

Equalities Panel

24th November 2008

Briefing Note on the Equality Framework for Local Government

1. Introduction

1.1 In 2001 the Equality Standard for Local Government was introduced as a performance and improvement framework to support local authorities in mainstreaming equality. The Standard has now been revised to take account of the challenges and opportunities set out in the local government white paper, 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', the new national performance framework that replaces the Best Value regime, and feedback from local authorities that the Standard was overly complex and focussed on process rather than outcomes.

1.2 The new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) has been designed by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to build on the work done under the old Equality Standard and authorities will be able to 'migrate' their achievements under the Standard to the new Framework.

1.3 The new Framework is intended to help local authorities to:

- improve the services they provide so they are more representative, relevant and efficient, whilst also improving satisfaction and trust
- ensure that policies and strategies deliver for everyone and improve their accountability to local people
- combat inequalities and avoid expensive litigation as a consequence of discrimination.

1.4 The Framework will link in with a number of other frameworks within which local authorities are or will be working, including:

- ♦ the Community Cohesion Framework being developed by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and migration good practice guidance being developed by DCLG and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)

- ♦ ‘Customer Services Toolkit’ developed by the Cabinet Office to drive customer-focussed change within organisations
- ♦ Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) – The experience of citizens, people who use services and the need to reduce inequalities and improve accessibility will be central to the new performance assessment framework for public service, the CAA.

2. Defining Equality

2.1 The Framework is designed to meet councils’ legal obligations but it uses a generic definition of equality that goes beyond the six equalities strands and includes some of the other most vulnerable groups in society such as looked after children and ex-offenders. Other groups such as people with learning disabilities and Gypsies and Travellers, are already protected by equality legislation, but are often not seen as part of the equality picture.

2.2 The definition of equality used by the Framework comes from the final report of the Equalities Review in 2007:

“An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways that people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.

An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be.”

This definition recognises that:

- equality is an issue for all
- we don’t all start from the same position in life and to create a fair society we must recognise different needs.

2.3 The Equalities Review also set out what it called “The 10 dimensions of equality” (see Appendix A) a set of everyday ‘rights’ that everyone should be entitled to and a useful aide memoire for thinking about whether services meet the needs of all citizens and communities and recommended for use with the Framework.

3. Equality Framework for Local Government

3.1 The Framework is built around five areas of change management:

a) Knowing your community – equality mapping

Understanding the profile of local communities and the life chances and opportunities of different groups is crucial in identifying the priority outcomes that shape strategic planning and service delivery.

Equality mapping is the term used for collecting information about communities and individuals. This is not just information about their gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation etc but also information about their socio-economic status, health and education status, availability of transport, accommodation type etc.

b) Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment

Strategic leadership is key to improving equality outcomes and it needs to be expressed in the local vision of place, strategic planning and the Sustainable Community Strategy. It is essential to the delivery of priorities that impact on inequality. Increasingly local authorities need to work with other public authorities and the voluntary and business sectors to identify inequality and to achieve positive equality outcomes.

c) Community engagement and satisfaction

Most local authorities recognise the importance of community engagement and have moved beyond simple consultation to more active and innovative ways of engaging and involving citizens in service development and delivery. It is important to understand though that geographical communities are not always the same as communities of interest and both need to be involved in corporate decision-making and service planning.

d) Responsive services and customer care

Service provision is still the main function of most local authorities. Personalising services to meet the needs of people from different backgrounds requires:

- ♦ greater cultural understanding on the part of service providers
- ♦ using Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) to ensure authorities understand the impact of service provision on different communities.

e) A modern and diverse workforce

The ability to deliver responsive personalised services depends in large part on the skills, understanding and commitment of the workforce. Local authorities need to ensure, therefore, that they have:

- ♦ fair employment practices that comply with legislation, including equal pay legislation
- ♦ training on equality issues, including EqIAs
- ♦ a workforce profile that reflects the diversity of the community and that measures are in place to monitor diversity and promote equality of opportunity.

4. Assessment against the Framework

4.1 The original equality standard had five levels:

Level One Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
 Level Two Assessment and community engagement
 Level Three Setting equality objectives and targets
 Level Four Information systems and monitoring against targets
 Level Five Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Cambridge City Council is currently at Level Three and working towards Level Four.

4.2 The new framework has three levels (see Appendix B for definitions):

Level One	Emerging
Level Two	Achieving
Level Three	Excellent

At each level assessment is against each of the five change management areas with a detailed check list provided to enable self-assessment.

4.3 To ensure that work under the old standard can be recognised authorities will be able to have their achievements migrated to the new Framework. An authority at Level Three will be treated as **Achieving**.

4.4 Authorities at the **Achieving** and **Excellent** levels can have their performance externally validated through a peer assessment and receive a recognition award.

5. What Next

5.1 Consultation on the Equality Framework has now closed and it is expected that a final version will be published early in the New Year with a view to the Framework being introduced from April 2009.

Appendix A

The 10 dimensions of equality	
Longevity	Including avoiding premature mortality
Physical Security	Including freedom from violence and physical and sexual abuse
Health	Including both well-being and access to high quality health care
Education	Including both being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications and having access to training and life-long learning
Standard of living	Including being able to live with independence and security; and covering nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth utilities, social services and transport.
Productive and valued activities	Such as access to employment, a positive experience in the work place, work/life balance, and being able to care for others
Individual, family and social life	Including self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage
Participation, influence and voice	Including participation in decision-making and democratic life
Identity, expression and self-respect	Including freedom of belief and religion
Legal security	Including equality and non-discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system

Appendix B

Equality Framework – Definition of Levels

An Emerging Authority

An **Emerging Authority** has the following characteristics:

- ♦ members and officers understand the significance of equality in the place shaping agenda and provide clear and visible leadership in building partnerships to address inequality
- ♦ it has demonstrated clear plans to undertake equality mapping and understands the profile and needs of communities of interest within their locality
- ♦ it has publicly committed to improving equality outcomes and the elimination of discrimination in both service delivery and employment based on race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation
- ♦ it is compliant with all legal requirements including having all the public duty Equality Schemes in place
- ♦ it has systems in place at corporate and service/unit levels to ensure the delivery, review and scrutiny of its equality and cohesion priorities
- ♦ key internal and external stakeholders and community members are consulted on equalities issues
- ♦ it has earmarked specific resources for improving equality practice
- ♦ it is carrying out generic impact assessments
- ♦ it is clear about its workforce profile and has plans in place to ensure equal pay out comes and improve representation where appropriate.

An Achieving Authority

An **Achieving Authority** has the following characteristics:

- ♦ members and officers take direct and personal responsibility for promoting greater equality and test themselves on progress by the outcomes they achieve
- ♦ it has undertaken equality mapping and used the information to inform corporate priorities
- ♦ it has set clear equality priorities in consultation with partners in the public and voluntary sector and these are reflected in the sustainable community and other relevant strategies, Local Area Agreements and local targets
- ♦ it works with partners in the public and voluntary sector to develop joint equality strategies
- ♦ its equality strategy complements and is integrated into the community cohesion and migration and neighbourhood engagement strategies
- ♦ it has set appropriate corporate and service/unit objectives to address persistent inequalities related to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief for service delivery based on impact assessments and consultation with internal and external stakeholders and partners
- ♦ it has set appropriate corporate and service/ unit employment and pay based objectives for race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- ♦ equality objectives are integrated into the local authority's business and service planning processes
- ♦ there is good practice in service delivery in all the sections of the council with few adverse impacts found in impact assessments- where adverse impacts have been found these have been mitigated

- ♦ key stakeholders and community members are able to scrutinise and challenge performance on equalities issues
- ♦ it has developed information and monitoring systems that allow it to disaggregate data where appropriate, assess progress in achieving objectives and targets and review them if necessary.

An Excellent Authority

An **Excellent Authority** has the following characteristics:

- ♦ members and officers have a reputation for championing equality issues and ensure that the equality issues relevant to their communities are embedded in strategic plans, LAAs and local delivery plans
- ♦ the local authority works with all strategic partners and the third sector to achieve defined equality outcomes
- ♦ it has good evidence of the equalities profile of the community based on national and local data that is regularly reviewed
- ♦ it is measuring progress on equality outcomes, is able to disaggregate data on relevant performance indicators and can demonstrate real outcomes that have improved equality in services and employment
- ♦ it identifies the changing nature of its communities and their expectations and then prioritises its activities and explains its decisions
- ♦ it provides good customer care by ensuring that services are provided by knowledgeable and well-trained staff, who are equipped to cater to particular needs of clients where necessary
- ♦ it has improving satisfaction and perceptions indicators from all sections of the community

- ♦ it uses Equality Impact Assessments to review all major new changes in policy and regularly conducts service Equality Impact Assessments
- ♦ all relevant data on service access is monitored against the equality strands
- ♦ there are forums for all equality stakeholders to share experiences and evaluate the authority's progress
- ♦ all parts of the authority can show tangible progress towards achieving outcomes which address persistent inequalities
- ♦ members, officers, key stakeholders and community members are confident about equality issues and their relevance for the authority and their own responsibilities
- ♦ the authority has implemented action for equal pay outcomes and demonstrates progress on under representation, flexible working, access to training and development and promotes an inclusive working culture based on respect
- ♦ it reviews its equality strategy and public duty equality schemes every three years and seeks innovative improvement challenges