

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

Annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2008/09

1.0 Introduction / purpose of plan

- 1.1 This is the Finance Directorate's Annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan for 2008/09. The plan is submitted to the Select Committee on the Environment before approval by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 1.2 In accordance with the standard corporate format for Equality and Diversity Action Plans, this plan contains:
- An explanation of its relationship with other plans
 - The directorate's equality and diversity vision and values
 - Key issues and targets for the plan
 - The action plan summary
- 1.3 Consultation on customer services provided by the directorate and proposed actions for 2008/09 has been undertaken with service users (members of the Benefits and Revenues Customer Focus Group and the Action for Disabled People and Carers Group). The feedback received has been noted and will be acted upon where possible. The Action Plan has also been considered and agreed by the Finance directorate management team.
- 1.4 Progress in achieving the targets set in the Plan will be reported quarterly to the Directorate Management Team. Any issues regarding performance will be addressed and followed up as part of the directorate's normal performance management process.
- 1.5 The review of the directorate's achievements against the targets set in the 2007/08 Action Plan, along with key facts and workforce and recruitment profiles, will be included in the 2007/08 Annual Report, produced after the end of the financial year and reported to the above Committee at its first meeting of the 2008/09 municipal year.

2.0 Relationship with other plans

- 2.1 The objectives and targets in this action plan relate and contribute, where relevant, to the Dudley Community Strategy, where the overall vision is for stronger communities to be delivered through five key themes:
- Creating a prosperous borough

- Promoting a sense of well being and good health for everyone
- Celebrating our heritage and local cultural life
- Safeguarding and improving the environment
- Promoting individual and community learning

2.2 The objectives and targets also relate and contribute, where relevant, to the Council Plan, the six themes of which are:

- Caring Matters
- Environment Matters
- Learning Matters
- Regeneration Matters
- Safety Matters
- Quality Services Matter

2.3 The Council Plan provides the strategic context for all service delivery by the Council, embodying the values of Leadership, Integrity, Good Stewardship, Democracy, Empowerment, Inclusion, Partnerships and Fairness. Directorate Strategic Plans set out how Council aims will be delivered in more detail.

2.4 The Council's approach to equality is set out in its [Equality and Diversity Policy](#), and the [Equality Scheme](#). The Scheme, combining the three equality strands of Disability, Gender and Race, provides the three year equality strategy and action plan for the Council, ensuring it meets legal requirements (Disability Discrimination Act 2005, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2006).

2.5 This Equality and Diversity Action Plan will form part of the Finance Directorate's overall Strategic Plan for 2008/09.

3.0 Vision and Values

Context

3.1 The Finance Directorate provides direct services to the public as well as support services to other directorates, as follows:

- Benefit Services - administers and pays Housing and Council Tax Benefit to over 30,000 households in the borough (amounting to over £70m per annum)
- Dudley Council Plus – provides a single point of contact for information on, or to request a Council service. Deals with 42,000 face to face enquiries and 445,000 switchboard and direct telephone calls
- Revenue Services - collects Council Tax from all borough households (approx. 130,000) and Business Rates (approx. 10,000 local businesses)

3.2 The Directorate also provides support services to the other directorates of the Council:

- Audit Services – reviews and reports on financial and other internal controls
- Financial Services – produces and monitors budgets; produces the final accounts; manages the Council's payroll and coordinates risk management

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services – manages the Council’s ICT facilities
- Purchasing and Payment Services – provides the Council with professional advice in purchasing goods and services

3.3 The directorate employs 672 staff, with a gender composition of 35% male and 65% female. Just over 7% of employees are from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background, while 2.3% of employees have stated they have a disability.

Vision and Values

3.4 The Directorate’s main aims, while promoting equality of opportunity for customers and employees, are to:

- Provide good services to its customers
- Promote good stewardship of public funds
- Support the Council’s objectives
- Provide good employee management

3.5 The Directorate supports the Council’s [Equality and Diversity Policy](#) and takes action to implement that policy, both as an employer and service provider. This commitment is reinforced in the Directorate’s overall statement of [Vision and Values](#) (Philosophy and Policies) and more specifically in its [Equality and Diversity Policy and Procedure](#), which outlines how the Directorate discharges its responsibilities to **employees** (in recruitment, employment and training) and to **customers** (access to services).

3.6 Senior management in the directorate (including divisional heads) are responsible for ensuring that the Council’s Equality and Diversity Policy is promoted, both in employment and service delivery. A principal officer is responsible for the overall coordination of equality and diversity issues, communicating key issues to employees, updating policies and targets and monitoring progress.

3.7 The directorate has established a People Management Action Plan, which reflects the corporate People Management Strategy. The Plan contains objectives and targets for performance management, learning and development, flexible working and change management, recruitment, retention and diversity as well as health and well being. One of the key aims of the Plan is to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and are given every opportunity to develop and succeed in their work.

Inspections and Reviews

3.8 During 2007/08, the Directorate was subject to various external inspections and reviews. Major achievements included:

- Benefit Services retained its top score of 4 as part of the CPA.
- CPA Use of Resources, on behalf of the Council - score of 3 (“Good”) achieved
- the Charter Mark was confirmed and retained for the first time for the directorate as a whole
- Financial Services retained its Investor in Excellence accreditation (this demonstrates achievement of a business standard based on the European Foundation for Quality Management Model)

Equality Impact Assessments

- 3.9 The Council's Equality Scheme requires directorates to undertake full equality impact assessments (EIA) on their services. During 2007/08, the Finance directorate undertook EIAs of Benefit Services and Revenue Services functions and of a draft Working from Home policy currently being developed. Actions emerging from the EIAs to be undertaken during 2008/09 are included in this Action Plan (see section 4 below).

4.0 Key Issues and Targets for 2008/09

- 4.1 The Equality Scheme identifies the key issues and challenges across the Council for the next three years.

Corporate initiatives

- 4.2 Particular priority has been assigned to progressing work through the corporate Equality and Diversity Advisory Group in the following areas – this work will continue into 2008/09:

- Developing clearer targets and desired outcomes (see Appendix 2 for proposed targets and outcomes for the Finance directorate)
- Improving communications around what we do and why, externally and internally, and celebrating success (this work is led by Marketing and Communications in the Chief Executive's directorate – we will promote the existence of the information e.g. equality and diversity Internet pages and other relevant publications to our staff)
- Improving approaches to consultation (in 2007/08 we participated in a council-led BME consultation event. We will continue to participate in such events in the future, alongside our own consultation initiatives e.g. the Benefits and Revenues Customer Consultation Group (which recently celebrated its 10 year anniversary)
- Identifying the equality and diversity competencies required for managers and employees (the Finance directorate has taken the lead with this initiative in developing a set of equality competencies for managers and staff, which have been adopted by Central Learning and Development for use on their courses). There is a further proposal that employees' equality and diversity competencies can be enhanced through the availability of an e-learning package, and this will be investigated in 2008/09.

The impact of these initiatives on the Finance directorate will be reflected where relevant in the Action Plan.

Equality Impact assessments

- 4.3 Following on from the initial set of equality impact assessments (EIAs) undertaken during 2007/08, the directorate plans to extend the programme of EIAs during 2008/09 and 2009/10 as follows:

2008/09 - Dudley Council Plus; Audit Services, Purchasing and Payment Services
2009/10 – Financial Services, ICT Services

As part of the programme of EIAs, in 2009/10 we also plan to work with the Chief Executive's directorate to carry out an EIA on the Corporate Procurement Policy.

Customer access to services

- 4.4 The directorate aims to maintain and continuously improve its service standards and customer access to services. This will be achieved through obtaining more information about our customers and their needs, and responding to those needs in the most effective way, e.g. through taking the service direct to them and using new technology.

Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough

- 4.6 From 2009, as part of the revised national inspection arrangements with Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), Benefit Services will undergo a new assessment process, which will place greater emphasis on service outcomes and contributions to area based priorities, such as tackling poverty and inequality and reducing worklessness. The approach will focus more on the perspective of service users and local citizens and less on process. The need for a different approach has also been identified through equality impact assessment of the Benefits Service (see 3.9 above) and work has already commenced to build up the knowledge the service has about its customers. Benefit Services has produced a benefit take-up strategy, which will be used in 2008/09 to provide improved targeting of campaigns on under-claiming sections of the community. Increasing benefit take-up demonstrates action on poverty and social exclusion, with the longer term aim of reducing pressure on other key services. Links are also being made to the work on the Local Area Agreements (LAA) and the Link Age initiative.

Revenue Services will use the work undertaken by Benefit Services as part of its own initiative to promote council tax discounts, which can benefit people with disabilities and single person households.

Manage staffing resources fairly and equally

- 4.7 As part of our People Management Strategy, we aim to ensure that all staff participate in an annual Performance Review and Development (PRD) meeting with their manager, ensuring their learning and development needs are identified and addressed. We also monitor the composition of the workforce and candidates for recruitment to ensure that the fairness of our employment process is maintained.

Contribute to making effective use of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) resources throughout the Council.

- 4.8 The government has established a challenge for local authorities to transform service delivery through new technology, with the aim of improving service delivery. This can include self service, provision of shared services / opportunities for partnership with other organisations and increased flexibility in service provision. In our support role to other directorates, we aim to provide ICT services to help achieve better delivery of services and information to customers so they have more choice and control. Up to date ICT gives service directorates better information on which to base decisions and work more effectively with partners. It can also provide opportunities for more flexible working for employees.

Promote equality issues in procurement

- 4.9 Following the development of corporate guidelines on promoting equality through procurement activity there is a need to raise awareness of good practice through training of employees and project teams involved in procurement. The corporate lead for this is Law and Property, however the Finance directorate will work closely

with colleagues throughout the Council in providing support and advice on a day to day basis.

5.0 Action Plan

5.1 The Action Plan is set out in Appendix 1, showing the priorities, objectives, target dates, planned outcomes and key performance indicators.

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Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement – Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2008/09

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
<p>Priority 1 Undertake planned equality impact assessments (EIA) S Beckett L Bradshaw I Clarke</p> <p>I Newman D Cook To be confirmed (all with support from M Flavell)</p>	<p>Objective 1.1 Complete EIAs in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dudley Council Plus - Audit Services - Purchasing and Payment Services. <p>Plan for further EIAs in subsequent years:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial Services - ICT Services - Corporate Procurement Policy (in conjunction with other directorates). 	<p>March 2009 March 2009 March 2009</p> <p>March 2010 March 2010 March 2010</p>	<p>EIAs completed within required timescales. Identified actions included in business plans.</p>
<p>Priority 2 Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough MN Williams (Assistant Director – Revenues, Benefits and Mangement Support)</p>	<p>Objective 2.1 Maximise social security take-up by priority groups through Attendance Allowance (AA) and Income Support (IS) campaign work.</p> <p>Objective 2.2 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 (action emerging from 2007 Equality Impact Assessment of Benefit Services and 2009 CAA requirements).</p>	<p>March 2009</p> <p>March 2009 (and continuing to March 2010)</p>	<p>Benefit shop take-up targets and no. of successful new AA and IS claims achieved.</p> <p>Improved knowledge of existing customer base, which will allow us to determine appropriate strategies for improved benefit take-up by various groups.</p>

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
	Objective 2.3 Maximise take-up of Council Tax and Business Rate reliefs / discounts through promoting customer awareness.	March 2009	Customer awareness initiatives undertaken. Financial value of council tax and business rate reliefs / discounts allowed during the year.
Priority 3 Improve customer access to services MN Williams	Objective 3.1 Maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels.	March 2009	Improved customer satisfaction levels with front lines (regardless of equality category). Charter Mark accreditation maintained.
MN Williams / M Flavell	Objective 3.2 Provide input into and support corporate strategies on vulnerable groups e.g. older people, children in care, carers.	March 2009	Finance directorate services fully reflected in and able to respond to these corporate strategies; Finance representation at officer working groups.
	Objective 3.3 Consider alternative solution for communicating with customers who have a hearing impairment.	March 2009	Improved facilities for customers who have a hearing impairment.
Priority 4 Manage staffing resources fairly and equally All divisional heads	Objective 4.1 Ensure all employees participate in the Performance Review and Development (PRD) process and have a training plan.	March 2009	% of employees who take part in the PRD process. % of employees who are satisfied with the PRD process. All by equality monitoring category.

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
	Objective 4.2 Ensure managers and employees receive appropriate learning and development opportunities in equality awareness.	March 2009	Training needs identified e.g. through PRDs are promptly addressed through relevant training provision.
	Objective 4.3 Ensure managers are aware of / receive training in the Council's leadership and behaviours.	March 2009	Training needs identified e.g. through PRDs are promptly addressed through relevant training provision.
	Objective 4.4 Monitor workforce composition to identify currently levels and enable managers to make decisions about future targets.	March 2009	% of employees employed % shortlisted and recruited all by equality monitoring category.
Priority 5 Promote equality through effective use of ICT resources D Cook (AD – ICT and Business Transformation)	Objective 5.1 Exploit new technology to provide improved access to council services.	March 2009 (and continuing to March 2010)	Increased use of electronic service delivery; no. of customers who pay by direct debit, telephone etc.
	Objective 5.2 Exploit ICT to allow services and information to be accessed from a variety of locations including citizens' homes and allow employees to work flexibly where appropriate.	March 2009 (and continuing to March 2010)	Increased use of ICT systems; No. using council website to access services, apply for jobs etc.
	Objective 5.3		

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
	Improve employee access to information through the development of publishing capabilities on the Intranet (improved access standards).	March 2009	Intranet web content management system successfully implemented; improved access for employees with certain disabilities.
	Objective 5.4 Support the development of an e-learning facility for the Council.	March 2009 (and continuing to March 2010)	Intranet e-learning facility implemented; to include facility for equality and diversity training; ability to monitor training records and improve competencies.
M N Williams	Objective 5.5 Pilot a Home Working initiative with benefit assessors and roll out further if successful.	March 2009	Successful pilot achieved and policy implemented; improved work life balance for employees who participate.
Priority 6 Promote equality through the procurement process I Clarke	Objective 6.1 Support corporate work in improving awareness of equality issues in procurement.	March 2009	Council officers involved in contracts are adhering to the corporate guidelines re. promoting equality through procurement.