

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
RESOURCES, PROSPERITY, PARTNERSHIP
AND CONSULTATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 21 MARCH 2002 at 10.30 a.m.**

**SCRUTINY OF PROMISE FOR 2001-02 “*PROMOTE EQUALITY AND
IMPROVE ACCESS TO OUR SERVICES, EMPLOYMENT AND BUILDINGS*”**

Report of the Corporate Director (People & Property)

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1. Purpose of Report

To give members of the Scrutiny committee an opportunity to examine the Promise for 2001-02 to promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings.

2. Summary

2.1 The performance of measures reported in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2001-02 against this Promise suggests that targets will be met or exceeded.

2.2 A number of actions are being undertaken to further this Promise including:

- The implementation of the County Council’s Equalities policy *Putting People First*, which covers equalities issues in employment and service delivery
- The development of Departmental Equalities Action Plans, which are scrutinised by the Equalities Panel
- Work on attaining the standards of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)
- Improvements to our buildings to improve accessibility for service users and employees
- Work on improving electronic access to services via the web and digital TV as well as through the Customer Service Centre.

3. Background

Objectives, actions and examples - What we said in the 2001-02 Best Value Performance Plan

3.1 Hertfordshire County Council is committed to achieving equality of opportunity both as a large employer and an organisation that provides and arranges services. We recognise that in our society, groups and individuals

continue to be unfairly discriminated against and we acknowledge our responsibility to actively promote equality and combat discrimination.

- 3.2 That's why we have a new equal opportunities policy, 'Putting People First' which sets out the county council's commitment to action on equality and meets our statutory obligations under equal opportunities legislation. It makes equality of opportunity a central responsibility of all Members, managers and employees. The policy clearly states at the outset that: "*no service user or potential services user, employee or potential employee, will be discriminated against because of age, colour, disability, ethnic or national origin, race, gender, being a gay man or lesbian, marital status, political or religious belief, or trade union activities.*"
- 3.3 The county council is implementing the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry report and has adopted the definition of racial incidents recommended by the Enquiry.
- 3.4 Our objectives to support this promise are:
- Provide services that are equally accessible to all people, free from prejudice and unfair discrimination and sensitive to the needs of all sections of the community
 - Value people and their differences and enable all our employees to achieve their full potential, creating vitality within our organisation and the services we deliver
 - Seek to influence the work and contribution of partner organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors by ensuring that equality issues and considerations are fully taken into account when developing major strategies
 - Work actively towards eliminating all forms of unfair discrimination, both direct and indirect through active monitoring, consultation and partnership work with minority
 - groups and active equality action planning
 - Target resources to groups and communities who are most excluded
 - All property will reflect relevant legislation including the Disability Discrimination Act
 - Encourage partnerships and participation in the development and application of Council policies and practices
 - Enhance the choice and control of people over their own lives

3.5 To support this promise all departments in the authority are developing specific Equalities action plans covering the following:

- Achieving a representative workforce
- Identifying equality training needs
- Developing effective consultation mechanisms
- Ensuring accessibility of services to all users and potential users
- Monitoring service uptake
- All county council properties to be audited by the end of 2001
- Targets to meet needs identified from audits carried out 2002 ~ 2004

3.6 In addition, we are talking to customers to understand what services are needed and how these should be provided. To improve access to services we have set up a customer service centre, and are developing a web site, to extend our out of hours service. Our Fire and Rescue Service has an Equalities Action Plan, which includes issues such as completing an audit of all fire stations in the light of the Disability Discrimination Act, and developing a customer care policy specifically including people with disabilities. A comprehensive Equality Strategy document is due to be launched later this year.

4. Progress so far and plans for the future

4.1 People

- The council was highly commended in the 2001 Regional Equality Awards for its *Putting People First* Strategy
- Departmental Action Plans are being developed throughout the whole of the County Council
- We achieved level 3 of the CRE Standard in December 2001. Only one other County Council has reached this level
- Member training on Equalities had taken place
- A seminar on the Race Relations (Amendment) Act began our programme of improvements to meet the new legislative requirements, including the development of a Race Equality Scheme
- Survey results indicate a significant increase in the number of disabled people employed by the council

4.2 Property

- Through building disposal and improvements we have been able to exceed our target to make more council buildings accessible to disabled people
- Hertfordshire Property has been working in partnership with each of the Council's Departments on building-related accessibility issues from which has flowed a programme of accessibility audits. This started in 2001 and will be completed in 2002
- Schools - Accessibility to School buildings is not subject to the anti-discrimination principles of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part III. Amendments made by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 are currently being assessed. Consequently schools audits have

not been commissioned. CSF and Hertfordshire Property are discussing accessibility issues and how they fit with HCC policies on Equal Opportunities.

- Some work emanating from the audit reports has been released by ACS and CIS in 2001-02. Other departments are currently assessing audit reports for work to be either carried out through maintenance and minor works programmes or capital projects.

4.3 Accessibility of services generally

- From a service delivery perspective more generally Hertfordshire residents can now access more of our services electronically and via the Customer Services Centre. Our website is visited by more than 1,700 people a day, on average and we have provided more PCs for public use in libraries.
- In December 2001 we launched a pilot project offering information to residents via digital cable TV. The one year pilot is part of our commitment to make services more accessible, and all information available on the website can be seen through the TV channel.
- A recent survey of 400 callers to the Customer Service Centre found the majority of callers to be "very satisfied" with the speed with which calls were answered, the efficiency of staff and the way the calls were handled.

4.4 Future Plans

- Issues will continue to be address service-related and employment issues through the implementation of the Council's 'Putting People First' Equalities policy, the People Strategy, and departmental Equalities Action Plans.
- We will be improving "Putting People First" in the light of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the new generic Equality standards for local government which include a wider range of Equalities issues including disability and gender
- We will develop a Race Equality Scheme (RES) by 31 May 2002 in accordance with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Work has started to improve our processes in relation to the reporting of racial incidents
- The works required to make our buildings accessible under the new legislation should be completed by 31 October 2004
- We will continue to develop electronic access, providing more information and transaction capability as set out in our "Implementing electronic Government" strategy.

5. Performance Measures

5.1 There are 7 measures of this Promise, which are shown below.

5.2 Performance against these measures suggests that targets will be met or exceeded.

PI ref	Performance indicator	2001-02 Target	2001-02 End of Year Estimate	Variance	Comments on performance
C06	<i>Promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings</i>				
BVPI 002	The level (if any) of the Equality Standard for Local Government to which the authority conforms. (Previously covered Commission for Racial Equality Standards only)	Level 3/4	Level 3	No variance	Resources select committee set a target to achieve level 3 of the CRE standards by Dec 2001. An independent audit has confirmed that this has been achieved. We are currently assessing how to move from the CRE standards to the generic equality standards under the new definition for 2002-03
BVPI 016	The percentage of Local Authority employees declaring that they meet the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 disability definition compared with the percentage of economically active disabled people in the Authority area	2.5%	2.97% compared to 16.31%	18.8%	Although the target was revised upwards as more comprehensive sampling of staff was undertaken, the result was higher than expected. Work is being undertaken to address differences in survey methodology which contributed to the poor comparison with the economically active disabled population
BVPI 017	The percentage of Local Authority employees from minority ethnic communities compared with the percentage of the economically active minority ethnic community population in the Authority area	2.2%	2.2% compared to 3.71%	0%	Although the data for 2001-02 suggests a reduction in performance compared with 2000-01, this is mainly due to a change in survey methods. Using previous methodology the result would be around 5.7%

PI ref	Performance indicator	2001-02 Target	2001-02 End of Year Estimate	Variance	Comments on performance
BVPI 157	The number of types of interactions that are enabled for electronic delivery as a percentage of the types of interactions that are legally permissible for electronic delivery	Information & Advice 90%; Receiving payments 10%; Consultation & Feedback 5%; On-line applications 30%; Bookings 10%; Procurement 10%		0% for all	
Local L026	Number of public PCs in libraries with Internet access	100	124	24%	Refurbishment of libraries and absence of major technical problems has resulted in target being exceeded.
Local L027	Public PCs in libraries in use x% of time	50%	52.4%	4.80%	
P19.2	Number of hits on new web site compared with old web site.	Average of 1 million per month	in excess of 2 million hits per month	>100%	Although a better than expected rate of growth has been achieved, the technical structure of the website makes this a less useful measure than L063 Number of Visits to new website. This indicator is therefore being dropped for 2002-03

Although not a measure of the promise for 2001-02, results for Indicator L063 are shown for information:

PI ref	Performance indicator	2001-02 Target	2001-02 End of Year Estimate	Variance	Comments on performance
Local L063	Number of visits to new website	An average of 35,000 per month	50,698 per month on average	44.90%	Growth of public use of Internet resources

Similarly, results for Indicator 156 are:

PI ref	Performance indicator	2001-02 Target	2001-02 End of Year Estimate	Variance	Comments on performance
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PI ref	Performance indicator	2001-02 Target	2001-02 End of Year Estimate	Variance	Comments on performance
BVPI 156	The percentage of Authority buildings open to the public in which public areas are suitable for and accessible to disabled people.	22.8% (18 buildings out of 74)	28.4% (21 buildings out of 74)	5.6%	Departmental reorganisations and improvement works

6. In depth scrutiny

- 6.1 The departmental Equality Action Plans are being reported annually to the members' Equality Panel for scrutiny. That Panel will also be scrutinising the implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, including the Race Equality Scheme, and the work on attaining the new Equality Standards for local government.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The performance of measures reported in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2001-02 against this Promise suggests that targets will be met or exceeded
- 7.2 A number of actions are being undertaken to further this Promise including the revision of the "Putting People First" Policy, development of a Race Equality Scheme, continued development of departmental Equalities Action Plans, and accessibility to buildings and services generally. Each of these will address issues of promoting equality in both employment and service delivery.