

Progress against our Comprehensive Equality Scheme

In 2007 we published our Comprehensive Equality Scheme which sets out what action we will take over the next three years to improve services and ensure they meet the needs of all the diverse communities in Exeter as well as meet our duties under equality legislation.

The CES can be found on our website and the annually updated Directorate Equality Schemes will shortly be published there. These will show how far specific services have met their stated actions for the year, as well as what actions they have identified for the following year.

Listed below are some of our key equality achievements during 2008/09 under each of the five strategic equality outcomes. Others are also reported in the main body of the Corporate Plan 2009/10 update:

1. Service users from traditionally hard to hear groups have access to information about, and are able to put forward their views on Council services, policies and procedures (consultation, communication, service development, access to councillors).

Consultation was carried out on our behalf by Living Options Devon with disabled members of staff to share their experiences and make recommendations for improvements to the working environment. An action plan has been produced and while some items are best fed into the development of the overall Workforce Strategy, immediate tasks that have been undertaken include a refresh of the Human Resource User Groups and ensuring that equality and access issues are a standing agenda item. The Groups have representatives from all services and feed into the Employee Liaison Forum which is attended by Councillors, Senior Management, Head of HR and Unison/Staff representatives.

A community Engagement Database has been developed providing community contacts in place and making it easier for officers to contact the right organisation. This also helps the Council to have an overview of the different groups that are working with or representing communities in the City.

2. All service users feel confident that the Council is committed to equality and diversity and is making real progress towards delivering actions (scrutiny, audit, committees, evaluation, reporting).

Equality Impact Assessments were carried out on Bereavement Services, Parking Enforcement Services, the Homelessness strategy, the Positive Steps Fund and the Benefits NVQ Assessment Centre. Issues identified will feed into the development of these areas of work ensuring that, wherever possible, the needs of different groups of people are met and potential for discrimination removed. For example Bereavement Services are developing a way of maintain stock graves so that Muslim burials can be catered for at short notice.

Building Control has continued its programme of auditing the accessibility of Council buildings to ensure the needs of disabled people are being met. The target of 20 accessible buildings by March 2009 has been achieved. An Exeter Access Guide is being published which shows the facilities available at different venues throughout

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the City Centre. The guide will be published on the website but hard copies will also be distributed through Living Options Devon and Exeter Visitor Information.

The Markets & Halls Team in Estates Services has worked with staff to undertake an initial equalities review of facilities and services at the Matford Centre and Corn Exchange. This will ensure that they are responsive to the needs of all service users. Further actions which have been included in the work programme for 2009/10 include a survey of customers.

3. The Council knows who its customers are and is able to respond to their needs (monitoring, assessment, delivery).

Work continues to embed equalities at each level of performance management. The Exeter Vision has been reviewed in consultation with the Vision Reference Groups and wider interest groups and equalities outcomes are now embedded in the Service Improvement Portfolios. The Vision will ensure a whole-city view of equalities so that the LSP can work more effectively partner agencies to tackle the issues.

All new housing tenant details are collected at sign up so that now 65% of all tenant data has been collected and work can begin to ensure needs are met. For example a follow up survey is being undertaken of all those who indicated that they have a disability.

All the parks now have clearer signage and improvements have been made to paths to make them more accessible. In particular work has been carried out in Bury Meadow to reduce risks from anti-social behaviour that might deter young mothers, their children and older people from enjoying the park.

4. Relations between different communities are good, tensions are challenged and the diversity of the City is promoted and celebrated (cohesion, leadership, challenge).

The Chief Executive has been working closely with the Police and local communities following the Princesshay incident to ensure that any necessary support is provided. This is feeding into a wider review of how the Council engages with the community.

Lord Mayor continues to attend and organise a diverse range of civic events including National Holocaust Memorial Day and Remembrance Sunday.

RAMMs Small World display was shown at four schools and colleges in the City. The display of textiles and adornments from around the world was accompanied by talks and workshops encouraged to stimulate debate about issues of identity to encourage the celebration of diversity.

5. All staff and potential employees believe that Exeter City Council is a workplace where all staff have equal opportunities, feel safe in their diversity and comfortable challenging offensive behaviour (recruitment, retention, development).

In partnership with the Trade Unions, Human Resources commissioned an independent Equal Pay Audit. No significant issues were found but an action plan is being developed to pick up any minor points. This will be reviewed annually.

Human Resources worked with Living Options Devon on a consultation with disabled staff to look at potential barriers to recruitment and retention. An improvement plan

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was developed as a result and immediate actions include a refresh of the Human Resources User Groups for staff and a review and update of relevant sections of the Employment Handbook.