

Equalities

Setting up a Prayer Room (Multi-Faith Room)

Aberdeen City Council

Contact for Enquiries

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Following several requests from employees to set up a prayer room facility, Aberdeen City Council's Faith, Religion and Belief Equality Group in HR began to look into what was required to achieve this.

Background

With no dedicated prayer facility for employees in the council headquarters, staff were using meeting rooms to carry out prayer or contemplation.

The council was keen to meet the demand from employees for this facility to improve the staff experience and aid retention. It was also regarded as an equalities initiative in relation to the council's employment equality outcome.

However, with free space in the headquarters building extremely scarce, the council faced a challenge in identifying a suitable and available room.

Key Activities

An employee focus group was set up to discuss and identify the requirements. The group met three times during the planning period.

Meetings were also held with the Facilities service about identifying a suitable room.

Benchmarking was undertaken against the two universities in the city – Aberdeen University and the Robert Gordon University – which both already had prayer facilities.

After determining the requirements, it transpired that the only suitable room available was in the building adjacent to the main headquarters building. This required employees to walk from one building to another to access the facility, which was regarded by users as not ideal.

However, the room was refurbished including the removal of excess furniture and the installation of dividers for privacy.

It initially operated on a trial basis for three months available between certain specified times and with a booking system.

Benefits and Impacts

Following a successful trial period, the room was made permanent and the hours of availability extended to the whole day.

Whilst the result partially matched the original objective of providing a prayer room for employees, there was a compromise with regard to location. Feedback from employees showed that they acknowledged and appreciated the efforts made to set up the room but there was some disappointment about its location.

The council will continue to monitor use of the prayer room to ensure that it meets user needs and to identify any improvements or changes needed to the facility. The council may, in future, seek to identify a prayer facility at other council sites.

Learning

Lessons learned:

Manage employee expectations

It had been envisaged that it would be relatively straightforward to put the facility in place and expectations were raised about the proposed timescale. In reality, it took significantly longer than planned due to detailed and prolonged discussions with the facilities service.

Identify issues early

One of the positive aspects of the planning was the establishment of the focus group and the benchmarking undertaken, which helped to identify the relevant issues in relation to the setting up of the room.