

# **Worcestershire County Council**

## **Equality Standard for Local Government Self Assessment Level Three Peer Challenge**

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CONTENTS

	Page
<a href="#"><u>Background on Worcestershire County Council</u></a>	4
<a href="#"><u>Leadership and Corporate Commitment</u></a>	6
<a href="#"><u>Community Engagement and Accountability</u></a>	11
<a href="#"><u>Service Delivery and Customer Care</u></a>	15
<a href="#"><u>Employment and Training</u></a>	18
<a href="#"><u>Adult and Community Services</u></a>	20
<a href="#"><u>Children's Services</u></a>	22
<a href="#"><u>Environmental Services</u></a>	24
<a href="#"><u>Looking Ahead</u></a>	26

## Background on Worcestershire County Council

Worcestershire County Council is a 4 star authority, which focuses on delivering excellent and continuously improving services, with our partners, to meet the needs of all our communities. Whilst historically we have always been in the lower quartile in terms of funding and council tax (the fourth lowest funded County Council in the country with one of the lowest council tax rates), we strive for top quartile performance and for continuous improvement and efficiency, and are driven by the things that are important to local people. Our shared vision for the county is:

**A county with safe, cohesive, healthy and inclusive communities, a strong and diverse economy, and a valued and cherished environment.**

### Worcestershire – The People and the Place

Worcestershire has a population of over half a million people. It is a diverse county, made up of towns located in both urban and rural areas. However, the majority (60%) of the population live in the towns of Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Evesham, Kidderminster, Malvern, Redditch and Worcester City. The remaining 40 per cent are dispersed across an area that covers about 670 square miles (173,529 hectares).

Worcestershire is located in the heart of England and is adjacent to the major West Midlands conurbations. It has good road access to and from the national transport network.

The County consists of six districts: **Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest.**

**Bromsgrove** is situated in north Worcestershire, lying to the south west of the West Midlands conurbation, and has a population of 91,600. Due to its proximity to the West Midlands, many inhabitants of Bromsgrove commute to work in Birmingham.

**Malvern Hills** lies to the west of the County and has a population of 73,900. The district is renowned for its beautiful scenery and part of the area has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

**Redditch** is situated in the north east of Worcestershire, approximately 15 miles south of Birmingham and bordering Warwickshire. The borough consists of two fairly well defined areas. The urban area in the north-east accounts for around half of the area, but is inhabited by over 90 per cent of the district's total population (79,500), whilst the rural area lies to the south-east. Redditch has the highest proportion of BME groups in the County.

**Worcester City** is the administrative and geographical centre of Worcestershire. Situated alongside the River Severn, the district has a population of around 93,400, and is the main employment centre of the County.

**Wychavon** is the largest of the six districts, both geographically and in terms of its population (116,300). The three largest towns in the district are Evesham, Droitwich Spa and Pershore, whose combined population accounts for almost half of the district total.

**Wyre Forest** is situated in a semi-rural, yet central location in the north-west of Worcestershire and has a population of 98,200. The district contains the three main towns of Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley forming a triangle with each being approximately five miles apart.

Worcestershire County Council has a wide-ranging approach to understanding local communities. The Research & Intelligence Unit was one of only eight best practice case studies used in an independent national evaluation undertaken of Local Intelligence Systems on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2006/07.

Over the last 12 months significant work has been done in bringing together a shared evidence base for the County Council and its partners, particularly in developing:

- The "Story of Place" for the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement 2008-11
- The "Joint Strategic Assessment of Need for Children, Young People and Families in Worcestershire – January 2008".
- The "Worcestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Health and Well-being - Adults"

- “Worcestershire County Economic Assessment 2007/08”
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships Strategic Assessments
- Gender and Ethnicity: Worcestershire’s Education and Labour Market.

**Some key findings to emerge from this work are:**

- The population of Worcestershire is expected to increase by about 38,000 (or 7 per cent) by 2026 (Office National Statistics (ONS), 2004-based projections) to approximately 590,000.
- Worcestershire residents are generally in good health, and life expectancy is increasing. Our population is aging faster than in England as a whole; premature deaths due to circulatory disease have halved since the mid-1990’s; and deaths due to cancer are below the national average.
- Lifestyle risk factors remain a concern: almost half the adult population and 30% of children age 11 is estimated to be overweight or obese; approximately 20 per cent of adults smoke; and only 1 in 4 adults participate in 30 minutes of physical activity three times a week.
- Whilst Worcestershire is ranked within the 25 per cent least deprived authorities using the English Indices of Deprivation 2007, it has some areas of challenge. Deprivation concerns are not solely linked to the urban parts of Worcestershire. Some rural parts of the County are amongst the most deprived areas in England in terms of geographical access to services.
- Worcestershire is a comparatively low crime area. Reductions in recorded crime in recent years are amongst the highest in the country. There has been a reduction of 24 per cent in British Crime Survey Comparator Crimes (a subset of 10 recorded crime types used by the Home Office) in the County between 2003/04 and 2006/07, compared with a national reduction of only 4 per cent over the same time period.
- Educational Attainment at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Worcestershire’s schools is generally positive compared with the national average. There are significant challenges being addressed in particular wards, such as Oldington and Foley Park in Wyre Forest which are in the top 1 per cent of deprived areas in England in terms of Income Deprivation Affecting Children.
- Claimant count rates (unemployment) in Worcestershire remain consistently below those recorded regionally and nationally. The long-term claimant count rate for Worcestershire also follows this pattern. Those who work and live in Worcestershire have lower than average national wage levels, though there are higher than average employment rates. More recently migrant workers have been attracted to Worcestershire, particularly to the seasonal and manufacturing work provided by the County’s agricultural industries.
- Around 2.5 per cent of the population of Worcestershire is made up of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. By 2011, it is estimated that BME communities will account for 4.3 per cent of the population of Worcestershire. In recent years there has been a shift seeing new migrants from the A8 Accession countries, with more than half of the migrants coming from Poland. The proportion of 0-19 year olds from BME backgrounds is 5.5% with 8.5% in Redditch in 2006/07. This is projected to rise over the coming years, so that by 2016 the proportion of BME 0-19 years old is estimated to be at least 13%, with half of these from Asian backgrounds.
- Worcestershire has a higher number of gypsy and traveller caravan pitches than any other County in the West Midlands, with 445 compared to between 200 and 250 in Shropshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire (DCLG, 2007). This number has risen by just over a quarter in the last two years.

**Political and Operational Structures**

**Political Composition**

The last County Council elections in Worcestershire took place on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005. These elections resulted in an overall Conservative majority of one.

There are fifty seven County Councillors in total; forty three male and fourteen female. Five of the Councillors are known to have a disability and two are from BME backgrounds. Twenty-nine seats are held by the Conservatives, seventeen by Labour, eight by liberal democrats, two by liberals and one seat by the Independent Health Concern.

The Council operates under a Cabinet system consisting of the Leader and seven Conservative Councillors, which represent the executive decision making function. Each of the seven Conservative Councillors have

responsibility for a particular portfolio. Some portfolio holders have Advisors who support and advise on specific areas of their responsibility.

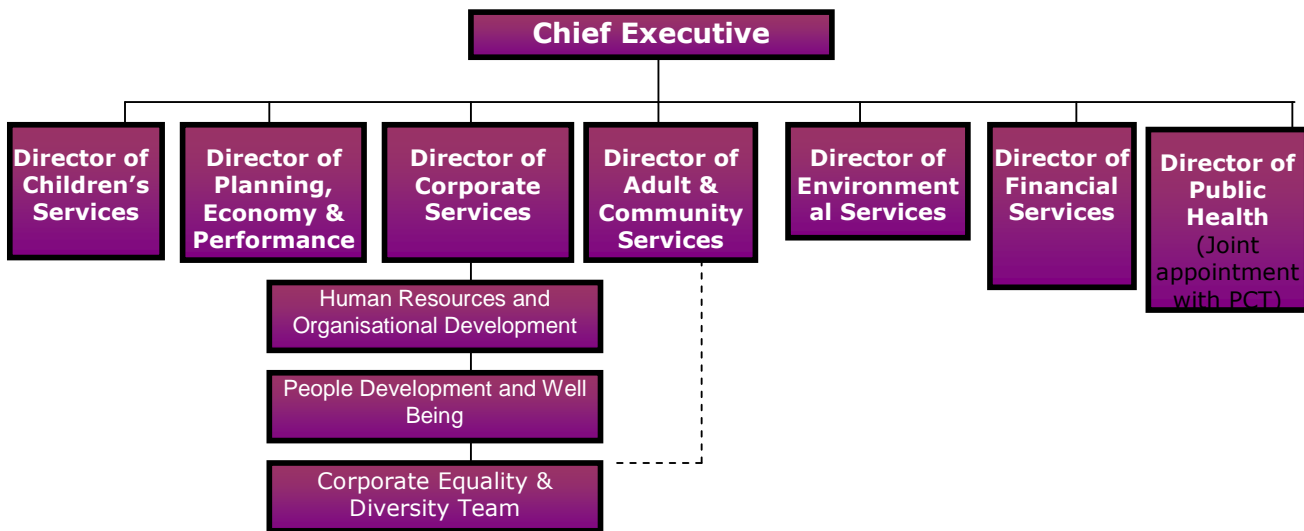
An Overview and Scrutiny Steering Committee (OSSC) exists and serves to hold the Cabinet to account. The OSSC is made up of Councillors who are not on the Cabinet and most shadow a specific portfolio. The Committee's main role is to establish and oversee time-limited scrutiny task groups of Councillors who investigate issues in depth and make recommendations to Cabinet.

**Organisational Structures**

The County Council has 7 Directorates: Adult and Community Services, Children's Services, Corporate Services, Environmental Services, Financial Services and Planning, Economy and Performance. Details of the services provided by each of Directorates can be found in the evidence folder (E1).

To ensure the delivery of improved services to the people of Worcestershire, the Council has made a joint appointment with the Worcestershire Primary Care Trust, establishing a Joint Director of Public Health in April 2007.

**Chief Officers Management Board (COMB)**



**Leadership and Corporate Commitment**

We have made significant progress on our journey towards equality and diversity, since 1998 when Worcestershire County Council was formed. Since then Equality and Diversity has become one of our key priorities as shown in the evidence included in this report. Set out below is our story.

**Corporate Leadership and Commitment**

The Director of Adult and Community Services, Eddie Clarke is the Chief Officer who leads on equality and diversity and has assumed personal responsibility for the agenda – ensuring that that it is central to the Council's work. Councillor Philip Gretton, Cabinet Member Responsible for Adult and Community Services, is the lead Member on equality and diversity and ensures the political ownership of the agenda.

**Corporate Equalities Board**

The Council has a Corporate Equalities Board (the Board) which takes the strategic lead on equality and diversity. The Board is chaired by Director of Adult and Community Services and comprises of senior officers from all Directorates. There are lead Members on the Board from the three main political groups. Three of the Board's Senior Officers each take responsibility for leading on two of the six equality strands as follows: Age and Disability, Gender and Sexuality and Race and Religion. Through the Director of Adult and

Community Services the Board reports directly to the Chief Officers Management Board, which is chaired by the Chief Executive.

The Board meets every two months and operates in accordance with agreed terms of reference<sup>1</sup> and a work programme. The Board is responsible for:-

- co-ordinating and monitoring Worcestershire County Council's work on the Equality Standard for Local Government, ensuring that its application and implementation is consistent throughout the authority;
- actively supporting the duty to promote equality of opportunity and good relations and eliminate all forms of discrimination;
- providing leadership in the development of authority wide policies, procedures and practices to promote equality of opportunity in employment and service delivery as a mainstream activity. This will take account of experience and new and emerging legislation.

The work programme for 2008-2009 includes achievement of level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, organising the Community Fairs, developing a Single Equality Scheme and delivering the Council's element of the Being Different Together project.

The Council also has an Equality Group for Race and Religion, which is chaired by an officer member of the Board. The Group, which meets every three months, includes officers from each directorate, as well as the Chair and Vice Chair of the Black Colleagues Group and the Gypsy and Traveller Manager. The Group operates under terms of reference<sup>2</sup> and has developed a work programme. It is responsible for organising the Community Fairs.

The Disability Equality Monitoring Group is charged with monitoring and challenging our progress in meeting the objectives set out in the Disability Equality Scheme. It is composed of service users and staff representatives from service areas responsible for actions in the Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan.

The Director of Planning, Economy and Performance leads on the gender and sexual orientation work and with the support of the Corporate Equalities Board promotes the gender and sexual equality duty within the Council.

### **Equality and Diversity within the Directorates**

Work and actions for Directorates on equalities flow from the schemes (and their action plans), feedback from forums, contact with the community, needs analysis, research and from EIAs. Performance against BVPI's, local indicators and progress against action plans (aligned to the three equality schemes) is monitored and reported to the Board. Actions within the schemes cascade down to Directorate Service or Improvement Plans. Due to the variation in size of Directorates some have their own specific equalities groups (Adult and Community Services, Children Services and Environmental Services)<sup>3</sup> and others monitor performance and drive forward the agenda through their Directorate Management Teams. Progress from each Directorate is then reported to the Corporate Equalities Board by the Directorate lead.

### **Corporate Diversity Team**

The Corporate Diversity Team is based in the Corporate Services Directorate. The Team consists of a Corporate Diversity Manager, Disability Equality Adviser, Equality and Diversity Trainer, Equality and Diversity Research Officer, Project Administrator, Team Administrator and an Officer Support Assistant. Adult and Community Services have a Race Equality Development Officer and a BME Carers Officer. Children Services have specific posts to support learning and community cohesion within school settings.

### **Equality Schemes**

The Council has published a Corporate Equality Scheme (**E2**), which is the primary document setting out how we will address equality related issues in employment and service delivery. The Council has also developed Race, (**E3**), Disability (**E4**) and Gender Equality Schemes (**E5**), that support our work in actively promoting equality and diversity in service access and delivery and in partnership working. These schemes are underpinned by our Equality and Diversity Policy (**E6**). All of the Schemes have been approved by COMB and Cabinet<sup>4</sup>. The Council is currently developing a Single Equality Scheme (**E7**).

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>2</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>3</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>4</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

## Scrutiny

Two scrutiny reviews have focused specifically on equality and diversity. The first took place in 2002 on race equality and the second in 2005 on disability equality<sup>5</sup>. Outcomes included extending the Black Colleagues Group to all BME staff within the Council and the appointment of the Council's first Disability Equality Adviser.

The Council has ensured that a Councillor on the Overview and Scrutiny Steering Group is a member of the Corporate Equalities Board. The Steering Group received a presentation on equality and diversity and their role in relation to the Equality Standard in November 2006<sup>6</sup> and as a result ensure that equality and diversity and its impact is addressed when undertaking a scrutiny.

## Sponsoring and Funding Organisations

The Council is a sponsor of the Gender Advisory Bureau, it has an agreement with Ethnic Access Link to use its signpost on its documents, and is one of the main funders of Worcestershire Racial Equality Council. It has also awarded the Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium<sup>7</sup> £7,300 to :-

- Support community cohesion agendas at a local level to ensure good community relations are promoted across and between different communities using community support groups as a facilitator and a conduit;
- Support marginalized groups and communities of interest in Worcestershire and in ensuring there is an increased take up of activities and services from them;
- Support the County Council, Worcestershire Partnership and local Voluntary Community Sector organisations to develop and shape services to meet the specific needs of minority and disadvantage communities.

## Conferences, Campaigns and Collaboration

The Council has organised a number of high-level conferences for senior officers, Councillors (including the Leader of the Council and the Chairman) and partner organisations. These include a:

- Race Equality Conference with key-note speaker, the Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality.
- Celebration of the European Year of Disabled People by the staging of an awareness raising campaign "Today, Not Tomorrow". This event highlighted the issues of concern for disabled people, raised the profile and widened the debate about equal opportunities and fair treatment of disabled people in Worcestershire.
- Artist residency on race equality and disability equality in three events which culminated with young people performing at the conferences
- Gender Equality Seminar called "Does Sex Matter?"
- Management Conference on Diversity when Loraine Martin, Head of Diversity at the Audit Commission was the keynote speaker .
- Management Conference on Disability Equality when Michael McGrath an equality and diversity expert who has Muscular Dystrophy was the keynote speaker.
- Conference on community cohesion in Schools to launch consultancy in community cohesion (iCoCo Project).

The Council has raised awareness of equality and diversity through a number of poster campaigns. Posters have been developed to promote awareness on race, disability, gender and sexual orientation<sup>8</sup>. These posters are displayed at all Council buildings and schools in Worcestershire. The race poster won an Institute of Public Relations Award and copies of the disability poster have been requested as far a field as Canada. The Corporate Diversity Team annually publishes a calendar for all staff, which continues to raise awareness of equality and diversity and the team.

In 2006 the Disability Rights Commission supported the development of Disability Equalities Schemes in 8 pilot authorities, and commissioned the Office for Public Management (OPM) to offer challenge and support to these authorities, with a view to producing tools, processes and learning which could be shared nationally. The purpose of the project was to develop learning about the challenges local authorities face in addressing the disability equalities agenda and how these can be overcome, and to disseminate that learning in order to support other local authorities. Worcestershire County Council was one of the 8 authorities and the work had the full support of the Chief Executive and the lead Member for Equalities.

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<sup>5</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>6</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>7</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>8</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

In Worcestershire, an action learning set was established, which brought together (about 15) representatives from service directorates, and corporate equalities leads. The primary objective of the action learning set was to work through the practical implications of developing a disability equality scheme in Worcestershire, using the previous experience of staff who have been involved in other equalities initiatives and those with a keen interest in these areas. Good practice identified within the 8 authorities was published in Beyond Good Intentions; A resource for local authorities implementing the Disability Equality Duty<sup>9</sup>. Also as a result of participating in this programme the Council presented its experience on developing our disability equality scheme at a number of conferences including the annual Local Government Conference in Bournemouth.

### **Partnership working on Equality and Diversity**

The County Council in partnership with the six District Councils has been awarded £230,000 by the Improvement and Efficiency Partnership from the Capacity Building Fund to improve the capacity of all the authorities involved to deliver on the equality and diversity agenda. The Councils are working together to enable diverse community participation. Details of the project can be found in the Project Initiation Document<sup>10</sup>. The project, Being Different Together was officially launched on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. The launch was chaired by the lead Member on equality and diversity at the Council, and the keynote speakers were Paul Goodman MP, Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government and Angela Mason Head of Diversity at the IdEA. The launch was attended by Councillors from all the local authorities, as well as Chief Executives, Chief Officers and Senior Managers. Currently a mapping exercise is being undertaken by Consultants, which will give us all an understanding and working appreciation of issues affecting all District Councils and the County Council Evidence Specification. The report will be presented to the Project Steering Group in December 2008.

In addition the Council works closely with other Partners such as the Police, Fire Service, Health, organising the Community Fairs, The Vine Magazine<sup>11</sup> and also on celebrating for Black History Month.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

The Council has developed Guidance (E8) and a Toolkit (E9) on Equality Impact Assessment, which is available to staff on the Intranet. In 2005 the decision was taken to extend the assessments to include sexual orientation, age and religion or belief. The Council has completed 33 screenings and 10 full equality impact assessments (E10). Equality Impact Assessments form part of the Council's corporate planning process and equality actions are carried forward in Directorate and service plans. Equality Impact Assessments are carried out as part of the service review process. The Council has published EIAs on its website. As part of the development of the Council's Single Equality Scheme a new timetable is being developed for EIAs on existing policies and reporting of results.

In July 2008 a review was undertaken on our equality impact assessment process as a result of the process will be revised for launch in April 2009.

### **Information Gathering and Equality Monitoring**

Since 2004 we have published annually employee monitoring data on our website on age, ethnicity and gender (Employee workforce Monitoring Reports (E11)). This data is analysed by our HR Department for inequalities and objectives and targets are set to address them. Our Research and Intelligence Unit analyse all survey evidence by age, gender and ethnicity. A detailed examination of the education and labour market within Worcestershire has been undertaken, considering particularly Gender and Ethnicity. The Unit also produces population forecast related specifically to age, gender, ethnicity and disability for the next 15 years or more. An audit to evaluate disability data held in different parts of the Council is being undertaken.

Worcestershire Partnership also monitors issues of community tension on a monthly basis, accounting for the knowledge of community intelligence through local policing teams and community safety partnerships.

The 2008 Worcestershire Story of Place<sup>12</sup> (SoP) provides an evidence base for the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) (E12) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) (E13), drawing on both statistical evidence and the needs and priorities of local communities as identified through mechanisms such as the Citizens' Panel and Best Value General Satisfaction Survey. The SoP identifies key characteristics of

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>10</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>11</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>12</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

communities in Worcestershire, including: an ageing population, a large Gypsy Romany & Traveller Community, relatively high levels of worklessness as a result of disability, rural communities and increasing numbers of migrant workers, particularly from eastern Europe. It also acknowledges that the county's Black and Minority Ethnic community is small and therefore requires a proactive approach to ensure that needs are properly addressed.

### **Local Area Agreement**

Worcestershire's second local area agreement covers the period 2008-2011. Our agreement includes targets to tackle some of the most difficult and cross cutting challenges in our area. Equality and diversity is a cross cutting theme, but there are specific equality targets which the Council is leading on:-

- NI 2 - % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood
- NI 146 – Adults with learning disabilities in employment
- NI 150 – Adults in contact with secondary mental health services in employment
- N154 – Satisfaction with services for disabled children.

### **Sustainable Community Strategy and Community Cohesion**

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Worcestershire (Second Edition) 2008-2013 sets out the strategic vision for the future of Worcestershire and focuses on activities needed in the short term to make it happen. The aim is to improve the quality of life people who visit, work or live in the country. The analysis in the SoP forms the basis of the inclusion of two cross-cutting themes in the refreshed SCS: community engagement and community cohesion. The SCS outlines the particular activity that will be undertaken in order to address these cross-cutting themes.

An Equality Impact Assessment of the SCS and LAA is currently being undertaken (**E14**). This will be published on the Partnership website shortly but has outlined key recommendations for the Partnership to take forward to ensure its work meets the needs of Worcestershire's diverse communities. These include the increased engagement of all of the county's communities through representative groups, the continual and externally checked monitoring of impact on equality and diversity and the provision of support for partners across the Partnership to consider equalities issues as they plan delivery.

### **Performance Management**

The Council has a Performance Management Framework, which gives a clear understanding of our approach to performance management, how it supports and fits with other corporate processes, initiatives, plans and strategies. It enables our staff and partners to clearly see the golden thread that runs from our top level Community Strategy through to the individual Staff Review and Development process. Equality and diversity form part of this process.

Each Directorate includes actions from the Schemes into their Directorate and Service Plans (**E15**). Directorate Management Teams measure progress on equality and diversity on a six monthly basis. COMB receive regular quarterly monitoring reports which set out progress made against BVPIs including equality and diversity PIs

The Corporate Equalities Board plays a key role in monitoring progress against equality and diversity targets in our Schemes. Each Directorate and sub-group lead presents a verbal report to the Board on how their directorate is progressing equality actions.

Adult and Community Services introduced Performance Boards as a method of challenging performance of individual services just over three years ago. An individual service has to present information about its performance and progress on key areas, which includes equality and diversity to a group of peers/senior managers in the Directorate, who are expected to provide robust, constructive challenge. In 2007 Corporate Services implemented Performance Boards using the same model. Similar arrangements are in place for managing performance to meet the priorities of the Children and Young People Plan. Major developments on equality and diversity are reported in the Council's Annual Report<sup>13</sup>. The Council has designed Equality and Diversity Journey Display Boards<sup>14</sup> which show the progress we are making on this agenda. These Boards are displayed in reception at County Hall and are used at public events to highlight our successes. In addition leaflets<sup>15</sup> are distributed at the Community Fairs and other events which highlight key achievements on equality and diversity.

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<sup>13</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>14</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>15</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

## Procurement

The Council's procurement vision, contained in our Corporate Procurement Strategy (**E16**) includes the "promotion of equality and diversity objectives through procurement activity". It also contains a commitment to ensure that procurement policy, planning and practice support Council priorities set out in the Worcestershire Community Strategy. These priorities include:

- Economic success shared by all
- Improving health and well-being
- Stronger communities

The Council works in close partnership with other Councils and the West Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for which it takes a lead on three significant work streams.

We have developed a Procurement Code<sup>16</sup> and Tendering Toolkit<sup>17</sup> which set out the procedures which managers are to follow and the standards which we expect them to apply. The template Pre qualification questionnaire we provide includes questions in respect of the equal opportunities practice of any organisation tendering for a contract. The Council has developed a simple evaluation sheet to assist managers in scoring this section of the questionnaire. Managers are able to access our procurement training and we also have a "Procurement Community" which we use to inform them of recent developments. The procurement team is always approachable and is able to provide one to one guidance where it is needed. A more general understanding of both Council expectations and legislation governing the equality strands is provided through the training given as part of our induction programme.

## Areas for Improvement

The Council has made considerable progress on equalities. However the following areas for improvement have been identified:-

- Although the Council has made progress on Equality Impact Assessment (EIAs) the Council needs to ensure consistent performance on, and quality of EIAs across the authority and assessments on all new policies
- The Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes have included actions needed to be taken to improve equality. However the Council needs to develop actions on Sexual Orientation, Age and Religion or Belief.
- Information gathering and equality monitoring does happen with the Council. However the Council recognise that it is important to provide guidance on information gathering and equality monitoring and ensure that this information and monitoring data is used to improve services and outcomes for our diverse communities.
- Set up a more comprehensive performance management framework for equality and diversity which will ensure that everyone takes ownership of the agenda and provides the leadership appropriate to their level.
- The Council continually seeks to improve the ways in which our procurement processes can be used to contribute to delivery of our corporate objectives. The Council recognises the potential of procurement in addressing social issues and are reviewing our current practice and guidance. Adult and Community Services Contract officers have recently carried out an equality impact assessment of the directorate commissioning process. The actions set out in the plan produced as part of that process will, when implemented, establish good practice which can be shared across directorates.
- Equality objectives and targets do appear in service plans, but this is an area which needs to be strengthened so that targets and objectives are embedded into all service plans.
- The Council will formally "map" in a more extensive manner the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of community groups, linked to the community cohesion framework and the Prevent Strategy.

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<sup>16</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>17</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

## Community Engagement and Accountability

### Consultation Strategy

The Council uses a variety of means to develop its knowledge of what matters most to the communities it serves. The Council's Consultation Strategy (E17) is its plan for improving public consultation in Worcestershire by using a range of techniques to consult with communities of interest and geography. This is underpinned by a Toolkit and the "[Ask Me! – Consultation Planner and Finder](#)". This comprehensive and simple to use database enables us to join up consultation exercises, plan what we do, share what we learn and to be responsive to local circumstances.

The Council recognises that communities can be identified in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is geography, but people belong to many different communities at different times of their lives. Users and citizens can be for example, members of communities of interest (commuters or churchgoers), demographic groups (young people or older people) or minority communities (black and minority ethnic groups, non-English speaking, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender community). Demographic information on Worcestershire's communities is available on the [Research & Intelligence Website](#). To consult successfully the Council needs to understand the perspective of all the people we serve and the complexities of all our communities. In this way we are more able to plan for and respond to people's needs

In order to do this the Council has adopted a number of mechanisms to seek communities' views. The Council ensures in all our consultation exercises that we have clearly identified our target audience, and considered how we will reach groups who we traditionally find difficult to engage and whose views may therefore be excluded or overlooked.

In the Toolkit there is a list of groups that we seek to involve to ensure that we are engaging everyone in Worcestershire. The Council is proactive in involving these groups in our consultation process by:-

- Providing information in accessible formats and support for those who need help to participate in consultation – guidance is available in *Communicating with our Customer*<sup>18</sup>.
- Providing practical advice, information and contacts to those running consultation processes on how to reach these groups
- Using existing networks and community organisations where appropriate to seek advice, views and opinions
- Being creative by using different methods of consultation
- Using Joined up consultation exercises wherever possible and join with partners to avoid "consultation fatigue"
- Assessing our success in reaching hard to reach groups by including this as a criteria in our evaluation of consultation

### Community Leadership and Engagement Framework

The Council has now put in place a Community Leadership and Engagement Framework (E18), which sets out the key issues and aspirations for Community Leadership, and Engagement in Worcestershire.

This Framework is an aspirational document, which puts the primacy of the elected Member's role at the heart of Community Leadership. Among the many outcomes of this document are:

- Improved local governance
- Enhanced place shaping
- Improved social capital and cohesion.

These principles are reflected in the initiative the Council is leading with District Councils and other partners to develop community engagement in Worcestershire as a potential 'shared service'.

### Accessible Formats

We recognise the importance of providing information in an appropriate and accessible format. The Council has published an Accessible Formats Directory<sup>19</sup> which provides guidance for staff on alternative formats. The Council includes a signpost on documents showing the contact telephone for Ethnic Access Link who can translate information into different languages. Ethnic Access Link provide quarterly reports which show how often they are contact about Council services and by whom. The Council can make documents available in alternative format on request. We have reviewed our Interpretation & Translation service

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<sup>18</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>19</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

including spend, suppliers, and use of the service and we are in the process of implementing the recommendation. This will include developing an interpretation and translation policy, joint procurement of a new interpretation and translation service, with Worcestershire Hub, and the setting up of ongoing monitoring. In addition currently the following quick wins are being implemented:-

- Identification of staff who can speak other languages including BSL.
- Provision of basic information on our website in key other languages.

### **Citizens Panel**

The Research and Intelligence Unit is responsible for running both the Worcestershire County and Worcester City Citizens' Panels. The Citizens' Panel has 1600 Worcestershire residents and takes place twice a year (Summer and Winter). The purpose of the Panel is to give residents the potential to influence decisions that are made to help us to plan and improve our services. We also hold an annual event at County Hall to facilitate more qualitative consultation, we select members from the panel to ensure as broad spread of backgrounds as possible amongst attendees. The current composition of the panel is broadly representative of the ethnic, gender and disability populations in the county. While we have good representation from age 18 to 94, the younger end of the age spectrum is under-represented when compared to the County's population.

Our main recruitment method is to send postal invites to random addresses across the county inviting an adult member of the household to join. However, in the coming weeks and months the Marketing and Communications Unit will be further promoting the Panel via the Vine magazine, at the three Community Fairs and through Word on Worcestershire. The Council would like to attract some additional members from our ethnic minority communities and we are also emphasising the need for people under 35 to join. With additional members from these minority groups we hope to be able to carry out more detailed analysis by ethnic group in the future.

### **Youth Cabinet**

The Worcestershire Youth Cabinet is a group of young people (aged 11 to 18) their aim is to provide all of the young people who live in Worcestershire with a voice – a voice that is heard and listened to by local, regional and national government, by providers of services for young people and by any other agencies who have an interest in the views and needs of young people. The Youth Cabinet has 31 members, 18 are male and 13 are female, 27 are white British, 2 are Black Caribbean and 2 are other ethnicity.

### **Gender Advisory Bureau**

The Council sponsors the Gender Advisory Bureau, and consults with them in relation to policies and plans we are developing. The Bureau has been involved in the development of the Single Equality Scheme.

### **User Involvement**

The Council has initiated the systematic development of forums for adults aged 55 and over across the county through the Adult and Community Services Involvement Officer for Older People, who continues to provide support for them. At present there are seven active forums and one area temporarily without a forum. These forums are run by older people for older people, they cover whatever issues older people feel are relevant to them. The forums have formed links with many other organisations providing services to Older People such as District Councils, Health Trusts, and relevant housing and voluntary groups. Each forum has a Management Committee which meets at least monthly, and holds public meetings with guest speakers. All eight forums have representatives on, or links with, their Local Strategic Partnerships. They also have representatives on the Health and Social Care Strategic Partnership Board.

The eight forums have established a Countywide Partnership that meets on a quarterly basis. Two representatives from this group are members of the West Midlands Older Peoples Advisory Group (OPAG), which feeds up to ministerial level as part of a consultative body under the national Better Government for Older People initiative. The forums also have Countywide sub-groups on transport and social care that feed into relevant County Council working groups. The forums are routinely involved in any formal consultation involving older people.

Adult and Community Services has a User Involvement Strategy<sup>20</sup>. A recent example of consultation logged here was consultation on the proposed Day Services Strategy for Older People. Methods of consultation identified were email and postal surveys, small focus groups, Older Persons Forums, existing social groups and a workshop for present service providers.

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<sup>20</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

Most service developments relevant to older people have a strong element of end user involvement in their development and design. The WiNN project is a particularly good recent example with local older people making up 50% of the membership of each local management board with equal voting rights, participation in staff recruitment and sitting on all relevant steering groups. They also participate in staff recruitment and sit on all relevant steering groups.

Work has been undertaken to identify and work with older people from minority ethnic groups. Older people have been part of corporate initiatives such as the Community Fairs covering all ages. In addition, Adult and Community Services have provided funding for a number of social clubs and groupings for older people partly as a means of establishing greater links and raising awareness of services generally eg community health plus initiative in Redditch, Asian men's lunch club. Work has taken place with carers of people with dementia, and as a result of this work a short breaks strategy<sup>21</sup> for this group has been developed. In the Council's resource centres for older people, a specific initiative called 'Having your say' was developed to ensure that the voice of people using these services was heard. This has been extended to private sector care homes.

### **Directory on Minority Ethnic Voluntary Organisations**

A review of minority ethnic voluntary organisations was undertaken in 2005. This has provided a directory of organisations making contact and communication easier with our Black and Minority Ethnic Communities<sup>22</sup>.

### **Community Fairs**

Greater understanding of the needs and concerns of BME communities has been achieved through a series of Race Equality/Community Fairs. These events have been organised annually since 2005, and have developed and evolved each year. They began as just a County Council event taking place in the evening. They now take place from 10am to 7pm and involve the District Councils, PCT, Police and the Fire Service. Stands and Stalls are set up to provide information on our services including childcare, social care, recycling, employment opportunities. Senior Officers attend to listen to issues and concerns of the communities, They then take action – for e.g. communities told us that they wanted to have access to financial support to celebrate cultural events and promote cohesion at a very local community level. We set up a grants scheme, setting aside £10,000, to support such projects. This scheme is now in its second year. Similarly the communities told us they were unhappy with the interpretation and translation service and this has now been externally reviewed. A project to develop an improved service is now in place. The ACS Service User Involvement Officer has worked with local disability groups to assist them in forming service user networks; members of these networks sit on the Strategic Partnership Board for Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment and associated sub groups. We also host the Learning Disability Partnership Board.

### **Equality and Diversity Policy and the Equality Schemes**

A very robust consultation process was undertaken on the Equality and Diversity Policy. Consultation on the Draft Equality and Diversity Policy took place between June and August 2004<sup>23</sup>. Consultation was conducted using postal self-completion questionnaires, an electronic web survey on the Council's website and focus groups.

Feedback on the draft policy was invited from Worcestershire residents, county councillors, council Staff, Worcestershire Association of Service Users, District Councils, other public authorities, voluntary and community organisations, Trade Unions and staff associations. Specific feedback was invited from all age based organisations, ethnic minority communities, including asylum seekers, refugees, gypsies and travellers, representatives for and from organisations for disabled people, gender based organisations, lesbian and gay groups and faith establishments.

Eight focus groups were organised to obtain feedback on the draft Policy and on equality of opportunity generally in Worcestershire.

In developing our Race Equality Scheme there was direct involvement of BME community groups to ensure the Scheme and action plan responded to the needs of the groups the Council intended to support. The Scheme is reviewed annually and progress reported to the communities through the "You Said We Will" report at the Race Equality Consultation Events. The action plan is revised annually to take account of the priorities highlighted by communities at the Race Events.

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<sup>21</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>22</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>23</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

The Council's Disability Equality Scheme was based on the mystery shopping research<sup>24</sup> the Disability and Independence Today Conference<sup>25</sup> organised in June 2006, feedback from service users on the Equality Group for Age and Disability, Focus Groups<sup>26</sup> with a range of organisations for and of disabled people, and the staff Action Learning Group.

In preparing the Gender Equality Scheme the Council utilised information analysed from a survey (which covered the following areas communication, the Regional Spatial Survey, Bus Priority Schemes and Local education facilities), feedback from Women Only consultation events organised in February 2006, the Mystery Customer Research, the Worcestershire Enterprising Women's Conference and the Gender Equality Seminar.

All equality policies and schemes are presented to Cabinet and Full County Council and are therefore public documents and open to public scrutiny.

In developing our first Single Equality Scheme wide consultation was undertaken with employees of the Council, and individuals from communities. Over 50 organisations were involved. The feedback has been documented in the Scheme and has contributed to the development of the Scheme, especially in relation to the action plan and key objectives.

### **Communications**

The County Council publishes the Word On Worcestershire magazine, which regularly includes articles on promoting equality and diversity. Pod casts of WOW are made into different formats and the links have been made with ethnic radio stations to promote the Community Fairs. The Council has published five editions of its Human Race Newsletter, which has been circulated to all staff, including school staff and partners. Articles are regularly included on the staff intranet in relation to equality and diversity. The Council has undertaken a review of its methods of communication with BME communities and as a result in October 2008 the Council with its partners will launch the first edition of The Vine Magazine, which will be targeted at the County's BME communities to promote services available to them<sup>27</sup>.

The County Council ensures that its publications include diverse images. The County Council has re-designed its branding guidelines<sup>28</sup> to ensure that communications regarding the services that are delivered are clearer in reflecting the County Councils involvement. A strong relationship with local press and radio has been developed. The Council has a positive approach to working with the press to raise people's awareness of the Council. This has included raising awareness of the publication of our various Schemes, promotion of the Cultural Diversity Grant Scheme<sup>29</sup> and the Community Fairs.

### **Being Different Together**

This project includes an objective on community engagement, which will result in the production of a participation strategy, which will support the development of a countywide approach to community engagement, with diverse groups. As part of this project community advisory groups will be established within each the District's, equality forum who will set up and the annual equality consultation events to take place across the County.

### **Areas for Improvement**

The Council has made considerable progress on equalities. However the following areas for improvement have been identified :-

- Although we consult actively with different communities we recognise that we need to strengthen our approach and ensure that we effectively engage with all our diverse communities and in particular proactively with lesbian and gay communities
- Develop a robust approach to involving members of the community in scrutiny
- Although we have a consultation strategy the Council would like to strengthen this and develop an overarching Participation Strategy with the Districts so that diverse groups can participate in the development of equality objectives.

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<sup>24</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>25</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>26</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>27</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>28</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>29</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

- Going forward we plan to use customer categorisation at a postcode level to improve equality impact assessments and to help target information and services appropriate to residents needs and interests.

## **Service Delivery and Customer Care**

### **Worcestershire Hub**

The Worcestershire Hub provides members of the public with improved ways of accessing a wide range of services in one place. A network of Customer Service Centres are located across the county to enable customers to visit in person with any enquiry about council services. This enables a more proactive service to be provided which looks more closely at the needs of the individual rather than just responding to their initial question. A good example is where a member of the public applying for a Blue Badge can also be told about benefits and concessionary travel.

These centres also offer the opportunity for accessing a range of other services, as surgeries are held on a regular basis with other organisations. This can include surgeries with elected members as well as voluntary and other organisations. This enables the centres to become a true community resource. In addition, members of the public can access services over the phone or online via the Worcestershire Hub. The Worcestershire Hub has a formal Governance Structure to ensure clear accountability, decision-making and a focus on operational and customer service management.

The eGovernment Agenda has been progressed where possible in partnership with local district councils. This focused on making improvements in terms of accessing services and e-enabling service provision. As a partnership we have a number of systems in place to support service delivery including a single customer relationship management system used by customer service staff to log, track and progress customer enquiries.

Online access has been simplified in that 5 of the 7 authorities now use the same content management system – hosted by the County Council - and the same home page template providing customers with a more friendly and common interface. There is also a single interface via the Worcestershire Hub website to better facilitate searching across the range of local government services and to ease promotion of self-service opportunities where only one site needs to be published. ICT increasingly underpins all that we do including making improvements to the provision of services.

The partnership remains strong with all partners committed to the Worcestershire Hub. The overall aims of the Hub remain in place and significant progress has been made to improve access to a wide range of services as well as improving the customer experience. Work is currently underway with the partners to develop the next stage of the strategy for the Worcestershire Hub as well as taking the opportunity to review the operating model to enable further service improvement and maximise the potential for the Hub to drive further service transformation.

### **Access Centre**

The Access Centre is the first point of contact for access to social care services for both children and adult services. The Centre has revised and published the English language poster and associated information in the five most commonly read languages in the county using ethnicity data on service use to prioritise information production in other languages. This information has been widely published and launched at the Community Fairs held in 2007. This has led to an increase in the number of enquiries received in languages other than English.

The Access Centre leads the county's shared knowledge database project (a project to create a single information source for the public) and among the various partners, Ethnic Access Link, Penderels (organisation to support those receiving Direct Payments) and Worcestershire Association of Carers continue to be used to publicise the single point of contact further. Several of these organisations have used the Access Centre model of good practice in relation to translation services at the point of contact.

The Centre has worked in conjunction with the Carers Development Officer for BME based in the Carers Unit to provide support to 22 BME organisations in Worcester and has worked with several of these groups directly to improve cultural sensitivity in access to services. The Access Centre provides training and refresher courses to Customer Service Advisers in Worcestershire Hub contact centres and telephony centre to develop a cultural sensitive responses. Work is ongoing to further develop religious and cultural diversity awareness training and quality monitoring to ensure ongoing improvement.

### **Hate Crime and Hate Incidents**

We are working with the District Councils, Police and voluntary sector partners to set up and further develop hate incident reporting partnerships across the county. All the agencies involved in the partnership work together to offer professional support and assistance to victims and witnesses and to take effective action to stop further incidents. Where the victim consents this can include prosecution of the offender. This partnership was established in 2007. It encourages the reporting of incidents perceived to have been motivated by the prejudice or hate of someone due to their:

- Race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins
- Religion
- Gender or gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Disability

Incidents can be reported on-line, by using a form available at our customer service centres, partners' premises (such as age concern, victim support, CAB offices) or via a telephone hotline.

Racist incidents are recorded in the Anti-Bullying strategy and ethnic reporting arrangements are being commissioned to increase understanding of the extent of the issue.

### **BME and Access to Services**

A number of initiatives have been undertaken to ensure that people from all sections of the community can access services – i.e. Community Fairs with BME groups, service profile raising initiatives such as funding for BME lunch groups, BME Community Development workers employed in mental health services, carer services and in the direct payments service.

### **Worcestershire Third Age Team**

A partnership between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Pensions Service, Worcestershire County Council and 6 local District Councils has created the Worcestershire Joint Third Age Team focusing on 'Older People'.

The aim is that one visit will enable the customer to get advice/help on a number of subject areas (such as: Winter Fuel Payments, Attendance Allowance, Pension Credit, Age Related Payments) and receive an immediate appraisal of their financial assessment and benefit entitlements.

### **Emergency Arrangements**

The council can show that its emergency arrangements are fit for purpose and allow the council to respond to emergencies, support emergency service partners and communicate effectively with the public about the emergency at any time, while continuing to deliver critical public services. It has identified vulnerable individuals and tailored arrangements to meet a diversity of potential needs.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

The Worcestershire Partnership recognises the important role that the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) plays in building and sustaining stronger communities and has formally signed up to the principles contained in the Worcestershire Compact.

The County Council has produced a VCS Funding Framework known as 'Shopping, Investing & Giving' as a result of wide consultation with the VCS and internally.

A review of Minority ethnic voluntary organisations was undertaken in 2005. This has provided a directory of organisations making contact and communication easier, and led to a grant process, now in its second year, providing essential funds to help community groups on the ground.

Volunteering has increased with the number of young people volunteering doubling over the last two years. There has been an increase in older age groups too, particularly in care and cultural areas. This year for the first time our Staff survey is asking staff whether they volunteer and how they are supported by the council, as an employer, to do so.

### **Supporting People**

The Supporting People Partnership has taken a systemic approach to ensuring that diversity and inclusion is built into all parts of the programme.

We have ensured that there are diversity outcome measures within all of the existing contracts for housing-related support. This enables us to track and improve the work taken by support providers to identify diverse communities, deliver culturally sensitive/responsive services and meet local needs. These outcomes are reviewed each year and revised according to the views of a wide cross section of stakeholders. The WAVES Group – as the user-lead consultation and inclusion body for Supporting People - has made significant efforts to seek the views of the BME community and to use this information to enable the Supporting People team to seek improved outcomes. All providers are expected to have detailed policies and practices relating to racial equality and the provision of culturally accessible / appropriate services.

A number of existing services have been reviewed and remodelled to meet the needs of specific groups previously excluded by the ways in which services were provided. This included:

- Re-modelling domestic abuse services to better meet need within different BME communities, including employing key staff from specific communities, particularly the Pakistani community and Polish / Russian speaking migrant community, to engage in ways that both sensitively challenged and supported those communities to seek and accept support.
- Re-designing service models for sheltered housing to enable providers to move-away from building-based service with limited options for responding to diverse cultural needs. Support providers for older people are now better able to respond to the need to offer culturally sensitive services to older people from diverse communities, incorporating greater choice as expectations change in relation to the care of elders within BME communities.

The Supporting People team has undertaken relevant Equality Impact Assessments of current procedures and continues to use this approach to improve new strategies and policies. All of the team have undertaken diversity training and have access to a range of specific expertise within the team.

### **Gypsy Service**

The Gypsy Service is responsible for the management of 9 permanent Gypsy Caravan Sites housing 126 families located within 4 of the six Districts in Worcestershire and for all unauthorised encampments arriving on land owned or managed by Worcestershire County Council.

The team consists of the Gypsy Service Manager, Site and Investigation Officer, 3.5 Site Officers and one Service Support Officer. The team take pride in working closely with families on and off site in an effort to maintain the highest possible standard of current accommodation and to investigate how family growth will be accommodated in the future.

The Gypsy Service has been present for over 21 years within the current Authority and the previous Organisation. Initially with a remit to take forward site provision under the 1968 Caravan Sites Act and following the repeal of that Act, to ensure those sites provided remained in perpetuity for future generations.

The Council has contact with the West Midlands Travellers Services to ensure children and young people receive appropriate learning support.

### **Business Support**

Support is provided to women's enterprise, social enterprise and ethnic minority enterprise. The county has historically had a high level of new business starts and this support ensures they have every opportunity to flourish and survive. This is seen as a route to providing further employment opportunities particularly in rural areas. Throughout the year the Council works with and supports various women's networking business events, which includes hosting the Worcestershire and Herefordshire new Women's Enterprise Centre of Excellence for the West Midlands; working with BME businesses and business support to BME Community Groups. In addition the Council has completed a mentoring project with young people from BME communities and extended this from schools to Pupil Referral Units. A mentoring project for young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) has been established to support young people into work.

### **Complaints**

The Consumer Relations Unit operates three representation processes for the council. In 2006/07 this centralised unit dealt with 134 Children's social care representations, 256 adult social care representations, 420 corporate representations and 36 Ombudsman complaints. Process are in place to ensure that services learn from complaints received and that recommendations are acted upon. In ACS complaints comments and compliments received under both the statutory social care and the corporate representations processes are collated and distributed with an analysis to senior management teams as part of a "learning from complaints" initiative. Examples of change made included issues relating to external providers of home care and timescales in completion of scale 2 complaints.

### **Mystery Customer Shopper Research**

The County Council organised Mystery Customer Shopper research in 2006<sup>30</sup>. The purpose of this exercise was to obtain everyday experience of customers of the Council covering a full range of access points and channels. Experiences of people with sensory and physical disabilities, Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and men and women were analysed to determine any differences or issues that may arise in relation to serving these customers. All customers were residents of Worcestershire and 80 transactions were carried covering a range of service areas and access points. These included various Hubs across the County, two libraries, two Record Offices, two Registration Service offices and various Countryside Parks. Service areas were mystery shopped using a variety of channels: face to face visits, telephone, email, letter and web searches.

Overall the customers reported that the level of service was generally good, but there were some strategic observations to be made with regards to equalities. The areas for improvement recommended from the exercise have been included in the Council's Equality Schemes.

### **Areas for Improvement**

The Council has made considerable progress on equalities. However the following areas for improvement have been identified:-

- We will work with our communities to assess the effectiveness of our current arrangements in encouraging people from different groups to come forward and report hate crime.
- To work in partnership to facilitate provision and demand led flexible training opportunities to increase opportunities to assist lone parents into work.

## **Employment and Training**

### **Our Workforce**

Worcestershire County Council employs more people across the County than any other organisation. We know that our staff are our most valuable resource and we seek always to set high standards as we both recruit them and develop their potential. We have undertaken a labour market survey of the County in respect of age, gender and ethnicity and are aware that more than 16% of economically active people of working age in our County have a disability and that 2.39% are from a BME group. We monitor our workforce profile in respect of ethnicity, gender and disability. From our data analysis we know that 4.9% of our workforce have a disability, 3.9% are from a BME background and that women make up 46.8% of staff in the top 5% of earners within the Council. We also monitor the proportion of job applicants and shortlisted candidates according to gender, ethnicity and disability and the proportions of staff from these groups working at different grades within the organisation.

### **Exemplar Employer**

We have recently established a cross-directorate subgroup of the Corporate Equalities Board entitled the "Exemplar Employer" group. This group has assumed responsibility for monitoring and extrapolating this data and for making appropriate recommendations for future actions which would "level the playing field" in terms of equal opportunity for all. We recognise that equality of opportunity can, at times, mean treating people differently. Within the past year we have set up a disability Work Experience Programme and are committed to extending this over the next year to offer 14 Supported Permitted Work opportunities across the organisation. In addition, Adult and Community Services will offer 6 work experience placements to

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<sup>30</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

disabled job seekers. We provide mentoring opportunities to BME staff and have conducted a survey from which we ascertained that female staff do not wish us to provide specific management training for them.

### **Single Status**

The Council conducted a Single Status project in 2005 and has implemented all related pay revisions. This approach has provided a high level of stability in this area and we have not encountered the equal pay difficulties evident in some other authorities.

### **Employee Information, Guidance and Support**

We have a well-developed and publicised intranet-based system of employee information and guidance which is regularly updated. As well as ensuring that equality and the value of diversity are embedded in general policies and procedures we have developed some specific recruitment and employment equality guidance. Our Policy and Employee Relations Manager ensures the Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken for new or substantially revised policies. Our Disability Equality Adviser contacts all recruiting managers who will be interviewing candidates who have a disability to check that they have the support and guidance they need. All interview panel chairs are expected to undertake recruitment and selection training. This training specifically addresses equality and diversity issues (including the need to make reasonable adjustments to both the interview process and the role itself).

Directorate newsletters and team briefings are used to share equalities initiatives and plans. Three Members (including the Cabinet member with responsibility for Adult and Community Services) sit on the Corporate Equalities Board; they are responsible for sharing and championing relevant actions and initiatives among their Member colleagues. We recognise the importance of Equality and Diversity in the Scrutiny process and are exploring ways of developing our joint understanding and responsibility in this area. Briefings and training in respect of the standard are provided by the equalities team as required. The Human Resources Strategy and performance groups are particularly helpful in providing relevant guidance and support to colleagues in respect of equalities practice (including legal implications) required for achievement of the Equality Standard.

In February 2007 the Council published a Carers Support Policy which explains that we recognise that some employees have caring responsibilities for relatives, partners or friends who need help because they can no longer manage to look after themselves. This policy sets out the support available in these situations. The Council has also a KiddiVouchers, a childcare voucher scheme in place for staff, including teachers, which can save them up to £1,200 a year.

### **Two Ticks Symbol**

We are currently undertaking a pilot project in Adult and Community Services to gauge the effectiveness of the "2 Ticks" initiative for both managers and interviewees. The findings from this project (which will include questionnaire feedback) will contribute to the Equality Impact Assessment which will be undertaken when our Recruitment and Selection Policy is revised.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

We have already conducted desk-top screenings for recruitment and selection functions and are taking action in some areas where we identified inequality. An example of this would be our sponsorship of the Vine, a community magazine aimed at the BME community. We are using this opportunity to raise our profile and encourage interest in the Council as a potential employer.

### **Training**

Equality and Diversity and/or Race Equality Training has been received by 1273 members of staff. Equality Impact Assessment training has been received by 270 members of staff. New staff are made aware of the Council's values and expectations, both in the ways in which staff relate to work colleagues and to customers. A specific one-day equality and diversity training course forms part of our induction process and we have employed an Equality and Diversity Trainer to deliver this training, examples of what the training covers is attached. (E19)

The Council focuses on training for specific activities, which includes equality and diversity. For example, members are briefed prior to Appointment Panels on these issues. This ensures that targeted, effective training is undertaken, which is more efficient and effective because of its 'just in time' nature. No complaints of any sort have been received in respect of our member led recruitment process, and we are confident our processes meet requirements.

Some staff roles, by their very nature, mean that post-holders will already have a grounding in this area. We provide specific training for these staff which takes account of the environment in which they work and the particular issues of which they will need to be aware. We have recently provided tailored disability and cultural awareness training for some frontline staff.

The Council will provide Member training and will deliver a revised programme in 2009 when new members will have assumed office, post elections in May.

Diversity Training has been received by Senior Officers including the Chief Officers Management Board who have received bespoke equality and diversity training.

### **Staff Review and Development**

The Council considers that responsibility for ensuring equality in all areas is an individual as well as a corporate imperative. This responsibility is reflected in our management competency framework. Our staff review and development process enables objectives to be agreed and monitored. We intend to highlight key areas which managers and staff should keep in mind during the SRD process. These will initially include equality impact assessment and supporting staff who have a disability to realise their potential. Our Network of Disabled Employees recently requested a workshop to look at the rights and expectations of disabled employees at work. Participants found the session we subsequently ran to be useful and informative.

Our People Strategy (**E20**) defines a number of goals which include:

- Recruiting for attitude and talent
- Focusing on peoples' strengths to maximise their performance and contribution
- Opportunities to progress for all. The Staff Review and Development Process ensures that the support needs of all staff are considered on at least an annual basis.

Preliminary findings from our recent triennial **staff survey** show that the vast majority of our staff feel that they are treated fairly and with respect and dignity at work.

### **Areas for Improvement**

The Council has made considerable progress on equalities. However the following areas for improvement have been identified :-

- Plans are in place to develop equality and diversity training for Councillors and in particular those who sit on appeals and appointment panels and those who sit on the Standards and Ethic Committee
- Strengthen our Equality Impact Assessment Training and support for Staff.

## **Adult and Community Services Directorate**

### **Leadership and Corporate Commitment**

Adult and Community Services provide visible leadership and corporate commitment to work on diversity. The Director of Adult and Community Services is corporate lead and chair of the Corporate Equalities Board and the Head of Culture, Commissioning and Community is chair of the Corporate Race and Religion Group. Directorate staff contribute to the Corporate Disability Monitoring Group.

The Directorate has a well organised and focused diversity group ACE (Adult and Community Equalities Group). This group broadened its remit from race only to all aspects of diversity work two years ago. All service areas are represented at the group at an appropriately senior level and these representatives are responsible for providing leadership to diversity issues throughout their service areas. ACS Directorate Management Team approves the work programme of ACE on an annual basis and receives updates on progress.

ACS DMT decided in 2006/07 that diversity objectives would be required in all services business plans (**E21**). This was to ensure that diversity was treated seriously throughout the Directorate and was part of mainstreaming the work. Business plan diversity objectives flow through into individual staff SRD objectives, and these are routinely monitored. Progress on diversity objectives is monitored by twice yearly performance boards where each service produces reports to other members of the Directorate Management Team on progress made across all aspects of business planning.

Activity reporting from ACS' database of service user information includes reporting on BME groups and is used to support the development of services. This information is also monitored monthly by the Directorate's Management Team as part of its consideration of the three performance assessment framework indicators.

### **Community Engagement and Accountability**

Adult and Community Services is committed to community engagement and accountability in two ways. The first is through supporting Council-wide community engagement activities and the second is through ACS specific activity. ACS staff contribute to Community Fairs that are held annually to inform communities of the service that are provided by the Council. In 2007 a range of Directorate stalls were present at the community fairs including Access Centre Services, Direct Payments, Supporting People and Housing and Adult learning.

Adult and Community Services also arrange open days to inform BME communities of services provided by the Directorate. ACS organise a range of events to celebrate specific cultural events, for example an annual Windrush celebration organised through Heritage Services and fashion shows and other cultural activity linked to a celebration of Eid.

All Adult Social Care services have strategic objectives to involve all people who use services, carers, staff and other stakeholders in setting objectives for the service. This is evidenced by user and carer and broader community involvement in developing commissioning strategies and other service changes and developments. In addition there is a range of user and carer networks for specific service user groups that are involved in developing services and holding delivery of services to account.

### **Service delivery and customer care**

The Adult and Community Services Directorate Management Team is committed to ensuring that service delivery and customer care is available and appropriate to all aspects of the community. In order to support this work a range of action has been taken including Equality Impact Assessments have been completed for a wide range of services / policies and procedures including access and referrals, public information, older people's strategy, commissioning and contracting of services, community meals, all substance misuse action team services, all Supporting People services, Adult Learning and Libraries, admission to social care, Direct Payments, death and dying, religious worship.

The ACE work programme has a focus on improving the numbers of people from BME communities accessing services with the Race Equality Development Officer work programme having a specific focus on ensuring that services are accessible to BME communities.

All Adult Social Care commissioning strategies focus on developing services that will meet the assessed needs of the local community and meet these needs in a way that is appropriate and acceptable. As a result of commissioning strategy development including users and carer involvement and the Equality Impact Assessment review, a number of changes and developments have been made to service delivery to ensure that these objectives are met. An example is the community meals service where specific work has been undertaken with BME communities including taster sessions and a focus on Halal acceptability to ensure that uptake increases.

ACS has a strong focus on developing our understanding of the needs of carers and responding to them and have established a Carers Development Officer for black and ethnic minorities based in the Carers Unit to provide support to 22 BME organisations in Worcestershire in the form of training, (including moving and handling) talks, information and focus groups. This post also works with the 4 BME Community Development Workers in the Mental Health Partnership Trust. ACS' Shared Lives team has commenced work to target carers from BME communities and focus groups have been established with minority groups. Adult Mental Health has appointed 4 Community Development Workers to work with ethnic minority groups within the County and as a result there has been an increase of service uptake by minority groups and greater involvement in planning of services by these groups.

ACS funds a development worker through Age Concern together with all costs to run lunch clubs/healthy living sessions for the Asian Community in Worcester and Kidderminster to support our engagement and identification of carers in these communities.

Work continues to increase the number of people from BME communities who access Direct Payments. Additional capacity created with the appointment of a BME development worker with Pendrells Trust – ACS' local DP support organisation. The development of individual budgets will specifically target people from BME communities. An information session about individual budgets was held in Redditch in May 2008 and these sessions will be followed up elsewhere in the County. As a result of the May session some individuals have followed up on obtaining an individual budget.

Hate Crime campaign developed as a joint course with the police and service users to increase learning about crime and abuse and how to tackle it and to encourage the police to recognise witness reliability amongst those with learning disability.

PACT (Partners and Communities Together) developed joint working with West Mercia police to encourage local engagement and provide the opportunity for police, partners and communities to meet and agree local policing policies. In order to make these meetings more accessible to people with physical disabilities, following feedback, the meetings were transferred to a Connect service unit and specialist personal care facilities provided.

### **Employment and Training**

ACS contributes to corporate work on employment and training including Diversity training, with it being a requirement for all new staff to undertake diversity training and EIA training – the ACS Directorate hosted a number of training sessions for its own staff to complement the corporate training and to provide a mix of training, advice and practical work in undertaking EIAs. For example, they ran an Equality and Diversity programme specifically aimed at social workers.

ACS managers participate in the corporate Black Colleagues Mentoring Scheme, as both mentors and mentees and ACS is leading on two Local Area Agreement targets to become an exemplar employer specifically focusing on improving employment rates for people with Mental Health challenges and Learning Disabilities. ACS Directorate has volunteered to be a pilot for a review of the 'two ticks' scheme to ensure it works more effectively. The Directorate is contributing to the piloting of a Disability Work Placement scheme with 14 work placements (two specifically for learning disability). The Directorate routinely records and reports on data for female and older employees including those from BME communities and with disabilities within the Directorate looking at a range of issues including types of role, salary levels and with targets set to encourage a representative workforce. ACS HR staff are currently developing a proposal to improve a diverse range of employees within the Directorate under the leadership of the ACE group.

ACS contributes to the corporate Vine booklet being used to encourage BME communities to take up County Council employment opportunities. Adult Learning services are providing mentors to support the corporate recruitment stand at the Community Fairs to support people to prepare CVs and application forms to gain employment.

Deafblind Training provided on Deafblind awareness and communication issues for staff in County Council and private and voluntary residential and nursing establishments to improve staff awareness and use of more appropriate modes of communication with Deafblind service users.

Disability and sensory impairment training has been provided for taxi drivers in Worcester. This has improved services for disabled people as taxi license conditions include a requirement to have completed the disability awareness training.

### **Areas of Improvement**

Whilst recognising the good practice identified above, there are areas which the Directorate recognises the need for development:-

- Further development of religious and cultural diversity awareness training and quality monitoring to ensure ongoing improvement in service delivery from social care Access Centre.
- Identification of appropriate user groups to consult with over access and delivery of mental health services.
- Improvement and increase in the creation of Equality Impact Assessment.

## Children's Services

### Leadership and Commitment

Worcestershire's Children and Young People's Plan<sup>31</sup> was originally written in 2006 and revised for 2008-2011. It sets out a number of key priorities for children and young people to improve their life chances. The CYPP is based on a thorough needs analysis, which identifies, where data allows, how diversity impacts on life chances. The CYPP includes a clear commitment to valuing diversity, and to 'narrowing the gap' between the majority of children and those who are most vulnerable. The CYPP was equality impact assessed (**E22**) by the Head of Commissioning and Quality.

Children's Services established a Directorate Equalities Group in 2006 and is chaired by a Head of Service. The Group has responsibility for monitoring on the action plan for the Directorate Equality and Diversity Strategy for 2008-2011<sup>32</sup> and will report to the senior management team. The Chair of the Group is a member of the Corporate Equalities Board, and the senior Council Officer representative on the Steering Group for Being Different Together project.

The Directorate recently commissioned a local West Midlands consultancy in community cohesion [iCoCo] to roll out a pilot project in schools to help them fulfil their community cohesion duty, and this project was formally launched by the Director. This project involves a number of schools taking a leadership role across the school sector, and they will be trained and supported to provide mentoring to other schools. We are currently negotiating with iCoCo to extend the contract for 2009 – 2011 to formulate a Community Cohesion Strategy for Children Services and the Council.

### Community Engagement and Accountability

Engagement of children and young people and parents and carers is central focus of Children's Services approach. An Engagement Strategy<sup>33</sup> has been in place since 2005 and this is performance managed by the Joint Engagement Management Group, chaired by the Cabinet Member for children and young people. The Directorate has been graded 4 by Ofsted [outstanding] for Making a Positive Contribution for the past three years.

A representative sample of pupils from school councils were actively consulted as part of the development of the CYPP. The Youth Cabinet has a member on the Joint Commissioning Board. It has young people with disabilities and BME members elected on it and has recently produced a Youth Manifesto. The Directorate has also established a 'Who Cares We Care' Council of looked after young people, which includes an unaccompanied asylum seekers and a young person with physical disability and young person with a learning disability.

The Directorate has contracted with the NSPCC to provide an independent advocacy service, and the reviewing service actively ensures looked after young people's engagement in reviews. Specific work with children with disabilities was undertaken as part of the development of the Children with Disabilities Strategy<sup>34</sup>.

The Directorate has a specific community capacity building function, which works to engage local communities in identifying the needs of children, young people and families and to support them in finding ways to address these needs. This has established links with a range of specialist providers including the Bangladeshi Youth Forum in Kidderminster, Caribbean Roots in Redditch, Pakistani Forum in Redditch and the Eastern European Recent Migrant Pilot forum in Redditch which has recently been adopted into a community cohesion sub-group under the auspices of the Local LSP. It is planned that each district LSP will develop its own community cohesion sub-group with Wyre Forest due for inception by March 2009.

### Service Delivery and Customer Care

The Directorate routinely reviews performance on a quarterly basis through the CYPP planning process. This involves considering impact of individual characteristics in relation to social care activity and school performance. Case record management systems routinely record diversity data relating to ethnicity, gender, age and disability and completion of this data is routinely monitored – this applies to education support services, social care and Children's Centres. The Directorate is undertaking during October 2008 a data

<sup>31</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>32</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>33</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

<sup>34</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

cleansing exercise of social care data to ensure this is accurate. Sexual orientation issues and religion would be identified for individuals as part of the core assessment process, and appropriate personalised support plans put in place. Racist incidents are reported by schools to the Directorate in the context of the Anti-Bullying strategy<sup>35</sup> and the Directorate is commissioning a business system to enable easier, wider and more extensive reporting of incidents.

The Directorate has prioritised children with disabilities as an area of in-depth investigation for the JSNA update for 2008/09. This work has commenced, and will involve the first systematic attempt in the local area to understand the extent of need of the children with disabilities population, so that this can inform effective commissioning of services. The Directorate has previously undertaken specific work to analyse poor outcome trends for particular ethnic minority groups, and introduced strategies accordingly – for example, the monitoring of the extent of English as an Additional Language has resulted in all identified schools receiving additional funding.

The extended services [inc Children's Centres] programme promotes the development of accessible services, targeted to areas of need. Vulnerable families are identified at an early stage and a range of partners provide support.

Children's Services provides a range of services for children with disabilities in partnership with other agencies. The number of children with SEN who are supported in mainstream settings has increased in recent years. Children with disabilities are a strategic priority for the Directorate.

### **Employment and Training**

Training for the Disability Equality Scheme and Accessibility Plan has been communicated to all schools. A survey of all staff in schools was conducted in July 2007 to identify which staff had a disability. All schools now have access to information advice and guidance on DDA issues in relation to ALL users of the school facilities e.g. parents, staff pupils, governors and to other users of the buildings when they are let. DDA training was delivered to a county wide audience in May. Over 100 mainstream schools were represented and 7 special schools, this included governors. Additional governor training is planned in January 2009.

The Directorate has participated in the disability work experience programme and offered work placements to three people. The staff complement is broadly representative of the population in terms of ethnic minorities and disability, and over 50% of senior managers are female.

### **Equality Needs / Impact Assessment**

The CYP Plan is underpinned by a strategic needs assessment. This includes a breakdown of key outcome indicators by age, gender, ethnicity and disability, enabling identification of particular issues. The Directorate has prioritised 'Narrowing the Gap', and ensured that all action in the CYP Plan explicitly include actions designed to do this. This will be actively monitored through the Partnership. The needs assessment and the action plan will be updated annually.

The CYP Plan was Equality Impact Assessed and the priorities and gaps reflected in the Plan. Most managers have been trained in EIAs, however, it is recognised that this approach is not yet fully embedded. All reports to the CYP Strategic Partnership require specific consideration of the equality and diversity impact of any proposal. The EIA process is monitored through the Directorate's Equality Group.

### **Areas for Improvement**

Whilst recognising the good practice identified above, there are areas which the Directorate recognises the need for development:-

- Ensure that the Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Directorate is clear about who will carry out the action and by when;
- Undertake a full needs assessment of the population of disabled children by December 2008, and to incorporate this in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment;
- Re-train managers in EIAs and embed this approach;
- Ensure that all needs and outcome data is understood in terms of the impact of age, ethnicity, gender and disability;
- Maintain the focus on Narrowing the Gap, and ensure that all service areas and developments are mindful of the potential negative impact of diversity, and take steps to address this.

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<sup>35</sup> Evidence can be provided on request

## Environmental Services

### Leadership and Corporate Commitment

The Directorate has an Equalities Group which is chaired by the Corporate Equalities Board member (a second tier post in the Directorate) and includes representatives from each Service area, and the Corporate Diversity Manager. These representatives report progress on equality impact assessment (EIA) work being done in their Service area. Completed Desktop EIA Screenings are 'challenged' corporately which has, on occasion, resulted in further information being required and the identification of areas which need to be subject to a full EIA.

Equality objectives have been set in the Directorate Action Plans (**E15**) (approved by the Directorate Management Team) which have been developed as part of the Corporate Race, Gender and Disability Schemes. Equality based targets have also been set in Service areas outside this process. Examples include:

- Trading Standards having targets in their Unit Performance Plan relating to consumers, particularly vulnerable people (especially the elderly) being enabled to act more effectively in the marketplace.
- The Countryside Service having an objective in their Service Development Plan which revolves around community liaison and equality of access to the Service.
- The Local Transport Plan has objectives within its Accessibility Strategy in relation to a barrier free transport network which takes into account issues faced by people with a physical or mental disability, and the needs of the elderly

Monitoring reports on the Directorate Action Plans are submitted after six and twelve months to the Directorate Management Teams (**E23**) and the Corporate Equalities Board so that progress can be assessed.

### Community Engagement and Accountability

The Environmental Services Directorate is committed to engaging with the community in the development of its services and has many examples of where this has happened. The following are some of those examples:

- A member of the Directorate plays a full and active part in organising the Community Fairs – corporate events held annually in Redditch, Kidderminster and Worcester which are open to all but which are actively promoted in the BME community. Numerous services participate in the Fairs with 'stalls'. Any Directorate issues raised at the Fairs have been swiftly followed up and responses sent.
- In developing the second five-year Local Transport plan, two specific workshops were held with the BME communities in Redditch and Worcester
- A successful "on Your Doorstep" multi-faith picnic was held at Waseley Hills Country Park to promote enjoyment of the countryside
- A successful Cultural Diversity Day was held at Worcester Woods Country Park to promote local green spaces within an urban environment
- New, easy to understand pictorial signs have been installed at all Household Recycling Centres and are used on associated literature
- Young people have been consulted in an alternative style to encourage composting
- Local taxi drivers are routinely consulted on traffic, highway and transport schemes
- A women only guided walk took place at Worcester Woods Country Park
- Working with schools, young people are given speed and safe driving training in racing cars
- Independent travel training is given to people with disabilities to enable them to travel independently to and from schools, colleges, leisure facilities etc

All consultations undertaken by the Directorate are logged on the Corporate Consultation Database so that staff and the public are aware of the consultations, their purpose and the outcome.

### Service Delivery and Customer Care

Equality actions set in Directorate Action Plans (see above) are linked to the Directorate Performance Plan and Unit Performance/ Improvement Plans as appropriate. Progress by those Units is discussed at regular staff review meetings and this is fed into the monitoring arrangements for the overall Directorate Plans.

All Directorate services are being assessed with regard to equality. More than 50 equality impact assessment (EIA) desktop screening forms have so far been completed and have been subject to corporate challenge (see above). This process has identified the need for some full EIAs and these are proceeding. Service plans will be adjusted in the light of actions which will flow from the completion of the EIA process. However, barriers have already been addressed in Equalities Plans and in day-to-day operations, for example:

- All drivers are trained in disability awareness.
- Pedestrian crossings are provided with facilities for the disabled
- Vehicle specifications are compliant with DDA
- National Guidance from the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) is used with regard to information provision to all sectors of the community

The Directorate ensures that feedback on service provision is received so that adjustments where possible can be made to better meet the needs of the community. Examples of this are:

- The Countryside Service carry out visitor surveys on its sites which allow comparison of visitor profile with the profile of the community of the catchment area. The Service also undertakes consultation exercises with under-represented groups.
- Trading Standards carry out consumer satisfaction surveys and these are considered quarterly by that Service's Management Team. Trading Standards have also worked with the Chamber of Commerce and are in the process of setting up a BME Business Forum.

In addition to this, Passenger Transport monitor contracts for vehicle compliance (DDA) and driver training. Community transport is also being re-evaluated regarding equalities in their service provision via the new grant criteria being introduced in the Autumn 2008. Passenger Transport also work with key operators to improve facilities for people with mental and/or physical disabilities.

Passenger Transport are also developing a new approach to passenger transport that will change the way services are delivered. This process has been initiated by the production of a new Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy (IPTS) and the production of 12 Best Practice Reports to inform the sub-strategies of the IPTS. These have now been consulted upon involving a diverse range of key stakeholders (including Older Peoples' Forum, Young people, Sensory Impaired, other disability groups). Each strategy will contain the mechanisms to deliver equality targets.

The Directorate has some major contracts with the private sector, notably the Term Highways Maintenance Contract and the Term Highways and Transportation Design Consultancy. The selection criteria for these contracts included service specific equalities issues.

### **Employment and Training**

The majority of staff has attended equality and diversity awareness raising training courses. Those staff involved in the production of EIA desktop screenings have also attended specific EIA training available - this includes all members of the Directorate Equalities Group. That Group and numerous other staff are also to receive bespoke training on identifying and overcoming barriers to service access.

Driver training takes place to ensure that all drivers have an awareness of equality and diversity issues. Contracts with passenger transport companies also stipulate the need for their drivers to be suitably trained.

The Directorate's Human Resources Team has been present at recruitment fairs, including the annual Mela at Birmingham, and at the annual Community Fairs which has a targeted audience of people from BME communities. The intention is to 'demystify' the Council and encourage people from BME communities to apply for jobs they may not have thought about before.

The Directorate strongly supports the aims of the Black Colleagues Group and ensures staff are free to attend meetings when they wish. A number of senior managers have also volunteered to be mentors for BME staff.

### **Areas for Improvement**

Whilst recognising the good practice identified above, there are areas which the Directorate recognises the need for development. These are:

- ensuring that a robust process is in place so that all proposed new policies are formally subject to an EIA. Currently, policy development can get to an advanced stage before formal consideration is given to equality issues. Notwithstanding this, it is evident that such issues are routinely considered, albeit in an informal way.
- generally, increasing awareness and further embedding equality and diversity issues in all that we do. It is most important that all staff understand the Authority's approach to equality and diversity issues and appreciate the role they can play in ensuring that agenda's successful delivery. There is a feeling that this may be currently restricted to those with more specific equality/diversity responsibilities.

### Looking Ahead

Looking ahead and building on our success the Council is going to refresh its work on equality and diversity with the leadership of COMB, and focus on equal life chances for all. The emphasis will be on defining what equality and diversity means to us in Worcestershire. There will be two strands to this work. One would be externally facing and concentrate on our communities, access to services, community participation and partnership working. Strong links will be made between this strand of work and some if not all of the proposals, outlined by Hazel Blears MP in "Communities in control, real people, real power". The other would be internal facing and the emphasis would be on becoming an exemplar employer, making our workforce diverse at all levels and improving recruitment opportunities for all our communities and retention of employees. In this way we would access better the best skills and abilities in our communities.

To help improve life chances for all the we have identified key objectives which sit with the two strands described above:

- Understanding of communities and needs
- Increase access to services, and ensure that the needs of all our communities are being met
- Engage and consult with all communities with demonstrable influence being evidenced
- Increase employment of people with disabilities (physical, sensory and learning) and mental health issues to become an exemplar employer
- Ensuring the workforce is reflective of communities we serve at all levels

Straddling both these strands will be the requirement to increase the number and quality of equality impact assessments undertaken on our services and policies, particularly on new policies. All service areas will need to set their own equality targets based on the above objectives, which will be integrated into the business planning process in October 2008 and monitored accordingly and reported back to the Board.

The Corporate Equalities Board is aware that the Council will need a robust support mechanism to achieve the above objectives. Therefore the Board will:

1. review the structure of the Corporate Diversity Team, to ensure that it can support the delivery of the two strands of work
2. review the Board's purpose, remit and membership and look at the role of the sub-groups (Equality for Race and Religion and Disability Equality Monitoring Group) to re-define their purpose and link to the Board and identify if specific groups are required for example to test the quality of EIAs
3. strengthen existing Directorate Equalities Group and where appropriate ensure that groups exist in all Directorates with the same remit and purpose
4. set up a performance management framework for equality and diversity, which will ensure that everyone takes ownership of the agenda and provides the leadership appropriate to their level, linked to a comprehensive programme of EIAs and delivery of the Single Equality Scheme
5. adopt the former Best Value performance indicators as local performance indicators
6. support existing staff networks and develop a network for LGBT employees
7. develop a Training strategy for Equality and Diversity and a programme of training for staff and for Members.