

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership

Leicestershire County Council takes Positive Action ▼

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.

Making a step-change to success ▼

In just twelve months, Leicestershire County Council implemented substantial service improvements to achieve the Level 3 Equality Standard. Using an innovative programme of Positive Action methods, team engagement and member training, it has effectively embedded Equality and Diversity into the culture of the organisation.

Rated a 4-star Council and voted Council of the Year 2009, the Council believes that embedding equalities into the heart of the organisation has contributed to its recent successes.

“Our primary concern is to improve the lives of our local community and the equalities initiatives we have embraced truly support this aim.”

Tony Mulhearn, Assistant Director of Universal Services.



Leicestershire
County Council



Responding to peers ▾

Leicestershire County Council covers seven district council areas and provides services for more than 600,000 local people from many diverse backgrounds.

During a formal peer review facilitated through the East Midlands Equalities Forum in October 2007, Leicestershire County Council was deemed to require improvement in several areas when assessed against the criteria for Level 3 Equality Standard.

Evidence from the review highlighted three objectives on which the Council should focus efforts, specifically:

- Increase knowledge to provide more directional leadership in Equality and Diversity, to generate greater value for money and minimise risk.
- Implement additional processes to facilitate the Equality and Diversity Strategy being fully integrated throughout the organisation.
- Increase the level of interaction between the Equalities team and the rest of the organisation, in order to mainstream equalities for the tangible benefit of the team, the business and the local community.

Taking positive action ▾

With the ambition of gathering all the evidence required for the Level 3 Equality Standard assessment by December 2008, Leicestershire County Council took a four-pronged approach to integrating equalities into its culture:

Increasing ownership

One of the most effective facilitators of such a rapid and successful step-change in this 24,000 strong organisation (including schools staff) is believed to have been the sharing of responsibility for Equalities and Diversity, empowering individual teams.

This ownership and sense of

responsibility has been successfully shared through:

- Active involvement – the Equalities team attend departmental Equalities group meetings across the organisation, developing relationships, understanding departmental plans and sharing the equalities vision.
- Establishing clear, measurable indicators and targets – Leicestershire County Council now has clear expectations and targets for Equalities and Diversity on which it must deliver, both at a departmental

and total organisation level. For example, employment targets have been set based on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and race, and measured on a quarterly basis, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative data.

Sally Edwards, Policy Manager – Equalities and Diversity says *“It feels like there has been a fundamental shift in our role. Rather than an ‘enforcement’ role, we can now take a much more advisory, supportive stance, because departments really want to deliver services with Equality principles at their core.”*

Training

A multi-layered training programme was developed and implemented across the organisation, to suit differing requirements for knowledge and engagement.

For example, an innovative training programme developed with an external organisation, Actorshop, was used to impart knowledge to members in an engaging and relevant manner. Using thought-provoking role play set in the familiar

surroundings of a Community Forum and a Councillor’s surgery, the team was exposed to ‘real-life’ challenging situations between diverse groups of people, encouraging debate and igniting a real interest in the issues, and potential solutions.

Alternative programmes to increase understanding and awareness of Equality and Diversity issues have been developed for staff groups, including those who are involved in procurement and commissioning activities. This allows a greater number of people access to the information and skills required in order to embed Equalities into their everyday working practises.

James Trotter, Senior Procurement Manager said *“In-house procurement training and the Intranet Purchasing Guidance provides practical advice on how to include Equality and Diversity at each stage of the procurement process, including sample contract conditions and contract KPIs. Also, Equality Impact Assessment training has been customised to relate to commissioning and procurement.”*



Equality and Diversity Actors

Staff development

Initially a departmental pilot, a mentoring scheme has been introduced organisation-wide, providing coaching in application and interview techniques for black, minority ethnic and disabled staff. 70% of attendees asked believed this scheme has helped their career progression.

In addition, First Line Management Training is available for aspiring managers within these groups. To date 90% of participants perceive this scheme has helped them to 'get on'.

Harnessing existing knowledge

Recognising that there was a wealth of knowledge and experience in existing teams and groups that could assist the business with understanding and embedding Equalities, Leicestershire County Council has endeavoured to harness this knowledge, sharing it throughout the organisation to help shape service improvement. Examples include:

- Worker Groups – the worker groups for disabled, black and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender workers initially existed as support groups. However, now these groups are formally involved in shaping the development of future services, as well as being involved in the framework for developing policy. Each group

is also represented on the Corporate Equalities Board. One example of how the Workers Groups actively contribute to the business of the organisation is the ground breaking DVD produced by the Disabled Workers Group which addresses direct and indirect disability discrimination, and which is being used successfully throughout the Council as a training tool.



- Representative Recruitment Panel's Register – this was established to address the fact that the number of black and minority ethnic workers recruited to the Council was disproportionately low to the number of applicants from these groups. Consultation groups believed that greater visibility of these groups in the recruitment process would put interviewees at ease. The register lists black and minority ethnic employees trained in recruitment and selection and two years after this initiative began approximately 70% of

recruitment panels now include representation from this register.

- Equalities Champions – this is an initiative, which began in Children’s Social Care teams

and is now being expanded across the organisation, aiming to empower employees to challenge discrimination and to better understand issues relating to Equality and Diversity.

Proof that positive action = positive results ▾

Although this is a long-term strategy, tangible results are already visible. Perhaps the most compelling is that in February 2009 the Council gained Level 3 of the Equality Standard, and indeed was found to be a ‘high performing’ council. Coming just one year after the initial report that identified the need for improvement demonstrates a significant step-change.

Other positive results were shown through the 2008 Staff Survey, which found that:

- 97% of staff believed that Equality and Diversity is everybody’s business.
- 91.2% believed the council values diversity in its workforce.
- 90.2% believed the council is committed to equal opportunities.
- 92.5% believed that their manager treats them with fairness and respect.
- 81% believe that progress had been made on the Equality and Diversity agenda in the past 12 months.

By increasing visibility of black and ethnic minority groups on recruitment selection panels, recruitment of new employees from black and ethnic minority groups has increased by 15% since 2007.

Integration is increasing and is more visible throughout the organisation; for example the Leicestershire Working Together Forum (established in collaboration with NHS Leicestershire and Rutland), with representation from all Equalities strands, has been set up to scrutinise the County Partnership, Leicestershire Together.

The results of other ongoing measures are still pending, for example, a new Corporate Complaints Policy and Procedure is being established which will include questions to enable better analysis by Equality strand.

A future in positive action ▾

Leicestershire County Council views the embedding of Equalities and Diversity into its culture as a long-term strategy, and although the initial stages have been a success, this is just one milestone, with significant learnings to take on board.

The major learning has been in creating a balance between empowering the organisation and yet maintaining expertise in Equalities and Diversity, plus ensuring that there is the capacity available to undertake all the additional responsibilities and team engagement.

Sally Edwards said *“We know we cannot be complacent; the achievements of the past year have been great, but there is always more to do. We are about to launch our Equalities, Diversity and Stronger Communities Charter endorsed by all political parties and we are already working on the project plan to achieve ‘Excellent’ accreditation of the Equalities Framework by March 2011.”*

Notes ▾

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