

EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE – 1 NOVEMBER 2011**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY – THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENT – FEEDBACK ON THE ASSESSMENT****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES****Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on a report which has been received from the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency, (LGID), which assessed the County Council against the Equality Framework for Local Government, (EFLG). (The focus of this report is on the feedback which was received on the Modern and Diverse workforce category of the assessment).

Background

2. The Employment Committee received a report on the 11 February 2010 informing them of the Council's ambition to achieve the highest level, 'Excellent' of the EFLG.
3. The Council's Equalities Board and Departmental Equality Workforce Groups collated all of the necessary evidence for submission. This was submitted to the LGID in January 2011 for the assessment process.
4. The Equality Framework assessed the Council in the following 5 key areas:-
 - Knowing your communities and equality mapping;
 - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
 - Community engagement and satisfaction;
 - Responsive services and customer care;
 - A modern and diverse workforce.
5. In addition to the written submission for assessment, a group of assessors visited the Council, (9-11th March 2011), to hold a series of interviews and focus group meetings. This was a Peer Challenge, not an inspection; the purpose of which was to validate the Council's own self-assessment. The peers were:-
 - Cllr Elizabeth Mallinson – Cumbria County Council;
 - John Cowings – Derbyshire County Council

- Kevin Lee –Gloucestershire County Council;
 - Andrea Brodie – Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service.
6. The peers were supported by Ernest Opuni (LGID Review Manager) and Vikki Goddard (LGID Improvement Strategist).

Outcome of the Assessment

7. The County Council achieved the requirements of the Excellent Level and formal endorsement of this has now been received.

Key Strengths identified through the Equality Framework Level Feedback

8. From the Peer Challenge Report the following strengths were identified:-
- Leicestershire County Council's employees are very positive about working for the Council. Employees are proud to work for the organisation and feel valued (citing examples of being told if they are doing a good job). Employees were clear about the relevance of their role and can see how they contribute to achieving the wider outcomes of the Council.
 - The Council's employees believe they work for an organisation which has a very diverse workforce and that it is reflective of the county's various communities. Flexible working arrangements are supported and encouraged and they demonstrated that they had a good understanding of processes such as those pertinent to reasonable adjustments
 - Employees believe that the Council is a good Council to work for as it cares about them. This held true even at a time when unavoidable cuts in resources will impact on jobs because Senior Managers and Members are working together with staff to achieve as positive an outcome for all as is possible under the circumstances.
 - Employees say there is a good range of well-used support services and facilities. An example of this includes the Council's provision of a staff welfare service. This includes a specialist counseling service which employees can access independently or through their managers.
 - Employees made it clear that bullying and harassment issues are taken seriously and that a culture of non acceptance has been created by the political and managerial leadership of the Council. It is felt that there are very comprehensive policies in place.

- There is additional coaching for employees from minority groups at risk of redundancy through restructuring. The Council has been very active in engaging with employees at every stage of this process. Staff engagement on the Council's efficiency programme commenced some eighteen months ahead of actual impact of resource reductions. There was evidence that employees supported the change programme and that the impact of significant savings needing to be made took place without the levels of protest and disquiet that can occur if employee engagement is not undertaken effectively.
- The Council funded a specific support programme for employees to provide one to one coaching and mentoring support. This was an example of an EIA being used which identified those staff most likely to be affected by the impact of restructuring. These considerations are integral to the Council's HR planning processes at both a corporate and service area level demonstrating the Council's overall commitment to openness, transparency and support for employees.
- The Council provides tailored training in order to ensure that it is directly relevant. The PDR process for the managers in the Council includes explicit Equality and Diversity considerations and expectations. Also there is a proactive approach taken by the Council in providing 'shadowing' and 'buddying' arrangements for front line staff (e.g. Homecare staff) as part of their induction.
- The training received by Members has been reviewed and improved. An example of this is where members have received training to support them in undertaking their role as corporate parents in relation to children in care. This can be a particularly challenging area and this approach to providing support is very positive and proactive. Also equality and diversity training is made available to Members achieved a very high level of take up.
- There is positive support for the work and contribution of workers groups. There is active engagement with these groups (i.e., LGBT, Disabled and Black Workers Groups) by the Leader, Portfolio holders and the Chief Executive; meeting with these groups and taking on board and following through on any issues raised.
- The Council is performing well against some of its workforce targets. For example the percentage of women in senior posts alongside the proportion of the workforce from BME backgrounds is increasing
- The Equalities Board/Task Group is doing positive work in workforce planning. There is good policy support in helping

women into management roles with the 'Spring Board' and 'Spring Forward' initiatives

- There are examples of best practice across the whole of the Council. An example of this includes the approach taken in the Environment and Transport Department in ensuring it is getting feedback from female employees in an area which traditionally has a predominance of roles to which males are recruited. Specifically the views of female employees have been sought about any requirements they may have to support them in their work. There is an active approach to ensuring that there is a good presence of women on recruitment panels as well as evidence of a culture of proactively encouraging women to train and apply for job opportunities
- Employees are actively involved in the development of EIA's. It is clear that they recognise their purpose and value their contribution as an integral part of effective business planning and a means of service improvement.
- There was good collaboration between the Trade Unions and the Council's Corporate HR service when developing a toolkit for managers to raise awareness of mental health issues and assisting them in providing appropriate support to employees reporting to them.
- There are Equality Champions within each department who are supported with resources including budgets in order that they can have a real impact.
- A commitment to supporting partnership arrangements was demonstrated by leading on training which takes place with partners on equality and diversity issues at Member and officer level
- There is a commitment to developing leaders in the organisation which recognise the importance of embedding equality and diversity in this area. The positive work the Council is doing is helping to improve confidence in providing leadership and dealing with challenging issues
- The Council was compliant on Equal Pay Audit in 2008 and will be re-running this exercise later in the year to undertake a further check.

Areas for consideration

9. The following areas were raised for the Council to give further consideration to:-

- The Council may wish to give consideration to reviewing the effectiveness and purpose of representative recruitment panels in consultation with the staff working groups. Whilst recognised as a positive overall, there were some concerns expressed that at the present time there is a greater emphasis on race than there is on other equalities groups.
- Staff network conferences are viewed as a positive initiative and Leicestershire County Council may wish to give consideration to how it markets and promote these events across the whole organisation.

Way Forward

10. Work is now underway in order to progress the areas where improvements can be made. This will be managed via the Council's Equalities Board. In addition to these, work will still be undertaken to ensure the Council retains its "Excellent" status and continues to improve.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.

Background Papers

12. None

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

13. None

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Equal Opportunities Implications

14. None