

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

Annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/10

1.0 Introduction / purpose of plan

- 1.1 The Council's Equality and Diversity Policy requires all directorates to produce an annual equality and diversity action plan. The policy is supported by commitments and actions in the Council's Equality Scheme. The action plan sets out how a directorate will implement the policy and the scheme in relation to its responsibilities, service areas and employment practices during the year.
- 1.2 The Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement Annual Equality and Diversity Action Plan is submitted to the Select Committee on the Environment before approval by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 1.3 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 statement
 - Key issues and targets for the plan
 - The action plan summary
- 1.4 Consultation on customer services provided by the directorate and proposed equality and diversity actions for 2009/10 has been undertaken with service users (Benefits and Revenues Customer Focus Group). Ongoing consultation with various other customer groups has also informed the equality and diversity planning process. The results of all consultations are recorded on the corporate Community Engagement database. The action plan has been considered by colleagues in the directorate and agreed by the Finance directorate management team. Once published, the plan will be available to all employees.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 The review of the directorate's achievements against the targets set in the 2008/09 Equality and Diversity Action Plan, along with key facts and workforce and recruitment profiles, will be included in the 2008/09 Annual Report, produced after the end of the financial year and reported to the above Committee at its first meeting of the 2009/10 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

The Council Plan provides the strategic context for all service delivery by the Council. Directorate Strategic Plans set out how Council aims will be delivered in more detail.

2.3 This Equality and Diversity Action Plan will form part of the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement Strategic Plan for 2009/10, which, in turn, responds to the Community Strategy and Council Plan.

3.0 Vision and Values

3.1 The Finance 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

3.2 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 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).

3.3 The Finance Directorate provides direct services to the public as follows:

- Benefit Services - administers and pays Housing and Council Tax Benefit to over 31,000 households in the borough (amounting to over £86m per annum)
- Dudley Council Plus – provides a single point of contact for information on, or to request a Council service. Deals with over 38,000 face to face enquiries and 419,000 switchboard and direct telephone calls
- Revenue Services - collects Council Tax from all borough households (approx. 132,000) and Business Rates (over 10,000 local businesses)

3.4 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 Council's final accounts, manages the Council's payroll and coordinates risk management
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services – manages the Council's ICT facilities
- Procurement, Contract Management and Creditor Services – provides the Council with professional advice in purchasing goods and services and administers the payment for goods and services.

3.5 The directorate employs 662 staff, with a gender composition of 35% male and 65% female. 6.8% of employees are from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background, while 3.2% of employees have stated they have a disability.

Roles and responsibilities

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 2008/09, the Directorate underwent various external inspections and reviews. Major achievements include:

- Benefit Services retained its top score of 4 as part of the CPA.
- CPA Use of Resources score of 3 (subject to Audit Commission confirmation)
- Charter Mark standard confirmed
- Dudley Council Plus was given a positive report by the Audit Commission

4.0 Key Issues and Targets for 2009/10

- 4.1 The Equality Scheme identifies the key issues and challenges across the Council for the period 2007 - 2010. The scheme includes areas which are specific to the Finance directorate and initiatives where the directorate works with other directorates, e.g. through the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group.
- 4.2 The 2008 corporate annual review of equality and diversity identified three priorities for the next twelve months and these are also reflected in the directorate's action plan, namely:
- Developing and implementing action plans for further access improvements to public buildings and increasing the number of employees with a disability
 - Updating the Council's vision for delivering equality
 - Ensuring that equality impact assessments are completed.

These priorities arose from analysis of performance indicators, an external review of the Council's approach to promoting equality and an external auditors' review of "supporting people with a disability".

Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)

- 4.3 An 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. Undertaking EIAs of Council policies and services is a legal requirement. In 2009/10 the Finance Directorate is planning to undertake EIAs of Financial Services and ICT Services. In addition, we plan to work with other directorates to carry out an EIA on the Corporate Procurement Policy.

Customer access to services

- 4.4 In line with its Charter Mark, the directorate aims to maintain and continuously improve its service standards and customer access to services. This will be achieved through consulting with customers and obtaining more information about customers and their needs. We aim to respond to those needs in the most effective way, e.g. through providing prompt, efficient services, making best use of new technology and taking the service direct to the customer (e.g. through home visits) where appropriate.

Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough

- 4.5 An EIA of Benefit Services identified certain gaps in our customer knowledge base so work has been undertaken to build up customer information working more closely with other Council teams and making better use of the information resources available in targeting areas of need. 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 and the Link Age initiative with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Revenue Services is also using 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

- 4.6 During 2009/10 the directorate is planning to renew its Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. IIP is based on the foundation of best practice in the training and development of staff, ensuring equal opportunities for all. 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.

- 4.7 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, combined with higher productivity and improved job satisfaction.

Promote equality issues in procurement

- 4.8 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.

Supporting corporate initiatives

- 4.9 During the next 12 months and beyond, the Finance directorate will support a range of corporate initiatives, as follows:

a) Assessing the impact of the forthcoming Equality Bill.

The Bill, once enacted, will strengthen and streamline equality law in a number of areas. This will inevitably result in changes in council policies, procedures and duties in both service delivery and employment, including a new duty to promote equality in general.

b) Responding to the recommendations of the external review.

During 2008 the Council commissioned a review (from Sushel Ohri and Associates) of its approach to promoting equality and diversity. The report made several recommendations which are currently being considered by Corporate Board.

c) Reviewing the Equality Scheme

The Council's Equality Scheme 2007–2010 sets out the approach to equality in terms of Race, Disability and Gender equality. With the publication of the Equality Bill there will be a need to review the Equality Scheme and introduce the further equality strands of age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

d) Adoption of the Equality Framework

The Council has previously adopted the Equality Standard for local government, and we are currently awaiting the publication of a new Equality Framework being drafted by the Improvement and Development Agency.

5.0 Action Plan

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

Contact Officers: Menna Flavell, Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement
Telephone 01384 814807
Email menna.flavell@dudley.gov.uk

Mike N Williams, Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement
Telephone: 01384 814970
Email: mike.n.williams@dudley.gov.uk

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Note – for explanation of abbreviations see end of Action Plan

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
<p>Priority 1 Undertake planned equality impact assessments (EIA) - HoFS - AD(ICT&BT) - to be confirmed (all with support from PO)</p>	<p>Objective 1.1 Complete EIAs in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial Services - ICT Services - Corporate Procurement Policy (in conjunction with other directorates). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - September 2009 - December 2009 - March 2010 	<p>EIAs completed within required timescales. Identified actions included in business plans.</p>
<p>Priority 2 Improve customer access to services AD(RB&MS)</p>	<p>Objective 2.1 Maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels.</p>	<p>Quarterly to March 2010</p>	<p>Improved customer satisfaction levels (regardless of equality category) with front line services Charter Mark accreditation maintained.</p>
<p>AD(RB&MS) / PO</p>	<p>Objective 2.2 Provide input into and support corporate strategies on vulnerable groups e.g. older people, children in care, carers.</p>	<p>March 2010 (ongoing)</p>	<p>Finance directorate services fully reflected in and able to respond to these corporate strategies; Finance representation at officer working groups.</p>

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
Priority 3 Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough AD(RB&MS)	Objective 3.1 Maximise social security take-up by priority groups through Attendance Allowance (AA) and Income Support (IS) campaign work.	Quarterly to March 2010	Targets achieved for Benefits Shop take-up and no. of successful new AA and IS claims
	Objective 3.2 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	March 2010 (ongoing)	Improved knowledge of existing customer base, which will allow us to determine appropriate strategies for improved benefit take-up by various groups.
	Objective 3.3 Maximise take-up of Council Tax and Business Rate reliefs / discounts through promoting customer awareness.	From April 2009 (billing) and ongoing	Customer awareness initiatives undertaken. Financial value of council tax and business rate reliefs / discounts allowed during the year.
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.	Quarterly to March 2010	% of employees who take part in the PRD process. % of employees who are satisfied with the PRD process.
	Objective 4.2 Ensure managers and employees receive appropriate learning and development opportunities in equality awareness and leadership behaviours	March 2010 (ongoing)	Training needs identified e.g. through PRDs are promptly addressed through relevant training provision.

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
	Objective 4.3 Monitor workforce composition to identify current levels and enable managers to make decisions about future targets.	Quarterly to March 2010	Workforce reflects the economically active community
Priority 5 Promote equality through effective use of ICT resources AD(ICT&BT)	Objective 5.1 Exploit new technology to provide improved access to council services, e.g. from citizens' homes	March 2010 (ongoing)	Increased use of electronic service delivery e.g. 24/7 telephone service; no. of customers who pay by direct debit, apply for services / jobs online
	Objective 5.2 Improve employee access to information through the development of publishing capabilities on the Intranet (improved access standards).	December 2009 (ongoing)	Intranet web content management system successfully implemented; improved access for employees with certain disabilities.
	Objective 5.3 Support the development of an e-learning facility for the Council.	December 2009 (ongoing)	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.
	Objective 5.4 Extend Home Based Working initiative	June 2009 (ongoing)	Numbers on the scheme; Improved employee productivity, job satisfaction and work life balance

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
Priority 6 Promote equality through the procurement process HoP	Objective 6.1 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.
	Objective 6.2 Support corporate work in reviewing the Corporate Procurement Strategy.	December 2009	Improved Corporate Procurement Strategy which addresses Council requirements
Priority 7 Support corporate initiatives EDAG	Objective 7.1 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	June / July 2009	Understanding of new legal requirements Improved identification and coordination of action for all equality strands
EDAG	Objective 7.2 Improve equality and diversity policy development and performance management: - Trial combined central directorates equality group - Undertake initial self assessment against the new Equality Framework and prepare evidence	From April 2009 July 2009	Improved coordination, sharing of good practice and performance management Areas for improvement identified and programmed

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / Performance Indicator
EDAG	Objective 7.3 Work with the Law and Property directorate to implement action plan arising from external audit review “Supporting people with a disability”, covering areas such as: - access to buildings - employment	Range of target dates included in the action plan	Increase % of employees with a disability

Abbreviations:

HoFS – Head of Financial Services, Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

AD(ICT&BT) – Assistant Director, ICT and Business Transformation

AD(RB&MS) – Assistant Director, Revenues, Benefits and Mangement Support

HoP – Head of Procurement

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

EDAG – Equality and Diversity Advisory Group (corporate)

AA – Attendance Allowance

IS – Income Support