

East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership

Mansfield District Council leaps into action with the new Equalities Framework ▼

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.

The authority's service improvement journey ▼

Following Mansfield District Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2003, Equality and Diversity was considered a key area for improvement and immediate action was taken to address this, incorporating equality targets into the Corporate Plan aiming towards achieving Level 4 by 2009. With this goal successfully achieved the Authority are now aiming for 'Excellent', against the revised Equality Framework.

Striving to achieve one Level per year did not come without its challenges, and none more so than the adaptation of the Authority's culture and attitude in order to ensure Equality & Diversity was embedded in everybody's working day. The formation of the Corporate Equality Group (CEG), which has been the corporate force for developing and establishing Equality & Diversity throughout the Authority was critical in helping the Authority reach Level 4.

‘The key thing that enabled us here in Mansfield to move from a Council that treated Equalities as “a nice to have” to a Council that sees Equality as “a core function” was the Corporate Equality Group that was not made up of heads of service and directors but of front line staff and managers from all the Council’s

departments that all worked together to promote equalities in a practical way though out the organisation.’

Councillor Philip Smith, Corporate Portfolio Holder and Chair Corporate Equality Group

Identifying the weaknesses ▾

Setting out on their Equality journey at Level 1, the Authority recognised that significant improvements should be made to ensure that Equality and Diversity became embedded throughout the organisation within working

practices and not as an “add on” to current service delivery. The Authority realised that this embedding would include some culture change issues within the organisation and a training plan was put in place to assist in the process.

Making the leap ▾

Following the Authority’s CPA assessment, the authority produced its Comprehensive Equality Policy, Corporate Equality Plan and Race Equality Scheme. This laying of foundations and putting policies in place enabled the Authority to have a clearer path to deliver Equality actions.

A Corporate Equality Group was also established in 2005 with members from a cross section of the organisation and Chaired at the time by the Deputy Mayor. This group became the corporate force for developing and establishing Equality and Diversity throughout the organisation.

Also in 2005 the Authority took part in the Diversity in the Districts pilot scheme (DiD) that funded Diversity in Action in Local Government (DIALOG) to assist in the process of laying down those foundations to achieve success. This scheme funded a consultant who assisted in setting a clear vision and direction in which to achieve the requirements of the Standard. This scheme was a catalyst to the authority achieving Level 1 of the Equality Standard and was the first significant milestone on the road to achieving their Equality objectives.

The appointment of the Equality & Diversity Officer in 2005 underlined the Authority commitment to providing the best possible services to the diverse communities of the Mansfield district.

- From Level 1 – 3, focus for the organisation was primarily on developing the impact and needs assessment process within all service areas; an Authority review of training and needs from Equality Works Consultancy; Equality Action Plans developed within services, a process to monitor progress and establishing consultations with Equality groups.
- At Level 4, the Authority's focus was to ensure all service areas were undertaking actions resulting from the impact assessments process and that these formed part of the service plan. This had been a challenging inclusion to enable this 'thinking' to be embedded, and able to gain measurement.

To maintain success at Level 4, and potentially reach 'Excellent' in the new Equalities Framework, the Equality & Diversity function requires ongoing internal evaluation of working practices, and the impact on Equality group's processes, promotion of successes and identifying new groups constantly, will allow the function to move forward.

Positive training for staff and members and evaluation of current practices and policies enabled the leap from Level 1 to 4, but this was hand in glove with the passion and determination from the Equality & Diversity Officer and the Community Engagement Officer to reach groups personally, and seeking out feedback and information directly. The altering of the way in which the culture shifted to include Equality into everyday thinking was implemented with the aid of training programmes, procedures and the use of champions to disseminate information, as well as the Corporate Equality Group leading by example and sharing good practises.



Members of the Mansfield District Council Corporate Equality Group

The outcomes that make the difference ▼

Achieving Level 4 in four years has been recognised as a fantastic achievement in itself and recognises the positive changes that the Authority has implemented in both attitude and culture, that embed Equality and Diversity within the Authority. These are only a few of the achievements:

- The redesign of Sherwood Baths, where Olympic Gold medalist Rebecca Adlington learnt to swim, was developed with local disabled user groups including DIAL (Disabled Information Advice Line). Their input into the design of the changing rooms was invaluable and led to modifications being made to produce a state-of-the-art changing facility for people with disabilities. The whole redesign was developed with consideration of all users including, mother and toddler groups, clubs and schools.
- Leisure development has always demonstrated a positive commitment to be inclusive to disabled people, and this is evident with the success of local inspirational swimmers, Paralympic Gold medalists Sam Hynd and Charlotte Henshaw.

- The introduction of a Youth Mayor aged 13-18. This scheme is in its second term – with one objective, amongst many, being to allow young people to influence and improve service provision in the district, and also allow them to have the opportunity to participate in a democratic election. In 2009, 5,300 voters turned out to the school and college polling stations, which is 2000 more voters than in 2008.
- Working in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council Adult Social Care and health PCT to offer respite flats in the district for hospital leavers requiring 24-hour care, before returning to their own home.
- Offering a facility for specialist Muslim burials as a result of consultation with this community. Up until this point, Muslims from Mansfield would have to bury loved ones as far away as Leicestershire, as the facilities were not available in the locality.
- Sign Language Course - voluntary training by employees to develop basic skills in Sign Language to improve their customer service.
- Working with Housing Repairs Service with regard to the issue of secure passwords for blind people when Council employees visit a tenant's property to carry out repair.

Challenging times ▼

The challenges experienced were around culture change and changing behaviours and attitudes. This was accomplished through positive focus on those areas and the support and commitment of the Managing Directors to move the Authority forward. The focus of the Corporate Equality Group was to drive Equality and Diversity throughout the organisation. This group's role will continue to maintain the momentum and drive, aspiring to constantly update and review impact assessments and develop working relationships with partners and stakeholders.

Setting the focus of the CEG was

a big challenge, alongside trying to plan the journey ahead. Good practice does not just concentrate on what actions are needed to reach the next level but what is needed to achieve the overall objectives and goals.

Do:

- recognise there is going to be a culture change, and ensure it is planned for, such as training, engaging with the right people, selecting champions to disseminate information throughout the authority. Also, help colleagues to live and breathe Equality & Diversity.

- promote Equality and Diversity within the organisation through staff newsletters, manager forums, team meetings etc.
- set up baselines at Level 1, to enable to demonstrate where improvements have been made, share knowledge and good practice with neighbouring authorities and consider joint working.
- review impact assessments – and don't let them sit on shelves. Keep the information alive and constantly assess it.
- be aware of groups in society that have not been taken into account.

Don't:

- treat Equality & Diversity as a 'tick box'. To ensure a successful change in culture and improvement of the embedding of Equality & Diversity through Authority services it is important to obtain good quality information, and to be able to draw out facts, experiences, accomplishments and to work through impact assessments together.
- assume that you know the needs of your customers and community - go out to consult and involve and feedback the results to them.
- get too 'bogged down' in processes - remember to focus on the outcomes achieved.

Notes ▾

Contacts ▾

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People can Succeed*

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