

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL
“ACHIEVING LEVEL” SELF-ASSESSMENT
EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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SUMMARY

This self-assessment demonstrates the Council' commitment to equality and what we are doing to meet the five themes of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

1. Knowing Your Community and Equality Mapping

This section looks at the profile of the District in terms of the equality strands and details some of the measures the council has in place to address specific issues. Through the use of MAIDeN we can demonstrate that we have well established partnership links across the county in sharing data and intelligence, which enables us to target resources at those most in need and helps us develop services to meet the changing demographics of the District.

2. Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

This section examines how the Council has worked with partners and in particular the Local Strategic Partnership to ensure that the views of all residents are considered in the formation of our policies and procedures, eg Unheard voices report. Key strategic plans, such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Delivery Plan are important in promoting our commitment to equality and diversity. We can show that our members and staff understand the important role they have in working with our partners to ensure that we are meeting these commitments.

3. Community Engagement and Satisfaction

We recognise the importance of community engagement and participation and can demonstrate that we have moved from simple consultation to real involvement. We have well established links with a number of community groups, in particular working with disabled, older persons and youth forums. Our satisfaction ratings are generally very good and residents have said they feel involved in local decision making.

4. Responsive Services and Customer Care

Each of our services have carried out Equality Impact Assessments to determine where they can improve service delivery to meet the needs of people with different backgrounds and ensure fair access. Putting the customer first is at the heart of our service delivery and in this section our services give examples of the excellent work that has been done to date and also any "areas for development".

5. Modern and Diverse Workforce

This section demonstrates how we are working to achieve equality outcomes for the workforce across employment, learning and development. Our aim is to have a workforce that reflects the community and to develop a culture where everyone has the opportunity and skills to deliver responsive, personalised services.

The **Action Plan** outlines how we intend improving equality outcomes within the Council and wider community.

INTRODUCTION

This document forms part of Stroud District Council's self-assessment, as required under the "Achieving level" of the Equality Framework for Local Government. It outlines the Council's achievements in terms of equality and diversity outcomes for the residents and visitors to our District and for the employees of the District Council.

Together with the five other District Councils and the County Council, we are in the process of producing a Single Equality Scheme for Gloucestershire. Extensive consultation across the seven equality strands has been carried out and specific workshops facilitated by Equality South West.

As a result of our self-assessment and the consultation undertaken, we will produce an action plan for the District to ensure that we continue to meet the diverse needs of all our communities.

1. KNOWING YOUR COMMUNITY and EQUALITY MAPPING

Background

Stroud District is a largely rural area covering 461 square kilometres (175 square miles) in the south of Gloucestershire, with five small town centres in Stroud, Dursley, Nailsworth, Berkley and Wotton-under-Edge.

Stroud officially has a population of 111,700 residents (ONS 2008) living in just over 49,000 properties. Approximately 60% of residents live in what the ONS define as 'Urban' settlements, with 16% in 'Town & Fringe' settlements, another 16% in 'Villages', and the remaining 8% living in 'Hamlets and Isolated Dwellings'.

The population of Stroud is expected to follow national trends with a significant growth in older people. Specifically, the group age 50 and over is expected to increase in the next 17 years with a sharp increase in the group age 75-84. The age group 10-24 is expected to decrease by around 3,000. The changing age profile of the district has huge implications on what and how services are delivered. With the government's efficiency agenda placing increased pressure on public resources it becomes all the more important to have reliable and accurate data on the make up of our communities.

Stroud has good health indicators and a safe and clean environment. It has low unemployment, offers good educational opportunities and has a housing affordability comparable to the national average ratio. The health inequalities gap within Stroud is small, relative to other districts in Gloucestershire. (NHS Stroud Area profile June 2009)

Ethnicity

According to the census 2001, there were fewer than 1,500 people from Black and ethnic minority groups living in Stroud -1.3% of the population. (0.54% of the population was of mixed ethnic group, 0.30% Asian or Asian British, 0.16% black or black British and 0.33% was Chinese or other ethnic group). This compares to 2.3% across the South-West region and 2.9% in Gloucestershire. The 2006 population estimate indicates that the figure has increased to 3.2%.

Although Gloucestershire has seen an increase in economic migration, Stroud has had considerably less national insurance applications than the rest of the County. More than half of migrant workers are aged between 18 and 34 years, with men outnumbering women by 3 to 1. Most migrant workers come from Eastern Europe, with more than 60% having their origin in Poland. These workers are most commonly employed in manufacturing, building and horticulture. With the recent economic downturn it is expected that the number of these applications will be reduced. [See Migrant workers report](#).

Disability

As the Department for Work and Pensions observe, there is no single measure or estimate of disability. According to the 2001 census 15.8% of the District's residents have a disability / limiting long-term illness. With partners across the District the Council is part of a Disability Action Group which aims to *"lobby and advocate on sport, health and social inclusion issues relating to disability at a local, sub-regional and regional level."*

In particular the Council is proud of the excellent working relationship it has with the Stroud & District Access Group, who have been pivotal in advising the Council on how to

improve our services to meet the needs not only of disabled people, but the wider community. The Group worked closely with our Services in producing our Disability Equality Scheme and have gained national recognition for launching the “Brighten up and be seen” campaign, together with our Neighbourhood Wardens.

The Council's offices at Ebley Mill are fully accessible and there is a wide array of useful information on the [Website](#), from obtaining a RADAR key to participating in accessible sports activities.

Religion and Belief

In 2001, 75% of the population of Stroud were Christian and 16.1% stated that they had no religion. 0.2% of the population stated they were Buddhist and 0.1% stated they were Jewish, which is equal to the SW percentage; 0.2% are Muslim. Other religions accounted for 0.4% of the Stroud population, among these are those of the Baha'i faith. This community have worked closely with the Council for a number of years to bring different faiths together to celebrate International peace day (21st September).

The SDC website gives contact details for the various [“Faiths, beliefs and religions”](#) in the District.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

Only limited survey evidence on the circumstances of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is available nationally, and there is no data on sexual orientation within the local population. The position is unlikely to change as following consultation, the ONS has concluded that it will not include sexual orientation in the 2011 UK Census (ONS 2006, Sexual orientation and the 2011 Census, London: ONS).

Stonewall estimate that between 5 to 7% of the population are gay, lesbian or bisexual, so some comparison of workforce data can be made with national estimates. The Council began collecting employee data on sexual orientation in 2008, as part of the annual validation of employee records. Equality South West are launching a survey to determine the experiences and needs of LGBT people across the region, so we may gain some useful data by summer 2010.

From the 2001 census we do know that 0.15% of the population aged over 16 in the District are living in a same-sex couple, compared with 0.18% in the South West and 0.20% in England.

Gender

In the Stroud District 65,000 residents are of working age - of these 47% are female and 53% are male. 87% of the district's working age residents are economically active, (43% are female and 57% are male). However, 86% of economically inactive women do not want a job. (ONS annual population survey)

Significantly there remains a huge pay differential in average weekly earnings, with men earning 40% more than women. Although this is slightly better than in 2008 when it was 44%, it is worse than in 2006, when the difference was 35%.

The Council's [Gender Equality Scheme](#) aims to address some of the issues facing men and women in the District.

Women are frequently disadvantaged by policies and practices that do not recognise their greater caring responsibilities, varied working patterns, more limited access to resources and their greater vulnerability to domestic violence and sexual assault. Men are also disadvantaged by workplace cultures that do not support their family or child care responsibilities.

At Stroud we have a range of initiatives highlighted in the Workforce section which aim to enhance employment opportunities for both men and women - such as, childcare voucher scheme, job-share, flexible hours and home working,

We have strong partnership arrangements in place to support the victims of domestic abuse and a range of useful contact information can be found on our [website](#).

The Council provides premises for 2 refuges in the district run by the [Stroud Beresford Group](#):

The 2008/09 [Place Survey](#) reveals that agreement is significantly higher amongst women than men that local public services are making the area safer; promoting the interest of local residents; and acting on their concerns. Additionally 39% of women agree that they can influence local decision making against 30% of men. (34% for all residents, which is the highest rating in Gloucestershire).

Data Sharing

Stroud District Council is working to ensure that we have a clear understanding of the people and communities that make up our District. There is a strong history of data sharing through the [Gloucestershire Local Intelligence Network](#) and the [MAIDeN](#) partnership.

MAIDeN is a database of local information capable of providing data and intelligence on community needs down to a neighbourhood level and has been recognised by CLG as national best practice. The background information on the district in the previous section has predominantly come from MAIDeN.

Data is used by the wider Gloucestershire Partnership to inform the aims and priorities of our sustainable community strategies, in particular helping to target measures around reducing crimes and health inequalities.

Some of the projects undertaken include:

- The seven local authorities have worked together to commission research and data to inform the development of Local Development Frameworks across the county. This includes the [Gloucestershire Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#), the Gloucestershire [Housing Needs Survey](#) (2004, with another being undertaken in 2009) and a [Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment](#)
- Research and analysis of the needs of local people in response to the [2007 floods](#) which enabled services to respond quickly and effectively to local needs. In the Stroud district we were able to use intelligence from our Careline Service and Neighbourhood Wardens to ensure water was delivered to the most vulnerable households during the 2-weeks that water supplies were cut off in certain parts of the district.
- Producing a report into the needs of migrant workers and their employers
- Producing monthly reports on the impact of the economic downturn on both businesses and local residents. (This work is helping partners to focus their efforts on addressing the predicted increase in NEETs in the coming months, and the role

of manufacturing and engineering in supporting Gloucestershire's recovery from recession).

Building on this work, the partnership has established a Strategic Intelligence Board to provide a co-ordinated approach to the evidence needs of Gloucestershire.

At a local level we have used the data to map areas of deprivation within the District [.http://intranet.stroud.gov.uk/keydocuments/Documentation/Indices_of_Deprivation/Valley%20report.pdf](http://intranet.stroud.gov.uk/keydocuments/Documentation/Indices_of_Deprivation/Valley%20report.pdf).

A profile of the most deprived wards is available on the Council's Intranet, with the interventions being taken by services to tackle local issues.

For example, 'Pride in Your Neighbourhood' events have been held in some of the most deprived areas of the District. This partnership initiative brings together local services – Fire prevention, environmental health, waste & recycling, police & community safety, neighbourhood watch and housing estate management, to improve the area. In Hardwicke, overgrown residential parking areas were cleared and tidied up, and Leyhill Prison offered its services to clear road gulleys. Poop scoops and micro chipping vouchers were given out and complaints about roaming dogs investigated. Three motor vehicles were reported as abandoned, and one was removed through our free removal scheme.

2. PLACE SHAPING, LEADERSHIP, PARTNERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

“We want local people, families, their communities and businesses to be resilient to change and able to thrive in a way that does not compromise the quality of life for present or future generations”. (Stroud LSP Vision)

The Council is working as part of the [Stroud District Local Strategic Partnership](#) (LSP) to promote equality outcomes for all of our communities. As well as representatives from the public and private sector, the LSP includes representatives from the Older Persons forum; Stroud District Youth Council; Churches Together and Stroud Voluntary and Community Service.

An [Interim Sustainable Community Strategy](#) was adopted by the LSP in December 2008. The full strategy is being developed in tandem with the Core Strategy of the district’s Local Development Framework. It also takes account of Countywide initiatives, in particular the Gloucestershire Sustainable Community Strategy and the Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA).

The Interim SCS has 2 cross-cutting principles, focusing on community engagement, as well as equality and inclusion, which guide the development of all work plans:

Community engagement

Building stronger communities must be a key outcome for the strategy. It means a society in which people know and look out for their neighbours, take pride in the places where they live and work, and play an active part in the community either through volunteering or as part of local political life.

Equality and Inclusion

The population of Stroud District is diverse, multifaceted and contains a rich mix of people and communities with different lifestyles, preferences, faiths, ethnic origins, and ages as well as varied wants, aspirations and needs. It should be the aim of the strategy to improve services for all these groups. However, it is essential that special attention is given to the District’s most disadvantaged or discriminated against members.

As part of the process to ensure that the views and priorities of a wide range of residents are reflected in the final Strategy, consultation has been carried out specifically with “seldom heard” groups (BME; people with disabilities; LGBT).

The [Unheard Voices](#) report states that through an analysis of the needs expressed, we can pick out a number of themes from the SCS that are appropriate to the needs of the different communities researched:

- easy access to appropriate skills development and learning opportunities.
- access to key services as close to home as possible
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society.
- engaging people’s creativity, energy and diversity.
- increasing business investment, including skills development, lifelong learning and re-skilling.
- creating entrepreneurial culture.
- a mixed economy.
- promoting improved accessibility across the District for disabled people.
- improving local public transport.

- ensuring new land uses attracting large public patronage are accessible by road, foot, bike and public transport.
- investing in arts and culture.

The report concludes that “whilst there is a high level of contentment, there are probably a number of more specific objectives emerging from the research that could be developed to deal with new communities and the growing workforce in the Stroud District”.

The LSP has supported a number of projects aimed at improving equality outcomes in the District, for example:

- There are a number of health, sport, physical activity and play initiatives that are a success across the district; This includes the Healthy Lifestyles Physical Activity Referral Scheme that incorporates the gym, health walks, cardiac and respiratory classes.
- The Shokkwave youth gym continues to benefit children from the age of 6 – 16 years, by encouraging children to participate in activities which they would normally shy away from at school. The ‘learn to swim’ programme is growing in size with young babies through to pensioners taking part. A recent partnership working with “Age concern” on the ‘fit as a fish’ campaign has seen a rise in the number of adults taking up lessons.
- The Community Sport and Physical Activity Network (CSPAN) for Stroud district has completed year one of it’s two year plan; the new Generation Games multi sport event, aimed at harder to reach families, was very successful in March 09, the Activity Club for Everyone (ACE) continues to deliver high quality multi disability sport sessions and the annual Sportsability festival was delivered for it’s third year.

Leadership and Organisational Commitment

Stroud District Council has 51 councillors covering 30 wards and these are elected by thirds over a 4-year period. The Conservative Party has overall control, with Labour, Liberal Democrats, Greens and Independents making up the other groups.

The Leader and Cabinet govern the business of the Council, with individual councillors within the cabinet taking lead responsibilities for seven portfolios:- Leader; Regeneration (Deputy Leader); Housing; Finance; Community Services; Climate Change; and Development.

Although the Leader has specific responsibility for the Council attaining the “Achieving level” of the EFLG, all Cabinet Members have a number of generic responsibilities, which include,

- *Ensuring equality and diversity issues are considered in policy and service development and equality impact assessments are carried out.*
- *“Systems thinking” being applied to all services. (See how this has improved service delivery in our [Benefits team](#)).*

Three **Overview & Scrutiny Committees** - Audit, Strategic and Performance, scrutinise the business of the Council. Opposition group members chair these committees and they review decisions made by the Cabinet, monitor performance and investigate matters of concern to local people.

The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SOSC) had expressed concerns over the sensitivity with which tenants, particularly older ones, had been “decanted” by the Council to allow for the redevelopment of their homes. The Committee made a number of recommendations for improvement to Cabinet, and these have been considered in the drafting of a new Housing Asset Management Strategy, which the SOSC will continue to monitor and review. http://www.stroud.gov.uk/info/members/cms_documentation/Aq07-Annual_OandSReport-COMLETEE.pdf

Members play an active role in promoting equality:

- Cllr Debbie Young (Housing portfolio) sits on the Council’s Equality Working Group and has helped to lead a well attended awareness raising presentation for staff. “It is important that Members show understanding and awareness of equalities issues in order that they can represent their electorate fully. In the housing service this is particularly relevant given the wide range of demographic groups within our housing stock.”
- Cllr Philip Booth (POSC) who supported the first Gloucestershire Pride events and helped ensure the Rainbow flag flew from District Council offices and the Subscription Rooms in Stroud, said: “I look forward to working with members to further common aims, not just within the scope of LGBT issues but also in other areas relevant to Human Rights, ethnicity and the erosion of our Civil Liberties....Forty years on from the legalisation of homosexuality, this country has nearly embraced a culture of acceptance, but we still have a way to go. Take for example the shocking suicide statistics that show 40% of gay boys bullied at school have gone on to attempt suicide. We need a zero tolerance policy enshrined in legislation in exactly the same way as we deal with racial bullying.” <http://www.glosgreenparty.org.uk/content/view/2225/2/>
- Councillors Pat Carrick and Rolland Blackwell are part of a local network that worked with Leyhill Prison on a scheme that helps provide affordable and sustainable warmth to people struggling with rising fuel bills. With start up finance from SDC, through the Tenants Forum, and Stroud Town Council, ‘Wood-u-Waste’ has been judged the ‘Best in Britain’ by leading fuel poverty charity National Energy Action. It beat over a hundred other national projects to win the Affordable Warmth - Sustainable World Award.

As part of the **Member Development** programme we are proposing that all Councillors complete the [IDeA “equalities and councillors”](#) member workbook, to help identify some of the equality issues within their own wards. We are also encouraging all scrutiny members to attend the workshop organised by RIEP on “fair access to services – the role of scrutiny.”

The Council’s Corporate Delivery Plan (CDP) sets out the Council’s priorities and the specific actions to be taken over the year. Having carefully considered the competing priorities of local people, one of our key areas of focus is

“Making sure that services meet the demands of local people and relevant statutory responsibilities in the most efficient and fair ways possible”

The Strategic Head of Customer Services leads on this priority and also chairs the Council’s equality working group. (details below).

The Principal Policy Officer has day-to-day responsibility for advising services on equalities issues and co-ordinating the authorities work in this area. This includes overseeing the production of the Council's [Equality schemes](#) (currently under review).

Many lessons have been learnt since the publication of the first scheme in 2002. Although it set out the Council's procedures for mainstreaming equality at service level, it took a long time for all services to carry out meaningful equality impact assessments. We now have a greater emphasis on outcomes rather than processes. The Council has benefited from the IDeA's LIFT and REIP initiatives, taking full advantage of the support and training opportunities that have been available.

[Equality Impact Assessments](#) have now been carried out on most of our key service functions, highlighting where service improvements can be made to help particularly vulnerable groups. The IDeA have commended the Council on the quality and thoroughness of its EqlAs, highlighting the 'Recruitment & Selection' and 'Regeneration through Sport' EqlAs as best practice.

Since introducing a new performance management system "Excelsis", there is now a better process for monitoring action delivery plans. As a consequence, all actions that have resulted from EqlAs have been entered onto Excelsis and are available to all staff and members. It is now clearly evident how plans are progressing and the outcomes being achieved.

We are determined that our new Single Equality Scheme will not only be a means of complying with legislative requirements, but used to continue to effectively drive the equality agenda.

Equality Working Group

The Council's Equality Working Group was re-launched in autumn 2008 and comprises representatives from many of the Council's service areas. The majority of the group have attained the NCFE Level 2 qualification in Equalities and Diversity. Group members have helped raise awareness amongst staff by making presentations at the staff forum, Proud of Stroud and individual team meetings. From November 2009 the group's representation has increased to include members from Public Spaces, Finance and Housing Services.

Moving forward the group will become more advisory in reviewing future EqlAs and keeping staff informed of legislative changes and best practice. We plan to promote the equality and diversity agenda through the creation of an Equality Newsletter commencing in summer 2010, sharing equality news stories across the Council.

[The County Equality Network \(CEN\)](#)

CEN was established in 2004 to share learning and support officers from the County and District Councils in working through the Equality Standard for Local Government. Over the years the focus of the group has evolved to have more strategic influence and to include other public agencies. In 2008 CEN commissioned the voluntary and community Gloucestershire Assembly to develop a county-wide equality and diversity advisory group – EDAG. Stroud had run its own district advisory panel for a number of years, but with ever increasing demand on the voluntary sector we felt it was timely to support a more joined-up approach.

A major success for CEN & EDAG in the first year of operating together is that the Gloucestershire Conference (which oversees delivery of the LAA), has accepted a proposal that a member of the Conference board take on specific responsibility for

championing equality and sustainability across the County, ensuring it is central to all policy initiatives, planning and commissioning.

CEN is currently consulting on producing a Single Equality Scheme for GCC and the District Councils, allowing us to make the most of limited resources, whilst providing a more co-ordinated approach for our customers.

Hate Crime & Incidents

[The Cotswold and Stroud Hate Crime and Incident Action Group](#) has been formed with local partners to provide an operational response to incidents within the two districts. The group has organised a number of well attended conferences and workshops at which speakers have shared their personal experiences of suffering racism, homophobia and disability discrimination. The group also raises awareness by producing an annual calendar of religious festivals, as well as banners, leaflets and pens publicising the reporting number, which are all widely distributed to schools, voluntary and public sector organisations.

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| <p>The success of this work is reflected in the Stroud District attaining one of the highest satisfaction ratings in the Country (88%) for NI1 – people from different backgrounds getting on well together.</p> |
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Support to the Voluntary and Community sector

The Council's [2010/11 grant allocation scheme](#) secured funding for the following voluntary and community groups supporting those in particular need: Glos. Older Persons Assembly: £5,000; Home Start £14,000; CAB: £125,000; VCA Stroud: £40,250; Care & Repair £7,000; Marah Trust Ltd: £2,000; Stroud Beresford Group £2,000; and GlosREC: £2,000.

The Council's Principal Policy Officer has worked closely with [GAVCA](#) to provide training sessions on equality impact assessments to around 15 voluntary groups. These have received excellent feedback and further sessions are planned for autumn 2010.

As well as providing financial support, wherever possible we offer our facilities free of charge to charitable groups for workshops and meetings.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SATISFACTION

The Council consults most local people well and as a result they feel able to influence decisions. The Council conducts an annual survey as part of its budget setting process to help to find out about overall satisfaction and inform spending priorities. The annual consultation includes businesses and residents. And the Council also regularly consults its youth council and older people's forum about a range of issues. The Council also commissioned external consultants to carry out consultation with some groups that could be inadvertently discriminated against (including local black and minority ethnic people, people from new European Union communities, disabled people and lesbian and gay people).

More people in Stroud than nationally and in other parts of Gloucestershire feel they can influence decisions locally. And just over half of people are satisfied with the way the Council runs things which is better than the national and South West averages.

Consultation in some parts of the Council is not as strong. For example, relationships with housing tenants are poor. Some tenants are not satisfied with current arrangements for being involved. **(One Place; Audit Commission 2009)**

Over the years the Councils has employed of variety of methods to try and engage a wide cross section of the community.

The voluntary and community sector often feel overloaded with consultation, therefore we did not want a situation where every service unit within the authority was approaching these groups separately. We decided on a co-ordinated approach and in July 2004 launched the County's first Equality Advisory Panel with representatives from the 6 equality strands. These included:

Stroud Community Voluntary Sector (CVS); Churches Together: Gay-Glos; Stroud & District Access Group, Gloucestershire Older Person's Assembly, Stroud Beresford Group (Women's services) and the Stroud District Youth Council.

This panel ran for over 2 years, reviewing a wide range of council services and strategies, including our Equalities Scheme; Housing Strategy; Statement of Community Involvement in Planning; Environmental Health; Community Safety; HR; and Customer Services.

"The Panel offers us the opportunity to engage on strategic and operational levels with the decision makers who are shaping local services. This level of engagement is essential for LGBT people who are often not on anyone's radar when customer care, employment, service delivery, policy formation and implementation are under consideration. The Panel offers us the opportunity to network with other organisations (statutory and non-statutory), find common ground and share valuable experiences. The recognition of the commonality of discrimination is a powerful tool for community cohesion and facilitates the emergence of alliances to tackle exclusion and alienation.

The respect and trust that has developed through involvement with the Panel has enabled real and effective communication to be undertaken on a much wider basis than would ordinarily be the case." **(Lisa Allane, Gay-Glos)**

"The Equalities panel provides an opportunity for representatives of various sectors of the community to examine the District Council's policies during the formulation process. Discussions between the council officers and community representatives are open and frank, so providing an invaluable forum for the exchange of ideas, needs and concerns."

(Gloucestershire Older Persons Assembly)

“It is reassuring to know that when issues such as policy making are being looked into that the disabled community and others are consulted, and more importantly are listened to. This is an important and positive way forward.

To quote one of our members “It is nice to know that Council Officers are not now trying to think what is best for me, instead they realise it is better to ask me”. I trust that the valued partnership working will continue, to the benefit of the whole community within the Stroud District area.”

(Stroud & District Access Group)

With the emergence of EDAG at a County level we no longer run a District advisory group, but we continue to work closely with our local communities through:

Stroud & District Access Group

Formed in March 2005 with support from the Council, the group advises on access issues across the District. (the former Access Group ran for 15 years, disbanding in May 2003). The current group of dedicated volunteers works very closely with many service areas and has advised on a wide range of projects, including:- the canal regeneration; new public conveniences; on-site visits with building control; the council's website; access audits of Polling stations, Ebley Mill, Stratford Park and the museum, to name just a few. Additionally the group has produced several 'Access Guides' covering Stroud, Wootton and Stonehouse town centres, working with local traders to make their premises and services more accessible.

Stroud District Youth Council

The Youth Council was founded in 2000 in order to give a democratic voice to the young people in the Stroud District, who have an opinion but no means by which to express it. Since then they have evolved into the recognised active voice of young people, striving to represent the 10,000 11 to 18 year olds in the district.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been and continues to be used as the basis for all development - this is further enhanced with the use of the national Hear by Right (HBR) standards for youth participation, providing the sound principles and values of this organisation.

Older Person's forum

The forum has been supported by Stroud District Council through provision of funding to Gloucestershire Older Person's Assembly (GOPA) and provides important links to other projects going on in Gloucestershire, such as care hubs and the POPPs projects.

The membership of the Forum is a particular opportunity to link with older people who are not currently known to the services and these will be identified through several routes, for example Neighbourhood Wardens, Careline, Virtual Teams and Care and Repair.

LGBT people and those exploring their sexual orientation can often find themselves isolated in a hostile environment. It is recognised that rural isolation, because of age, lack of transport, lack of money or friends may further add to a sense of loneliness and lack of self confidence. Isolation can be exacerbated by constant homophobic bullying and harassment. In February 2006 **Gay-Glos** launched the first of their Rural Friendship Support Groups in Stroud. Gay-Glos have a strong strategic voice across the County and District, sitting on a number of influential partnerships, including the Safer, Stronger Communities Partnership.

Gloucestershire Race Equality Council

Stroud District, along with Gloucester City and the County Council continue to fund GlosREC, a charity which works towards the elimination of racial discrimination in all forms. Their role is to:

- Assist individuals in cases of racial discrimination by advising, supporting and where necessary, assisting with legal action.

- Policy Development work with other agencies.
- Consultation with Minority Ethnic communities.

They are represented on the Council's hate crime and incidents group.

Tenant involvement

There are a range of ways that tenants can engage with the Council through a comprehensive range of groups which were agreed as part of the recent revised tenants' compact. These include a sheltered accommodation panel, an overarching sheltered panel and the tenants and residents forum. There are 11 focus groups that concentrate on specific service areas. The Council is also building up a database of tenants who are willing, outside of this formal arrangement, to comment on other aspects of the service. There are also village and street representatives and, although their numbers are currently limited, this is helping to address representation in rural areas.

Satisfaction Surveys & Monitoring

The Council's 2009 resident's survey for the first time included monitoring information relating to sexual orientation and religion and belief, as well as the other equality strands. However, the government's prescribed Place Survey questionnaire only included monitoring relating to race, disability and gender.

Where relevant the Council will monitor all strands and [guidance](#) produced by Stonewall has been made available to customers, staff and members as to why we collect this information.

The demographic information from the [2008/09 Place Survey](#) has been analysed and a full report is published on the website. The Stroud District achieved a well above average response rate of 48% and a set of responses that were weighted to represent a good cross section of the actual population.

Local residents rated the Stroud District above the England average in 16 of the 18 National Indicators, with 13 of these also being above the South West and Gloucestershire averages. The 2 indicators that were below average are being addressed by the crime & disorder partnership (now Safer, Stronger Communities)

The Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement uses 2 National Indicators as measures of community cohesion and equality:

NI 1 – People from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

There is a strong sense of community cohesion in Stroud District, with 88% of residents agreeing that people from different backgrounds get on well together. This is the highest rating in the country and improves on 2006 result of 85%.

Agreement is significantly higher for the 75+ (95.2%) age groups and females (90.9%), but lower for 18-24 (65.6%) age group, males (85.0%) and amongst people with a disability (83.7%).

NI 140 - Fair treatment by local services

Here the Stroud District again scores above the figure for Gloucestershire and the English DC and LA averages. Analysis shows that this measure is a key driver of satisfaction with the way that the Council runs things. There were no significant differences amongst the various demographic groups for this question.

4. RESPONSIVE SERVICES AND CUSTOMER CARE

The Council provides a range of services including environmental health, planning, social housing, leisure services, community safety, household waste collection and recycling. We do not provide social services, education, transport provision or highways maintenance as these are County Council functions.

All Council services have completed [Equality Impact Assessments](#), which are published on the Council's website. The resulting action plans are incorporated within each Service plan and monitored through the Council's performance management system "Excelsis". Each Service has given an example of how it is working to improve outcomes for equality target groups and those most vulnerable in our community, as well as giving examples of the key actions they will take to improve equality outcomes.

Asset Management

Adaptations and Alterations to General Fund Premises

Following access audits of all premises in 2004 a programme of works was implemented to ensure buildings met the recommendations of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. Provision was therefore made for audio loops and adequate signage to all buildings, a new access lift was installed to the Old Town Hall and lift controls were upgraded to both Ebley Mill and Brunel Mall. Earlier schemes of refurbishment to the Subscription Rooms, Kingshill House and Stratford Park Leisure Centre included the provision of new passenger lifts.

The integrity of existing access, equipment and facilities to premises is subject to regular review via building inspections and through interviews with the respective building managers.

Areas of Improvement

It has been identified that the quality of information and access to that information regarding car parking in the District can be improved. The intent is to provide accurate, useful information to users, in a suitable format, including concessions, signposting, recommended car parks and accessible public conveniences.

Canal Regeneration Project (This is the Council's flagship project)

In line with best practice, an Access Audit was completed in 2007, in partnership with the Stroud & District Access Group – that is before any work started. This is being used to inform engineering design work and has been incorporated into the project Conservation Management Plan (completed October 2009).

Quarterly meetings with town/parish councils in the canal corridor enable two-way exchange of information and views. These meetings are also open to other groups with an interest in the project. The venue alternates between 4 locations in the canal corridor in order to facilitate attendance.

- Canal towpath to be widened to 2m where possible, facilitating access by wheelchair and mobility vehicle users and others with impaired mobility.
- Volunteer Manager commencing employment on 9/11/09. Key part of job description is to drive community involvement in the project. This will secure volunteer input and increase community ownership of the project.

- Re-establish links with Stroud Access Group with the aim of ensuring that individual works packages meet the needs of those with mobility difficulties (*initial contact made*).

Community Safety

Older People Careline

The Careline service is a low cost alarm system which has over 1,800 customers within the district. If an older person falls in the home, the Careline is a way of getting help through the telephone system, quickly and efficiently 24 hours a day.

This service covers both the Stroud and Cotswold districts. As well as installing care-line equipment, the officers ensure that the wider needs of vulnerable customers are met.

- Regular conversation with customers regarding Attendance Allowance, Disabled Parking Scheme and would contact either Gloucestershire County Council for the Disabled parking or the Department of Work and Pensions for the Attendance Allowance packs.
- Regular update telephones for the hard of hearing and installing tone callers and if they need assistance I would then contact British Telecom Age and Disability Section and order the relevant equipment for them and install it for them, this also is the same for customers with poor sight.

Youth Participation

- During the last 3 years the Council's Diversity Policies and Strategies have been complemented by the increased development of Youth Participation work in partnership with the (GCC YS).
- The adoption of the national Hear by Right standards for youth participation by SDC in 2008
- Leading to greater involvement of young people in the council's work – this decision being influenced by young people themselves.
- Majority of work has resulted in a more diverse representational membership for Stroud District Youth Council (SDYC), with young people from local communities and a further education college now playing a huge role.
- Emergence of Local Youth Forums across the district has enabled the wider youth voice to be heard from communities outside of schools.
- Membership 35 in 2009, so that SDYC now interacts with young people of wider different social backgrounds and sub cultures as well as academic abilities.
- Geographical areas also benefit from active youth participation, as the work to create 8 local youth forums continues.
- Specific consultation is delivered with support from Stroud Rural Peer Education Project (GCC YS) and is tailor-made for each project, community or circumstance
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Articles 12 and 15, remain as the drivers for continuous development and change.

Neighbourhood Wardens and equality

The earlier success of the service was highlighted in an IDeA publication (2002), 'The man in the caravan and other stories...' The book features a collection of stories which describe how improved public services have helped change people's lives.

"Bobby Burns' house is clean for the first time for years. More importantly he has someone to talk to. Bobby has lived on his own for years and hardly spoke to anyone on his estate near Stroud until he was befriended by one of the council's neighbourhood wardens, who organised for his house to be cleaned up. Bobby lived for years in terror of being burgled. Now he feels safe, he says his life has never been better."

Neighbourhood Wardens worked alongside the Access group to raise awareness of the issues of safety for mobility scooter users in the district resulting in a launch of reflective stickers reading “**BE SAFE & BE SEEN**” and a mobility scooter Highway Code booklet educating users as to their responsibility as a road user. This was a huge success with many local authorities nationwide making contact with the Stroud and District Access Group to replicate this success in their areas. Following this the Neighbourhood Wardens were invited to join the group in assessing local villages and the access to their amenities.

The key to the success of the Neighbourhood wardens is their ability to assist vulnerable members of the community with day to days tasks such as mowing the lawn, shopping for groceries and assisting them to fill out forms often leading to them receiving benefits they had previously not realised they were entitled to. This service goes a long way to assisting members of the community to maintain there independence and subsequently their self esteem.

There is currently one Neighbourhood Warden trained to British sign Language level 2. With one in seven people in the UK suffering with a hearing impairment it is seen as an essential tool in maintaining the Neighbourhood Wardens rapport with the local community.

Stroud District Older Persons’ Forum

This Forum was launched in April 2008 and has held 10 bi-monthly meetings which have all been well attended with an average of 15 older people. Members have commented on a feeling of increased self esteem as they can make a valuable contribution to local issues and PCT consultations. The family of a particularly frail older lady has noticed a real difference in her independence and mental alertness since joining the forum.

Areas for improvement

- To roll out Hear By Right throughout SDC under Article 12 of the United Nations Human Rights by including it in a corporate service delivery target for each service.
- United Nations 18 Principles for Older People (1991) to be disseminated into the corporate service delivery target for each service.
- Put in place review dates for Equality Impact Assessments on a six monthly basis to meet with impact assessment author as Head of Service, examine actions and update accordingly.

Cultural Services

- ACE (Activity Club for Everyone) was named Disability Sports Opportunity of the Year 2008 at the Annual Gloucestershire Sports Awards. The award recognises a group or organisation that has demonstrated a commitment to providing opportunities for disabled people to access and participate in sport on a regular basis. ACE was nominated by parents whose children attend the club sessions; One parent said “The difference could hardly be greater. Since joining ACE last year my son has gone from spending hours in front of the TV, who was prone to regular meltdowns and who spoke mainly to ask for food, to a child who is more active, more communicative and who has a new motivation to learn”.
- The Subscription Rooms has held a series of musical entertainments for older people “Your Musical Memories” and are promoting yoga classes specifically for children,

families and pregnant women. They have also held an exhibition celebrating the gypsy and traveller community.

- The Museum in the Park is now engaging with 31 different primary or secondary schools within the district, this is double the number recorded in 2007/08. Seven engagements were made with special schools or referral centres. Group visits in 2009/10 included five from elderly care and 16 from adult special needs organisations. It has developed a varied programme to promote diversity, including a range of exhibitions, one such held in 2008 on the idea of beauty in different cultures; story-telling sessions particularly aimed at disabled children; and in 2009 delivered the Secret Garden project in partnership with local support groups encouraging vulnerable adults to take up art.
- Dursley Pool staff worked successfully in partnership with Age Concern to promote and deliver swimming lessons for over 60 year olds.

Areas for improvement

- Generally improve the collection of data of who is using our facilities/services, as is already the case at the Museum.
- Consider a wider variety of ways to consult with disabled children and their families regarding physical activity and play, and increase consultation with non users.
- Update booking and membership system at Dursley Pool to allow us to collect data on customers and use the Maiden project and other demographic research tools in order to actively look at our target audience
- Maintain the new external Play Strategy website aimed at under 16 year olds. Also evolve the audit of disabled children and young people to cover play and physical activity and link to our Youth Council work to consult via Hear By Right
- Programme more events at the Subscription Rooms which are accessible to all groups in the district, through working with organisations such as Planet Arts, Arts Shape and Gloucestershire Dance.
- Develop better evaluation and feedback systems for participants of events / classes / workshops.

Environmental Health

- The Warm and Well scheme provides advice and grant aid to help owner occupiers and tenants who are vulnerable to health problems associated with low temperatures and are living in fuel poverty to install or improve insulation and or heating measures so as to reduce cold related illness and improve thermal comfort for these vulnerable households.
- Food safety courses run in ethnic minority languages to help those whose first language is not English. This initiative has contributed to there being no zero rated establishments in the district.
- We are winners of the SW regional National Energy Action Award Scheme for our briquette project. This project uses recycled waste wood from furniture made at Leyhill prison and has benefited both the local community and the environment.

Areas for improvement

- Better understanding and communication with the public on gypsy and traveller issues particularly relating to unauthorised encampments.
- Further work in relation to Gypsies and travellers
– Improved information and links to County Council pages

- Train staff to be aware of literacy problems when filling in forms, etc.
- provide leaflets on Gypsies and travellers protocol.

Housing Services

- There are examples where Resident Involvement has led to significant service improvements for tenants. This relates mainly to the co-op area and the two estate agreement areas where active participation and some management by tenants has led to improved service quality and effectively tackled matters such as ASB.
- Sheltered housing tenants have worked with the Council to improve facilities within sheltered housing schemes.
- All staff have attended a seminar on recognising child protection issues and where to report it.
- Responsive repair contractors are able to provide female operatives if requested.
- An adequate translation and interpretation scheme is in place and this has been used for the benefit of tenants.

Areas for Improvement

This service has approached the Audit Commission for “advice and assistance” to improve service provision to tenants. The AC’s report identified a number of areas where the service could improve equality outcomes.

- The STATUS Survey showed lower levels of satisfaction among BME tenants but it is not clear that further work has been carried out to investigate this and take action on the outcomes. It is not clear that satisfaction with services is analysed by the diversity strands to ensure there are no barriers to services.
- While equality impact assessments have been completed for services, they are of variable quality and do not sufficiently test and remove barriers to services.
- The service has not developed a robust range of high-level strategies to address the needs of vulnerable people (for example, older people who form a large proportion of service users).
- Comprehensive profiling of tenants to inform service delivery has not been completed. Although there are some examples where special needs are being responded to (for example in the responsive repairs service through instructions to the contractor) this is not consistent across all services.
- Staff are not given guidance on how services might be varied to meet the individual needs of tenants – even though repairs receptionists are empowered to offer a quicker repairs service if they feel it is appropriate.
- Staff report that diversity training has not been carried out for some time (this also applies to involve tenants and contractors and partners) and the Council does not provide corporate resources through a central training budget for this.
- It is not clear that the plan to carry out an access survey and tackle barriers for people with physical and/or sensory disabilities in all housing buildings has been carried out.

To address these issues the service is currently:

- Developing, through engagement with service users and advocacy groups, an equality action plan for the housing service;
- Undertaking Equality Impact Assessments across all key housing strategic plans and services and taking actions that arise from these assessments; and
- Ensuring all staff receive regular and appropriate training;
- Profiling all current and potential service users and ensuring that services are proactively delivered to meet their needs.

Planning

- The Planning Strategy team are engaged with a board cross section of the community and have taken great care to be as inclusive as possible, visiting community groups to consult on future development plans for the District.
- Building Control work closely with the Stroud Access Group, carrying out site visits and referring plans for comment where appropriate.

Areas for improvement

- Investigate the use of feedback questionnaires on planning and building regulation applications. Looking to introduce a systematic approach to feed back on a statistically valid sample on an on-going basis at the completion of a project.
- Investigate the use of timed inspections for Building Control to address concerns of carers and working individuals who find open ended inspection times difficult to accommodate.
- Incorporate equality impact assessments into the Vanguard review of the Building Control service.

Public Space

Over the last two to three years, Public Spaces has focussed on developing its services in line with customer needs and views; consultation has therefore been key and indeed very successful in progressing a number of projects, one of which has received a national award. Examples include:

- Consulting with the BTA to ensure DDA compliance and innovations of new toilet block at Stroud Town Centre
- Development of Stratford Park to encourage increased use amongst disabled users
- The use of a focus group consisting of local residents in the design and implementation of a new waste and recycling scheme in the Stanleys (Received a National Award for Environmental Excellence – use of a Focus Group)
- Review of cemetery regulations enabling improved access to grave plots

Areas for Improvement

Data collection is usually fairly basic making it difficult to fully understand the Council's customer base and its needs in relation to each of the front line services. (Annual surveys often do not provide service managers with adequate qualitative information)

Providing feedback to customers has not been the section's strong point albeit it is acknowledged that this aspect of service delivery is fairly critical in terms of improving their understanding of the services and to encourage their future involvement in service development.

- Improve access to Stratford Park facilities for people who are disabled – toilets and bowling green
- Improve signage around Stratford Park for disabled users
- Refurbishment of Bedford Street toilets – this is a project nearing its end. The new toilet block will have new and improved service provision for disabled users (DDA compliant).
- Operation of a Kerbstone removal programme at Stroud Cemetery to provide improved access to grave plots for people who are disabled and elderly
- Consult with disability groups over bring site provision and specifically the pending roll out of cardboard and mixed plastic banks.

Revenue & Benefits

The benefits team at Stroud District Council has reduced the time it takes to process claims despite the increase in workload. It also runs benefits sessions in companies where redundancies are being made. CAA 2009

The benefits team offer a personalised service to everyone making a claim. Now each claimant is assigned a single assessor who sees them through the whole process. Anyone who is unable to come to us is offered a home visit, to help with completing the form and to make sure we have all the information we need to assess the claim.

Almost all of our reminding and chasing is now done by telephone rather than by letter. Thanks to our IT team, we also send text messages to claimants via the benefit system. Our younger claimants find this an easier way to communicate and it invariably produces an instant response. One customer wrote:

“I’ve always had a fear of any kind of authority and found it a bit daunting to go down to the Council offices. To my surprise, I found you approachable, helpful and considerate. I feel I owe you thanks for the way you helped me.....”

Choice-based lettings was introduced in 2009 with a County wide EQIA completed to ensure inclusion of all vulnerable/minority groups. The new system is designed to give officers more time to spend with people who require additional assistance to secure a stable home. An Access and Inclusion strategy has been produced as a result of the EQIA and service delivery will be monitored through the Vulnerable persons group.

Areas for improvement

- The service will be undertaking debtor profiling to target areas of deprivation
- Capturing customer profiles from benefit applications
- Increase staff awareness through team briefs etc.

Regeneration

Regeneration are project leading on a partnership programme with Stroud College and GCC to deliver learning and skills in a deprived community. The inherent challenge was to first engage with residents in the local community, particularly those who are generally overlooked by standard methods of contact, unless they become unfortunately involved in legal issues/ disputes. A key learning project has been working with ‘painting and decorating’, where-by a tutor from helps a resident improve one room of their home. Whilst doing so, they touch on mathematics, design, health and well being, safety and have general conversations about how people can source help with day-to-day problems which may form a barrier to them integrating and interacting with the community. Through this one programme, tenants are more encouraged to look after their home – particularly when it is something they have achieved themselves.

This model will be rolled out to other deprived communities and promoted within SDC Housing Service, as the programme gives officers the opportunity to engage better and in a more positive way with their tenants.

Areas for improvement

- In our contracts for external services and Agreements with other organisations we will require the provision of an equalities statement/policy.
- Ensure that we are aware of the social demographics of the communities we work in so that delivery of services and engagement are appropriately targeted.

Procurement

The importance of equality in the procurement process is an area we have been particularly focussing on (identified in Finance Service EQIA). In January 2009 we were one of 10 authorities who took part in a national research project to better understand the issues around equalities in procuring services and to feed this into Government's thinking on how to handle procurement in the Single Equality Bill.

With support from RIEP some service manager and our corporate procurement group has received training on equalities issues, and our services can now demonstrate some good examples of securing better equality outcomes for our residents through the procurement process.

- One of our major contracts and investments is the restoration of the Cotswolds Canal, for which we have received Heritage Lottery funding. Not only will this project help regenerate the area, but by engaging with organisations such as Leyhill prison and REACH to carry out some of the works, we can help rehabilitate vulnerable individuals in the community and give them a skill set and a purpose.
- The contractor who secured the Housing gas contract is offering specific training to encourage more female operatives.
- There has been extensive consultation with a wide cross section of users and non-users in preparing the specification for the Council's Leisure Centre contract.

Access to Information and Services

As evident throughout this document, a wide range of information is made available on the Council's website - from who to turn to in [times of crisis](#) to registering for housing through the new [Homeseeker scheme](#).

We are conscious that not everyone has access to a computer at home, and have published a list of free, public-access computers in the District, where no appointment is necessary.

<http://www.stroud.gov.uk/docs/community/internet.asp>. The Policy team is conducting some further research through MAIDeN to map areas of the District with lower levels of internet use.

We aim to make the website fully accessible to everyone and are committed to continually re-assessing and improving the site. To ensure that everyone is able to access information easily, we have worked closely with [Modern eyes](#), who produce a web-based magazine, as well as a range of other services for people with visual impairments. The website can be translated into a range of languages and all council services have access to a telephone translation service "The Big Word".

<http://www.stroud.gov.uk/docs/accessibility.asp>

All our Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny meetings are web-cast, enabling those unable to travel to Ebley Mill to view proceedings from their own home or at a later date.

The **Customer Service Centre** is the first point of contact for most people either phoning or visiting the Council. It offers open, comfortable access to services in a multi-function reception area, with a range of reading books, colouring materials and toys to occupy children accompanying adults.

Staff are trained to respond to a variety of needs and situations required by the customer and have undertaken equalities awareness and mental health awareness training.

They carry out quarterly customer satisfaction snap surveys, to ensure we are meeting the needs of all visitors.

As well as providing free Public internet access at Ebley Mill, customer services provide outreach services at Wotton-under-Edge, Dursley and Mobile Police Station.

Challenges for the future:

- Work on building customer profile intelligence using MAIDeN
- Respond swiftly to the changing needs of the customer
- Complete Child Protection awareness training Level 2 for all staff
- Continue customer satisfaction snap surveys
- Be the 'eyes and ears ' of the Council to constantly improve services where required.

5. A MODERN, DIVERSE AND REFLECTIVE WORKFORCE

Human Resources plays a key part in helping the council achieve its corporate aims through the recruitment, development and retention of skilled, knowledgeable and motivated staff, helping the Council to deliver the best possible service to the people of the Stroud District.

Human Resources strive to;

- Recruit and retain staff of the highest calibre, who are appropriate in terms of skill, qualification and experience, and are committed and well motivated.
- Enhance and develop the capabilities of staff by providing learning and continuous development opportunities to achieve the highest standards of customer service.
- Help create an environment where positive relationships between managers, employees, members, and trade unions enable team work and flexibility to flourish.
- Support organisational development.
- Ensure the Council adopts a consistent, fair and equitable approach to human resources throughout the organisation.
- Achieve the highest possible level of staff performance, motivation, job satisfaction and commitment by recognising that staff are our most important asset.

The council's current **Workforce Strategy** highlights as a key area senior management and members engaging in workforce issues, understanding labour markets and effectively managing the workforce. Without understanding the composition of our workforce we cannot adequately address equality issues or adequately plan for the future.

In order to address this, workforce planning is currently being undertaken across the Council's Service Areas to ascertain major likely future workforce issues, such as having an aging workforce profile.

Workforce Profile

As at October 2009 the total Headcount (including casuals) was 537 and the Council's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was 364.14. This compares with a total headcount of 548 and a FTE of 382.19 in October 2006, a reduction of 18.05 FTE.

A total of 454 employees have contracted hours of work across the Council's multiple sites. A high proportion of the Council's employees work part time hours (169 including sports centre staff) which is 37% of the contracted workforce. 111 excluding sports centres (24.4% of the workforce).

Staff turnover:

Turnover has decreased from 11.97% of the workforce leaving in 2006/7, 10.2% in 2008/9 and 5.61% so far in 2009/10. It is worth bearing in mind that the organisational pay and grading review was effective from April 2006 so turnover levels may have initially been somewhat inflated and also the current lower turnover rate may be predominantly due to the uncertainty of the prevailing economic climate.

Gender:

The Council's workforce consists of 63% women and 37% men (November 2009).

Under half of the top 5% of earners, (44.65%) are women even though nearly 2/3 of the workforce are female. However, this figure does correspond favourably with 29.36% at the end of June 2006. This figure has increased largely due to the fact that there have been a number of senior male staff that have left the Council that have not been replaced rather than any specific initiatives that have focused on encouraging women's career development.

Age:**Older workers**

An ageing workforce has been identified as a key issue in the Council's Workforce Strategy (2009 -13), and subsequent workforce planning. At 2nd November 2009 157 out of 454 staff were aged 50+. This equates to 35% of the workforce. A more pressing concern is that 49 employees were 60+ equating to 10.8% of the contracted workforce. An aging workforce presents a very real future challenge with regards to skills retention and replacement.

Within the next 10 years about 1/3 of the workforce will be reaching the current default retirement age of 65 and / or requesting extended working. However, the government has brought forward a review of the DRA to early 2010, so it may only be a matter of months before the default retirement age is scrapped. A number of companies e.g. B&Q, and local authorities e.g. Hertfordshire County Council, have removed the default retirement age.

Areas for improvement

Making an organisational decision to remove the default retirement age may help address potential skill shortages. From a moral and equalities perspective it can be seen as the 'right' thing to do as the Council will not be at risk of discriminating against people because of their age.

Younger workers

Only 16% of the Council's staff are under 30 and furthermore 34% of employees are under 40.

The Council is attempting to attract younger people specifically through;

- Offering work placements for local school children.
- Offering NVQ Apprenticeships in Business Administration in a number of service areas (Housing Services, Housing Advice, Development Services, Finance), in association with Stroud College.
- Ebley Mill history tours for school parties – increasing awareness of the Council.

Stroud District Council has become the first local authority in Gloucestershire to pledge its support for the government's national campaign; 'Backing Young Britain'.

The Backing Young Britain campaign has been set up to help create more opportunities for young people.

Areas for Improvement

The Council could further appeal to young people by;

- More involvement with local schools and colleges in the form of visits and promoting SDC careers.
- Attending any relevant careers fairs.
- More widespread use of the NVQ apprenticeship scheme across the Council's services.
- Services developing closer links with colleges, universities that offer qualifications in traditionally hard to fill areas such as planning, building control and environmental health. Investigate the wider use of work placements such as student Environmental Health Officer.

Ethnicity

The Council's workforce is broadly reflective of the Stroud District in relation to ethnic composition, therefore no specific targeted recruitment is required. In the 2001 Census 1.3% of the district's population was classified as coming from a BME (Black & Minority Ethnic) background and 1.2% of the district's economically active population were from BME backgrounds. However, by 2006 this figure has risen to 3.2% of the district's population coming from a BME background.

Approximately 3% of all job applications between April – September 2009 and 2.43% of the workforce were from ethnic minority communities as at 30th September 2009. 1.92% of the Council's workforce were from BME backgrounds in June 2006.

Disability

10.7% of the top 5% of earners at the Council, but only 2.64% of the workforce as a whole considered themselves as being disabled as at 30 September 2009. This compares with an average of approximately 11.2% of the Stroud District's economically active population having a disability (2003-4). By means of comparison in June 2006 0% of the top 5% of earners considered themselves as having a disability and 1.92% of the total workforce had a disability.

The large differential highlighted above between the percentage of the workforce that consider themselves as having a disability compared with the percentage of the district's economically active population with a disability is likely to be due to a number of societal reasons. These are largely outside of the Council's control such as an individual's fear of stigma of disclosing a disability and fearing that it may count against them or people not actually regarding themselves as having a disability.

The Council through its commitment to Jobcentre Plus: Positive about Disabled People, 'Two Ticks' guarantees to offer an interview to any disabled applicant that fulfils the essential job criteria as detailed in the person specification. The 5 commitments that the Council adheres to under the 'Two Ticks' scheme are;

1. Interviewing all applicants with a disability who meet the minimum (essential) criteria for a job vacancy and considering them on their abilities.
2. Ensuring that there is a mechanism in place to discuss, with employees with disabilities (at any time – but at least once a year), what can be done to make sure that they can develop and use their abilities.
3. Making every effort when employees become disabled to ensure that they stay in employment.
4. Taking action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make the commitments work.
5. Each year to review the five commitments and plan ways to improve on them.

The Council has made a number of workplace adjustments to accommodate new and existing staff's changing needs, working with the employee and Access to Work to fulfil these requirements.

Areas for improvement

In order to appeal as a employer of choice to people with disabilities and to further enable potential new and existing staff to feel able to disclose their disability;

- Consult with local disability groups asking for their perception of working for the Council / applying for a job with the Council (Job application form and recruitment & selection process).
- Review the hard copy recruitment literature and online Jobs & Careers pages, including the job application form with regards to the content and explanation as to the purpose of equalities monitoring information.
- Give clearer communication on the purpose of equalities monitoring in general to employees. A leaflet on the purpose of equalities monitoring was included with staff pay statements in the October 2009 pay run.
- Undertake analysis on the number and proportion of job applicants and staff that do not indicate whether they consider themselves having a disability or not.
- Develop links with Jobcentre Plus around the offering of work placements for people with disabilities.

Monitoring

Equality information relating to recruitment is reported to the Equality Steering Group on a 6 monthly basis. Leaver's analysis also occurs but needs to become regularised. Workforce monitoring data is updated quarterly on the Council's Performance Management System (Excelsis), and is currently presented to corporate team on an ad hoc basis.

From an individual employee relations perspective incidents of formal disciplinaries and grievances are very low with their being four cases of disciplinaries in 2007/8 and 2 in 2008/9 and also 2 so far in 2009/10. There have been 2 incidents of formal grievances in 2007/8 and in 2008/9 with none so far in 2009/10.

No formal incidents of bullying and harassment have been occurred in the last few years. The Council operates a Promoting Acceptable Behaviour Bullying and Harassment Policy. Any potential incidents in relation to bullying & harassment and grievances are encouraged to being resolved informally in the first instance. The Council also offers through Gloucestershire Counselling Service a confidential counselling and mediation service for employees.

Existing monitoring analysis has shown that in many ways the Council broadly reflects the composition of the community that it serves. There are a greater proportion of women applying for jobs and working at the Council than men, however the top 5% of the workforce have a slightly greater proportion of men. As mentioned previously both in terms of job applications and proportion of workforce the Council does not closely reflect the % economically active disabled people in the District.

Sexual Orientation & Religion & Belief

Data collection and analysis on **sexual orientation** and **religion & belief** is a requirement under the Equality Framework for Local Government as well as being best practice. There is no legal obligation to monitor for sexual orientation however ACAS, Stonewall and the Employers' Organisation are agreed that monitoring sexual orientation is essential to achieve a fair working environment and society for all.

Data analysis on the above areas in relation to recruitment and the workforce will commence from spring 2010 with the introduction of the new HR system.

In respect of asking for such sensitive information it is important to state clearly why the questions are being asked and to reassure the job applicant or employee of the confidentiality of the information that they provide.

The Council began collecting employee data on sexual orientation and religious belief in 2008 as part of the annual validation of employee records.

Area for improvement

- Reporting of recruitment, workforce and leavers data in relation to equalities needs to be regularised on a minimum twice yearly basis. This information should be made available to Corporate Team in addition to the Council's Equality Group.
- Monitoring on age, sexual orientation and religion & belief need to be incorporated into monitoring reports
- The equality monitoring section of the Council's job application form will be amended to include a series of 'forced choice' options aiding more effective recruitment monitoring in relation to sexual orientation and religion and belief. Likewise, workforce and leavers monitoring will mirror this with the use of forced choice options. This should give more accurate figures on applications and the composition of the Council's workforce according to sexual orientation and religion & belief.

The introduction of the new HR system by spring 2010 will enable more accurate real time reporting of data.

A MODERN WORKFORCE:

The Council offers a variety of working options that encourage a flexible workforce appealing to a wide range of potential and current employees, such as: job-share, various forms of part time working and a flexible working hours scheme. Employee requests to alter working hours / patterns whether made under the formal right to request flexible working or generally tend wherever possible to be accommodated.

Initiatives that have been introduced within the last two years include;

- Introduction of Childcare Vouchers Scheme.
- Introduction of a Home Working policy.
- Introduction of Staff Volunteering policy.
- Revision of NVQ / Modern apprenticeship scheme. The Council typically offers 2 - 3 NVQ apprenticeships a year linked with Stroud College. The apprenticeships typically last a minimum of 12 months and provide an excellent career development opportunity illustrated by the fact that a number of past apprentices have progressed into Business Support and Benefit Officer posts. The revised scheme pays the apprentices significantly higher than the training grade of £80 per week and instead uses the National Minimum Wage for 22 + as the benchmark pay.
- The Council also offers on a more ad hoc basis:
 - Work experience placements for students from local schools.
 - Work Placements for the long-term unemployed lasting 16 weeks.
 - Community Safety in partnership with the Nelson Trust offer placements for people who have suffered from drug and alcohol problems as part of their rehabilitation.

Human Resources Policies

The HR Service as a whole, in addition to the specific areas of Recruitment & Selection, Absence Management and Corporate Dress Code Policy have been equality impact assessed. The Council's Disciplinary, Grievance, Capability and Retirement Policies are in the process of being updated and equality impact assessed.

Recruitment & Selection

The Council's recruitment and selection procedure aims to be both robust and fair and has been equality impact assessed, the EQIA being cited by the IDEA as an example of good practice in the South West Region.

Equalities is incorporated into all job descriptions;

To promote the Council's overall commitment to equality of opportunity/Diversity at all times and work within the requirements of the Council's Equality Scheme.

and person specifications;

Committed to working for an employer that values diversity and equality of opportunity.

The job application form is periodically revised in line with developments in employment legislation and has been consulted on with the disability access group and Modern Eyes.

All personal and equalities monitoring data is retained by Human Resources. Managers shortlisting is based on qualifications, work experience and knowledge, skills and abilities.

Unit Managers, Heads of Service and other potential recruiters have undertaken Recruitment & Selection training courses in 2007 and 2008.

Job adverts, person specifications, shortlists and interviewing questions are checked by Human Resources to ensure that they are fit for purpose and do not discriminate.

Adjustments have been made to arrangements on interviewing day to accommodate candidates with special requirements. One such instance was when a partially sighted candidate that was invited for interview that needed the verbal and numerical exercise printing in large font on A3 paper. With consultation with Modern Eyes adjustments were also made in order to accommodate a work related IT test. The candidate was consulted regarding their requirements and appropriate changes made to accommodate their needs and ensure that they did not suffer any detriment.

Work related assessments in terms of Job Profiles, Candidate Temperament Profiles and a verbal/ numerical exercise are currently provided through McQuaig. These assessments can offer real value to the selection process. Recruiting managers have previously attended McQuaig interpretation sessions.

All candidates attending interview are given an anonymous feedback questionnaire to complete on their perception of the recruitment process.

Areas for Improvement:

- To re-enforce and develop management capability with regards to recruitment and selection through a new programme of Recruitment & Selection training for relevant staff.

The last sessions were ran in summer 2008 and since then there have been a number of new managers and supervisors that have joined the Council that have not undertaken formal recruitment and selection training. This may have a potential adverse impact in relation to recruitment and selection in terms of quality and fairness.

- Updated recruitment & selection guidance incorporating employment law and equalities issues is needed on the Council's intranet.
- There is the need for objectivity and consistency in work related tests. Work related tests are typically devised by the recruiting manager. Administrative, clerical and IT skills off the shelf test packages are available which are likely to give more accurate, unbiased assessment.

Equal Pay

The council undertook a pay and grading review effective from April 2006. This involved extensive staff consultation and meetings including the creation of a new Employee Handbook of Terms and Conditions.

In 2008 The Council commissioned an Equal Pay Audit to be undertaken by an external provider. The review identified a number of issues to address to ensure that the Council's pay and grading process was fair and removal of any anomalies. An action plan has been agreed with Unison to address the issues that have been identified.

As part of the pay audit it was identified that women in full time employment within the Council earn 19.9 % less than men. This gender pay gap of almost 20% is significant, however in the context of the Stroud District as a whole in 2006 men earned on average 35% more than women. This figure has sharply increased to 40% in 2009.

Induction

Human Resources value the importance of an effective induction process that helps gives new employees knowledge, awareness and confidence, helping them settle into the organisation. Induction plans covering corporate and service specific areas are completed for all new employees. Equalities and Diversity is integrated into the staff induction process through the use of a Diversity Workbook that all new staff read and complete an externally verified test. This was externally recognised in the form of winning a best training award in 2005. An e-learning course has also recently been developed and is available on the Councils intranet (Hub).

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Individual and collective learning and development are critical to the increased skills, motivation and productivity of the workforce.

Corporate Training offered includes:

- ICS (Institute of Customer Service) qualification.
- ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management) qualification.

Both these courses give the participants added knowledge and skills to assist with personal effectiveness.

The Council has also developed staff members to be internal assessors for Investor in People (IIP), in addition to training coaches to support practioners undertaking the ICS qualification.

Staff awareness of Equalities and Diversity has increased through;

- 10 members of the Equalities Steering Group have achieved NCFE Level 2 qualification in equality & diversity.
- Proud of Stroud sessions in spring 2009 included a presentation on equalities and diversity.
- Members of the Council's Equalities Steering Group have delivered equalities presentations at individual service area team meetings.
- All new staff complete Equalities workbook 'Respect for People', as part of their induction and are required to pass a short test.
- EQIA (Equality Impact Assessment Training) has been undertaken with Heads of Service and unit managers and is integrated into the Council's performance management system (Excelsis).

Proposed future initiatives include:

- Offering NCFE Level 2 Equality & Diversity training for Unit Mgrs and Heads of Service in association with Stroud College. This will increase managers understanding of E & D and assist with people management skills.
- Further Member awareness training on equalities issues incorporating a Member Workbook on equalities issues.

Investor in People (IIP)

The Council was one of the first Council's in the country to become IIP accredited and successfully retained IIP accreditation in 2008.

However the 2008 Investor in People report highlighted a number of development areas, namely;

- Further development of the appraisal / performance management process. Links to more effective, regularised 1-1s and team meetings. Raising the business awareness of staff / strengthening the 'golden thread'.
- Developing staff access to IT.
- Encouraging councillors to give motivational feedback to staff.
- Encouraging strategic leaders to enhance their 'figurehead'.
- Raising feelings of inclusions of staff from outlying sites.
- Improving the evaluation of training. Building into performance management / 1-1s.
- Reviewing the 'Stroud Manager' and improving the consistency of management behaviour production of a management competency framework for use in appraisals and recruitment.
- Integrating agency and contract managers into SDC management requirements / culture.

Staff Consultation & Involvement

Quarterly meetings are held with Unison and this communication channel is used to inform and consult with Unison on any corporate policy changes and changes to working practices / arrangements.

Workforce Survey results

Two separate random surveys were commissioned through The Times, Best Councils, 2007 & 2008. A survey was sent to a random selection of staff to complete and the results of the survey were analysed in relation to the other local authorities that participated. One of the key findings in the Best Councils Reports was around the perceived weaknesses around organisational leadership.

Staff were informed of the results of Best Councils through Proud of Stroud staff awareness sessions and team meetings. One outcome from the survey was the creation of a number of random groups of employees by grade across the Council into a 'Work Positive' Group.

Work Positive

Five groups were tasked with prioritising key areas identified in the Best Council's and Stress Surveys, 6 monthly meetings facilitated by the Kudos Group. Areas identified were:

- Senior Management, lack of internal support, low morale.
- Excessive workload, insufficient time, local targets.
- Management style, communication & consultation, lack of job security.
- Deadlines; Team & Colleagues, customer demands, lack of resources, working environment, lack of training & career progression.

Outcomes from Work Positive Groups have been;

- Creation of a set of behaviour standards for a Stroud Employee called ORACLE.
- Creation of a 'Golden Thread' presentation helping employees become more aware of how they contribute to the overall picture / council's goals.
- Developing personal confidence workshops linked to behaviours and a new effective measurable appraisal system focusing on the behaviour standards.
- Development of 5 new key Leadership Behaviours.
- Emphasis on the use of effective team meetings (Also highlighted through 2008 IIP Review).
- Promoting networking across service areas amongst the Council's unit managers through 'speed dating' events.
- Developing the use of 'career journeys'.

Change from Stroud Manager should to Stroud Employee Should (ORACLE), revised leadership behaviours, staff involvement and ownership over the suggested revision of the appraisal process.

Area for Improvement:

The Best Council's surveys have acted as a useful barometer to gauge corporate health across a range of areas. An annual staff survey and subsequent analysis would provide a useful ongoing indicator on corporate health.

The Council has adopted the '**Systems Thinking**' approach with regards to focusing on customer needs and improving the efficiencies of internal processes. This has had staff involvement and particular successes have been in the Re-housing and Revenues and Benefits teams.