

Buckinghamshire County Council

Planting the seeds of change

Cohesion & Equalities Annual Report 2007
Executive Summary



1. Introduction

This is an Executive Summary of Buckinghamshire County Council's first Annual Report on Community Cohesion and Equalities. Although we have published a wide range of information about specific aspects of equality, the Report brings together for the first time all our activities and future aims in this area. Cohesion and equalities are a high priority for the County Council and strong communities are central to our Vision of Achieving Outstanding Performance

The Report follows the general format of the Equality Standard for Local Government so that we can link our achievements and progress against a clear corporate framework, which sets out our future direction. However, the central point about our approach to cohesion and equalities is that we aim to secure better outcomes for individuals and communities in Bucks, and so we have tried, throughout the Report, to use case studies that illustrate the difference that we are making.

Although the Report concentrates on the County Council's work, so that we can improve our accountability in this area, our whole philosophy is to work in partnership. Much of our work described in this report involves other public service providers and the voluntary and community sector in Bucks. Through the next Local Area Agreement, the new Comprehensive Area Review process and "Getting Closer to Communities", we will be seeking to build upon these partnerships.

Finally, as the County Council's lead Cabinet Member and Officer for community cohesion and equalities, we would like to express our deep appreciation to all those colleagues whose commitment and skill are reflected in the achievements set out in this Annual Report.



Frank Downes
Lead Cabinet Member for
Cohesion and Equalities

Dean Taylor
Lead Strategic Director for
Cohesion and Equalities

Our Challenges

The general level of prosperity in Bucks masks pockets of deprivation in certain areas and within particular groups, for example:

- 1% of the population live within areas which are in the 30% most deprived
- 12% of under 16s live in these areas.
- over 40,000 people are claiming benefits (not including pensions or pension credit)
- 1 in 5 of the working age population has no qualifications or any kind
- Children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups, those in care and those with physical, learning and sensory disabilities experience inequalities in terms of their educational, social and economic outcomes
- The towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe experience higher levels of unemployment, crime and vandalism and poorer education attainment, housing and health than other areas of Buckinghamshire.
- There is over a 10 year difference in life expectancy across wards, with life expectancy tending to be lower in the more deprived wards.
- Buckinghamshire experiences significant and growing difficulty in relation to the provision of affordable housing.
- The number of individuals and families that are homeless is growing, correlating to an exponential increase in people placed in temporary accommodation, unable to settle down and build the networks necessary to become included members of society.
- Young people are increasingly finding themselves in housing need irrespective of income due to the escalating house prices and rents.
- Those on low incomes and benefits are forced to live in temporary or unsatisfactory housing for long periods or have to rely on emergency accommodation.
- Our rural communities also experience isolation and difficulties in accessing key services and facilities, particularly those people without access to cars such as young people and the elderly.
- The changing composition of the county in terms of ethnicity and age characteristics, and the addition of new communities in housing growth areas will all provide challenges for both new and established communities.

Looking back

Leadership & Corporate Commitment

Evidence of "*Leadership and corporate commitment*" to mainstreaming community cohesion and equality is contained within our overall approach to "*Stronger And Cohesive Communities In Bucks*" our Cohesion and Equality Strategy approved by Cabinet in June 2006. Other evidence includes:

- Activity being undertaken through the Local Area Agreement
- Improvement actions undertaken in response to the 2006 CPA to:
 - Embed a strategic approach
 - Ensure strategies specifically addressed diversity issues

- Share learning and understanding across the council
- Improve performance against the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG)
- Our work with partners, namely:
 - Bucks Strategic Partnership
 - Community Cohesion & Equalities Forum
 - Bucks Equality Network
 - Action Against Homophobia and Transphobia
 - Racial Response Group

Community Engagement and Accountability

This section summaries the Council’s Consultation Strategy objectives and identifies action in relation to:

- Residents Panel
- GC2C update
- Thematic Partnerships
- Statutory Sector working and the Race Equality Councils
- Work undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny
- Consultation and engagement activity over the year

Service Delivery and Customer Care

We aim to have services that are joined up, delivered locally and meet customer needs including “hard to reach” groups and are using a service transformation model to look at services from the customer perspective. In addition other activity over the last year to support this aim include:

- Mystery shopping
- Production of an accessible information directory
- Guidance about people’s needs in relation to their faith
- Development on an online reporting system to record discriminatory incidents, including bullying and harassment for staff and service users
- Equality impact assessments completed over the year within services

This section also includes examples of where services have been making a difference to their service users and staff.

Employment & Training

The County Council’s vision is to continue to be an Excellent Authority that represents the interests of all its residents. Our People Strategy identifies the following key objectives to help deliver that vision:

- Being the best employer
- Bringing in additional talent
- Developing our existing talent
- Championing Diversity

- Transforming the organisation

This section highlights key activity in terms of:

- Introduction of the Diversity Core Competency into our recruitment and appraisal processes
- Establishment of Employee Equality Forums covering Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), Disabled employees and employees of Faith
- Training and development activity
- Overview of the Occupational Health Survey results
- Employee monitoring data in relation to age, disability, race and gender
- Examples of activity undertaken by services

Measuring Our Performance

This section shows performance against a range of existing Best Value Performance Indicators and analyses the outcome of key questions contained within the last Residents Survey and the BVPI Residents Survey. Benchmark data with national indicators is included where available.

Looking Ahead

This section sets out the next steps for the development of the County Council's approach to Community Cohesion and Equality including identifying a number of principles that will underpin our analysis of the cohesive issues we need to address.

- Establish a picture of community cohesion in Buckinghamshire through a **community mapping exercise**
- **Identify the priority issues** in relation to cohesion and equalities
- **Agreeing a range of actions** including cross cutting, service and local area based actions
- Use a **local approach to deliver** community cohesion through the GC2C programme
- **Develop a basket of indicators** to monitor our progress
- **Develop a revised framework** that can be discussed by Members in October
- Develop a **Single Equality Scheme** through a review of our existing Race, Gender and Disability Equality Schemes with partners and stakeholders
- Develop the actions necessary to deliver the **changing national Indicators around equality** once agreed
- Develop an **equality monitoring policy** to ensure that we are fulfilling our legal duties to eliminate discrimination across all six equality strands
- **Celebrate Diversity** through a programme of activities, agreed with partners where appropriate
- **Equality Standard for Local Government** – to embed the improvements achieved so far and action plan for the revised indicator *“Increase the reported levels of satisfaction by service users across the strands of race, gender, disability, faith and age to reach the highest reported level for each Service Area”*

- **Equality Impact Assessments** – monitor the delivery of the schedule and continue to improve the quality
- **Develop a publicly searchable database** that will provide information on Service provision countywide, including by the Voluntary and Community Sectors, and key events taking place
- **Equal Access to Services** – undertake a programme of disabled mystery shopping to complement the corporate programme and also carry out research around the communication needs of disabled people within the county
- **Themed Partnerships** – to be established and functioning
- **Develop a training and development plan** within existing resources

If you wish to comment on the content of this document, you can send an e-mail to equalities@buckscc.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can telephone Angie Sarchet, Cohesion and Equalities Manager, on 01296 382756 or you can send a letter to:

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