

Derby's civic home for everyone

Background

Derby City Council's home – the Council House – is a beautiful building, but it was very worn out and so we started on a huge project to refurbish it. This meant all employees had to move out into temporary accommodation for two years, which was a challenge in itself. Alongside this, Derby took the opportunity to change the way staff work, offering a much better service to customers and more flexibility for employees. This included much more remote working and hot-desking and smarter working as a whole – 'work is something you do, not somewhere you go'. We call this project Derby Workstyle.

Summary

Working or visiting a cold, draughty building, that's no longer fit for purpose, however beautiful, cannot go on indefinitely and so Derby made a decision to refurbish its civic building – Derby's Council House. It's been a massive project, but it's coming to an end soon, as staff all move back to the newly-refurbished Council House in late November 2012.

We had to find alternative office accommodation for employees who worked in the Council House, so the work could begin. Trying to find somewhere so large that was accessible was quite a challenge, but we did, with a few extra tweaks to the access. We then had to find out what reasonable adjustments our disabled employees needed in the temporary accommodation, so we sent out an all-user message for disabled employees to come back to us with their requirements – we moved in to our temporary accommodation with only a few teething problems, but most people were satisfied.

We set up an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) Group, which meets regularly and is made up of community representatives and employees, to go through the planning of the refurbishment. This involved lots of studying plans and materials and working out what we needed in the building and how the building would work for us as employees and as customers.

The architects and designers came to many meetings and happily took on board people's suggestions. Right from the start, we knew we wanted the building to be fully accessible for councillors, employees, and visitors and for it to be a community building for Derby. High on the shopping list was a breast-feeding room, baby changing room, 'Changing Places' toilet and of course a multi-faith quiet and contemplation room with appropriate washroom facilities. We have achieved all of these, as well as a small grassy space for assistance (guide) dogs to 'spend a penny'.

The EqIA Group has split into sub-groups and we have people looking at the workings, protocol and décor of the multi-faith quiet and contemplation room. Deaf and hearing-impaired people are looking at IT and communication and others looking at the mood boards and signage.

We are working our way through the move back to the Council House now and, as it is totally different to how we left it, we are all learning about new ways of working. Crucial to this, is that we have done another exercise to establish our disabled people's reasonable adjustments for their move to the Council House, which has been a big exercise. Once we have moved in, we will be checking with everyone to make sure their adjustments are just right.

Who was involved?

- Council's Transformation team
- Designers, architects and project manager
- Disabled People's Diversity Forum members representing organisations of disabled people
- Minority Communities Diversity Forum

- Gender and Sexuality Diversity Forum
- 50-Plus Forum
- Lead on equality and diversity
- Access Officer
- Council's Communications team
- Council's engagement officers – adults and health and diverse communities
- Policy and strategy manager
- Cabinet and elected members
- Head of policy, research and engagement
- Diverse employee network representatives, including employees with a range of religions and beliefs and those with none.

Outcomes

The outcome is that that we will have a really nice, friendly and accessible building for people to work in and visit. We also hope to host International Women's Day there in March 2013. The impact will be that we hope people will enjoy visiting us and working for us and that the many barriers people faced at the old Council House will no longer be there.

What we learnt

Key outcomes for us have been:

- Working alongside our community organisations and employees, including our LGBT Employees' Network, Disabled Employees' Network and Black and Minority Employees' Network on equality impact assessing the project, gives much more quality and knowledge to the assessment and project as a whole. It can save costly mistakes later on and makes people feel part of what you are doing and feel valued for their input.
- Try out materials you are going to use in any building project, such as the signage you are using, the carpet textures, the colour contrasts, the paving outside – again can save very costly mistakes and complaints.
- Despite all the consultation, and the work of the equality impact assessment group, we seem to have missed the fact that the breast-feeding room ideally needed a hand basin and we have just discovered at this very late stage that it hasn't got one. Nothing we can do now, apart from making the room really comfortable and relaxing and a nice place for a mum to feed her baby if she wants.

Contact

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