

Equality Impact Assessment Guidance

Social Policy Unit – January 2006

Introduction

This document provides guidance on carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA). It explains:

- ❑ Why we carry out EqIAs
- ❑ How EqIAs relate to other council policies and processes
- ❑ What has happened to date
- ❑ Some basic principles underpinning EqIAs
- ❑ The three stages of an EqIA

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1. Why we carry out EqIAs

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to promote race equality in their policy-making, service delivery, regulation, enforcement and employment. This includes three overlapping areas of responsibility:

- ❑ To eliminate discrimination
- ❑ To promote equality of opportunity
- ❑ To promote good community relations

To meet these responsibilities, we have published our equality scheme 2005-2008. This sets out our overall policy for addressing equality, diversity and social cohesion in our borough. We recognise that people may face discrimination, or experience adverse impact on their lives as a result of age, disability, ethnicity, faith, gender or sexuality.

Our current statutory duty in terms of assessing impact relates explicitly to ethnicity and race, but as good practice we have extended our impact assessment to these wider aspects of potential inequality. We anticipate that the statutory duty will in any case shortly be extended to disability. However, this does not mean that that we are diluting our focus on race equality issues.

EqIAs are intended to examine the aims, implementation and effects of policies, practices and services to check that no groups are receiving or are likely to receive differential treatment or outcomes that are discriminatory or unfair in nature. They should cover the following areas of potential inequality:

- Race and ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Age
- Faith/belief
- Sexual Orientation

They should also consider the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers and of refugees and asylum seekers.

However, clearly the amount of emphasis given to each area will vary according to its relevance in relation to the policy or service being assessed.

At the executive committee meeting of October 11 2005, where the draft equalities scheme was approved, executive members decided that they should sign off all EqlAs following completion of stage three. This means that in future your respective portfolio holder will be taking a keen interest in the progress of the EqlA, and that your executive member must sign off your EqlA before it can be accepted as complete by the social policy team.

2. Equality Impact Assessments and the wider processes

EqlAs are part of the council's wider commitment to equalities, as set out on the corporate equalities action plan 2003-2006. This plan seeks to address:

- Quality of life – closing the gap in educational achievement, employment, health, income, victimisation etc by gender, race, disability, age, sexuality
- Social cohesion – reducing racial tension, valuing diversity, promoting a common vision and sense of belonging, developing positive relationships
- Compliance – meeting the equal opportunities local government equalities standard, and equalities legislation, including the requirement to publish a race equality scheme and undertake race equality impact assessments

EqlAs will help with the implementation of the corporate equalities action plan by:

- Providing a mechanism for the collation and analysis of data and feedback from consultations on the main issues affecting equality
- Using this information to identify how policies and services affect different groups and contribute to the overall goal of closing gaps in service provision
- Identifying specific inequalities in policies/services and the reasons for them
- Providing a firm basis for improving policies and services

3. What has happened to date?

We undertook our first programme of EqlAs between 2002 and 2005.

Our initial three-year programme identified good practice in many areas of policy and service delivery across the authority. We have documented the extensive range of existing good practice from across the authority. This has been disseminated widely to help improve delivery in other policies and services. We will continue to share good practice across the council, and to learn from other local authorities and other public bodies.

The programme also found a number of gaps, which led to significant changes being made to some existing policies and services. Corporately, new ethnic monitoring arrangements have been introduced, together with improved interpretation and translation services, and staff training. The actions agreed as a result of the EqlAs have been integrated into the business planning process to ensure implementation and to facilitate monitoring of progress.

The council has examined all policies and services to assess which have, or potentially could have, a high, medium and low impact in relation to equalities issues. This schedule is the key document in determining our programme of Equality Impact Assessments.

The programme of EqlAs for 2005-2008 sets out when EqlAs are scheduled over the next three years. This is available on the Social Policy team's intranet pages.

4. Some basic principles underpinning EqlAs

EqlAs enable close examination of a policy or service in terms of its potential or actual impact on equality of treatment or outcomes. Whilst there is a process to be followed to ensure that the assessment is thorough, carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment should not be an onerous task nor should the steps set out below be adhered to rigidly where there are sound reasons for deviating from this approach. It is important that EqlAs do not become simply a paper or a box ticking exercise.

To be effective, EqlAs must:

- Get to the core issues and priorities as quickly as possible
- Satisfy stakeholders, both internally and externally, that it has been a sufficiently rigorous exercise in proportion to the importance of the issue and nature of the policy/service
- Identify what is working well and what needs to be improved
- Focus on outcomes and tangible improvements
- Establish equality issues within the council's wider review and decision-making processes.

Consultation with service users, local people and communities of interest should be an important component of all EqlAs. Whilst often a useful early step, it is not enough in itself for officers to speculate on the impact of a policy or service on the people affected by it. A judgement will need to be made about the nature of consultation required, in proportion to the scale of the policy or service concerned.

It is anticipated that some of the following sources may be approached as part of the consultation:

- ❑ Umbrella organisations for community groups in Southwark such as Southwark race & equality council (SREC), Strategic ethnic alliance, Southwark community care forum, Southwark multi-faith forum, Southwark LGBT network, and Southwark action for voluntary organisations (SAVO)
- ❑ Organisations and groups representing specific communities, particularly those that have an obvious interest in your policy or service area
- ❑ Existing networks that different departments use to consult on the new policies and services.

Guidance on consultation related to equality and diversity, available on the social policy team's intranet pages, sets out more detail on who might be consulted and how that consultation might be organised. It addresses specifically the views expressed by Lord Ouseley that it is important that EqlAs seek feedback from the users and potential users/beneficiaries of a particular policy and function.

It is also important to make use of routine data. Our system of ethnic monitoring should mean that, in time, services will have a better understanding of who their customers are. Other information such as that received through the customer feedback process should provide further evidence of gaps or problems.

5. The role of the equality and diversity panel

In 2003, the Council established an equality and diversity panel (EDP). This panel comprises representatives from forums and organisations in Southwark with a particular interest in issues of equality, diversity and social cohesion. Members come from groups include representing the following communities:

- ❑ Black and minority ethnic
- ❑ Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
- ❑ Traveller
- ❑ Age related
- ❑ Disabled people

An important function of the EDP is to receive and review EqlAs, to comment on the way that they were carried out and to make recommendations for any further

actions that should be taken in addition to those identified through the assessment exercise.

To date, there has been a requirement that the EDP see all EqlAs twice: at the end of stage one and stage two. The large number of policies and services to be reviewed between 2005-08 means that it will not be practical for the EDP to review every single assessment that is undertaken. The social policy unit has consulted with the EDP on how they would like to prioritise the assessments are brought to panel meetings. It was agreed that the panel will receive:

- High-relevance function assessments twice - at the end of stage one and at the end of stage two
- Medium-relevance functions assessments once - at the end of stage one. Where significant issues become apparent at this stage, the panel will be able to request to receive the assessment at the end of stage two as well

These arrangements will be reviewed at the end of the first year of the new Scheme, in April 2006.

6. How do I carrying out an EqlA?

There are three stages to an EqlA:

- Stage one: scoping
- Stage two: assessment of impacts
- Stage three: making recommendations, taking decisions and formulating and implementing an action plan

The report structures below are designed to help you go through this process. Two report structures are provided, one for policies, strategies and plans and one for functions and services. Stage three is the same in both cases.

Stage one reports should not be any longer than six pages and stage two reports should not be longer than eight pages. Additional supporting information, if required, can be put in appendices.

It is important that reports are written clearly and in plain English, so that they are easy to understand. It is also important to avoid jargon or abbreviations. If you need to use them, make sure you explain what you mean the first time you refer to them. It should be possible for a layperson reading the report to understand the policy or service and its impacts without any previous specialist knowledge.

POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND PLANS

Stage one: scoping

1. What policy, strategy or plan is this assessment addressing?

Start by giving the title of your policy.*

Then underneath write one or two paragraphs that briefly describe the policy so that someone who was not familiar with this area could understand what the policy is about.

2. Is this a new or an existing policy/strategy?

If this is a new policy you simply need to state that, although if it has developed out of previous policy it might be useful to explain that this has occurred. If it is an existing policy it would be helpful to explain how long it has been in existence and why it has been chosen to review it at this time.

3. If existing, has the policy/strategy already been reviewed under the previous EqIA programme? If so, what were the findings to come out of this and has the agreed action plan been implemented? What has changed since the last assessment was undertaken (in terms of context, nature of the policy/strategy or the type of people affected by the policy/strategy).

The purpose of this question is to enable you to refer back to a previous EqIA, where one has been undertaken.

4. What do you think are the main issues for your policy or strategy in relation to equality, diversity and social cohesion?

Issues to consider may include:

- Whether your policy could have or is having a differential impact or unintended consequences which are disproportionately and unfairly benefiting or disadvantaging certain groups.*
- Whether there may be any barriers which could prevent certain groups from benefiting fully from what you are intending to happen as a result of your policy.*
- Whether there is any risk that the policy could lead to worsening relations between members of different groups or exacerbate tensions between communities.*

It is important to address all six equality areas here (age, disability, faith & belief, gender, race & ethnicity and sexual orientation), even if for some you just state that you do not think there is, or will be, a differential impact. You should also consider the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers and of refugees and asylum seekers.

Any issues identified here will provide an initial focus for the impact assessment.

** Policy is used as shorthand throughout for any policy, plan or strategy.*

Stage two: assessment of impacts

Part A: Feedback from the equalities and diversity panel

1. What feedback did the panel give you at stage one?

Part B: Purpose and aims of policy/strategy

2. What is the overall purpose of the policy/strategy?

This should be a short one or two sentence statement.

3. What are its aims?

These should be high level and there should be approximately three to five of these.

4. Could these aims be in conflict with the Council's responsibility to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote community cohesion and good relations between different groups

It is not enough simply to say no here – you need to justify your answer.

5. Does the documentation relating to this policy/strategy include specific reference to the Council's responsibility (as set out above) and a commitment to work to meet this?

If practical you could include short extracts from your policy here or references to relevant paragraphs and page numbers.

Part C: Application of this policy/strategy

6. What steps are you taking or will you take to ensure that the policy is or will be implemented consistently and fairly?

For example:

- How will you communicate and explain the policy?*
- Will you need to do anything additional to enable certain groups of people to participate on an equal basis?*

7. **Could the way that this policy/strategy is being or will be implemented be discriminating against any particular individuals or groups or be potentially damaging to relations between different groups?**

8. **What changes could you make to either the policy/strategy itself or the way it is applied to improve the positive outcomes for all groups and to reduce or eliminate any negative outcomes?**

9. **What information do you collect or do you plan to collect to monitor the impact of this policy/strategy on different groups?**

(For example, monitoring of understanding and use of policy amongst different groups).

FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES

Stage One: Scoping

1. What function or service is this assessment addressing?

*Start by giving the title of your service**

Then underneath write one or two paragraphs that briefly describe the service so that someone who was not familiar with this area could understand what the service is about.

2. Is this a new or an existing service?

If it is a new service you need to explain briefly why it came about.

3. If existing, has the service already been reviewed under the previous EqIA programme? If so, what were the findings to come out of this and has the agreed action plan been implemented? What has changed since the last assessment was undertaken (in terms of context, nature of the function or service or the type of people who use or who are affected by the service).

The purpose of this question is to enable you to refer back to a previous EqIA, where one has been undertaken.

4. What do you think are the main issues for your function or service in relation to equality, diversity and social cohesion?

Issues to consider may include:

- Whether there could be any barriers that might prevent certain groups from using or benefiting fully from your services that could be unfair or discriminatory in nature.*
- Whether your service could have or is having a differential impact or unintended consequences which are disproportionately and unfairly benefiting or disadvantaging certain groups.*
- How the service could help or is helping to promote community cohesion and good relations between members of different groups.*

It is important to address all six equality areas here (age, disability, faith & belief, gender, race & ethnicity and sexual orientation), even if for some you just state that you do not think there is, or will be, a differential impact. You should also consider the experiences of Gypsies and Travellers and of refugees and asylum seekers.

Any issues identified here will provide an initial focus for stage two of the impact assessment.

** Service is used throughout as shorthand for function or service.*

Stage Two – Assessment of impacts

Part A: Feedback from the equalities and diversity panel

1. What feedback did the panel give you at stage one?

Part B: Service delivery

2. What do you know about the level of need for this service amongst people from different groups:

- From local or national research
- From feedback from existing or potential service users
- From consultation with the wider community
- From what people who work or volunteer in the service tell you
- From any other credible source

3. What information do you collect to monitor service use?

(For example, monitoring of ethnicity, gender, disability status of users, recording of number and type of contacts etc.)

4. What does this information show about the use of this service by people from different groups and how does this correspond to what you know about levels of need?

5. What practical changes could you make to ensure that everyone who needs to is able to make use of your service (focusing in particular on any discrepancies you have noted between levels of need and service use)

Part C: Outcomes of the service

6. What do you know about the positive and negative impacts of the service for people from different groups?

- From local or national research
- From feedback from existing or potential service users
- From consultation with the wider community
- From what people who work or volunteer in the service tell you

- From any other credible sources

7. What practical changes could you make to improve the positive outcomes for all groups (but in particular those groups who are currently benefiting least) and to reduce or eliminate any negative outcomes or differential impact?

Stage three: Developing your action plan and making changes

Having completed stages one and two of your EqlA, you are likely to have identified a number of areas where improvements could be made. In stage three you will pull together a comprehensive list of the issues that have been identified so far. You will then outline what you are going to do to address these. This document has been designed to enable you to outline and keep track of the changes you are making.

Over the coming months you will complete three separate documents to take you through the different stages of implementing the necessary changes to your policy or service. There are:

- 1) Outlining what you are doing and how you are going to do it – developing your Action Plan (this document)
- 2) Measuring progress towards implementation, which occurs on a quarterly basis
- 3) Measuring the impact of the changes you have made. Once you have made all of the required changes, you will complete a final document that can be used to record what impact the changes you have made have had for different clients

This document is the first of these documents. It concentrates on helping you to draw up your Action Plan. Once this has been completed you should complete a quarterly progress report, which will help document your progress in relation to the actions you are committed to and the impact they are having.

Developing your action plan

The first step is to draw up your action plan. The following explains what needs to go into each of the boxes:

Completing the action plan
<p>Issue: The aspects of your policy /service which have been identified as presenting potential or actual problems</p>
<p>Action: The changes that you propose to make to address the issues that you have identified</p>
<p>Who: Those members of your team who will be responsible for making these changes. This should be added to unit business plans, individual work plans and monitored as part of performance management systems</p>
<p>When: The date by which the action will be completed. This should be realistic and achievable</p>
<p>Measuring Impact: What systems will you use to measure whether the changes you are making are having a positive impact on different communities and increasing the accessibility of your service. This could include increasing service take-up by particular groups or use of language support or reduced numbers of complaints</p>

Equalities impact assessment action plan: making changes				
Issue	Action	Who	When	Measuring Impact

Once your Action Plan is complete, **which must include sign-off by your Executive Member**, please e-mail it to the social policy unit. You now simply have to begin the work of making the changes you have identified.

Quarterly EqIA progress report

Having drawn up your action plan, it is important to monitor progress in implementing the different actions. Please complete the following progress report. This will help to ensure that you keep to the time-scales you have outlined and to seek advice from the social policy unit where you are experiencing problems with implementation of particular actions. The following outlines what information should go into each of these boxes.

Completing your progress report

<p>Action - The changes that you are making to address the issues that you have identified (simply cut and paste from the action plan)</p>

Progress - What has happened so far. This should be completed on a quarterly basis, identifying any progress and any problems you are encountering

Completed - Once you have fully implemented the action you simply need to add the completion date

Outcomes - What's changed as a result of your EqIA

Evidence - How do you know if things have changed

Action	Progress	Completed	Outcomes	Evidence

Once you have completed your progress report, please return it to the social policy unit. Further progress reports should be filled in by the responsible officer on a quarterly basis.

Stand alone progress report templates are available on the social policy team's intranet pages.

The social policy team's compliance and monitoring officer will be ensuring that all progress reports are completed to time, so that they may in turn be reported to chief officers equalities sub-group and the council executive.