

Directorate of Corporate Resources

Annual Equality Action Plan 2012/13

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The council's equality policy provides the overall framework for meeting its commitment to advancing equality. The council recognises the importance of tackling discrimination and advancing equality between different groups in the community, whilst also addressing the diverse needs of individuals. The policy covers the council's own employment policies and practices, the provision of services and public functions and its wider community leadership role.

1.2 The policy responds to and is supported by:

- the Community Strategy 2005-2020
- the Council Plan
- the Equality Scheme¹
- annual directorate action plans
- other policies, procedures and guidance covering equality and human resource issues.

1.3 This is the second equality action plan of the Directorate of Corporate Resources, following its establishment on 1st January 2011. The plan covers the period April 2012 to March 2013 and contains:

- an explanation of its relationship with other plans
- a summary of the directorate's equality vision and values
- a description of the directorate structure, services provided and roles and responsibilities for promoting equality
- key issues and targets for the plan
- the detailed action plan.

1.4 The Directorate of Corporate Resources Equality Action Plan 2012/13 is submitted to the Environment Scrutiny Committee as an information item before approval by the appropriate Cabinet Member through the decision sheet process.

1.5 An annual report setting out achievements against the Equality Action Plan for 2011/12 for the Directorate of Corporate Resources will be completed at the end of the financial year.

¹ Whilst there is no longer a legal requirement to publish an equality scheme, the council feels that it is important to set out the arrangements that have been put in place to make progress in advancing equality and to ensure that it continues to implement the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Scheme is currently being revised and will be in place for the 2012/13 municipal year.

- 1.6 Council-wide progress in promoting equality is reported each year in the Annual Review of Equality which is submitted to the Regeneration, Culture and Adult Education Scrutiny Committee (as the scrutiny committee with responsibility for corporate equality issues) and the Cabinet for approval.

2.0 Relationship with other plans

- 2.1 This action plan will form part of the overall strategic plan for the Directorate of Corporate Resources for 2012/13. The strategic plan in turn responds to the Community Strategy and the Council Plan, where the overall vision is for stronger communities to be delivered through six key themes of:

- Jobs and prosperity
- Health and well being
- Heritage, culture and leisure
- Environment and housing
- Individual and community learning
- Community safety.

- 2.2 In addition, the Council Plan includes a Quality Services priority to ensure good governance and best use of resources. As members are aware, the ongoing impact of the government's Comprehensive Spending Review has meant that the council has to plan and implement further budget reductions, which may have some impact on the delivery of this Equality Action Plan during 2012/13.

- 2.3 This plan also reflects objectives in other key corporate plans and strategies, including the Revenue Budget Strategy, the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Human Resources Strategy, the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategy and the Procurement Strategy.

3.0 Vision and Values

- 3.1 In 2009 the council agreed a ten year vision for equality, which will contribute to the achievement of the Community Strategy. In 2019 the council will be one:

- which will be recognised nationally as a leading council on equality
- which had improved its response to the needs of the borough's communities
- whose services receive high satisfaction ratings from across the borough's communities
- whose workforce reflects the local community at all levels of the organisation and for which people from all backgrounds want to work
- which has improved its equality training and the skills of its employees in dealing with all customers.

- 3.2 The overall objective of the council's equality policy is to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people from different backgrounds.

This objective covers the council's employment policies and practices, and its services and public functions. The council will lead by example and will work with its partner organisations and the Borough's communities in order to achieve this objective. The objective applies to all groups protected under the Equality Act 2010. The council will also make sure that it does not treat less favourably on any grounds that cannot be shown to be justified people protected by other legislation, such as that covering trade union or political activities, social class, where a person lives or spent convictions.

3.3 The directorate supports the council's equality policy and is committed to implementing that policy, through building an organisation which values diversity in the workforce, by maintaining an environment which maximises the contribution each person can make to the directorate in serving the needs of a diverse society. The directorate's commitment to equality will be achieved through:

- reviewing services, policies and procedures
- consulting with customers and employees
- undertaking equality impact assessments
- action planning and reporting procedures
- designating responsibility for actions to named officers
- providing learning and development opportunities to employees
- working effectively with partners in the voluntary, not for profit and commercial sector in delivering services.

Equality roles and responsibilities

3.4 Specific responsibility for promoting equality in employment and services within the directorate rests with the senior management team (Director, Treasurer and three Assistant Directors). Heads of services and other managers in the directorate are responsible for ensuring that the council's equality policy is implemented. A principal officer is responsible for the overall coordination of equality issues, communicating key issues to employees, updating policies and targets, advising on equality impact assessments, as well as preparing plans and monitoring and reporting on performance.

3.5 All employees have a responsibility to comply with the requirements of the council's equality policy in all dealings with members, other employees, job applicants, residents, service users and other members of the public, and with other organisations. Training and development needs of employees in the directorate are identified in annual performance, review and development discussions with their line managers. During 2011 all employees were required to undertake an e-learning course in equality.

Directorate Structure and Services

3.6 In delivering services, the directorate aims to provide value for money and a high level of customer satisfaction. It actively seeks and participates in external evaluation of its services and in the last year achieved or maintained standards such as Customer Service Excellence and LEXCEL over a significant area of its operation.

3.7 The directorate is organised over four separate divisions, as follows:

Customer Services Division

The division provides a front line customer contact centre for a wide range of council services through Dudley Council Plus. The division also manages housing and council tax benefit, council tax, business rates, registration, citizenship, coroner and celebratory services and commercial services (curatorial, Dudley Market and CCTV), all of which involve dealing directly with the public.

Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development Division

The division provides a full range of HR, organisational development and payroll services to council directorates and schools that purchase the service, aimed at enabling and supporting a high performing and continually improving workforce and organisation culture, within the framework and challenges of council priorities and plans. It supports the development of HR management by the design and implementation of HR standards, strategies and policy across the council. The function includes services such as payroll and pensions, learning and development and occupational health.

Law and Governance Division

The division provides advice and support for the council's legal, democratic, health and safety and property / asset requirements, as well as the licensing function. It also supports the rest of the directorate in planning and managing performance.

Treasurer Services Division

The division provides advice and support for the council's financial requirements through accountancy, audit and procurement services, ensuring resources are properly managed. It is also responsible for providing the council with ICT services, including systems and networks, as well as advice, support and training in their use.

Workforce information and employee development

3.8 As at 31st December 2011 the directorate employed 921 staff, with a gender composition of 33.2% male and 66.8% female. 8.8% of employees were from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background, while 2.9% of employees had stated that they had a disability. Directorate action in relation to managing employees follows the council's HR Strategy and action plan 2009-14, which focuses on the following priorities:

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

4.0 Key Issues and Targets for 2012/13

4.1 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public bodies to publish equality objectives at least every four years. The council has identified in its Equality Scheme the following issues and challenges which need to be addressed during the next three years and beyond:

- the needs of an ageing population
- high and rising unemployment levels amongst young people
- child poverty and troubled families
- impact of welfare reforms
- health inequalities
- the impact of the Localism Act and the development of ‘Our society in Dudley’
- respect and dignity – hate crime, harassment and domestic abuse
- council employment issues – development of leadership and management skills, equality training, implementing the pay and grading structure, tackling under representation in the workforce.

4.2 Arising from the key issues and challenges, a number of equality objectives have been set out in the scheme (subject to approval by Cabinet). The ones which are particularly relevant for the directorate to contribute towards and against which actions are identified in the plan are as follows:

- improvement of levels of recruitment and retention of disabled and other under represented groups in the council’s workforce
- implementation of a new grading and pay structure, addressing equal pay and other issues
- development of an employee development framework that addresses current and future needs
- development of a corporate financial inclusion strategy
- response to Localism Act requirements, including community rights and Our Society initiatives

4.3 The priorities below have been identified by the Directorate of Corporate Resources as key for promoting equality. They have been influenced through a variety of drivers and sources including government policy, the corporate equality objectives above, other council led initiatives, customer engagement and issues from equality impact assessments of services and policies. They reflect the directorate’s responsibility for providing support services to the council, delivering services direct to the public and managing its own employees.

Priority 1 – Improving customer access to services

The directorate has previously achieved, and wishes to maintain a high standard of customer satisfaction by the public with its services. It therefore intends to continue with annual reviews of key parts of its service against the government’s Customer Service Excellence standard. With reducing resources, service delivery will inevitably become more challenging, and the council is looking at ways of making more effective use of resources. One such initiative is based on transforming its office accommodation in Dudley town centre, which will also result in changes to customer access, making better use of Dudley Council Plus.

Priority 2 – Reduce poverty and social exclusion

The council currently administers £111m in housing and council tax benefit to over 35,000 households in the borough. Key economic challenges for the borough include an ageing population, high levels of long term unemployment, low skill levels, high youth unemployment and high levels of child poverty. The government’s

welfare reform proposals will have an impact on the above and may, in the short term, result in higher demand for our services. We are currently preparing to address the government's proposals regarding the localisation of council tax benefit and recognise the impact it may have on claimants. We are also awaiting developments regarding the implementation of Universal Credit in 2013. In the meantime, we will continue to remind housing and council tax benefit claimants of their entitlements and council tax and business rate payers of the discounts and reliefs they are able to claim. We will also support work to develop a financial inclusion strategy for the council.

Priority 3 - Promote employee equality through the HR Strategy

Budget reductions have impacted on the workforce, so the council will need to manage within reduced resources. It is also important to have a workforce that reflects the community it serves. As part of our business planning processes we will undertake workforce planning exercises and equality impact assessments and provide advice and training to support managers with the challenges they face. In particular, we will look at ways of improving the levels of recruitment and retention of disabled employees and other under represented groups in the council's workforce. We will also implement the grading and pay process, including dealing with appeals. In addition we will take account of employee needs when implementing the council's office accommodation strategy and flexible working proposals.

Priority 4 – Improve employee knowledge and skills

Integral to making the most of our employees is the need to equip them with the skills and knowledge they will need in the foreseeable future. The way councils do business is changing and new opportunities and competencies are emerging. We are developing a corporate leadership programme which will be piloted. The council's approach to employee performance, review and development (PRD) is being reviewed and a revised approach and process will be launched. We have already implemented online equality training, with positive employee feedback, and this will be rolled out to further areas of the council over the next year and beyond.

Priority 5 – Promote equality through the ICT Strategy

This area of work is closely related to improving customer access to services. Plans include more accessible council web pages and e-forms, more open data, facilities such as video conferencing that will mean less need to travel; extended wireless access in public places and working with partners to improve broadband accessibility will help to improve digital inclusion for the community, a key government accessibility aim. Suitable accessible equipment will be provided to staff to enable them to do their work at a variety of locations.

Priority 6 – Promote equality through the Procurement Strategy

The council's Procurement Strategy and Toolkit already provide guidelines on good practice on equality in procurement. We currently await updated guidance on procurement following the publication of the Equality Act 2010.

Priority 7 – Respond to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and council policy

The directorate will support the council's equality objectives through publication of equality data, undertaking and updating equality impact assessments; reviewing the budget process and responding to Localism Act requirements (including community rights and Our Society initiatives).

5.0 The Action Plan

- 5.1 The detailed 2012/13 Action Plan is set out in the Appendix, showing priorities, objectives, lead officers, target dates and planned outcomes / performance indicators.
- 5.2 Progress in achieving the targets set in the plan will be reported quarterly to the directorate management team. Any issues regarding performance will be addressed and followed up as part of the directorate's usual performance management process.

Directorate of Corporate Resources
1 March 2012

Appendix

Directorate of Corporate Resources – Equality Action Plan 2012/13

Note – for explanation of abbreviations see end of Action Plan

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
Priority 1 – Improve customer access to services, ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction			
1.1 Achieve Customer Service Excellence Standard in relevant services.	1) Review customer engagement across the directorate aiming for improved consistency of approach. 2) Undergo Customer Service Excellence health check reviews of Licensing, Customer Services and Treasurer Services. <i>Mike Williams (AD – Customer Services) / Menna Flavell / Janet Elliott (Law and Governance)</i>	June 2012 September to November 2012	Improved target setting for customer satisfaction will allow for better comparisons between services, leading to more sharing of good practice and concerns being addressed. Improved service standards leading to higher levels of satisfaction across all customer groups.
1.2 Review the options for delivering customer services.	1) Make better use of Dudley Council Plus facilities e.g. through reviewing / consolidating customer reception points (Dudley Town Centre Office Accommodation Strategy) and increasing the number of interview rooms <i>Sean Beckett, (Customer Services) Steve Cooper (Law and Governance)</i>	March 2013	Improved customer access to an increased range of services and improvement of the one stop shop facility will lead to increased customer satisfaction.

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
	2) Increase the range and improve the efficiency of the Benefit services provided at Dudley Council Plus. <i>Liz Ralph and Jackie Davies (Customer Services)</i>	March 2013	As above.
	3) Identify and implement further services to be delivered from Dudley Council Plus e.g. supporting environmental services and trading standards. <i>Mike Williams and Sean Beckett (Customer Services)</i>	March 2013	As above.
	4) Support the Chief Executive's directorate in embedding the recently implemented national Tell Us Once system into Dudley Council Plus (notifications via Registrars appointments). <i>Sean Beckett and Jayne Catley (Customer Services)</i>	March 2013	More convenient access to service for customers – avoid having to give the same information more than once.

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
Priority 2 – Tackling poverty and promoting financial inclusion			
2.1 Ensure borough residents, particularly those in the protected characteristics groups, are receiving the local authority benefits to which they are entitled.	1) Prepare for the requirements of the government’s welfare reform proposals regarding council tax benefit including equality impact assessment in 2012. 2) Continue to remind borough residents of the housing and council tax benefit to which they may be entitled. <i>Liz Ralph (Customer Services)</i>	2012/13 and beyond Throughout 2012/13	Help to minimise the impact on areas of the community that will be affected by the changes in council tax benefit rules. Increased income for the poorest residents will contribute to improved outcomes in a range of areas including health, mobility, housing, learning, jobs.
	3) Remind council tax and business rate payers of the discounts and other reductions to which they may be entitled. <i>Ian Wollaston (Customer Services)</i>	March 2013	Take-up of housing and council tax benefit and council tax / business rate reductions during the year will be maximised.
2.2 Promote financial inclusion Corporate lead to be confirmed	Work with other council services / agencies as appropriate to develop a financial inclusion strategy for council stakeholders. <i>Menna Flavell (Law and Governance)</i>	Throughout 2012/13	Improve the financial resilience of borough residents.

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
Priority 3 – Promote employee equality through the HR Strategy			
3.1 Achieve a diverse workforce that reflects and represents the community it serves.	<p>1) Continue to offer facilitated workforce planning sessions to management teams when they are considering their service plans.</p> <p>2) Complete the staffing equality impact assessment of the second round (2012/13) of budget reductions and use the outcomes to inform the workforce planning process.</p> <p>3) Address the major issues emerging from workforce planning, i.e. ageing workforce, general under representation of disabled people and other groups across the council.</p> <p>4) Continue to provide training for managers and employees in dealing with organisational change e.g. Facing the Future sessions.</p> <p>5) Improve the employee information held in PSE through reminding employees to review their personal data in YourSelf.</p>	<p>March – May 2012</p> <p>June 2012</p> <p>March 2013</p> <p>March 2013</p> <p>March 2013</p>	<p>Managers will know the key issues impacting on their workforce and future services and will therefore be in a better position to take early action.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>Managers and employees will be better equipped to deal with the impact of change on themselves as individuals.</p> <p>Individual employee data will be regularly reviewed and updated so it will be more accurate.</p>

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
	<p>6) Ensure employee equality considerations are taken into account as part of the planned office moves resulting from the Office Accommodation Strategy.</p> <p><i>Heads of HR and Corporate Learning and Development</i></p>	Ongoing to March 2013 and beyond	Employee well being, satisfaction and motivation will be maximised.
3.2 Support the grading and pay review (Project Sponsor John Millar (DUE) / Project Manager Pete Sanford (Chief Exec's).	<p>Implement the grading and pay arrangements and deal with appeals.</p> <p><i>Lead – see left</i></p>	Ongoing to September 2013	Equal pay achieved regarding gender and job roles.
Priority 4 – Improve employee knowledge and skills			
4.1 Build on the Equality and Diversity training strategy that encompasses a range of learning options to meet the competency levels required for different levels of employees.	<p>1) Develop a robust learning plan for equality.</p> <p>2) Continue with corporate roll-out of Equality e-learning package to DCS and DUE during 2012/13.</p> <p>3) Develop approach to delivering equality training to those without direct</p>	<p>April 2012</p> <p>March 2013</p> <p>April 2012 – March 2014</p>	<p>Improved employee knowledge, understanding and therefore compliance with the law, for both employment and service delivery. This will help the council achieve its 10 year vision for equality.</p> <p>Numbers attending and completing equality training courses will be measured, as will whether staff felt more informed as a result of undertaking training.</p> <p>As above.</p>

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
	<p>access to a PC. Implement during 2013/14.</p> <p><i>Sarah Treneer (HR and Organisational Development)</i></p>		
<p>4.2 Ensure employees receive appropriate training and development to enable them to fulfil their roles.</p> <p>J Millar (DUE) is corporate lead</p>	<p>1) Develop a corporate approach to leadership skills and employee competencies to support the organisation and its employees with the new ways of working that will be required of local authorities in the future.</p> <p>2) Complete the review of the council's PRD process to ensure it continues to meet service needs. Launch and implement the revised PRD approach and process.</p> <p><i>Sarah Treneer as above</i></p> <p>3) Ensure that all directorate employees undergo an annual PRD meeting.</p> <p><i>Divisional Heads</i></p>	<p>March 2013</p> <p>March 2013</p> <p>March 2013</p>	<p>The organisation and its employees will be better prepared to meet challenges as resources reduce, minimising customer dissatisfaction. Employees will be provided with fair access to learning and development opportunities.</p> <p>As above.</p> <p>As above. Extent of use of the PRD process will be monitored. Managers are required to enter PRD data in PSE.</p>

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
Priority 5 – Promote equality through the ICT strategy			
5.1 Refresh the council's web site with view to making it more interactive and citizen focused.	Launch new website following latest upgrade incorporating standards facilitating improved access. <i>Andrew Tromans (ICT Services)</i>	April 2012	Improved access leading to higher levels of satisfaction across all customer groups.
5.2 Develop video conferencing facility further to offer flexibility and reduce travel.	Complete the work on unified communications incorporating wider availability of WebEx communications. <i>Lance Cartwright (ICT Services)</i>	April 2012	Provision of more flexible options for managing meetings, working from home etc. Deliver digital inclusion through the provision of wider facilities.
5.3 Continue to extend the availability of e-service options.	The updating of e-forms is an ongoing process as required by the business. Examples include forms requesting services such as Telecare and the Assisted Collection facility. <i>Pete Hipkiss (ICT Services)</i>	March 2013	Improved usability and accessibility thus improving access to information and communication between government, council and public.
5.4 Open data and transparency.	Respond to the government's approach for Transparency and Open Data Strategy which is aimed at establishing a culture of openness and transparency in public services, e.g. publication of financial transactions, purchase orders, contracts, salaries of senior staff, other	March 2013 and ongoing	Improved levels of open government and information transparency.

Objective	Detailed action / target <i>Lead officer(s)</i>	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
Priority 7 – Respond to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and council policy			
7.1 Respond to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.	1) Support the corporate revision of the equality scheme. 2) Review requirements for publication of equality information, working with Chief Executive's directorate to provide comprehensive and meaningful data on the council's website. <i>Menna Flavell in conjunction with CEDLG</i>	April 2012 Throughout 2012/13	Have an approach that is flexible enough to respond to the approach of the organisation and the needs of the local community. Meet legal requirements and work towards the government's vision of a fairer society.
	3) Update the equality monitoring categories used by the council's HR system (PSE) to reflect 2011 Census and Equality Act requirements. <i>PSE Team and ICT Services</i>	March 2013	Will enable more extensive and accurate equality monitoring.
7.2 Review the budget process	Review budget process to ensure it continues to be effective in addressing equality impacts in future budget rounds. <i>Philip Tart, Director / Iain Newman, Treasurer</i>	September 2012	Decision making process is properly informed; ensuring difficult financial decisions are arrived at fairly. Less likelihood of priority groups being discriminated against. The risk of legal challenge is minimised.

Objective	Detailed action / target Lead officer(s)	Target Date / Milestones	Planned outcome / performance indicators
7.3 Continue to embed EIAs.	<p>(1) EIAs to be undertaken of all new or revised policies and new or changed service areas.</p> <p>(2) Existing EIAs to be reviewed and actions relating to previous EIAs to be addressed.</p> <p><i>All divisional and service heads</i></p>	Throughout 2012/13	EIAs help assess the effect that new or changed policies and services may have on the public and the workforce. They are therefore an essential part of the decision making process.
7.4 Report to Corporate Board on HR Equalities issues and options for achieving the council's ten year equality ambition.	<p>(1) Report to Corporate Board.</p> <p>(2) Develop action plan to implement agreed actions.</p> <p><i>Margot Worton, Head of HR supporting central directorates</i></p>	March 2013	Agree and implement actions approved by Corporate Board and work towards stated council ambition.
7.5 Respond to the provisions of the Localism Act. Lead is through the Localism Steering Group chaired by Philip Tart	<p>Support corporate initiatives as required</p> <p><i>Various responsibilities as required</i></p>	September 2012	New rights and powers for local communities

Abbreviations and glossary

AD	Assistant Director
CEDLG	Corporate Equality and Diversity Leadership Group. Consists of nominated equality directorate lead officers, representatives of employee groups and council partners who ensure that equality principles remain integral to the council's work and that procedures comply with equality legislation and best practice. The group meets monthly.
DCR	Directorate of Corporate Resources.
DCS	Directorate of Children's Services.
DMT	Directorate Management Team.
DUE	Directorate of the Urban Environment.
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission.
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment – a process which assesses the impact that a policy, procedure, service or function is likely to have on protected groups (people who share one or more of the following protected characteristics – age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation).
PRD	Performance Review and Development - the council's employee appraisal process, which provides a structured annual opportunity for managers and employees to discuss individual performance and learning and development requirements.
PSE	PS Enterprise, the council's HR and Payroll system.