

## Good Practice Case Study

# Derbyshire County Council: Success embedding Equalities Impact Assessments ▼



East Midlands  
Improvement and  
Efficiency Partnership



Residents taking part in just one of Derbyshire County Council's inter-generational activities

## Excellent embedding of Equalities Impact Assessments in project management ▼

Derbyshire County Council has been recognised for the design of a new Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) and embedding it successfully into the Council's ways of working, particularly within project management across the Council. The revised EIA assisted in achieving Level 3 of the National Equality Standard for Local Government. During the Level 3 assessment Derbyshire County Council was particularly commended for its work in the use of equality mapping, consultation and research, as well as for its strong record on promoting disability equality.

*"The way in which the new Equalities Impact Assessment has been embedded at Derbyshire County Council, at every level, means Equalities is considered in day-to-day decision making, rather than separately. This means that not only are our staff empowered, but the communities we work with are too. Two-way communication that invites people to be actively involved, help us achieve our aim of considering the impact change can have on people in every decision."*

Nick Hodgson  
Chief Executive  
Derbyshire County Council

## Changing the way Equality Impact Assessments are carried out ▾

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Derbyshire has a population of approximately 762,000 and is a place of geographical and social contrasts, with a number of heavily built-up areas and large, sparsely populated rural areas. Key characteristics of the county are:

- A growing ethnic minority population; with concentrations in Chesterfield, Long Eaton and South Derbyshire
- A working migrant community of approximately 2,000 people
- 19.4% of the population is disabled or has a long-term limiting illness, compared to the national average of 17.3%. People of retirement age make up 20% of the total population
- Extremes of wealth and challenging circumstances; 16 areas in Derbyshire rank amongst the 10% most deprived areas in England, whilst some rural areas are very affluent with the result being that house prices are amongst some of the most expensive in the East Midlands
- Derbyshire County Council sees its different communities as being at the heart of equalities policy-making. The Sustainable Community Strategy's key objective is 'for everyone in Derbyshire to enjoy a good quality of life, both now and in the future' and has an overarching aim of reducing inequalities

The Council is presently working on a new single equalities and human rights scheme to move forward its ambitions over the next four years.

## Changing approach: From INRA to EIA ▾

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The Impact and Needs Requirement Assessment (INRA) at Derbyshire County Council had been in place for some years. Completing it was perceived as a separate 'task' and for many managers and senior officers leading the assessments was a time-consuming exercise.

The INRA was at risk of not being fully used, and thus not aiding the review and development of Council

policies and services. It lacked a focus on action planning and as a result the early INRAs failed to help managers identify practical things they could do to improve their services.

### **Steps to change**

Derbyshire County Council's experience of undertaking Equality Impact Assessments has not been without difficulties, like that

of many other types of council's. The Council's revised processes for carrying out assessments has finally helped the drive to make the progress desired and feel confident enough to use them to impact on other business processes.

The first step was clarifying what the EIA's purpose was and how they could help service teams identify improvements needed. The second step was to ensure the process itself would be accessible and easy to use by non-experts on equalities, with managers and teams across the Council striving to deliver high quality services to everyone who needs them.

### **Outlining objectives**

The aims of the new process were to:

- Simplify the process so it is easy to use by everyone in the Council as well as accessible to stakeholders, so they can see what has been identified and what is planned as a result
- Focus on what is needed to change or improve
- Ensure high standards of customer care
- Actively engage staff and stakeholders in helping to shape future services and policies
- Develop actions which could and would be implemented
- Make EIAs part of the day job, part of a regular cycle of 'Plan, Do and Review', and part of the project management process

- Equality proofing: Having a shortened method to support the development of strategy in the Council
- Aid decision makers by ensuring that they have all the facts (including equality-based information) before they make a decision
- Open up the Council's policies and services to greater internal and external scrutiny

Discussions took place across the Council to ensure that the resulting process would be bought in by officers, and provide practical steps to assist with improving its services for the different communities the Council serves.

### **The Equality Practitioners Group**

Around this time, the Council had also established a new group, consisting of officers whose work linked strongly to equality and human rights, called the Equality Practitioners Group. This was one way of developing corporate engagement in the development of policy and practice across this large organisation.

The Equality Practitioners Group, the Chairs of the three staff networks, other colleagues, Trade Union representatives and a small number of partners from the community and voluntary sector, all began to look at how best to carry out Equality Impact Assessments, to help make a difference to people's lives and promote further equality.

As a result of revising the process for carrying out EIAs the Council has:

- Simplified the format from 30 pages to just nine
- Completed just as many EIAs in the last 12 months as they did in the previous three years
- Been able to show their value as a useful tool to aid service improvement and get buy-in from services
- Demystified equalities for many managers and services by promoting a business-based approach to service improvements
- Improved its understanding of the needs of different communities
- Altered plans to change services because of the findings in EIAs

## Implementing and embedding the new EIA ▾

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### How Project Management is helping

Derbyshire County Council has a robust Project Management culture and the corporate toolkit is well used across the authority. In 2009 an EIA was carried out on the toolkit to ensure that as an aid for officers, it was accessible and supported the promotion of equality and human rights. As a result of the assessment, changes were made to the toolkit, so that there is now a requirement at project initiation stage for officers to consider when an EIA should be carried out as part of the business argument for a project. Changes have also been introduced to ensure that consideration of issues like equality and sustainability are now at the heart of project initiation.

Anyone completing a project proposal must indicate how equality issues will be addressed and assessed, on a par with resources

and risk, so that equality becomes a key part of each business case for each project.

This also means that equalities should become an issue from the start and throughout the development and implementation of projects, as part of programmes across the Council.

### Closing the circle

Like any performance issue, equality and diversity needs to be performance monitored and managed with internal and external scrutiny, to ensure that stated results are tested.

At Derbyshire County Council progress on equalities and the impact of policies and services are being tested more rigorously following improvements to the way in which things are scrutinised by Members. Guidance on scrutiny has been reviewed to ensure robust

examination of equality issues in any Improvement and Scrutiny Review. A cross-party sub-group of the

main Scrutiny Committee has been established with its focus being specifically on work around equality.

### Reflecting on change ▾

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Derbyshire County Council has identified the following key ways to embed equality assessments:

*Unified policies:* Equalities need to be embedded in day-to-day decision-making, not separately. Staff must have a holistic approach to its inclusiveness within their service area. This has been significantly aided by simplifying a once complex process and adapting the existing project management toolkit. As the toolkit was designed to be used as a structure for people who lead on the development of a new project or service, or manage an existing project, it has been an ideal tool to use.

*Moulding the EIA to fit:* People being asked to complete an EIA have shown preference for a form to help

them, as a prompt to consider all the issues and provide a standard way of recording findings and planned actions. At Derbyshire County Council, staff decided to take ownership and make the process work for them rather than the other way round.

*Be realistic:* Applying the EIA to 'real situations' within a department makes it more understandable and relevant. Focusing on identifying and making a small number of changes to policies and services makes the whole process more achievable and practical, so that changes can be implemented. This is usually without major resource implications, especially when most services just need tweaking rather than overhauling.

## Building on their success ▾



John Cowings (far right), Senior Policy Officer, with fellow colleagues

Although Derbyshire County Council has achieved much success to date with its work on equalities, it recognises that this is part of an ongoing journey. Many inequalities issues are persistent, and the result of national and international changes. The Council's job is clearly to soften and counter any negative impact of factors such as financial constraint on customers and residents. Additionally, it is important to ensure that any barriers to opportunities for local people are removed or reduced whenever possible.

### Critical friends

Rather than using new wholesale consultation, increasingly, information is being obtained from a wider range of sources and better co-ordinated interaction with customers and communities.

More work is planned to identify equality stakeholders who may have an interest in a particular topic or situation. Then to encourage them to become actively involved in EIAs as a 'critical friend', with their role being to bring a fresh perspective and foresee potential challenges around specific areas of service or policy.

*"The success of embedding the new EIA at Derbyshire County Council undoubtedly lies in having people at the forefront of Equalities policy making and the shaping of services and simplifying what is essentially a very simple process."*

John Cowings  
Senior Policy Officer, Equalities  
Derbyshire County Council

**Notes** ▾

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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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