

Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Equality Standard for Local
Government

Level 3 Peer Review

Self Assessment

Draft

Foreword

We are proud of this Council's vision and achievements for the people of Stockton-on-Tees. Our twelve year journey to excellence has provided a solid foundation of high quality services, extensive partnership working and community engagement. Stockton-on-Tees is a very different place to that of 1996/7 when the Council was created against a backdrop of low aspiration, significant levels of deprivation and high unemployment. We have narrowed the gap in these areas with a strong record of achievement including:

- Significant improvements in educational attainment with 2008 GCSE results (5+ A*-C) have continued the improvement trend ahead of the national rate of increase, closing the gap between national and local performance. Although girls are outperforming boys, this is in line with national trends.
- Significant improvements in crime levels – we are now the safest place in the Tees Valley with the lowest ever level of recorded crime. This is reflected in resident opinion, with 31% of non-white respondents, who typically live in town centre wards, stating they think the level of crime has gone down in their area, compared to 14% of non-respondents.
- Massive reduction in unemployment from 6% in 1998 to 3.1% in 2007 compared with a national reduction of 1.5%, outperforming the Tees Valley and the rest of the North-East. The Annual Labour Force Survey has also shown that the BME employment rate in Stockton is 3.6% higher than the North East average figure and in line with the national figure.
- Regeneration schemes focussing on our most deprived neighbourhoods including development of a new Mosque and housing improvement loan scheme compliant with Sharia law
- High performance in residents feeling people from different backgrounds get on well together, an average of 44% agreement across the borough.
- Top quartile performance in employment for disabled members of staff and women in senior management positions
- Closing the gap in life expectancy between Stockton and the national average as well as between males and females.
- Stockton International Riverside Festival is well established as a leading international festival, with increasing levels of community participation from vulnerable groups, including BME communities, disabled residents and neighbourhood renewal areas.

These achievements are recognised by local people. Resident satisfaction with the Council is at an all time high, bucking a national trend of decreasing satisfaction. Residents are more optimistic than ever before about the future of the borough with those living in neighbourhood renewal areas even more so. Our new Sustainable Community Strategy, "Shaping our Future" is focussed on taking the borough forward for the next 14 years and has been developed following extensive community consultation, including but not limited to the BME Network and Disability Advisory Group.

Our approach to community leadership and reputation for promoting equality and diversity extends far beyond our locality. Our vision can only be realised through engaging on a sub-regional, regional and national basis. We were leading players in the development of a harmonised set of procurement procedures across the region, ensuring the embedding of equality and diversity within the new processes. We also represent local government regionally in discussions with Government Office North East to embed and mainstream equalities across the public, private and third sectors. Officers from the Council are highly regarded nationally in the field of Community Cohesion and are frequently called upon to speak and facilitate at Community Cohesion conferences, with the Council also playing a leading role in bringing a national Police IAG conference to the Tees Valley. Our big picture thinking, drive and enthusiasm is propelling us forward. Within the Council we have an exceptional culture focussed on meeting the needs of all residents, embedding equality and diversity, to provide high quality services and improve quality of life.

Neil Schneider
Interim Chief Executive

Councillor Ken Lupton
Leader of the Council

Councillor David Coleman
Cabinet Member – Access & Communities

Context

We are proud of our borough, our Council and its achievements. The Council again topped the national performance leagues in 2007 as one of the few Councils to achieve the maximum four star and improving strongly rating, being the only authority outside London to achieve the maximum five 4s for its Use of Resources judgement. Satisfying though this is, the Council will not rest on its laurels and while the 2008 Corporate Assessment was incredibly successful for the organisation, it highlighted some areas for improvement in terms of the Council's approach to Equality and Diversity. These have been embraced by the organisation and along with the ongoing development of our approach are detailed in this self assessment.

A Borough of Contrasts

The borough is one of contrast, a mix of busy town centres, urban residential areas and picturesque villages. The borough has five main townships of Stockton, Billingham, Thornaby, Ingleby Barwick and Yarm, each with its own unique identity. The borough is one of the most polarised in the country with areas of affluence sited alongside areas of disadvantaged. We have 17 of our 117 Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the top 20% most affluent in England and 40 within the 20% most deprived. (IMD 2007) Our residents report significant and increasing levels of optimism about the future, 26% believe the borough will improve, but in our most disadvantaged communities, where many of our BME residents for example live, this rises to 41%.

Our Place

The quality of our environment has improved in line with resident priorities. From being named one of the dirtiest place in 2001, five years later we were one of the cleanest boroughs, winning Britain in Bloom for Best City in 2007 and no fewer than 20 awards at 2008 Northumbria in Bloom.

We have the highest rate of two car ownership in the North East and continue to improve our road network whilst also maintaining our commitment to improving public transport to ensure equal access to

services and no over-reliance on the private car. We have regenerated large portions of our housing stock, including that in our most deprived neighbourhoods working closely with the predominantly BME communities to develop excellent and appropriate new housing schemes. Crime rates continue to fall and are now the lowest in the Tees Valley and significantly fewer people now feel unsafe. We have world leading cultural activities such as Stockton International Riverside Festival and Billingham International Folklore Festival which have proven vital in promoting community pride and cohesion as well as excellent parks and countryside facilities.

A Listening Council

"The Council has strong and effective communication mechanisms .. residents receive feedback and consider themselves well informed."

Audit Commission 2008

We believe quality of life and access to high quality services can only be improved through listening to residents. The Council has a strong track record of listening to and implementing residents views. For example it has:

- highly successful adult and young people's residents panels regularly consulted on a variety of issues
- a Disability Advisory Group comprising disabled residents from across the borough meets regularly to hold the Council to account and influence service delivery.
- "Extensive and influential consultation with children and young people" (JAR report) through the PIC network.
- Excellent relationships with the third sector helping develop the Sustainable Community Strategy, and independent and external community challenge arrangements for the Council's EIA processes.

Knowing Our Communities

We know our communities and have invested time in compiling comprehensive data in order to better inform Equality Impact Assessments and continual service improvements. This has been developed into an intelligent web tool to allow interrogation of data on a local level. Profiles, based on six key diversity strands, have been compiled to ensure all services have easy access to information on the communities they serve.

Gender

There are differences in trends between males and females in Stockton but these are broadly in line with trends in England and Wales:

- There are fewer female births but more older women.
- Men outnumber women in the working age population and there are many more women than men in the retirement age group
- female life expectancy outstrips male life expectancy.
- Girls out perform boys at key stage 2, 3 and GCSE. Similar proportions of males and females have degree level qualifications and more males have apprenticeships.

Faith and Belief

- More people define as Christian in Stockton-on-Tees than in the North East generally and than England (82%, 80% and 72%).
- Ten percent of the population stated that they had no religion in the Census.
- Muslims count for 1.4% of the population in Stockton compared to 3.1% nationally.
- All other religions account for less than one percent together compared to over three percent nationally.
- Many of our Muslim communities live in our more disadvantaged town centre wards.
- 35% of Muslims are under 16 years old, a young profile for the faith group. 26% of people with no religion are under 16, closely followed by Sikh and Hindu groups (25% and 22% respectively).
- Muslims have a low rate of employment in Stockton, as they do nationally.
- The unemployment rate of Hindus and Sikhs is lower than the general population (3.4% compared to 5.8%).

Race and Ethnicity

- Stockton has a much smaller minority ethnic make-up than the country and most BME residents are of Pakistani origin (1.1%).
- In addition to the established BME population of Stockton there are 372 registered asylum seekers in Stockton (March 2007).
- There is a large variation across ethnicities in relation to the attainment of 5 or more A*-C passes at GCSE level. Chinese pupils have the highest level of attainment with a pass rate of 100% and Black pupils have the lowest with 37.5%; the overall scores for all groups was 55%.
- The Annual Local Labour Force Survey shows since 2002/03 there has been a marked increase in the employment rate for BME groups to 58.9% in 2004/05. The BME employment rate in Stockton is now 3.6% higher than the North East average and in line with the national figure.

Disability

Almost 20% of the population report having a Limiting Long Term Illness. This is higher than the national figure of 17.9% but lower than the North East figure of 22.7%. This figure varies widely across the borough at 41% in the Stockton Town Centre ward and 10.5% in Ingleby Barwick West.

Age

In line with national population trends, Stockton expects to see a major change in age of the population by 2029.

- The number of children in the Borough overall is projected to remain fairly stable, but general population rises in the affluent areas of the south of the borough will see numbers of children and young people rising in these areas.
- The number of working age people will decrease by 2%
- There will be a large increase of 62% of older people (retirement age)

Sexual Orientation

- We estimate that 9-13,000 residents in the borough of Stockton-on-Tees are lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Further work is taking place to better understand the needs of the LGBT community and develop our LGBT action plan.

Why We Are Claiming Level 3

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has made significant progress against the Equality Standard for Local Government and is confident it exceeds the criteria of a level three authority.

There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity from Managers and Members. The Chief Executive is committed to driving the agenda forward and diversity is headed up by the Assistant Chief Executive supported by the Policy and Development Manager, three dedicated Diversity Officers and a Community Cohesion Coordinator. At a Member level, diversity and cohesion is embedded within the Access and Communities Portfolio supported effectively by the Corporate Management and Finance Portfolio, concerned with the performance management of the Council. Lead Officers and Members are supported by the Council's Corporate Diversity Working Group which brings together key officers from across the organisation as well as the ALMO, chaired by a Head of Performance and reporting directly in to the Council's Corporate Management Team.

The Council has successfully produced and implemented three editions of its Single Equality Scheme which brings together the Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes. These schemes are formulated following detailed consultation and engagement with relevant communities, developed by and ascribed to individual Heads of Service and approved by Members. Actions within the Single Equality Scheme are then referenced in individual Service Improvement Plans and subjected to the Council's usual performance management arrangements, described by the Audit Commission in 2008 as "embedded, comprehensive and pervasive." This approach has led to the successful completion of well over 90% of our targets in the Race, Gender and Disability Action Plans and the regular reporting of diversity related performance to Members.

The Council has reviewed and successfully embedded a new Equality Impact Assessment Framework. The requirement to carry out EIAs is enshrined within the Council's constitution and all Cabinet reports recommending significant policy or service changes must be subject to EIA before proceeding. The Council also has in place

its prioritised programme of service assessments which will ensure by 2010 all council services and policies will have been subject to EIA, a process which is scrutinised both by internal mechanisms and an external community reference group.

The Council is increasingly being recognised at a national and regional level for its work in promoting diversity and community cohesion. We are active members of ICoCo and are regularly invited to speak at major conferences on the subject. At a regional level we are working closely with Government Office North East amongst others on a major project to mainstream equalities through all sectors as well as improving the region's approach to information sharing and tension monitoring. We have played a key role in supporting the North East Centre for Excellence in rationalising procurement documentation across the region and ensuring that equalities are embedded in procurement activities at every stage of the process.

Community involvement is at the heart of the Council's approach to equality and diversity. The Council knows its communities and ensures its services are planned and delivered in a way to ensure maximum benefit for all residents. We have had in place for some time a series of Diversity Profiles, containing detailed information of the borough's population broken down by Sustainable Community Strategy themes. These profiles were developed long before the proposal to include a "Knowing your Communities" theme in the draft revised Equality Framework and have been vital in service planning and the Equality Impact Assessment process. All actions in the Single Equality Scheme have been developed as direct result of community consultation and the Council supports a variety of community reference groups such as the Disability Advisory Group and BME network to ensure ongoing community involvement.

Consultation and engagement is integral to the Council's service planning and review process. We have a long standing and well regarded Citizen's Panel broadly representative of the community we serve, the results of which can be broken down by diversity strand to ensure equality of service. A corporate consultation working group is in place which brings together officers from across the organisation and partners

ensuring consultation can be coordinated across the organisation and best practice can be shared. The group is chaired by the same senior manager as leads the Diversity Team thus ensuring continuity between this group and the Corporate Diversity group.

We regularly analyse direct feedback such as compliments, comments and complaints, and have rolled out new processes to capture diversity information at the time of contact. We hold regular "Tell us what you think" events, an annual conference for older people "Are you being served ... well?" and utilise a range of innovative approaches to gathering the views of children and young people through our Participation, Involvement and Consultation (PIC) network.

Our website has been highlighted as good practice in accessibility. A recent Sitemorse report has stated that we are one of the top ten local government websites for accessibility. It includes key information in the most widely spoken community languages in the borough and also contains a raft of diversity related information, including the latest version of the Single Equality Scheme, diversity profiles and all published Equality Impact Assessments.

The Council is committed to being an equal opportunities employer and holds the two ticks positive about disabled people symbol, as well as organisation wide Investors in People status. Through carrying out a comprehensive staff census we have very detailed and accurate staff records and know as an employer we are in the top quartile nationally for percentage of disabled employees (BVPI 11c) and percentage of women in senior management positions (BVPI 11a). Targets have been set at a Council wide level to improve still further the diversity of our workforce.

We also have in place detailed People and Workforce Development Strategies which reflect our commitment to all our employees and to have a workforce representative of the local population. The management of diversity and delivery of the diversity agenda is embedded throughout the Stockton Employee Competency Framework and monitored through the appraisal process. We have successfully completed an equal pay review and have moved all employees to Single Status.

The Council has a longstanding and comprehensive diversity training programme. A series of roadshows aimed at raising cultural awareness amongst officers and Members whetted the appetite for more training across the organisation and now well over one thousand employees have received detailed diversity training. The training offer is comprehensive and ranges from introduction to diversity, to management of diversity for middle and senior managers, to specialist social care diversity courses such as moving and handling and caring for people with dementia. In addition training on the Council's approach to telephone translation and equality impact assessment is freely available to employees, with over 400 members of staff having been trained in telephone translation. The diversity team offers bespoke training, specifically tailored for individual services on request.

The Council's approach has been incremental and to embed diversity across the whole authority whilst development has taken place. As such, the Council's understanding and approach to diversity has not developed in a piecemeal way and all departments are brought into the corporate approach. As such this self-assessment highlights the work the authority as a whole has carried out to promote diversity with departmental information included as evidence to highlight the impact our approach has had on employment practices, service delivery and improvements in quality of life for local people. All services across the Council have contributed to the developments highlighted in this self-assessment.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is already amongst the very best performing authorities in the Country, being rated as one of the few Four Star Improving Strongly Councils for the last two years running. We are one of only two Councils in the country to score top marks for our use of resources judgement and have recently received an excellent corporate assessment report. It is against this backdrop of success that the Council has made significant strides in its promotion of diversity and believes it is performing strongly at or above level three of the equality standard for local government.

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT

Leadership and Corporate Commitment

“Improvements have been driven by strong managerial and political leadership”

Audit Commission 2008

Leadership on equality and diversity is distributed throughout the authority, reflecting the Council's overall commitment to a devolved leadership and management approach. The Assistant Chief Executive acts as the lead officer for equality, diversity and community cohesion, supported at the corporate centre by the Policy and Development Manager, three Diversity Officers and a Community Cohesion Coordinator. This core team offers strong leadership and coordination of diversity activity, but is supported by key officers at all levels throughout the organisation. Managing Diversity is embedded within the Council's competency framework¹ and the top three tiers of managers in the organisation are appraised against a Managing Diversity Competency.

Case Study Stockton Competency Framework

The Stockton Competency Framework has been developed to clarify and communicate the Council's expectations of its employees. It acts as a guide to workplace behaviour, a tool for identifying training and development needs and underpins the annual appraisal process. It outlines what is expected of employees at all levels of the organisation with equality and diversity threaded throughout. Senior and Middle Managers in the Council must demonstrate their performance against a Managing Diversity competency which includes challenging inappropriate behaviours and attitudes and promoting a culture in which diversity is the norm. The Competency Framework ensures that employees at all levels of the organisation are aware of their responsibilities including the need to; demonstrate racial, cultural and religious sensitivities, treat others with respect, understand the diverse range of peoples needs and respond respectfully and appropriately to them. The Competency

Framework ensures that all interactions with the Council should be positive for all customers.

The Council has in place a series of corporate working groups aimed at empowering Heads of Service and senior third tier managers to provide leadership, contribute to organisational development and provide solutions to key strategic developments. The Corporate Diversity Working Group is one of these groups. Chaired by a Head of Performance it has senior level representation from across the Council and the ALMO reporting directly to the Council's Corporate Management Team. It is responsible for developing and monitoring the Single Equality Scheme, providing support and challenge to the development of new corporate diversity initiatives, ensuring coordination of approach across the organisation and also considers which reports being submitted to each month's Cabinet should be subject to Equality Impact Assessment. CDWG also approved the Council's approach to equalities monitoring.²

CDWG is not the only working group which has a role in diversity with the Human Resources Strategy Group and Procurement Working Group also having responsibility in driving forward the agenda, the latter being responsible for ensuring all contracts have been assessed for their relevance to diversity and supporting the Council in its lead role to harmonise procurement documents regionally and ensure Equality and Diversity are embedded therein.

The Single Equality Scheme

The Council has published three editions of its Single Equality Scheme³ which brings together the Council's Equality Policy and outlines its responsibilities both as an employer and a deliverer of key local services. It also contains the Council's Race, Gender and Disability Equality Action Plans and is wholly integrated with the Council's planning framework. The fourth scheme incorporating age, faith and sexual orientation action plans will be approved by March 2009.

The Council and its partners in Stockton Renaissance (our LSP) have had a long

¹ Competency Framework

² Monitoring guidance

³ Single Equality Scheme Version 3

term policy platform of “Promoting Achievement: Tackling Disadvantage”. Successive generations of the Community Strategy and more recently, Shaping our Future⁴ our new Sustainable Community Strategy have built on this being driven by an agreement of themes to which the council and its partners are subscribed. These themes of Economic Regeneration and Transport, Environment and Housing, Safer Communities, Children and Young People and Health and wellbeing and supporting themes of Stronger Communities, Older Adults and Arts, Leisure and Culture run through the Council Plan, other key strategies, the Single Equality Scheme and Service Improvement Plans. This joint framework has been described by the Audit Commission as a “powerful discipline for promoting a shared delivery focus between the Council and its partners” and has helped the success of the Single Equality Scheme.

As the three action plans in the Single Equality Scheme are arranged by the key corporate themes, they can easily be seen in their context and the importance of diversity in delivering all the Council’s objectives is obvious. The SES also benefits from having every action in all three action plans being ascribed to an individual Head of Service and referenced within individual Service Improvement Plans. As such actions have clear owners, are identifiable, monitorable at departmental level and are subject to the Council’s rigorous performance management framework.

Targets and actions in the Single Equality Scheme are developed following community consultation. The Council has in place a clear framework of community reference arrangements and works in partnership with partners and the third sector to support others. The first edition of the SES was produced following a large Tell Us What You Think event with local disabled people. Indeed so successful was this event that many attendees formed the Disability Advisory Group which meets quarterly to advise the Council on key developments and monitors, through a designated sub-group, progress against the disability equality action plan.

Subsequent editions of the SES have been developed through similar methodologies and as such the Council has ensured that hundreds of local people have been able to directly influence the Council’s equality objectives.

The Single Equality Scheme also outlines the Council’s approach to sexual orientation, age, religion and belief and targets with appropriate action plans being developed for these strands when the fourth edition is approved in March 2009. Indeed a large consultation event with our LGB communities has recently taken place in Stockton ARC which attracted a number of participants. The event followed the culmination of a large amount of work with local LGB groups and has provided significant levels of information to allow the Council to agree its first ever LGB action plan.

Not only are the individual targets in the Single Equality Scheme approved by all Heads of Service, the scheme in its totality is approved by the Council’s Corporate Management Team and Cabinet, thus ensuring Member and Senior Officer ownership. Progress on diversity is annually reported to Cabinet.

[Equality Impact Assessment \(EIAs\)](#)

The Council has developed a detailed and comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment process⁵ which can easily be applied to service and policy assessments and equally valid for forward looking assessments and those of existing services. Many officers from across the Council have attended a detailed two day training session in how to carry out EIAs and act as lead officers within their individual services to support and guide colleagues. Completed EIAs are published via the Council’s website.

Equality Impact Assessments are an integral part of the Council’s Corporate Planning Processes and the requirement to carry them out is embedded within the Council’s constitution.⁶ All reports being brought forward to Cabinet must be subject to Equality Impact Assessment if they recommend a significant new policy or change in service delivery. Corporate

⁴ Shaping our Future

⁵ Latest version of EIA paperwork with guidance notes.

⁶ Appropriate section from the constitution

Diversity Working Group makes recommendations on which reports should be subject to EIA. Any potential negative effects, as well as neutral effects where appropriate, must be either mitigated against or addressed in the longer term through an action plan appended to the individual assessment. Monitoring of these actions is then fed into the Council's performance management processes. Prior to Cabinet sitting, all Members have the opportunity to scrutinise the EIAs associated with that month's decisions.

The EIA process has been embedded across the authority and streamlined as appropriate. We have produced a prioritised list of service impact assessments⁷ which will ensure all activities of the organisation have been subject to Equality Impact Assessment by March 2010. All service areas have been subject to at least one impact assessment. Summaries of all EIAs are published on the Council's website, along with their action plans and as such are available for public scrutiny. In addition all contracts held by the Council have been risk assessed for diversity and scored either high, medium or low. As such when they are due for renewal special attention will be given to those with most relevance for diversity. An EIA has been carried out on the procurement function and the Council has played a key role in leading a regional project aimed at harmonising procurement documentation and embedding diversity at all stages of the process. Over 40 employees have been trained across the Council.

Relationships with the third sector in Stockton-on-Tees are excellent and the Council has in place effective community reference arrangements for Equality Impact Assessments, coordinated on our behalf by Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association. A group of community representatives regularly meets to scrutinise impact assessments. Receiving presentations from and able to question the relevant officers, the group selects which impact assessments it wants to review and makes recommendations for future provision, endorsing or rejecting the assessment.

[Performance Management](#)

⁷ Most up to date list

“Performance monitoring is embedded and pervasive.”

Audit Commission 2008

“Performance management is clearly the backbone of the organisation”

liP Report 2006

Performance Management in the Council is challenging, constructive and comprehensive. An annual planning cycle links together the budget setting process, identification and prioritisation of service improvement objectives. Planning takes place between September and March with full consideration of resident priorities and service workshops to identify areas for improvement and development. Members consider suggested improvements alongside resident priorities through a series of seminars and surgeries. These processes result in the Council Plan and service Improvement Plans driven by the core improvement themes of the Sustainable Community Strategy. This approach results in full alignment of plans to the MTFP, early identification of pressures and full integration of council wide actions such as those from the single equality scheme.

It is against this backdrop that performance management of the diversity agenda has been embedded within the Council's processes. The Single Equality Scheme is developed as part of the planning cycle and its actions read across into individual service improvement plans for each service area. Equalities actions are then subject to bi-annual monitoring alongside other key targets and measurements of performance. This embeds diversity throughout the organisation, sees its inclusion in key corporate and service level documents such as the Council Plan and as such its regular reporting of performance to Members.

Reporting of diversity progress within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is not seen as an “add-on”, however, as it is so well integrated, a highlight report is produced annually to ensure that senior managers and Members are clear on progress made. This approach ensures all Gender, Race and Disability equality action plan targets are effectively, efficiently and robustly monitored.

In 2007/08:

- 97% of Race Equality Action Plan targets achieved or on track

- 95% of Gender Equality Action Plan targets achieved or on track
- 96% of Disability Equality Action Plan targets achieved or on track

With the move away from BVPIs to the new National Indicator Set, the Council has retained some of the BVPIs such as the percentage of women in management positions and percentage of disabled employees, where we already a top quartile performer, as part of its key corporate basket of performance indicators. We will also retain BVPI2a to continue to monitor our progress against the ESG. We regularly monitor our position and at the time of writing assess our performance as:

Level One	100%	Compliance
Level Two	100%	Compliance
Level Three	100%	Compliance
Level Four	x%	Compliance
Level Five	y%	Compliance

Given the structure of the new Equality Framework as outlined in the recent consultation, we expect to be an “excellent” authority shortly after its introduction.

Community Engagement and Accountability

“Clear and challenging ambitions are supported by well-developed consultation arrangements which lead to action.”

Audit Commission 2008

The Council believes quality of life, public services and performance against the diversity agenda can only be improved effectively in partnership with local communities, key partners and agencies. Resident views inform our priority setting, service and resource planning, help us decide how to change and improve service and help us track our progress in achieving our ambition. We use numerous ways to gather the views of residents and stakeholders including:

- Analysis of direct feedback such as complaints and commendations, which can be broken down by diversity strands
- Viewpoint (our representative Residents Panel) which receives regular questionnaires to both adult on youth panels of key issues, plus focus groups to test ideas and investigate issues in

depth. All results are tested for variations in diversity strands and reported as appropriate

- A biennial independent residents survey
- The national BVPI / Place Survey
- A range of innovative approaches to gathering the views of children and young people through the Participation, Involvement and Consultation (PIC) network
- Our annual conference for older people – “Are you being served ... well?”
- Ad hoc consultations on particular regeneration schemes or key issues

Coordination of consultation across the authority is sound, achieved through a corporate consultation plan, available on the internet, which highlights key consultations about to commence, what the issues are and how residents can get involved⁸. This plan brings together all consultation underway by all departments in the authority and increasingly those consultations carried out by partners. Results of recent consultations are also published on the internet. Diversity consultation is integrated within this consultation plan and all is driven and guided by an agreed Consultation, Communication and Engagement strategic framework⁹ and a Consultation Communication and Engagement corporate group. The Council and its partners in Stockton Renaissance have signed up to a third sector compact which commits the authority to a twelve week period of consultation on any strategy or service change which has a significant impact on the third sector.¹⁰

The consultation plan and CCE Strategic Framework are underpinned by a series of guides for consultation. These guides have been developed by the Consultation and Diversity teams and act to support officers from across the Council carry out their own consultations in an effective and appropriate manner. In addition to generic support, specific guides have been produced:

- Guide to effectively consulting disabled people
- Guide to effectively consulting BME residents

⁸ Consultation plan

⁹ CCE

¹⁰ Compact

- Guide to effectively consulting children and young people¹¹

These are underpinned by an ongoing training programme.

Development of the Single Equality Scheme has benefited from the corporate approach adopted by the Council, the Gender Equality Action Plan for example draws heavily on the results of the biennial resident survey. To supplement this the Council has also developed a raft of diversity specific consultation, notably "Tell Us What You Think Events". Tell Us What You think are large public consultation events where the Council invites residents to give their views. Typically on hand are over twenty Council and Partner services representing the wide range of services on offer in the borough to receive delegates and capture their views. Tell Us What You think events have had a big impact so far:

- Four events held one focussing on Race, Disability, Faith and Belief and LGBT
- Over 400 local residents have been involved in the events
- Race and Disability Equality Action Plans directly informed by resident opinions at these events
- Over 20 different Council and partner services represented

Following the events, Heads of Service across the Council develop the findings into actions for their individual service areas. These are then aggregated into the equality action plans as part of the Single Equality Scheme. The draft scheme is then consulted on again with the community, employees and trades unions before being submitted to Members for final sign off and approval. The scheme itself, action plans and all Service Improvement Plans which include departmental level targets are published on the Council's website to highlight what action is taking place and to aid public involvement and scrutiny. The Council has created a summary single equality scheme to aid with understanding and like all corporate documents, the SES can be translated into the seven key languages spoken in the community if requested.

Tell Us What You Think Events and the development of the Single Equality Scheme have led to the development of ongoing engagement between the Council and the community. Whilst the faith and belief event uncovered little appetite for a faith and belief action plan amongst delegates it has been successful in creating a multi-faith group tasked with looking into and developing faith representation on Stockton Renaissance, our LSP.

The Disability Advisory Group was established following a Tell Us What You Think Event. The first meeting of the group took place in December 2006, where members of the group agreed to meet formally three times a year to work with Council officers and partner agencies to make services more accessible and plan for the future.

Achievements of this group include:

- The group currently has almost 80 members and includes young people and representatives from the VCS.
- Members have worked with the Diversity team to monitor the Council's Disability Equality Scheme
- Advising the Access to Services team on more accessible communication methods including electronic communication such as email and the website
- members of the group have been involved in planning the future of Preston Park and Hall, including DDA compliance, improved signage and improved layout of the collections as well as working with a consultant in an access audit and putting together two funding bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund and
- The Housing Reception Area at 16 Church Road was visited by members and their feedback on how to make it more accessible was immediately taken on board. Leaflet racks were re-positioned to be accessible to wheelchair users
- The group has been successful in having difficult to engage bodies, such as bus service providers, attend their meetings
- Following a presentation from the Council's car parking manager on a new Enhanced Concessionary Fare scheme many members of the group were made

¹¹ Consultation guides

aware that they were eligible and have since been supplied with their passes

- the group was represented on the Stockton International Riverside Festivals 2008 organising group to ensure the needs of people with disabilities were heard.

[Shaping our Future: Stockton's Sustainable Community Strategy](#)

“We welcome the many opportunities the community had to influence this important strategy .. It is a testament to the strong relationship between Stockton Renaissance and the Community Empowerment Network that we worked together to ensure everyone had the chance to make their voice heard.”

**Chief Executive
Stockton Residents & Community
Groups Association**

The Sustainable Community Strategy outlines the direction for the Council and its partners for the next thirteen years and is aligned closely with the Local Development Framework and Regional Spatial Strategy. It outlines the five key and three supporting themes against which all core policies including the Council Plan and Single Equality Scheme are structured. Consultation on Shaping Our Future was comprehensive with around thirty different groups, including the Area Boards, BME Network, a BME resident focus group drawn from Viewpoint and the Disability Advisory Group being consulted both on the initial proposals and the final strategy itself. Both the strategy itself and the Local Area Agreement which underpins it were subject to full Equality Impact Assessment and all thematic partnerships of the LSP have terms of reference outlining their commitment to be inclusive in their operation. Not only did this embed equality and diversity at the top of the planning hierarchy, but significant changes were made to the draft strategy as a result, including the development of a Stronger Communities theme, to be delivered by the Community Cohesion Strategy.

[Community Cohesion Strategy](#)¹²

“strong relationships help to increase social capital and community cohesion in Stockton.”

Stockton-on-Tees Borough has enjoyed good community relations and has not experienced the break down in cohesion which characterised many northern towns in the early part of the decade. However, Renaissance is not complacent and has developed a Community Cohesion Strategy to ensure the Borough remains on track. The Strategy has been adopted by all thematic partnerships of Renaissance with the partnerships themselves developing the action plan. Implementation of the strategy will be led by the Council which invested considerable resource to appoint a coordinator within the Diversity Team. The Community Cohesion Strategy and close involvement of the Diversity Team in the development of the SCS ensure the Council is leading its partners in the embedding of equality and diversity across Stockton-on-Tees Borough.

[Scrutiny](#)

The Council's scrutiny function is a crucial tool in policy development and has been important in driving forward the diversity agenda. One of the first services subject to equality impact assessment, scrutiny ensures that all Members of the Council, not just those on the Executive have a role in driving forward diversity:

- The Chair of Corporate Policy Select Committee described the input of the Disability Advisory Group into the review of meeting venues as “invaluable.”
- Consultation with local faith groups as part of a Cemeteries and Crematoria review highlighted the need for extended funeral times on Friday evenings and weekends. Working arrangements for both registration and burial and cremation were reviewed as a result and new arrangements were put in place to prevent water damage to graves.
- A scrutiny review into the borough's festivals made three separate diversity related recommendations including increasing awareness and involvement of BME communities in the borough's festivals, all publicity material to include information for disabled attendees and a Disability Advisory Group member to advise on future developments of festivals.

¹² Community Cohesion Strategy

In order to maintain this momentum, all scrutiny reviews are scoped in depth before they begin, a key part of which is the consideration of equality and diversity issues which may arise during the review. All scrutiny review action plans are also subject to Equality Impact Assessment prior to their implementation.

The Council is mindful of the recent report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in particular its recommendations on translation. This supports the Council's long held position to translate materials when required. In order to make our publications accessible, the Council has identified the seven key languages spoken in the borough and agreed a standard wording which appears on all documents informing residents of availability in different languages and formats. Key information is available on the Council's website in these seven languages as well as English. The Council has arrangements in place for translation and transcription where needed. Members of the disability advisory group for example have papers available on audio cassette and in Braille as well as large print depending on the needs of the individual concerned.

In order to ensure its services are accessible to residents and visitors whose first language is not English, the Council holds a contract for telephone translation services and has trained well over 400 officers from across its operations in how to use the facility. The Council monitors which languages are being requested and of late the most popular are not those identified as the most widely spoken in the borough. This demonstrates the ever changing nature of the borough's population and further justifies the Council's policy on translation.

Service Delivery & Customer Care

“The ethos of the council is to work together to create and provide the very best levels of service.”

IIP report 2006

The Council is committed to delivering world class public services which meet the needs of the borough's residents. Services are

reviewed regularly and all such reviews are informed by considerable levels of service user involvement. The Council's approach to user involvement has been highlighted as good practice for some years and consistently praised by the Audit Commission. Community involvement can be seen in the planning of services and mechanisms such as the Council's residents panel and biennial resident survey are at the heart of service planning and delivery. The Single Equality Scheme contains summaries of the consultation activities which have informed the development of the various action plans and Cabinet reports must outline what consultation has taken place to inform the content of the report.

The Single Equality Scheme contains detailed action plans for race, gender and disability equality with targets set at a service level. Action is well under way to develop objectives for sexual orientation with comprehensive consultation undertaken during the autumn of 2008, an age action plan is being developed based on the excellent young and older people's strategies already in place. Following on from the success of a faith and belief event, a multi-faith group is now meeting aimed at developing faith representation on the LSP and whilst this group has so far been overwhelmingly positive about the Council, will ensure that a faith and belief action plan can be developed by March 2009. This work is all underpinned by the equality impact assessment programme which assesses potential impact against all equality strands, as well as Community Cohesion.

The completion of equalities targets has already begun. Of the targets outlined in the second edition of the Single Equality Scheme at the end of the 2007/08 financial year we had achieved:

- 32 targets in the Race Equality Action Plan with 26 on target and only 2 slipped
- 49 targets in the Disability Equality Action Plan with 22 on target and only three slipped
- 33 targets in the Gender Equality Action Plan with 18 on target and only 2 slipped

This demonstrates an improvement in diversity provision comparable in pace and depth with the overall performance improvement of the Council. This is

performance well above level 3 of the standard as the Council is now delivering.

Procurement

Equalities issues are addressed right through the tendering process. Regional work has taken place with the North East Centre of Excellence to produce some harmonised documentation for the Pre Qualification and Invitation to Tender stages of the process. This means that as a minimum, the contractor complies with equalities legislation and is informed of the standards that the council expects the contractor to meet. All services use the standardised documentation so contractors are aware of the standards they have to meet up front. Training has been held by the Procurement, Legal and Diversity sections to ensure managers understand how to use this documentation. In addition, services that assess themselves as being highly relevant to the equalities legislation carry out extra work to keep providers informed of what they must do to meet the needs of the clients and the legislation and carry out detailed reviews to keep these standards high.

Because the council operates a devolved procurement function, services manage suppliers in a way most appropriate to their own service. This ensures suppliers and service providers have an understanding and commitment to the principles and practices of equality in what they do. The Diversity and Drugs Action Teams worked with providers to raise their awareness of the equality and diversity element of working with the council. Supporting People has ensured all contracted services have been involved in detailed reviews where the Service Provider has self assessed and provided an evidence portfolio. In addition they are required to show annual improvement in reviews with staff and service users. Finally, there is a standard clause in all contracts that providers will abide by the council's equality policies. Due to the fact that there is a standard clause relating to equality and it is listed in the Invitation to Tender documentation, all contracts should be monitored on this basis. Contracts that are more relevant to the equality duties will inevitably be monitored more closely.

Employment and Training

The Council has successfully completed its equal pay review and implemented its Single Status agreement. The application of Single Status within the Council was underpinned by the key objective of developing fair and non-discriminatory grade structures. The job evaluation scheme has been designed to be free from gender bias and discrimination on the grounds of race, sexuality, religious belief, age and disability. Employees were informed throughout the process through a series of newsletters and employee briefings¹³ as were Trades Unions (Unison, GMB and Unite). The single status agreement has been subject to an equality impact assessment. That this review has been carried out and successfully implemented is testament to how the Council is performing above level 3 standard.

The Council's People Strategy¹⁴ builds on our longstanding approach to organisation workforce (including recruitment and retention) and skills development. It provides a framework for continuous HR improvement through action planning including HR input into the Single Equality Scheme and inspection and assessment programmes such as Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and Investors In People (IIP) It is a way to measure our journey of success and ensure the Council deals with future pressures and change.

The strategy has five high level goals:

- Developing the organisation; achieving excellence in leadership and management
- Becoming a modern and diverse employer with the ability to recruit and retain a high quality workforce, representative of the community
- Developing internal effectiveness, ensuring HR has the skills and capacity to help Stockton achieve its objectives
- Developing workforce skills and capacity to ensure we have employees with the right skills, qualifications and competencies at all levels of the organisation
- Providing a safe and healthy environment and engaging with our employees through effective two-way communication

¹³ Job Evaluation Newsletter November 2007

¹⁴ People Strategy

The People Strategy is underpinned by the Workforce Development Plan¹⁵ which builds on the commitment to be a modern and diverse employer including commitments to further develop diversity training for managers and attracting new people to local government.

The Council has in place a raft of HR policies and procedures designed to promote equality and diversity at work. These are contained in a comprehensive handbook and include:

- Flexible working arrangements
- Job sharing scheme
- Special leave
- Career break scheme
- Maternity leave and paternity / maternity support provision
- Adoption leave policy
- Parental leave
- AIDS / HIV Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy

This handbook is continually under review to ensure it remains current and relevant to our employees.

The Council is committed to making its recruitment and selection processes as accessible as possible and is maximising the opportunities provided by new technologies. All vacancies are advertised on the Council's website as well as specialist sites such as Sector 1. All person specifications and job descriptions which follow an agreed standard format can be downloaded and applications submitted electronically. The Council is a proud holder of the two ticks positive about disabled people symbol and guarantees an interview to disabled candidates who meet all the essential criteria. We are committed to encouraging applications from as many people as possible and continue to use the traditional print media as an avenue and have recently consulted with our BME communities to ensure we are meeting their needs when applying for jobs. All these activities are underpinned by a robust recruitment handbook.

The Council knows its employees and has a personnel system which is capable of meeting our needs. We have carried out a full employee census which collected

information on age, ethnicity, religion, gender and gender identity, disability and sexual orientation. The survey which was carried out across the Council and our ALMO received a return rate higher than that observed in similar sized local authorities and far in excess of some large metropolitan areas. The figures for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual employees are particular impressive with Stonewall indicating that to achieve the level of declaration the first time the question has been asked, indicates a greater level of trust in the Council as an employer than might normally be found. Corporate level targets have been set for all six equality strands based on the results of the staff census and will be developed to individual department level as soon as is practical.

Employee engagement is vital to continued improvement in Council services.

Employees are involved and kept informed through:

- Keeping You in Touch our monthly employee newsletter which includes diversity information in each issue¹⁶
- "Setting the Standard" our regular middle and senior managers' conference, focussing on policy and delivery
- Regular information included in payslips, including an annual summary of the Council Plan for all employees
- "Postmaster" e-mails delivered to all employees highlighting key issues
- A corporate Intranet and highly accessible internet site which includes key HR and diversity related information

These opportunities have been maximised by the Council to promote equality and diversity and ensure that all employees have access to and awareness of diversity policy and action.

Training

The Council has a longstanding and comprehensive diversity training programme. A series of roadshows aimed at raising cultural awareness amongst officers and Members whetted the appetite for more training across the organisation. A large scale and comprehensive corporate training programme has been delivered to meet our commitment in the Council Plan 2007-2010 that by March 2008 all first, second and third

¹⁵ Workforce Development Plan

¹⁶ KYIT issue with Diversity Calendar

tier officers as well as 10% of all other staff would receive diversity training. To ensure effective and timely delivery, external consultants were approached and asked to quote to deliver a training programme consistent with the Council's approach to equality and diversity as well as the competency framework. Three distinct and tailored programmes were developed including one for the most senior managers where the focus was the leadership, management and driving of diversity.

Setting the Standard

Four half day sessions were arranged third and fourth tier officers. A total of 95 delegates attended the training over the four sessions which had the objectives of:

- Be aware of their own attitudes and effectiveness as an inclusive leader
- Understand the key constituents of the Diversity Excellence Model (DEM)
- Identify Discrimination in action.
- Explain the barriers to inclusive service delivery.
- Describe the skills required to effectively challenge discriminatory language and behaviour.

Feedback indicated around 90% thought the course objectives had been achieved the same number feeling the information was relevant to their workplace, and around three quarters feeling the information learned would assist in the promotion of diversity across the authority. When asked about the trainer the vast majority of respondents thought them to be highly skilled and knowledgeable.

This has been key in ensuring the buy-in of third and fourth tier managers from across the Council which has helped contribute to our success.

Key staff across the authority

A total of five hundred and fourteen officers attended these courses with full day courses held at various venues around the borough to ensure a wide a spread of attendees as possible. The sessions were designed in line with the core competencies of the Competency Framework and had the following objectives:

- Understand equalities legislation and apply it to customer service
- recognise examples of discrimination, harassment, victimization and positive action.
- Understand and identify actions which would reduce or eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Understand the term 'Equity' in relation to providing a service that meets customer's needs
- Understand how culture impacts on communication.
- Differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate language and terminology and adjust their use as necessary.
- Understand how people from minority groups respond to dominance and state the three minority responses that may influence an individuals associated behaviours

Feedback showed 99% of attendees felt the course objectives had been achieved. 94% of attendees felt the information was relevant to their job with a similar number (90%) feeling the information learned would assist in the promotion of diversity in the workplace. Overall a 98% satisfaction level was observed.

Ongoing and embedded training

The training offer is comprehensive and also includes:

- Telephone translation training ensuring officers across the Council can effectively utilise the Councils language line provision. Over 400 officers have been trained so far
- Equality Impact Assessment training to ensure effective EIAs are being carried out with over 40 senior officers trained across the authority
- Bespoke and tailored training provision delivered in areas of identified need
- High quality and specialist social care diversity courses such as moving and handling and caring for people with dementia
- Consultation training including consulting traditionally hard to reach groups
- Diversity embedded across corporate training programme and visible in a wide variety of training provision
- Diversity information collected from all attendees on training courses

- Diversity training embedded in Member induction and community cohesion training delivered to Members.

The Council has trained well over 1000 employees in various aspects of equality and diversity, yet continues to improve its provision with an expanded offer and further embedded provision being available from January.

Departmental Self Assessments

Resources

Resources contains the core functions of the Council which enable it to deliver its activities. The services included in Resources are Human Resources, Finance and Administration and Taxation.

Resources are committed to the Diversity agenda and are fully engaged with the Council's corporate approach. Single Equality Scheme targets are embedded within Service Improvement plans and monitored through audited corporate performance management arrangements. Resources make full use of corporate consultation activities and have been heavily involved with tell us what you think events, have used the Viewpoint residents panel and have an ongoing relationship with the Disability Advisory Group, members of which has heavily influenced the design of the new Thornaby customer service centre.

The procurement function is within the resources directorate and has been vital in ensuring the Council's leading role regionally in improving procurement practice as well as improving our performance, embedding equality clauses within contracts in advance of regional work being competed.

Human Resources are vital in driving forward the diversity agenda and much of their good work such as the single status agreement, staff census, diversity related policies and training is discussed in depth in the preceding sections. In addition workforce profiles by each of the six diversity strands have been developed and targets set to improve the diversity of the workforce. Guidance and training for all those involved in recruitment is available.

Resources have responsibility for driving forward the Council's corporate approach to customer services, Customer 1st:

Case Study Customer First

The Council is committed to delivering modernised, excellent customer services with the customer at the heart of all our activities. As such, all Council services are working towards achieving Stage 2 of our Customer First programme. Customer first builds on essential elements of other quality awards and challenges services to demonstrate they are delivering excellent customer service, both internally and externally. Customer first assesses against key attributes needed to deliver excellent customer services:

- Service delivery
- Service responsiveness
- Organisational Culture and Attitude
- Accessible Services
- Service Equality

Diversity is embedded throughout the customer first criteria and highlighted specifically within Service Equality which commits services to:

- Contributing to the Single Equality Scheme
- Being aware of the offensive incidents procedure
- Promoting the use of plain English and ensuring documents are available in other formats
- Making appropriate use of interpretation, translation and transcription services
- Having hearing loops and text phones installed where applicable
- Carrying out EIAs on new policies and procedures
- Training employees in equality and diversity to the appropriate level
- Being aware of the needs of all service users

As all services are committed to achieving these standards we can be assured that diversity is being embedded across the entire organisation.

Embedding diversity within the Customer First programme has had great benefits for promoting the agenda across the Council. Indeed a recent scrutiny review considered the next steps for the programme, and whilst recommending a move to the national

customer service standards were insistent that the diversity elements of Customer First be retained in the new programme due to their success. The Customer First Manager is a key member of the Corporate Diversity Working Group and member of the interview panel appointing Diversity officers.

Resources manage the corporate Commendations, Comments and Complaints programme which seeks to record the views of customers on their contact with the Council be it good, bad or neutral. A single form is used for all which also collects diversity related information from each respondent, with staff being trained in how to successfully collect this often sensitive information. Each service area has a dedicated CCC officer who collates and records Compliments, Comments and Complaints, which are then considered by a council wide working group. The results feeding into service planning and improvement and the Equality Impact Assessment process.

Resources are responsible for the administration of Council Tax bills and information can be provided in a range of formats including a talking bill service, home visits, translated bills, large print, Braille and audio tape. Similar arrangements are in place for business rates with hearing loops and minicom systems being present in cash offices and reception points. A ground floor committee room has been built into the main administration building, an effective, reasonable and above all cost effective adjustment to mitigate access problems in older buildings.

Resources are committed to training and development of their employees and all customer service officers have received detailed diversity training as well as specially tailored sessions such as how to ask the diversity related questions on our, Commendations, Comments and Complaints survey. All employees within taxation have completed customer care training with many having attended deaf awareness training coordinated by a third sector partner, Stockton Blind People's Voice, CAB training on debt awareness, cultural awareness training, plain English and the reporting of offensive incidents. Key staff within the service have attended the corporate training, consulting with hard to reach communities.

Development and Neighbourhood Services

Development and Neighbourhood Services (DaNS) includes all the Council's place related services; Direct Services, Planning, Technical Services, Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development and Performance and Business Services.

The strength of commitment to diversity across DaNS can be seen through the service improvement plans for each service area which clearly demonstrate links with the Single Equality Scheme and the performance observed for the 2007/08 financial year. Performance against the 3 action plans was

- Disability – 93% of actions achieved or on track
- Gender – 93% of actions achieved or on track
- Race – 95% of actions achieved or on track

Selected successes include:

Disability

- Promotional materials are available in large print, in specific colours and in Braille where necessary
- Through effective promotion of adaptations and disabled facility grants, 433 residents benefited in 2007/08.
- Development control ensured all new developments consider disabled access and disabled parking at the design stage.
- Of the 125 pedestrian crossings in the borough, 119 have facilities for disabled people. Works to improve the remainder are programmed.
- All forms of public transport are accessible to wheelchair users and almost half of all bus stops are fitted with low floors to aid access.

Gender

- The number of business start up grants awarded to females is aligning with that awarded to males.
- Gender differences in service satisfaction have been investigated and amended where appropriate

Race

- A BME housing strategy has been developed and implementation begun.
- The benefits section website includes information in eleven different languages which can be downloaded direct from the site.
- A total of 43 business start up grants were given to BME residents in 2007/08.

DaNS are at the heart of the Council's corporate approach to consultation and community involvement and have participated in some of the key consultation activity, supporting the "Tell Us What You Think Events" notably the waste awareness team working with BME residents to raise awareness of the recycling service offered by the Council and maximising the use of Viewpoint. The Disability Advisory Group has supported DaNS in the development of:

- The local development framework
- Local transport planning
- Designing the new Billingham Town Centre
- Designing Thornaby Pavillion and library refurbishment
- The new leisure facilities at Billingham Forum
- Improving the Housing reception area

The offensive incident scheme has been relaunched as a partnership between the Council's diversity team, community safety team, Cleveland Police and Tristar homes. The scheme is embedded within the anti-social behaviour procedures and as such boasts a telephone helpline which is staffed on a 24 hour basis as well as internet and reception point reporting.

In addition the commitment to resident involvement has led to the following successes against all diversity strands:

- The Community Safety Team organised an awareness event for adults with learning disabilities.
- The Housing service regularly provides information on its services at Stockton Central Mosque with the housing regeneration team promoting the progress of local regeneration through the Mosque and regularly updating the Imam.
- The Homeless Prevention strategy was well informed by the views of BME

residents through the Faith and Belief Tell Us What You Think Event and through a questionnaire to which 14% of respondents were from BME communities.

- The housing service has worked successfully with RSLs to develop two Extra Care Schemes in the borough for older people and a young persons supported housing scheme.
- In housing regeneration areas, equity loan schemes have been developed which are compliant with Sharia law thus ensuring all Muslim residents can take advantage of the scheme. During its implementation, work was undertaken with local banks to ensure Sharia compliant accounts were available for local people.
- Claim at Home is a home visit service offered by the benefits team to ensure older and disabled residents are supported in claiming housing / Council Tax Benefit.
- Text messaging has been introduced as a way of communicating to maximise contact with young people.

DaNS has enjoyed success in breaking down the barriers to service delivery and providing services for traditionally very marginalised groups:

- The community development team actively promote accessibility to centres. One centre in Yarm, traditionally only available to older residents has been transformed into a venue offering a warm welcome for all ages and interests, overseen by a fledgling management committee committed to intergenerational work.
- All community centres are challenged annually to demonstrate a clear statement on equality of opportunity
- Domestic violence services are available to both men and women,
- Housing and planning services, in partnership with the other Tees Valley authorities have commissioned a major study to identify accommodation needs and aspirations for gypsies and travellers. Monies have been sought to upgrade our existing static gypsy and traveller site and work is ongoing into the need and potential for a transit site.

DaNS is committed to its employees and ensuring diversity is embedded in all its activities. There has been a significant

increase over recent years in the number of women employed in Security; Neighbourhood Enforcement Service and Car Parking Enforcement Service; each of these services has been traditionally male dominated. Evidence of widespread understanding of equality and diversity issues has been tested through those services that have successfully achieved level 2 of the Customer First criteria with employees continually updated on diversity through ongoing training, employee newsletters, development of service improvement plans and regular discussions at team meetings.

The success of the Council's approach to diversity is demonstrated well within DaNS which includes those service areas which Council's traditionally find to be slowest in responding to the diversity agenda. This is not the case within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and DaNS can boast the following successes in these areas:

- The Planning service has trained a number of its senior officers in carrying out equality impact assessment, has assessed its LDF Core Strategy and all Development Plan Documents and developed the LDF alongside and complementary to the Sustainable Community Strategy thereby ensuring the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders.
- The technical services department has investigated gender differences in satisfaction with car parking and has successfully launched one of the most comprehensive concessionary travel schemes in the region.
- Car parking restrictions are relaxed near the Central Stockton Mosque to allow parking at Friday prayers. This relaxation is lengthened in winter months to accommodate longer prayer times. Local BME residents were consulted about development of a resident parking scheme using the corporate consultation guidelines.
- Our waste recycling and refuse collection service offers a variety of support services for residents such as assistance in moving wheelie bins.
- Our trading standards and licensing team carried out Consultation with disabled people and groups on the new Taxi policy which will directly inform the accessibility requirements of all taxis licensed by the authority.

- Bus lane and waiting restrictions have been relaxed for taxis, thereby improving access to the town hall for older and disabled people

Children, Education and Social Care

CESC brings together all the Council's "people" services, such as education, social services and culture under one directorate. This forward thinking approach has been important in driving forward the diversity agenda

Adults

Adult strategy and adult operations are fully committed to the promotion of equality and diversity and to the corporate approach adopted by the Council. Like DaNS they provide an excellent link to our key partners and help the Council drive diversity in our locality, notably the most senior managers within CESC are jointly funded with the PCT.

Evidence of how adults services are integrated with the corporate approach include:

- Service areas have dedicated diversity leads, staff trained in EIA and a dignity champion
- The Practice Based Commissioning Governance framework, identifies equality and diversity issues. A wide range of stakeholders are engaged in service redesign and improvement.
- The Independent Living team is developing an equality and diversity group to promote diversity in team but also with service providers.
- Supporting People hosts a number of Inclusive Forums and Service User Forums, BME carers have been specifically consulted as part of the Carer Strategy consultation
- Specialist services are funded to support BME groups such as the refugee housing support service
- Specialist third sector organisations have been commissioned. The Hindu Cultural Society for example provides day services and carers provision for Asian residents.
- The Independent Living Team monitors each contract and service provider through planned compliance audits and the collection of data relating to the measurement of equality such as

recruitment and selection processes, complaints policy and disability policy.

Adults services are also committed to involvement of local people in the development of their services and the best in customer care, notably:

- As part of the Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework, service providers are enquired to evidence consultation with service users
- The annual "Are you being served ... well" event attracted over 250 older people
- The Carefirst database sets out preferred methods of communication for its users and is actively used by the health and care team to ensure information and contact are accessible.
- Supporting People introductory leaflets are available in the common languages spoken in the borough,

Case Study – STEPs

The STEPs service was established in 2001 as an ESF funded project which is now predominantly funded by the Council. STEPs provides the support needed to access vocational training for disabled people with a diverse range of needs. STEPs offers one to one support, practical advice and guidance to help individuals access opportunities and overcome barriers to employment, helping build confidence, self esteems, recognise abilities and realise potential.

Of the clients currently on the WORKSTEP provision there are people with a mixture of disabilities including learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health issues. Since June 2007 there have been two progressions to employment and a further seven sustained progressions. This success in sustained progression in to employment equates to the service having the second highest progression rate nationally.

Children

Stockton's Children's services have been hugely influential in promoting diversity, their success highlighted by our 2008 Joint Area Review report:

"Schools are taking effective action to promote anti-bullying initiatives. There is little evidence of racial tension in the

area and most children and young people report that any issues of bullying or racism are dealt with decisively. Children have good opportunities to contribute their views and make a positive contribution to the wider community. Asian young people have made films about topical issues, such as racism and drug abuse, which have been effectively used to enhance the knowledge and understanding of children and adults. The asylum support team uses presentations to white British communities to dispel the myths about asylum seekers and refugees."

The success of children's services is due to the corporate approach adopted by the council and its influence on the services:

- 21 Children's services Managers have undertaken EIA training
- The EIA of the Children and Young People's Plan has identified the demographic trends which will impact on future commissioning and ensured a focus on areas where further development was needed
- Information on children medically unfit to attend school is used to ensure good quality support. In 2006 100% of pupils achieve level 1 threshold and 67% at least 1 GCSE grade A*-C.
- The JAR report highlighted the "effective use of data to track individual progress of pupils in vulnerable groups, with children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities making particularly good progress."
- The strong culture of partnership and collaborative working within Children's services has been highlighted by our JAR report "Sharing of information between service providers to support the development of children's services and provision for asylum seekers and refugees is good."

Children's services also demonstrate well how the Council uses its commissioning powers to promote diversity and community cohesion:

- A new substance misuse service has been commissioned for young people
- Voluntary sector providers have been commissioned to support young BME residents following research they carried out into sexual health and substance misuse in young BME people

- Banardos have been commissioned to offer support services for children and young people
- Specialist services have been commissioned to support young carers
- Brook service provides sexual health and contraceptive advice to hard to reach groups including developing a boys and men's project

Children's Services have enjoyed success in breaking down barriers and supporting the more marginalised groups in our borough:

- Targeted efforts to recruit more governors from BME communities has led to improved representation.
- A partnership between Children's Centres and Stockton Riverside College has seen ESOL provision delivered from the centres. Free crèche provision has enabled parents to attend and the children have developed improved social and English language skills. The African Women's Healthy Eating sessions immediately follow ESOL enabling families to share a healthy lunch.
- A dedicated asylum support team is in place
- Good data and well established partnerships has improved the Council's knowledge about local travelling communities. This joint working has seen the access rate at secondary age increasing from 83% to 93% in 2007.

The PIC (Participation, Involvement and Consultation) Network was set up to make sure that the Council works closely with other organisations and agencies in the best way possible to involve young people.

At the moment, the PIC Network has over 70 members representing organisations and services that engage with young people in many different ways both inside and outside of the Council. Groups involved include Looked after Children, the Cornerhouse Project, which includes a group of BME young people, young carers, young people with disabilities and is currently developing work with young LGB people.

The aim of the PIC Network is to contact and share information with others about the best possible ways to involve young people as well as being a mechanism for getting young people's views through active participation. Other ways young people are involved include:

- Stockton Disability Youth Forum, a self-directed forum which chooses its own issues to address. They have developed their own award scheme, MB awards, accrediting sport and team working.
- Members of the Youth Assembly have contributed to the Children's Trust Board and have given evidence to Scrutiny
- Children with SEN / LDD routinely take part in appointment of staff in the Disabilities and Care Teams

Culture

Culture and Leisure Services are fundamentally concerned with diversity, they start from a belief that it is every individuals right to explore and express a sense of cultural identity and belonging. Many of the programmes, though not described as Diversity projects, are about appreciating the benefits of difference and variety, as well as similarity. As such there are numerous projects which serve as evidence of our commitment to Equality and Cohesion. The largest single example is the Stockton International Riverside Festival, SIRC. SIRC is not described as a cultural diversity event, yet it actively brings together disparate local communities as participants, celebrating their identities, and it promotes professional work by companies whose cultural origins mirror those of the significant resident minority ethnic communities. A recent Viewpoint survey showed a higher level of attendance at SIRC from the BME sample than the 'other' individuals questioned, and similarly a higher percentage of the BME group thought the subsidy of SIRC represented good value for money.

SIRC Carnival is shaped and designed by the participant community groups. SIRC Carnival 07 involved 37 groups, 8 of which were from BME communities and 5 were disability or learning difficulty groups. SIRC is steered by a large group involving community representatives, private companies, public sector partners and special interest groups. The Stockton Disability Advisory Group is a member and has led to the festival being as accessible as possible. SIRC also bases its planning on the feedback of a large sample of attendees. For the past 6 years SIRC has collected data from over a 1000 visitors, conducting detailed interviews with a selected sample to give robust evidence of the needs and

aspirations of all age and socio economic groups represented. The trends over several years are of particular value in responding to the very broad appetites of the very mixed audiences. SIRF has consistently achieved over 90% satisfaction ratings.

Law and Democracy

Law and democracy oversees the Council's legal and democratic services functions, for example ensuring the requirement to carry out EIAs is enshrined in the Council's constitution. The democratic services function have played a key role in promoting diversity and encouraging all communities to be active in democratic processes. A dedicated community engagement officer is in post who delivers an annually refreshed community engagement strategy. Notable successes include:

- Promotion of electoral registration to BME communities at the Mela, Tell Us What You Think events and the inclusion of information in the New Citizen Welcome Packs.
- Use of the Viewpoint panel to review polling stations, leading to changes in the siting of some stations to improve accessibility
- Young people aged 16 and 17 are specifically targeted as potential voters and their names added to the electoral register to ensure they are able to vote as soon as they turn eighteen. This has seen a 15% increase in registration between 2006 and 2007.
- Managers of all care homes in the borough have been specifically informed of the need to ensure all residents are registered so as to not disenfranchise older people.
- All democratic services publications indicate how to obtain information in different formats and the register of electors free phone telephone service is available in other languages simply by pressing the appropriate button
- Presiding officers for all 108 polling stations used in the May 2007 elections were trained in using telephone translation