contracts and are sign posted to Business Link for appropriate training. Services are responsible for monitoring their contracts and equality and diversity is incorporated into the tender specification and contract.
- There are examples of external partnership working that have made a positive impact for citizens. For example, the Citizens Advice Bureau providing debt advice for tenants.
- The Council is exploring Participatory Budgeting that recognises finite resources, needs and expectations and managing those expectations.

## Equality impact risk assessments

- Equality Impact Assessments have provided a vehicle for staff participation in developing more responsive policies, procedures and services
- A rolling programme of Equality Impact Assessments inform the service planning and corporate business planning process, for example housing services reviewed provision for older and disabled people, to ensure that the Corporate Plan objective of supporting people to live independently was met. The equality impact risk assessment process has been used by services to identify equality actions and outcomes for customers in service provision and policy. Where these have been identified actions have been included within service plans and performance monitored through the performance management framework.

## **Areas for consideration:**

- Link to and build upon internal partnerships across departments and services
- There needs to be further consultation with gypsy and traveller communities in order to understand their requirements relating to permanent and temporary sites.

## Performance management and monitoring

- Performance management of delivery against Corporate Plan equalities outcomes needs strengthening, this needs to be done through ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services and projects to ensure that they are providing the required outputs.
- Currently the Customer Service Standards guidance has a specific section relating to disability. The guidance could be strengthened if there was an explanation to help understanding of all the equality areas linked back to the Equality and Fairness Scheme.
- Extend and implement equality monitoring for all relevant services and policies. This should be supported with guidance that helps provide an understanding of the benefits of equality monitoring data, how to use the data and support with collecting and using.
- Continuity of monitoring post contract across all services providing a consistent approach.

### 3.5 A modern and diverse workforce

#### Strengths:

- The Council has developed a set of values that includes reference to treating people fairly. Whilst these are newly developed, there is a commitment to promote these across all staff (including agency/temporary workers) through inclusion in strategic documents, training sessions and through general promotion initiatives.
- There is a perception that employees feel that the Council has effective policies and procedures to deal with any discriminatory issues concerning staff.
- There is a culture of supporting staff taking maternity leave. There is flexibility to allow them to stay in work as long as they wish and also there are adaptations available to allow them to return to work.
- The workforce profile is believed to be broadly representative of the community although it is recognised that more could be done to improve the representation levels and there are a number of initiatives in place to address areas of concern for example, apprenticeship, training and development opportunities for young people and Springboard for women into management.
- The Council recruits some staff from external agencies and these are provided with training to ensure that they are aware of the Council's values and also how to provide a service in a non-discriminatory manner.
- The Workforce Development Plan directly links to the "Vision" the "Corporate Plan" and the Equality and Fairness Scheme. This also ensures that equality and diversity is integrated within the personal development review.
- Despite reaching an impasse and imposing a statutory process South Derbyshire has made significant progress on its Equal Pay Review. Employees are kept informed of progress in a timely manner.
- All new and existing employment policies go through the equality impact risk assessment process to help identify areas for improvement.
- South Derbyshire understands its staffing profile and has a number of initiatives in place to address areas of concern for example, apprenticeship, training and development opportunities for young people and Springboard for women into management.
- There is a harassment and bullying policy and procedure in place. Employees and managers feel confident that the policy and procedure is accessible for people who may experience bullying and harassment.
- There are positive relationships with Trade Unions leading to honest and open discussions and a willingness to look at compromises. Formal structures are in place, for example the Joint Negotiation Group, which acts as an information exchange and policy review group between Trade Unions and management.

- The Workforce development profile document is clearly set out, covers all the equality areas currently monitored within all sections of employment and links directly to the Workforce Development Plan.

*'We have run training courses on developing our staff, including Springboard, which enables women at lower grades to learn about career development. We have also run courses for women in middle and senior management. This is intended to address the representation of women at senior management level.'*

**Areas for consideration:**

- Whilst there is training on equality and fairness, it is evident that a higher level awareness course would be welcomed by those staff who wanted to learn more about equality and fairness.
- The guidance for equality impact risk assessment needs revising. Consistent language needs to be used. Although high, medium and low ranking is suggested within the process there is no advice within the current guidance about this, It would be worth including consideration for positive as well as negative impacts, to help demonstrate the positive benefit resulting from proposed service or policy changes.
- Generally, there is a perception that all staff are committed to the equality and fairness agenda, but to embed real change across all staff will take time. There is a need to continue to celebrate and continue the work to achieve equality and fairness for all.

## 4.0 Key Challenges

- ✓ Performance management to ensure delivery against corporate and community objectives.
- ✓ Celebrating the real differences that are being made to raise awareness of both staff and public.
- ✓ Continuing embedding equality and diversity into the day job.
- ✓ Continue to implement equal pay in a way that is fair to all parties.
- ✓ Implementing the corporate change programme in a way that identifies, considers and addresses any negative workforce and customer access issues.
- ✓ Ensure that there is a consistent use of language across documents and forms and are in a format that is accessible to all.
- ✓ Ensuring a balance of activities for all equality areas, for example lesbian, gay and bisexual

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