

Good Practice Case Study

Nottingham City Council: Simpler equalities = simpler life ▾



East Midlands
Improvement and
Efficiency Partnership

Equalities: a simple formula for successful integration ▾

The development of a new Equality scheme in 2009 gave Nottingham City Council the opportunity to simplify its approach to equalities and embed it into services, departments and key processes such as performance management and commissioning.

This approach has already brought a number of benefits including clearly showing the Council's equality priorities and how people can support them, an emphasis on outcomes rather than activities, clear accountability and a greater freedom for officers to achieve outcomes through existing work.

Michael Williams, Corporate Director of Community and Culture at the City Council said: *“The language of equalities, and what we are seeking to achieve, is more now simply expressed and invites colleagues to use their knowledge and skills to make our services more relevant to the diverse needs of our citizens.”*



Residents from St Anns, Nottingham



Nottingham
City Council

Strong foundations for a ‘Just and Fair Nottingham’ ▾

Although the Council was starting from a strong base on equalities – it had been assessed at Level 4 of the former Equality Standard for Local Government in December 2008 - voluntary groups and residents wanted to see clear outcomes on key equality issues.

Its four existing equality schemes covering race, gender, disability and sexuality set out over a hundred objectives and several hundred potential outcome measures - making it difficult for staff and residents to see the Council’s equality priorities.

Other challenges included:

- Aligning the approach with the new Equality Framework for Local Government to help achieve a target of ‘Excellent’
- Preparing the organisation for the forthcoming equalities bill
- Making sure the equality scheme linked into wider Council strategies and developments

After a series of consultation events with key stakeholders to understand the changes required, the Council made significant changes to the Equality Scheme. The most significant and far-reaching were:

- Reducing the number of equalities objectives from over 100 to just 17
- Grouping these under four overall aims - ‘Making Nottingham a welcoming place for everyone,’ ‘Making services easier to access,’ ‘Providing fair treatment’ and ‘Making Nottingham a place where everyone can achieve’
- Creating just one outcome measure for each objective in the scheme using existing National or other indicators where possible

The resulting scheme is streamlined and easy-to-understand; it is linked to existing work wherever possible, directly linked to feedback, for example ‘You said, we did...’ and is designed for people to clearly understand how they can contribute to the success of the scheme.

Embracing change

Councillors from all parties welcomed the simple approach and effort to widen the scheme’s relevance. It was launched in September 2009 with an awareness campaign for staff featuring posters and summary business cards, highlighting four simple ways staff can support the Council’s equality objectives.

Useful contacts

- **Interpreters or information in different languages:**
Call Language Solutions on 915 4475
- **Telephone interpretation service (emergency only):**
Call Language Line on 0845 310 9900 quoting ID code L15373
- **Reporting hate crime:**
Call Nottingham Hate Monitoring Partnership on 958 6515
For Victim Support call 0845 30 30 900
Please report any harassment to your manager
- **Find out more about Equality and Diversity and the Council's Scheme:**
call 915 8664 or email
equalityanddiversityteam@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Make a difference on diversity!

Be welcoming
Be accessible

Ask about people's needs
Help everyone achieve

Fair and just Nottingham

Figure 1. Summary card given to staff accompanying the new Equality scheme

Working equalities into the performance management process ▼

Prior to the new scheme, there had been a completely separate performance reporting system for equalities. Performance was gathered through a network of departmental ‘practitioners’ outside of the main Performance Plus system. This meant that although equalities performance was being driven and results were being achieved, a large amount of work was being reported as part of wider Council initiatives but not captured as evidence of progress on equalities.

Also, managers were duplicating the evidence they submitted – once for the main Council performance management reporting process, and again for progress on equalities. This duplication risked a perception of equalities being an additional, rather than an integral part of tasks.

In Summer 2009, equalities reporting was incorporated into the Council’s

main performance management system using Performance Plus. This was achieved by:

- Training a member of the Equalities team in the Performance Plus system
- Creating objectives and measures in the system corresponding to those set out in the new Equality Scheme
- Working with performance management colleagues to identify the best way to link data collection for the Equality Scheme into existing practices
- Working with the corporate performance team to check and test the new arrangements
- Changing the schedule for equalities performance reporting to be included with the overall performance cycle

The task of integrating equalities into performance management was made easier by the reduction in the number of objectives, use of existing performance indicators where possible and the use of outcome-based objectives in the new Equality Scheme.

The benefits of the new approach have included:

- Regular and systematic reporting against objectives in the Equality Scheme
- Avoiding duplication in reporting
- Bringing equalities reporting into line with wider performance reporting processes and timescales

- The ability to ‘link’ equality objectives to existing measures and capture equalities-related progress from other initiatives
- More focused performance reports providing regular updates on progress and outcomes rather than details of general activities

The authority’s Equalities Board now receives a quarterly ‘scorecard’ of progress against its equality objectives. This makes it clear where progress is satisfactory, and where more attention is needed. (See figure 2)

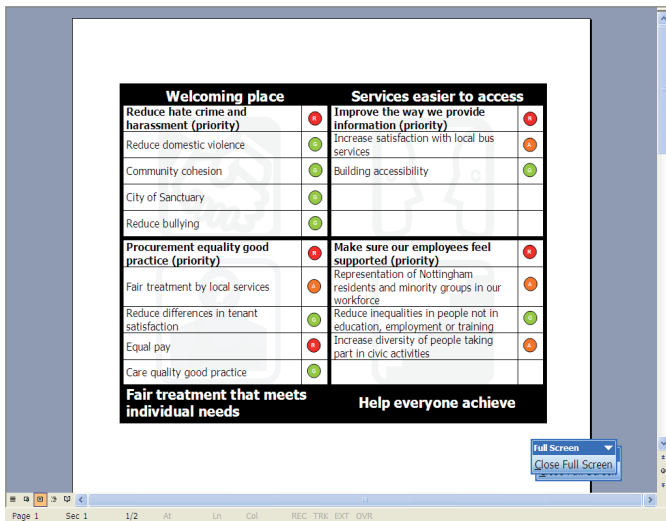


Figure 2. Example of the scorecard based on the new approach

Working equalities into the commissioning framework ▾

Around a fifth of Nottingham City Council's entire budget is spent through procured services.

Within the assessment for the Council's Equality Standard Level 4, it had demonstrated good practice around procurement, for example with its 'passport to Equality and Diversity' for suppliers; however it had ambitions to further integrate equalities into its processes.

As part of a wider organisational development programme, a review of commissioning across the Council took place. Its purpose was to establish corporately agreed definitions and provide a consistent and transparent approach to commissioning across the authority.

Key challenges included:

- Ensuring commissioning is managed as a continuous process including: need analysis, strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- Addressing equality issues throughout the entire commissioning process
- Recognising the vital role of elected members at all stages of the commissioning cycle through scrutiny and as Councillors representing their communities

- The need to respond to the recently introduced Duty to Involve
- Responding to the important role the third sector can play in providing services to local communities

The review was led by a project manager from the Organisational Development team, but colleagues in teams with significant experience of commissioning, for example Adult Services, were closely involved in the development of the framework.

A cross-council seminar was organised to gain a wide range of views, and to make sure a corporate framework could be developed with a common set of definitions, taking into account the different requirements from relevant teams in the Authority.

The event brought together around thirty officers from across the organisation. The support from top line management could be seen due to the Corporate Director of Adult Support and Health chairing the session. Following the seminar, consultation and liaison continued with elected members to provide clarity on their role in the process.

From this seminar, a Commissioning Framework document was produced, illustrating how different stages of commissioning fit into the overall

cycle and including where and how different equalities issues need to be considered. This is being introduced accompanied by training and online guidance for officers involved in commissioning.

Improvements as a result of the new framework include:

- Corporately agreed definitions and understanding of what commissioning is and the approach that needs to be taken
- A clear recognition that there is no one stage of the process at which equality considerations can be taken account of - each of the four stages of the commissioning cycle needs to include equality, diversity and cohesion considerations as an integral part of the process
- Specific guidance on equalities consideration at different stages of the commissioning cycle, for example it is essential to:

- o ensure the needs of different equality groups are considered as an integral part of the needs assessment in the **Analyse** stage

- o carry out Equality Impact Assessments of commissioning strategies and/or procurement plans in the **Plan** stage;

- o include and monitor equality related requirements through procurement and purchasing processes in the **Do** stage

- o refer to equality priorities as part of the **Review** of both operational and strategic objectives and outcomes of the commissioning strategies and procurement plans.

The Commissioning Framework is being introduced in Spring 2010 and will play a significant role in developing the authority's approach to commissioning both overall, and in the recognition of equalities issues as part of the commissioning process.

Initial lessons learnt ▾

Nottingham City Council has been on a significant journey in embedding equalities further into the culture and heart of the Council including through performance management and commissioning. There is already significant learning, which could benefit others about to embark on a similar process:

Keep it simple – having fewer objectives can help achieve clear outcomes

Encourage joined up thinking – making equalities part of mainstream processes offers a number of potential advantages

Use plain language – to make sure a wide range of people understand what documents are about and what action is needed

Make it clear how people can contribute – to make sure everyone can see how they can play a part

Make it easier for officers to achieve equality outcomes through wider service developments – do this by assigning responsibility for outcomes or targets rather than activities

Make use of existing initiatives and performance targets where possible – why try and create more activity when there's something

already in place to deliver an outcome?

Use qualitative data as well as quantitative – this can help identify if initiatives are making a tangible difference on equality for residents

Use the 'COUNT' principle – collect performance information once and use it numerous times rather than having separate collection processes

Identify and work closely with key stakeholders – both managers and community representatives are instrumental in developing meaningful and achievable equality objectives

Let people know how you've responded to their feedback – taking a 'You said we did' approach can increase confidence that comments given will be acted on

Haseeb Ahmad, Head of Equality & Community Relations said:

“Making equalities easier for staff and residents to understand, working it into key processes and keeping the language simple is really important - we want to make it clear that equalities is relevant to everyone, and that everyone can play a part in making it happen.”

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East Midlands Improvement and Efficiency Partnership Case Studies

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

The EM IEP 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.

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