

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 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 2007/08 under each of the five strategic equality outcomes. Others are also reported in the main body of the Corporate Plan 2008/09 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).

In the newly expanded Customer Service Centre, all service positions can be accessed by disabled users and a loop system has been fitted both in the main reception area and the individual interview rooms. Four Civic Centre staff have now received the Level 1 qualification in British Sign Language and of these a further three are studying for Level 2.

A training programme has been put together for staff to improve the quality of written information provided by the council. The programme includes elements on design and plain English, and will look improving accessibility of information to all our customers.

The Economy and Tourism Unit surveyed visitor accommodation in order to achieve a clear picture of facilities suitable for people with disabilities and which has since been used to improve web site and paper based publications providing public/visitor information. City guides have been translated into Polish for use by the majority migrant population. Audio interpretation is being developed for the Heritage Trail around the city centre. The new Visitor Information Centre and Underground Passages visitor centre have been specifically designed for ease of use by people with disabilities

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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).

The Contracts team have been developing ways to ensure our suppliers comply with equality legislation. All contractors are now required to supply information on how they address equality of opportunity. In larger scale contracts this work is monitored to ensure compliance.

Equality Impact Assessments were carried out on the Housing Strategy, Walking Project and employee Home Working Pilot. 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.

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

Six new accessible toilets have been provided at allotment sites together with path access improvements. Larger plots have also been subdivided to increase the number of smaller plots available to people who may have less time or ability to manage a whole plot for example single parents or people with ill health.

Administration & Parking Services has obtained 20 Safer Parking Awards, which reflect the management, design, accessibility and community safety aspects of car parking facilities

A number of events were held for small to medium enterprises to encourage them to bid for council contracts. These events were particularly focused on BME businesses.

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

To mark the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum loaned items from the city's collection to exhibitions at Plymouth and Bristol museums supported by a programme of education and events. In addition the City Council and Lord Mayor hosted a public ceremony on Cathedral Green on 25 March to commemorate the bicentenary.

The Respect Festival 2007 was supported with funding and officer assistance for a programme of mainly free entertainment celebrating the city's diversity

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and promoting community cohesion. The 2008 festival is being supported in a similar way including play-days and museum events linking in.

Grant funding was provided to a number of new dynamic community initiatives including Azadi, a dance project to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the independence of India and Soundwaves, a music project for adults and young people with learning disabilities to meet and play music together.

In February RAMM joined Devon Record Office's Community Bus in Cowick Street to explore Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Transgender histories in Devon. Visitors came aboard to find out how to access archives to research LGTB heritage.

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).

The Materials Reclamation Facility has supported a member of staff to train as a professional interpreter and develop the Multi Lingua interpretation agency via Devon Racial Equality Council. The member of staff who is one of several workers from eastern Europe countries was given a flexible work pattern to allow him to attend training.

A three year rolling programme of diversity awareness training has begun to ensure all front-line and new staff are up to date with recent equality legislation and understand the diverse communities they serve. This is being supported by articles in the staff newsletter and briefings.

The development of the recruitment pages of our website includes more direct promotion of our commitment to encourage applications from more diverse backgrounds. This development was a direct result of our work with the Racial Equality Council to look at barriers to recruitment for people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities.