

# Diversity Peer Challenge

## High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

### Report



## 1. Background

This report is a summary of the findings of a Diversity Peer Challenge organised by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and carried out by its trained peers. The report satisfies the requirements of the Equality Standard for an external assessment at level 3. The Peer Challenge is designed to validate a council's own self-assessment at level 3 of the Equality Standard, by considering documentary evidence and by carrying out a series of interviews and focus groups with employees and other stakeholders.

The basis for the Peer Challenge is a benchmark which incorporates the set criteria of the Equality Standard at level 3. The benchmark focuses on four key areas: Leadership and Corporate Commitment; Community Engagement and Accountability; Service Delivery and Customer Care and Employment and Training.

The Peer Challenge is not an inspection; rather it offers an external assessment of a council's own judgement of itself against the Equality Standard benchmark, by critical friends who have experience of delivering an equality/diversity agenda in their own councils.

The diversity peer challenge took place on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

Peers were:

Councillor Laura Willoughby M.B.E	London Borough of Islington
Councillor Eunice Campbell	City of Nottingham Council
Julian Horsler	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Abid Hussain	Milton Keynes Council

The team appreciates the welcome and hospitality provided by the council and would like to thank everybody that they have met during the process for their time, enthusiasm and contributions.

### Overall conclusion

Following this Diversity Peer Challenge, we have reached the following conclusion:

**High Peak Borough Council & Staffordshire Moorlands District Council completed a satisfactory self-assessment against the criteria for level 3 of the Equality Standard.**

**High Peak Borough Council & Staffordshire Moorlands District Council are “achieving” under the Equality Framework for Local Government**

Strengths and areas for improvement as identified by peers are highlighted in paragraph 3.

## 3. Detailed findings –

### **3.1. Leadership and Corporate Commitment**

#### **3.1.1 Strengths:**

#### **3.1.2 Joint Strengths:**

- (i) The commitment of elected Members and Chief Officers and staff is excellent- strong leadership and commitment from elected members, the Chief Executive and senior management and a clear understanding of the importance of all six strands
- (ii) Designated portfolio holders with responsibility for Equality & Diversity in place
- (iii) Equalities champions are in place across both authorities
- (iv) There is a clear vision for the strategic alliance and an aim to embed equality and diversity at all levels
- (v) Clear vision through out both organizations – single message from staff at all levels and elected Members that both Councils are committed to equality and diversity in all that they do
- (vi) There is a strong partnership ethos across both authorities – respected for their contribution by statutory and community partners
- (vii) There is obvious learning from each other in areas of community engagement and equalities
- (viii) Robust performance monitoring in place
- (ix) There was evidence to show that the “golden thread” was in place linking Local Area Agreement (LAA) to corporate Plans to Service Business Plans to individuals’ objectives
- (x) There is a well respected and knowledgeable joint equality and diversity dedicated resource

#### **3.1.3 Strengths – High Peak**

- (i) High Peak has a good reputation for being the drivers for equality and diversity in the County
- (ii) The authority is well regarded by partners and the LSP
- (iii) Equality and diversity training is included in Member induction programme

#### **3.1.4 Strengths – Staffordshire Moorlands**

- (i) Equality and diversity training is included in Member induction programme
- (ii) Locality working is developing and providing valuable information for service and area improvements.

### **3.2 Consultation, Community Development and Scrutiny**

#### **3.2.1 Strengths:**

#### **3.2.2 Joint Strengths**

**The following strengths were in evidence in both authorities**

- (i) The alignment between **community engagement** and **service delivery** is seen as seamless
- (ii) There is a strong sense that the Councils know the communities they serve
- (iii) The Councils are aware of the future challenges facing the current and emerging communities
- (iv) There is a strong LSP commitment and the authorities well regarded by partners. Overall there is a strong partnership ethos

### **3.2.3 Strengths – High Peak:**

- (i) EIAs are leading to improved community engagement and targeting across all the equality strands.
- (ii) There are good examples of community engagement and the disability access groups are a good example.
- (iii) Joint working with Derby University on the experiences and needs of ethnic minority residents and workers is helping improve community knowledge.
- (iv) The hate crime panel encourages reporting.
- (v) The Sustainable Community Strategy has informed equality and diversity priorities and is based on needs
- (vi) Good examples of working with the communities -the Liberation day and inter- generational work have been successful.
- (vii) The authority is a member of the “empowering authorities” network
- (viii) The local CVS commissioned to consult with communities

### **3.2.4 Strengths – Staffordshire Moorlands**

- (i) Good support for community groups through funding and support
- (ii) Locality working brings together the Council and residents with a view to improving the quality of life
- (iii) There was positive proactive work done to mitigate possible issues with migrant workers at Alton Towers
- (iv) The authority has a 'can do' attitude and when approached by issues take up the challenge
- (v) Community groups are involved in challenge panels
- (vi) The authority seeks out and targets “hard to reach groups”
- (vii) The authority has established and supported an effective access group representing disabled people

## **3.3. Service Delivery and Customer Care**

### **3.3.1 Strengths:**

### **3.3.2 Joint Strengths**

**The following strengths were in evidence in both authorities**

- (i) The alignment between **service delivery** and **community engagement** seen as seamless
- (ii) Both Councils know their customers - There is good data collection leading to good knowledge about the customer base through the CRM system
- (iii) There have been genuine attempts to involve communities in determining service delivery
- (vi) There are strong procurement policies and customer care charters in place

**3.3.2 Strengths High Peak**

- (i) Customer services are held in high regard
- (ii) There is evidence that some EIA outcomes feed into service plans

**3.3.3 Strengths Staffordshire Moorlands**

- (i) The “One stop shops “ are high quality facilities (Leek) and good example of delivering local needs based services jointly with partners and are highly regarded by customers and partners

**3.4 Employment and Training**

**3.4.1 Joint strengths:**

- (i) There is a good workforce strategy and single status agreements in place
- (ii) The equal pay review has been undertaken
- (iii) High Quality and engaging Equality and diversity training happens for all staff and refreshed on a regular basis.
- (iv) Staff equalities groups are in place
- (v) Staff are professional, enthusiastic and committed
- (vi) There is a good working relationship with trade unions who sit on the equality panel
- (vii) Staff data is monitored across six strands
- (viii) There is a joint equality and diversity guide
- (ix) The staff survey has a clear action plan and the development of the stress management framework shows action happens.
- (x) The authorities have an innovative and proactive approach to recruitment –placing adverts in mosques, synagogues and temples

**4. Key issues to progress toward excellence under the equality framework for local government**

## **4.1 Knowing your communities and community mapping**

### **4.1.1 Data Collection**

- (i) Review the process for collection of data regarding communities; service users and staff (across all 6 strands)
- (ii) Share more data and intelligence with LSP and other stakeholders – and develop a two-way process
- (iii) Make best use of CRM data and analyse all data and intelligence to inform community engagement; service delivery; staff engagement

## **4.2 Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment**

### **4.2.1 Single Equality Scheme**

- (i) Consider a move towards a single equality scheme to cover both authorities
- (ii) Ensure equality scheme(s) are outcome focussed – what will be different?
- (iii) Ensure LSP engagement & sign up to single equality scheme(s).

### **4.2.2 Performance Management**

- (i) Ensure that corporate plan(s) include clear equality priorities and objectives and these run from corporate, to service and individual plans.
- (ii) Ensure that there is a process in place so that it is clear where performance on equalities (both implementation and outcomes) is monitored, reported and actioned

### **4.2.2 Equalities Champions Group**

- (i) Introduce terms of reference for group – this will give them a clearer understanding of their role when meeting together and how they can get things done within the organisation.
- (ii) Introduce a work programme for the group so success can be measured.
- (iii) Ensure that it becomes a self-sustaining vehicle to drive forward equality and diversity

### **4.2.3 Equality Impact Assessments**

- (i) Review internal processes and ensure focus on outcomes, governance and quality assurance
- (ii) The two authorities should consider common approach when bringing services and processes together.
- (iii) More work needs to be done to embed EIA's/INAs into all departments as a positive part of all work.
- (iv) Explore the use of the “change team” to drive EIAs/INAs as part of the business improvement/

transformation process

- (v) Raise awareness with Members and staff of how EIAs/INAs fit in to the business planning process
- (vi) Involve communities; service users and front line staff earlier in EIA/INA process
- (vii) Produce a scheduled and prioritised programme of EIAs/INAs, include HR policies and EIA/INA all services when being outsourced.

### **4.3 Community engagement and satisfaction**

#### **4.3.1 Communication**

- (i) There is a lack of clarity about the lead responsible officer in both authorities
- (ii) The equality / cohesion lead officer needs to be involved in community tension monitoring
- (iii) The cohesion approach/ strategy needs implementing to strengthen and coordinate good practice examples and promote proactive partnership working.
- (iv) Market equality and diversity in external communications.

#### **4.3.2 Equality Impact Assessments**

- (i) Involve communities and front line staff earlier in EIA/INA process

#### **4.3.3 Community Cohesion**

- (v) There is a lack of clarity about the lead responsible officer in both authorities
- (vi) The equality / cohesion lead officer needs to be involved in community tension monitoring
- (vii) The cohesion approach/ strategy needs implementing to strengthen and coordinate good practice examples and promote proactive partnership working.
- (viii) There is a lack of evidence in cohesion interventions based on tensions monitoring
- (ix) There needs to be a more explicit commitment to and action on hate crime (Parins) network
- (x) Refresh the Social Inclusion Strategy taking into account the economic situation changing the profile of those in need, use of Procurement, Leisure, digital inclusion initiatives to tackle exclusion.

### **4.4 Responsive services and customer care**

#### **4.4.1 Communication**

- (i) Review processes regarding consultation with service users to ensure you are reaching the hard-to-reach
- (ii) Ensure a consistent approach to feedback to service users.
- (iii) Celebrate successes

#### **4.4.2 Customer Services**

- (i) Continue to develop the excellent customer services/one stop shop across both authorities

#### **4.4.3 Equality Impact Assessments**

- (i) Involve service users and front line staff earlier in EIA/INA process

#### **4.5 A modern and diverse workforce**

- (i) Ensure capacity and resources in place to deliver agenda
- (ii) Consider establishing staff groups e.g. LGBT and consider new group around gender
- (iii) Introduce procedures to make both authorities at all levels more representative of the communities and the staff profile
- (iv) Look at proactive development tools to support women management development and BME management development
- (v) Ensure positive culture currently in both authorities continues through change process.
- (vi) Develop current recruitment practices to make both authorities employers of first choice.