

Equality Framework for Local Government

Epping Forest District Council

Assessment Report

1. Introduction

This report is a summary of the findings following an assessment undertaken by Stuart Elrick Independent Consultant.

The basis for the assessment is a benchmark which incorporates the set criteria and characteristics of an “achieving authority” as per the Equality Framework for Local Government. The benchmark focuses on 5 key areas:

- knowing your community and data mapping
- place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- community engagement and satisfaction
- responsive services and customer care
- modern and diverse workforce

The assessment was carried out on 15th. March 2010.

I appreciate the welcome and hospitality provided by the authority and would like to thank everybody met during the process for their time, enthusiasm and contributions.

2. Process

Epping Forest District Council submitted a self-assessment identifying under each of the headings within the equality framework where they believed they as an authority were on their equality journey.

The report sections are set out under the 5 themes as per the equality framework for local government.

3. Conclusion

Based on the self assessment document, information gained through discussion with Members, senior management and staff along with Epping Forest’s own development and action plan **it is the view that Epping Forest District Council is further along its journey towards being assessed as an “achieving authority” than it gives itself credit for.**

Detailed findings

4. Knowing your communities and data mapping

Characteristics

- data and intelligence collection systems are developed and fit for purpose
- data and intelligence is shared with LSP and other stakeholders – 2 way process
- data and intelligence is shared internally(use of COUNT principle)
- information and monitoring systems are developed that allow data to be disaggregated where appropriate, assess progress in achieving objectives and targets and review them in the light of changing needs, when necessary.

4.1 Strengths

- (i) information gathering about the communities within Epping is evolving and there is a greater understanding at all levels within the Council that the collation, sharing, both internally and externally of up-to-date data and intelligence about the communities within Epping to inform decision making will enhance community engagement and service delivery.
- (ii) the purchase of Mosaic Public Sector as the tool to collate data and intelligence is seen as a positive step.
- (iii) there is good evidence of joint data and intelligence collection and sharing - the LSP “One Epping Forest” has recently published a data profile on the district entitled “Shaping the Future”
- (iv) detailed ward profiles are being undertaken
- (v) use and relevance of the Data Observatory is evolving
- (vi) the Council is using the data to inform its priorities and objectives.
- (vii) there is awareness within the Council that there needs to be a corporate approach to the collation of data and intelligence.

- (viii) there are examples of where up-to-date data and intelligence has lead to service improvements e.g.
- Community Services and Customer Relations section – strategic action plans in place in various wards in the district
 - Housing Service – census of tenants and leaseholders

4.2 Development Areas

The Council may wish to consider the following as areas for development

- (i) develop data collection protocols as part of the roll out of the Mosaic system.
- (ii) develop data collection and sharing protocols with LSP partners and community stakeholders.
- (iii) develop data collection and intelligence both internally and externally around the C.O.U.N.T (Collect Once Use Numerous Times) principle.
- (iv) develop a process for gathering intelligence from Members about the communities they represent.
- (v) enhance the sharing of data internally so that all departments, service areas have the same data informing decision making on current and future service delivery.

5. Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational development

Characteristics

- members and officers take direct and personal responsibility for promoting greater equality and test themselves on progress by the outcomes they achieve
- it has set stretching equality priorities in consultation with partners in the public and voluntary sector and these are reflected in its sustainable community and other relevant strategies, Local and Multi Area Agreements, and local targets
- it works with partners in the public and voluntary sector to develop joint equality strategies

5.1 Strengths

- (i) there is an understanding of and commitment to equality and diversity from the Chief Executive and senior management team. “equality and diversity needs to be part of the day job”
- (ii) the Leader is the portfolio holder responsible for equality and diversity
- (iii) there is a growing understanding amongst Members that equality and diversity is not an additional burden on service delivery and that by striving to deliver services of excellence to the communities within Epping, equality and diversity becomes a consequence
- (iv) the (recently established) Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) chaired by the Asst Chief Executive is seen as a positive step and the members are looked upon as “equality champions”
- (v) the staff are committed to delivering services of excellence and to helping the most vulnerable within the community.
- (vi) there is a strong partnership ethos with a strong LSP delivering positive outcomes for the community.
- (vii) the Council also has taken the initiative in certain cross-cutting themes – it brought together partners in order to increase the level of attainment within the secondary schools within Epping.
- (viii) there is awareness by the Council and its partners of the future challenges facing Epping Forest and this helping shape the future vision which is outcome focussed.

- (ix) a strong performance lead culture with a robust performance management and monitoring system in place.

5.2 Development Areas

The Council may wish to consider the following as areas for development

- (i) enhance the current Member development programme to ensure a greater understanding of the cultural difference within the communities. The IDeA publication – Leadership Academy – Equalities Work-book may be a tool the Council could introduce.
- (ii) Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG)
- enhance the profile of the group and the individual members throughout the authority.
 - ensure that the group members are the **facilitators** of the equality and diversity agenda and are not the **doers** allowing service managers to opt out.
 - Consider inviting the Portfolio Holder (for equalities and diversity) to attend the meetings (say on a monthly basis) – this will assist in Member understanding of the issues being raised
 - review the terms of reference as the work of the group evolves as the Council progress on its equality and diversity journey.
- (iii) review the role of Scrutiny in regard to the implementation of the equality and diversity journey to ensure that positive outcomes are being achieved for communities and service users.
- (iv) enhance the partnership evaluation process to ensure that positive outcomes are being achieved for communities and service users.
- (v) enhance the profile both internally and externally of the member of staff with the Performance Management Team who is responsible for equality and diversity.
- (vi) consider a more prominent position on the Council's website for the Council's equality and diversity statement of intent.

6 Community Engagement and satisfaction

Characteristics

- key stakeholders and community members, including those who are vulnerable and marginalised are able to scrutinise and challenge performance on equalities issues

6.1 Strengths

- (i) the Council is developing its knowledge of the communities throughout the District.
- (ii) alignment between community engagement and service delivery is developing through the Council developing its knowledge and understanding of the communities it serves and this results in the Council engaging with the communities to be aware of local issues.
- (iii) there is evidence to support the Council is taking a strong and effective community leadership role
- (iv) community consultation is developing
- (v) there are examples of good practice of community engagement
 - youth
 - the establishment of the Epping Forest Youth Council
 - the Big Youth Debate and
 - Promoting Local Democracy youth conference initiatives
 - disability involvement and engagement group
 - housing initiatives
 - sheltered housing forum
 - rural housing forum
 - the varied work carried out by the Community Services and Customer Relations Section

6.2 Development Areas

The Council may wish to consider the following as areas for development

- (i) ensure that there is an understanding with the Council and within the communities of the difference between the Council's **Community Leadership** and the Council's **Community Engagement** roles.
- (ii) enhance, where appropriate, the involvement of the community in the EIA process.
- (iii) develop evaluating
 - the community consultation to ensure the message is getting through.
 - the community initiatives to ensure that they are delivering positive outcomes for the communities.
- (iv) enhance current data and intelligence gathering systems to ensure a growing knowledge of all communities both current and emerging that make up Epping Forest and this informs decision making and involve Members in this as they have "local knowledge"
- (v) ensure that the various consultation forums that are in use are
 - fit for purpose,
 - a true representation and
 - deliver positive outcomes and
 - there is feedback to the communities
- (vi) develop engagement across all strands.

7 Responsive services and customer care

Characteristics

- set appropriate corporate and service/unit objectives to address persistent inequalities and to narrow the gap related to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, or other areas of inequality for service delivery based on impact assessments and consultation with internal and external stakeholders and partners.
- use Equality Impact Assessments to review all major changes in policy and regularly conducts service Equality Impact Assessments.
- there are good practices of delivery in all the sections of the council with few adverse impacts found in impact assessments – where adverse impacts have been found these have been negated.
- equality objectives are integrated into the business and service planning processes.
- all relevant data on service access is monitored against the equality strands.

7.1 Strengths

- (i) alignment between service delivery and community engagement is developing through the Council developing its knowledge and understanding of its service users and this results in the Council engaging with the service users to be aware of local issues.
- (ii) the Council is aware of the challenges it faces in service delivery
 - changing needs of service users
 - ever increasing expectations of the service users
 - emerging new communities requiring different services
- (iii) staff enthusiastic, professional and committed to delivering services of excellence – there is a real sense of all wanting to do better.
- (iv) customer charter in place.
- (v) Interpretation services available

- (vi) Web site being developed to be accessible to everyone
- (vii) Council in partnership with “Public –I “delivering webcasts of its main public meetings
- (viii) there is a growing awareness that procurement is a major driver in improving equality and diversity practice. Equality and diversity is built into all stages of the procurement cycle, including defining the specification, prequalification, invitation to tender, contract conditions, award of contract, and monitoring. The Council is a member of the Essex Procurement Hub.
- (ix) Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) - there is an understanding of how the process informs decision making in service delivery.

7.2 Development Areas

The Council may wish to consider the following as areas for development

- (i) Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) – as the process becomes more integrated and the staff more confident in their use the Council may wish to
 - review process to ensure all data is used to inform EIA process
 - consultation – ensure that there is a consistency in use of data and intelligence coming from consultation and that this informs decision making.
 - ensure consistency of application across the organisation.
 - ensure Member understanding and support for process to make them aware of how the EIAs feed into service delivery planning.
- (ii) review the layout of the literature on display in the various public areas.
- (iii) introduce Braille signing throughout the building through a review of the Council’s DDA compliance and customer and staff access policies.
- (iv) enhance current information on website re Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) – e.g. EIAs completed; EIA future programme; who was consulted ;outcome

8 Modern and diverse workforce

Characteristics

- set appropriate corporate and service/unit employment and pay based objectives for race, gender, disability and age, religion and belief and sexual orientation.
- work to make Epping Forest District Council more representative of
 - the community it serves and
 - representative at all levels of the work profile

8.1 Strengths

- (i) staff enthusiastic, professional and committed to delivering services of excellence – there is a real sense of all wanting to do better.
- (ii) the Council gained liP re-accreditation (2008)
- (iii) job evaluation agreement in place.
- (iv) equal pay audit undertaken.
- (v) equality and diversity part of induction process
- (vi) equality and diversity training mandatory for all staff – “dealing with diversity course” – delivered by an external training provider.
- (vii) positive approach to flexible working .
- (viii) good examples of innovative approach to recruitment of under represented groups
 - Employ Ability project – people with learning disabilities
 - use of different media
- (ix) Equality Impact Assessments undertaken on HR policies.
- (x) involved with Essex HR Strategic Partnership initiative on succession planning to counter low turn-over and aging workforce.
- (xi) initiatives in place to make Council at all levels more representative work profile e.g.
 - Springboard Women’s Development Programme

8.2 Development Areas

The Council may wish to consider the following as areas for development

- (i) undertake a staff survey and preparation of action plan arising out of findings - it is advised that this should be done prior to the Council undertaking a Diversity Peer Challenge by the IDeA.
- (ii) collection of staff data across all strands and an explanation to staff on why this data is needed and will be used.
- (iii) continue to explore more initiatives to make the Council more representative of the communities it serves.
- (iv) take a pro-active approach to making the Council at all levels, but particularly at senior manager level more representative of the work profile.
- (v) review the equality and diversity information on the intranet with a view to making it more prominent and easier to navigate. Currently it is housed under performance management . A search under equality and diversity came up with “no results”

9. Next steps

The Council may wish to consider using the matrix contained within the equality framework to undertake a gap analysis along with an assessment of where the authority scores against the characteristics of an achieving authority.

Along with the Council's development plans and the areas for development highlighted above the gap analysis will help the authority prepare for being assessed as an **“achieving authority”** under the equality framework and assessed by an IDeA diversity peer challenge team.

When preparing the written self-assessment for submission prior to the diversity peer challenge, the Council may wish to consider the following:

- (i) enhance the current self-assessment document with examples of good practice and outcomes. For example it is suggested that the work done with “the youth” be a case study. Rather than just mentioning that there is a strategy in place – give an example of an outcome it has achieved or is programmed to achieve.
- (ii) the self-assessment document is the main information source for the peer team to learn about the achievements of Epping Forest District Council on its equality and diversity journey so it may be necessary to state the obvious along with what the Council sees as its future .

Epping Forest District Council Equality Framework for Local Government
Achieving assessment - Focus Groups

Positives	Could Improve	Barriers
Verbal/ written communication	Recognising when systems/procedures need changing	Stuck in our ways - not wishing to change
Open dialogue	Appreciation at manager level of staff efforts	Fear of what equality and diversity means and will it entail more work
Documents in different formats	Provision for blind and partially sighted around the building - no Braille signs	A lot of the data is old and out of date
Employing staff through "employability" to enable them to get back into a working environment	Sharing data and information internally	Capacity to drive real change
Open door policy	Mapping the district across all E&D strands	Tendency for managers and others to leave it up to the CEWG members rather than getting involved and adopt the right attitude themselves
Helping staff develop themselves	Understanding best how we can contact the minority groups within the community e.g. LGBT	Poor internal communication - mixed messages
Provision of visiting services	Data on who our customers are	Lack of corporate ambition
Try to accommodate special needs of customers	Need to listen to our communities more instead of telling them what we (the council) think they want	Lack of or poor data on some sections of community

Positives	Could I improve	Barriers
Time management	Consulting with our service users in a meaningful way	Lack of Member "buy-in." Attitude and understanding of (some) members
Provide help for refuse collection for disabled and infirm customers	Asking the service providers (the staff) about changes to service delivery	Engagement of staff in process
Getting better at collecting data	Better use of monitoring information	Getting message across in current culture
Development of trust and openness	Anticipating sensitivities both of communities/services users and staff	Not "mainstreamed"
Willingness to share issues and problems	Better use and understanding of translation services	Resources
Workforce development, variety of training opportunities	Intranet - difficult to navigate and find relevant information on E&D	Conflicting priorities
Supporting line managers in workforce issues	Web site - more prominent E&D message	Image of council to some of the minority groups (LGBT)
Knowing our local communities	Employment of people from ethnic minorities	
Better understanding of strengths and weaknesses across the council in respect of E&D	Internal communication networks need to be developed further	
Dissemination of data across the council	Sharing success across organisation	
Development of consultation groups	Celebrate when we have "made a difference" to vulnerable groups	

Positives	Could Improve	Barriers
Communication as a result of the CEWG group there is a greater awareness of E&D issues		
Joint working with partners to help vulnerable groups access services		
Delivering EIA training		
Using technology to help people access services		
Staff involvement		
Positive corporate approach		
Increased learning from EIA process		
Increased awareness of what E&D is		
Positive engagement		
Corporate Equality Working Group members seen as E&D champions within their service - increasing awareness		
Consultation with customers		
Accessibility to services e.g. disabled access at polling stations		
Grant aid schemes encouraging take up from minority groups		
Improved level of corporate support for E&D.		

Epping District Council
Equality Framework for Local Government
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