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# Case study summaries

## Case study one

### Site record

The borough council includes both urban and rural areas. The population is 191,151, of whom less than 5 per cent are from black and ethnic minority communities. The borough houses 1,000 asylum seekers. The area is among the 50 most deprived local authority area in England, and there is a legacy of poor health. The comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) judged the council as excellent in the way it provides services for local people.

### What we did

OPM interviewed the chief executive, the leader of the council, representatives from the Jewish Community Council, the community liaison and development officers for community-based services, the strategic director of human resources and the head of corporate purchasing. We also met with the assistant chief executive, and throughout the visit we were in regular contact with the council's diversity officer.

### General approach

Throughout the visit, we were made aware of how much the council had changed over the last five to ten years in its approach to equality and diversity. At the corporate level, significant efforts have been made to initiate and maintain a 'culture shift' throughout the organisation, in order to bring equalities and diversity into the mainstream and make it a fundamental part of the council's work.

From the start, the council has aimed to make the equalities agenda as wide-ranging as possible – not to focus on one area to the detriment of others. However, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2002 means that race is currently placed higher on the agenda than other aspects of equality and diversity.

The impetus for equality and diversity work has been generated by changes at the corporate level, ie from the chief executive's office downwards, and by national legislative developments. The Council's Strategy Group has overarching strategic control for a number of different equalities roles/bodies with differing responsibilities. At the moment, the focus is on raising awareness of the issues – which is something that has never before been done in a systematic way.

### Legislation and policies

The council includes equality and diversity in its written policies on recruitment and selection, training and development, flexible working, bullying and harassment, service procurement, service delivery and the community plan. It also has a Race Equality Scheme up and running.

An equal opportunities policy was agreed and published during 2001-02. The policy covers gender, marital status, employment status, race, colour, religion and ethnicity, age, disability and sexual orientation. It makes clear that 'everyone has a responsibility for equal opportunities', and goes on to state that equal opportunities is not about 'treating everybody the same' but about treating people 'as you would want to be treated and others as they want to be treated'.

An important feature of the council's work on equality and diversity is the corporate purchasing equal opportunities policy. Contractors are obliged to demonstrate that their

employment practices and service delivery comply with equal opportunities legislation, codes of practice and recommendations.

The corporate purchasing equal opportunity policy statement recognises 'that the pursuit of equality of opportunity is essential for a productive and professional business environment'. In particular, there is a commitment to ensuring that contractors:

- (a) Aim for equality of opportunity in terms of access to their services, and that the provision of services reflects, and is appropriate to, the needs of the diverse communities within the population;
- (b) Give prospective and present employees equal and fair treatment in relation to recruitment, selection, terms and conditions of employment, training and promotion.

Mechanisms to consult with the public and monitor the effectiveness of equality and diversity policies and practices include:

- annual employee surveys ('personal detail audits')
- user surveys
- best value reviews
- complaints and grievances from staff and users
- a record of accreditation for recruitment and selection.

However, some of the people we spoke to felt that the mechanisms are not as strong as they could be and that there are significant gaps in some areas, especially around sexual orientation.

## **Structures and processes**

There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity within the council and the chief executive's office appears to drive the equalities agenda. Its work is supported by an *equalities group* made up of officers from all the different service areas, and there is an *equalities champion*, who is the group director of community-based services. The *human resources* department also plays a key role in this area.

## **Staff issues**

The council currently has a workforce of 11,000 people. It monitors its internal workforce and applicants for employment by ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. However, staff we spoke to pointed out that the council needs to improve the way it uses the information it gathers to improve practices.

The council has a flexible working policy and aims to promote family friendly policies among staff and managers, and to make sure that members of staff are able to take advantage of these. The council received £50,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry to change work-life practices, including allowing career breaks, home working, flexible hours, job share, and carers leave.

There is also a 'disability support procedure' for disabled employees, which includes help with aids and adaptations such as specialist chairs, desks and computer equipment, and ramps, lifts and other ways of improving access to buildings. It also covers redeployment to other areas of work, reduced hours and rehabilitation into work after a long spell of absence due to disability.

The general perception among staff seemed to be that the understanding of equalities issues at the corporate level is quite good, but that such understanding only exists (consistently) at the higher levels of the organisation. To help raise general awareness and understanding, all staff receive a handbook describing the council's key policies, including those relating to equalities and diversity; the council also provides employee briefings, learning and development programmes and a weekly newsletter. However, by far the biggest initiative the council is undertaking in relation to diversity is the imminent 'diversity training initiative'; training will be provided to all staff over the course of two years.

Making the workforce more representative and recruiting and promoting under-represented groups has been made a priority for the council. Six hundred managers have participated in workshops on different interviewing techniques for candidates from diverse backgrounds, and job advertisements are being targeted to specific black and ethnic minority communities through local publications. The council is also considering re-establishing a black working group as a launching pad for other groups representing the interests of different communities, such as gay and lesbian people or women. The council leader also recognised that more had to be done to increase opportunities for promotion.

Most complaints are addressed through the normal complaints procedure, although a racial incident policy has recently been put in place. The council takes all complaints and grievances very seriously, although a view was expressed that procedures are not sufficiently sensitive to diversity issues. The council also has a bullying and harassment policy and a code of conduct, which is available to all staff and members.

The 'racial incident policy' is translated into ten different languages. It supports the council's equal opportunities policy by outlining the procedure for dealing with racial harassment or racist incidents against service users. It also explains what employees can do if they are subjected to racial harassment or racist incidents. A racist incident officer will reinforce the existing reporting system and make sure that the number of racist incidents is accurately monitored.

### **Service delivery and community participation**

The CPA judged the council 'excellent' in the way it provides services for local people, and there is a very high level of satisfaction with the council in the community. The council is perceived as having good intentions in terms of service delivery, and of wanting to deliver an equal service to all people. It is recognised that the council has undergone significant change over the last five to ten years, and everyone sees this as a positive development. New council offices were built relatively recently; these are more accessible to the general public, with a large foyer area, a set of PCs with Internet access, and a canteen that is open to the public from 1.00pm onwards. The council has made a real effort to change its approach to communicating with communities; it is ending imposed services and beginning to set up jointly owned strategies for planning and service provision. The assistant chief executive was keen to stress that community representatives have regular access to the chief executive's office. However, the council also realises that consultation and engagement with hard-to-reach groups requires further development.

### **Assessing community needs**

The black and ethnic minority population has historically been relatively small, and the council leader suggested that it will take a while for the council to understand the needs of these diverse populations properly, and that many individuals currently lack access to services specific to their needs. He pointed out that the biggest barrier to understanding and meeting the needs of different groups was a lack of funding/resources. For example, it costs

a lot of money to turn access for disabled people into a reality. A number of members also pointed out that the council has found it difficult to reconcile conflicting views both *within* and *between* ethnic communities. For instance, the Muslim Society has not wanted the council to talk to other groups representing Muslims, which has caused some local friction. There was a general perception that, while the council's approach to equality and diversity has been holistic, gender, sexual orientation and age have not been tackled as thoroughly as race and ethnicity.

One of the council's major problems has been the 'unannounced and unplanned' arrival of asylum seekers in the area, due to the national dispersal system. Asylum seekers have great difficulties accessing social care and health services, and the chief executive acknowledged that their arrival has been a real challenge to local services.

However, the council is aware of these problems, and is actively trying to address them and has created plans and strategies. For instance, the leader was keen to stress that members and officers 'go out into the community a lot more' – with road shows, for example – and that this has improved local service provision.

The Jewish Community Council representative described how there had been a 'transformation' in its relationship with the council over the last seven years, through a number of consultative mechanisms and regeneration initiatives linked to the Single Regeneration Budget. His perception was that the council has been extremely sensitive to differing cultural needs, and has almost been a victim of its own success, with expectations now raised to very high levels. However, he admitted that this was probably partly because this particular community is very well organised and almost self-sufficient. He suggested that the council finds it more difficult to provide for less cohesive communities.

The council will shortly be launching an action plan – *community-based services: race equality audit of children's services*. To make sure that there is constant improvement within the service, a monitoring group has been formed from operational staff, development officers, service users and carers. A service manager from the children and families service will chair the group. This group will meet quarterly to receive reports on the progress of the action plan, and will have the authority to make recommendations on ways to progress race equality within the children and families service. After each quarterly monitoring meeting, progress reports and recommendations will be presented to the children and families management meeting. The action plan lists a number of specific *actions* and *tasks*, including:

- Develop an information pack for asylum seeker families that covers services available to children and families and information on living in the area
- Strengthen access to interpreters
- Capacity build within the black and ethnic minority communities to encourage voluntary services to develop and family support groups based on ethnicity and language
- Develop a multi-agency forum to examine issues of racism and harassment for young people in the area
- Seek to recruit and retain more BME staff, particularly staff with community language skills and cultural knowledge
- Develop a forum of black young people.

The council is currently driving forward its neighbourhood management work to promote community partnerships and increase community participation. There is good recognition within the council of the challenges of encouraging participation from not just the 'same old

faces' but from *all* sections of the community; however, there is no strategic plan to turn these challenges into opportunities. A number of members were aware of being hindered by not knowing what other councils are doing in this area or hearing about examples of good practice.

In terms of communicating with diverse groups, the council has established a diversity forum, which is open to any black and ethnic minority community group and individuals who are working to benefit the lives of local black and ethnic minority people.

## **Political leadership and representation**

The Labour party is firmly in control, holding the majority of seats in the council. The cabinet system supports collective decision making, and there are always at least two people involved in each portfolio. The system seems to be popular and the CPA reported that it works well.

There are concerns that the British National Party will put up candidates in the next election. Asylum seekers are an issue in the area, and the leader suggested that, while previously the council had thought it best to play down the asylum issue in order to avoid raising tensions, it may now be time to engage with it; this will allow the council to disseminate clear information to counter the presuppositions of the local community, which the far right parties are using to their advantage.

Councillors recognise that they are not demographically representative. The majority of members are white, middle-aged, able-bodied men (there are no representatives from the black and ethnic minority community). Most do, however, live in the wards they represent, and the chief executive felt that links into communities are good. Councillors may connect with their communities via surgeries and through links with parishes, community groups and the race equality council. New councillors will receive new member training, which will include equalities issues.

Representatives from one ethnic community organisation did not perceive representation as crucial. So long as elected members were sympathetic, and local services were able to meet the culturally diverse needs of various communities, they almost considered it more advantageous for such communities to retain influence from outside the council, rather than being represented by 'one particular voice'. They described access to councillors, through both formal and informal routes, as good. This may not, however, reflect the views of all ethnic communities.

## **Overall impressions**

The council should be congratulated for the serious way in which it has tackled issues of equality and diversity, and for its willingness to change previously held assumptions and make changes throughout the organisation, in terms of representation, structures and service procurement. The council's good intentions in terms of equality and diversity are recognised both by staff and by the community. The main challenge is making sure that these intentions are put into practice, and that initiatives have a real impact. There are some very positive policies and procedures in place, for example the corporate purchasing equal opportunities statement. The council could be more prepared to reward and celebrate such achievements, because there sometimes appeared to be a lack of awareness within the council about what policies and procedures exist.

A number of policies and procedures are on the verge of being rolled out across the organisation – for example the community based services race equality audit of children's services and the diversity training initiative – which are likely to have a huge impact, both within the council and in the community.

Recruitment and promotion of a diverse workforce is important. The council will need to undertake more outreach into diverse communities in its recruitment, for example hosting job fairs; this is, to an extent, already under way. Nearly every member of the council was aware of the need to have a more representative workforce, and the strategic director of human resources felt very strongly about this.

One criticism of the council is that the procedures for monitoring progress in equality and diversity are not strong enough. It appears that members and officers embarked on this huge culture change without deciding what they wanted the council to look like at the end; thus there is currently no baseline standard against which to measure change.

## **Case study two**

### **Site record**

The county council is situated in the North West of England and covers a large population. The county covers 12 districts and an area of 290,000 hectares, including urban, rural and coastal areas. 2001 census figures show that black and ethnic minority communities make up between 5 and 10 per cent of the population. The proportion varies greatly across the county, from 1 per cent in some areas to over 15 per cent in others. The council comprises 78 councillors and is controlled by the Labour party. In the recent comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) report, the council was measured as 'good' in the way that it serves local people.

### **General approach**

The council has identified equality and diversity as a major area for improvement and service development. Among all those we interviewed, there was a strong view that most senior managers and elected members in the council were very committed to the equality and diversity agenda and were willing to be held to account for improvements in this area.

Over the past years, the council has established a number of structures, processes, policies and initiatives to promote equality and diversity, both internally and to the communities it serves. A new working group has recently been set up to review and co-ordinate council policies and practices in this area. The deputy leader heads the group, which comprises a number of senior officers and councillors.

A number of the people we spoke to highlighted the importance of modernisation in driving improvements in the way equality and diversity are handled. According to the deputy leader and the chief executive, the switch from traditional committees to the cabinet model, with overview and scrutiny committees, has helped to focus minds and actions on the equalities agenda. Instead of policies becoming bogged down in slow committee structures, the new system has allowed the council to put equality and diversity policies in place quickly and effectively.

Another positive aspect of the new arrangements is the focus on partnership working. In order to strengthen links with district councils and local communities, the council has appointed partnership officers in each of the district councils, whose job is to articulate the corporate agenda of the council locally and to make stronger ties with local communities. Although there was concern that these officers may become overburdened, there is a view that they have helped strengthen the equalities and diversity agenda locally, build up the focus on equalities within local strategic partnerships, and develop closer links with communities.

The council has tried to integrate the focus on diversity into its mainstream corporate structure and strategic objectives. The council's community plan – the overarching strategic document for the council – contains a strong message about equalities, including a number of specific objectives. However there is a realisation that the council still has a long way to go if equalities is to become fully embedded into the behaviours and practices of the council. Realising the enormity of the task facing the council, the working group has concentrated on a smaller number of diversity issues – race and domestic violence – to begin with, before it attempts to deal with wider issues of sexual orientation, religion and age.

## Legislation and policies

The main driver in relation to equality and diversity is the council's race equality scheme, which sets out the authority's arrangements for meeting its general and specific duties under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2002. The scheme focuses on the following:

- Action plans: the scheme details the county council's action plans for service delivery and employment and staff development
- Information: to enable staff, service users, elected members, community groups, partner agencies and local agencies to have a better understanding of the authority's approach and commitments
- Service improvement: to help directorates and services to highlight the importance of race equality and other initiatives
- Accountability: to help all interested parties to assess and scrutinise the effectiveness of the authority's approach
- Inspection: to enable a wide range of inspection bodies to assess whether the council is meeting its duties.

The council regards itself as a leading proponent of widening access for disabled people. To meet the legislative requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, it has developed a number of policy documents and strategies to improve services for disabled people, both internally and externally. One of the main developments in this area was the production of a report outlining policies and guidance for employing disabled people. This sets out new approaches to the recruitment of disabled people, improved complaints procedures, better accommodation and facilities, and better protocols for the treatment of disabled people at work. In 2000 the council developed an *Accessible Information Guide* for disabled and older people, which provided information on a whole range of developments, including the creation of better documents for the visually impaired, improved document design, audio tapes for those who request them, improved websites and telephone communication and better training to support this work.

Within specific departments, new policies have been implemented to meet the needs of both employees and service users. The social services department, for example, has developed its own strategy that intends to deliver culturally appropriate care to service users, as well as a wider commissioning strategy for minority ethnic groups. As part of its commitment to raising achievement for ethnic minority pupils, the education department has developed several strategic and policy documents about how it will target assistance onto under-achieving groups.

The council has helped to set up a network for women and minority ethnic communities. The purpose of the group is 'to facilitate, encourage and support work with and for women from minority ethnic communities in the area to enable them to identify, access and participate in economic and social opportunities'. It aims to do this by:

- sharing good practice in order to facilitate improvements in services for women
- offering advice and consultancy to employers and service providers
- developing partnerships with organisations, in order to promote a more coherent approach by these agencies to addressing the needs of ethnic minority women
- seeking funding to achieve these objectives

- providing training opportunities to improve social and professional development.

## **Structures and processes**

Like many local authorities, the council is currently moving through a process of rapid structural change to reflect the demands imposed by the modernisation agenda. Over the past few years, the council has switched from a traditional committee-based system of political management to a leader and cabinet model, with the cabinet held to account through various overview and scrutiny committees. At the moment, the cabinet has eight portfolios; however, there are plans to combine education and the children's function of social services to create a children's services portfolio.

Senior political leaders have clear functions in relation to equalities; the deputy leader has overall responsibility for equality and diversity, while other cabinet members lead on particular issues within this. The working group supports the equalities agenda and co-ordinates activities. A number of senior officers take the lead on equalities in each of the four directorates. These officers develop individual action plans for each department, monitor progress and report on issues to the main working group. This new structure has made equality and diversity into a higher priority. As one person we spoke to said, "because we have senior managers and politicians driving this agenda, and sitting on the key decision-making bodies, it feels like the subject has been given real clout."

## **Staff issues**

In order to make the council more representative of the community it serves, the council has worked hard to increase the diversity of its staff. Aware that the council as an employer 'does not appear attractive to some groups', it has started to actively promote the council in under-represented communities, such as the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Work is carried out with voluntary sector groups, faith and community groups and in schools to build the reputation of the council as a good employer; one that not only responds to their differing needs, but that can offer a range of benefits including good pay, professional status and flexible working conditions. As part of its goal of increasing recruitment and retention rates amongst diverse employee groups, the council has established systems to monitor and track data on recruitment, progression and leaving on the basis of ethnicity, gender, age and disabilities. This data, supplemented by the regular staff surveys, is then used to inform the development of staff policies and ways to support future recruitment and retention.

Reflecting its duties under the disability legislation, the council has started to convert most of the council buildings to make them accessible to disabled people. To reflect the differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds of staff, the council is implementing a new code of conduct to make working practices in the authority more responsive to diverse needs. This has led to new policies on employee's dietary requirements, religious practices, and uniforms at work. To make sure that the workplace meets the needs of those with disabilities, efforts have been made to improve communication and information technology for those with sensory difficulties. There is also recognition that in order to attract diverse groups, the council is going to have to become more modern and flexible in the way it operates, reflecting changes taking place in the private sector. For example, a new cyber café is being developed to give people the opportunity to access the Internet in their own time.

After learning about the growing concerns of some black staff about the lack of progression, the council has set up a forum of Asian and black employees. The purpose of the group, which has about 50 members but is growing fast, is to provide an opportunity for black staff to meet and discuss issues of concern, share examples of good practice and provide mutual support.

There was a view that the council is on the right track in raising awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues across staff groups. Several of those we spoke to highlighted the importance of the new staff development programme, *Shape Your Future*, which is aimed at developing staff skills in a number of competencies. This programme was particularly influential because it has made *equality* one of the core competencies under which staff are trained and appraised. For the most part, staff have welcomed this additional investment in training; however, one interviewee felt that “awareness raising is not the same as changing behaviour”, and that changing behaviour will require long-term and sustained effort.

The council also has a well-established member development programme. Led by a full-time officer, member development provides a full range of training programmes to all elected members, including training in equality and diversity.

## **Service delivery and community participation**

All of our interviewees emphasised the importance of the council’s strategies to involve the public, and in particular diverse communities. Aware that, historically, its level of engagement with some communities has been inadequate, the council has proactively tried to engage diverse groups. The main mechanisms through which this engagement takes place are: the community panel, which is representative of the local community; focus groups and interviews targeted at hard-to-reach groups; representative surveys; and road shows that tour the county.

The council has a strong reputation for community consultation. It has set up a number of question and answer events, which travel around the county and give people the opportunity to question the council about local services. Each road show is designed to be like a BBC *Question Time* session, with questions fielded by members of the council cabinet. Each event is advertised in advance through a number of routes, including local radio, and is compered by a professional journalist. In order to ensure that the audiences are representative, the council deliberately targets recruitment towards under-represented groups, such as black and ethnic minority communities and young people. Each event also gives people the opportunity to ask officers from the major departments detailed questions about service quality, and after each event a short report is written up and handed to the cabinet for discussion.

This range of consultative approaches reflects the council’s belief that different groups of people like to be consulted in different ways; for example, some groups like to be contacted through a survey while others – including some ethnic minority groups – prefer one-to-one contact. The council’s policy is about ‘creating many different avenues’ to involvement.

The council is aware that there is a difference between consultation and actually turning people’s views into strategies for change. Those we interviewed, while confident they were on the right track on consulting diverse communities, admitted that it is proving much harder to meet community concerns with appropriate responses from the council. This was seen as the key challenge for the future.

When we asked about the level of feedback that the community receives about consultations, the council informed us that they provide a regular newsletter that says, ‘You said you wanted this, and we have done this.’ However, a number of the community representatives we spoke to felt that more could be done to follow up on consultation and provide better feedback.

Concerned about variations in the attainment of different ethnic groups, the local education authority (LEA) has been developing systems for a number of years to track attainment on the basis of ethnic group and highlight groups that need additional support. The data, which

provides breakdowns of the performance of every ethnic group in primary and secondary schools, can enable the council to highlight problems at school and LEA level, identify which specific ethnic groups are falling behind and track at which points in their education particular groups do not perform as well as the overall average. This data is actively used by the LEA to target resources and additional help to schools, to 'close the gap' between the attainment of ethnic groups.

## **Political leadership and representation**

People we spoke to, both in the council and in the community, were generally positive about the council's activities around equality and diversity. Some interviewees felt that the politicians, particularly in the cabinet, are serious about taking forward the equality and diversity agenda, and willing to devote a significant amount of their time to these issues. One voluntary sector leader said that, "I organised an event looking at equalities, and there were a number of councillors, including the leader, in attendance. I think it gave everyone a boost." Much of the impetus for taking forward equality and diversity issues appears to come from the deputy leader of the council, who sits on the equalities and diversity working group and leads on domestic violence and equalities. However, it also appears that a number of other members, including some in the cabinet and on overview and scrutiny committees, are deeply involved in equalities, and spend a considerable amount of time addressing groups and meetings about diversity issues.

The area that caused most concern was political representation. The council has only two black and ethnic minority councillors. While this is accepted to be generally a matter for the political groups rather than the County Council, a considerable effort had been made to attract more non-white councillors. While the general desire for more elected members from the ethnic minority communities is widely accepted among members, they also note that such Members would need to represent the whole of their constituency, and not just their own ethnic community. This seems not to be fully understood in some groups and has sometimes resulted in unfair challenges to the elected Member as not delivering sufficient improvements to their "own" community. Members suggested that a wider involvement of black and ethnic minority individuals generally in local politics, whether or not at elected level, backed up by civic education programmes, in schools and elsewhere, might help to address this problem.

It was also noted that potential politicians from black and ethnic minority communities, many of whom are self employed, are reluctant to give up substantial amounts of their time to council work, especially now many of the meetings take place during the day. This was also cited as a barrier to involvement for those who are young or female.

One person we spoke to was keen to stress, however, that political representation was not the same as true representation. He argued that, "it is naive to believe that just by having more black councillors, we are better represented; it is more complex than that. There needs to be higher levels of representation through out the public sector agencies."



## Case study three

### Site record

In the London borough we visited, between 25 and 30 per cent of the population are from ethnic minority communities, and around 125 languages are spoken in the borough's schools. It is a high-performing council, which received an 'excellent' rating in its comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). It has a good reputation for addressing issues around equality and diversity. The council operates a modernised political structure based on a leader, a single-party executive and a scrutiny system.

### General approach

The majority of senior officers and members that we spoke to appeared to have a clear idea of what the council is trying to achieve. Equality and diversity are an integral part of the council's commitment to social inclusion and reducing inequalities. These priorities are outlined in its community strategy, its Diversity Statement and its social inclusion strategy, which appears to be understood and owned by the majority of managers, members and partner agencies.

### Legislation and policies

The council has a number of units and departments that keep up to date with all current legislation and assess its implications for the organisation (in particular, the equalities unit, the borough solicitors office and the personnel department).

Most of the council staff we spoke to were aware of the council's range of policies and procedures in relation to equality and diversity. Nobody questioned the intent and goodwill behind these policies, although a view was expressed that there can, at times, be problems translating these policies into practice – especially among more junior staff. At present there are no specific performance measures on equality and diversity, although efforts are being made to incorporate equality and diversity into the new performance management framework, which will provide a basis for assessing managers' performance in relation to twelve core competencies.

The council seeks to 'provide a forum to celebrate diversity and embrace "difference" across race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age.' The council has a *Diversity Policy Statement*.

The council aims to develop, promote and deliver its services, information and employment opportunities without discriminating on the basis of a person's race, disability, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation or any other aspect of an individual's background or heritage which is used as justification for unfair treatment. It will regularly monitor and review the impact of services and procedures on the borough's different communities and make changes to help meet this aim. The council is committed actively to shaping its services based on the varied needs, expectations, and experiences of all its communities and to provide services that are relevant, appropriate, and responsive to individuals. It undertakes to ensure that its contractors and others who deliver its services share and implement this vision and these values. The council will manage its work force in a way that gets the best from their diversity, valuing their experience as individuals and integrating fairness and equity into every aspect of its employment practices. It will do this by recruiting, developing and retaining the most talented people and valuing their varied skills and experiences. The council will develop more imaginative and open ways of recruiting and retaining a diverse work force. As well as a service provider and employer, it has an important leadership role in influencing others, promoting and encouraging fairness and equality and contributing to a more just and compassionate society. The council will work with all its citizens, partners,

businesses, voluntary and community groups to develop a shared understanding and commitment to this objective.

In 2002 the council published its race equality scheme in compliance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. In developing this scheme, the council undertook a detailed gap analysis of where it is at and what its key priorities should be for the future. Some departments consulted with diverse communities to inform the analysis and production of the scheme. Many people felt that the race equality scheme had given the organisation a good opportunity to identify current weaknesses and the improvements required. For example, as a result of the process the council is now reassessing the way it funds voluntary sector organisations, hoping to bring in new guidelines to support voluntary organisations whose initiatives and services fit with the council's priorities, including equality and diversity.

The council also has a commitment to work-life balance and has implemented a successful flexible working policy. It is at the discretion of managers, but those employees who choose to sometimes work from home are generally supported in doing so.

### **Structures and processes**

The borough has a separate equalities unit, which was established in 1992. The unit has responsibility for driving forward and supporting the development and implementation of the council's equality and diversity policies and practices. As part of this, the unit provides training and delivers research reports on particular minority ethnic communities. Officers also work on special projects that celebrate diversity, such as black history month.

A Best Value review is currently being undertaken on Policy across the Council. This may have implications for the way equalities is delivered in the future. Change is also taking place as part of current budget reduction, which may see the equalities function merged with other policy functions, although decisions have not been made on future structures.

It was evident that there are mixed feelings among staff, members and the community about the appropriateness of this. The community and some staff fear that the equality and diversity agenda will be marginalised. Although there is agreement that equality and diversity should be mainstreamed, there is doubt about whether this can be achieved without a specific unit to support it. Members are divided about this proposal and have asked for an investigation into alternative models to help them to decide on the best course of action.

Resources exist within the council's corporate personnel service, to consider, manage and implement equality and diversity issues that apply to employment. In addition to the equalities unit, the council has a corporate management team equalities sub-group, made up of directors and assistant directors from each of the departments in the council. Its aim is to act as a strategic 'think tank' on equalities and diversity issues, to provide an overall strategic framework for the council in taking forward the equalities agenda; to provide leadership on equalities issues; and to promote this agenda actively both within and outside the council. There is also an officers' group, working at a much more operational level.

To support race and community cohesion and maintain an overview of existing initiatives and strategies dealing with racial and religiously motivated harassment, a race and community cohesion forum has been set up. It is made up of officers from different departments within the council, community and voluntary sector representatives and police representatives. The council also has a specific member with responsibility for regeneration, social inclusion and equalities.

The council has systems for collecting a range of data relevant to the promotion of equality and diversity. It holds full records on its workforce and councillors in relation to ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. It also holds some records on the local population in terms of ethnic origin, gender, disability, age and religion. Some people felt that asking people about their first language was more appropriate and useful than asking about ethnicity. The equalities agenda is subject to scrutiny by members. However, while there are good monitoring systems in place, some officers are concerned that the council does not always make the best use of the data.

## **Staff Issues**

Just under one-third of the council's employees are from black and minority ethnic groups. While senior staff told us that they feel the council has a reasonable reputation for employing a diverse workforce, there are issues about the diversity of staff at a senior level. However, recent Best Value Performance Indicators showed that the council's female representation at senior levels is very good, at around 52 per cent.

Attempts are being made to introduce new recruitment guidelines, which are less rigid and will provide managers with more creativity, flexibility and responsibility in attracting and retaining diverse, high performance teams. This will also take into consideration the language used in job advertisements and how and where posts are advertised. The council is also looking at ways to improve its recruitment and retention monitoring, and to help under represented staff groups to move up through the ranks.

The corporate personnel department produces a six-monthly Valuing Diversity in Employment report, which considers trends as applied to BME staff against specific areas, including the number of grievances and disciplinary action taken. The council has a relatively low rate of complaints, with only 17 official grievances raised last year (out of approximately 5,500 non teaching staff). However, it was apparent when we spoke to the staff panel that there is little confidence in these grievance procedures among staff, particularly in the lower grades. Staff members told us that in their opinion, there is no independent investigation into the complaint, and there is a feeling that the human resources department is working for the organisation, not the individual. There is also a fear that making a formal complaint will affect future job opportunities within the organisation, and senior officers are aware of this. Staff also claimed that many grievances are dropped due to technical hitches. A few managers we spoke to echoed some of these concerns.

Reporting has also identified that certain ethnic groups had grievances more often than others. In an attempt to address this problem, the council has introduced 'comfort zone' training for managers to look at these issues. This was supposed to offer managers a chance to reflect on their own behaviour and interpersonal skills. Some senior officers we spoke to felt that there is a need for more sustained training for managers, or some kind of network to support them in dealing with equality and diversity issues. There was a feeling that some managers may be embarrassed or frightened to admit that they need help in getting to grips with equality and diversity, especially considering their position in an authority with a very large black and ethnic minority population.

While much is being done to put equality and diversity on the agenda, some staff feel that more could be done to establish a shared understanding of valuing diversity. A 2002 staff survey indicated that 64 per cent of respondents felt that their manager demonstrated the importance of diversity.

### **Example of good practice**

After a number of complaints about staff and the services available in the borough's libraries, it became clear that there was a lack of awareness of cultural differences among some staff. To tackle this problem the council implemented back-to-basics training, asking staff to reconsider 'what is good customer service?' A departmental group and a shadow group of frontline staff was also set up; they now regularly undertake work on specific user groups (such as disability). This initiative received positive feedback from both staff and users.

## **Service delivery and community participation**

The council has achieved a great deal in terms of community participation. The community and voluntary organisations we spoke to were very complimentary, both about how the council tackles the diversity agenda in general and about its attempts to consult with diverse communities. The council has a number of structures and processes in place to facilitate community participation, and an executive member has the brief for this area.

The council, in conjunction with the NHS and the local voluntary sector, has recently published a good practice guide called *Creating Partnerships with People: Citizens, services and effective involvement*. It has been developed as a practical toolkit for how to involve users and potential users, particularly from socially excluded and hard-to-reach communities, in public sector activities. Members and staff told us they had found this guide very valuable.

The council has also:

- Established a number of themed liaison groups to give service users, carers and their advocates an opportunity to discuss their views and suggestions with councillors and senior council officers
- Supported a black and minority ethnic consultative forum, in partnership with the primary care trust, the mental health and social care trust, voluntary action group and the health and race group
- Helped a number of voluntary and community organisations to form a black and ethnic minority alliance. The alliance is hoping to secure a seat on the local strategic partnership and the network of networks
- Put in place a number of other forums to consult on specific issues with specific communities; it has numerous tenants associations and a citizens panel, and it holds public meetings.

Overall, the council has been very proactive in trying to consult with diverse communities, especially non-English speaking communities. However, community representatives fear that there is a risk of over-consulting, especially as they say that often the communities do not see the outcome of all this consultation. The council has now taken steps to rationalise its consultation processes. If a department wants to carry out a consultation, it now has to fill out a form, which is reviewed and signed off by a consultation board. Departments also have to demonstrate how their proposed plans are meeting the equality and diversity agenda.

The council is making great attempts to take into consideration its multiple and diverse communities in service delivery. It has implemented some very innovative and successful initiatives (see boxes below), but is aware that there is still a great deal of work to be done to make sure that everyone has equal access to services.

Through monitoring key stages, it was discovered that Bangladeshi children were not achieving academically in the borough's schools. The council's education department embarked on research, working with the community and parents to find out why. The research team contacted leaders in the community and asked their advice on how to improve the achievement of the children; their input informed the strategy used by the local education authority (LEA). The LEA then worked in partnership with schools to raise the achievement of the Bangladeshi pupils. Resources were targeted to improve the attainment of these children. This initiative achieved its aim, and it is planned that in the near future the same strategy will be used to raise the academic achievement of Caribbean children.

The council was prompted by the lonely death of an elderly woman in the borough who died and lay unnoticed in her house. This led the council to think about how it could build a stronger, more caring community, where such lonely deaths were be possible. It invited a number of people to form the tackling vulnerability together initiative. This was a coalition of councillors, people from council services, representatives of health and voluntary organisations and older people. They consulted with the most vulnerable residents about what was meaningful in their lives, using a number of quality of life indicators. The council claims that this approach radically altered the way services were delivered, and led to the development of the quality of life strategy for older citizens. The strategy seeks not only to improve the quality of life of older people, but also to change stereotyped and limiting attitudes to ageing.

A project called building stronger communities was resourced through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Through a process of consultation the council tried to find out found what various communities wanted, then small amounts of money (such as £10,000) were awarded to facilitate joint working between black and ethnic minority groups and service providers. For example, one project tackled the housing needs of the Somali community (their need for translated information and help to access services). The district housing office and the Somali community centre had to have an agreed and established partnership before any money was awarded.

The council's engineering and traffic services received a number of comments and complaints from disabled members of the public about the borough's street environment. The council realised it would be cheaper to consult with the disabled members of the public and find out what should be done in the first instance, rather than carrying out engineering works and then having to change them. Because of this problem, the council produced *The Journey*, which is a film that catalogues the day-to-day difficulties that can be faced by disabled people. Various members of the public with differing access needs went out in the borough and pointed out specific problems with some street environments. *The Journey* is a reference guide for engineers, so that they will not lose sight of the needs of the disabled public when carrying out works and devising projects. The film is now also used on engineering courses at various universities, and a copy is available at the British Library.

Most of the council's literature and publications are available on request in a number of different languages. However, staff raised concerns that, for example, rent arrears letters and planning notices are still only sent out in English. They feel that more innovative ways of

communicating with different non-English speaking communities should be developed. Sometimes it is not even good enough to translate documents into a given language, because there can be low levels of literacy within certain communities.

Most people we spoke to appreciated that many more interpreters are needed in order to deliver services equally; however, this is hindered by lack of resources. Nevertheless, the council appears to have worked with the voluntary sector to increase access to services, especially for elderly people from black and ethnic minority communities. For example, the council was aware that there was a need to boost the uptake of elderly care services, and they now have improved their needs assessment process by employing bi-lingual assessors. The Cypriot community has just secured funding from the council to recruit Greek-speaking home helps. This is more established in the Chinese and Asian communities, who now also have funding to train people from their own communities to become home helps.

### **Political leadership and representation**

Many of the councillors have a commitment to issues of equality and diversity, but the area has a constantly changing population, with new ethnic communities establishing themselves. This can sometimes make reaching and representing the views of all the different communities difficult. An understanding of the complexities of the agenda varies between councillors.

Other members and staff within the council state that there has been a strong steer from the current leader on equalities. There appears to be a healthy and mutual respect between many of the senior council officers and members.

Six members of the council are from black and ethnic minority communities. Labour councillors told us that they had made real efforts to get women and black and ethnic minority candidates to stand for elections, through open evenings at the town hall. They also offer a mentoring scheme for new councillors, which has been successful, but they argue that cultural barriers can pose significant problems, for example the restrictions placed on some Asian women, a problem they also encountered when trying to encourage Bengali women to stand as school governors. Other barriers such as time pressures and child-care responsibilities can also tend to exclude certain people.

However, although most councillors did not deny the need for more BME councillors, many argued that so long as they are open, honest and flexible they can adequately represent their community. As discussed above, councillors have a range of forums and groups that they can use to tap into their communities' needs, and councillors also told us that they often hold their surgeries in different community centres, and that if people have a problem communicating they find ways around this. The councillors were highly complimentary about the support they receive from the equalities unit.

## **Case study four**

### **Site record**

The district council is run by a joint administration of liberal democrats and independents, with no overall control. There are two joint leaders. This is one of the most sparsely populated and rural districts in the country, with only 40,000 residents in an area of over quarter of a million acres. Only three towns have populations in excess of 3,000 people. The economy is largely dependent on agriculture. Ethnic minority communities make up less than 5 per cent of the local population.

### **General approach**

Owing to the very low proportion of black and ethnic minority groups in the community, members emphasise the need to think about equalities in very broad terms, rather than focusing on particular aspects of diversity. The focus is on social exclusion more broadly, including people in isolated rural areas.

The council is small and non-politicised, with a focus on local issues. There is recognition among both staff and community groups that minority communities are dispersed and quite isolated, and that because these groups are small and not very vocal, racism and prejudice tend not to be recognised as significant issues. Community groups suggested that xenophobia is still a huge problem in the rural areas. We heard several times from council staff and members that hard-to-reach groups are extremely hard to reach – it is difficult for the council to communicate with these dispersed communities, and vice versa.

The chief executive noted that the tax base is very small, so that efforts to divert resources to target a particular community tend to create a bigger issue than they might in a larger council.

The policies in place are quite new, since equalities and diversity has not been a high priority until the last 18 months or so. The duty to produce a race equality scheme, as well as performance indicators under best value, has highlighted the importance of the issue.

There have been a number of initiatives on disability and access, and the council has always perceived itself as an equal opportunities employer. However, in the past year there has been increased recognition of the need to bring things together and to take a more formal, proactive approach to equalities policy at the corporate level. This is coupled with the need for evidence to justify the council's approach, which will involve establishing a much clearer picture of minority populations and their particular needs.

The chief executive supports the duty to promote equality, but suggests that it needs to go further – looking at the whole community in terms of where positive action is needed.

### **Legislation and policies**

The council has a corporate equal opportunities policy, which commits the council to combating discrimination on the grounds of disability, race, gender and sexual orientation. It aims to ensure that all formal decision-making processes take into account the equal opportunities implications, and to improve physical access to council premises for people with disabilities. All service managers have a responsibility to make sure that service delivery does not discriminate in any way. Where contractors are employed to deliver a service, they are required to adhere to the council's equality policies. Grant recipients must be able to demonstrate their commitment to equal opportunities.

The race equality scheme sets out a three-year action plan. It is a shared responsibility between the chief executive and the corporate policy unit. The scheme was adopted by the council in May 2002 and so formally launched. It is available on the council website. The council plans to adopt the equality standard in time. Inclusion and equality of opportunity is included as a key theme in the community plan.

The council has tried to use the specialised press to recruit people from minority communities, although this has not been successful to date. All vacancies are also sent to the local race equality council, which posts notices in its own offices and at other community venues.

The council has introduced racial harassment incident reporting forms, along with the council's partners in the community safety partnership and community planning. The police service has very good links with the council, through the community safety partnership, and they have developed information-sharing protocols. The housing department works closely with the council. All housing stock has been transferred to the local Housing Association, with whom the council works in partnership to address issues on disability adaptations. The community safety partnership and the district community partnership have adopted the council's corporate equality policy.

The council is currently drafting a harassment and grievance procedure, specifically to cover discrimination against staff. At present there is only a standard grievance procedure. Equality champions will also be able to handle complaints. Grievances are monitored by ethnicity, gender and disability. However, this is a small council and grievances are fairly rare – staff suggested that if a discrimination grievance was brought it would be perceived as a major incident. To date, there have been very few complaints about discrimination. The service procurement strategy is under review. The council is currently developing standard wording that will be included in all tender documentation. In each best value review, the corporate template must include cross-cutting issues, including equalities. There is recognition among all levels of staff that there is still much work to do. Among community groups there is a perception of a fragmented and reactive approach to policy – although they also recognise that this may be true for many organisations in rural areas, and is partly a resource issue. Representatives from community groups suggested that, while the council is trying to provide more inclusive services, it is doing so in the context of very limited resources. It was, however, noted that much of the regeneration work focuses on hard-to-reach groups, and that there has been good progress on the community safety partnership.

## **Structures and processes**

The council comprises three departments, headed by the chief executive and two corporate directors. The council currently has 157 full time employees. Seven employees have stated that they have a disability. There are currently few employees from ethnic minority groups. Women fill 23 per cent of senior management posts.

The council has an interdepartmental equality group supporting the equality and diversity function, as well as a separate budget to help with corporate equality and diversity initiatives. The leader holds the equalities portfolio. The council has established a policy panel looking at community safety issues, issues of accessibility and equalities.

In the last year an equality working group has been formed, comprising officers from a range of service areas and levels. The group reports to the directors and the corporate team. Its remit is to keep the council on track in terms of the equalities management agenda, to act as a driver and to reinforce diversity policies. The group has talked with each head of service

about his/her service's approach to equalities. The group is soon to develop an action plan that will be distributed to all members of staff, to publicise the group's role.

The most effective mechanism to date is the recruitment and selection process, which has proven very robust. The selection team receives no personal information about the candidate until after short-listing is complete. Anyone who meets the job specification must be invited to interview. The human resources department surveys all applicants in terms of gender, race and disability, and writes to people who have requested information about vacancies but not followed through with an application. The human resources department is now beginning to collect data on recruitment, performance and promotion, through best value procedures.

Monitoring of the equalities agenda will take place through the equalities working group and the panel. The council will identify performance indicators. The council is also committed to forming relationships with minority communities, in order to learn how policies affect them. The first step will be to identify those communities, and to develop a baseline of their experiences.

## **Staff issues**

Employees are monitored by ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. The chief executive and staff recognise the need to build awareness of equalities into the everyday jobs of officers.

At present there are no staff groups to support minority staff, but an equality champion will be appointed in each service area, to make sure that people are aware of what they should be doing, to provide a point of contact for people dealing with equalities issues and to offer support to minority staff. These individuals will receive specific training to equip them for the role. The council is also seeking volunteers among staff who have knowledge of diversity from their personal experiences, to feed into developing a more general awareness among staff. The council has also identified support groups for particular minorities at county level, and has provided contact details for these on its website. A counselling service is available through the county council. Staff are able to contact the service directly and anonymously.

All staff have recently attended mandatory equalities awareness training. Staff suggest that this initial training was fairly basic, but that it did raise a number of issues for further attention. There was initially some resistance to the training programme, since individuals had to commit to a full day of training, but the evaluation feedback was very positive, particularly from front-line staff. It is likely that specific further equalities training will be rolled out for different service areas, as a way of making sure that the equalities policies have an impact on services.

All equalities and diversity policies are included in the staff handbook. Managers are supposed to make sure that information is cascaded to staff in the team briefings, and to provide opportunities for debate. However, this does not yet appear to be happening much in practice. Staff awareness of the council's diversity policies and initiatives was varied, and some senior officers suggested that awareness is quite low for people not directly involved in initiatives.

The council consults with staff about new policies, receiving both input about what should go into policies and feedback about how policies are working. The council aims to develop an intranet facility, on which it will post all policies and make links between them. It also aims to include awareness of equalities and other policies through the induction programme.

There is a perception among female staff that it is generally women who do the administrative jobs, although there is an equal split in gender terms among officers. On the whole, there is a strong focus on competencies. Staff noted that the size of the council can act as a barrier to promotion – there are only around 200 members of staff, and people tend to stay in their roles.

There seems to be limited encouragement of flexible ways of working. The human resources manager, however, suggested that all requests for flexible working would be considered, and adopted wherever feasible. The problem may be lack of staff awareness of the possibilities, rather than council rigidity.

### **Service delivery and community participation**

All services are currently undertaking baseline monitoring. The exercise ran from October to March 2003, and will be an annual event. The council is using best value reviews to find out more about the specific needs of minority groups. Asset management is currently surveying all council premises for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

At the May election there will be an interpreter in the polling station in the area with a significant ethnic minority community. Leaflets will be produced for people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and appropriate notices placed in polling stations. The council has also done a lot of work to review disabled access to polling stations, and where possible has relocated stations to improve accessibility. Postal votes are offered to those who need them, and this is promoted on polling cards. Equalities issues will be included in a briefing session for all polling clerks. Ballot papers are also available in Braille and large print.

Council information, publications and complaint forms are available in the four minority languages identified as most prominent in the 1991 national census. A language line is also available for translation services. Consultation documents are always accompanied by a plain English summary, which is available to the public. Versions of these are also available in Braille and large print. The web site is also accessible in minority languages, and the council has an interpreting service and makes use of the minicom service provided through BT. The council also has a visiting office for people with communication or language difficulties. Literacy is an issue in the area. Some local people have weaknesses in basic reading and writing skills.

While the council consults the public on all major policy changes, it recognises the need to develop innovative techniques, including e-government, to include hard-to-reach groups. As a rural council it faces huge issues around access, for example where to put local customer service centres. Staff would welcome the opportunity to learn from the experience of other local authorities, particularly rural authorities, that have carried out more work in this area.

The chief executive feels strongly that the focus of consultation should be services. Dialogue with minority communities should focus on their experience as service users and identify barriers to access. He hopes that this will help to avoid consultation fatigue, since people will see improved service delivery as the objective.

The council does not know at this stage whether services are meeting the needs of diverse populations, because it does not have a clear picture of who and where those diverse groups are and what needs they have. Work to address this is just beginning. In particular, the council has focused some of its effort on a partnership with a significant Pakistani community in one area of the district. It is hoped that lessons learnt through this project can be applied on a wider scale to benefit the council as a whole. The council also recently launched a poster campaign to invite hard-to-reach groups to approach the council.

The council is also trying to develop a better idea of local population needs through customer satisfaction surveys. Service monitoring forms are sent out with all routine council forms. The equalities working group is targeting work with ethnic minority businesses, to find out more about their needs.

There is a perception within the community that services are unequal, in that members pay more attention to what older residents want at the expense of the younger population. There is also a perceived lack of knowledge of the needs of ethnic minority communities, and a lack of cultural competency among council staff. Staff members suggested that the council does not do enough to advertise the services it is able to offer; they recognise the need to do more to reach out to minority groups.

### **Political leadership and representation**

There are seven members of the executive – two joint leaders, four portfolio holders and one without portfolio. The council recognises that perceptions of the political structure are quite unclear among members of the community, who also lack clarity about the respective responsibilities of the district council and county council.

Leadership styles can be quite different within the council, given that it is a joint arrangement between different parties. Members suggest that this is a largely non-politicised council, with a focus on local aims. Decision-making is mostly consensus based.

The chief executive perceived members as having been passive in developing the equalities agenda, and the race equality scheme was passed without much debate. Members' main concern has been to ensure that other groups, such as those in isolated rural areas, are included in equalities and diversity initiatives.

Staff and community groups suggested that members need mandatory training, to broaden their views of society and recognise the problems the council has in connecting with minority groups. Some of the members we spoke to felt that it was vital to raise awareness of equalities issues among members, as well as awareness of the levels of prejudice that exist within the local community. The council encouraged all councillors to attend equalities awareness training, and attendance was around 50 per cent.

The majority of councillors are over 50 years old, and many are retired. Councillors and senior officers with whom we spoke suggested that there are not enough women councillors, not enough young people or people with young families, and no ethnic minority councillors. There is at present one councillor with a physical disability. There is an active youth forum, and a youth council which local councillors have been invited to attend.

Councillors' efforts to get in touch with their communities include knocking on doors and making themselves available by telephone and email. Because this is a fairly small community, individual councillors can become widely known, and this helps to make them more approachable for members of the public – there is a high reliance on personal, informal contact. Councillors, however, recognised that their ability to represent the interests of all the diverse groups within their constituencies is limited.

Councillors suggested that the barriers to people from minority groups standing as councillors were mainly lifestyle issues. The council has more meetings in the day than in the evening, which can make attendance difficult. Meeting times need to be reviewed, as a first step towards encouraging diversity among councillors. The volume of paperwork and the assumption that considerable experience is needed might also put individuals off. The executive is currently discussing the structure of the council and trying to come up with more

flexible alternatives, but suggests that at least some of the barriers are not under its control. Councillors and community representatives cited the conservative nature of the area as another barrier to ethnic minority or younger councillors. An Asian candidate who stood at the last local election, for example, experienced considerable prejudice and discrimination from the community.

Community groups suggested that councillors were not necessarily the most important source of representation for minority communities, and that representation in other arenas where communities can bring about change should also be recognised and encouraged.

## **Case study five**

### **Site record**

This is a unitary authority, providing all local government services for a quarter of a million people, in a mixed urban and rural area. The authority is relatively new, set up about five years ago following the merger of two local councils and some county council services. The ethnic minority population is between 5 and 10 per cent. There is also a substantial gay and lesbian community. The CPA judged the council 'good' in the way it provides services for local people.

### **General approach**

When the council was initially set up as a unitary authority, there was no equalities strategy in place and no active work was taking place with minority communities. From the start, the council aimed to make the equalities agenda as wide-ranging as possible, emphasising performance management and customer focus. The council strives to demonstrate that equalities and diversity is important to the authority and that there is a strong business case for diversity, both in terms of staff and as a service provider.

The impetus for equalities and diversity work tends to be generated by individuals within the council. The aim is to be proactive, rather than merely complying with legislative requirements. The corporate policy unit is responsible for best value, community consultation and performance management, and is able to drive the process at a strategic level. There is strong cross-party support for the agenda, and councillors are involved in different relevant groups. The chief executive and the senior management team are recognised by staff and the community as being very committed to equality and diversity issues, and the council has good links with the local race equality council.

### **Legislation and policies**

The council has a comprehensive corporate equalities strategy (available in minority languages), which provides the framework on which directorates develop their service plans. The authority has also adopted the Equality Standard.

The council has published a race equality scheme (RES), which builds into these processes. It is available as a published booklet and on the council's website. By April 2003 the council plans to disseminate to all service managers a model for assessment of impact under the RES. Services to be included in year 1 include youth services, school improvement, arts and leisure.

The council includes equality and diversity in its written policies on recruitment and selection, training and development, grievances and discipline, flexible working, bullying and harassment, service procurement, service delivery and the community plan. The recruitment and fair treatment policy initially focused on race, gender and disability, and has recently

been extended to include religion. The council has recently acquired Race Equality in Employment Partnership (REEP) accreditation following a two-year assessment process, and this was celebrated with a launch day to raise awareness. The council gained Positive about Diversity accreditation in 2001 ('two ticks') but is aware that more work is needed to make the council building accessible for disabled staff. In conjunction with the local Access Group, the Council has surveyed all its buildings and produced a programme of works to this end, to which £3 million has been committed to date.

Mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of policies and practices on diversity and equality of opportunity include annual employee surveys, user surveys, best value reviews, complaints and grievances from staff and users, baseline audits, equality impact assessments and take-up of training.

The outcomes of monitoring are subject to scrutiny by members, but only to a limited extent. The council recognises that its monitoring process for equality and diversity policies are not as good as they should be. It notes that bullying and harassment is difficult to monitor in service settings such as schools.

The authority recognises that development of family-friendly policies for staff and support to staff and members from under-represented groups is most important over the next five years, followed by outreach to under-represented groups in the community and flexible working.

The council has produced a cultural diversity guide, describing different minority communities, their cultures, religions, festivals, customs, diet etc. The guide, produced in co-operation with the regional television company, is illustrated with attractive images associated with different cultures. The information was gathered with the help of minority communities in the area, who had direct input into its contents. It is disseminated to all service managers and all headteachers, and is available on sale to the wider community. The council hopes that the guide will help to build acceptance and understanding of cultural difference.

## **Structures and processes**

The council has a firm strategic direction and commitment, but the process of translating this into practice is still underway. The council aims to advance progress through its emerging performance management framework, and in particular a bespoke Excellence Model, a variant of the EFQM, which has been independently assessed by a specialist equalities consultancy. By 2003/4, all Directorate and Service plans will be required to include equality targets, drawn from the corporate targets. An interdepartmental equality group supports the equality and diversity function, and there is a separate budget to help with corporate equality and diversity initiatives. Responsibility for equalities is located in the corporate policy unit and the executive member for corporate services holds the equalities portfolio.

The council plan for 1999-2004 has six core values, of which equalities is one. The core values operate across directorates. The equalities core value working group provides an opportunity to bring people together to discuss the overarching issues and is chaired by the chief executive.

Council meetings open with prayers said by chaplains from a range of religions, reflecting the faith groups within the community.

## **Staff issues**

The council currently has a workforce of more than 7,000 people. It monitors its internal workforce and applications for employment by ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. Data is produced for each directorate, allowing it to focus on areas of under-representation. To

make sure that the characteristics of staff reflect those of the local population, the council has equality targets covering gender, disability and race. Monitoring of training opportunities is to be introduced, together with an annual breakdown of training by gender, disability and ethnicity.

The council has a flexible working policy, and aims to promote family-friendly policies among staff and managers and to ensure that staff are able to take advantage of these. However, this is currently used only patchily, and it seems likely that not all managers endorse it as much as they should. The council is looking at mentoring options and at encouraging secondments or 'managing up', for example when colleagues are on maternity leave, as ways of building a more diverse and representative workforce. These initiatives are recognised as causing some discomfort among white staff, but the council is committed to taking positive action where they feel it is appropriate.

The council has also implemented:

- a job evaluation scheme, to make sure that there is equal pay for equal value, bringing all staff from the different councils prior to the establishment of the unitary authority onto a common pay scale and grading system.
- an annual workforce census, now in its second year. Last year it achieved a 90 per cent return rate.
- a supported employment scheme for disabled staff. All vacancies are circulated via the local disability employment advisor at job centres. It also uses an in-house temporary employment agency, which includes several individuals with disabilities.
- a system by which all vacancies are circulated to the temples, mosques, dance groups and community groups in the local area. This process is assisted by outreach workers at the REC.
- a handbook that is distributed to all staff, describing the council's key policies, including those relating to equalities and diversity.
- an independent assessment of its Performance Development Review system to review equality content. Equalities is now one of the core management competencies and is included in managers' 360 degree assessments.

All managers receive equality packs, that include workforce statistics, suggested actions, information on training courses and two ticks, disability newsletters detailing reasonable adjustments and information on supported employment schemes and minority press advertising.

The chief executive recognises the need to encourage people to feel that they can practice their faith, for example through the establishment of a prayer room, although this has not happened yet.

Events are held for all managers within a directorate to make sure that managers are in tune with the council's aspirations. Team briefings are held once a fortnight, and the messages are supposed to cascade from senior management. However, there is a perception among staff that information tends to get stuck at third- and fourth-tier management levels, and that people below this level do not know how to disseminate the information. A community representative suggested that, while the senior management team is very committed to the diversity agenda, this message has not yet reached the middle management and supervisor level.

The council provides funding for a black workers' forum (BWF), age forum and disabled workers' forum. The possibility of setting up a gay and lesbian workers' forum is being considered. The forums provide staff with the opportunity to discuss and address issues specific to their experience, and help to develop council policies and initiatives. Forums receive and manage a training budget, provided by the core value group. The BWF has brought in training facilitators and mentors to help build staff capacity and facilitate career development. The chief executive meets with the different forums every three to four months.

Forum chairs sit on the core value group for equalities. The BWF is aware of some resentment from white members of staff, however. There is a perception among some white staff that the forum is about trying to separate people.

All staff have received awareness training and there is recognition among staff that equality is important to the authority. There is now a comprehensive equalities training programme linked to service and business planning. The course lasts for three days, with a focus on mainstreaming in equalities and analysing the impact of policies on minority groups. All directors and service leaders have received this training, which will be translated from the directorate through the senior management structure to the service plans. Attendance was compulsory, and the exercise involved around 400 senior staff. The training was funded by the learning and development department, and cost £50/60k. Other equalities training includes the welcoming disabled customers workbook, deaf awareness, sign language and cultural awareness sessions. Diversity is the theme of this year's managers conference, linking to improving customer service.

A number of black staff have left the council within the last 18 months as a result of perceptions of poor promotion prospects, and have secured better jobs elsewhere. While there are a few senior black individuals at third-tier management level and in professional roles, there are not many in the middle band. The council is now looking at options for positive actions on promotion.

The human resources manager suggests that there are likely to be barriers to promotion for people with disabilities, owing to a poor understanding among managers about their needs and unwillingness among individuals to apply. The equalities portfolio holder agreed that disability is probably the area most in need of attention in the workforce, and that the council needs to do more to encourage people to apply. In terms of gender, the situation is perceived as being positive, with an even split in the senior management team. Best value places the authority in the top quartile for gender equality in employment.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures are problematic and are being reviewed by the human resources department. There have been a number of grievances based on discrimination, some of which have been quite overt. The council now employs an independent counselling service and encourages parties to use mediation. The human resources department recognises that support post-grievance is currently inadequate and plans to improve this.

## **Service delivery and community participation**

The council is perceived in the community as having good intentions in relation to service delivery and as wanting to deliver an equal service to all people. Community representatives noted, however, that where specialised services are available the council could do more to make individuals aware of them, and to make sure that such services are consistently available across the council.

The council conducts regular local surveys to assess the needs of the community. A booster sample of ethnic minority residents in the annual residents' survey showed that satisfaction has increased by 5 per cent. Service use is monitored by race, gender, age and disability. The council works with a range of external bodies that challenge and advise it, and provide opportunities for the council to receive community feedback.

The Council has standing focus groups for minority ethnic residents, older people, and people with a disability, and is developing a similar group for the gay and lesbian community. All directorates consult with these groups toward informing and developing policy.

The first point of contact best value review examined equalities and customer care. It recommended that the council produced a more standardised approach at all its points of contact. This involves standardising equipment, procedures and training so that front-line staff are able to deal with a range of people, including those whose first language is not English and people with a disability.

### **Targeted initiatives to ensure services meet the needs of all communities**

In order to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, the council, in conjunction with the local access group and the disability focus group, carried out an audit of all council buildings open to the public. The process identified that works to the value of £6 million were needed. The council has already committed £3 million in 2001-02 and 2002-03, and further proposals are under consideration. However, the access group was not initially involved, and had to approach the council to be included. The access group is now doing follow-up visits to the buildings surveyed in the audit, providing the council with advice on priorities and picking up things the surveyors missed. The group has also been involved in planning applications and making recommendations to architects, and this has been working very well.

The ethnic minority population has historically been relatively small, and it was suggested that the council needs to develop a way of reaching all groups. There is a perception that those with the 'loudest voices' are more likely to have their needs acknowledged.

The council has a voluntary sector forum to provide a formal link and pathway for consultation. It has supported the development of a council for voluntary service and is involved in the creation of a community resource centre for community and voluntary organisations. The council, in partnership with local communities, has developed an Ethnic Minority Forum, which is now a Limited Company and has successfully bid for over £300,000 of government funding. The Forum is currently working with the Council on projects such as a major community centre and an ethnic minority volunteering project. The council has representatives on the local REC, and consults with and receives guidance from the REC and ethnic minority forum.

An Interfaith group, which has been running since the unitary authority was set up, was established with encouragement from the council. The group was closely involved in the debate on the council's core values. There is a young people's parliament and several multi-cultural community events. Officers show a willingness to come into the community and talk to people and groups; for example, an officer participated in a series of lectures for the interfaith group. Various community organisations are represented on the transport forum, including the pensioners' forum and the women's forum.

Community representatives commended the council for its proactive approach to race equality. The council was also perceived as supporting the pensioners' forum and being active on pensioners' issues. While the council is recognised as having a very good policy on diversity and that it has good intentions and makes an effort to listen, community representatives note that it does not always take things on board.

Community groups suggested that, if their members needed to complain about discrimination, they would probably write to the chief executive and hope that the complaint was passed on to the appropriate person. There is also recourse to the local ombudsman and the Disability Rights Council or Commission for Racial Equality, although members of the public would not necessarily know what route to follow.

The council is doing some work to encourage people to use libraries and learn how to access IT. The service needs to publicise better what opportunities are on offer. Much of the software is suitable for people with disabilities.

Most of the authority's libraries are accessible on the ground floor, but not on the second floor, which is often where reference books are housed. Community representatives noted that signposting and labelling of catalogues is not adequate for partially sighted people. Thought needs to be given to issues such as the height of shelves and the extent to which people in wheelchairs can access things independently without having to ask for assistance. There needs to be more publicity around the mobile library, as people don't know when or where to access it. Braille books are not widely available, and while there are some audio books, availability of these is limited.

There is very little information about library services available in community languages, although some books are available. Community representatives point out that if people feel that things are too difficult to access, they will tend not to use the library at all.

## **Political leadership and representation**

The council has no party in overall control. It operates a leader and cabinet model. Cabinet members are from the Conservative party. Overview and scrutiny committees consist of members of all political groups. The council has a commitment to consensus politics; regular meetings between party leaders to discuss policy issues result in most priority actions being taken forward.

The council enjoys cross-party commitment to the equalities agenda. The portfolio holder on equalities has an important role in advancing equality and diversity issues. There is a perception that members feel more comfortable talking about equality issues than they used to.

However, there are concerns that the British National Party will put up candidates in the next election. Asylum seekers are an issue in the area, and this is sometimes played up in the media. However, there is a long record of work around bringing communities together and promoting inclusion among community groups, and this helps to keep tensions from flaring.

Councillors recognise that they are not demographically representative. The majority of members are white, middle-aged, able-bodied men. Most do, however, live in the wards they represent and the executive member for equalities felt that links into communities were good. New councillors will receive new member training, which will include equalities. Community representatives felt it was important for councillors to be representative of the local community, but recognised the problem of apathy among local people, as well as issues around the ability of people to take on the responsibilities and workload associated with being a councillor. Particular groups tend to be less likely to get involved in council activities, be it for reasons of poor access (physical and language), confidence, limited understanding of the processes or individuals' willingness to put themselves forward.



## **Case study six**

### **Site record**

The county council covers a mixed urban and rural area. The comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) report judged the council 'good' in the way it provides services for local people. The ethnic minority community makes up less than 5 per cent of the local population.

### **General approach**

The majority of people we spoke to stated that equality and diversity were very important issues for the council; several commented on the commitment to improving practice that exists at senior levels of the organisation.

Some officers suggested that this relatively low number of black and ethnic minority people meant that the council had to adopt a 'balanced', 'proportionate yet persistent' approach to equality and diversity that situates these issues firmly in the context of mainstream service improvement. Others felt that the demography of the area created specific problems – staff issues and community discrimination and isolation – that the council needs to address.

Most interviewees demonstrated a clear awareness of the broadening out of the concept of equality and diversity to include gender, disability, age and sexual orientation as well as race and ethnicity. Some officers and community representatives stated that council attitudes to different communities vary, with the needs of some groups being taken on board to a greater extent than those of other groups.

Several people we spoke to mentioned the importance of developing a flexible approach to equality and diversity, so that the council can respond to the common requirements of different communities but does not assume that individuals within these communities have identical needs, priorities and concerns.

### **Legislation and policies**

In 2001 the council reached level 3 of the CRE race equality standard. The council is currently operating at level 1 of the generic equalities standard, although it plans to reach level 2 by the end of this year. The priority will then be to consolidate performance throughout the organisation, rather than to push to reach level 3 immediately. The council has recently undertaken best value reviews of equality and communication and consultation, resulting in targeted improvement plans in each of these areas.

Compulsory equal opportunities training has been provided for officers at all levels of the organisation, and the council has taken additional steps to promote staff awareness through newsletters, briefings etc. External guest speakers have been invited to help the council understand relevant legislation and key issues for minority groups. Equality issues are also discussed on the Certificate in Management course and in staff induction programmes.

A local voluntary organisation has been contracted by the council to provide HIV and sexuality awareness workshops for senior and middle managers. The workshops focus on both the legislative and the moral bases for equal treatment of diverse individuals. The workshop organisers aim to create an open and supportive environment in which staff members are free to explore issues and raise any questions they might have.

Most people we spoke to said that they knew about relevant legislation and the council's key policies and procedures on equality and diversity. Overall, there was a feeling that the council has sound policies and procedures in place.

However, the majority of people we spoke to emphasised that having appropriate policies and procedures was only the first step in promoting equality and diversity. A commitment to implementing the policies effectively and the existence of credible sanctions for inappropriate behaviour were also needed. While there was praise for the energy and commitment of several individuals, some officers suggested that a concern with equality and diversity did not necessarily reach every corner of the organisation. There was a danger, therefore, that policies were not always being implemented consistently throughout the council.

## **Structures and processes**

The county council has a corporate equalities group, chaired by the director of human resources, and equalities groups in each of its four divisions: education, libraries and heritage; environment and transport; social services; and resources. The rationale behind this structure is to mainstream equality and diversity issues – to make sure that they infuse every aspect of the working life of the council.

Members of the divisional equalities groups are recruited largely for their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the issues, rather than their job title or level; it is hoped that they will act as champions for equality and diversity throughout the organisation. Representatives of key minority groups – such as the black workers support group and the disabled workers forum – also sit on the equalities groups.

The groups' remit includes internal, staff-related issues as well as external issues relating to engagement with the community and service delivery. The groups consider relevant legislation and existing activities in their divisions, and are then charged with generating action plans to fill significant gaps. Actions agreed by the groups are circulated to everyone in the council who has Internet access. Most officers we spoke to stated that overall this structure was working fairly well.

The council has systems for collecting a range of data relevant to equality and diversity. It holds records on recruitment by ethnicity, gender and disability. It also collects data on the highest-earning 5 per cent by gender. Council literature states that the organisation was aiming to produce quarterly divisional reports on staff progression by ethnicity, gender and disability by December 2002, and was also planning to collect more data on those leaving the organisation. The council also holds some records on the local population, by ethnicity, gender, disability and age.

A couple of interviewees expressed concerns about the usefulness of some of the data collected, given the significant number of people who choose not to disclose diversity issues or fall into the 'other' categories. However, most people we spoke to felt that a sufficient quantity and quality of data was being collected and reported, and that the next step is to take actions to improve the numbers.

## **Staff issues**

The council recognises that it needs to remove barriers to employment for people from diverse communities. It is undertaking a range of measures, including community-based recruitment in those areas of the county that have significant ethnic minority communities.

The council has successfully implemented a work-placement scheme for disabled graduates. The scheme offers placements of between six and ten weeks, to give graduates the opportunity to sample employment in local government. The scheme has been very successful and has led to permanent employment being offered to one of the graduates.

Officers we spoke to also recognised that types of work and levels of responsibility are patterned by gender and ethnicity. One measure that the council is taking to address this issue is its senior women in management programme. This is a six-day residential course held over three sessions in a local venue. The course is open to women already working or aspiring to work at a senior level. Ex-participants are expected to mentor other women in the organisation, so that learning cascades down. The council also plans to introduce on-going care and support for course participants, to help them to apply the knowledge and skills acquired on the course. It is hoped that the course will contribute towards women making up 40 per cent of senior managers by 2005.

The council is keen to move towards a position where it actively manages staff careers, and recognises that this approach will require careful monitoring to make sure that equality and diversity issues are fully taken into account. There is concern among some diverse staff that a new emphasis on informal mentoring and coaching of staff targeted for promotion may leave members of diverse groups at a disadvantage in career terms. Senior officers seem aware of these issues and are planning to develop firmer criteria for entry onto training courses and to arrange mentoring specifically for staff members from diverse groups.

The county council has a complaints procedure whereby staff can take grievances directly to a senior level, bypassing their own line manager if necessary. Although we found general support for this procedure, some interviewees said that staff members hesitate to use these mechanisms in the absence of a stronger steer from senior managers that this is acceptable. Some staff we spoke to felt that complaints were being held outside the system, and suggested that this might explain the low numbers of diversity-related grievances. These staff stressed the importance of sending clear messages from the top of the organisation about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and of taking sanctions against those found to be behaving inappropriately.

Some interviewees expressed the view that it would be possible to be openly gay or transsexual in the council. However, there was a feeling that attitudes vary across the council. Managers, who have had sexuality awareness training, were regarded as more likely to be supportive than some other members of staff. There was a feeling that individuals would be fearful about disclosing positive HIV status. However, people we spoke to recognised that this is likely to be a difficult issue for many organisations.

The council is taking steps to explore flexible working arrangements, with flexible hours, part-time working, sabbaticals and home working available for many staff.

### **Service delivery and community participation**

Officers we spoke to pointed out that although the county is regarded as a largely middle-class area with small numbers of ethnic minorities overall, in certain areas diverse communities make up a sizeable proportion of the population, and these groups have significant unmet needs.

Heads of service are expected to take equality and diversity issues fully into account in drawing up individual service plans. They are sent a list of ten key questions to prompt their

thinking and to check their own and their staff's awareness of the relevant legislation and council policies and procedures:

- Do you know what the current statutory duties are for your service, with respect to race, gender and disability?
- Have *all* your staff been fully briefed on equality issues as they affect the delivery of your service?
- Are you collecting evidence to check that the services you provide are equally accessible to all local citizens?
- Are you using that evidence to identify any possible barriers to service take-up by minority users?
- Do you have an action plan for eliminating these barriers?
- Have you consulted with relevant minority groups over improving access?
- Have you linked your equality action planning to relevant best value plans, or to statutory targets/performance indicators?
- Have you considered how to adopt the county council's plans for increasing the diversity of its workforce?
- Have all staff involved in recruitment/interviewing received appropriate training?
- Do you regularly review equality issues at your service meetings?

The council uses a variety of approaches, including community forums, public meetings and intranet postings to consult on policy initiatives. Officers recognised that they need to involve diverse groups to a greater extent in service planning in the future. There was a feeling that some progress has been made in the past two to three years, and that CPA had been helpful in highlighting the issue.

The council also employs a variety of mechanisms for providing information to diverse communities. It produces literature in a variety of languages and formats. It uses an interpreting and translation service and has recently negotiated a contract with another supplier to provide an over-the-telephone interpreting service for the new direct contact centre.

The county council has provided funding for a traveller initiative, run by a local voluntary organisation. Promoting better understanding about the issues affecting the travelling community – which is the county's largest ethnic minority group – has been a main aim of the Initiative. Progress so far includes more children attending local playgroups, the launch of a training CD for agencies and a greater awareness of the impact of racist incidents against this community.

There was widespread recognition among people we talked to that different techniques will be required to engage different communities. Some officers stressed the need to engage with communities in a way that is positive and non-threatening. Others warned of the danger of raising people's expectations through consultation and then not delivering.

One or two officers suggested that the council needs to consider the culture of partner organisations involved in service delivery, not just its own policies, procedures and ways of working. In line with new statutory requirements on local authorities, the council does have systems in place to monitor contracts for equal opportunities at the tendering stage.

The county council is clearly regarded by some external stakeholders as a helpful, positive and proactive partner. Interviewees also expressed support for the work of some of the council's partners, who were working hard to create a positive and supportive climate in the area. The police were widely recognised as having done good work to promote equalities and diversity in the county.

The council's innovative initiatives to engage and involve diverse communities in service planning and delivery were recognised by the officers and external stakeholders we spoke to.

## **Political leadership and representation**

Several of the people we spoke to reported that council members tended to be middle-aged, white and male. A number of interviewees suggested that council hours tend to exclude some people with full-time jobs or childcare responsibilities from standing. It was suggested to us that this effect might be exacerbated by the new local authority structure, which places additional pressures on those councillors selected for the cabinet.

Some attempts have been made by the council to address this issue – for example, offering help with childcare. However, officers recognised that building a more diverse group of councillors is difficult, as the pool of candidates from any particular background is small.

Among officers we spoke to, there was a feeling that, overall, members might be less aware and committed to equality and diversity issues than paid staff. There was a perception that members assume they are representative of the whole community by virtue of being elected.

Several officers we spoke to stated that diversity training for members would be useful. There has been some progress on this – for example, the council's last monthly members' meeting focused on gender differences in educational achievement. Officers also reported a desire that some members wanted training and advice on equality and diversity.

## **Case study seven**

### **Site record**

Situated in North East England, the area is relatively isolated. Most of the population, which numbers just over 150,000 people, live in three major towns. The recent census figures reveal that black and ethnic minority people account for less than 5 per cent of the total population in the area. Historically, the local economy was based on the fishing industry, which suffered a major decline in the 1980s. While unemployment has reduced over the last three years, the area still has a high unemployment rate comparative to the rest of the region, (just over 5 per cent) and there are significant levels of deprivation in the area. The comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) judged the council as 'poor' in the way it provides services for local people, and a major recovery programme is now underway. The council has reported that there are increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the region. The most recent estimate is approximately 150 'official' asylum seekers, although this is likely to be an under-representation of the actual number.

## **General approach**

The council was established as a unitary authority in 1996, and since then much effort has gone into bringing together the different cultures and ways of working of the different organisations from which it was formed. Equality and diversity issues have traditionally not been high on the corporate agenda, although some work has been done over the past year, with the production of the race equality scheme and the equality strategy. The director of human resources (who is also a member of the strategic management group) has taken a lead on this work, supported by the corporate equalities group.

The focus of work to date has been on responding to legislative requirements on ethnicity and disability by developing plans and procedures. Most work has centred on employment issues, with less emphasis on service delivery as, “it’s easier to understand our responsibility in this area [employment] because it has been around for so long and it is specific”. Next steps for the authority will be to focus on implementing the strategy and plans developed over the past year and to broaden the focus to service delivery.

Some senior officers and members we spoke to, however, mentioned a number of factors that make progress in this area difficult for the authority. First, there is currently a low level of shared understanding of what equality and diversity means amongst senior managers, officers, front-line staff and members. Secondly, the council is currently working on a recovery programme following its ‘poor’ CPA rating. For some in the authority, this means that the council is too busy to deal with equality and diversity – the focus at the moment is on “ticking the right boxes”. Thirdly, equality and diversity is not always perceived to be relevant, as the number of black and ethnic minority groups in the community is relatively low. Comments such as, “it [equality and diversity] would be more important in other areas where there are higher proportions of BME groups, but not here” were made by a number of the people we interviewed. Other people, however, challenged this view. They mentioned incidents where serious anti-social behaviour had led black and ethnic minority and gay residents to close their shops and venues. A few of the people we spoke to felt that the council could do more to deal with these types of issues and to support these groups in the community.

## **Legislation and policies**

As mentioned previously, the equality and diversity focus in the authority has primarily been on employment. The legal requirements and duties placed on the council were the key drivers for change. Equality and diversity issues are now included in the council’s written policies on recruitment and selection; training and development; grievances and disciplinary procedures; flexible working; and bullying and harassment. However, it is recognised that more will need to be done in terms of implementation, monitoring and reviewing progress.

The council’s equalities statement includes a commitment to:

- Equality of treatment for everyone in service delivery, recruitment and employment
- The broad principles of social justice
- Treating equally everyone with whom its representatives come into contact
- Ensuring that no-one is treated in any way less favourably on the grounds of race, colour, national ethnic or social origin, gender, sexuality, religion, age, disability or political/other personal beliefs
- Implement all necessary action and training to fulfil its commitments with regard to equality of treatment, and monitor and review progress made

In May 2002, the authority published its race equality scheme, which is available on the authority's website. To ensure that the scheme took into account views of minority groups, the chair of the corporate equalities group planned a number of meetings/focus groups where all black and ethnic minority and/or disabled staff in the council were invited to participate. However, only one member of staff decided to participate.

The scheme sets out corporate actions for 2002/03. Some of these are listed in the box below.

- Develop effective links with the local black and ethnic minority communities
- Integrate equalities issues into the work of the local strategic partnership
- Develop methods to make sure that all sections of the community have equal access to information on council services
- Make all staff aware of the need for and content of the race equality scheme
- Develop and implement a corporate template to assess the relevance of future policies and proposals for service delivery to the general duty
- Monitor future policies and proposals for service delivery, to assess impact on racial groups and equality issues generally
- Integrate consideration of race equality issues into corporate systems and procedures such as best value, performance management, corporate business planning etc
- Integrate the race equality scheme into the Public Service Agreement proposals.

## **Structures and processes**

In 2000, the corporate equalities group was established with the task of moving forward equality work in the council. A member of staff, who was very committed and active in the area, led the work of the group. Unfortunately, this member of staff left the council and there was a period with less progression in the area. Over the past year, however, the director of human resources has picked up the work. She is now the chair of the corporate equalities group.

Officers at relatively senior levels from all key service areas are represented in the corporate equalities group. The priority of the group has been to develop and publish the race equality scheme and the equality standard, which are now completed. The next step is to focus on implementation.

The members of the corporate equalities group are each expected to work with a director in their area to take the agenda forward in the departments. The senior managers prefer this structure to one where responsibility for equality and diversity is placed with one person or a small group of people. As one person said: "equality and diversity can't be an add-on to the ordinary activities of the council – it has to be integral to people's approach and therefore responsibility for this cannot sit with just one person".

## **Staff issues**

Equality and diversity in employment is the area where most progress has been made, especially in making sure that all policies and procedures take into account equality and

diversity. The progress is, in part, helped by the fact that the director of human resources is pushing the agenda and has taken up the role of chair of the corporate equalities group. There are issues about under-representation of black and ethnic minority staff in the council. Black and ethnic minority groups make up only 0.81 per cent of the current staff base (compared with 1.4 per cent in the population as a whole).

With the exception of one person, all the people we spoke to shared a view that there are no significant problems of discrimination in the council's recruitment, retention and promotion policies and activities. This view is based on the fact that there are very few instances of people raising such concerns to the people we spoke to. One person, however, was of the opinion that there are significant barriers to recruitment and promotion within some sections of the council and that the council should do more to promote and support diversity in their employment practices, as well as providing informal and formal mechanisms for raising concerns when they occur.

To date, there has been limited proactive effort to obtain the views of staff in this area, but there is general agreement among senior officers that the council operates an 'open door' policy and that staff feel able to raise concerns.

As mentioned previously, there is currently a low level of shared understanding of what equality and diversity means. While some argued, "staff would know what to do if/when they came across these issues in their particular area of work", many felt that the lack of shared understanding is a major barrier to further improvement in this area. As one person pointed out, "people do not necessarily want to put their hands up and say that they can't do it or don't understand it – most people do not want to offend anybody, so some may choose not to deal with it".

While there are a limited number of specific training initiatives planned for human resources staff and the corporate equalities group, the senior management group believes that training to all staff is not a cost-effective way of raising awareness of the issues. Instead, senior managers in each service area are given the responsibility to take forward the work in their departments. To support them and other officers, the chair of the corporate equalities group is working to pull together a resource book covering equality and diversity.

## **Service delivery and community participation**

Generally, there appears to be some dissatisfaction with the way in which the council provides services for local people, as indicated in the recent CPA and an inspection report that criticised the social care department for not paying sufficient attention to race issues.

Although there are pockets of good practice in some service areas (especially around access for disabled people and services for older people) relatively little is done at a corporate level to systematically assess and address the diverse needs of the community. Some officers find it a challenge to keep the focus and identify the needs of black and ethnic minority groups, because there are not many in the community and they are not very visible.

Recently, work has been undertaken to make sure that the council buildings are accessible and that there are meeting facilities for people with hearing difficulties. The disability forum has supported this work. The forum is generally very pleased with the efforts of officers within the council.

A race justice forum has operated in the area for the past seven years, which supports black and ethnic minority communities and acts as a voice for these communities. Recently, the

authority has supported the work of the group by providing funding for a part-time member of staff. The forum does much good work with the authority and communities, although resource constraints remain an important issue for the group. In the future, the forum hopes to do more to raise awareness and to support and encourage black and ethnic minority people to participate actively.

## **Leadership and participation**

The authority is labour led and there are a total of 42 members in the authority. There is one black and ethnic minority member; about one third of members are women. The majority of members are over 50 and many are retired. The lack of younger members was an issue mentioned by all the members we spoke to. Many mentioned that there is not a tradition of close cross-party working in the authority.

There are scrutiny committees, one of which deals with equality and diversity issues and receives quarterly updates from the corporate equality group.

Although some members are interested in equality issues, it is widely acknowledged that equality and diversity has been officer-driven in the authority, with few members pushing the agenda actively. There is – according to some of the people we spoke to – a general lack of understanding about equalities among members, and some expressed the view that members in general could and should do more to engage with their communities. Members can serve as a link between the authority and the community, but more needs to be done to support them in this. Training to raise awareness and develop their roles in this area is planned as part of the induction of new councillors.

A few people we spoke to raised concerns that some members are “still pushing right wing views” and that the British National Party was likely to put up candidates in the next election. Despite the new requirements for community leadership, the need to promote more diverse representation and participation is not viewed as a key priority by members, or seen to be within their specific remit. To date the authority as a whole has done little in this area.

## **Case study eight**

### **Site Record**

From April 2002 the Council set up a new modernised political structure under a system of Leader/Cabinet decision-making with six portfolio holders in its nine Member Cabinet. These portfolio themes and those of the six Scrutiny & Review Panels are aligned to the six Council priorities.

### **General Approach**

Whilst some people we spoke to felt that equal opportunities had always been considered an important issue to the council others felt that in practice, this commitment had been historically weak and limited in both policy scope and application. There was agreement amongst staff that although the council has been a late starter in the area of equality and diversity, it is starting to get things right and is now developing an overarching approach.

Education particularly was keen to stress its development of a strong agenda around inclusion and broadening their awareness and action on equalities, e.g. the needs of traveller children and young people. They talked of their emerging ethos of 'inclusive minds' to enable children to develop tolerant attitudes toward diversity and difference.

The fact that equalities is now being taken much more seriously was seen as very much helped by the current status that brought together some active knowledge of equalities issues in both education and social services. However it was acknowledged that the attitudes of some members and staff did at times give negative signals regarding the increased impetus to develop a broader and yet more effective, response to equalities and diversity.

Many respondents cited the appointment of the Policy Officer (Equalities) as being a major impetus for change and progress, and that this has helped to challenge a 'no problem here' culture to one where awareness is being raised and practice challenged. The post-holder has created the freedom to develop the role which has led to some real breakthroughs whilst at the same time, begging the question for developing a more focussed role in the future – given the enormity of the equalities and diversity agenda.

The approach is not yet overarching and is still considered by some staff as 'a bit piecemeal' but it has undoubtedly become more 'joined up', structured with a strengthening corporate steer. It is now less dependent upon the networks and interactions of a few committed individuals to take things forward, although all respondents still recognised the necessity of leadership and commitment for 'making things happen'.

The views of external respondents were slightly more cynical in that they felt that the council's general approach to equalities was historically one of 'we know best'. There is a general feeling that the authority needs to listen more to the specific needs and concerns of all minority groups, even 'non-traditional' ones. However, progress was acknowledged in that the early/historical focus on equalities was mainly on staff and recruitment issues, but has since developed a service delivery dimension.

There were also perceptions that although gender and race were now being discussed in the public domain, there was still some way to go as far as disability and special needs were concerned. In addition, sexual orientation and gay and lesbian issues remain largely 'unspoken' within the Council, a view that was further exacerbated by negative comments appearing in the press, attributed to Members.

An indicator of the way the Council is maturing in its orientation toward diversity can perhaps be detected in the Community Safety Partnership's Strategy 2002-2005, which states: 'The population... is becoming increasingly diverse and it is important that community involvement reflects this diversity. Crime will have a different impact according to a person's age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social and economic circumstances.'

The area has a significant number of international students visiting the town during the course of the year. It also has a large gay and lesbian community. Although the town is relatively affluent, pockets of deprivation do exist.'

## Legislation and Policies

The council has reached level 1 of the CRE's 'Standard for Local Government' and is making progress toward level 2 in the current year. It intends to be at level 5 within 5 years.

The Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2002/2003 sets out a large number of Best Value performance targets relating to equality and diversity. Education is taking a good lead on the RES particularly and has consulted with 40 schools to get it right and now supporting schools in developing their own action plans.

External perceptions vary about the council's response to the legislative agenda, partly through limited knowledge or a concern about equal treatment at grass roots level rather than the central government drivers of change. Certainly a respondent talked of disability as a form of 'hidden segregation' experienced by many children, and that effective educational mainstreaming could not take place until teaching and support staff had the correct attitudes and knowledge. However the LEA's Inclusion Strategy was welcomed even if there was still some way to go to make a reality for every child.

In addition to the above the council has a number of other plans and procedures, including:

- Corporate Equal Opportunities Policy, due for review in Spring 2003 under the leadership of the Director of Central Services
- A Race Equality Scheme and Implementation Plan 2002 – 2003. In particular, both Education and Social Services have *integrated* Equal Opportunities and RES Implementation Plans, and Environmental Health and Trading Standards have an integrated Ethnicity/RES 2002-05 Action Plan.
- Education Equal Opportunities Policy and Equal Opportunities Action Plan
- Education Inclusion Strategy
- Special Educational Needs Policy
- Education Accessibility Strategy (draft), plus Equal opportunities policies in individual schools

Piloting flexible working practices means that work-life balance arrangements are being developed but that there are different responses in different directorates, leading to the view that it depended upon the information resources of individual staff rather than a generally understood policy initiative.

The Council is also developing its subcontracting/procurement policy into equal opportunities contract compliance in order to meet best practice in procurement in line with IDEA guidelines. This is felt to be a useful lever to question why contractors hadn't scored

themselves particularly well. Staff said they felt 'supported not pushed' to develop good EO practice in the contractor assessment procedure.

In 'partnership' terms, the Local Strategic Partnership brings together more than 100 different organisations in the Council and was launched in the May 2000. It's Community Plan 2002 'Building a Better [name of authority]' contain a number of equalities related strands:

- Developing Communities and Tackling Crime: Objective 2, for example, aims to 'Tackle issues that lead to poverty and social exclusion and actively support the work of the Anti Poverty Forum. Target 8 refers specifically to 'Develop consultative networks, where all minority issues can be addressed and produce effective responses to concerns raised, by April 2003'.
- Caring for People: in general terms makes reference to 'encourage a society.... in which everyone is valued and supported to achieve the best of their ability', and more specifically reflects the concerns of local people that disable people should be better assisted at work. Target 10 states that the partnership will 'increase the number of people with disabilities employed by members of the Partnership by 10% between April 02 and April 05'.

### **Structures and Processes**

The internal structures and processes supporting equalities and diversity include:

The Corporate Equalities Group comprising service heads and supported by the Policy Officer (Equalities). Upcoming priorities for discussion under the equalities agenda include specific disability objectives including the appointment of a Corporate Disability Officer and the schedule for the launch for Two Ticks. In addition, the Draft Equalities Implementation Plan and the resource implications of achieving improvement under best value; the corporate policy on Translation and Interpreting, plus updates from partnerships like the County Joint Implementation Working Group (Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2002) and the Asylum Seekers and Refugee Strategic Group. In addition, regular feedback is also sought from a number of internal working groups:

- Gender Working Group (very new)
- Race Equality Working Group
- Disability Working Group
- Personnel Working Group

Recent proposals for improving the Council's strategic performance management include corporate guidance on the preparation and approval of business plans for 2003/04. The guidance exhorts service heads to consider how to start mainstreaming equalities and diversity issues by showing links to Customer Care Strategy, Complaints Policy and Equal Opportunities Policy. The Council's Policy Officer (Equalities) is supporting the process by offering to conduct an assessment of the draft service/business plans to '... help improve its impact on gender, race and disability issues'.

The Citizens Panel was first formed in 1999 as a low cost way of keeping in touch with local people on issues and is now considered the primary means by which views of local people are sought. Around 1300 residents take part. In addition the partnership is supporting a pilot scheme of neighbourhood forums for eight areas, which have well-established, natural

communities. The aim of which is to provide a strong link between local people and the partnership, and key leaders in the respective communities. The Panel has a proportionate number of members from ethnic minority communities, and the Council's RES makes specific reference to the fact that: 'Those from ethnic minorities may be invited to take part in focus group work, either targeted directly to discuss race issues and access to services, or simply as members of the population with a view on Council services and priorities'. The same commitments also apply to the arrangements for targeted surveys.

Supportive partnership working structures also include the Local Strategic Partnership. The Policy Officer (Equalities) is encouraging the Partnership to strengthen its focus on social inclusion and to sign up to 5 new key inclusion commitments, including 'exploring positive action initiatives with the Partnership in respect of employment, training and modern apprenticeships with particular reference to women, black and minority ethnic communities and disabled people'. If adopted, these key inclusion commitments would send a strong leadership message across the Council.

Other partnerships include the Multi-Agency Action Group to address community safety issues in relation to diversity and hate crime, made up of a Multi Agency Policy Forum and a Multi Agency Task Group. Supporting and/or part funding the Compact Group for local black and minority ethnic voluntary or community organisations to discuss key issues and concerns, and the Race Equality Council which plays a key role in the Multi Agency Panel and Racist Incidents Panel.

### **Staff Issues**

The race, disability and gender sub-groups are generally seen as a useful resource both in terms of supporting the staff/HR, and the service delivery agenda as well as feeding into the corporate equalities structure. No-one thought that particular groups of staff were being utilised against their will, on the contrary there seemed to be real enthusiasm even if their actual impact had yet to be measured. Some interviewees pointed out that equalities needed to be more widely owned if it wasn't to be marginalised to a few very active groups and individuals.

The black workers support group was seen as supportive by some, and not really understood by others. There appeared to be some confusion as to whether this was a support structure for black staff or a resource to the Council on race issues.

Interestingly few staff thought that there were any barriers to promotion *once people had joined the Council*, but that there was probably an issue persisting around positive action strategies for recruitment and selection. It was generally accepted that unitary status had brought in a more diverse set of staff backgrounds and abilities. It was also clear that any type of 'nepotism' was strictly frowned upon. A small proportion of staff mentioned that 'your face needed to fit' in the council and that there were still real barriers to progression for women, evidenced by only 2 of the business unit heads being female.

There has undoubtedly been a raising of awareness about the dangers of discriminatory behaviour and many members of staff felt that lessons had been learnt from past mistakes. Staff felt that the staff welfare provision and policies such as the anti-Bullying and Harassment policy were effective and supportive.

### **Service Delivery and Community Participation**

The Council's key role in the Partnership was seen as providing a critical lead, so long as it could deliver on its own equalities and diversity agenda. It was felt that the 2001 Census data would provide useful up-to-date information of the diversity of needs in the area, and

that this would be an opportunity to identify real needs relating to Black and minority ethnic engagement, youth engagement etc.

There's clearly a need to help staff be confident about ethnic monitoring, especially in Social Services whether there needs to be assessments on race and religious needs. The Race Equality Working Group is actively promoting working with different communities in order to better understand their needs.

Some interviewees were clearly concerned that in working with specific ethnic groups there could be a danger of being 'devisive' rather than 'inclusive'. This may be because there's an increasing recognition that 'treating everyone the same' is no longer an acceptable excuse for questionable customer care, but that there's still a slight vacuum in understanding and being confident about dealing with difference.

There appeared to be some frustration because of the low absolute numbers associated with ethnicity and religion, but an emerging recognition that these issues are nonetheless important ones.

### **Political Leadership and Representation**

Members interviewed felt that the council had always been committed to equal opportunities, and that this 'should be for everybody', regardless of background. They acknowledged that there had been big changes in the staff makeup over the last 20 years and felt that there had been 'some very good diverse appointments in recent years'. The Council's partnership activities and community consultation structures were working very well to further engage with local communities.

There was a recognition that more could be done on supporting people with disabilities and although there had been a history of support, financial constraints combined with new regulation has meant limited progress in some areas. Members also acknowledged that they would welcome more representation from Madeiran or Moslem communities and that this would help raise the issues relating to these communities.

Reference was made to some of the economic drivers of the Council: tourism, financial (and international) services and language schools – all of whom bring overseas visitors and different language groups, and all of whom are vital to the local economy. This coupled with a seasonal workforce, refugees and asylum seekers and an albeit small, traveller community means that the area is more diverse than it would at first appear.

Members were quite realistic about their leadership role with respect to equalities and diversity: they were sure that they were just perceived as 'the Council' regardless of their individual policy/portfolio roles, but that since 2000 they have thought harder about the equalities agenda and what it means for the Council.

Some Members felt that if they were doing their jobs properly then in theory they should be able properly 'collectively' represent their constituents regardless of background. Others however felt that 'with the best will in the world they couldn't represent all interests in all wards'. But they could refer individual constituents with particular problems onto knowledgeable third parties as and when the situation required.

Members didn't perceive any barriers to becoming an elected Member apart from the difficulty some would have in taking time off for Council business.

In response to what could be improved for the better, there were a number of thoughts:

- Consider a weekly programme on community relations on TV.

- Improve communications with different communities.
- Have more focal points in the communities.
- Engage more with different ethnic, religious and disability groups.
- Ensure that the Journal reaches everyone.

## **Case study nine**

### **Site record**

The council is a shire district local authority in a mainly rural area. It has a population of approximately 122,000 people and is a relatively prosperous district, with some pockets of deprivation. At the last census in 1991, the black and ethnic minority population of the area was around 2 to 3 per cent, but these numbers included American air force personnel and their families located on airbases in the area. Following the recent closure of the bases, the black and ethnic minority population is now thought to be below 1 per cent, mainly Indian and Chinese. The ethnic minority population is very dispersed, with single families often living in isolated villages. There are also a couple of unregistered travellers' sites in the area. Asylum seekers have also used the local port as a point of entry into the country, although most people we spoke to stated that numbers were fairly small.

### **General approach**

Some people we spoke to expressed confusion about the meaning of the terms equality and diversity. Several felt that the council did not have a shared understanding of these concepts and should do more to promote a common corporate understanding. Others felt that our questions would be more meaningful to people in the council if they were re-focused around issues of customer care and potential barriers to effective service provision.

In response to questions about the range of issues one might consider under the heading 'equality and diversity', most people we interviewed focused on race and disability, rather than a broader range of issues.

All the people we spoke to described their area as predominantly white, middle class and rural, although a number of people pointed to pockets of poverty and black and ethnic minority communities across the area. Many expressed the view that the issue of ethnic diversity was not therefore particularly relevant or of pressing importance to the council's work. There was a greater level of awareness about disability, and this was widely recognised as an important issue for the council.

When prompted for other relevant diversity issues, a number of the interviewees also talked about age and rural isolation. We were told that poor transport links created social isolation and exacerbated economic hardships in some areas of the district.

Several of the officers we interviewed described the council's approach to diverse communities as 'open door'. Many stated that their aim was to treat everyone in the area equally and fairly, and some expressed a concern that any possible targeting of resources to minority groups might be seen as 'positive discrimination'.

### **Policies and legislation**

The council has an equal opportunities policy in place and equality and diversity issues are included in the council's disciplinary procedures and recruitment guidance.

The council has worked on, but not yet published, a race equality scheme. It has not yet adopted the Equality Standard, but plans to do this within the next year or so.

Several interviewees stated that they were not clear what the new general duty to promote race equality meant in practice.

## **Structures and processes**

The head of personnel is taking a lead on staff-related aspects of equality and diversity across the council. There is widespread recognition of her commitment to driving these issues forward. The director of finance is responsible for taking forward the council's race equality scheme. He also chairs an interdepartmental group charged with looking into equality and diversity issues. One of the environment and housing officers has responsibility for access issues relating to council-owned buildings.

We were told that there had been a growing realisation of the need for better integration and co-ordination of equality and diversity across the council. A member of the finance team is shortly to assume responsibility for this role.

The council is currently carrying out a number of activities in the area of equality and diversity, in conjunction with partner organisations. The council belongs to a joint diversity working group, which is led by the county council and includes district councils, the police authority, health service providers and a number of other local agencies. Partnership work is seen as an opportunity to pool resources and expertise and achieve a better level of impact and coverage than the council could achieve working alone. However, we were told that progress was sometimes slowed by difficult relationships between with partner organisations.

## **Staff issues**

There was a perception among the people we spoke to that the council was better at tackling equality and diversity in relation to staff issues than in relation to service delivery.

The council monitors its workforce on ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. Monitoring is largely voluntary and now covers around 74 percent of the workforce. Council statistics indicate that the workforce currently reflects the local population in relation to race.

We were told that the council's job advertisements set out its commitment to equal opportunities, and interviewers are now required to provide clearer justifications for their hiring decisions.

Several interviewees felt that the condition of the council buildings was a significant barrier to the recruitment of more disabled staff members. The council has now set aside £100,000 for improvements to the physical environment.

The council offers a range of training on equality and diversity issues, including equal opportunities training as part of induction, equal opportunities training for those involved in recruitment and appraisal, diversity workshops focusing on the Race Relations Amendment Act for front-line staff, and disability awareness training. A few years ago the council also organised a race awareness seminar for managers, which drew together a range of relevant partners in the area.

Charismatic speakers and the use of personal stories were seen as important factors in getting messages across. Other methods of raising staff awareness included team meetings, email updates and newsletters. The council has not yet carried out training on bullying and harassment, but plans to organise this soon. Training is currently monitored by gender, working pattern, department and grade. The council is planning to monitor training by ethnic origin, disability and age.

With other partners, the council has organised and run training courses for women aspiring to management positions. We heard that the chief executive and leader were supportive of senior women.

The council has a disciplinary and grievance procedure in place, and this is set out in the staff handbook. The majority of people we spoke to felt that the staff knew about the procedure and would feel comfortable using it. No monitoring of disciplinary and grievance actions for equality and diversity issues currently takes place, as numbers of cases are very small (i.e. no formal grievances lodged in four years, and only one or two disciplinary cases per year).

The council also offers a counselling scheme for staff. This is run by an external agency; however, the head of personnel receives feedback on the general issues that people are raising. Varying views were expressed about whether or not the council would be a supportive environment for staff from different backgrounds. Some claimed that people would be friendly and welcoming, but others disagreed.

### **Service delivery and community participation**

Some interviewees felt that the council was already offering a good service to the public, and this assertion is supported by the low levels of complaints that the council receives. However, other people we spoke to felt that the council could do more to engage with local people and ensure that services were developed to meet their needs.

The council does not yet have comprehensive data about the ethnic origin of service users.

We were told that the council produces information in a variety of formats and that they subscribe to Language Line, a translation service.

Some of the people we interviewed talked about the range of techniques they currently use to consult with the public. These include testing ideas with local voluntary groups, consultation with a representative panel of local people (run jointly by a range of partner organisations), posting notices on the council web site, and carrying out surveys and questionnaires.

The council carried out a disability audit of its services five years ago, which resulted in action plans for various areas. The council currently employs a care worker to help disabled citizens to apply for modification grants for their homes. Although the council employs an access officer, this person is responsible for council-owned buildings only. Several people we talked to felt there was a need for an access officer with responsibilities for non-council buildings.

We were told that council funding for the voluntary sector was in the region of

£100,000 to £200,000 a year. Most of this money goes to fund improvements to the physical infrastructure of the area. The council also funds the local race equality council and three citizens advice bureaux – two in the district itself and one in a neighbouring area that is used by council residents.

We were told that there were difficulties in adopting a uniform approach to equality and diversity over so many different service areas. The dispersed nature of the black and ethnic minority community and the absence of community leaders were also regarded as factors that made consultation more difficult.

Interviewees expressed concerns that proactive outreach work with particular communities would be associated with positive discrimination. There was a feeling that any attempt to connect with particular communities would therefore need to be carefully linked with broader attempts to engage the public, otherwise there would be a risk of a backlash.

Several interviewees stated that service heads did not receive enough concrete guidance on how, practically, to address issues of equality and diversity in delivering their service. Other interviewees claimed that pockets of outdated views persisted in some parts of the organisation. Changing the attitudes of 'blue-collar' front-line staff was seen to be particularly difficult. We were told that this group often found it hard to appreciate the relevance of equality and diversity training to their job, and their dispersed location and hours made attendance at training events more difficult.

## **Political leadership and representation**

The council is controlled by the Conservative party, which holds 37 of the 55 seats. It recently adopted new political structures, with the leader supported by a cabinet. There is a cabinet member with special responsibilities for race equality and social exclusion issues. Two other cabinet members have responsibilities for older and younger people.

The council does not currently monitor its councillors in terms of equality and diversity. The view expressed by many officers and some councillors is that members are overwhelmingly white, middle class and male. We heard reference to the '1950s views' of some members and the 'old boy network' that operated in the council chamber.

The council has made some attempt to encourage people from more diverse backgrounds to stand for election, for example by offering assistance with childcare costs. However, the funds offered were viewed as insufficient. We were told that, while women were undertaking much of the constituency work in the area, they were unwilling to stand as councillors themselves. There was some suggestion that women would be put off by 'the atmosphere in the chamber', and that they might not feel comfortable with the attention that being a councillor can bring.

We were told that most members saw themselves as representative by virtue of being elected, and did not see the need for additional engagement with the community to strengthen representation. However, some councillors and several officers talked about the need for members to get out and network more widely with the community. We heard that members relied largely on their own *ad hoc* contacts in order to sound out the community and did not have formalised links with, for example, the voluntary sector or other key stakeholders. Some councillors we talked to suggested holding open days or conferences in the council, so that community groups and local people could get to know councillors and share ideas with them.

Some councillors felt that the new political arrangements, with a strengthened role for the cabinet, would help to drive the equality and diversity agenda forward, even in the face of opposition or indifference from backbenchers. However, they also recognised that the level of responsibility and time commitment required by cabinet members precludes those with busy full-time jobs or care duties from participating as councillors.

Interviewees mentioned that the cycle of electoral politics was often an obstacle to achieving change in the area of equality and diversity. Even if equality and diversity issues are adopted as important by members, they are likely to be dropped in favour of 'more popular' or 'mainstream' issues as elections draw near.

Several of the officers we spoke to stated that they rarely or never met with councillors, and many people felt that links between officers and councillors will need to be strengthened if the equality and diversity agenda is to be progressed.

## **Case study ten**

### **Site Record**

The Council is run by a joint administration of labour, conservative and liberal democrat councillors, with no overall control. The Council has adopted a Cabinet form of Executive, where each of the 52 members serves on the Cabinet or one of the scrutiny committees. This is one of the largest District Councils in England comprising a mixture of rural, urban and suburban communities, with a total population of approximately 154,000. The mix of populations on each ward is diverse in terms of affluence and race. People from ethnic minorities form almost 10 per cent of the population, although in some wards this rises to more than 20 per cent. Those interviewed felt that there was little racial tension. Unemployment is high in some areas due to the decline of the local textile industry, and the difficulty in redeploying people due to the lack of easily transferable skills.

### **General approach**

Those interviewed spoke of the Council's strong commitment to equality and diversity and the ambitious objectives that it has set itself for the next two to three years. All of those interviewed were supportive and helpful in providing information to us and were open about their strengths and weaknesses.

Much of the impetus for the Council's actions comes from a wish to achieve level three of the Equality Standard: however, there is strong dedication from the Cabinet and Chief Executive to address all aspects of equality and diversity over and above the minimum requirements. A dedicated Equality Officer was appointed some 6 to 7 years ago. The Council has developed a strategic approach to equality and diversity through the establishment of a common framework, and has put a lot of effort into developing policies and procedures and embedding them within the organisation. One community group described the Council as "leading edge" within the region, which is testimony to the work that the Council has done in the area of equalities. This positive picture is further reinforced by the recent identification of the authority as a site for the Home Office's community cohesion Pathfinder initiative. Historically within the Council there has been a stronger focus on race and disability. However, the Council is keen to strengthen and broaden its work into other areas of equality and diversity. Some work in these areas has already been undertaken, for example, age and religion.

The Council has a history of good working relationships with the community. It established a compact with the voluntary sector and has agency agreements with the Race Equality Council, CVS, a Community Arts group, and the CAB. Within constrained resources, the Council has developed a number of policies and procedures and endeavoured to integrate these into daily working processes.

The Council is in the early stages of developing targeted services to specific minority groups. This is partly due to the limited resources of the Council and its efforts to provide a consistent level of service throughout the community, and partly due to the need for evidence to support a clear strategy for targeting its efforts. A recent example of work in this area is the building of community development capacity in a specific part of the borough.

Service delivery appears to be variable with regard to equality and diversity. Some service areas have been quick to grasp the agenda, whilst others have had greater difficulty in recognising the need for integrating equality and diversity policies and procedures into their working practices.

Officers acknowledged that there was a lack of a performance culture within the Council and this is an area that they are trying to address. As a result little analysis is carried out of the

equalities information so far collected. The new service planning framework which is being rolled out for equalities will draw a clear link between desirable actions and the performance measurement of them.

## **Legislation and policies**

The Council includes equality and diversity in its written policies on recruitment and selection, grievances and disciplinary, bullying and harassment, and the Community Strategy. It has more limited exposure in the areas of service procurement, delivery and impact. The Council has recently introduced standard categories for monitoring so that information can be gathered across the organisation. Internal policies are made accessible to staff on the Council's intranet, external policies are made available to the public on the Council's website.

The Council has a Corporate Equalities Plan which draws together all of the Council's commitments under its Equal Opportunities Policy and Race Equality Scheme. It outlines the actions the Council must take to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Equality Standard and the commitments laid down in its Equal Opportunities Policy and Race Equality Scheme from 2003-2006. The Equal Opportunities Policy was adopted by the Council in 2003, which commits the Council to combat discrimination on the grounds of disability, race, gender, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. The Council also intends, where appropriate, to go beyond its legal obligations in these areas to promote equality of opportunity and the development of good working practices.

The Council has made a commitment to reach level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by December 2003; level 2 of the CRE Standard was achieved in May 2002. It has published its Race Equality Scheme, which provides for shared responsibilities across the organisation.

The Council has been working in conjunction with the police and the local race equality council to establish a racist incident Coordinator post. This post will be funded for a year to look at developing a common approach to racial harassment incident reporting across all agencies in the Borough. Planning, housing and regeneration services are currently looking at ways they can strengthen their links with the local Disability Forum to ensure that they consult local people with disabilities about the impact of new buildings or building extensions in the area.

The Council has recently introduced an harassment and grievance procedure specific to incidences of discrimination for staff, which has been supported by training courses for employees. There has to date been a very minimal level of complaints around discrimination issues.

The Council is participating in a research project being carried out by Cambridge University which is focusing on age diversity. As part of this research the Council is piloting a new approach to working with older staff, and will conduct a staff survey dealing with issues of age diversity.

The service procurement strategy is shortly to be reviewed. The current policy requires officers to include standard wording in all tender documentation. Further progress in this area to date has been limited due to a lack of resources, however, the Council is keen to develop new rules and regulations for procurement.

The Council's personal development reviews [PDRs] incorporate an aspect relating to equalities. Whilst recognising the good intention behind the principle, a number of officers

interviewed felt that further work could be done in this area to provide a stronger impetus for taking personal responsibility for equality and diversity through establishing individual performance objectives.

### **Structures and processes**

The Council is undergoing a re-structuring, which has been taking place over the last 18 months, and has been led by the Chief Executive. Recruitment for a new Managing Director is due to take place in the summer of 2003. The number of service areas within the Council has been reduced from 21 to 14, and each Head of Service is responsible to an overview director. In addition there are two Management Support units – Policy, and Business support, which encompasses Human Resources. The Director's team comprises the Chief Executive and Directors of Community Engagement, Performance Improvement and Resources. There are 678 employees, 9 employees have stated that they have a disability, and 43 employees are from ethnic minority groups. There are no women or ethnic minority officers on the senior management team.

A Policy Officer for Equalities was appointed in July 2002 after an 18-month vacancy in the post from the previous Equalities Officer, who had been in post for more than five years. The Policy Officer sits within the Policy Unit, and is supported by staff in Human Resources who also play an active role in developing good practice with regard to equalities. The Policy Unit deals with cross-cutting issues such as equality opportunities, social inclusion and community safety. The approach the Policy Unit is adopting in driving forward the equality and diversity agenda is to support and encourage the service areas to take ownership of policies and procedures, within a common framework. The framework links equalities to service planning and performance improvement.

Monitoring of the equalities agenda takes place through the Equality Working Party (see Political Leadership below) and the wider Council, although the link between monitoring and resultant action would benefit from being strengthened. As an example, the analysis of the data for staff recruitment does not yet provide a clear sense of the underlying causes behind under-representation of certain groups in the organisation. The Equality Working Party will monitor progress of the Corporate Equalities Plan, and the relevant Scrutiny Committees will review all equality targets and actions set in Service Delivery Plans formally on an annual basis.

### **Staff Issues**

Employees are monitored by ethnic origin, gender, disability and age. The Chief Executive and officers recognise the need to build awareness of the equalities into their everyday jobs. There are clearly set out policies regarding staff equalities, and these appear to have been well communicated to staff. Recruitment processes are rigorous and have been well-received by recent appointees, but the implementation of these policies is more problematic in some areas.

Equalities awareness training is designed to be interactive and thought provoking. The Council have employed a drama organisation, Impact, who train members and officers on equalities through enacting real-life situations with actors. Scenarios are played out and the ensuing issues discussed by the group. This approach was considered much more interesting, challenging and effective than more conventional awareness training.

There are differing views within the organisation about the existence of discriminatory practices. Most officers were of the opinion that there were no issues, however, some officers and community groups did alert us to a small number of instances where discrimination had taken place within the Council or in relation to service delivery. This suggested a possible lack of understanding of the issues around discrimination of minority

groups and a culture of people from minority groups being uncomfortable to speak up about issues they face.

There are no staff support groups to support women, ethnic minority staff, or any other group, although these did exist in the past but have now petered out. The HR department is however keen to introduce new groups in order to provide a point of contact for people around equalities issues and to offer support to minority staff.

In most equalities related situations the equalities officer is informed of any problems and internal policies are followed, to ensure a consistent approach.

We were advised that the senior management team is made up exclusively of older, white men. Most people interviewed, felt that this was largely due to circumstance, in that there had been no vacancies at senior management level. There were some suggestions, however, that there were possibly some underlying contributing factors, such as differential rates of pay and differential levels of job protection between men and women in the recent management review.

Certain initiatives to develop women into senior roles have been taken, for example, a Springboard programme. The impact of such a programme has not, however, been monitored, and this lack of monitoring appears to be symptomatic of the wider performance management issue for the Council as mentioned above.

There is growing encouragement of flexible ways of working, and the Council is currently putting significant effort into this area. One member of staff who had recently joined was very impressed with the flexible working approach of the Council and described it as an “eye opener”. Furthermore, the Council is reviewing its leave entitlement policy in order to be able to respond to the variation in requirements for different religions.

Officers recognise that they face real challenges in putting some of the more recent legislation into practice, for example, sexuality legislation and would welcome guidance in these areas. As a District Council, they feel that much of the guidance from Government is more relevant to larger councils and can be difficult to apply in their locality.

### **Service delivery and community participation**

The Policy Unit has drawn up a framework for building equality and diversity into service plans. Heads of Service have been encouraged to carry out their own equalities self-assessment, which identifies their performance criteria and possible improvement actions. These improvement actions are then integrated into their annual service plans. These self-assessments were carried out last year, but their success was undermined by the lack of follow-up from the Policy Unit. As a result, this year the Policy Unit intends to meet with the Heads of Service on a regular basis in order to review their progress and provide support where required.

There has been a mixed response from the Heads of Service. Some have been happy to take responsibility for incorporating equality and diversity policies and procedures into their work, whilst others still see the responsibility resting primarily with the Policy Unit. The Policy Unit is keen to work closely with the Heads of Service as it recognises the advantages of a strategic, integrated approach to equalities. There is a feeling that whilst there is clear leadership on equality and diversity from the Chief Executive and the Cabinet, there is the need for the equalities agenda to be grasped at senior management level. Some of those interviewed were concerned that a new Chief Executive or political party in power might place less emphasis on the equalities agenda and devote less resources to it, and the challenge for the organisation will be maintaining the momentum it has achieved.

The impact assessment of equality and diversity actions on services has not yet been fully developed and officers recognise that there is much work to be done in this area. There is, however, a realisation that with limited resources progress will inevitably be slower than desired.

Interpreting services are available to the community and some Council information is available in the minority languages, although due to its resource constraints translations are largely carried out on request only. Monitoring of translation and interpreting services is carried out, but this tends to be limited to the frequency with which demands are made for particular languages rather than developing an understanding of users' satisfaction with services. Interpreters are largely drawn from the local minority ethnic communities, and there is the potential for the Council to take greater advantage of these links into the community to gain a better understanding of their needs.

Officers acknowledged that the Council does not have a clear understanding of whether services are meeting the needs of diverse populations, as it does not yet have a clear picture of the needs of these groups, given that they form a relatively small proportion of the community, are widely dispersed and under-represented within the Council's political structure. It is hoped that the imminent appointment of a Public Relations Officer (a joint post with the local PCT) will help improve the Council's profile and communications with the community.

The Council consults the public in a number of ways – through newsletters, meetings, consultations, focus groups and citizen panels. It has also carried out Village Visioning and Planning for Real exercises. Whilst the Council has made real efforts in consulting with the community it also recognises the need to develop innovative techniques to include hard-to-reach groups. The mix of urban and rural make-up of the Council creates challenges around access, and the Council is thinking of, for example, piloting surgeries with translators in the community for planning applications as a way of overcoming these issues. Newer officers are bringing the learning from their previous organisations in thinking about innovative ways of engaging with communities and are networking in order to learn from the experience of other authorities.

Officers recognised that consultations they have carried out have tended to raise expectations within the community and in some instances the Council has struggled with managing these expectations as, for example, where the Single Regeneration Budget 7 did not materialise. Officers are aware of the need to adopt a more mature dialogue with the community in order to overcome potentially deteriorating relationships in these cases.

A successful development for the Council has been the Local Strategic Partnership [LSP], which was established in April 2002. It comprises a Board, which contains representatives from the Council, the County Council, and a range of local community representatives. The Board is held accountable to the Forum, which has more than 100 members. The LSP has prepared a consultation draft of its community strategy. This will be supported by an Action Plan, which is currently being developed. The strategy has been intentionally aligned with the Council's own strategy for working with the community. Many of the people interviewed felt that the Council had made great progress in setting up the LSP and that it would be instrumental in assisting the Council in developing stronger community relations. The success of the Council in setting up an effective LSP in such a short time is due largely to its good working partnerships over the years with community and voluntary agencies and other statutory organisations.

## **Political leadership and representation**

There are nine members of the Executive supported by 5 Scrutiny Committees, a Standards Committee, and Appeals and Reviews Committees for regulatory matters. Since 1999 there has been no overall control of the Council. Whilst in the past the Council has been highly party political, it appears that there has been good joint working in the absence of overall control.

The majority of councillors are over 50 and many are retired. Councillors and senior officers suggested that there are not enough women councillors or young people. There are no councillors from ethnic minorities or with physical disabilities.

Officers and members feel that this under representation is largely due to the political party systems. Whilst ethnic minority candidates have stood for election in the past they have not been successful for a combination of reasons – seats become available infrequently as many Council members have held their positions for a number of years, the ethnic minority population is made up of a large number of small groups and in any one area the critical mass of people from ethnic minorities is relatively small, and there is a perception that for cultural reasons people from ethnic minorities are reluctant to go into politics. The Labour party is, however, confident that at the next election a candidate from an ethnic minority is likely to be elected.

Community groups and members acknowledged, however, that the Council was only one of many sources of representation for minority communities and that other environments in which communities can work together and influence change should also be recognised and encouraged.

Members recognise that the political structure and workings of the Council may be unclear to new members, however, they were able to identify a number of mechanisms by which they are able to support new members. These include members' induction training for all new members, assistance given to members who do are lacking confidence in speaking and writing, and the ability to gain knowledge in a specialist area through the scrutiny committee structure. Members also receiving training, and more recently have attended equalities awareness training.

In addition to the formal committee structure there is an Equality Working Party, which comprises a range of members, officers and representatives from community groups. This working party used to be a sub-committee prior to the new executive structure. We were told by a number of participants that the mix of elected members, officers and community organisations on the working party made it a more effective body now than in the past when it was a member-only sub-committee under previous governance arrangements.

## **Overview**

The council has had a positive and proactive approach to equality and diversity for a number of years, and is very probably one of the first councils of its type to appoint a full time equalities officer. As a result of committed leadership from both senior officers and elected members strenuous efforts are being made to achieve level three of the Equalities Standard by 2004. However this hard work is now revealing some gaps between intentions, policies on paper, and their practical implementation. Whilst the council is seeking to ensure equality and diversity practices are fully incorporated into individual PDRs and business planning processes, it is now beginning to appreciate that more attention needs to be given to performance management and monitoring across the board if they are to be successful in

achieving their goals, and that this is essential if equality and diversity is to be mainstreamed as an intrinsic part of everyday working.

So far most attention has been given to race and disability in the community and there is little evidence that the traditional make up of officer and member cadres has been affected by the work to date. However if the council's principled commitment can be matched by a equal willingness to examine and challenge the real impact of its policies and procedures there is every likelihood they will be successful in meeting their stated aims. The council has made it clear that they would welcome advice and guidance that is tailored to their particular situation.

## **Case Study Interview Guide**

### **Questions for the Chief Executive**

#### **Structures and Processes**

1. What is the rationale or philosophy behind X's approach to equality and diversity?
2. Can you give a brief overview of the structures and processes that X has in place in order to create, implement and evaluate a coherent and over-arching equality and diversity agenda?
3. How well have these structures and processes to promote equality and diversity operated in X? How have they impacted on staff? How have they impacted on elected members? What is the role of members in promoting or developing these strategies and processes?

#### **Policies and Procedures**

4. Show list of policies from baseline survey: Would you agree that this is a full list of the equality and diversity policies for this authority?
5. What strategies and policies are specifically in place to ensure equality and diversity, as well as good value, in the procurement of goods and services from external suppliers?
6. If you had to name one, which of X's policies or strategies in equality and diversity do you consider the most effective? Why is it effective? How has its effectiveness been measured or monitored?
7. What does equality and diversity mean in terms of X – which groups are key targets for these strategies and policies? [may need to probe to distinguish staff from public as targets]
8. What mechanisms and structures are in place to ensure that staff are aware of X's equality and diversity strategies and processes? What role(s) are staff expected to play in the promotion of equality and diversity within the authority?
9. Can you tell me about monitoring equality and diversity policies and strategies? How is effectiveness measured, e.g. procurement of goods and services from external suppliers
10. How are the council's strategies and policies on equality and diversity communicated to the general public in X? What has the response been? [Probe: how do you know this is the response? Is there are better response from some sections than others?]

#### **Service Provision and Procurement**

11. Do services meet the needs of the local population in a way that also complies with the equality and diversity agenda for X? What are the challenges for X in ensuring that services are delivered in a way that meets the needs of all but also achieves equality in service delivery?

#### **Legislation**

12. What has X done to ensure compliance with relevant equalities legislation? [Race Relations Act, Race Relations (Amendment) Act, Disability Discrimination Act, Sex Discrimination Act] (Ask for examples)

How has the duty to promote race equality been taken on? (Ask for examples)

What, if anything, could be done to improve or fine-tune this approach?

13. What is X's view on the possible introduction of a duty to promote equality?

14. What might be the impact of the Sex Discrimination (Election of Candidates) Act be on X? Why will it have that impact?

### **The Future**

15. As Chief Executive of X, what needs to be done over the next 12 months in terms of the authority's equality and diversity agenda?

16. What challenges does X face in achieving these aims over the next 12 months?

## **Questions for senior and junior staff**

### **Processes and Structures**

1. Tell us about what you know about your council's approach to equality and diversity? Do you think there is an overarching approach to equality and diversity in X?
2. Where does the impetus for equality and diversity come from? [may need to probe, i.e. senior officers, council members, community activists, compliance with legislation]
3. How are the council's policies and initiatives communicated to staff? Are they well known about?
4. What are the systems in your organisation for equality and diversity such as a diversity unit, champions? Do all staff know about these? Are they effective?
5. Which aspects of diversity are considered: ethnicity, age, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation?
6. What do you think was the reason for choosing these?
7. What is used to promote equalities and diversity within your council, e.g. newsletters, conferences?
8. What is done to promote the council's work in equalities and diversity in the community?

### **Policies and procedures**

1. What equalities and diversity policies and procedures do you know about? (Areas: procurement, service delivery, recruitment and retention etc)
2. How are they advertised/promoted?
3. Which ones do you consider to be most effective? (probe –do they know how effectiveness is measured?)

### **Staff-role of employees**

1. How much does the equality and diversity agenda in X impact on your day-to-day work?
2. In your work, is there any one aspect of equality and diversity that you would consider to be the most effective? Why?

3. In your work, is there any one aspect of equality and diversity that you would consider to be the least helpful? Why?
4. What support mechanisms are there for staff in X? [probe to see if there are any mechanisms oriented to particular groups of staff, e.g. for disabled staff.] Are you involved in any? Overall, how effective do you think they are?
5. Is it easy to make use of flexible working in X?
6. In your department, would it be true to say that particular types of people tend to do particular tasks or have particular roles? How does this come about?
7. Are officers from particular groups likely to take on specific tasks or roles? Why do you think this is the case? Is this a known expectation or just something that happens?
8. Are some staff more or less likely to get promoted because of how their background is seen in X? What barriers/escalators are there? [probe about employees from different groups: women, disabled employees, ethnic minority employees and so on]
9. How are complaints from the public about discriminatory behaviour/policies managed?
10. What mechanisms are in place for staff to complain about discriminatory behaviour? Are they effective?
11. Please describe the council's approach to grievances and tribunals? (Probe-effectiveness of grievances and tribunals)

### **Service Provision**

1. What do you know about what X does to become aware of the needs of the local population?[ e.g. user surveys]
2. What types of services are offered by the council to meet the needs of diverse groups? (include contracted out services)?
3. In your experience as an officer in X, do the diverse groups in your community feel that their needs are met by the services the council provides?
4. How are the services monitored in terms of equality and diversity, e.g. surveys of users? Do you know what is done with the results of monitoring?
5. What changes, if any, do you think are needed to make services more diverse, e.g. awareness training?

### **The Future**

1. What changes, if any, are needed to improve the council's work in equality and diversity?

### **Questions for members**

#### **Processes and Structures**

1. What is the rationale or philosophy behind X's approach to equality and diversity?

2. Can you give a brief overview of the structures and processes that X has in place in order to create, implement and evaluate a coherent and over-arching equality and diversity agenda?
3. How well have these structures and processes to promote equality and diversity operated in X? How have they impacted on staff? How have they impacted on elected members?
4. Can you describe the role(s) of members in promoting or developing these strategies and processes? What are the typical issues relating to equality and diversity that are raised in the chamber? Who typically raises them?
5. What are the systems in your organisation for equality and diversity such as a diversity unit, champions? Do all staff know about these? Are they effective?
6. What does equality and diversity mean in terms of [name of council]? Drawing on your experience(s) as a councillor(s), which groups would you say are most in need of these policies and strategies?
7. What is used to promote equalities and diversity inside your council, e.g. newsletters, conferences?
8. What is done to promote the council's work in equalities and diversity in the community?

#### **Mechanisms for citizen and community participation**

1. Please describe the mechanisms that the council uses for consultation and participation, e.g. focus groups, citizen's panels? What is done to ensure equality and diversity issues are addressed in terms of participation or issues covered?
2. How successful are they? Do they draw in participants from the range of groups in X? [If yes: How do you know this?]
3. What is done to identify and consult with hard to reach groups?

#### **Political Leadership and Representation**

1. What are the political management arrangements?
2. How are roles and responsibilities allocated, e.g. membership of committees and allocation of positions?
3. Does this impact on perceptions of the council held by the community? [probe: how do they know this?]
4. Are councillors working effectively in terms of promoting and leading on equality and diversity?
5. What are the different leadership styles? (probe for differences in style if from a diverse group)
6. Are there, in your opinion, any barriers to councillors from different backgrounds from the average councillor, such as women, disabled people, gay people, ethnic minorities, young people, acting as councillors? [If challenged, remember that over

70% of councillors are white men, and the majority of these are retired] (propensity to self exclude, of one group to dominate, different roles being allocated)

7. Do councillors take on a wide range of issues from their communities?
8. What steps do councillors take to try and represent the interests of people in their ward as a whole?
9. What barriers, if any, are there for local councillors in understanding (and representing) the needs of different groups or people different from oneself?

### **The equalities and diversity agenda**

1. How has [name of council] responded to legislation such as e.g. Human Rights Act (1998), Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000?
2. What responsibility do you, as councillors take for implementing equality and diversity initiatives? How is this promoted?

### **Representation**

1. Do you think that X is representative of its population? In your opinion, should there be more or less councillors from different backgrounds?
2. With the best will in the world, is it possible for a councillor understand all the needs of all their constituents? Can you explain why?
3. Is there a relationship between actual representation and the perception of local authorities by diverse groups?

### **The Future**

1. What are the challenges which [name of council] faces in its work on equality and diversity? What, if anything, would you like to see improve over the next year in this area of work?

### **Questions for HR representative**

#### **Processes and Structures**

1. Please describe the work that Human Resources has done in the area of equalities and diversity.
2. Tell us about what you know about your council's approach to equality and diversity?
3. What are the systems in your organisation for equality and diversity such as a diversity unit, champions? Do all staff know about these? Are they effective?
4. Which aspects of diversity are considered: ethnicity, age, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation?
5. What do you think was the reason(s) for choosing these?
6. What is used to promote equalities and diversity in your council, e.g. newsletters, conferences?
7. What is done to promote the council's work in equalities and diversity in the community?

### **Policies and procedures**

1. What equalities and diversity policies and procedures exist? How are they promoted? (Areas: procurement, service delivery, recruitment and retention etc)
2. Which of your policies/practices do you consider to be most effective? How do you test effectiveness?

### **Staff-role of employees**

1. What support mechanisms are there for under-represented staff?
2. What flexibility is there in relation to working patterns?
3. What are [name of council]'s policies on assigning tasks and roles in work? [Only ask if nec: Is there an equality and diversity aspect to the policy? (probe: is this informal/formal, ie. written and specified as part of policy or expected/assumed)]
4. In your experience, have you found that officers from under-represented groups are expected, perhaps inadvertently, to take on specific tasks or roles because they are from a diverse group?
5. Are there identified or perceived barriers to employment and promotion for diverse employees and how are they seen to operate?
6. What strategies has [name of council] got in place to deal with these? How effective are they?

### **Discriminatory Behaviour**

1. In your experience, to what extent do diverse staff feel able to complain about discriminatory behaviour? What enables them to complain? What discourages them from complaining?
2. Please describe the councils approach to grievances and tribunals. Probe to identify if they keep records etc. Have there been cases involving diversity? [If yes, probe to see how much of a motivator for policy these cases have been]

### **Retention**

1. What data is kept to monitor performance, recruitment and promotion etc?
2. What does the in-house monitoring data reveal about patterns of employment within councils? How is the data used?
3. Are particular groups likely to be located in particular sectors of an authority? If so, what are the reasons behind this? [probe: could be preference, encouragement by friends etc to apply as well as discrimination]
4. Does the authority have guidelines for appointments that include an equality and diversity agenda? Are they applied by councillors and council officers?
5. What are the barriers to recruiting from diverse groups?

### **Change**

In your opinion, what changes are needed in Human Resources to Improve [name of council]'s ability to promote equality and diversity? Why are these changes needed?

## **Questions for the community**

### **Processes and Structures**

1. Tell us about what you know about your council's approach to equality and diversity?
2. Do you think [name of council] has a good approach to equality and diversity issues, ie. does it deal fairly with different people from different groups and backgrounds?
3. Who or what groups do you think the council is talking about when equality and diversity issues are mentioned or promoted? What do you think was the reason for choosing these?
4. How do you know about [name of council]'s approach to equality and diversity issues? [newsletters, consultation, participation events, community activist] Is this a good way of telling people about this?

### **Representation**

1. Do you think that the councillors here reflect the different groups in the community, e.g. women, disability, ethnicity and race, religion?
2. How important is it that the different groups in the community are actually represented among councillors?
3. Do you think that a councillor can or should try and represent all the different people in their ward?

### **Mechanisms for citizen and community participation**

1. Councils often ask for views and opinions of the community on a range of issues- do you know which ones has your council used?-focus groups, one day conferences, mail outs of questionnaires, community fora. Have you ever been involved in any of these? What was your experience like?
2. Are these methods useful? What suggestions can you make to improve participation?
3. How many different groups do you think there are in the community[only prompt if necessary: what about people with disabilities, women, sexual orientation, ethnicity]? Do you think that the council gives them a fair deal?

### **Discriminatory Behaviour**

1. Do you know what to do to make a complaint about the council? What do you need to do?
2. Do you know what staff have to do to complain about some aspects of the council ?
3. Have you, or do you know of anyone, who experienced discrimination at the council? What was done about it?

### **Service Delivery**

1. In your opinion, does the council offer the same services to all people? Is this a good or a bad thing?
2. Can you name any services that are offered by the council to meet the needs of diverse groups?

3. Do you think that all the different types of people with their different needs (ie. women, disabled people, ethnic minorities etc.) feel that they get the services they need from [name of council]
4. What changes do you think are needed to make services more diverse, e.g. awareness training for staff? Do you think services should be less diverse in any areas?

### **The Future**

What changes would you like to see to improve the council's work in equality and diversity?