

London Borough of Sutton**Equality and Diversity Forum – 10 December 2008****Report of the Executive Head of Policy & Communications****IMPROVEMENT AGENCY'S DIVERSITY PEER CHALLENGE REPORT****Ward Location:** Not applicable**Authors and Contact Phone Number(s):**

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Area Served: Borough-wide**Lead Councillor:** Ruth Dombey**Summary**

In April this year the council self-assessed as having met the requirements of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. We prepared a detailed self-assessment evidencing our achievement. This self assessment along with other written evidence was submitted to the Improvement & Development Agency for local government (ID^eA) in August as part of the external verification process. In October the IDeA's assessment team spent two days carrying out interviews and running focus groups. The team has produced its draft report which confirms that the council has achieved level 3 of the standard. This means Sutton is one of only 15 councils nationally which has been externally accredited through the Diversity Peer Challenge process.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the positive achievements which the assessment team has identified and to consider how we take them forward as part of our continuing drive to embed equalities and diversity.

Recommendations

5.1 Equality and Diversity Forum is asked to note the actions being taken in response to the assessment::

a) The Policy & Partnerships Team is developing further our corporate approach to equality impact assessments to address the issues raised by the assessment team with regard to scope, consultation and publication and will bring forward a revised model to Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Equality and Diversity Forum in January/February 2009, respectively.

b) The Policy & Partnerships Team is including within its review of the council's community engagement strategy practical ways in which we can improve how we engage with 'hard to reach' groups and young people.

c) The Head of Transformation & Procurement is developing guidance on how equality can be used to bring about improvements in service quality and employment through procurement.

d) The Head of Transformation & Procurement is reviewing the inclusion of equalities in performance monitoring of contracts, particularly where temporary or agency workers are involved.

e) The Executive Head of Human Resources is identifying all HR policies of high possible equalities impact not yet assessed to ensure they are fully assessed by 31 March 2009.

f) the Policy & Partnerships Team is ensuring that the refresh of the Sutton Equality Scheme for 2009-12 picks up on all the other areas for improvement identified in the IDeA report.

g) the finalised IDeA report shall be circulated with the next Equality and Diversity Forum Bulletin.

1 Background

- 1.1 All councils self-assessing as having met the requirements of level 3 of the equality standard are subject to an external verification process. This is carried out by trained peers through the Improvement & Development Agency (IDEA) diversity peer challenge process.
- 1.2 As part of the accreditation process the council produced a level 3 self-assessment. This self-assessment, together with other written evidence, and the findings of the assessors during their on-site work provides the basis for judgement.
- 1.3 The ID^eA carried out their on-site assessment of our progress on the 13th and 14th of October. The assessors found that Sutton had achieved a strong Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Members of the Forum were informed of this at their meeting on the 15th of October. The Forum requested a more detailed account of the external assessment, which this report provides.

2. Strengths

- 2.1 It was clear from the feedback meeting with the peer assessors that they regarded Sutton as a strong 3, well on the way to achieving Level 4 of the current equality standard. The report states that there is a feel that equalities are integrated into everything the council does. It points to strong performance in the following areas:

- Excellent commitment of elected members, chief officers and staff;
- Equality Champions Group is leading change;
- Sutton Tracker ensures managers are directly accountable for the delivery of equality targets;
- Clear evidence from the community and staff of getting things done quickly;
- Effective stakeholder engagement e.g. successful Equality & Diversity Forum; work with people with dementia and with travellers;
- Strong shared vision – fairness theme giving added prominence, good website;
- Scrutiny monitoring performance through Tracker;
- Positive responses to customer feedback
- Strong partnership working
- Use of data collection and analysis in some service areas
- Positive relationship between Sutton Housing Partnership and the council;
- Equality targets established for the workforce
- Good progress on improving declared representation in the workforce
- Employment of people with learning disabilities;
- Equalities training;
- Strong progress in understanding requirements for monitoring sexual orientation;
- equal pay audit completed.

2.2 Taken together, this is an impressive list of achievements and is testimony to the significant progress the council has made in the past 18 months during which we have introduced a new single equality scheme embedded in the organisation's priorities; a new way of performance managing equalities; a new set of governance arrangements; strengthened our equality champions group and enhanced capacity by reframing roles within the Policy & Partnerships Team.

3. Areas for improvement

3.1 The report identifies a number of areas where we can improve. In this way the report provides a helpful analysis which we can use to ensure we are focusing on the right things as we continue to work towards the achievement of Level 4 of the equality standard.

Leadership and corporate commitment

3.2 The report suggests that we should:

- encourage councillors to attend our 'diversity matters' training sessions;
- consider giving greater prominence to promoting community cohesion in our corporate plans;

- ensure equality impact assessments have been completed on all potentially high impact areas by briefly reviewing the functions of each group;
- improve our impact assessments in line with best practice;

Consultation, community development and scrutiny

3.3 The report suggests that we should:

- seek to engage a wider range of people in community and consultation structures;
- diversify our forms of communication;
- seek to develop a greater role for backbench councillors in monitoring progress towards level 4;
- support greater external consultation on services as part of equality impact assessments e.g. through a panel of critical friends from key groups
- include a summary of key feedback and the responses/actions taken as an appendix to completed equality impact assessments and publish these on the council's web site.

Service delivery

3.4 The report suggests that we should:

- improve our use of data to target actions and encourage participation from those people who are most dis-engaged;
- improve participation of young people;
- share the results of consultation across the organisation;
- use equality to bring about improvements in service quality and employment through procurement.

Employment and training

3.5 The report suggests that we should:

- consider positive action training to improve the representation of BME and disabled staff in senior management;
- provide greater resources for Minority Ethnic Employees Association members and consider other staff groups (e.g. disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender);
- carry out equality impact assessments of all HR policies identified as of high possible equalities impact and not yet assessed (e.g. recruitment and selection policy)
- review the monitoring of equalities issues in contracts;

3. Next steps

3.1 The report provides us with a very helpful analysis of the areas that we now need to focus upon. Three recurrent themes stand out:

(i) equality impact assessments

We have arranged to follow up on this with Marc Adams (LB Richmond upon Thames) who was a member of the peer team and has specialist knowledge of equality impact assessments. Work on improving our approach will be a key focus for the Policy & Partnerships Team in the second half of this year. Linked to this there is a specific piece of work for the Executive Head of Human Resources to ensure that existing HR policies identified as of high possible equalities impact and not yet assessed are equality impact assessed by the end of March 2009.

(ii) stakeholder engagement

In taking forward our work on community engagement, and in keeping with the feedback we have received through the corporate assessment and the Joint Area Review, we need to do more to engage with 'hard to reach' groups and with young people.

(iii) procurement

Include within the Procurement Strategy as well as contractual compliance, an emphasis on using equality to bring about improvements to service quality.

4. Financial Implications

None at this stage although there are some implicit resource issues that need to be addressed in areas identified for improvement such as additional resources for MEEA or improved communications. These may be provided through existing staff resources or facilities but any additional costs will need to be contained within existing group budgets.]

Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment

Addressing the area for improvement identified by the peer assessment will enable the council to better assess the equality and diversity impacts of both existing and new policies.

Influence of the council's core values

One of the council's values is diversity. The progress that we make against the equality standard gives us a good indication of the extent to which we are putting this value into practice.