

The journey to equality

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The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in these services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

National Context

- 1 Equality is an issue that affects all public services as local populations become increasingly diverse. Tackling inequalities benefits the whole community as services will be able to respond to individual needs. Wealth creation will be stimulated through, for example, increased education attainment and reduced unemployment, as well as improving community cohesion. All public sector organisations have a duty to promote good race relations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Human Rights Act (1998) enshrines the right for everyone to be treated with fairness and equality.
- 2 Our research found that public sector organisations are at different stages on the journey to race equality.
 - **Resisting** agencies believe that race equality is not an issue that affects them.
 - **Intending** agencies feel over-confident but have little motivation to make real change.
 - **Starting** agencies are motivated and ambitious, yet are under-confident.
 - **Developing** agencies have set ambitious targets and are improving outcomes across all services.
 - **Achieving** agencies have clear priorities for their local community and a track record of delivering race equality.

Local context

- 3 The Isle of Wight Council seeks to increase the diversity of its workforce, and ensure services are developed and delivered to meet the needs of a diverse local population. A Race and Diversity Standing Forum has been established to improve services to socially excluded groups across the island through working with partner agencies. The forum links the Island Futures Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) through the Promoting Health and Equality theme.
- 4 The council has developed a Comprehensive Equalities Plan merging the Equalities and Diversity Policy and the Race Equality Scheme. This provides a framework for mainstreaming equalities into all aspects of council activities, including policymaking and service delivery. The council has established a Diversity Policy Group which leads the council's response to the equalities agenda. Three sub-groups have been established as the initial focus for this work:
 - the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA);
 - Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups; and
 - Women into Management.

- 5 This review was established in summer 2004 to help the council assess its progress in focusing on equalities outcomes. We aimed to facilitate an assessment over a period of months. During this time we worked to establish the key equalities outcomes for the council, and identify actions that need to be taken to address barriers to delivering these outcomes. We have given external input as a 'critical friend' through constructive challenge. This review
- 6 supports the draft Comprehensive Equalities Plan and its target to increase the level of the Equality Standard for Local Government from the current Level 1 assessment to Level 3 by December 2005.

Overall Assessment

- 7 At the beginning of this review the IOW Council was assessed as being in the starting stage on the Journey to Race Equality Model. Over the following six months, significant progress has been made and the council is now agreed to be entering the developing stage. **Developing** agencies have set ambitious targets *and are improving outcomes across all services*. The council has undoubtedly set ambitious targets and is working very hard to achieve them. However, to ensure the transition to the developing phase is maintained, sustained effort will be required focused on improving outcomes across all services.
- 8 The council has made significant progress in developing structures and processes to deliver improved equalities outcomes for the Isle of Wight. These include the:
 - establishment of the Race and Diversity Standing Forum which is made up of the council, and other public private and voluntary sector bodies;
 - establishment of the Diversity Policy Group;
 - establishment of the Director-led Diversity Link Group (cross directorate representation), with sub groups leading on BME, DDA and Women Into Management;
 - development of a Comprehensive Equalities Plan; and
 - implementation of a competencies framework for all staff which includes diversity.
- 9 There has been investment in diversity training, the appointment of an equalities officer, and promotion of equalities and diversity within departments through the Diversity Link Group. Furthermore, a number of projects have been completed or are in progress including the mapping of BME communities; seminars to publicise the requirements of the DDA for the public, private and voluntary sector; and a programme of work to increase physical access to council buildings.
- 10 Our review found that staff generally assessed the council as 'starting' or 'developing' (using the Journey to Race Equality model) but acknowledged some variability in progress and performance within and between different departments.
- 11 During the period of the review, the council has shown commitment to addressing the equalities agenda, and progress has been identified in a number of areas. For example, partnerships with the health sector, police, prisons and the further education sector are now resulting in firm initiatives to support and train staff.
- 12 Equalities have been mainstreamed into the council's performance management systems. A range of performance indicators, based on local priorities and national requirements, have been incorporated in the main reporting system for the council. In future, this will be augmented by prioritised action plans following impact assessments completed by all directorates.
- 13 Commitment has also been shown through the smooth transition to a new lead director; and the establishment of a full-time permanent Equality and Diversity Principal Officer post with an associated re-grading and budget increase.

- 14 Consultation with service users has been strengthened through a range of initiatives e.g. a customer access audit of all council buildings; a diversity questionnaire linked to the customer relationship management system; and the work of a number of partnership groups including the DDA Task Group and the Race and Diversity Standing Forum.
- 15 The council now faces the challenge of ensuring that the progress it has shown since summer 2004 is maintained, and is translated into delivery of equalities outcomes. Its Comprehensive Equalities Plan has developed a locally specific, realistic but aspirational vision which can be translated into clearly defined outcome focused objectives. The council needs to ensure continued emphasis on:
- clear and measurable equality outcome targets;
 - equalities integrated into mainstream performance management; and
 - recognising and rewarding improved performance in equalities outcomes.
- 16 The council needs to understand and address some of the behaviours that get in the way of defining and delivering the vision. It needs to:
- clearly communicate why equality and diversity are important;
 - create an open environment by providing opportunities for 'safe' discussions ;
 - be clear about (and enforce) appropriate behaviours and competencies; and
 - draw on the experience of staff as a valuable source of information and knowledge through staff networks.
- 17 Finally, the council must ensure that outcome targets are shaped and supported by feedback from service users and the wider community.

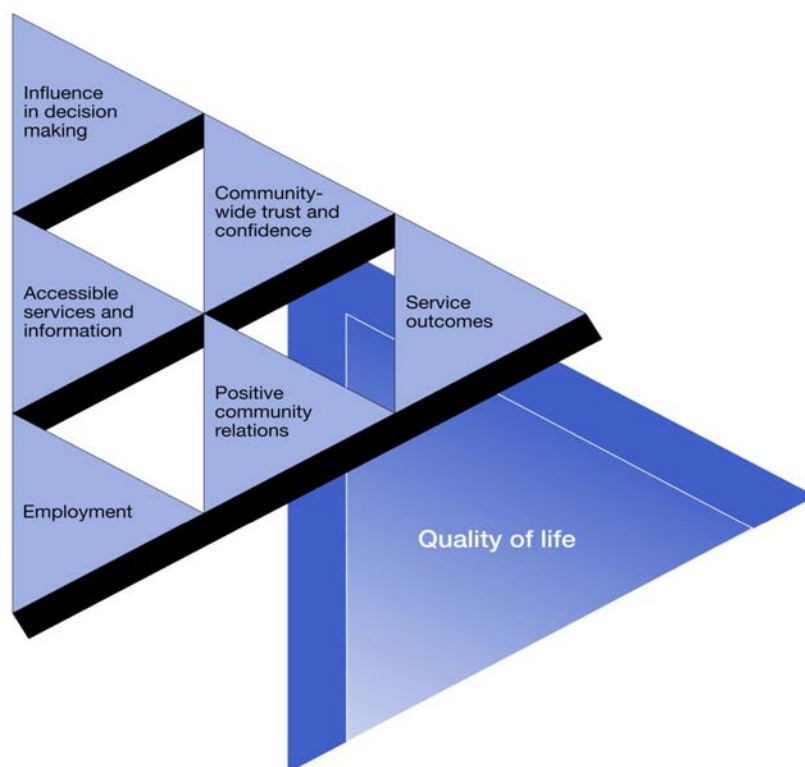
Equality Outcomes

- 18 The focus for the review has been the three priorities for the Race and Diversity Policy Group i.e. Women into Management; Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Groups and the Disability Discrimination Act. It was agreed that the review should highlight two areas for improved outcomes – employment, and accessible services and information. For services to be accessible, people need to be aware of the services they need, and be able to access them easily. Services should be tailored to meet the specific needs of a range of diverse groups, including physical location, cultural competence, language and translation. Improved employment outcomes would see the council working to removing barriers and actively promote the recruitment, progression and retention of staff from minority groups.

EXHIBIT 1 – EQUALITY OUTCOMES

Source: Audit Commission, *Journey to Race Equality, January 2004*

- 19 Exhibit 2 shows how the council would be able to evidence improved outcomes in employment and access to services for its priority groups.

EXHIBIT 2 – PRIORITY GROUP OUTCOMES

GROUP	ACCESS OUTCOMES	EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES
WIM	Feedback from women used to increase and widen access to council services.	Increased numbers of women in senior roles and positive feedback from female staff on the council's record as an employer.
BME	Positive feedback on accessibility of services and information provided by the council. The council could demonstrate it had raised BME communities' awareness of information and services so that they become more accessible.	The council's record as an employer of staff from BME groups through a range of indicators e.g. increased recruitment and retention.
DDA	Positive feedback from service users with disabilities, as well as a range of indicators to demonstrate increased access to buildings, services and information.	Employment of increased numbers of staff with disabilities and receipt of positive feedback from this staff group about the council as an employer.

Source: Audit Commission

Women into Management

20 The council is in the lower quartile for senior women (28 per cent) in management position. In response to a CPA criticism of the low levels of women in the 'top four tiers of management' efforts are being made to increase the numbers of women in such senior roles within the organisation. The Women into Management group is focusing on potential barriers to progression. It is working to create a supportive network; to establish a flexible working culture; and to secure development opportunities for female staff. The group recently received high peer-assessment from IDeA which reviewed the council.

Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

21 The council has a small number of staff from ethnic minorities (0.5 per cent); and the island population recorded as black or Asian is also less than 1 per cent. The number of recorded racially motivated crimes is very small - 1.5 per 100,000 population. The size of the black and minority ethnic (BME) communities on the island presents the council with the challenge of understanding and addressing the needs of potentially isolated communities and individuals. People from BME communities continue to experience inequalities and discrimination, and have a right to expect improved access to better-quality services. The Isle of Wight Council has recognised this need and has taken a range of action to understand these issues for their local population. Two workshops have been held with partner agencies to raise the profile of diversity issues, and a training programme has been introduced for council staff. A training plan is now in place which provides staff with access to a range of diversity-related learning resources. A consultancy has undertaken a mapping exercise which identifies where BME communities are located.

Disability Discrimination Act

22 The council is in the lower quartile of authorities for staff with disabilities (0.74 per cent) and for buildings with facilities for people with disabilities (11 per cent). However, the local population is in the upper quartile for those of working age with a disability (16.54 per cent) and the 2001 census data shows that the island has an above average number of people with a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability. It also shows a higher than average number of people assessing their health as 'not good', and a higher than average number of people providing voluntary care to support family members, friends or neighbours. The Disability Discrimination Act group has been formed to support the council's work to understand the needs of service users, and support service development to meet the diverse needs of disabled people. This group is linked with the Sensory and Physical Partnership Board and is planning to appoint a jointly funded Developing Access Officer post.

Strengths and areas for improvement

23 We have reviewed current progress in light of the building block model developed in the Journey to Race Equality. The building blocks are outlined in the exhibit below.

EXHIBIT 3 – BUILDING BLOCKS FOR RACE EQUALITY



Source: Audit Commission, *Journey to Race Equality*, January 2004

Leadership

24 Clear leadership is demonstrated by key officers and is now becoming embedded through leadership across the council. This is evidenced by the range of organisational arrangements for diversity across the council led by a number of senior managers, and the strong partnership links that have been developed to support diversity. It is vital that this strong corporate commitment to diversity is maintained to ensure the council's progress in this area continues and results in improved equalities outcomes for island residents.

At the **London Borough of Lewisham** race equality is seen as an integral part of the vision for making 'Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn'. Councillors and senior managers have endorsed a comprehensive equality and diversity plan that sets out the strategic approach to race equality along with age, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation. They speak with one voice: that race equality is fundamental to the delivery of improved performance, community well-being and engagement. This commitment is universally recognised and valued by staff at all levels within the council.

Source: *Audit Commission, Journey to Race Equality*, January 2004

The chief executive at **Devon County Council** takes race equality very seriously but recognises that the council is just starting out on the journey. He has demonstrated his commitment through a number of tangible actions:

- personally requesting a series of focus groups with staff of black and minority ethnic origin, where they told him about the issues they faced as employees;
- taking action to investigate and address examples of discrimination within recruitment;
- contributing to the core funding of key local organisations and networks to develop capacity;
- organising a session for councillors where members of black and minority ethnic communities told their stories about the realities for them of living in Devon; and
- working with peers to increase public authority investment in the local Racial Equality Council.

Source: Audit Commission, Journey to Race Equality, January 2004

Culture and Rationale

25 Whilst it was generally accepted that diversity is a priority, a clear understanding of the rationale was not always evident. Furthermore, the high-level commitment to equality was sometimes perceived as not being supported on the ground – e.g. perceived lack of day to day practical back up for staff. The council is now communicating a clear rationale for why equality matters and this will be evidenced with specific links to priorities for improvement following analysis of the impact assessment action plans.

26 There were many comments on the relativities of different diverse groups, mainly highlighting the priority that should be given to older people and those with disabilities. However, even for these perceived priority areas, the rationale for tailoring services to meet individual needs was not always understood. Leaders throughout the council need to be able to articulate the duty on public services to respond in a way that is proportionate to the level of need, rather than to the size of the population.

Central Manchester and Manchester Children's Hospital University Trust are at an early stage in developing a strategic approach to race equality. They recognise the importance of involving staff in the development of this approach but also in rewarding and celebrating positive behaviours. Their plans include:

- holding an equality and diversity summit for the top 200 managers at the trust to launch the strategy. This will be endorsed by the chief executive and chair and will include space for managers to start mapping what the strategy means for them; and
- establishing equality and diversity awards for both services and individuals who are demonstrating good practice in race equality. This is also seen as a way of sharing good practice more widely among staff.

Source: Audit Commission, Journey to Race Equality, January 2004

Vision, Priorities and outcomes

27 The council has defined three priority groups, and there are related performance management indicators, but the outcomes for these priorities are not fully articulated. There was clear evidence of action being taken on a number of fronts, eg HR policies being reviewed, training programmes put in place, procurement guidance being revised, and access to buildings improved. The Comprehensive Equalities Plan now provides a clearly agreed set of priorities, and will ensure developments are no longer undertaken as part of 'rolling programmes of review'. Identifying key improvement priorities, a baseline of current performance and setting clear and challenging targets is now supporting (and potentially speeding-up) further progress.

Engaging with diverse communities

28 Delivering services that are focused on the needs of users means public services must engage with all parts of the community. Our review initially found limited engagement with service users generally, and a low level of data collection about service users to inform improvement planning. On BME communities specifically, a mapping exercise provided the council with good baseline data but this had yet to be followed up with a consultation strategy.

29 A number of initiatives have now been established to gather information about the needs and views of the public and service users. This will put the council in a better position to engage with its diverse communities, and to ensure that its improvement priorities are those which will make a real difference to outcomes.

A community-wide housing needs survey showed that **Chesterfield Borough Council** needed a better understanding of the experience and needs of its local black and minority ethnic communities. It contracted an external consultant to carry out research into where black and minority ethnic communities were located, the quality of their housing and their broader experience of public services.

In order to get good-quality information from a wide range of households a survey team was recruited from local black and minority ethnic groups. Their local knowledge helped to identify households to include in the survey. Many members of these households were known to the interviewers. This helped to gain interviewees' trust, enabling them to talk about difficult issues, such as language problems and experiences of racism.

The research helped the council to develop a housing strategy for black and minority ethnic communities, including work to address:

- the housing needs of black and minority ethnic communities, including Gypsy families;
- racism and harassment; and
- communication with black and minority ethnic communities, including support to specific community groups and establishing a forum for people from black and minority ethnic groups.

Source: Audit Commission, Journey to Race Equality, January 2004

Training needs to take a positive approach. Sessions which outline what high quality, culturally sensitive services look like are much more motivational than training which focuses on what is being done wrong.

Staff feedback suggests that the impact of a negative approach is likely to make staff less confident and more anxious about providing services to BME service users.

Source: NHS workshop, Manchester

Capacity

30 Capacity within the public sector is limited and organisations have to manage a tension between prioritising equalities and achieving other important targets. Whilst many of those interviewed referred to resources as a risk (e.g. in compliance with the DDA), this area was not seen as a major issue. A number of references were made to positive investment in this area e.g. the diversity training programme and an equalities officer in place. However, further work is needed to cost the equality action plan, and ensure the longer-term support and commitment that is required. One particular area of concern raised by staff was the investment in diversity training. Some staff were unclear about how it related to the specifics of their jobs. Resources are now being targeted to ensure training equips people with customer-focused skills and confidence to ask diverse service users about their specific needs and requirements. The council needs to review its staff training and support programme to ensure that resources are appropriately focused on staff diversity needs.

Working with others

- 31 A Race and Diversity Standing Forum has been established to improve services to socially excluded groups across the island. The forum links the Island Futures Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) through the Promoting Health and Equality theme. A review of the forum and its links with the LSP has not formed part of this project.
- 32 Examples of partnership working to support equalities were provided at the start of this review, and in the following months these arrangements have been strengthened. Partnerships are enabling the council to train and support its staff; jointly consult with service users; and invest in shared posts. These developments have significant potential to deliver improved equalities outcomes for island communities, but require strong and sustained commitment from the council in the longer-term.

Norfolk Constabulary has developed strong cross-agency relationships to address the needs of black and minority ethnic communities. These have evolved out of the Norfolk Equal Opportunities Network, through which the different agencies have developed a high level of trust and understanding. Individual members are highly committed and enjoy working together. A specific project the group has developed is the Multi-Agency Protocol for reporting racist incidents across the county. All local agencies have signed up to a single method for reporting incidents and a lead co-ordinating agency (the Constabulary) has been established, working with the local Racial Equality Council. This has resulted in an increased number of reported racist incidents and has enabled the Police to investigate them more thoroughly.

Source: Audit Commission, Journey to Race Equality, January 2004

Managing performance

- 33 Work has been undertaken to mainstream equalities and diversity into the performance management of the council, and to improve the quality of the related data. However, there has previously been little systematic use of the performance monitoring data for equalities, though this is now being addressed through the comprehensive equalities plan.
- 34 The council must ensure that performance continues to be managed in this area and focused on delivering outcomes. This requires clarity about who is accountable for delivery and measuring progress.

- 35 Following the prioritisation of the impact assessment action plans, a review should be undertaken to ensure equality is fully integrated within service planning, performance management and individual objectives.

Implications for the Isle of Wight

36 The following actions will help the Isle of Wight Council deliver improved equality outcomes.

To build organisational capacity

37 Seek feedback from staff to ensure appropriately tailored support to enable them to deliver improved equalities outcomes.

To ensure that actions are sustainable

38 Integrate clearly identified diversity outcomes for the IOW into the council's broader strategic vision.

To ensure that the outcomes are what matters to citizens

39 Undertake focused consultation with service users and the wider community to inform service planning, review and evaluation.

To ensure delivery

40 Review performance management and monitoring arrangements for all diversity targets following prioritisation of impact assessment action plans. This review should assess:

- integration with corporate and service planning processes;
- whether responsibilities have been clearly allocated;
- the extent to which diversity and equality targets are translated into measurable corporate and individual targets; and
- reporting arrangements to support delivery of identified equalities outcomes.

Review approach

- 41 We have worked with officers and members of staff to:
- assess how the council is positioned to improve employment and access to services and information using the building blocks identified in the Audit Commission's Journey to Race Equality study and
 - look at the current systems and processes within the council to identify any barriers to improving access to employment and services and information for the island's population.
- 42 We have undertaken this work through a document review, interviews with staff, and workshops with departmental equalities leads, staff and managers.
- 43 We have also identified relevant examples of good practice from the research undertaken for the Journey to Race Equality report; and from a range of other current external sources.
- 44 This work was undertaken between September 2004 and March 2005.

Acknowledgements

Participants

- 45 We would like to thank officers from the Isle of Wight Council, particularly Rosie Barnard, Diversity Officer.

Review staff

- 46 The Audit Commission review was conducted by Elizabeth Hale and Alison Dewar.

Status of report

This report is for services provided under Section 35 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. A formal Letter of Engagement contains our terms and conditions. Before work is commenced the Letter of Engagement must be signed by all parties. Any variations to the terms or specification must be agreed in writing and placed by both parties with the signed Letter of Engagement. Such variations must also record the effects on the project fee and timescale. Under this agreement the audited body has the normal rights of complaint in line with current notification. The intellectual rights of the contents of this Project Specification are owned by the Audit Commission.

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