

## **Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement**

### **Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2009/10**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 This Annual Report is produced in accordance with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and reports on progress with implementing the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2009/10. The directorate's action plan for 2010/11 was considered by the Select Committee on Environment on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and subsequently approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 1.2 The annual report covers the period from April 2009 to March 2010 and contains the following:
- Key facts about the directorate (service and employment)
  - Issues from equality impact assessments
  - Achievements against the directorate's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2009/10

#### **2.0 Key Facts about the Finance Directorate**

- 2.1 The Finance Directorate's aim is to ensure the most effective use of the Council's financial resources by:
- Serving its customers well (we hold a directorate-wide Charter Mark)
  - Promoting good stewardship of public funds
  - Supporting the Council's objectives as detailed in the Council Plan
  - Providing good staff management
  - Promoting equality and diversity, ensuring equal opportunity for all.
- 2.2 The economic downturn has inevitably put pressure on council resources. During 2009/10 the Finance directorate has responded to changes in service demand in a pragmatic way, both in relation to its direct customers and also through participation in corporate initiatives, to ensure that all sections of the community receive fair access to services. Examples of our responses are set out below:
- Dealt with increased demand for benefit services. In the year to March 2010 Benefit caseload increased by 7.4%, on top of an increase of 5.5% in the previous year. This has resulted in the following rises in workload since March 2008 - (prior to the recession) to March 2010:-
    - A 20% rise in new applications processed
    - A 64% increase in change of circumstances processed
    - A 50% increase in visits to our counter
    - A 60% increase in telephone calls received

- Paid invoices within 10 working days (average). This action is intended to support the cash flow of small and medium sized enterprises.
- Worked closely with other directorates to present a coordinated approach by the Council e.g. Recession Bus, information about customer contact points, web pages providing information on how to become a contractor for the Council.

2.3 The directorate provides services direct to the public through Benefit Services, Revenue Services and Dudley Council Plus. Brief details of these services are set out below.

**Benefit Services** provides an up to date, high quality, caring benefit service at a cost the public and the Council can afford, in a rapidly changing environment. The service aims to maximise take-up through improved customer insight and works closely with other Council services to target potential claimants not currently in receipt of benefit. In January 2010 the Benefits customer service counter was transferred to Dudley Council Plus, providing improved customer access and increased opening hours. Key facts about the service are detailed below:

- administered £105m in Housing and Council Tax Benefit to over 34,000 households
- administered free school meals benefiting nearly 9,500 children in the borough
- undertook nearly 1,500 home visits to benefit claimants
- The Benefits Shop facilitated nearly £2.3m in benefit take-up.

**Revenue Services** collects council tax, business rates and sundry debt. It offers customers a wide range of payment facilities, including electronic and telephone. Key facts about the service are detailed below:

- achieved the second highest council tax collection rate among metropolitan councils, at a low cost
- administered the billing, collection and recovery of over 133,000 council tax and 10,000 business rate accounts
- received direct debit payments from around 62% of council taxpayers and 47% of business ratepayers

**Dudley Council Plus** provides a single point of contact for customers contacting Dudley Council. It aims to make contacting the Council easier by providing information on, and access to all services in one place, through a variety of communication channels including personal visits, telephone calls, emails and electronic internet forms. It also provides a payment service for cash, card and cheque payments. In 2009/10 the service was extended into the community through major libraries. DC+ works closely with external organisations, hosting visits and campaigns from bodies such as Centro (bus passes for pensioners); Age UK and Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Castle and Crystal Credit Union. In addition, DC+ was recently used to provide a hotline for staff who had received equal pay offer letters. Key facts about the service are detailed below:

- answered 91% of all incoming telephone calls, 426,000 in total
- received 127,000 payments
- saw 82% of customers within 10 minutes of their arrival

- enabled 99% of customers to make cash payments within 10 minutes

2.4 The Directorate also provides support services to the Council as follows:

**Audit Services** investigates and reviews internal controls and risk, ensuring the Council's resources are used in the most effective way.

**Financial Services** provides financial information, training, support and advice to managers and Council Members. This includes managing the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets and borrowings. It also administers the Council's payroll, pensions and risk management functions.

**Procurement, Contract Management and Creditor Services** develops arrangements for purchasing goods and services and supports major projects and contracts within the Council. Ensures the Council's bills are paid efficiently and promptly. The service has been involved in developing corporate procurement guidelines that encompass equality principles.

**Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services** helps the Council deliver best value by exploiting information and communication technology. The service supports the Council's data communications network and provides advice, guidance and training on ICT issues, particularly in the Council's adherence to the electronic government agenda. The use of new technology is a key element in ensuring that customer services are accessible.

## 2.5 **Customer service and engagement**

The directorate holds the Charter Mark, having maintained it on review in November 2009. On this occasion, Dudley Council Plus achieved the standard for the first time, while the assessor described the service as one "that has been transformed in the last two years, such that it now delivers an excellent service to the residents of Dudley".

2.6 The directorate records all major engagement activity on the Council's Community Engagement database. Activity during 2009/10 included the following:

- Budget consultation with Business Rate payers
- Budget consultation with the general public
- Benefits enquiry counter customer survey
- Monthly customer satisfaction surveys of Benefit Services, Revenue Services and Dudley Council Plus.

Other consultation takes place with a customer group, landlords, housing associations, property agents and through a CAB / Bailiff liaison group.

2.7 Customer satisfaction levels range from 93% and 96%, about which the Charter Mark assessor commented "satisfaction levels are very high ...this performance has been achieved despite very challenging circumstances resulting from the economic downturn". Whenever possible, services will contact any dissatisfied customers to try to resolve the problem.

2.8 The Finance directorate takes a lead role in reviewing and updating the corporate Customer Feedback Procedure, ensuring it continues to meet customer

requirements. Part of this role involves reporting to Corporate Board and the Cabinet, through the quarterly Performance Management process, about the Compliments, Comments and Complaints received by the Council

- 2.9 The directorate has also led on the development of a corporate Customer Charter, which sets standards that customers can expect in their dealings with the Council.

**2.10 Strategic Planning and Performance Management**

The Directorate publishes an annual Strategic Plan, to inform staff, internal customers and Council Members of its work. The plan, which is available on the Intranet, sets out the Directorate's objectives, priorities and targets for the year, including those for equality and diversity issues. Performance in achieving action plan targets is measured and managed through regular meetings between senior management and divisional (service) heads, and is formally reviewed by the directorate's management team on a quarterly basis.

- 2.11 Within the directorate, high priority is given to ensuring all employment practices, procurement activity, use of technology and service delivery comply with equality and diversity policies and current legislation. An Assistant Director is lead officer for equality and diversity, and a Principal Officer has specific responsibility to ensure directorate activities are linked to the corporate agenda, enabling policies to be translated into action at directorate and divisional level. This includes liaising with senior management and divisional heads, providing advice and direction, monitoring progress and preparing regular progress reports.

**2.12 Employment and Workforce Monitoring**

Full data about employment across the Council, including that which meets the requirement for employment monitoring by racial group under race relations legislation, will be published in the Council's Annual Review of Equality and Diversity 2010.

- 2.13 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010, the Finance Directorate employed 665 staff in 7 service areas. The profile is set out in Table 1(a), showing breakdown by grade. This can be compared to the Council's profile as a whole which is set out in Table 1(b). The equivalent figures for 31 March 2009 and 2008 are set out in italics in tables 1(a) and (b).

- 2.14 In relation to BME employees, the data shows that overall, the Finance Directorate has a similar profile to the Council average; but with a higher percentage below scale point 34 and a lower percentage at scale point 34 and above.

**Table 1(a): Finance Directorate workforce profile 31/3/10** *(compared with 31/3/09 and 31/3/08)*

Finance		Female (%)	Male (%)	BME (%)	Disabled (%)
Scale point 34 and above (Principal Officer grades)	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>48.3</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>
	<i>31/3/09</i>	<i>49.7</i>	<i>50.3</i>	<i>5.3</i>	<i>2.4</i>
	<i>31/3/08</i>	<i>47.8</i>	<i>52.2</i>	<i>6.8</i>	<i>1.9</i>
Below scale point 34 (lower grades)	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>71.4</b>	<b>28.6</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>
	<i>31/3/09</i>	<i>69.8</i>	<i>30.2</i>	<i>7.5</i>	<i>3.2</i>
	<i>31/3/08</i>	<i>70.6</i>	<i>29.4</i>	<i>7.6</i>	<i>3.0</i>

<b>Total</b>	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>
	31/3/09	64.7	35.3	6.9	3.2
	31/3/08	65.1	34.9	7.4	3.4

**Table 1(b): Dudley MBC workforce profile 31/3/10** (compared with 31/3/09 and 31/3/08)

<b>Dudley MBC</b>		<b>Female (%)</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>BME*</b>	<b>Disabled (%)</b>
<b>Scale point 34 and above (Principal Officer grades) (excluding schools) #</b>	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>4.5</b>
	31/3/09	51.1	48.9	9.2	4.5
	31/3/08	50.3	49.7	9.0	4.6
<b>Below scale point 34 (lower grades) (excluding schools) #</b>	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>69.2</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>2.6</b>
	31/3/09	69.3	30.7	6.3	2.6
	31/3/08	69.5	30.5	6.2	2.6
<b>Total (excluding schools)</b>	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>33.6</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>2.9</b>
	31/3/09	66.5	33.5	6.8	2.9
	31/3/08	66.6	33.4	6.6	2.9
<b>Total (including schools)</b>	<b>31/3/10</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>1.7</b>
	31/3/09	75.0	25.0	5.6	1.8
	31/3/08	74.9	25.1	5.5	2.0

Notes: Scale point 34 on 31 March 2010 £28,600 approx.

\* BME figures exclude those employees for whom no ethnic origin data is held

# Grade breakdown excludes schools due to the different grading for teachers

- 2.15 The percentage of employees with disabilities has fallen since 31/3/09 due to individual employees advising change in status. The percentage of employees with disabilities at scale point 34 and above is now considerably lower than the Council average. During 2010/11 the Council will be introducing a new HR self service system which will allow employees to check and update their personal data. Following the introduction of this system, employee data will continue to be monitored for any changes.
- 2.16 Whilst women represent approximately two thirds of the workforce, the proportion at senior grades is just under half, slightly lower than the Council average.
- 2.17 The directorate supports flexible working. As at 31 March 2010, 44% of all female staff and 33% of those on scale point 34 and above worked part time hours. 10% of male staff work part time hours. Following a successful pilot we now have 21 employees working from home. This initiative has proved beneficial to all parties in terms of increased productivity, reduced sickness absence, more flexibility in terms of the hours worked and reduced travelling time. It has also enabled one employee with a disability to continue working.

2.18 In 2009 the Council conducted an employee satisfaction survey, which included questions about whether individuals had experienced discrimination by their manager, team, division or directorate. 1% of respondents felt they had been discriminated against on the grounds of age, gender or sexual orientation. This compares with approx. 2% across the Council. The employee survey is anonymous.

#### 2.19 **Recruitment**

Table 2 sets out the Directorate's recruitment analysis for 2009/10 compared with the previous two years. Recruitment is conducted in accordance with Council policies and procedures, which guarantee an interview for all disabled candidates who meet the person specification.

**Table 2: Finance Directorate – recruitment activity**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Male %</b>	<b>Female %</b>	<b>BME %</b>	<b>Disabled %</b>
<b>2009/10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0%</b>
<i>2008/09</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>2007/08</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>77</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>

#### 2.20 **Learning and Development**

During 2009/10 93% of employees underwent annual Performance Review and Development (PRD) meetings with their manager, and agreed action plans for future work targets and skills development, including professional qualifications and NVQs. Some planned PRDs have not yet taken place for several reasons e.g. sickness absence of employees and workload issues. These will be undertaken as soon as practicable.

2.21 The directorate supports the principles of Investors in People and was due to have been reviewed in November 2009. However, pending the implementation of the Directorate of Corporate Resources it was agreed with the awarding body (Investors in People West Midlands) to postpone the review until the new directorate is established and new management procedures embedded.

### **3.0 Equality Impact Assessments**

3.1 An equality impact assessment (EIA) is a systematic and thorough approach to assessing the effects that the Council's policies or services have, or are likely to have, on different groups or communities. These usually relate to age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. EIAs respond to the requirements of equality legislation and therefore need to be carried out by all public authorities.

3.2 During 2009/10, in accordance with the programme set out in the Council's Equality Scheme, the Directorate undertook Level 1 EIAs of:

- Corporate Procurement Strategy 2009-2010
- Financial Services
- ICT Services

In addition, an equality impact assessment of the Benefits counter at Dudley Council Plus was undertaken as part of the transfer of the service from Ednam Road.

Issues arising from these assessments were:

- maintain and continually improve staff awareness and knowledge of equality
- monitor equality in procurement and promote through providing corporate guidance

Actions to address the issues have been included in the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11.

#### **4.0 Achievements against the Directorate's Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2009/10**

- 4.1 The achievements against each of the targets set in the directorate's equality and diversity action plan for 2009/10 are set out in the Appendix.

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement  
June 2010

## Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement – Performance against Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2009/10

Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
<b>Priority 1</b>				
<b>Undertake planned equality impact assessments (EIAs)</b>				
<b>Objective 1.1</b>	Complete EIAs in the following areas:	March 2010	EIAs completed within the timescales and improvement actions identified and scheduled.	EIAs completed within timescales. Identified actions included in 2010/11 equality and diversity action plan and divisional business plans.
AD-RB&MS	- Transfer of Benefits Counter to DC+			
IAD-FS&CF	- Financial Services			
IAD-ICT&BT	- ICT Services			
HoPS	- Corporate Procurement Policy			
<b>Priority 2</b>				
<b>Improve customer access to services</b>				
<b>Objective 2.1</b>	Maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels	March 2010	Improved customer satisfaction levels with front line services	Benefit Services 96% (96%) Revenue Services 97% (98%) DC+ 93% (94%) (previous year scores in brackets), with no apparent difference in satisfaction between the various equality groups.
AD-RB&MS			Charter Mark accreditation maintained	Charter Mark was maintained for existing services and achieved for the first time by DC+. Benefits counter transferred to DC+, providing improved access to services and longer opening hours.



Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
				DC+ service extended into the community through major libraries.
<b>Objective 2.2</b> AD-RB&MS / PO	Provide input into and support corporate strategies on vulnerable groups e.g. older people, children in care, carers	March 2010	Finance directorate services fully reflected in, and able to respond to these corporate strategies. Finance representative at officer working groups	Involvement in corporate parenting; older people strategy; CRB checks and training for staff that come into contact with vulnerable people, e.g. DC+. Participated in corporate BME consultation event in November 2009.
<b>Priority 3</b> <b>Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough</b>				
<b>Objective 3.1</b> AD-RB&MS	Maximise social security benefit take-up by priority groups through Attendance Allowance (AA) and Income Support (IS) campaign work	March 2010	Targets achieved for Benefits Shop take-up and number of successful new AA / IS claims	Achieved nearly £2.3m in take-up (target £2m) and over 900 successful AA / IS claims (target 800). Dealt with increased claims for housing and council tax benefit due to impact of economic downturn.
<b>Objective 3.2</b> AD-RB&MS	Develop knowledge of the local community and service users to ensure that the service is accessible and responsive and people get the benefits to which they are entitled	March 2010	Improved knowledge of existing customer base, which will allow us to determine appropriate strategies for improved benefit take-up by various groups	Ongoing work to identify potential benefit claimants not currently in receipt.
<b>Objective 3.3</b> AD-RB&MS	Maximise take-up of Council Tax and Business Rate reliefs / discounts through promoting customer awareness	March 2010	Customer awareness initiatives undertaken. Financial value of council tax and business rate reliefs / discounts allowed during the year.	Reminder sent with annual bills. Nearly £11m in council tax discount occupancy relief and over £2.2m business rate relief granted.

Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
<b>Priority 4</b> <b>Manage staffing resources fairly and equally</b>				
<b>Objective 4.1</b> All divisional heads	Ensure all employees participate in the Performance Review and Development (PRD) process and have a training plan with jointly identified and agreed training priorities.	March 2010	% of employees who take part in the PRD process. % of employees who are satisfied with the PRD process	As at 31 March 2010 93% of employees had undergone a PRD with their manager (compared with 89% across the Council [ <i>source : Employee Survey 2009</i> ]) In the 2009 employee survey 73.2% of Finance staff agreed that the PRD process was useful (72.4% in 2007).
<b>Objective 4.2</b> All divisional heads	Ensure managers and employees receive appropriate learning and development opportunities in equality awareness and leadership behaviours	March 2010	Training needs identified e.g. through PRDs are promptly addressed through relevant training provision	Ongoing – training needs identified at induction and through the PRD process and addressed through corporate training courses. As a result of PRDs 14 staff attended equality and diversity training, while 3 managers attended leadership training.
<b>Objective 4.3</b> All divisional heads	Monitor workforce composition to identify current levels and enable managers to make decisions about future targets.	March 2010	Workforce reflects the economically active community	Workforce data is monitored and reported to Finance DMT every quarter as part of the performance management process.
<b>Priority 5</b> <b>Promote equality through effective use of ICT resources</b>				
<b>Objective 5.1</b> IAD-ICT&BT	Exploit new technology to provide improved access to council services e.g. from citizens' homes	March 2010	Increased use of electronic service delivery e.g. 24/7 council tax telephone service; customers who pay by direct debit; apply for services / jobs online	Introduced type-talk to improve communication with people with hearing difficulties. Supported developments e.g. digi tv, council tax automated telephony and text read facility that help provide

Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
				services which people can access from home; e-capture of benefits data allows the service to provide a quicker response to paying benefit claims; 0300 numbers to improve service continuity for customers; 62% of council tax payers and 47% of business rate payers pay by direct debit
<b>Objective 5.2</b> IAD-ICT&BT	Improve employee access to information through the development of publishing capabilities on the Intranet (improved access standards).	March 2010	Intranet web content management system successfully implemented; improved access for employees with certain disabilities	New Intranet implemented, providing improved accessibility. Includes dedicated "Equality Matters" pages for employees to access information about equality issues.
<b>Objective 5.3</b> IAD-ICT&BT	Support the development of an e-learning facility for the Council	March 2010	Intranet e-learning facility implemented; to include facility for equality and diversity training; ability to monitor training records will help identify and address training gaps.	Ongoing support provided to proposed corporate equality and diversity e-learning, to be launched in 2010/11. Other instances of e-learning already in place providing more staff with learning and development opportunities.
<b>Objective 5.4</b> AD-RB&MS	Extend Home Based Working initiative	June 2009	Numbers on the scheme; Improved employee productivity, job satisfaction and work life balance	Home based working was extended in Benefit Services and is running successfully. It has also been provided as a "reasonable adjustment" to enable a disabled employee to remain in work.

Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
<b>Priority 6</b> <b>Promote equality through the procurement process</b>				
<b>Objective 6.1</b> HoP	Support corporate work in improving awareness of equality issues in procurement.	December 2009	Council officers involved in contracts are adhering to the corporate guidelines re. promoting equality through procurement.	Equality in Procurement guidelines updated and published. Presentation on revised Corporate Procurement Strategy given to EDLG.
<b>Objective 6.2</b> HoP	Support corporate work in reviewing the Corporate Procurement Strategy.	December 2009	Revised Corporate Procurement Strategy which addresses Council requirements.	Revised strategy approved by Cabinet.
<b>Priority 7</b> <b>Support corporate initiatives</b>				
<b>Objective 7.1</b> Working with EDLG	Assess the implications of the Equality Bill and prepare for the introduction of the Act: - Assess new duties and outline action required - Include other equality strands within the Equality Scheme - Draw up revised Council vision for equality	March 2010 ongoing	Understanding of new legal requirements. Improved identification and coordination of action for all equality strands.	Commenced. The delayed introduction of the Equality Act means this will continue into 2010/11. Equality Scheme updated in accordance with timetable and approved by Cabinet. 10 year Council vision for equality approved by Cabinet.
<b>Objective 7.2</b> Working with EDLG	Improve equality and diversity policy development and performance management: - Trial combined central directorates equality group - Undertake initial self	From April 2009  July 2009	Improved coordination, sharing of good practice and performance management Areas for improvement identified and programmed	Support service directorates equality group has been established and meets every 2-3 months to discuss key issues, share good practice and monitor performance. Corporate work on self assessment

Objective (lead officer)	Detailed action / target	Target date / milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicator	Progress / final outcome
	assessment against the new Equality Framework and prepare evidence			against the Equality Framework has commenced but awaiting decision on external assessment as no additional corporate resources identified to undertake work.
<b>Objective 7.3</b> Working with EDLG	Work with the Law and Property directorate to implement action plan arising from external audit review "Supporting people with a disability", covering areas e.g. - access to buildings - employment	Range of target dates included in the action plan	Increase % of employees with a disability	The % of employees with a disability in the Finance directorate has reduced since 31/3/09 due to individual employee advising change in status.

#### Abbreviations:

AD-RB&MS – Assistant Director, Revenues, Benefits and Management Support

IAD-FS&CF - Interim Assistant Director, Financial Services and Corporate Finance

IAD-ICT&BT – Interim Assistant Director, ICT and Business Transformation

HoP – Head of Procurement

PO – Principal Officer (with equality and diversity responsibilities in the Finance Directorate and member of EDLG)

EDLG – Equality and Diversity Leadership Group (corporate)

AA – Attendance Allowance

IS – Income Support

DC+ – Dudley Council Plus