

Diagnostic report on Equalities: Wiltshire County council, for WIP

This report provides a diagnostic assessment of the position of Wiltshire County Council on equality and diversity including the level of the Equality Standard reached.

A. The Purpose of Project

As part of the Wiltshire Improvement Partnership, this defined the task for Di Parkin, and her team: Graham Partridge and Caroline White (mapping aspect) the IDeA Consultants as:

- An assessment of how authorities are currently performing in terms of the ESfLG
- Identification of action taken or underway to address weaknesses identified in inspection reports
- Identification of ongoing weaknesses in mainstreaming equality and diversity
- Identification of areas where joint working could be explored
- Target date for achievement of next level of Equality Standard, with action plan
- Mapping of Equality and Diversity Initiatives

This report covers the first three items for WCC

B Report structure

1. The Wiltshire county demographic context
2. Review of Documentation on equality
3. Evidence of staff understanding of and commitment to equality
4. Level of Equality Standard reached
5. Conclusion

1 The Wiltshire County context:

Wiltshire is a southwest county covering 150 square miles; it is a predominantly rural area surrounding market towns and the city of Salisbury, with a population of 445,150. It is divided into twenty-community areas

The Council's Disability Equality Scheme estimates that 15-20% of the population has a disability

The Race Equality Scheme estimates that 2% of the population are of black and minority origin (2001 census) However this figure is liable to be an under estimate, given the general increase in population and the Department for Communities and Local Government DCLG 2006 Household Survey had 5 % of its returns from a random survey of 3,500 people declaring that they were of minority ethnicity.

Schools surveys suggest 3.33% of pupils are non-white, with 72 different languages being spoken in Wiltshire schools. Over a third of Wiltshire's total population is over 50

2 Review of Documentation and Equality

This review examines some crucial documents and policies on equality as well as other significant policies, as a snap shot on equalities

2.1. Corporate Equality Policy (CEP) and plan

This very thorough policy covers all the issues well; however it starts from the perspective of "making services accessible to all; and treating people fairly" rather than from a perspective of recognising **inequality** and discrimination which needs challenging.

The action plan is very clear and would take the authority forward on this area; however, as the Corporate Equality Group recognises, there needs to be integration of all the equality plans, from the RES, DES and GES. In addition all the action points need to be included in service plans

2.2. Race Equality Scheme

Despite recognition of slippage in the review of the scheme, the report states commendable progress, since the original scheme:

Key achievements

Hidden Voices: a major research report on the experiences of people from minority ethnic groups living in Wiltshire

- o The service planning process amended to more effectively link equal opportunities practices to service plans.
- o A strategy to increase the involvement of Black and Ethnic Minority people in consultation processes including 'Tomorrow's Voice' and 'People's Voice'.
- o More rigorous data collection has improved the statistical information on the ethnicity of our workforce
- o Staff information monitoring systems now meet the statutory requirements.
- o Action has been taken to increase job applications from BEM groups.
- o Corporate induction includes equality and diversity issues.
- o The Council has supported the creation of a Black and Ethnic Minority Staff forum
- o Equality and diversity training including on incidents of racial harassment.
- o A 'Clear Communication' document has been written and implemented.
- o A process for the completion of Equality Impact Assessments has been compiled.
- o The Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) supports Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) pupils at risk of being excluded and outreach work-
- o A data base of families is being established for contacting a rural BME population that is spread thinly across the county.
- o Monitoring of young people for Youth Development Service show high proportion of Black and Ethnic Minority young people.
- o working with the Wiltshire Race Equality Commission to develop opportunities for

people who have a learning disability, mapping the resources and networks used by people from ethnic communities.

- o Traveller families who are new to the county, are visited within 48 hrs of arrival, school places are offered

Comment

However our on the ground work shows that there are still questions on the dissemination of this good practice; for example the Clear Communication Guide is not yet in use and reception at County hall does not include any signposting on how information can be obtained in other languages and formats. There is a lot known about black and minority ethnic people in the county, but too many staff is not aware of this knowledge. In addition the equality impact assessment process does not seem to be as firmly in place as the review suggests

2.3.1 Consultation on Race

Tom Frost's report 12/2006 indicates studies have shown that lack of English language is a key issue, that minority ethnic people feel isolated and that County hall is seen by some as "White, middle class and Establishment, didn't recognise the culture and needs of Black and Minority Ethnic people" In addition respondents said that racism exists but it is underreported.

2.3. DES

The scheme is based on very detailed research, involvement of and consultation with disabled people. Its summary indicates the following outcomes:

- o changes that will help disabled people to be treated fairly which may mean being treated more favourably than other people.
- o 'involving disabled people when we make changes to our services. questioning and challenging all policies and procedures.
- o Wiltshire County Council will be a more disability-friendly service provider.
- o Job opportunities within the County Council will be more accessible for disabled people.
- o Disabled employees will feel better supported and encouraged to progress through equal opportunities in training and development.
- o Wiltshire County Council will be a more disability-friendly employer.
- o Disabled people have been involved in every stage of this project
- o We will have made steps towards improving the everyday life of disabled people in Wiltshire, mainstreaming the issues

Comment

As with the RES, the key concern will be integrating the action plans into one common plan, which is included in, service plans and insuring follow through on actions. An example of past problems with this is the report to the Corporate Equality and Diversity group in April 2007 that actions requested by disabled staff re fire evacuation procedures had not been acted on.

2.4. GES

This very thorough scheme covers the issues well, with the key aim of:

- Seeking to understand how well services meet the needs of men and women and ensuring that services are reviewed and developed to better meet those needs
- Seeking to raise awareness and understanding of gender equality issues within our workforce and our elected members, and ensuring that our human resource policies and practices are fully supportive of gender equality
- Seeking to ensure that those with whom we work in partnership recognise the importance we attach to gender equality and share our commitment to its promotion in all that they do

Comment

As with the RES, DES the key concern will be integrating the action plans into one common plan, which is included in, service plans and insuring follow through on actions. In addition there needs to be more focus on issues of gender occupational segregation; the BVPI figures on the numbers of women in the top 5% of earners are given, but there is not information in the next layers, which is where the glass ceiling tends to be located and the preponderance of male or female dominance flips, with more women below this point and more men above it

2.6 Guidance on Clear Communication

This is an excellent document, which makes all the right points on how to communicate with diverse groups, and is evidence of the changing direction in Wiltshire

2.7 Corporate Plan to 2009

This plan includes targets for achieving excellent and improving services, with a vision for achieving potential in school, leading active and independent lives, growth balance with protecting the environment and a community where people want to live and work. However there is little in this vision which acknowledges that these people are diverse and have different needs, apart from in the area of disabilities. Even in this area the wish to do more customer contact over the internet is not marked by the different issues this may raise for older people or people with some disabilities

2.8 Sustainable strategy for Wiltshire

This report indicates awareness of change and contrasts in income levels and other variables. However all its information is presented without reference to how diversity impacts on these variables. For example it does not mention that race and gender are an issue in poverty and skill levels, or more women are in pension poverty, have lower levels of skill, and relatively more lack access to private transport.

2.9 Our Heritage our Future Local Area Agreement

Again this report tends to present its general data in a homogenous way, not signalling difference by gender and race. For example the outcome on improving the basic skill levels of adult learners needs to take cognisance that older women are more likely to be lower skilled and the transport dimension needs to pick up on women's' lower likelihood to have access to a car and the different nature of women's' public transport needs. It does however have some specific outcomes, which pick up on equality themes, such as the outcomes on transnational workers.

2.10 Community planning: Getting Closer to the Community

Whilst Wiltshire had Beacon status for its Closer to Communities work, its community strategy is "not strong on social inclusion" so does not pick up on diversity issues.

2.10.1 Specific Community area plans

We looked at some of these to assess the extent to which they recognised and integrated the diverse needs of Wiltshire's communities. We are aware that different partnership groups throughout the county produce the plans, but the County's role in mainstreaming equalities should mean more reference was made to the issue.

Trowbridge

The Trowbridge plan summary does say, "Welcome" in three languages, but doesn't say in those languages where anyone could get it translated. Also there is no sense throughout the plan that anyone in Trowbridge is different from anyone else and has diverse needs

In the fuller plan it refers to "ethnic communities" given that we all have an ethnicity, that of the dominant group being White British, it is preferable to refer to "minority ethnic" communities. The plan does recognise that there are diverse housing and leisure needs and access to leisure as well as to Arabic classes. It also refers to the need for "Better mobility/access for disabled people."

However the full plan whilst signposting large print version, doesn't do this for minority languages.

Corsham

The Corsham plan makes no reference to ethnic diversity but does talk about youth provision. The copy of the survey form included in Corsham plan, shows that ethnic monitoring questions are not asked, nor is a question about disability, despite some other monitoring questions being asked. It does say that the document is available in different formats.

Malmesbury

This plan refers to youth issues and youth development work. There is reference to poor transport links and problems for non car users, but no mention that these disproportionately impact on disabled people and women who are less likely to have access to a car

There is reference to housing needs for disabled people, and it does say that the document is available in different formats.

3 Evidence of Commitment and knowledge

This was ascertained via interviews with individuals and focus groups (At the County, because visits were made over two days (some of the time being Spent on matters to do with the overall management of the project) it was possible to interview more individuals so a focus group was not held

3.1 Leadership: Officer and Members

People said that the Chief Executive was committed to the issue, and there is a member Champion on the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group Wiltshire has been through a period of some turbulence at a Chief officer level, with funding problems, more than a usual amount of change and turnover. This has meant it is difficult for a consistent leadership message on the significance of the equalities agenda to be cascaded throughout the organisation.

The recent turbulence and co-incidental problems with retaining equalities officers (which is not the council's fault) have impacted strongly on the equalities role, where there has not been consistency of lead.

However the recent appointment of a new equalities lead at Director Level, who is clear on the need to get the agenda more firmly embedded at a senior level, means that this is likely to change. A Chief Officers' event at the beginning of May will entirely focus on the issue and the Leader is reported as saying at a recent Chief Officer's meeting

"We have got to get this higher up our agenda"

There is an awareness in key quarters that what is needed is a cultural change, a shift in understanding and awareness.

However the challenges of local government reorganisation mean that focus is, understandably, taken away from this agendas.

3.2 Staff views on Equalities in Wiltshire.

"A lot is going on across the council, but it isn't always consistent"

This section is presented following a SWOT analysis; the questions being:

1. What do you perceive as Wiltshire's strengths on equalities?
2. What do you perceive as Wiltshire's challenges in this area?
3. What one thing would you wish to change
4. What one thing would you wish to celebrate?

3.2.1 Strengths

It is particularly important to note that in the short time available we have not been able to record all the strong points. (other strong points are recognised in the document review)

Although we have not had time to meet with them, it is clear that the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service and the Travellers support service are examples of good practice as is the progress made on reducing the gender gap in educational achievement of boys and the employment placement of disabled people. Work with migrant workers in Tidworth and Pewsey was also praised, as were activities around rural needs (which is itself a diversity issue)

The three equality schemes show good practice and very thorough consultation and research (see above)

Other staff, leading customer focused approaches showed a passion about access to services, an awareness of the pockets of significant deprivation, and a recognition that different people needed to use different methods to access services.

In HR monitoring and analysis is completed for those who have applied, been short listed, appointed by equality groups.

Racist incident reporting procedures and forms can be found on the council's web site

A new post in HR has been allocated responsibility for making sure that the equality actions in the three schemes are acted on

3.3 Challenges

3.3.1 Consultation

Everyone (both within the County council and across the districts) it is said does consultation separately and differently and there is a weakness in the failure to feedback the results of the consultations and what has happened as a result. There is a lack of follow through of actions proposed; an ongoing conversation was wanted. The Hidden voices report points out that Wiltshire does not have visible minority ethnic communities living in close proximity to one another. However both this report and the Buffer zone Community safety detailed qualitative consultations spoke with large numbers of individual BME people across Wiltshire.

3.3.2 Lack of confidence

A number of people said that staff was under confident of the equalities agenda and nervous of saying the wrong thing, so they shied away from it

Important to build peoples' confidence that they are moving in the right direction, rather than criticising.

3.3.2 Lack of weight and follow through

Responsibility for equalities was seen by some as having not been given enough weight in the organisation. (We have the impression this is now changing) There had been a tussle as to whether it was the responsibility of HR or someone else, which was especially difficult at a time when HR was not in a strong position, with recent staff changes. There had been turbulence with the corporate equalities lead not being replaced and a holding position with the lead being held part time by someone who also has major other responsibilities

“Equality and diversity activity goes on in lots of different places, but there is no corporate lead”

There is a concern for example that the many training initiatives do not always pick up the action points and analyses of the RES, GES and DES

3.3.3 Equality impact assessments

It is reported that some fifty of these have been conducted across the county, but that they are of variable quality and there is not a clear prioritised list across the various strands (rather than the initial 2002 list on race) of what the priorities should be; a rolling programme is planned in this area. (It is suggested that this approach is one that is also rolled out through the districts.) Proposals are also underway for checking those assessments, which reveal less understanding of the issues and where there might be adverse impact.

At the Corporate Equality and Diversity group mention was made of the difficulties of getting action taken on various matters such as safe means of escape for disabled staff

3.3.4 Training

The recent, thorough report on the wide range of types of training and lack of consistency makes recommendations, which need to be followed; a working group is to be set up to implement a joined up approach (We suggest that this initiative should be followed through across districts also)

3.3.5 Monitoring

We are aware that monitoring is conducted in HR areas; however managers are reported as not always returning the forms, which makes it incomplete. It is also difficult to collate central information by equality category on access to training as each department holds its own data base There is little evidence we can see about monitoring customer satisfaction, take up of services and other issues by equality group.

4. Level of Equality Standard

The authority has reported at level two of the Equality Standard. However a (draft) gap analysis, waiting answers to some questions, reveals that level two is not yet robustly consolidated throughout the council and needed some further work on this before moving forward to level 3.

There are some minor issues of concern, giving an amber traffic light, but some areas where the light remains at red and further work is needed (See appendix). These areas are:

Robust process and plan for equality impact assessments, including a quality check to ensure that those eias which have been completed are focussed on outcomes, identifying and redressing adverse impact, rather than ticking the box and saying there is no adverse impact, when this is not the case.

It is suggested that the report at level two stands and the consolidated work to redress these issues is completed in the next few months, allowing a target for reaching level three of July 2008

5Conclusion

WCC gives a clear impression of an organisation, which, until the recent past, has not given a clear lead on the equalities agenda. There are pockets of disjointed good practice, which are not clearly communicated throughout the council. Co-ordination of equalities work is always difficult at a County level, where there is both a geographic spread **and** it is harder to engage communities face to face than it is in districts.

The equality impact assessment approach (crucial to the Equality Standard and to the three equality schemes) has not been robustly pursued with a clear process, quality control and a widespread understanding of the purpose of eias. Thus the purpose, as with mainstreaming equalities, is to see services from the point of view of traditionally excluded groups with the outcome of actions to reduce any adverse impact.

However if the three equality schemes actions are integrated into service business plans and progress monitored then improvement should follow. At the same time the appointment of a new AD lead on equalities, together with the Chief Officer event on the topic on 1st May should herald a re invigoration of the agenda.

Di Parkin, for IDeA 27/04/2007