

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11

1.0 Introduction / purpose of plan

- 1.1 The Council's Equality and Diversity Policy requires all directorates to produce annual equality and diversity action plans and annual reports. The policy is supported by the detailed arrangements, priorities and actions in the Council's Equality Scheme. The directorate's action plan describes how it 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 Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11 is submitted to the Select Committee on the Environment before approval by the Cabinet Member for Finance through the decision sheet process.
- 1.3 An annual report setting out achievements against the directorate's action plan for 2009/10 will be completed at the end of the year.
- 1.4 This action plan covers the period April 2010 to March 2011 and contains:
 - an explanation of its relationship with other plans
 - a summary of the directorate's equality and diversity vision and values
 - key issues and targets for the plan
 - the action plan summary.
- 1.5 The plan should be read in the context of planned changes to the structure of the Council. Following the appointment of the Director of Corporate Resources, a new directorate is to be established, bringing together the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement and the Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources. Consultation and planning will take place during the first half of 2010/11, and the Director of Corporate Resources will report to Cabinet in the autumn with a view to establishing the detail of the emerging directorate, including what services it will provide.

2.0 Relationship with other plans

- 2.1 This action plan will be incorporated in the overall strategic plan for the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement for 2010/11. The strategic plan in turn responds to the Borough's refreshed Community Strategy 2010-13 and the three year Council Plan.

- 2.2 The Council's overall long-term policy framework for equality and diversity is set out in the Equality and Diversity Policy. The Equality Scheme, published in April 2007, which brings together the statutory disability, gender and race equality schemes for the Council, provides the overall three-year equality strategy and action plan. A supplement covering age, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender equality was approved by the Cabinet in June 2009. The disability equality scheme was revised in December 2009 and the gender equality scheme is currently being reviewed.
- 2.3 Council-wide progress in implementing the Equality Scheme is reported each year in the annual review of equality and diversity, which is submitted to the Select Committee on Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education (as the select committee with responsibility for corporate equality and diversity issues) and the Cabinet for approval.

3.0 Vision and Values

- 3.1 The Council has agreed a ten year vision for equality, which will contribute to the achievement of the Community Strategy. In ten years the Council will be one:
- which will be recognised nationally as a leading Council on equality and diversity
 - which had improved its response to the needs of the borough's communities
 - whose services receive high satisfaction ratings from across the borough's communities
 - whose workforce reflects the local community at all levels of the organisation and for which people from all backgrounds want to work
 - which has improved its equality training and the skills of its employees in dealing with all customers.
- 3.2 The overall objective of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy is to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment
 - promote equality of opportunity
 - promote good relations and positive attitudes between people of diverse backgrounds.

in its employment policies and practices, services and its engagement with partners and the communities of the borough. The Council aims to ensure that no job applicants, employees, residents or service users receive less favourable treatment on any grounds which cannot be shown to be justified. This covers race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, responsibility for children or other dependants, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, trade union or political activities, social class, where the person lives or spent convictions.

- 3.3 The Finance Directorate supports the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and is committed to implementing that policy through:
- providing excellent customer services which are fair and do not discriminate

- promoting good governance for the Council including good stewardship of public funds
- managing its employees to a high standard.

Services

3.4 The Finance Directorate holds the Charter Mark and provides services to the public as follows:

- Benefit Services - administers £105m in Housing and Council Tax Benefit to just under 34,000 households
- Dudley Council Plus – provides a single point of contact for information on, or to request a Council service. Deals with over 48,000 face to face enquiries and 473,000 switchboard and direct telephone calls
- Revenue Services – administers the billing, collection and recovery of nearly 133,000 Council Tax accounts and 10,000 Business Rates accounts.

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

- 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 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 payment for goods and services.

3.6 In delivering services, the directorate aims to provide value for money through working closely with a range of partners including the voluntary / community sector and commercial organisations.

Staffing

3.7 The directorate employs 667 staff, with a gender composition of 35% male and 65% female. 7.3% of employees are from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background, while 2.8% of employees have stated they have a disability. Directorate action in relation to management of employees follows the Council's Human Resources Strategy and Action Plan 2009-14, which focuses on the following priorities:

- People and performance management
- Leadership
- Skills development, flexibility and organisational change
- Pay and reward
- Recruitment, retention and diversity

All staff undergo a Performance Review and Development (PRD) meeting with their manager at least annually, where previous performance and training needs are discussed and future targets agreed. We also seek staff views on a range of issues through the corporate staff survey, the output from which shapes our thinking and treatment of staff.

Roles and responsibilities

- 3.8 Senior management in the directorate (including divisional heads) are responsible for ensuring that the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy is implemented. A principal officer is responsible for the overall coordination of equality and diversity issues, communicating key issues to employees, updating policies, targets and equality impact assessments, as well as monitoring progress.

4.0 Key Issues and Targets for 2010/11

- 4.1 Key issues and targets for the Finance Directorate during 2010-11 and beyond are set out below. These reflect the future priorities and challenges set out in the Council's Equality Scheme.

Equality impact assessments (EIAs)

- 4.2 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. As all Finance Directorate services have undergone EIAs in previous years, during 2010/11 the Directorate is planning to review and update EIAs of Benefit Services and Revenue Services. ICT Services is planning to update the Council's ICT Strategy in 2010 so an EIA of this will also be undertaken. In addition, an EIA of the new Directorate of Corporate Resources will be undertaken when the plans for the new directorate emerge.

Service provision and delivery

- 4.3 Following the achievement of the Charter Mark for all Finance directorate services, we plan to progress to the new Government standard, Customer Service Excellence (CSE), which has a strong focus on customer insight (identifying customers, engaging and consulting with them and meeting their needs). The CSE standard also corresponds with the standards required to achieve Level 2 of the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- 4.4 In January 2010, the Housing and Council Tax Benefit counter service was transferred to Dudley Council Plus. As part of the planning process, an EIA of the relocation was undertaken. It was found that accessing a different location may impact adversely on some customers with a physical disability, and this is being addressed through staff directing customers to the correct location.
- 4.5 Due to proposals for the redevelopment of Dudley Town Centre, Dudley Council Plus will need to be relocated. Given the need to provide a suitable customer service location, officers will start to consider various alternatives during 2010.
- 4.6 Benefit Services continues to combat poverty and social exclusion in a variety of ways. The Council recognises that it has an ageing population which will require specific services. As a development of its work on benefit take-up, Benefit Services is undertaking an innovative "Knowing Our Customer" campaign to identify people over the age of 60 who may not be receiving the Housing and Council Tax benefits to which they are entitled (this involves matching our Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit records with demographic information produced by the Council to identify areas of low take-up and then targeting individuals who may be potential

claimants). In addition to the above, benefit advice and support will be available to people affected by the recession.

- 4.7 Previous EIAs have underlined the need to ensure that all our staff are adequately trained in equality and diversity issues. One area of training need that has emerged in the last few years is in relation to safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. Employees likely to come into contact with children and vulnerable adults have already been provided with guidance on what to do if they encounter potential safeguarding issues. In addition, we will make available further training (online) to improve staff knowledge and awareness of safeguarding issues.
- 4.8 Specific community engagement and customer consultation initiatives taking place during 2010/11 will include quarterly meetings of the Benefits and Revenues Customer Consultation Group, customer satisfaction surveys and participation at the Council's annual BME consultation event. We also plan to hold liaison meetings between Revenue Services and both the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Council's bailiffs firm.

Procurement Strategy

- 4.9 In September 2009 the Council agreed a new Procurement Strategy, with a greater emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity and diversity. Corporate Board agreed that all key decisions must take into consideration economic, environmental and social factors (job creation, human rights, ethical trading, working conditions, working with the third sector etc) in the award of contracts. Subsequently, the corporate guidance "Promoting Equality through the Council's Procurement Activity" has been updated. With the publication of the Equality Act, a further review of the guidelines and awareness-raising of the issues involved will be undertaken in conjunction with the Chief Executive's directorate.

Employment

- 4.10 Whilst workforce data is already monitored and reviewed, the Council has embarked on a robust workforce planning exercise. Workforce planning is about trying to predict the future services that will be required by our customers and therefore determine the range of skills, experience and numbers of employees that will be required to deliver those services. Action plans are currently being developed and will typically include:
- agreeing our future strategy regarding home based working
 - addressing the impact of the Council's customer service strategy (when produced) and the level of demand for services
 - developing key skills to deal with issues such as change management
 - undertaking succession planning to ensure we maintain an adequate skills and knowledge base.
- 4.11 An employee survey was undertaken in November 2009 and managers are reviewing the results to identify areas for improvement.
- 4.12 In line with plans for the Directorate of Corporate Resources, an action plan towards renewing Investor in People accreditation has been agreed by the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement and the Directorate of Law, Property and Human Resources, and has been approved by Investors in People West Midlands (the IIP awarding body).

Effective use of ICT in helping to transform services

- 4.13 The use of ICT has already helped provide customers with more choice and control over the way they access our services. Initiatives planned for 2010/11 and beyond will aim to improve to the Council website and introduce public wi-fi and e-petitioning. ICT has also helped improve staff work life balance through supporting flexible working (e.g. home based working in Benefit Services), and staff knowledge through intranet pages and online training. Work in these areas will continue in 2010/11 and beyond.

Supporting Corporate initiatives

- 4.14 During the next 12 months and beyond, the Finance directorate will support corporate initiatives including:
- Assessing the impact of the forthcoming Equality Act
 - Updating the Equality Scheme

Directorate of Corporate Resources

- 4.15 Following the appointment of the Director of Corporate Resources, work will be undertaken to establish the new directorate and identify which services it will provide. As mentioned in 1.5 above, work will be undertaken during the first half of 2010/11 with a view to reporting recommendations to Cabinet in the autumn. As part of this exercise, an EIA will be undertaken and a revised equality and diversity action plan for the new directorate will need to be developed in due course.

Consultation

- 4.16 Consultation on proposed equality and diversity actions for 2010/11 has been undertaken with service users (Benefits and Revenues Customer Consultation Group). The results of all directorate consultations are recorded on the Council's Community Engagement database. The action plan has been discussed by colleagues in the directorate and agreed by the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's management team.

Performance Monitoring

- 4.17 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 usual performance management process.

5.0 The Action Plan

- 5.1 The 2010/11 Action Plan is set out in Appendix 1, showing priorities, objectives, lead officers, target dates and planned outcomes / performance indicators.

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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 indicators
Priority 1 Undertake equality impact assessments AD(RB&MS) IAD(ICT&BT) M Flavell	Objective 1.1 Review / update previous EIAs of Benefit Services and Revenue Services. Undertake EIA of the Council's ICT Strategy.	December 2010	EIA reviews completed Identified actions included in business plans and the equality and diversity action plan
Priority 2 Improve customer access to services AD(RB&MS)	Objective 2.1 Achieve the Government's Customer Service Excellence standard for all Finance directorate services	November 2010	Standard achieved for services being reviewed
	Objective 2.2 Engage with our customers to ensure that our services continue to meet their requirements	Ongoing to March 2011	Customer satisfaction survey results. Customer Consultation Group feedback. Revenues / CAB / Bailiff Liaison Group feedback.
Priority 3 Contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in the borough AD(RB&MS)	Objective 3.1 Maximise take-up of benefits and other reductions by priority groups	March 2011	Amount of new benefits achieved No. of successful new claims for Attendance Allowance and Income Support Amount of council tax and business rate reductions allowed during the year.

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / performance indicators
	<p>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</p>	March 2011	Improved knowledge of existing customer base, which will allow us to determine appropriate strategies for improved take up of benefit and other reductions by various groups.
<p>Priority 4 Manage staffing resources fairly and equally All divisional heads</p>	<p>Objective 4.1 Ensure all employees participate in the Performance Review and Development (PRD) process and have a training plan with jointly identified and agreed training priorities.</p>	March 2011	<p>% of employees who take part in the PRD process. % of employees who are satisfied with the PRD process.</p>
	<p>Objective 4.2 Ensure managers and employees receive appropriate learning and development opportunities</p>	March 2011	Numbers receiving training in equality and safeguarding issues.
	<p>Objective 4.3 Monitor workforce and undertake workforce planning to enable managers to make decisions about future targets.</p>	March 2011	Workforce meets service needs and reflects the economically active community.
	<p>Objective 4.4 Review the results of the 2009 employee survey and address any issues arising.</p>	June 2010	Improved employee satisfaction. Improved employee survey results in future years.

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / performance indicators
	<p>Objective 4.5 Subject to the plans for the Directorate of Corporate Resources, achieve the targets in the Investors in People (IIP) action plan for the new directorate.</p>	March 2011	IIP accreditation achieved.
<p>Priority 5 Promote equality through effective use of ICT resources IAD(ICT&BT)</p>	<p>Objective 5.1 Undertake improvements to Council website that will provide users with improved access to information about Council services</p>	June 2010	Improved access. "Hits" on most popular pages and customer feedback via occasional surveys.
	<p>Objective 5.2 Consider implications for the Council of the Digital Britain mandate from central government, and the Public Sector Network which could underpin it.</p>	March 2011 (ongoing)	Improved communication / better access to information between government, council and the public. Outcomes will become clearer during the year.
	<p>Objective 5.3 Trial public wi-fi project that will enable the community to connect to the internet (hence council services) from hotspots in Council buildings (e.g. libraries)</p>	May 2010	Improved communication facilities for service users.
	<p>Objective 5.4 Introduce e-petitioning service, which can act as a catalyst for community consultation.</p>	December 2010	Improved channels for service users to make their views known.

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / performance indicators
All divisional heads	Objective 5.5 Investigate the possibilities regarding extending the home based working initiative	June 2010	Numbers on the scheme; Improved employee productivity, job satisfaction and work life balance.
Priority 6 Promote equality through the procurement process HoP	Objective 6.1 Support corporate work in developing the guidance on equality issues in procurement and promoting awareness following the publication of the Equality Act.	March 2011	Latest guidance provided; officers following corporate guidance. Number of Key Decision contracts taking into consideration Economic, Environmental and Social factors in the award procedure.
Priority 7 Support corporate initiatives Equality and Diversity Leadership Group	Objective 7.1 Assess new duties under the Equality Act, agree action plan and commence implementation	March 2011	Meet legal requirements Key priorities and actions identified Improved outcomes for equality groups
	Objective 7.2 Support the review the Equality Scheme in light of requirements of the Equality Act	October 2010	
Priority 8 Deal with impact on services and employment re. Directorate of Corporate Resources Director of Corporate Resources and	Objective 8.1 Undertake equality impact assessment of changes and develop action plan	March 2011	EIA undertaken
	Objective 8.2 Address actions / issues re. above	During 2011/12	Actions achieved

Objective (and Lead Officer)	Detailed Action / Target	Target Date / Milestones	Planned Outcome / performance indicators
Management Team	Objective 8.3 Produce equality and diversity action plan for new directorate	March 2011	Plan agreed and published

Abbreviations:

IAD(ICT&BT) – Interim Assistant Director, ICT and Business Transformation
AD(RB&MS) – Assistant Director, Revenues, Benefits and Mangement Support
HoP – Head of Procurement
DMT – Directorate Management Team