



# Equality & Diversity - An 'Excellent' Council



## A Quick Guide

- The Council is an exemplar of good practice and works with others to share best practice.
- Councillors and Officers have a reputation for championing equality issues and ensure that the equality issues relevant to their communities are embedded in the Sustainable Communities Strategy, Local Area Agreement, Corporate Plan and Delivery Plans.
- The Council reviews its public duty equality scheme every three years and seeks innovative improvement challenges.

- The Council works with all strategic partners, including the third sector, advocates to achieve shared equality outcomes
- The Council identifies the changing nature of its communities and their expectations, then prioritises its activities and explains its decisions.
- The Council measures progress on equality outcomes, disaggregates data on relevant performance indicators, and demonstrates real outcomes that have addressed persistent inequalities and narrow the gaps.
- The Council provides good customer care by ensuring that services are provided by knowledgeable and well-trained staffs who understand the needs of their communities.



- The Council knows and regularly reviews the equality profile of its communities and workforce.
- The Council improves satisfaction and perception indicators from all sections of the community and workforce.
- The Council addresses under-representation and implements actions for equal pay, flexible working, training and development, and promotes an inclusive working culture based on respect.
- Community equality groups are involved in community engagement programmes, and are able to review the Council's progress.



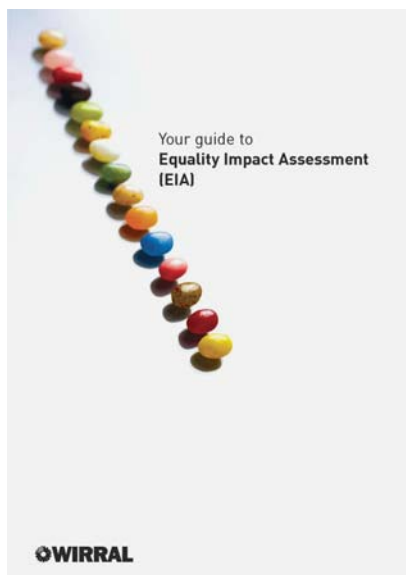


**‘Over 1,000 staff and members of the public came to see how diverse Wirral’s community services are’**

**‘The Council raises the rainbow flag in recognising and celebrating the contribution made by lesbian, gay and bisexual staff and residents’**



**‘The Council launches its first gender identity policy to support transgender staff, elected members and customers’**



**‘equality impact assessments are completed for all Council services and functions to ensure no-one is impacted on negatively when providing services and when making major decisions’.**

## **What is Equality Watch?**

The Corporate Equality and Cohesion team want to ensure council staff and Wirral's residents can easily recognise the equality programme of the Council and decided to generate a brand with the help of the Tourism and Marketing team.

Equality Watch and the accompanying jelly beans are now recognised widely across Wirral to promote equality and diversity events / projects, and to receive regular e-newsletters / bulletins.

The differently coloured jelly beans represent human 'beans' and depict that we all should be provided with opportunities to reach our full potential.

The Council also has an Equality Watch membership scheme, open to all staff, elected members and residents. To become a member and receive regular bulletins please email [equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk)

If you do not wish to become a member, you can always access guidance and information via the Council's intranet and website.

## **What is Level 3?**

In November 2009 the Council was awarded Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local government, a management and policy framework to ensure a whole Council approach to bringing about change and breaking down any discriminatory barriers that may exist across the Council, in service delivery as well as in the provision of employment opportunities.

Achieving Level 3 means that the Council has developed and implemented numerous systems, processes and projects in order to promote equality, eliminate any unlawful discrimination or harassment, promote good relations and positive attitudes, and promote involvement.

The Council was due to work towards the final levels of the Equality Standard, when it was replaced, by Government, with a new Equality Framework. Because the Council was already at Level 3, we automatically migrated to 'Achieving' level of the new framework. The next stage is to reach 'Excellent' level by November 2011.

Reaching 'Excellent' level will mean that the Council is generating best practice in equality and diversity and sharing that practice with others, that the Council is championing the needs of all Wirral's communities, that the inequalities that exist across Wirral are being addressed successfully, that the Council is providing excellent customer care, and that the Council is a modern employer and has a diverse workforce.

## **What we need to get to grips with in the future**

- Despite progress since 1997 to reduce the gender pay gap, women still earn, on average, 22.6% less per hour than men;
- Less academically able, but better off children, overtake more able, poorer children at school by the age of six;
- The gap between the employment rate of disabled people and the overall employment rate has decreased from 34.5% to 26.3% since 1998, but disabled

people are still more than twice as likely to be out of work than non-disabled people;

- If you are from an ethnic minority, you were 17.9% less likely to find work in 1997 than a white person. The difference is still 13%;
- One in five older people are unsuccessful in getting quotations for motor insurance, travel insurance and car hire; and
- 6 out of 10 lesbian and gay schoolchildren experience homophobic bullying and many contemplate suicide as a result.

## **Equality Act**

From the first Race Relations Acts back in the 1960s, through legislation on race and gender equality in the 1970s and disability rights in the 1990s, to more recent new laws on religion or belief, sexual orientation and age, Great Britain has a strong framework of equality legislation. Great progress has been made in making Britain a fairer and more confident nation, but inequality and discrimination persist today.

The Equality Act 2010 received Royal Assent on 8 April 2010. The provisions in the Equality Act will come into force at different times to allow time for the people and organisations affected by the new laws to carefully prepare for them.

The Government will be consulting over the coming months on some of the detailed secondary legislation which will be needed to implement some of the new measures – for example, the integrated public sector Equality Duty and the ban on age discrimination in services and public functions.

They will be working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and with the public, private and voluntary sectors to make sure people understand how the law is changing and how it will affect them. Ensuring that appropriate help, advice, guidance and support is made available so that people know what they need to do differently, and so that the Act is implemented in an effective and proportionate way.

### **'The Wirral Cup' Wirral Older People's Parliament golf charity tournament**

'Playing golf is great at the best of times, playing golf for charity and at the same time representing equality for women is even better!'

A small team of 4 keen women golfers took up the challenge to represent the Women's Diversity Forum at a recent charitable event held at Heswall Golf Club. The team led by captain Caroline Reed had a clear focus - to enjoy the day, have fun, meet new people and play well and that they did! Heswall Golf Club was the perfect location.



Pictured are: Mary Dean, Linda Collins, Pat Rice and Caroline Reid, members of Wirral council's women's staff diversity forum who took part in the charity golf tournament on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2010.



All proceeds from the event went to the dementia unit at Age Concern's Devonshire House.

### **Council wins North West Equality and Diversity award!**



We are delighted that the North West Employers Organisation has awarded the 'Wirral United trophy football tournament' event that took place in November 2009 a North West equality and diversity award!!

In October 2006, North West Employers launched an Equalities Award Scheme to highlight and promote awareness and achievement within authorities in relation to equality and diversity issues.

This regional scheme celebrates and encourages creativity and innovation in promoting equality of opportunity for all.

The Award is made to the local authority/partnership of authorities, who are members of North West Employers within the region, which submits examples of innovative good practice of an activity or project which:

- Promotes Equality and Diversity in terms of Age, Disability, Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation, Faith, etc.
- Should note be prior to 2005
- Can demonstrate that fundamental changes have taken place that have advances existing practices



This year 41 submissions were received and the judging panel met on Friday 21 May. 12 projects have been successful in gaining the award for 2010 across the North West region.

Wirral United Trophy entailed two events, the first one engaged male adults of various ages and ethnicity (white English, Chinese, Irish, Bengali, Indian, Sudanese and Polish) of which teams participated in an all day football tournament.

A celebration event took place at the Lowry Hotel, Salford on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Full details of all 2010 winners can be found at:

<http://www.nweo.org.uk/EqualityDiversity/NorthWestRegionalEqualitiesAward>

### **“How Cool is your School?”**

Wirral schools are committed to providing inclusive learning environments that are equally accessible for all children. Equality of opportunity for pupils, staff and parents who have disabilities is important to us all. Over the past years, Governors have received training on the changing legislation around disability. Initially being focussed on disability discrimination, this has broadened its horizons to the promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

As part of the latest Governors and Head Teachers continue to have a duty to review, refresh and publish their School Access Plan. This is a list of actions they plan to take in order to ensure that their school buildings are accessible for everyone who uses them.

Because children are the architects, town planners and builders of the future – the Access Officer Steve Foden and the co-ordinator for pupils who have physical / medical needs, Julie Hudson – have produced a tool which teaches them how to conduct an access audit of their school building. It is called “How Cool is your School” (the children came up with the name).

There is a booklet which shows children how to walk around their school site and identify any parts which would represent a problem for people with disabilities. We recommend that it is done by the school council (all of which have a designated disability representative). We are lucky to have Steve who helped to develop the tool, available to train children in a small number of primary schools. Steve and his colleague Ged Smyth have already trailed the checklist and reported that the children are excellent at spotting barriers and keen to come up with solutions which “make it fair for everybody”.

The Local Authority supports schools to make any costly adaptations with funding that is specifically for increasing access to school buildings.



Pictured is Ged Smyth, Julie Hodson and school council members of Overchurch primary school

### **Reasonable adjustments for customers**

Do you know failing to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people could mean you are acting unlawfully which might result in a court case, a fine and negative publicity for the Council?

Disabled people may include those with mobility or sensory impairments, learning disabilities, mental ill health, severe facial disfigurements and certain other conditions. It is important to recognise that not all disabilities are obvious.

About 1 in 5 of the adult population have a disability which is covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. These people have rights under the Act and with an ageing population this ratio is set to rise. Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for service providers to discriminate against disabled people by failing to make reasonable adjustments. Included are reasonable adjustments to the physical features of the premises. Making your service more accessible will make it easier to use for other people including children, parents, older people and first time visitors.

A reasonable adjustment means making changes to your services, including the building the services are delivered from, so that it is not unreasonably difficult for the disabled person to use the service.

Reasonable adjustments vary from case to case. You can take into account the type of service being provided, its size and resources and the practicality of taking a particular step. The Act also says that you can provide a reasonable alternative method of providing a service if a disabled person cannot access it.

Physical features are any features arising from the design or construction of a building and cover any fixtures, fittings, furnishings and equipment on the premises. This could include paths, entrances, exits, entry systems, car parking, public phones, changing rooms, service counters, doors, toilets, stairs, shelves, waiting areas, signage, floor and wall coverings. This list is not exhaustive but it shows the variety of features which can present barriers and for which solutions have to be considered. You will have to anticipate the types of problems that could arise means when a disabled person requests a service, reasonable steps will already have been taken to overcome any access issues.

By taking an inclusive approach when reviewing services, commissioning building or refurbishment work, will mean that equal access and best practice fare included at the outset. You will need to plan to make improvements and ensure that once adjustments have been made you and your staff are able to maintain access to the service. Also it is good practice to let disabled people know about access to your service and premises.

## **Do you want to become a member of Equality Watch?**

**This will entitle you to receive copies of equality watch newsletters, regular updates on national and local equality and diversity headlines and the opportunity to be involved in the council's equality watch initiatives. If you are interested in becoming a member of equality watch and would like to register please email: [equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk)**

