

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership

Generating savings and efficiency through shared services: High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands ▼

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

The East Midlands Improvement & Efficiency Partnership (EMIEP) is committed to celebrating the successful, innovative and imaginative project work that exists in the East Midlands region.

The EMIEP Support Team publish case studies showing how East Midlands councils are improving services, and delivering significant improvements and efficiencies.

The case studies are intended to inspire councils in the region, and indeed nationally, to transform services and benefit from the processes developed by those councils that have pioneered the way forward.

Introduction to shared services ▼

The strategic alliance of High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and the sharing of its services, including an Equality & Diversity Policy Officer, has already begun to generate savings and increase efficiency in just under a year.

As well as other potential benefits such as sharing of knowledge and experience that leads to increased productivity and delivery of better results, challenges and risks can be faced. To ensure the successful implementation of shared services in authorities, they ideally need to share similar objectives and goals, have resembling demographics and be open to changes in virtual working as a way of moving forward.



'The shared Policy Officer covering Equalities and Diversity was an early opportunity in the alliance to see how shared values within the two councils could be translated into common objectives. Working within the same legislation and having a similar demographic profile has meant that we have been able to quickly merge some of our processes, improve efficiency and make savings for both councils.'

Councillor Tony Hall,
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

A natural progression to shared services ▾

High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council had been successfully sharing its Chief Executive, and established a joint Chief Executive's Office in 2008. This included a shared Equality and Diversity function, delivered via a Policy Officer covering both councils in late 2008.

Since then, High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands have created Executive Director roles across both councils and have shared Heads of Service.

A review process of the Equality & Diversity function took place to evaluate the best solution for the

delivery of shared services, via the Alliance Improvement Management System (AIMS). From this, an action plan was created.

The AIMS process supported the notion that the Equality & Diversity functions in High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands had the same objectives, worked in the same legislation framework and each of the Council's communities had a similar demographic profile. The Equality strands also applied equally across both authorities, which meant that the approach for the Equality & Diversity Policy Officer could be the same in each, although there may be varying levels of need.

A solid foundation for success ▾

To ensure that the joint function would be able to deliver against the national Equality Standard, the Improvement & Development Agency (I&DeA) was approached to undertake an independent assessment (otherwise known as a Joint Peer Challenge Process)

of both authorities. At the time of the assessment Staffordshire Moorlands was performing at a Level 4 (self assessed), and High Peak was operating at Level 3 (self assessed). External assessment was only available at Level 3 and was therefore based on this level.

Following the joint assessment by I&DeA in March 2009, the Equality & Diversity function across both authorities was confirmed as operating at Level 3, and given strategic guidance and actions to enable them to potentially reach Level 5 (or ‘excellence’ under the new Equality Framework) within two years, as a joint function.

Via the recommendations from I&DeA, actions have been taken to improve the Equality & Diversity service and improve efficiency, including:

- The development of a joint Equality action plan for both authorities which is currently being implemented.
- Creation of a joint authority single Equality & Diversity scheme.

As part of the shared services good practice, which led to its successes, was the creation of Equality Champions across the two authorities. Currently eight Equality & Diversity Champions have been appointed, and their main role is to drive forward the Equality & Diversity agenda within their service areas, and to disseminate good practice.

Specific training requirements were also identified for the Equality & Diversity Champions, as well as for general staff across the two authorities.

The action plan from the Joint Peer Challenge Process also gave the Equality & Diversity function interim deadlines and objectives to ensure that by the end of the two years, the function should achieve a level of ‘excellence’.



Staffordshire Moorlands District Council leader Sybil Ralphs (left) holds the concordat she has signed with High Peak Borough Council leader Tony Ashton (right), affirming the two authorities’ strategic alliance. Looking on, behind, is Simon Baker, the Chief Executive of both councils.

The successes due to shared services ▾

As well as the improved efficiency of the authorities through having shared services, savings have been generated across the shared services of the alliance – from the Chief Executive down to Heads of Service.

A total saving of £1.9 million per year will be made by the end of year three of the alliance, including an annual saving of £500,000 from implementation of the new shared Senior Management Team.

Other successes include:

- Local authorities having improved relationships with each other.
- Efficiency savings around processes and procedures.
- Having shared objectives in Equality & Diversity.
- More frequent opportunities to share best practice and improve service for all.

As part of the Joint Peer Challenge Process review, success of the shared services was spotted very early on:

- There was a clear vision for the strategic alliance and an aim to embed Equality and Diversity at all levels.
- Clear vision throughout both authorities – single message from staff at all levels and elected Members that both Councils are committed to Equality and Diversity in all that they do.
- There is a strong partnership ethos across both authorities – respected for their contribution by statutory and community partners.
- There is obvious learning from each other in areas of community engagement and Equalities.

What were the challenges and potential risks faced? ▾

During the 11 months of operating the Equality & Diversity function across both authorities, one of its largest challenges was found to be duplication. High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands not sharing the same county meant that Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and network groups in each county would have to be nurtured and managed separately.

Potential risk was the dilution of relationships with the local partnerships in each of the counties. This was overcome by the Equality & Diversity function maintaining a presence with both county networking groups and attending events.

Another potential risk is to the identity of the councils sharing services. All documents, materials and booklets are required to have joint branding – making it clear for residents that there are two authorities working together, as opposed to allowing for

misinterpretation of a potential merger taking place.

Putting in place an effective shared services function for Equality & Diversity can be challenging, and there are authorities within the UK who have experienced challenges, and not succeeded, or decided no longer to implement the shared services. Predominantly, the challenge is to develop, maintain and nurture a relationship between the two authorities, and to build on the shared ambition - that will make or break the success of a shared Equality & Diversity function.

Although technology systems were different, this did not lead to many issues as the role of a shared Equality & Diversity Policy Officer could be managed through flexible working practices and the creation of a 'virtual' office.

Key lessons ▼

There are a number of key learnings for other authorities thinking about implementing a shared Equality & Diversity function:

- Involve independent bodies that measure the success of the service at an early stage to check whether the proposition is viable, and out of this draw up an action plan to ensure goals are set, to help reach next level.
- The key factors which help authorities work best together is having a good working relationship, a similar demographic profile, compatible systems and the positivity to make a success of something that is not yet common as a working practice.
- The biggest and foremost requirement from each of the authorities is the commitment to share expertise between the authorities.
- The desire to learn from peers who are also in a similar role, with other shared functions – again, to share best practice.

The rest of the learning process is ongoing, with the action plan for High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands continuing through to 2011 – with a goal to reach ‘Excellence’ level. This evaluation will be the ultimate measurement to see whether the Equality & Diversity shared function is an overall success.

‘The process of aligning policies and processes is still happening and we continue to refine our thinking. Whilst we will adopt common methods where possible to deliver better Equality and Diversity outcomes for our residents, we are always mindful of the specific characteristics of our two councils and will always respond with tailor made solutions where these are needed by our communities.’

Councillor Emily Thrane, High Peak Borough Council

Notes ▾

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