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Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England

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Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone 020 7944 4400
Web site www.odpm.gov.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government considers equality and diversity to be an essential element of the modernisation agenda for local government. This reflects a growing realisation of the benefits of a more diverse and integrated workforce, and the importance of more responsive and flexible service delivery in combating social exclusion and building strong communities.

In order to support equality and diversity in local government, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) commissioned OPM™ to undertake research into how local authorities have addressed equality and diversity issues in three core areas of their work:

- Representation, participation and leadership
- Structures, committee organisation and staff
- Service procurement, delivery and impact

The project aimed to generate baseline information about equality and diversity practice in local authorities, and to begin to explore what seems to be working in each of the three areas of work, and why.

The project built on a literature review undertaken by ODPM, and involved a series of scoping interviews with key stakeholders, a baseline survey sent to all local authorities in England, and ten exploratory case studies. The baseline survey was jointly commissioned by the Dialog team in the Employers' Organisation, who had been planning a separate survey on similar equalities issues.

The main findings of this research are listed below.

Overview

Awareness of, attitudes to, and practices used to promote, equality and diversity vary across England's councils. There is a tendency to equate diversity with race, especially in rural areas with smaller numbers of people from visible minority ethnic groups. Whilst gender and disability were also considered important issues by some councils, age, sexuality and religion received markedly less attention. Overall there is a perception that some aspects of diversity may be easier to tackle than others: for example, physical access to buildings for people with disabilities seems to be regarded as less contentious than race issues. Councils also report that the legal requirements relating to race, and to some extent disability, channel efforts towards these issues, often at the expense of a broader approach to equality and diversity.

REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Despite being elected by local people, councillors are not always seen to be representative of the diverse communities they serve. There is some evidence that steps are being taken to address this problem – for example some councils are offering contributions towards childcare costs, others are running mentoring schemes to support new Councillors. However, the challenge of broadening representation is often perceived to be ‘beyond the Council’s remit’, and instead the proper responsibility of political parties.

Although widening the pool of elected councillors is regarded as important, it is clear that good community leadership involves more than elected representation of particular groups. There was widespread support for more proactive attempts by councillors to engage with the local community and recognition of the skills development that might be required to assist them in this task.

Community engagement techniques varied across the local authorities studied. However, current methods tended to be somewhat passive and ad hoc, focusing on the provision of information in various formats, rather than the creation of opportunities for meaningful involvement in on-going decision-making. The need for local authorities to develop more strategic and creative approaches to community engagement and involvement was recognised by many of the research participants.

Evidence of effective collaboration between members and officers on diversity issues was variable across the case study sites. However strong working relationships with clearly defined roles and responsibilities were regarded as important in progressing the equality and diversity agenda.

STRUCTURES, COMMITTEE ORGANISATION AND STAFF

There are many instances of effective practice in relation to staff recruitment, training and development. However the absence of a strategic, co-ordinated, and corporate approach to equality and diversity appears to be hampering further progress. It is clear that many councils lack a shared organisational understanding of equality and diversity and the breadth of issues that are relevant in this area.

The majority of people interviewed during the scoping phase placed a strong emphasis on the need for senior level commitment and clear lines of responsibility to ensure the effective promotion and delivery of equality and diversity policies and practices. This was borne out by the case studies, where interviewees in several sites and at all levels noted the importance of visible commitment from the Chief Executive’s office and the need for responsibility and accountability to be clearly defined, in order to ensure that policies and initiatives are followed through. Scoping interviews and case studies also showed the importance of strong performance management systems in providing councils with valuable intelligence about what works and evidence of impact to support the case for continued effort in this area.

SERVICE PROCUREMENT, DELIVERY AND IMPACT

Tackling equality and diversity in service delivery and impact is regarded as a much more complex and difficult task than addressing staff-related issues.

Many councils expressed doubts about how, practically, to integrate equality and diversity into mainstream service provision. Some councils lack accurate information on their populations and reported difficulties in monitoring services and assessing their impact. The broadening out of the equality and diversity agenda was seen to add to the significant challenge councils face in this area. In some rural areas there was a concern that focusing on diversity and the needs of particular communities in relation to service delivery might actually exacerbate community tensions.

We heard that there is potential to use the procurement process as a vehicle for promoting equality and diversity. However, some local authorities reported difficulties in making sure that their contractors comply with regulations and requirements.

There is a perception that current inspection regimes do not reinforce equality and diversity, as requirements tend to emphasise processes rather than outcomes, and different regimes are sometimes in conflict.

Doubts were expressed about the capacity of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to fulfil its policing role in relation to equality and diversity.

There are some clear opportunities and drivers to improve practice in the area of equality and diversity

There is a growing awareness of England's diverse population, and recognition of the mounting pressures on councils to respond to the new demands and accountabilities this creates, in relation both to staff issues and services. More specifically, there is a growing awareness, even among councils whose practices are not yet fully developed, that there is both a 'public service business case' and a moral responsibility to promote equality and diversity

Developments in the legislative framework are establishing a range of new expectations of councils, and mapping out a more proactive role for them in promoting the equality and diversity agenda. At the same time a range of other important factors are coming together. Modernisation and continual service improvement are reinforcing the kind of questioning, self-critical attitudes and behaviours that are also required to address equality and diversity issues. The neighbourhood renewal agenda, and the new focus on community planning, are highlighting the importance of consultation, engagement and responsiveness. Finally, the increasing emphasis on partnership working presents some new opportunities to share knowledge, experience and resources.

However, some blocks and barriers remain

Despite some clear drivers in the external environment, changes in attitudes and behaviour do not appear to be as far-reaching or consistent as might be expected given the length of time many equality and diversity issues have been on the agenda.

The failure of councils to develop and disseminate shared corporate understandings of equality and diversity that reflect current guidance appears to be a significant obstacle to

progress. In some cases, a climate of fear or uncertainty surrounds these issues, and this seems to be preventing councils from addressing the issues effectively. In other cases, there is a lack of practical competence, especially in how to integrate equality and diversity into mainstream service provision and assess the impact of policies and services. Under-developed management (and particularly performance management) systems also appears to be a block to the best intentions.

The current pool of elected members remains unrepresentative of England's population and councillors do not always have the capacity, incentive or interest to act as champions for equality and diversity. The cyclical nature of electoral politics with its emphasis on short term, vote-winning strategies does not always help to promote the equality and diversity agenda.

The absence of credible sanctions for poor performance and non-compliance with legislation means that efforts to promote equality and diversity sometimes lack a sense of urgency and real progress appears to depend instead on the personal conviction and commitment of certain key individuals. There is scope for central government to further clarify its expectations of local government.

Key recommendations to strengthen practice in the area of equality of diversity

Developing a more strategic approach and building best practice

Further work is needed to explore what kind of practical assistance is required by councils, differentiated by type and demography, to allow them to assess need, integrate equality and diversity into mainstream service delivery, and monitor and measure impact. Smaller councils in particular may need to work with others to access expert equality and diversity advice.

Such practical assistance needs to address the whole range of equality and diversity issues, including 'newer' aspects such as age, sexual orientation and race. Some councils may need assistance and encouragement to revisit the question of gender and tackle this more effectively, as there is some evidence to suggest that this issue may have dropped off the agenda.

There is a particular need to explore the kind of advice and assistance needed by councils in rural areas, to help them understand what diversity means in the context of small black and minority ethnic populations and to formulate appropriate strategies for addressing the broader range of issues to which diversity refers.

A number of longer-term, in-depth studies of local authorities are needed to find out exactly what impact particular measures have on organisational performance over time. Extension of the Beacon Council and other similar schemes might encourage excellence in this area.

Fostering leadership and cultural change

Real progress on the equality and diversity agenda will require strong and effective leadership from chief executives, senior teams and leaders, acting as champions for these

issues. Further work needs to be done to identify the kind of support that senior individuals require in order to assume such a role. Additional and possibly new types of training – either individually, or through action learning sets where senior staff and leaders can share best practice – need to be considered.

There is a need for further work with members to raise awareness of the need to consult with the whole of their constituency, and to take steps to target hard-to-reach groups in particular. Members may need more guidance on new and more creative techniques for engagement, so that they can expand their repertoire beyond established approaches, such as surgeries. Diversity concerns might be better integrated into existing training for members. Existing support for black and minority ethnic councillors needs to be better promoted, and further opportunities explored.

Improving community engagement

More help needs to be given to councils to help them improve community engagement. Progress needs to involve the development of a strategy for engagement that explicitly addresses how and why local communities should be engaged. The strategy needs to reflect the challenges of community engagement in different contexts, and the fact that different approaches will be necessary in particular situations, to consult on different issues, and with certain groups. Officers and members may then require further training in order to build their skills and capacity to deliver this strategy.

Inspection, regulation and sanctions

The capacity of the various commissions with responsibility for equality and diversity to undertake effective promotion, development, and regulation needs to be addressed. Thought also needs to be given to what is needed to encourage compliance with legislation and guidance, beyond sanctions.

Further work is needed to explore whether equality and diversity can be better integrated into mainstream service provision by including specific and measurable targets within established inspection regimes (and integrating diversity issues across inspection regimes). Targets need to focus much more specifically on outcomes and impact for local people.

CHAPTER 1

Overview

Introduction

Demands on, and expectations of, public services have developed enormously over the last decade, and this trend has not diminished under the Government's modernisation agenda for local government. Public services are encouraged to be citizen-centred, outcome-focused and equitable, to establish successful partnership working and to tackle equality and diversity issues in a holistic and effective way.

In the Government's drive to transform Britain into a society that is inclusive and prosperous, where equality of opportunity is a reality for everyone, the public sector also has to set the pace in the drive towards equality and diversity. Many different pieces of legislation are providing the framework for change, including the Human Rights Act (1998), the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000). The European Commission has passed legislation and disseminated guidance on equality and diversity. The Employment Directive and the Race Directive set out a more comprehensive anti-discrimination legislative framework that, over time, will include gender, age, sexual orientation and religion. Local authorities are expected to embrace this more complex and comprehensive equality and diversity agenda in order to deliver high-quality public services that address the needs of increasingly diverse communities.

To support this end, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissioned OPM to undertake a research project on equality and diversity in local government in England. Covering a wide variety of issues, the project aimed to develop an understanding of current practice and key challenges, and to identify ways in which local authorities can be supported into the future.

This report sets out the findings from the research under the following headings:

- Research brief
- Methodology
- Our underlying assumptions
- Summary of the data
- Emerging themes
- Good practice
- Opportunities and barriers

- Areas for further research

Research brief

A wide range of research has already been undertaken into equality and diversity and the factors that help promote them in local government¹. Audits of progress at the local level reveal considerable variation between authorities. This project aimed to extend the findings of work at the local level, to develop a clearer understanding of current policies and practices and what works, and to explore what more can be done to support local government as it pursues the equality and diversity agenda.

In particular, the project has three main aims:

- To provide baseline information on current practice in local authorities in relation to equality and diversity
- To gain a better understanding of the challenges that local authorities face in meeting the current and future requirements of relevant legislation, the Equality Standard, and the new EU directives
- To identify good practice in relation to the leadership styles, organisational structures and cultures, and methods of service delivery necessary to realise equality and diversity.

In pursuing these aims, this research explored a wide range of local authority roles and activities – in relation to both the internal environment of the council and the council's interactions with, and impact on, the local community. In order to focus the research, three interlinked thematic areas: representation, participation and leadership; structures, committee organisation and staff; and service procurement, delivery and impact were identified by ODPM. Within each theme, we identified and pursued a number of more specific research questions². These are summarised below.

Representation, participation and leadership

The aim of research under this theme was to explore the importance of representation, participation and leadership in local government, with particular reference to minority and under-represented groups, by identifying and examining:

- General and specific perceived barriers to members of different minority and under-represented groups participating as councillors in local government
- General and specific demands on councillors from minority and under-represented groups in their representative and leadership roles
- The importance attached to perceived differences in leadership and participation styles

1 A gap analysis of the ODPM literature review is provided in an appendix to this report, available on the ODPM website at www.local.odpm.gov.uk/research/crosscut/crosscut.htm

2 The full list of the research questions posed is provided in an appendix to this report

- The importance attached to achieving proportionate representation by councillors in relation to the local population
- The parameters of participation for those involved at different levels.

Structures, committee organisation and staff

Under this theme, the aim was to investigate local authorities' commitment to equality and diversity. This included how far they were fulfilling their general duty to promote equality and diversity and the structures and processes in place to tackle these issues (with a particular emphasis on staff issues). We did this by identifying and examining:

- The profile of local authority employees (within a number of case studies) to establish how representative they are relative to the local population, including reference to positions of authority and importance and areas of employment
- Barriers to promotion – general and specific, real and perceived – for employees from under-represented or minority groups
- Whether officers from under-represented or minority groups are expected to take on specific roles or tasks because of their membership of that group
- The importance for the authority and local communities of representativeness, consultation and participation in partnerships and on committees
- Barriers to participation, including in committees and partnerships, for different groups within the local population
- The extent to which the structures of the local authority explicitly reflect an equality and diversity agenda.

Service procurement, delivery, and impact

Under this theme, we sought to establish the importance of service delivery and the procurement of goods and services in promoting a meaningful equality and diversity agenda in local government. We did this by:

- Examining the effect of the equality and diversity agenda on service delivery and the procurement of goods and services
- Establishing how the local authority is judged across a range of services by different sections of the local population, including service users
- Investigating the local response to, and knowledge of, equality and diversity and local government, and the authority's success in managing equality and diversity.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

As the overview of aims and objectives above makes clear, the scope of this research is extremely wide, covering:

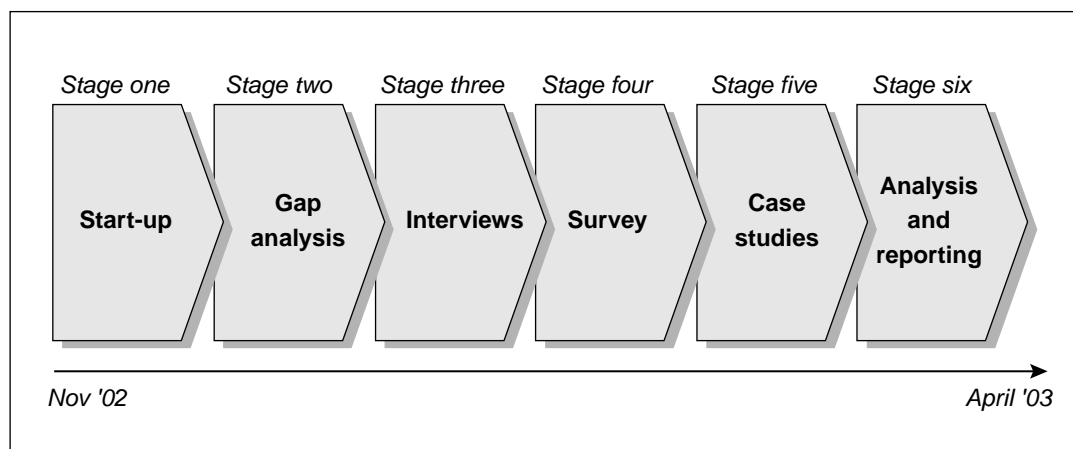
- The three thematic areas (including the inter-relationships between them)
- An inclusive definition of diversity (that is: ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability and religion)
- Views from a broad range of stakeholders, both inside and outside local government
- Baseline data about how local authorities manage the equality and diversity agenda
- Good practice in terms of what works.

Each one of these areas could easily be the subject of a substantial research study in its own right. It is important therefore to recognise that the timescale and scope of the project has not allowed for an in-depth study of all of these areas. While we have made use of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches to encompass the breadth and depth of current practice, we need to emphasise that this research provides an overview only. Further research may be needed to explore specific aspects in more detail and to validate findings. The final section of this report highlights some areas where further investigation might be needed.

An analytical framework was used to organise the research themes and to illustrate how attention to equality and diversity is necessary in relation all elements of a council's activity. The framework assumes a diverse community, made up of many groups and individuals. Various systems and processes, both in the internal and external environment, need to be considered and aligned in order to mainstream equality and diversity. Thus processes and structures that relate to representation should lead to diverse participation; appropriate staffing policies and practices lead to a diverse staff group; and procurement and best values processes should translate the council's efforts into diverse services which have a positive impact on increased equality. Intentional side effects of this work are better-informed authorities and a contribution to research and good practice in the area of equality and diversity.

Project stages and activities

Research was conducted in six phases, which are outlined in the diagram below:



Stage one: Start-up

This stage involved development of the analytic framework for the research, and finalisation of the methodological approach (email survey, gap analysis, case studies, validation event).

Stage two: Mapping of relevant literature

In order to make sure that the research built on learning generated from previous research, a mapping of relevant published and 'grey' literature was undertaken. This gap analysis built on a comprehensive literature review already completed by ODPM's research manager for this project. On the basis of this review and OPM's own experience and knowledge, available literature and data was mapped onto the three themes. This enabled identification of those areas and aspects that were well covered and those where there were knowledge gaps.

Stage three: Scoping interviews

The findings of the desk research were 'reality tested' with a series of short telephone interviews with key stakeholders. Interviewees were asked to identify what information they would find useful and meaningful as a spur to make progress on equality and diversity issues. They were also asked to identify some of the challenges ahead. The results of this scoping exercise helped to identify issues and questions to probe in the survey and case studies.

We interviewed a total of twenty-one stakeholders, including councillors and officers from various local authorities, representatives of the voluntary sector and other well-informed individuals. The table below provides information about the people who were interviewed:

Number of interviewees	Area of responsibility/ expertise	Organisation
1	Chief Executive	City Council
3	Head of Equalities	City Council
1	Equal opportunities	Borough Council
1	Head of Equalities	London Borough
1	Best Value Officer	City Council
1	Conservative Councillor	London Borough
1	Head of Procurement	London Borough
1	Equalities	LGA
5	Chair/Director	Voluntary Sector (CEMVO, Valuing People, Stonewall, Interfaith Network, OBV)
1	Policy Officer	Voluntary Sector (CEMVO)
1	Diversity	Academic
4	Chair/Head of Policy	Regulatory bodies (Audit Commission, CRE, EOC, DRC)

Stage four: Baseline survey

The evidence collected in stages two and three was used to inform the design and remit of a baseline survey, aimed at providing information on current practice on equality and diversity in local authorities. An email-based questionnaire was sent out to all local authorities in England, asking them to indicate what policies and practices they have in place and what they consider to be the main challenges in pursuing this agenda. This email survey was done in partnership with the Dialog team in the Employers' Organisation. Authorities were also asked to provide examples of good practice. Fifty-two per cent of England's 388 local authorities responded to the survey. Those that responded were representative of the total local authority community in England in terms of:

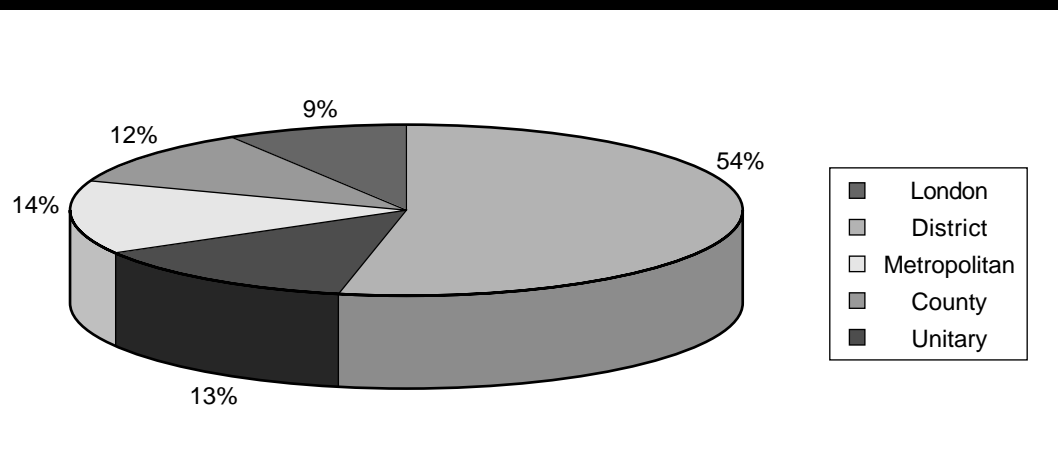
- size
- type
- geographical location
- local demographics
- political control
- socio-economic circumstances
- rural and urban context
- political management arrangements.

Political control of survey respondents compared with all local authorities in England

	Respondents		All local authorities in England	
	N	per cent	N	per cent
	200	100	388	100
Conservative	64	32	109	28
Labour	64	32	114	29
Liberal Democrats	16	8	27	7
Independent	3	2	14	4
No overall control	53	27	124	32

Where relevant totals do not equal 100 per cent, this is due to either non-response or computer rounding.

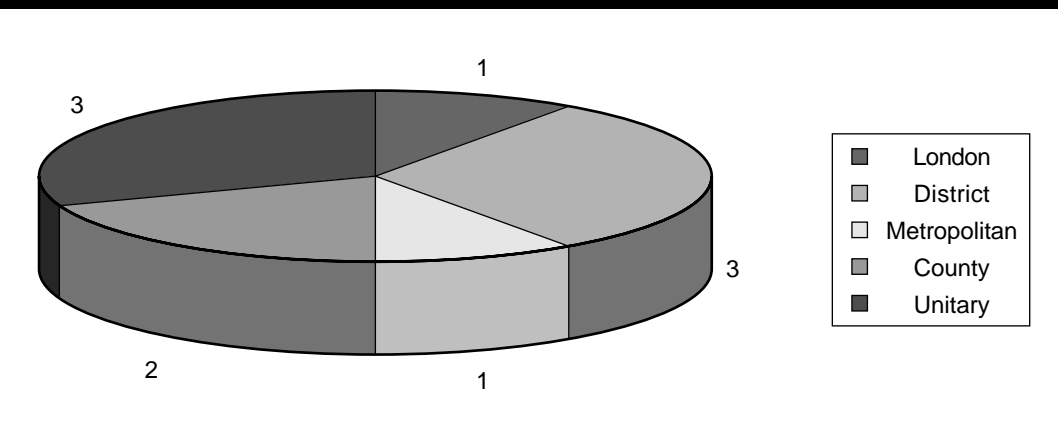
Survey responses by type of council



Stage five: Case studies

A sample of ten authorities were selected as in-depth case study sites, ensuring a broad representation of the variety of authorities in England in terms of the criteria set out above. The chart below indicates the types of authorities that took part as case studies.

Type of authority selected for case studies



Case studies involved two-day site visits, during which we carried out qualitative consultation with stakeholders within the local authority and the community.

Some case studies looked at departments in-depth, while others focused on the efforts of the local authority as a whole. Each case study involved:

- a review of council documents
- face-to-face meetings with the chief executive
- a series of interviews and focus groups with other staff and stakeholders
- interviews with present and former councillors
- interviews or focus groups with service users and community organisations.

In each case study, we asked a series of questions based around the three themes, building on findings from the baseline survey, scoping interviews, and gap analysis. These were set out in an interview protocol agreed by ODPM. Case studies allowed us to explore in more detail current practices, progress to date, perceived blocks and challenges, and ideas and suggestions about what works and why. The case study sites comprised 3 urban councils, 2 rural, and 5 mixed urban and rural. A case study was undertaken in each of the regions, including London, except for the East of England region where two case studies were conducted to bring case studies to a total of ten. In terms of political control, two councils were Conservative, four Labour, one Independent. Two councils had no party in overall control at the time of the case study visit.

Stage six: Analysis and reporting

In order to verify the emerging findings and begin to identify and recommend new measures for the future, we held a workshop with 20 participants, comprising representatives from some of the case study areas and other external stakeholders. Participants were invited to discuss and ‘test out’ the main themes and issues. The workshop offered an opportunity to ‘reality check’ each case study with a mixture of national experts and those working in the field, allowing a cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives across the case study sites, and resulting in a sharpened focus on the key findings.

Findings from the gap analysis, scoping interviews, baseline survey, and case studies were also reported separately and can be found in full in the appendices³. In this report, we summarise the main findings from each of the data sources and then identify the key themes that emerge from the data overall.

Underlying assumptions

Equality and diversity is a hugely complex and difficult area for research. It is an area of social policy where political choices and action come up against firmly held values and beliefs about social justice, identity and morality. It is a topic that is often fraught with disagreement, confusion and anxiety.

³ These reports are available on the ODPM website.

Our brief was to survey policies and practices in the area of equality and diversity in order to identify gaps in provision, explore barriers to progress and unearth examples of good practice. We sought to find out what is going on in local government, and how people within and outside councils feel about the challenges they face. In carrying out our work, we have made use of the definitions provided to us by ODPM. However, given some of the complexities of conducting research in this area it is appropriate to set out some of our underlying assumptions about equality and diversity.

For this research the equality and diversity agenda is defined in a broad way, to encompass any dimension on which someone might be excluded from equal and fair treatment. The equality and diversity agenda is set in the context of the wider social inclusion agenda and efforts to engage communities with the structures and processes of political life. Responsiveness to diversity is understood to be central to efforts to improve the quality of public services. The terms equality and diversity are assumed to refer to age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity and religion.

Managing equality and diversity is about recognising and valuing individual differences across a range of personal and group characteristics, in order to achieve greater business effectiveness and enhanced human relationships. It applies both to internal staff and to external relations with customers, stakeholders and communities. It is about enabling every member of an organisation to maximise their potential and ensuring that services are appropriate and sensitive to the needs of diverse service users. It requires changing attitudes, managerial style and organisational structure, and introducing flexible systems appropriate for a range of needs.

The OPM team began this project with a generic understanding of equality and diversity. However, during the course of the research, it became clear that such generic understandings are not particularly helpful in guiding practice in the face of significant differences in local demographics, experience and capacity. We return to this issue in later sections of the report.

CHAPTER 3

Summary of the data

In the section below, we provide a brief summary of the findings from each of the four research strands. For the purposes of brevity, this section is not structured around the three research themes; however, information on each theme is included here. The next section of this report looks at the three themes in more detail.




For a fuller description of research findings from the gap analysis, baseline survey, scoping interviews and case studies, please refer to the appendices.

Gap analysis

The desk research identified a number of areas within the thematic framework (see Methodology, above) where existing knowledge is patchy. While a significant amount of both academic and practical research has been conducted on issues relating to ethnicity and gender equality, disability and age are less well covered, and research in relation to religion and sexual orientation is very limited at present.

Information about structures, committees and staff is fairly comprehensive, not least as a result of monitoring requirements introduced by central government. A significant amount of research exists on representation, participation and leadership, although by its nature this tends to be ‘softer’ data than that for staff and structures. We found information on service procurement, delivery and impact to be least comprehensive, with existing studies tending to be fairly localised and specific. The table below identifies where there is most and least current knowledge.

	Representation, participation and leadership	Structures, committee organisation & staff	Service procurement, delivery and impact
Gender	Some information	Most information	Some information
Age	Some information	Some information	Least information
Disability	Least information	Some information	Least information
Ethnicity	Some information	Most information	Some information
Religion	Least information	Some information	Least information
Sexual orientation	Least information	Least information	Least information

Key  Most information  Some information  Least information

Across all themes, we found more information and data about structures and processes and less about impact. While there is substantial data on numbers, profiles and so on, there is far less 'soft' information about what works and the pressures and challenges that authorities face.

Baseline survey

With a response rate to the survey of 52 per cent, the findings provide a good baseline picture of equality and diversity across the 388 English councils. The email survey was carried out in partnership with the Dialog team in the Employers' Organisation.

The survey shows that most authorities are monitoring their workforce on gender, age, disability and ethnicity. However, fewer authorities monitor their communities on these dimensions, and even fewer their councillors. Only a few authorities monitor their workforce, communities or councillors on sexual identity and religion. Authorities are, however, more likely to hold statistical data on their community's religious beliefs than on the beliefs of staff or councillors. The findings do not reveal data about how often the records are updated or in what form the records are held.

Equality and diversity issues are included in policies more often when they relate to staff issues (recruitment and selection, training and development and bullying and harassment) than when they relate to service delivery and procurement issues. One in nine authorities responding to the survey had not published a race equality scheme, although this is a requirement of the Race Relations Amendment Act, and one third of authorities have not yet adopted the Equality Standard.

Most of the initiatives that were reported as best practice in our survey focused on ethnicity and disability. There were fewer initiatives in other areas. The most popular initiatives focused on establishing internal and external groups and forums and conducting surveys.

Only a few councils have taken a strategic, 'joined-up' approach to equality and diversity. Seventy-three per cent of respondents reported having an inter-departmental group supporting the equality and diversity function. Thirty-five per cent reported having a separate budget to cover corporate equality and diversity initiatives.

Survey findings were checked for variance in responses according to structure, political control and the percentage of black and minority ethnic groups in the community. There were few notable differences in responses according to structure and size of black and minority ethnic population; however, the political control of authorities had some impact on the responses.

Scoping interviews

The scoping interviews suggested that local authorities are finding it difficult to do justice to all the different areas of diversity and equality. The large number of different requirements set out in legislation, inspection regimes and guidance make it difficult to know how to integrate strands of work and distinguish real priorities. Interviewees said that central government needs to make more explicit links between different requirements, and

to show how new initiatives relate to existing ones and to the broader social inclusion agenda.

Our interviewees felt that implementation of legislation was at best patchy, and saw the failure to effectively monitor and track initiatives as key to poor performance. There was a feeling that failure to take implementation seriously at a corporate level encourages cynicism and disillusionment among those expected to deliver policies and the intended beneficiaries of the policy – allowing discrimination and frustration to persist.

The equality and diversity agenda was seen as largely process driven – encouraging the ticking of boxes and filling of forms, rather than being driven firmly by a concern with improving outcomes. Some interviewees expressed concerns that equality and diversity policies and race equality schemes allow authorities to sound as if they are doing things when they are not.

Interviewees reported a tendency for numerous small initiatives to be launched, without a more co-ordinated, corporate approach to the issues. Initiatives were often left in the hands of junior staff without enough authority to forge links between projects and create a ‘spill-over’ effect. Most people we spoke to stated that a more co-ordinated approach was needed, with designated individuals at a senior level being given responsibilities and being held personally accountable for meeting them.

Interviewees expressed concern about the under-representation of minority groups in decision-making structures – as councillors, community representatives, leaders and officers. They felt that mainstreaming will only begin to be effective when leadership within these groups is developed and minority groups have opportunities to present a range of perspectives through formal structures.

Interviewees expressed confusion and concern about who has the power and capacity to hold public bodies to account on equality and diversity issues. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was seen by some interviewees as under-resourced, capacity-strained and difficult to deal with. The CRE and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) were perceived as being in a state of flux, and so not able to adequately support local authorities.

Finally, interviewees suggested that institutional discrimination remains a problem in society and in local government. Government at all levels is still not good at acknowledging or talking about the problem.

Case studies

Findings from the case studies reveal that most authorities have the relevant policies and procedures in place, but that implementation of these policies is variable. Three authorities had made significant progress in a number of areas: employment, involvement.

The findings point to the need for some authorities to put in place clear and strong leadership, backed up by sufficient resources, to drive the equality and diversity agenda forward and meet policy objectives. They also signal the need for co-ordinated, corporate responses, rather than piecemeal, *ad hoc* measures. Cross-cutting structures are in place in most authorities, but structures tend to include only senior staff, and knowledge of these

structures is often poor at junior levels. Case study authorities demonstrated a keen interest in learning from other authorities and sharing best practice.

Representation from diverse communities among officers and, especially, among councillors, was regarded as poor in the majority of councils. Most case study authorities are exploring ways of tackling this issue – with some success in relation to staff. However, the problem of how to boost minority representation in the council chamber was seen by interviewees in case studies as very difficult to solve.

Despite the length of time that equality and diversity issues have been on the agenda, case studies revealed that attitudes and beliefs have not changed as much as might be expected. Many councils lacked a shared understanding of the issues, and there was a tendency for participants in rural areas to associate equality and diversity issues with race, and therefore to perceive the issues as less relevant to their situation.

Although most authorities are providing equality and diversity training for staff, there are questions about the quality and appropriateness of this, and the extent to which it actually helps people to address equality and diversity issues in their job. A key issue is the need to create safe spaces in which ‘awkward conversations’ can take place and problems can be acknowledged honestly.

In many case study authorities, participants argued that inadequate baseline data and poor or patchy monitoring and performance management were hampering progress towards greater equality and diversity.

CHAPTER 4

Emerging themes

In the section that follows, we consider the full range of data collected during the course of this project and set out some of the over-arching themes that emerge. Our aim is to provide an overview of the rich tapestry of opinions, views and practice around equality and diversity, under the three research themes. Inevitably, there is some overlap across the three themes, but broadly the section on representation, participation and leadership focuses on political leadership and community engagement, the section on structures, committee organisation and staff on the internal structures and working of the council, and the final section on service delivery and impact in the community. Issues relating to legislation, policies and procedures are clearly pertinent to all three themes. For the purposes of this report, however, they are addressed primarily under the section on structures, committee organisation and staff.

The text that follows reflects views and information given to us by participants, rather than the opinions and judgements of the consultancy team. Throughout the text we have inserted in boxes some information on particular approaches and initiatives that participants have adopted to respond to the equality and diversity agenda. These examples are largely drawn from the case studies.

Representation, participation and leadership

REPRESENTATION

Scoping interviews and case studies revealed a widespread perception that councillors are not representative of local communities. Many officers we spoke to described councillors as overwhelmingly white, middle class and middle-aged to elderly. Participants in the scoping interviews stated that there are very few black executive members or senior politicians in local government, and that representation declined further after the May 2002 elections.

In nine of the case study authorities, interviewees explicitly recognised that councillors do not reflect the demographic make-up of the local population. In the majority of these cases, both councillors and officers recognised this as a problem. However, councillors in both rural and urban case study sites tended to stress the difficulty of addressing this issue, given the general lack of interest in council politics among local communities. Councillors in seven case study sites suggested that the considerable time involved in attending council meetings and undertaking associated duties excluded those with busy full-time jobs or caring responsibilities from standing. Several members we spoke to during the course of the case studies felt that new political structures exacerbated this problem, with the onerous time commitments required of cabinet members acting as a particular barrier. This sentiment was echoed by several interviewees during the scoping exercise.

In several of the case studies, we were told about specific barriers facing would-be BME councillors. In one County Council, we heard that despite considerable efforts to attract a more diverse body of councillors the council has only two black and minority ethnic members. We were told that there was considerable reluctance amongst individuals from some communities to get involved with the council. Two reasons were given for this. First, there was a sense that some potential candidates were fearful that they might let their communities down if they either stand and do not get elected, or are elected and fail to deliver improvements for their community. Secondly, potential candidates from black and minority ethnic communities, many of whom are self-employed, are reluctant to give up substantial amounts of their time to council work, especially when many of the meetings take place during the day.

In terms of the literature available, there is considerable information on the barriers preventing members of black and minority ethnic communities and women from standing as councillors, although there is limited information about the barriers for people with disabilities. With respect to age, the literature tends to be quite general, with references to the general apathy among young people that prevents engagement in political processes and structures. We found no information on barriers to participation in relation to religion or sexuality.

In the course of carrying out the case studies, we heard that a number of councils are taking steps to address the issue of unequal representation: one authority in a rural area, for example, is offering a small amount of financial support for childcare. The survey also asked local authorities about targeted initiatives or programmes to widen participation, representation and leadership. Approximately half (52 per cent) of responding local authorities said that they had implemented targeted initiatives in the area of ethnicity; a similar number (47 per cent) indicated they had done so in the area of disability; just under a third (30 per cent) said they had implemented initiatives in the area of gender; and a quarter (27 per cent) indicated that they had done so in the area of age. Only one in nine (11 per cent) informed us that they had implemented targeted initiatives to increase wider participation, representation and leadership of people with different sexual orientations, and one in ten (10 per cent) had done so in relation to religion.

However, there are clearly concerns about where responsibility for action in this area lies. Several officers we spoke to during scoping interviews and case studies expressed concern about interfering with an issue that was regarded as beyond the council's remit, and something for political parties to address.

In one Metropolitan Unitary, Labour councillors told us they have made real **efforts to get women and black and minority ethnic candidates to stand** for elections. They have organised open evenings at the town hall, and also offer a mentoring scheme for new councillors, which has proved successful. However, they argue that they are faced with significant cultural barriers, such as the restrictions placed on some Asian women. This was a problem they had encountered when trying to encourage Bengali women to stand as school governors. Other important barriers such as time pressures and childcare responsibilities were also thought to exclude some people from standing. (*Metropolitan Unitary Council, urban, South East*)

In one of the scoping interviews, a head of service stressed the importance of recognising the links between service provision and representation. If people's experience of service delivery has been negative, this can have an impact on their perception of the council as a place to work or become a councillor. Another scoping interview participant stated that efforts by authorities to attract members from black and minority ethnic backgrounds must be coupled with attempts to make sure that a representative number are assigned some formal responsibility.

In two case studies, both with very small ethnic minority populations (less than two per cent) representatives from the voluntary sector (local disability rights groups and faith groups) revealed that they did not actually perceive representation to be crucial. So long as elected members were sympathetic and local services were able to meet the culturally diverse needs of various communities, it was almost considered more advantageous for such communities to retain influence from outside the council, rather than to be represented by 'one particular voice'. This point was echoed by one of the scoping interview participants, who argued that 'political representation' is not the same as 'true representation'. The interviewee stated that 'it is naive to believe that just by having more black councillors, we are better represented – it is more complex than that. There need to be higher levels of representation throughout the public sector agencies.'

Effective monitoring of councillors across a range of diversity categories may help to raise visibility of this lack of representation and provide better baseline data, something that was regarded as important by many case study participants. Our survey revealed that monitoring of councillors by gender, age, ethnicity and disability is much more common than monitoring by the more 'hidden' aspects of diversity, such as religion and sexuality. However, monitoring of any kind is far from universal. Forty-five per cent of respondents to the survey hold records on gender for all or some of their councillors, 34 per cent on age, 28 per cent on ethnic origin, and 24 per cent on disability. Only 2 per cent of respondents hold records on the religious beliefs of their councillors, and none of the local authorities surveyed holds records on the sexual orientation of their councillors.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP, PARTICIPATION, AND CONSULTATION

In three of the case study authorities, elected members expressed the view that they were representative of the community by virtue of being elected. In the majority of case studies, however, officers and councillors stated that being elected is not on its own sufficient to ensure that members fulfil a community leadership role. There was a perception among many officers and some councillors that members need more support, training and guidance to fulfil the community leadership role. In scoping interviews, a central government interviewee pointed to the need to understand what community leadership means in practice. In one authority which we visited, with a very small ethnic minority population, councillors suggested that despite their best efforts to represent the community, minority groups might want to be represented by and communicate with someone like themselves. In a rural district authority with a very small ethnic minority population, councillors we spoke to indicated a strong need to raise member awareness of equalities issues, as well as awareness of the levels of prejudice that exist within the local community. In three other authorities, officers suggested that all members would benefit from training on diversity and equality issues.

The importance of strengthening participation and improving practice in the area of consultation emerged as a central theme in all the research strands. This reflected a growing recognition, in line with the DETR's *Modernising local government: Local democracy and community leadership* (1998), which states that 'open and in-touch councils will be at the centre of their local communities. And at the heart of council's role will be leadership – leadership that gives vision, partnership and quality of life to cities and towns all over Britain'. However, while most officers and members were aware that engagement needs to be closely linked to the political and managerial processes of their authorities at all levels, realising this in practice was considered to be extremely challenging.

Our research identified some good practice in the area of consultation and engagement. Many of the case study authorities are taking steps to produce information in a variety of languages and formats. Council officers and members told us about a whole host of consultation and engagement techniques they are employing, including surveys, citizens panels, focus groups and better use of Internet sites. However, many of the initiatives we heard about were passive activities, rather than robust mechanisms for continuing engagement and involvement in real decision-making. Several scoping interview and case study participants talked about the need to develop new and more creative ways of engaging the public, and were keen to hear more about what other councils are doing in this area. Others stressed that council officers need more training in consultation skills.

In order to strengthen engagement with certain communities, one County Council has facilitated the creation of a **Network for Minority Ethnic Women**. The purpose of the network is to encourage and support work with and for women from minority ethnic communities in the area, to enable them to identify, access and participate in economic and social opportunities. The network, which is supported by the council and meets within council buildings, seeks to share good practice, offer advice and consultancy to employers and service providers, develop partnerships with organisations in order to ensure a more coherent approach by these agencies, and provide training opportunities to improve social and professional development. (*County Council, mixed urban and rural, Cumbria and North West*)

Participants in scoping interviews and case studies felt that it is important to take a strategic approach to consultation. They suggested that authorities should link up with partners to make sure that communities, especially small communities, do not suffer from consultation overload. They stressed the importance of taking into account the capacity of any community targeted for engagement and identifying any preparatory work that needs to be done to build capacity –providing different or better information, for example. During the scoping interviews, one voluntary sector representative stressed the need for consultation and involvement to be defined by the public's agenda, not the council's, and to take place at a time and location that is convenient for the people being consulted. He noted that people need to feel that their voices are central to decision making if they are going to take the time and effort to become involved. This view was echoed by a number of community representatives in the scoping interviews.

In one Metropolitan Council, officers **recognised the business case for effective engagement** and had employed some **innovative and creative techniques to consult** with people from diverse communities. The council's engineering and traffic services received a number of comments and complaints from disabled members of the public concerning the borough's street environment. The council realised that it would be cheaper to consult with the disabled members of the public first, rather than to carry out expensive engineering works and have to make changes later on, when the new street environment turned out not to be suitable. In response to this issue, the council decided to produce *The Journey*. *The Journey* is a film that catalogues the problems that can be faced by disabled people in the borough on a day-to-day basis. To prepare the film, various members of the public with different types and levels of disability went out into the borough to highlight specific problems with some street environments. *The Journey* is used as a reference guide for engineers so that they will not lose sight of the needs of the disabled public when carrying out works and devising projects. The film is also now used at various universities on engineering courses. A copy is available at the British Library. (Metropolitan Unitary Council, urban, South East)

One scoping interviewee from the voluntary sector highlighted the importance of not undermining the authority of local government bodies through over-emphasising 'community representation'. He stressed that the council has been elected to represent local people and, while it is important to get consultation right, it is also important to recognise that 'community representatives' are not elected or directly accountable to their community, nor necessarily representative of the wider community as a whole.

Members in one case study also pointed out that councils face challenges in reconciling conflicting issues both *within* and *between* ethnic communities. For instance, in their area, the Muslim Society does not want the council to talk to other groups representing Muslims, which has caused some local friction. In the same authority, representatives of the Jewish Community Council stated that the authority had been extremely sensitive to their cultural needs; however, they pointed out that their particular community is very well organised and almost self-sufficient. They suggested that the council finds it more difficult to provide for less cohesive communities. Equally, members and staff representatives in one rural District Council expressed the view that consultation with minority groups is especially difficult in rural areas, as communities are more dispersed and 'hard-to-reach groups' are extremely hard to reach.

The importance of leadership in progressing the equality and diversity agenda was stressed by many of the people we spoke to in case studies and scoping interviews. One case study participant in a rural District Council told us that the new political structures paved the way for sympathetic cabinet members to drive the agenda forward, even if there was limited support among backbenchers. However, only 16 per cent of the local authorities that responded to our survey informed us that their leader is charged with promoting equality and diversity, and under half (48 per cent) that an executive member holds the equality and diversity portfolio. In twelve percent of authorities the deputy leader holds the portfolio, and in nine per cent it is held by another member. Sixteen per cent of authorities reported that no one holds the equality and diversity portfolio.

In our analysis of the literature, we found that research on the importance attached to perceived differences in leadership and participation styles across the different groups is limited, although some information is available about minority ethnic and women councillors. There has been some research into the importance attached to achieving proportionate representation in councillors, particularly in relation to black and minority ethnic councillors. We found considerable research about the general and specific demands faced by black and minority ethnic councillors, although we did not find comparable information for the other categories.

Structures, committee organisation and staff

LEGISLATION, POLICIES, AND INSPECTION

In our survey the vast majority of local authorities reported that equality and diversity issues are included either to a great extent or to some extent in their organisation's written policies on recruitment and selection (96 per cent); training and development (84 per cent); bullying and harassment (80 per cent); service delivery (77 per cent); grievances and disciplinary (75 per cent); and best value performance plans (69 per cent). Fewer councils reported that equality and diversity issues were included in their community plan (68 per cent) or their written policies on flexible working (58 per cent) or service procurement (56 per cent), with high proportions in fact reporting that equality and diversity issues are either not at all included in these policies or that no policy has yet been developed in these areas. It is not possible from this data to draw conclusions about the impact of the policies and practices in place. The majority of case study authorities include equality and diversity in written policies on recruitment and selection, training and development, flexible working, bullying and harassment, service procurement, service delivery and community plans.

Our survey also revealed that eleven per cent of responding authorities have not yet published a race equality scheme, although this is a requirement of the Race Relations Amendment Act. Seven of the case study authorities reported that they had developed a race equality scheme, although implementation is at different stages. One was in the process of developing the scheme.

The Equality Standard explains the steps that local authorities need to take to identify and remove barriers to ensuring fair and equal treatment in services and employment, with regard to gender, race and disability. The Standard is included as a Best Value Performance Indicator for 2002-03. One third of survey respondents have not yet adopted the Equality Standard. Twenty-four per cent said that their authority would adopt the Standard within the next year; six per cent that their authority will adopt it in more than one year; and one per cent that their authority will not adopt the standard for the foreseeable future.

Three local authority representatives consulted during scoping interviews felt that the equality and diversity agenda is being unhelpfully skewed by statutory and regulatory requirements. One noted the tendency for councils to focus on responding to inspectorates and best value performance indicators (BVPIs). As a result, local authorities channel effort into their race equality schemes and to meeting other BVPIs around race, gender and disability. Other aspects of diversity are likely to receive little attention in the absence of

specific indicators. In one case study, a unitary authority had taken steps to address this, with an approach that treats all aspects of diversity as if they had the same statutory requirements, to ensure that particular minority groups are not left off the agenda.

Twenty-three survey participants identified initiative and policy overload, together with difficulties understanding and implementing the current legislation, as a key barrier to progress. Several interviewees and case study participants expressed uncertainty about how to integrate the various strands of diversity work, and the competing or conflicting demands of the government agencies charged with policing different parts of the equality and diversity agenda. Two scoping interviewees suggested that establishing a single equalities body might help to clarify the priorities.

In eight of the case study authorities, disability awareness and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act was reported as high on the diversity agenda. However, the time and costs involved in making significant alterations to buildings were noted as being considerable. One authority had however conducted a thorough compliance assessment and had committed a significant portion of its budget to carry out the required changes. Very few people we met during the course of the case studies made reference to legislation on gender issues.

Participants in scoping interviews pointed to the lack of credible sanctions available to the bodies responsible for policing council activities in the area of equality and diversity. A voluntary sector representative suggested that the CRE in particular does not have the capacity to fulfil its policing role, while a policy manager noted that the CRE and EOC appear to be in a state of flux, making it hard to look to them for support.

Several case study participants suggested that, while the legal and policy aspects of equality and diversity are obviously important, they are only the first step in making sure that issues are tackled adequately. One case study participant suggested that equality and diversity work should not just be about the avoidance of lawsuits. Rather, it needs to focus on educational, cultural and attitudinal change – fostering a climate of respect for all.

Officers and members in two rural District Councils we visited expressed the view that legislation and guidance on equality and diversity is often inappropriate for areas with small black and minority ethnic communities. In both of these, interviewees described their area as predominantly white and middle class, apart from pockets of ethnic minority communities and poverty in some places. In one of these authorities, many interviewees expressed the view that the issue of ethnic diversity was not therefore particularly relevant or of pressing importance to the council's work. In the other, it was noted that 'developing an appropriate approach to equality and diversity issues in a rural, predominantly white area, with a small ethnic minority community is particularly challenging.' In a third rural District Council, case study participants insisted that for the diversity agenda to be taken seriously, it has to be regarded as part of a broader approach to building social inclusion that takes equal account of the problems faced by isolated rural communities as well as minority ethnic groups.

STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

Some of the interviewees in the scoping phase of the research, and many of our case study participants, felt that the location of the equality and diversity function within the organisational structure of a council was a significant factor in its success. The majority of people we spoke to felt that success was dependent on responsibility being located at the heart of the organisation, and on senior-level commitment.

According to our survey results, the equality function is located in the chief executive's office in only 25 per cent of responding local authorities (although in 19 per cent of responding authorities it is situated in the corporate equalities unit). In 30 per cent of responding local authorities, the officers responsible for equality and diversity are situated in multiple departments. In twelve per cent of authorities they are situated in the service departments. While only 9 per cent of survey participants stated that the equalities function is situated in the human resources (HR) department, the view of several of our scoping interviewees was that this practice is common. One interviewee expressed the view that this needs to be stopped – arguing that if the impetus comes from HR, it will lack sufficient corporate clout to bring about systematic and fundamental change.

The survey asked local authorities whether the post holder or post holders who deal with equality and diversity have other responsibilities. Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) of post holder(s) also have responsibility for employment; two thirds (69 per cent) also have responsibility for services, three-fifths (59 per cent) also have responsibility for community development, and half (49 per cent) of those authorities surveyed said their post holder was also responsible for representation, participation and leadership. Smaller numbers of respondents said that their post holder(s), responsible for equality and diversity, also deal with corporate policy (3 per cent), the Chief Executive's department (2 per cent), and/or legal services (2 per cent). Thirteen per cent of those surveyed also indicated that the post holder(s) were responsible for equality and diversity or deal with 'other' areas. 'Other' includes organisational development and governance, management investigation, e-government, best value and faith issues. Finally, one per cent of respondents indicated that their authority has no specific post holder.

The need for a co-ordinated, corporate response to equality and diversity issues was raised during a significant number of our scoping interviews and case studies. There was concern that, while laudable initiatives might be happening in various places across the organisation, without a co-ordinated approach they could only ever have limited impact, and synergies and shared learning would be lost. The survey asked authorities whether or not their organisation has an interdepartmental group co-ordinating the equality and diversity function. Overall, about three quarters (73%) of responding councils said they did.

One scoping interviewee and several case study participants talked about the need to involve those individuals who were passionate about equality and diversity issues, rather than forcing reluctant people to take on unwanted responsibilities. A voluntary sector representative who was interviewed during the scoping stage stressed the importance of making sure that initiatives have broad structures of support, so that they can be sustained over time even if key individuals move on.

Scoping interviews and case studies pointed to the need to link responsibility for equality and diversity to individuals' job descriptions, and to make sure that equality and diversity

are built into competency frameworks for managers. The survey asked to what extent those members of staff responsible for equality are held accountable. The vast majority (81 per cent) reported that the relevant staff were held accountable either to a great extent or to some extent. A further eight per cent (8 per cent) reported that those staff that are responsible for equality are held accountable only to a little extent, three per cent (3 per cent) that relevant staff were not at all accountable, five per cent (5 per cent) said that no staff were directly responsible for equality and diversity and the remainder (4 per cent) reported that they did not know.

In a number of case studies, participants highlighted another important issue - namely that diversity initiatives are likely to be less successful where authorities do not already have effective management systems and processes in place to enable them to link up and learn from activities. In three Borough Councils and a County Council we visited, interviewees expressed a concern that a lot of data is being collected about equality and diversity, but that it is not being put to good use. Local authorities that had successful working performance management and appraisal procedures appeared better placed to achieve real change in the areas of equality and diversity. A Unitary Council we visited stressed that strong performance management is key not only to improving practice, but also to sustaining commitment and morale.

One case study illustrates some of the tensions that councils face in structuring their response to equality and diversity. A Metropolitan Unitary currently has a **separate equalities unit**, which was established in 1992. The unit has responsibility for:

- further development and implementation of the councils' valuing diversity strategy
- providing advice and leadership in responding proactively to new legislation
- ensuring that the equality and diversity agenda is considered in all policy development
- supporting members in their leadership role
- ensuring that there are strong links with the community and voluntary sector
- providing increased access to services through interpretation and translation services
- capacity building to deliver the diversity agenda
- training
- research and special projects

Following a best value review, which recommended that the council should make 15 per cent efficiency savings, it is highly likely that the equalities unit will be disbanded and **equality and diversity issues 'mainstreamed' into service delivery areas**. The community and some staff felt that the whole equality and diversity agenda would be marginalized if this approach is adopted; they attributed past success to the existence of a dedicated team of professional staff. Whilst there is agreement that equality and diversity should be mainstreamed across the council, there is doubt about whether this can be achieved without a specific unit to support the work. (*Metropolitan Unitary Council, urban, South East*)

Several people we consulted discussed the importance of adequate resourcing for equality and diversity work. The issue of resources came up thirteen times in the scoping interviews, and *all* the case studies talked of the difficulties of progressing the diversity agenda in the

context of limited resources. Our survey revealed that, overall, only 35 per cent of responding authorities designate a separate budget to equality and diversity.

One case study authority noted that links between officers and members with equality and diversity remits are not always strong, and that more effective working relationships would help to advance the equality and diversity agenda.

STAFF

Our gap analysis found comprehensive statistical information on the profiles of local authority staff across many areas of diversity. This is backed up by survey findings, with 100 per cent of respondents stating that their council holds records on some or all of its workforce by gender, 90 per cent by age, 99 per cent by disability and 100 per cent by ethnicity. However, only 6 per cent of survey respondents hold records on religious beliefs and 3 per cent on sexual orientation.

Participants in three of our case studies felt that individuals may choose not to reveal some diversity issues, thus undermining the validity of the data. Disability registration is voluntary, and we were told by officers in two case study authorities that staff, particularly at more senior levels, might not be willing to register for fear of the stigma that continues to be associated with disability. Interviewees in another case study expressed doubts about the appropriateness and usefulness of attempts to collect data on sexuality and religion, as these areas are perceived as particularly sensitive.

At least five of the councils we visited were taking steps to increase diversity in the staff body. Measures mentioned to us included placing advertisements in specialist publications aimed at minority groups, recruiting in the community and offering work placements for staff from particular groups. The survey showed that most initiatives to improve diversity among staff focus on ethnicity and disability. Authorities are least likely to have implemented any targeted initiatives in relation to faith or sexual orientation.

One District Council told us about efforts they had made to improve the **recruitment and selection process**, to try to ensure that it does not discriminate against certain candidates. The selection team now receives no personal information about the candidate until after short-listing is complete. Anyone who meets the job specification must be invited to interview. The HR department administers a survey of all applicants in terms of gender, race and disability, and writes to people who have requested information about vacancies but not followed through with an application. *(District Council, rural, Midlands)*

One County Council we consulted was keen to increase recruitment from local people with disabilities. To this end, the council designed and successfully implemented a **work-placement scheme for disabled graduates**. The scheme offers placements of six to ten weeks, to give graduates the opportunity to sample employment in local government. The scheme has been well received and has led to permanent employment being offered to one of the graduates. *(County Council, mixed urban and rural, South East)*

However, even where staff numbers reflected the local population, there were concerns about the levels of responsibility and authority that members of some communities were attaining. In one case study site, a black employee pointed out that gaining promotion often involves far more than just adequately fulfilling one's job description. In the same case study, staff from minority groups expressed concern that a new emphasis on informal mentoring and coaching of staff targeted for promotion may leave members of diverse groups at a disadvantage in career terms. Senior officers in this authority seemed aware of these issues and are planning to develop firmer criteria for entry onto training courses, and formal mentoring opportunities specifically for staff members from diverse groups.

In one case study site, participants told us about a specially tailored programme designed to build the confidence and skills of women aspiring to senior management positions. However, overall, we heard less about gender than about race and disability during the case studies. It was not clear whether this was because participants felt that considerable progress has been made on this 'older' diversity issue and it is therefore no longer considered to be pressing, or because it has fallen off the agenda.

One scoping interviewee noted that many managers continue to hold outdated views and this makes it difficult to ensure that the equality and diversity agenda filters down to all parts of the organisation. Case study visits confirmed that attitudes and behaviours vary considerably across and within councils, depending on the service area, leadership and culture of the department or division. The attitudes of staff and managers are seen to be particularly problematic in some rural areas, where there is a perceived lack of direct experience of diversity issues. In one rural District Council interviewees claimed that pockets of outdated views persisted in some parts of the organisation, and that changing the attitudes of 'blue-collar' front line staff was particularly difficult. We were told that this group often found it hard to appreciate the relevance of equality and diversity training to their job, and their dispersed location and hours made attendance at training events more difficult.

There was a sense that some diversity issues are easier to tackle than others – perhaps because of people's underlying beliefs about the issues. Interviews with case study participants suggested that race and sexuality are more emotive than other areas of diversity, and are harder to tackle for this reason.

Two case studies highlighted the importance of imposing credible sanctions on people who behave in an unacceptable fashion. Staff in one case study authority stressed the importance of sending clear messages from the top of the organisation about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and taking action against those found to be behaving inappropriately. Effective bullying and harassment procedures were also widely seen as important in upholding equality and diversity. The survey and case studies revealed that monitoring of grievances and tribunals was variable across councils. In rural areas, we heard from several case study participants that there had been very few grievances linked to discrimination; however, they were not sure whether this was because discrimination did not exist, or because people felt uncomfortable about using the grievance procedure.

Three of the case study authorities appeared to have well-developed support groups for minority staff. These councils also have procedures for meeting and consulting with support groups on policies and other relevant issues. In one authority, however, we were told that a black workers' forum was regarded with suspicion by some white staff, who may perceive

the forum as unnecessary or resent the time that minority staff spend attending meetings. This council has significant numbers of ethnic minority employees in the lower tiers and a few senior black individuals at third-tier management level and in professional roles, but very few in the middle band.

In one Unitary Council, the council provides funding for a **Black Workers' Forum (BWF), Age Forum and Disabled Workers' Forum**. The possibility of setting up a gay and lesbian forum is also being considered. We were told that the forums provide staff with the opportunity to discuss and address issues specific to their experience, and to help with the development of council policies and initiatives. Forums receive and manage a training budget, and the BWF has used this to bring in training facilitators and mentors to help **build capacity and facilitate career development**. The Chief Executive demonstrates her commitment to equality and diversity by meeting with the different forums every three or four months. *(Unitary Council, mixed urban and rural, South East)*

Survey data revealed that 78 per cent of responding authorities required senior managers to attend equality and diversity training, 78 per cent expected this of middle managers, 76 per cent of human resources staff and 73 per cent of front-line staff. In 9 per cent of responding authorities, no one was required to attend equality and diversity training.

In one case study, several people spoke favourably about their in-house training course, which had made equality one of the core competencies under which staff are trained and appraised. For the most part, staff have welcomed this additional investment in training; however, a concern was raised by one interviewee that 'awareness raising is not the same as changing behaviour', and that changing behaviour would take a long-term and sustained effort. A local authority interviewee in the scoping exercise echoed this point and suggested that traditional awareness-raising training has largely failed to make a real impact.

Participants in several of the case studies pointed to the difficulty of providing meaningful training in a half or single day. In a London borough case study, senior officers flagged up the need for more sustained training for managers or some kind of network to help and support them with equality and diversity issues. There was a feeling that some managers may be embarrassed or frightened to admit that they need additional help getting to grips with some of the issues in this area, particularly given the large size of the local black and minority ethnic population.

A local voluntary organisation in one County Council has been contracted to provide **HIV and sexuality awareness workshops** for senior and middle managers. The workshops focus on both the legislative and the moral bases for equal treatment of diverse individuals. The workshop organisers told us that they aim to create an **open and supportive environment** in which staff members are free to explore issues and raise any questions they might have. They felt that these conditions were important prerequisites for successfully challenging and changing beliefs and perceptions. *(County Council, mixed urban and rural, East)*

Interviewees in one case study in a rural area expressed support for training that focuses on personal stories and makes the issues come to life. This approach was seen to be particularly appropriate in rural areas, where the issues were perceived to lie outside of people's everyday experience. One of the local authorities we visited was carrying out innovative awareness raising and training using a local theatre group.

Moving on from simple awareness raising, one Unitary Council has developed some innovative training activities that are designed to help staff to implement good equality and diversity practice in their work. There is now a comprehensive **equalities training programme linked to service and business planning**. The course runs for three days, with a focus on mainstreaming equalities and analysing the impact of policies on minority groups. All directors and service leaders have received this training, which will be translated from the directorate through the senior management structure to the service plans. Attendance was compulsory, and the exercise has involved around 400 staff. The training was funded by the learning and development department and cost £50-60,000. (*Unitary Council, mixed urban and rural, South East*)

Service procurement, delivery and impact

DELIVERY AND IMPACT

A number of scoping interviewees and the majority of case study participants revealed that council efforts in the area of equality and diversity have tended to focus on employment and other staff issues, rather than service delivery and impact. This was backed up with findings from the survey, which showed that while over 80 per cent of authorities include equality and diversity issues to a great extent or to some extent in their organisation's written policies on recruitment and training, for example, only 69 per cent include these issues in best value performance plans, and only 56 per cent in service procurement.

Four of the case studies stressed the importance of having accurate information about local communities and their needs in order to ensure that there is appropriate and effective service delivery. The survey showed that the majority of responding authorities hold statistical data on either all or some of their community in terms of ethnic origin (81 per cent), gender (78 per cent), age (73 per cent), and disability (69 per cent). Seventeen per cent of local authorities report holding records on the religious beliefs of either all or some of their community. Only 3 per cent hold records on sexual orientation within their local population.

When asked whether their organisation had implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to ensure that services met the needs of all communities, 52 per cent of survey respondents said they had implemented initiatives to ensure that services met the needs of all communities in relation to ethnicity; 47 per cent said they had done so in relation to disability; a third (30 per cent) in relation to gender; 27 per cent in relation to age; and one in nine in relation to sexual orientation (11 per cent) and religion (10 per cent).

One County Council has drawn up guidance to **help staff to integrate equality and diversity into service planning and delivery**. Heads of Service are sent a list of ten key questions to prompt their thinking and to check their own and their staff's awareness of the relevant legislation and council policies and procedures. The ten questions are:

- Do you know what the current statutory duties are for your service, with respect to race, gender and disability?
- Have *all* your staff been fully briefed on equality issues as they affect the delivery of your service?
- Are you collecting evidence to check that the services you provide are equally accessible to all local citizens?
- Are you using that evidence to identify any possible barriers to service take-up by minority users?
- Do you have an action plan for eliminating these barriers?
- Have you consulted with relevant minority groups over improving access?
- Have you linked your equality action planning to relevant best value plans, or to statutory targets/performance indicators?
- Have you considered how to adopt the County Council's plans for increasing the diversity of its workforce?
- Have all staff involved in recruitment/interviewing received appropriate training?

(County Council, mixed urban and rural, East)

However, mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the impact of initiatives designed to improve service delivery in terms of equality and diversity were seen to be weak or underdeveloped. Many case study participants regarded impact assessment as highly challenging. This was due to the number of initiatives that may be going on at once across the council, and the difficulty of establishing causality. One participant criticised regulators for their emphasis on processes rather than outcomes. Several participants in the scoping exercise suggested that the regulatory bodies need to provide better leadership and guidance to councils on how to integrate equality and diversity issues into effective service delivery. Three scoping interviewees suggested linking the various inspectorates and co-ordinating performance indicators across inspection regimes.

The importance of building diversity into community relations was noted in both the scoping interviews and case studies. A few case study participants and scoping interviewees stressed the need to make sure that the council's efforts to strengthen equality and diversity in the area of service delivery are linked into the community plan, community cohesion initiatives, local strategic partnerships and other partnership work. The potential dangers of not doing so were noted in one rural District Council, where several participants expressed concerns that focusing on delivering the specific services needed by minority communities might exacerbate community tensions, rather than facilitating greater inclusion.

Literature in the area of service delivery and impact is fairly limited. Institutes such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have carried out considerable research at a more specific level, looking at service delivery in particular service areas for particular clients, such as housing for disabled people. MORI polls provide useful information about service users' satisfaction with local services, but these tend to be limited to ethnicity, gender, disability

and age. MORI surveys in 1998 and 2000 showed a mixed picture for black and minority ethnic communities, with black citizens more likely to say that public services fell a long way short of their expectations. These findings were backed up by the scoping stage of this research: interviewees reported a perception that local authorities have failed to meet the needs of BME communities, who are dealing with increasing problems of poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and discrimination.

SERVICE PROCUREMENT

Under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, councils are held to be responsible for the behaviour of their supplier organisations. Two local government representatives who took part in scoping interviews argued that procurement has a lot of potential to address diversity issues – the contractual process gives councils the opportunity to use their leverage to encourage positive behaviours. One of these interviewees suggested that if only a small amount of large budgets could be directed towards minority groups and those companies employing them, this would create an instant injection of money into diverse communities.

One District Council had worked hard to develop an effective and appropriate **corporate purchasing** equal opportunity policy statement. The statement recognises ‘that the pursuit of equality of opportunity is essential for a productive and professional business environment’. In particular, there is a commitment to ensuring that contractors:

- (a) Aim for equality of opportunity in terms of access to their services and that the provision of services reflects, and is appropriate to, the needs of the diverse communities within the population;
- (b) Give prospective and present employees equal and fair treatment in relation to recruitment, selection, terms and conditions of employment, training and promotion.

The statement lists the requirements for potential contractors in terms of both service delivery and employment practices, before laying out the equal opportunities legislation contractors are expected to comply with. The statement also provides definitions of the different types of discrimination (both direct and indirect) as defined by the various legislation, codes of practice and recommendations. (*District Council, mixed urban and rural, North East*)

However, survey findings demonstrate that existing practice in service procurement is far from ideal. Although 70 per cent of authorities reported that contractors are assessed in the tendering process, only 26 per cent reported that contractors are assessed on their compliance with equality legislation in the contractual period. Large numbers of interviewees (38 per cent) did not know whether or not contractors were assessed in the contract period. There were no sizeable variations in terms of whether contractors are assessed in the post-contract period.

An officer with responsibility for procurement interviewed during the scoping exercise suggested that European Union (EU) legislation might prove to be a stumbling block to advancing the equalities agenda, as outsourcing is regulated by EU legislation covering large contracts, which has a strong focus on free movement of capital. She felt that this may limit

the efforts of individual local authorities to take positive action in contracting out, and prevent them from working with small, locally based enterprises and minority-led businesses.

Some good practice was evident in the case study authorities. One of the case study sites had conducted an extensive exercise involving partners and lawyers, and created a comprehensive and thorough procurement system that was compliant with current and future legislation. Case study and scoping interviewees suggested that local authorities might need to strengthen capacity and build skills in the area of contract specification, monitoring, and management.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis

In this section, we reflect on the data gathered during the course of the project and set out some of the key opportunities and drivers for progressing the equality and diversity agenda in local government. We then explore some of the significant blocks and barriers that are hampering change. This section derives the data gathered during this project, but also draws on OPM's wider experience in this area.

Opportunities

There are a number of opportunities and drivers for change in the broader environment, as well as within councils more specifically. Of course, many of these opportunities also have potential pitfalls or problems associated with them, and we try to signpost these below.

SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS

Local authorities are facing new, and in some instances increasingly vocal, challenges to adapt themselves and their services to meet the needs and demands of an increasingly diverse population. The research suggests that some authorities are rising to these challenges more positively and successfully than others.

England's BME population is growing. Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of minority ethnic groups in England rose from six per cent to nine per cent. However, minority groups are often clustered in certain parts of the country, in particular towns and cities, and within these, in specific neighbourhoods and areas. This mixed geographical picture is made more complex still by the fact that particular communities often have very different needs. As the case studies demonstrate, these factors create very different types of pressures on authorities across the country. Councils will need to demonstrate considerable flexibility to develop appropriate local responses.

There were 12.1 million women of working age in employment in autumn 2001; of these 7.2 million were employed full-time. Among women with dependent children, those whose youngest dependent child is under 5 years of age have the highest rate of unemployment. Authorities need to engage with the particular needs of women - especially those with young children - if they are to design appropriate services and combat poverty and social exclusion. And as more than two-thirds of those employed in public administration, health and education are women, authorities also need to think about how best to accommodate women's life circumstances and preferred working practices. However, findings from the research suggest that gender may not be as high on the agenda as race or disability.

According to the 2001 census, almost 9.5 million people (18.2 per cent) say they have a long-term illness, health problem or disability that limits their daily activities or the work

they could do. This is an increase since 1991, when 13.3 per cent of the population of England and Wales were recorded as having a long-term illness. In the same period there has been a 3.4 per cent increase in the number of people aged 65 and over. This has implications in terms of how local government addresses the issue of disability when recruiting and retaining staff and also in terms of its' provision and planning for the needs of older people and carers.

GROWING AWARENESS OF THE 'PUBLIC SERVICE BUSINESS CASE' AND BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

In those areas of the country with significant and visible diverse communities, local authorities are likely to be more aware of both the pressures and opportunities that diversity brings – a finding that seems to emerge from our research. However, local authorities in those areas of the country that are perceived to be more homogeneous may not recognise these factors to the same extent. The challenge will be to broaden definitions and understandings of equality and diversity, beyond the most visible aspects (especially race and physical disabilities), to include a whole host of other issues, such as age, rural isolation, gender, sexuality and care responsibilities; and to show how responding to diversity offers a means of improving services for all.

There are some clear benefits for employers in responding to equality and diversity issues. Challenging an oppressive work environment will help to improve productivity by raising motivation and commitment and boost profitability by reducing staff turnover, while also minimising the risks and costs associated with conflict resolution and industrial tribunals. In a rapidly changing environment, it is also in the organisation's best interest to attract people with new and different ways of thinking. Capitalizing on differences encourages creativity. Employees that mirror broader demographic shifts can also be better placed to understand a range of customers. Recognising the diversity of the customer base will allow the organisation to develop new services to meet the needs of ignored or marginalised groups. Furthermore, working with communities and building a reputation for fair behaviour and approaches will strengthen local authorities' image and could result in improved levels of civic responsibility, community engagement and participation.

AN EVOLVING LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Recent developments in legislation and policy, together with existing requirements, set out some far-reaching expectations on local government.

Key developments in the legislation

The Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) extends the 1976 Act in relation to public authorities, outlawing race discrimination in a range of functions not previously covered. It places a new 'general duty' on specified public bodies, including local authorities, to work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. The Act requires local authorities to prepare and publish a race equality scheme, setting out how the authority intends to meet this general duty and a range of more specific obligations, for example around consultation and staff training.

Some councils in our study reported anxiety about ‘positive discrimination’. However, the Act does allow for ‘positive action’ to be taken to help members of under-represented racial groups to compete on equal terms with others in the labour market, for example through targeting members of a particular racial group to apply for particular work, or providing special training for a particular group, where people of that group are under-represented. Whilst the Race Relations Amendment Act ‘general duty’ to promote equality and diversity is to be welcomed, our research suggests that many councils do not understand exactly what this means in practice. Even more specific duties around consultation are problematic, as many authorities lack an understanding of what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’ practice. There are concerns too about non-compliance or poor compliance with the legislation – an issue that is highlighted in this study by the number of authorities who have not yet published a race equality scheme.

Although gender was not mentioned to any great degree during the course of this study, councils are bound by the terms of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), which makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sex or marital status. The Act applies to both males and females and makes sex discrimination unlawful in employment, vocational training, education and provision of goods, facilities and services and housing. Councils are also subject to the Equal Pay Act (1970), which makes it unlawful to offer different pay and conditions where women and men are doing the same or like work, or work of equal value in terms of the demands that it makes. The fact that this legislation and the issue of gender more generally did not feature very heavily in survey responses or case study interviews raises some concerns that the issue may have dropped off the agenda.

Under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), since December 1996 it has been unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability. Since October 1999 this had meant that employers have to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, such as providing extra help or making changes to the way they provide their services, and from 2004 they will need to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. These developments clearly have the potential to encourage far-reaching change that will benefit disabled people. However, although our study revealed an emphasis on physical disability and considerable concern with the state of council premises with a commitment to increasing access, there was a tendency for officers to frame the issues in terms of aspirations rather than legal requirements, frequently citing the considerable difficulty and costs involved.

Broadening the equality and diversity agenda

The CRE Standard has now been replaced with the Equality Standard for Local Government, developed by the Employers’ Organisation with the CRE, Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Council. The new standard allows local authorities to self-assess, on a number of levels, their progress in delivering equality to ethnic minorities, women and disabled people. The new integrated standard covers both services and employment. This recognition of the need to adopt a broader approach to equality and diversity issues is clearly to be welcomed. However, some concerns remain. Our study revealed some uncertainty about how to integrate and prioritise across the three areas covered by the standard. And there was a perception that the emphasis on these areas, particularly on race and disability, may prove detrimental to others, which may only be covered by voluntary codes or guidance.

Consultation and participation

In the area of consultation and participation, the *Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services* White Paper (2001) reinforces the importance of recognising that 'local areas are becoming more diverse', and sets out the need for councils to hear the whole range of voices from the community. This need was recognised by many of the councils in this study, both in the baseline survey and the case studies. However, the study suggests that current consultation practice tends to focus around information gathering and provision rather than real attempts to involve local people, and participants were rarely given any feedback on the impact of consultation. It seems clear that the quality and nature of consultation processes will need to improve if councils are going to meet this challenge.

The recruitment and role of councillors

The White Paper *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People* (DETR 1998) was published in the wake of a government consultation paper on local democracy and community leadership, which highlighted the poor representation of black communities in the current body of councillors. The Government has committed itself to recruiting more black councillors, and calls on councils to take every opportunity, particularly in the context of streamlining their structures, to consider how their meetings can be scheduled to accommodate a more diverse group. It hopes that the new structures, offering a combination of more rewarding roles for councillors and steps to address potential financial or other disincentives, will encourage recruitment from a wider cross section of the community.

INSPECTION REGIMES AND FOCUS ON CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Inspection cycles provide another vehicle for making progress on the equality and diversity agenda. The discipline of meeting best value and comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) requirements reinforces the kind of systematic, proactive and questioning stance that is also necessary to achieve change on the equality and diversity agenda. The adaptations required to manage diversity effectively, in terms of responsiveness, managing change and learning from people from different backgrounds, arguably keep an organisation flexible and better able to meet ever-increasing demands to improve performance in other areas.

However, although inspection regimes have some potential as a means to raise achievement levels in relation to equality and diversity, the research points out that at present pressure for real change is minimal, because equality and diversity issues are not included as core, specific and targeted measures within all inspection regimes. There is also a concern that the targets that do exist tend to focus on the establishment of processes rather than the achievement of outcomes and do not always reflect the complexity of the work required. Of course, some authorities do appear to be making progress on equality and diversity, even in the absence of a firmer steer from the government and the external environment. However, we argue that these tend to be authorities in more diverse areas, which face greater pressure to change from their staff and the local population. Our research suggests that, in those areas where communities appear more homogenous and external pressure for change is minimal, a stronger and clearer approach to target and expectation setting might be required. This is not to say that examples of good practice, for example in relation to race equality, cannot be found among councils with quite low ethnic minority populations.

COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PLANNING AND PRIORITISING

The Government's neighbourhood renewal agenda also provides an important driver for change. Moving away from the top-down approach of previous regeneration initiatives, neighbourhood renewal has clearly placed local people and voluntary sector groups at the heart of attempts to build safe and productive communities. With the advent of community strategies, authorities have new responsibilities to involve local people in planning and prioritising to meet local needs.

The research highlights some important questions about the appropriateness of much current practice around consultation – the difficulty of reaching some groups, the problem of councils relying on consultation with the 'usual suspects', and the very significant issue of whether public consultation results in real changes to service provision. However, there is a degree of commonality between the neighbourhood renewal and equality and diversity agendas, and the general thrust of policy in this area seems to reinforce the 'bottom-up', proactive and responsive approach that is also necessary to tackle equality and diversity issues.

A community-focused approach to service planning and delivery may be easier in urban areas, where transport and communication links tend to be better. In rural areas, a more dispersed population, together with a lack of voluntary sector capacity and infrastructure, can make engagement more challenging. This was certainly a factor mentioned to us by some rural councils. Nevertheless, rural councils have a clear responsibility to improve practice in this area; they have an opportunity to link equality and diversity to a broader agenda around neighbourhood renewal and social exclusion, presenting it as part of a wider attempt to provide a more sophisticated and responsive service to their publics.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

There is a growing emphasis on partnership working at a local level, with local authorities increasingly working side by side with other statutory agencies and private, voluntary and community sector organisations. This new approach, and the new structures that have been created – particularly local strategic partnerships – create opportunities for partner agencies to share experience and benefit from each other's learning on equality and diversity. Some of the officers we spoke to during scoping interviews and case studies mentioned that they were already sharing best practice with partner organisations and neighbouring authorities. They valued the local knowledge of partner organisations, and expressed the view that it is far easier and more effective to learn from real-life stories and concrete examples than from guidelines and policies. Partnership working also offers the opportunity to pool resources and achieve economies of scale. This might be particularly helpful in rural areas, where diverse communities may be hard to reach, and for District Councils that have less capacity. A 'joined-up', collaborative approach to consultation and engagement should also help to avoid over-consultation with the same groups – something that can have negative effects on council-community relations.

However, while partnership working offers some opportunities for local authorities, it also presents some risks. A lack of shared understanding of the issues and desired outcomes can act as a stumbling block to a co-ordinated approach. Ensuring that partner agencies work to appropriate standards can be challenging in the absence of real control. Different

approaches to, and systems for, collecting and recording information means that performance monitoring and management is even more difficult than for single organisations. Finally, new or poor quality relationships between partner organisations can threaten progress on this and other service delivery areas. Equality and diversity concerns need to be adopted as founding principles in any partnership arrangements, and targets need to be set and monitoring systems established so that partners can be held accountable for their actions.

Barriers

In the opinion of the consultancy team, there are a number of significant underlying blocks and barriers that stand in the way of more effective practice in the area of equality and diversity.

ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

It seems clear that there has been some shift in attitudes to, and beliefs about, equality and diversity in England over recent years. Developments in the legislative environment, widespread coverage of numerous serious racial incidents (including the Stephen Lawrence case), a more positive, progressive attitude towards individuals from minority groups in some parts of the media and a whole raft of work-related training and more general awareness raising and campaigning initiatives have highlighted the issues and started the process of changing values and behaviours.

However, despite these welcome developments, our findings suggest that, while there are positive, progressive attitudes and a significant level of awareness and commitment among some staff and members in some councils, this is not necessarily the case across the country.

A few of our interviewees used language and expressed opinions that cannot be considered to fit with the thrust of legislation and guidance in this area. For example, we heard interviewees stating that 'there aren't many coloureds around here'. When asked about sexuality issues, one interviewee stated that 'there was a rumour that there was a gay boy in one of my teams'. Several interviewees we spoke to were at pains to point out that black and minority ethnic people in their community 'weren't any trouble' or 'made an effort to fit in' – views that clearly imply an underlying association of race and diversity with social problems. This seemed to be a particular problem in authorities in more rural parts of the country.

While senior executive staff, cabinet members and leaders tended to show a greater level of sympathy with and commitment to equality and diversity issues than junior staff or backbenchers, they did not always seem to fully appreciate the implications of their statutory responsibilities to promote equality and diversity. Staff and members in urban, cosmopolitan areas tended to demonstrate a better understanding and higher level of commitment to equality and diversity issues. Knowledge, awareness and commitment were particularly poor in some rural areas. Some differences in attitudes and behaviour in rural areas are perhaps not surprising, given smaller black and minority ethnic populations and therefore less direct personal experience of some diversity issues. However, with the advent of new statutory responsibilities it is clearly not acceptable for councils to reflect what may

be majority attitudes in their local population. Rather, they have an obligation to lead the way and question, and take meaningful steps to overcome, established attitudes and perceptions.

It seems clear that progress on the equality and diversity agenda will be hampered by the continued existence, in large parts of the country, of the kinds of beliefs and attitudes outlined above. These beliefs and attitudes will need to change before significant progress in the areas of staff treatment and development, community participation and service delivery can be expected. Cultural and attitudinal change is hard to achieve, but it is likely that this will require high profile and genuine commitment on behalf of senior staff and councillors, and the existence of skilled and confident middle managers who are able and willing to act as champions for equality and diversity and to cascade policy commitments down to the organisation's front-line. It will also involve suitable and effective approaches to manage situations where inappropriate behaviours are demonstrated.

ABSENCE OF FULL AND SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS

It was common for individuals within councils to have very different conceptions of equality and diversity, perhaps reflecting their different roles and responsibilities, personal beliefs and previous work and life experience. In several of the councils we visited we were explicitly told that there was no commonly understood, shared understanding of these issues.

When prompted for their understanding of equality and diversity issues, a number of interviewees expressed confusion and asked for further clarification of the terms. It was common for interviewees to offer thoughts and reflections on race, when faced with the question 'what do you understand by the terms equality and diversity?' or 'what are the equality and diversity issues you face as a council?' Disability, and to a lesser extent than might have been expected, gender, were sometimes mentioned. Other aspects of diversity, such as sexuality, age and religion, tended to be mentioned infrequently, unless people were explicitly prompted by interviewers to consider these issues. Very few interviewees talked about the links between various aspects of diversity or talked about equality and diversity in the context of the broader social inclusion agenda.

The evidence we gathered from interviews and case studies seems to suggest that there is still a degree of confusion about the definition and scope of the concepts of equality and diversity. The broadening-out of understandings of diversity seems to be adding to confusion, and in some areas contributing to a sense of powerlessness in the face of an impossibly large and complex challenge. It seems likely that confusion over the terms and terrain and a lack of shared corporate understanding will make systematic attempts to address equality and diversity issues more difficult. Councils need to develop a shared understanding of the term and of the particular diversity issues in their area. They then need to prioritise the issues so they can move forward with targeted and meaningful action.

LACK OF CONFIDENCE ABOUT ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

While legislative changes, some media coverage, and training and campaigning activities have helped to highlight the importance of equality and diversity, they may also have

created a climate of anxiety around these issues. Several interviewees we spoke to stated that they or their staff felt anxious and under-confident about expressing opinions or asking questions about equality and diversity. Some interviewees stated that the importance attached to the appropriate use of language in this area exacerbated their own or others' anxiety.

Anxiety seems to focus around different types of issues in different areas. In urban settings, where populations are more diverse and awareness of the importance of the issues tends to be greater, anxiety seems to focus on the implications of 'getting it wrong'. In rural areas, we found pockets of anxiety and concern about how best to convince the majority population that the issues are important and challenge unhelpful beliefs and attitudes.

In our judgement, the anxiety and fear that often surrounds these issues is a significant barrier to improving practice. Councils need to consider how they can build 'comfort zones' – safe spaces where people can have open and honest discussions about equality and diversity issues without fear of losing face or suffering other repercussions. Without these opportunities to reflect on the issues in a supportive environment, it seems likely that a whole host of unacceptable views will be pushed under the surface and will persist, unnamed and unchallenged.

LACK OF PRACTICAL COMPETENCE

Many of the individuals we interviewed in the case studies expressed concerns that, while they had some understanding of the thrust of current legislative requirements, they did not fully understand how to translate this into concrete actions and outcomes in their council. Several interviewees stated that there was insufficient guidance on how to integrate equality and diversity into existing practices, particularly in the area of service delivery.

The question of when and how to mainstream equality and diversity is an area where people are particularly lacking in skills. There is a danger that councils may confuse mainstreaming with service provision for the majority, leaving minority communities marginalised once again. Councils need to link targeted help with mainstream improvements, so that the whole community benefits. Even if beliefs and attitudes can be changed, shared understandings disseminated, and fear and anxiety overcome, this may not be sufficient to improve service quality and outcomes significantly in the absence of practical guidance and skills.

DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

While democracy provides an obvious incentive for elected members to consult with, and attempt to meet the needs of, local communities, it does not, on its own, guarantee effective community leadership. Under some conditions, democracy can make it even more difficult to address some complex or highly contentious community issues. In areas with sizeable minority communities, it may be in members' interests to appeal to these communities in order to ensure re-election. However, if numbers are small or geographically dispersed, members may not have the same electoral incentive to focus on the needs of these communities, and equality and diversity considerations might be squeezed out.

Indeed, promoting the equality and diversity agenda might be regarded as politically risky, in an area where the majority views this as unnecessary or undesirable.

The cycle of electoral politics also seems to work against a sustained attempt to address equality and diversity issues. Several of the people we interviewed as part of this project stated that, even where members were making attempts to address equality and diversity, these issues tended to be dropped in the run-up to elections, in favour of more 'popular', vote-winning, priorities. In the absence of efforts by members to reframe equality and diversity and promote it as vital to the delivery of mainstream services, sidelining through the electoral cycle seems likely to continue.

LACK OF CREDIBLE SANCTIONS FOR POOR PERFORMANCE

Despite welcome changes in the legislative and policy environment, it is questionable how much real change can be achieved in the absence of credible sanctions for poor performance against these new requirements. Our research raised some significant questions about compliance, even in those areas where authorities are subject to statutory responsibilities. The survey, for example, revealed that one in nine councils had not yet published a race equalities scheme.

CHAPTER 6

Recommendations

In this section, we set out the further work that needs to be done in order to progress the equality and diversity agenda in local government. We highlight the key areas emerging from this research where steps might be taken to address the blocks and barriers set out above and to build on the opportunities we have identified.

Practical advice on developing a more strategic approach

Authorities need assistance on how, practically, to move from creating specific initiatives to mainstreaming equality and diversity across the council. A further piece of work might explore further what help and guidance is needed to help translate good intentions and pockets of good practice into a more corporate response. One possibility is to develop a diagnostic tool kit that will help authorities to address both the internal and external aspects of equality and diversity and to make links between the two, at all levels. This might include a concise summary of the requirements set out in relevant legislation, some prompts to encourage councils to ask questions about what the issues mean for them, and advice on designing and checking policies and procedures, creating suitable structures, and new approaches to training. It might also include some examples of approaches taken elsewhere, in comparable authorities, and some advice and guidance on anticipating likely feelings and reactions. Such assistance needs to help councils to tackle 'newer' equality and diversity issues such as age, sexual orientation and faith. And it also needs to suggest how some councils can revisit 'older' issues, such as gender, and address these more effectively.

Though all councils have obligations to meet the requirements of legislation, it is clear from our research that the challenges councils face in meeting the equality and diversity agenda vary considerably, depending on a whole range of contextual variables. A menu of different approaches might need to be designed to reflect the particular issues that councils face and the range of appropriate strategies they might employ. Uniform guidance that does not acknowledge genuine differences of circumstance and efforts to encourage councils to learn from radically different comparators may not be helpful. The need for a special set of advice for rural areas emerges particularly clearly from our research. Smaller District Councils may also benefit from specially targeted assistance.

The research suggests that achieving real change in this area requires a significant shift in attitudes and behaviour, not just a strict compliance approach in relation to legal requirements. In order to encourage appropriately reflective and thoughtful use of such a toolkit and prevent it becoming another 'tick-box' exercise, councils might need some outside support and challenge around its use.

Fostering leadership and cultural change

It seems clear from this research and from other experience that sound policies and procedures are not sufficient to guarantee equality and diversity, in the absence of firm cultural support for these issues in the council. Changing the culture of organisations is notoriously difficult and takes time. However, leadership is key to achieving such change.

Real progress on the equality and diversity agenda will require strong and effective leadership from chief executives, senior teams and leaders, acting as champions for these issues. Further work needs to be done to identify the kind of support that senior individuals require in order to assume such a role. Additional and possibly new types of training – either individually, or through action learning sets where senior staff and leaders can share best practice – need to be considered.

In several of the authorities we visited, officers discussed the particular challenge of meeting the requirements of legislation in the face of indifference or hostility from elected members. This issue seemed to be particularly problematic for those officers in rural councils. It is our sense that officers in this situation might need particular guidance and support about how to manage the tension between their legal and political considerations.

There is a need for further work with members to raise awareness of the need to consult with the whole of their constituency, and to take steps to target hard-to-reach groups in particular. Members may need more guidance on new and more creative techniques for engagement, so that they can expand their repertoire beyond established approaches, such as surgeries. Diversity concerns might be better integrated into existing training for members. Existing support for black and minority ethnic councillors needs to be better promoted, and further opportunities explored. Beyond this, further work is required to investigate ways of encouraging a more diverse range of candidates to stand for office.

Improving community engagement

Improving the quality of community engagement in local authorities is essential to achieving change on the equality and diversity agenda. Although some authorities are starting to think creatively about community engagement, it seems clear from our research that there is room for improvement in this area. Much of the activity we heard about focused on the more passive end of the engagement spectrum – ie giving out information – rather than genuine involvement of local people in key decision-making.

More help needs to be given to councils to help them improve community engagement. Progress needs to involve the development of a strategy for engagement that explicitly addresses how and why local communities should be engaged. The strategy needs to reflect the challenges of community engagement in different contexts, and the fact that different approaches will be necessary in particular situations, to consult on different issues, and with certain groups. It also needs to reflect the range of engagement activities being undertaken by partner agencies in a particular area. Officers and members may then require further training in order to build their skills and capacity to deliver this strategy.

Building best practice

This study has gone some way towards identifying a range of existing practice in the area of equality and diversity and some sense of what might be working and why. However, we were not carrying out an evaluation of practice in this area. More in-depth and longer-term research in a select number of different local authorities would yield valuable data on the success of particular strategies, approaches and activities over time. The Beacon Council scheme has already covered themes which touch on this area, such as ‘community cohesion’, ‘tackling social exclusion through ICT’ and ‘promoting racial equality’. Extension of the Beacon Council and other similar schemes might encourage excellence in this area. Councils in different parts of the country could be chosen, to reflect the range of challenges that authorities face in tackling equality and diversity issues. Alternatively, other models, such as the Leadership Challenge (CRE) could be developed specifically for local government.

Inspection, regulation and sanctions

Lack of credible sanctions is clearly a significant barrier to achieving improved outcomes in the area of equality and diversity. Government needs to address the capacity of the various commissions with responsibility for equality and diversity to undertake effective promotion, development and regulation. Thought also needs to be given to what is needed to encourage compliance with legislation and guidance, beyond the threat of sanctions.

Further work is needed to explore whether equality and diversity can be better integrated into mainstream service provision by including specific and measurable targets within established inspection regimes (and integrating diversity issues across inspection regimes). Targets need to focus much more specifically on outcomes and impact for local people.

APPENDIX

Baseline survey findings

Executive summary

This report outlines the findings of a survey on equality and diversity in local authorities in England. The email survey was carried out in partnership with the Dialog team in Employers' Organisation. All local authorities in England were asked to provide information about how they manage the equality and diversity agenda in three core areas: representation, participation and leadership; structures, committee organisation and staff; and service procurement, delivery and impact. Fifty-two per cent – or 200 authorities – responded to the questionnaire. This is a relatively good response rate for a survey of this type. However the findings should be treated with some caution in areas where sub-group analysis has been undertaken or where not all respondents have answered the question.

The aggregated results give a good overall picture of the policies and practices that are in place in local authorities. However, the survey was not intended to gather information about the *impact* of those policies and practices.

The findings fall into four main headings: records held; policies and practices; good practice; and challenges and how to overcome these. Amongst the main findings are:

- **Records held:** Most authorities monitor their workforce on gender, age, disability and ethnicity. Fewer authorities monitor communities on these dimensions, and even fewer monitor councillors. Only a few authorities monitor their workforce, communities and councillors on sexual identity and religion.
- **Policies and practices:** Equality and diversity issues are included in policies more often when policies relate to staff issues (recruitment and selection, training and development and bullying and harassment) than when they relate to service delivery and procurement issues. One in nine authorities has not published a Race Equality Scheme, and one third of authorities have yet to adopt the Equality Standard.
- **Good practice initiatives:** Most of the initiatives that were reported focused on ethnicity and disability. There were fewer initiatives in the other areas. The most popular initiatives focused on establishing internal and external groups and forums and conducting surveys.
- **Challenges and how to overcome these:** Only a few councils have taken a holistic approach to equalities and diversity, and reliance on input from central government was clear in many of the challenges and solutions that were mentioned.

Findings were checked for variance in responses according to structure, political control and the percentage of BME groups in the community. Whilst there were few notable

differences in responses according to the structure and percentage of BME groups in the community, the political control of authorities had some impact on the responses to the questions.

1. Introduction

In November 2002, OPM conducted a survey on equality and diversity in local authorities in England, commissioned by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister and the Employers' Organisation⁴.

The survey, which was sent to all local authorities in England, covered three themes:

- Representation, participation and leadership
- Structures, committee organisation and staff
- Service procurement, delivery and impact.

The survey is part of a wider research project commissioned by ODPM that includes a series of interviews and case studies. The EO intends to use the information gathered to profile current resourcing of equalities functions that it supports, and to help target resources where they are most needed.

This report outlines the findings of the survey. All findings are based on the information provided by respondents.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

- All percentages in tables below are calculated including non-responses in order to ensure consistency.
- Where relevant totals do not equal one hundred per cent this is due either to non-response or computer rounding.
- Unless otherwise stated, no significant variations in responses were found between type of council, leadership of council or the proportion of black and ethnic minority groups in an area. Comparisons often proved difficult due to the small number of responses in some categories, and for this reason any comparisons made should be treated with some caution.

⁴ ODPM and EO were separately planning surveys on similar equalities issues, but in the interests of reducing the burden on local authorities, they agreed to merge them into this single piece of work.

2. About your local authority

A total of 200 local authorities responded to the survey, or 52% of all authorities in England. Table 2.1 below shows a breakdown of the sample profile.

Of the responses received, over half (54%) were from district councils; thirteen per cent (13%) were from unitary councils; fourteen per cent (14%) were from metropolitan borough councils; twelve per cent (12%) were from county councils; and the remainder (9%) were from London borough councils.

Approximately a third (32%) of responses were from councils led by Conservatives; another third (32%) were from Labour-led councils; eight per cent (8%) were from councils led by the Liberal Democrats; two per cent (2%) were from independently led councils; and the remaining quarter (27%) were from councils where there is no overall political control.

As also shown in table 2.1, if we compare our response profile with the profile of all local authorities in England, it is evident that we have obtained a fairly representative sample in terms of both type of council and political leadership.

We also asked respondents to estimate what proportion of the population in their area is from black and ethnic minority groups. Over a third (35%) of respondents estimated one per cent or less; a similar number (37%) estimated between two and five per cent; one eighth (12%) estimated between six and nine per cent; four per cent (4%) of respondents estimated between ten and thirteen per cent; three per cent (3%) between fourteen and seventeen per cent of their population; and nine per cent (9%) estimated that the proportion of people from black and ethnic minority groups in their area was eighteen per cent or more.

Table 2.1 Response profile

	Respondents		All local authorities in England	
	N	%	N	%
Total	200	100	388	100
Type of council				
District Council	108	54	238	61
Unitary Council	25	13	47	12
Metropolitan Borough council	27	14	36	9
County Council	23	12	34	9
London Borough Council	17	9	33	9
Leadership of council				
Conservative	64	32	109	28
Labour	64	32	114	29
Liberal Democrats	16	8	27	7
Independent	3	2	14	4
No overall control	53	27	124	32
Proportion of people from BME groups in respondent's area				
1% or less	70	35	N/A	N/A
2-5%	74	37	N/A	N/A
6-9%	23	12	N/A	N/A
10-13%	7	4	N/A	N/A
14-17%	5	3	N/A	N/A
18% or over	18	9	N/A	N/A
Don't know	1	1	N/A	N/A
Base: 200				

3. About the records you hold

We began by asking local authorities about the records they hold on their internal workforce, their councillors and their community, with reference to ethnic origin, gender, disability, age, religion and sexual orientation.

As table 3.1 shows, nearly all those local authorities surveyed hold records on gender (100%), age (90%), disability (99%) and ethnicity (100%) for either all their workforce or part of their workforce. Only six per cent (6%) of respondents hold records on the religious beliefs of their full workforce or part of their workforce and only three per cent (3%) hold full or partial records on their workforce's sexual orientation.

Far fewer local authorities reported that they hold records on all or some of their councillors with regards to gender, age, ethnicity or disability. As illustrated in table 3.2, under a half (45%) report holding records on gender for all or some of their councillors;

approximately a third (34%) hold records on age for all or some of their councillors; under a third (28%) hold records on the ethnic origin of all or some of their councillors; and a quarter (24%) hold records on disability for all or some of their councillors. Two per cent (2%) of respondents hold records on the religious beliefs of their councillors and none of the local authorities surveyed hold records on the sexual orientation of their councillors.

Table 3.1 Do you monitor your internal workforce on...

	Records held on full workforce %	Records held on part of workforce %	No records held %	Non-response %
Gender	93	7	1	1
Age	83	7	5	6
Disability	80	19	2	0
Ethnicity	78	22	1	0
Religion	3	3	75	19
Sexual orientation	2	1	79	19

Base: 200

Table 3.2 Do you monitor your councillors on...

	Records held on all councillors %	Records held on some councillors %	No records held %	Non-response %
Gender	41	4	48	8
Age	29	5	55	12
Ethnic origin	24	4	64	8
Disability	19	5	66	11
Religion	1	1	83	17
Sexual orientation	0	0	83	17

Base: 200

As demonstrated in table 3.3 below, the majority of those surveyed also indicated that they hold statistical data on either all their community or part of their community in terms of ethnic origin (81%), gender (78%), age (73%) and disability (69%). Seventeen per cent (17%) of local authorities report holding records on the religious beliefs of either all or part of their community. Only three per cent (3%) of organisations hold records on the sexual orientation of part of their community.

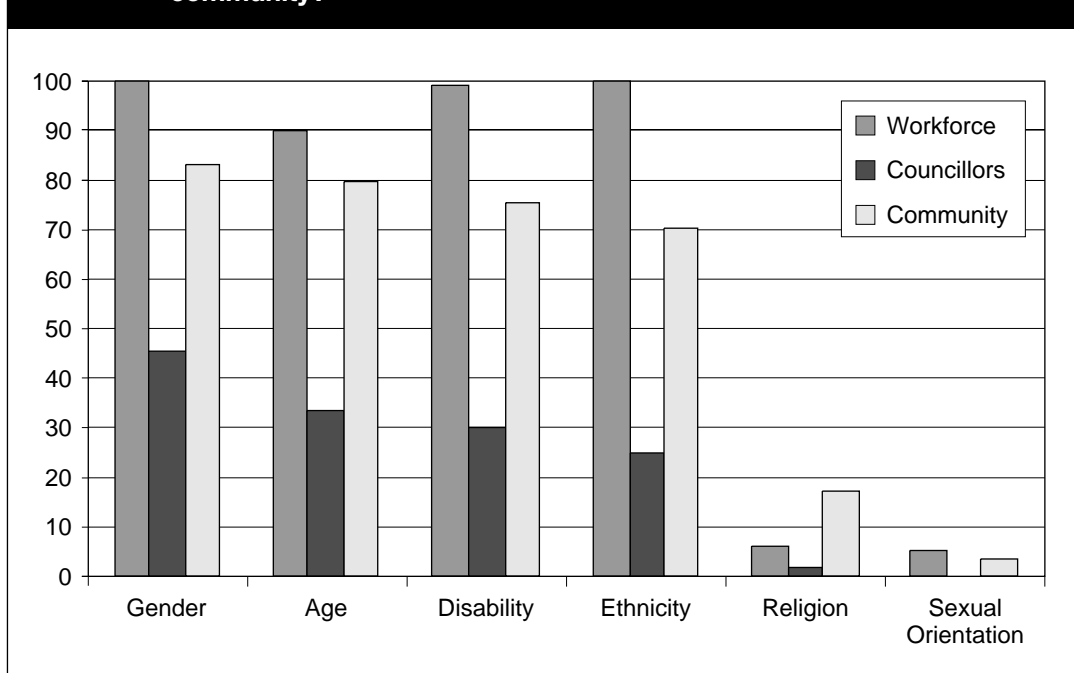
Table 3.3 Do you hold statistical data on your community in terms of ...

	Records held on all of community %	Records held on part of community %	No records held %	Non-response %
Ethnic origin	62	19	15	4
Gender	62	16	17	6
Age	55	18	19	9
Disability	40	29	23	9
Religion	6	11	67	18
Sexual orientation	0	3	77	20

Base: 200

As illustrated in chart 3.1 below, local authorities are more likely to monitor their internal workforce on gender, ethnic origin, disability and age than to monitor their community and their councillors. Nevertheless, a large majority do also hold statistical data on these factors for their communities.

Respondents were, however, more likely to report that they hold statistical data on their community's religious beliefs than on their internal workforce or their councillors. The most common factors for which local authorities monitor across all these groups are gender and ethnicity and the least common factors are sexual orientation and religion. The findings do not reveal data about how often the records are updated or in what form the records are held.

Chart 3.1 Do you hold full or some records on the workforce, councillors and community?

4. About your policies and practices

We went on to ask respondents about their policies and practices.

POLICIES

Respondents were presented with a numbers of areas on which they were likely to have a written policy and asked to rate the extent to which equality and diversity issues were included in that policy.

As is evident from table 4.1, the vast majority of local authorities reported that equality and diversity issues are included either to a great extent or to some extent in their organisation’s written policies on recruitment and selection (96%); training and development (84%); bullying and harassment (80%); service delivery (77%); grievances and disciplinary (75%); and best value performance plans (69%).

Fewer councils reported that equality and diversity issues were included in their community plan (68%) or their written policies on flexible working (58%) or service procurement (56%), with high proportions in fact reporting that equality and diversity issues are either not at all included in these policies or that no policy has yet been developed in these areas. It is not possible from this data to draw conclusions about the impact of the policies and practices in place.

Table 4.1 Do you include equality and diversity issues in your organisation’s written policy on...

	Yes, either to a great extent or to some extent %	Only to a little extent %	No not at all %	No policy developed yet %	Don’t know or non-response %
Recruitment and selection	96	3	1	1	1
Training and development	84	7	5	4	<1
Bullying and harassment	80	10	3	6	3
Service delivery	77	15	2	4	4
Grievances and disciplinary	75	17	8	0	1
Best value performance plans	69	17	3	2	11
Community plan	68	12	1	11	9
Flexible working	58	17	15	9	3
Service procurement	56	20	10	6	9

Base: 200

RACE EQUALITY SCHEME

Respondents were asked whether or not their authority had published a Race Equality Scheme. Nine out of ten (90%) respondents stated that their organisation had published a Race Equality Scheme. Over three-quarters (78%) of those surveyed said it had been published as a separate document, seven per cent (7%) said it had been integrated into a corporate policy strategy, and a small number (5%) said it had been published as both a separate document and integrated into a corporate policy strategy. Nevertheless, one in nine (11%) local authorities stated that they had not yet published a Race Equality Scheme.

Table 4.2 Has your authority published a Race Equality Scheme?

Yes, as a separate document	78%
Yes, integrated into a corporate policy strategy	7%
Yes, as a separate document and integrated into corporate policy strategy	5%
No	11%

Non-response: 1

Base: 200

Table 4.3 Is the Race Equality Scheme available on your website?

Yes	76%
No	22%
Don't know	2%

Base: 178

As table 4.3 above shows, of those local authorities who have published a Race Equality Scheme, three-quarters (76%) state that it is available on their website.

EQUALITY STANDARD

We went on to ask whether the respondent's organisation had adopted the Equality Standard. Two-thirds (67%) of those surveyed indicated that their authority had adopted the Equality Standard; a quarter (24%) said that their authority had not adopted the Equality Standard but will do so within the next year; six per cent (6%) said that their authority will adopt it in more than one year; and one per cent (1%) indicated that their authority will not adopt the standard for the foreseeable future.

Table 4.4 Has your authority adopted the Equality Standard?	
Yes	67%
No, but will do within the next year	24%
No, but will do in more than one year	6%
No, will not adopt the standard for the foreseeable future	1%
Don't know/ non-response	3%
Base: 200	

MONITORING

In order to gain an insight into how local authorities monitor their practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity, we presented respondents with a list of possible methods, approaches and indicators and asked them to rate the extent to which their organisation uses them to monitor the effectiveness of its practices, policies and procedures.

Table 4.5 Which of the following methods, approaches or indicators does your organisation use to monitor the effectiveness of its practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity?				
	Yes, to a great extent/ some extent %	Only to a little extent %	No not at all %	Don't know or non-response %
Consultation				
User surveys and other forums	76	15	7	3
Other consultation with communities	72	18	5	6
Annual employee surveys	60	15	22	5
Member surveys	12	16	53	20
Complaints				
Complaints and grievances from users	66	18	11	7
Complaints and grievances from staff	61	21	12	7
Assessments and reviews				
Best value reviews	71	21	5	5
Local performance indicators	65	18	13	5
Equality impact assessments	43	21	27	10
Management assessment frameworks	38	14	27	22
Baseline audits	36	23	20	22
Other	11	2	5	N/A
Base: 200				

Chart 4.1 The most popular methods, approaches or indicators used to monitor the effectiveness of practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity

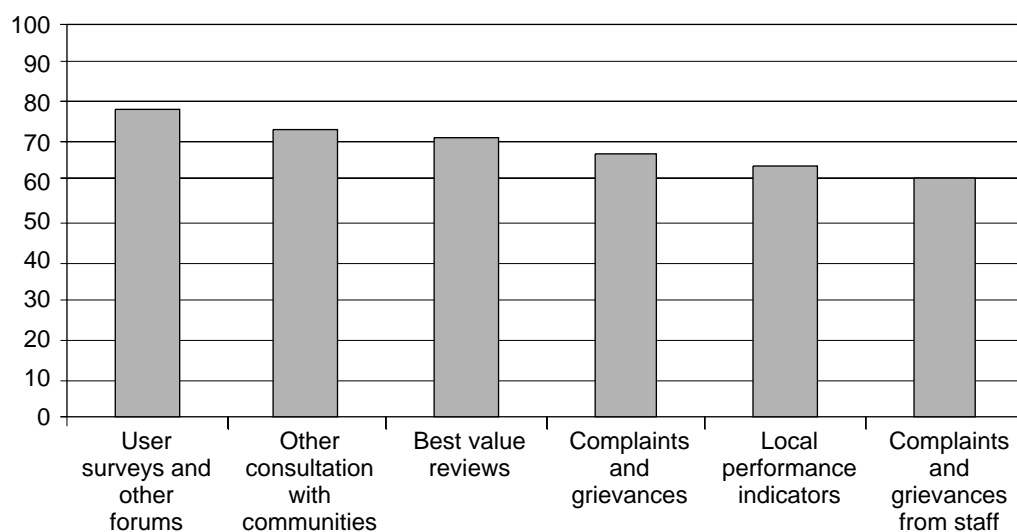
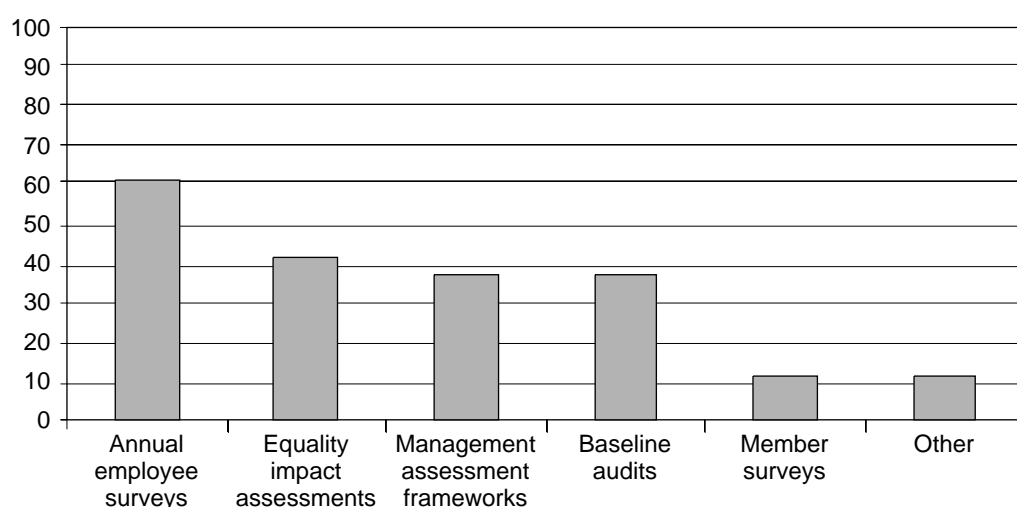


Chart 4.2 The least popular methods, approaches or indicators used to monitor the effectiveness of practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity



The methods, approaches or indicators most likely to be used either to a great extent or to some extent by organisations to monitor the effectiveness of its practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity are: user surveys and other forums (76%); other consultations with communities (72%); and best value reviews (71%).

The least popular methods, approaches or indicators used are member surveys (12%), baseline audits (37%) and management assessment frameworks (38%).

Consultation

As discussed, user surveys, other forums and other consultations with communities are the most popular methods used to monitor the effectiveness of local authority practices in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity. A large proportion (60%) of respondents also indicated that they use annual employee surveys either to a great extent or to some extent in their monitoring; nevertheless a quarter (27%) reported that they either do not use or do not know whether they use annual employee surveys to monitor the effectiveness of their practices, policies and procedures.

A member survey is the method used least to monitor the effectiveness of practices. Only twelve per cent (12%) of respondents report using this type of survey either to a great extent or to some extent. The vast majority (73%) indicate that they either do not use this method at all or they do not know whether they use this method.

It could be the case that some local authorities do not conduct annual employee surveys or member surveys and therefore do not have the data available; however, it is difficult to substantiate this from the data available.

Complaints

Large numbers of local authorities also indicate that they use complaints and grievances from both users (66%) and staff (61%) either to a great extent or to some extent to monitor the effectiveness of their practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity. Approximately one in nine (11%), however, indicated that they do not use complaints and grievances from users in their monitoring and a similar number (12%) indicated that they do not use complaints and grievances from staff in their monitoring.

Assessments and reviews

As already mentioned, best value reviews (71%) appear to be one of the most popular approaches used, either to a great extent or to some extent, to monitor the effectiveness of an organisation's practices. Further to this, a large proportion of respondents indicate that they use local performance indicators (65%) either to a great extent or to some extent in their monitoring process.

Notably lower proportions of those surveyed report using equality impact assessments (43%), management assessment frameworks (38%) or baseline audits (36%) either to a great extent or to some extent in their monitoring compared to other methods, approaches and indicators. Similar proportions actually report that they either do not use these methods or do not know whether they use these methods.

One in nine (11%) local authorities also state that they use other methods, approaches and indicators, either to some extent or to a great extent, to monitor the effectiveness of their practices in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity. Many of these respondents did not specify what 'other' approaches they use, those who did included recruitment and training, benchmarking, scrutiny commissions and strategic equalities groups.

SCRUTINY

As shown in table 4.6 below, when we asked those surveyed if the outcome of the monitoring was subject to scrutiny by members, approximately one fifth (18%) said it was to a great extent; over a half (56%) said it was to some extent; one sixth (16%) said only to a little extent; and a tenth (10%) said that the outcome of monitoring was not at all subject to scrutiny by members.

As might be expected, those respondents who indicated that the outcome of monitoring is subject to scrutiny by members to a great extent or to some extent were more likely to also report that they use the following methods, either to a great extent or to some extent, to monitor the effectiveness of their practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity: user surveys and other forums; other consultations with communities; annual employee surveys; complaints and grievances from users and staff; best value reviews; and local performance indicators.

Table 4.6 Is the outcome of the monitoring subject to scrutiny by members?

Yes, to a great extent	18%
Yes, to some extent	56%
Only to a little extent	16%
No not at all	10%
Don't know/ non-response	1%

Base: 200

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Respondents were asked whether or not their organisation has an interdepartmental group supporting the equality and diversity function; as illustrated in table 4.7, about three quarters (73%) said that they do. We also asked whether or not their organisation has a separate budget to assist with corporate equality and diversity initiatives; far fewer (35%) local authorities reported that they have a separate budget.

Table 4.7 Which of the following does your authority have?

An interdepartmental equality group supporting the equality and diversity function	73%
A separate budget to assist with corporate equality and diversity initiatives	35%

Base: 200

Local authorities were asked whether the post holder or post holders who deal with equality and diversity have other responsibilities. Respondents could indicate as many areas as were

appropriate. As demonstrated in table 4.8, just over three-quarters (76%) of post holder(s) also have responsibility for employment; two thirds (69%) also have responsibility for services, three-fifths (59%) also have responsibility for community development, and half (49%) of those authorities surveyed said their post holder was also responsible for representation, participation and leadership. Smaller numbers of respondents said that their post holder(s), responsible for equality and diversity, also deal with corporate policy (3%), the Chief Executive’s department (2%), and/or legal services (2%). Thirteen per cent (13%) of those surveyed also indicated that the post holder(s) were responsible for equality and diversity or deal with ‘other’ areas. ‘Other’ includes organisational development and governance, management investigation, e-government, best value and faith issues. Finally, one per cent (1%) of respondents indicated that their authority has no specific post holder.

Table 4.8 Please indicate whether the post holder or post holder(s) responsible for equality and diversity deal with any of the following...	
Employment	76%
Services	69%
Community development	59%
Representation, participation and leadership	49%
Corporate policy	3%
Chief Executive’s department	2%
Legal services	2%
Other	13%
No specific post holder	1%
Base: 200	
Note: New categories have been created where two or more respondents have listed the same location in the ‘other’ category	

We went on to ask those surveyed where in their authority the post holder(s) or unit responsible for equality and diversity is situated. As shown in table 4.9, nearly one in three (30%) local authorities told us that those responsible for equality and diversity were situated in multiple departments; one in four (25%) told us the post holder(s) or unit was situated in the Chief Executive’s department; one in five (19%) that they were situated in the corporate policy unit; and one in eight (12%) that they were situated in the service departments. Of the remainder, nine per cent (9%) indicated that those responsible for equality and diversity were situated in the human resources department; one per cent (1%) that they were situated in legal services; and a further one per cent (1%) that they have a separate equality and diversity unit. Again one per cent (1%) of respondents indicated that their authority has no specific post holder.

Table 4.9 Where in the authority is the post holder(s)/ unit responsible for equality and diversity situated

Multiple departments	30%
Chief Executive's department	25%
Corporate policy unit	19%
Service departments	12%
Human resources department	9%
Legal services	1%
Separate equality and diversity unit	1%
No post holder	1%

Non-response: 8**Base: 200**

Local authorities were then asked to what extent those members of staff responsible for equality are held accountable. Table 4.10 shows that the vast majority (81%) reported that the relevant staff were held accountable either to a great extent or to some extent. A further eight per cent (8%) reported that those staff that are responsible for equality are held accountable only to a little extent, three per cent (3%) that relevant staff were not at all accountable, five per cent (5%) said that no staff were directly responsible for equality and diversity and the remainder (4%) reported that they did not know.

Table 4.10 Are the staff that are responsible for equality held accountable?

Yes, to a great extent	35%
Yes, to some extent	46%
Only to a little extent	8%
No not at all	3%
No staff directly responsible for equality and diversity	5%
Don't know/ non-response	4%

Base: 200

As shown in table 4.11, just under half (48%) of those organisations that responded informed us that an executive member holds the equalities portfolio; approximately one in six (16%) said that their leader holds the equalities portfolio; one in eight (12%) that their deputy leader holds the portfolio; and one in eleven (9%) that another member holds the portfolio. Interestingly, one in six (16%) indicated that no one holds the equalities portfolio.

Table 4.11 Which member holds the equalities portfolio?	
Yes, to a great extent	35%
Executive member	48%
Leader	16%
Deputy leader	12%
Other member	9%
No one	16%
Non response: 2	
Base: 200	

STAFF TRAINING

When we asked respondents, who, if anyone, in their local authority was required to attend equality and diversity training, half (51%) of them reported that members were required to attend training. However, as illustrated in table 4.12 below, much higher proportions informed us that senior managers (78%), middle managers (78%), human resource staff (76%) and frontline or service staff (73%) were required to attend equality and diversity training. Further to this, one in five (20%) organisations also indicated that ‘other’ staff were required to attend equalities and diversity training: ‘other’ includes all new staff, partner agencies, chairs, and all those staff working on the Race Equality Scheme.

Nevertheless, nine per cent (9%) of organisations that responded told us that no one was required to attend equality and diversity training.

Table 4.12 Who, if anyone, in your local authority is required to attend equality and diversity training?	
Members	51%
Senior managers	78%
Middle managers	78%
Human resource staff	76%
Front line/ service staff	73%
Others	20%
No-one	9%
Base: 200	

CONTRACTORS

Organisations were asked whether contractors were assessed on their compliance with equality legislation. Seven out of ten (70%) local authorities reported that contractors are assessed in the tendering process, and only one in four (26%) reported that contractors are

assessed on their compliance with equality legislation in the post-contract period. However, large numbers (38%) also indicated that they did not know whether contractors are assessed in the post-contract period.

Table 4.13 Are contractors assessed on their compliance with equality legislation?			
	Yes %	No %	Don't know or non-response %
In the tendering process	70	17	14
In the post-contract period	26	37	38
Base: 200			

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Finally in this section, we presented those surveyed with a list of equality and diversity policies and asked whether they thought they would be more or less important to their organisation in the next five years. Respondents were given a scale of one to five, where 1 indicated that it was the most important and five indicated that it was the least important.

Table 4.14 For your organisation, do you think that the following equality and diversity policies will be more or less important to you in the next five years?				
	Average score	Most common score	1 (most important) %	5 (least important) %
Out-reach to under-represented groups in the community	2.2	1	36	5
Family-friendly policies for staff	2.3	2	28	3
Flexible working	2.4	1	30	5
Support to staff and members from under-represented groups	2.6	2	21	5
Others	3.0	5	8	9
Base: 200				

As shown by the averaged scores in table 4.14, overall the most important policy to local authorities over the next five years is out-reach to under-represented groups in the community; over a third (36%) of organisations give this policy a rating of 1 (most important).

Nevertheless, there is a very small margin between all of the policies, suggesting that they are all issues that are at least somewhat important to many of the organisations surveyed.

‘Other’ policies detailed included encouraging older employees to remain part of the workforce, building a representative workforce, community cohesion, procurement and contract compliance, equality training and development for all levels of staff and the development of policy frameworks in relation to age, religion and sexual orientation. These ‘other’ policies however, appear to be slightly less important than the others detailed in table 4.14 above.

5. Good practice

Local authorities were then questioned about their current efforts to bring diversity and equality into local government. The questions in this section asked councils whether they had implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to widen participation, representation and leadership; to support changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff; and to ensure that services meet the needs of the community.

With reference to targeted initiatives or programmes to widen participation, representation and leadership, approximately half (52%) of those organisations surveyed said that they had implemented targeted initiatives in the area of ethnicity; a similar number (47%) indicated they had done so in the area of disability; a third (30%) said they had implemented initiatives in the area of gender; and a quarter (27%) indicated that they had done so in the area of age. Only one in nine (11%) informed us that they had implemented targeted initiatives to increase wider participation, representation and leadership of people with different sexual orientations, and one in ten (10%) had done so in relation to religion.

Table 5.1 Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to promote wider representation, participation and leadership for any of the following areas?	
Ethnicity	52%
Disability	47%
Gender	30%
Age	27%
Sexual orientation	11%
Religion	10%
Base: 200	

With reference to supporting changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff, smaller proportions of local authorities report implementing initiatives aimed at tackling this area compared to those aimed at increasing participation, representation and leadership and ensuring that services meet the needs of all communities, with the exception of initiatives in the area of sexual orientation.

As detailed in table 5.2, two-fifths (38%) of respondents indicated that they have implemented targeted initiatives or programmes in relation to ethnicity, to support changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff. A third (31%) have implemented targeted initiatives or programmes in relation to disability; a quarter (24%) in relation to gender; one fifth (18%) in relation to age; approximately one eighth (12%) in relation to sexual orientation; and finally one ninth (11%) report having implemented initiatives in relation to religious beliefs.

Table 5.2 Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to support changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff in any of the following areas?

Ethnicity	38%
Disability	31%
Gender	24%
Age	18%
Sexual orientation	12%
Religion	11%

Base: 200

When asked whether their organisation had implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to ensure that services meet the needs of all communities, nearly three out of five (56%) respondents said they had implemented initiatives to ensure that services meet the needs of all communities in relation to ethnicity; two out of five (39%) said they had done so in relation to disability; one in four (26%) indicated they had implemented initiatives in relation to age; one in five (22%) in relation to gender; and approximately one in nine in relation to sexual orientation (11%) and religion (12%).

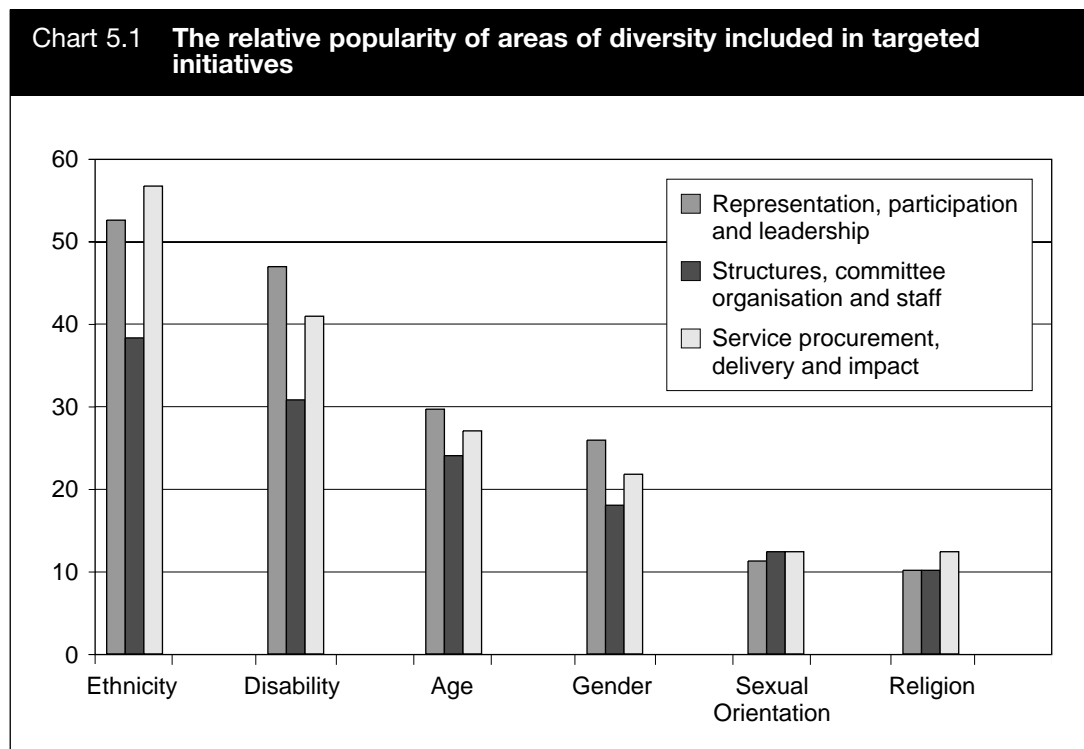
Table 5.3 Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to ensure that services meet the needs of all communities in any of the following areas?

Ethnicity	56%
Disability	39%
Age	26%
Gender	22%
Sexual orientation	11%
Religion	12%

Base: 200

Overall, therefore irrespective of whether initiatives were trying to increase wider participation, representation and leadership, support changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff, or ensure that services meet the needs of the community, a much higher proportion of the initiatives were in the area of ethnicity and

disability compared to any of the other areas. Religion and sexual orientation were the areas in which authorities were least likely to have implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes. No notable differences were found between different types of council.



INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE INITIATIVES

Respondents were also given the opportunity in this section to give full, written details of initiatives, which they found were the most innovative or effective in relation to:

- Increasing wider participation, representation and leadership
- Supporting changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff
- Ensuring that services meet the needs of all communities.

It should be noted that the findings from the qualitative analysis in this section will not correspond directly with the figures in tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 above, because respondents were only asked to provide details of one initiative or programme, in each of the above areas, that they felt was the most innovative or effective. Further to this, even when respondents indicated that they had implemented targeted initiatives or programmes in the above areas, some chose not to give details.

METHODOLOGY

The responses were analysed using a coding system that was devised by an initial inspection of the data. It was adapted as the analysis progressed so that all of the data could be included. The categories that were used to analyse the data on initiatives were:

- Establishment of groups/forums
- Conducting surveys, conferences and consultations
- Recruitment
- Retention-management development
- Awareness-training
- Awareness-publicity
- Development of policies and strategies
- Service initiatives

These categories were used to analyse the data in each of the areas of diversity: age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender and disability. The tables depict initiatives that are specifically aimed at a given area of diversity. Initiatives that encompass diversity and equality or address more than two areas are noted in the relevant sections.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

The responses indicated that the majority of the councils were carrying out more than one initiative in a range of areas of diversity. However, few had adopted a whole systems approach. The majority of the initiatives were in the area of ethnicity, disability and gender and fewer in age, religion and sexual orientation. Further details are provided below.

Please note that absolute numbers and not percentages are provided, as there were multiple counts that render it difficult to include percentage data.

RANGE OF INITIATIVES REPORTED BY COUNCILS

Establishment of groups/forums

This was the most popular type of initiative. Two types of groups/forums tended to be established: those for community and/or voluntary groups and the others for various types of staff.

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Community groups	30	4	10	13	3	1
Staff groups	23	9	18	0	0	1

The community groups that were formed in the area of ethnicity consisted of fora, a weighted citizens panel, a Somali umbrella group, a mother and toddler’s group for Bangladeshi people and networks. The community groups that focused on gender included one that was established for women in public life and two domestic violence fora. The majority of the groups that concentrated on disability tended to focus on access issues and were mainly fora, with the exception of a 600-person strong coalition. Only thirteen community groups focusing on age were mentioned either for older or young people. Two faith networks and a faith communities consultative group were reported. One community forum had been established for gay and lesbian people, as well as two hate crime reduction groups that looked at gay and lesbian issues.

A large number of staff groups had been set up for black and disabled staff. One or two of these had a specific focus, such as the creation of the local Race Equality Scheme or consideration of access issues. Only one was reported to have direct access to the chief executive. No staff groups for older or younger staff or for staff of a particular religious orientation were reported. Two groups had been set up for staff of different sexual orientations. Only four respondent councils had established staff groups in more than three areas, eg black and ethnic minority, gay, lesbian and transgendered staff, senior women managers and staff with disabilities.

Some authorities (16) had established groups that considered the issues of equality and diversity collectively rather than by area. Four of these were multi-agency groups. Only one council reported the existence of a group to specifically address the needs of the traveller community.

Conducting surveys, conferences and consultations

These were the second most popular intervention.

Table 5.5 Conducting surveys, conferences and consultations

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	30	2	3	3	1-planned	0

The majority of the reported interventions were concerned with ethnicity, and a large number of these (11) were needs audits of the local community. Only one looked at multi-cultural issues, the needs of travellers. There were two conferences on gender and both focused on the needs of women, eg for international women's day. Two of the initiatives on disability focused on the issue of compliance, whereas the other concentrated on disability in general. One intervention, a planned conference on faith, was noted in the area of religion and no events or consultations were specifically planned in the area of sexual orientation.

There were only three examples of initiatives that were aimed at a range of diversity areas. One council noted that it had hosted the following: International Women's Day, Older Peoples Development Day, Mental Health Awareness Week, Annual Holocaust Memorial Day, Community Empowerment Network Conference, Kids and Culture Conference. Another council conducted a best value review of older people's services that looked at gender, ethnicity and disability.

Only one council reported the outcome of an audit. It had conducted a disability compliance audit that concluded that £6 million would be required. The council had already committed £3 million.

Recruitment

Efforts aimed directly at recruiting diverse staff included placing advertisements in places where members of the diverse communities are more likely to see them, offering placements for graduates, running a pool of temporary staff who are disabled (some of whom moved into permanent positions), using the guaranteed interview scheme (under the Disability Discrimination Act) and encouraging school leavers.

Table 5.6 Recruitment

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	13	0	10	3	0	0

Retention-management development

The majority of the management development initiatives for ethnicity were programmes targeted at black staff. Two focused on mentoring. Three councils stated that they had developed community leader capacity building programmes. The programmes for women were aimed at enabling them to progress through the council, and two of these focused on black female staff. The disability initiatives included a programme aimed at recruiting long-term unemployed people and one aimed at becoming aware of the equipment requirements of disabled staff. One of the initiatives focussed on older staff and was aimed at rewarding them, it was titled ‘Worthy at Work’.

Table 5.7 Retention-management development						
	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	9	6	2	2	0	0

There were three initiatives that were generic in nature and focused on all equality and diversity issues: these were employment development strategies where the focus was on individual learning using a range of interventions including coaching, mentoring and secondments. Two of these emphasised work/life balance, with one offering flexible working patterns, a childcare subsidy and Indian head massage during work time.

Awareness-training

Most of the training that was reported in the area of ethnicity focused on race, and in two cases it was offered to both members and officers. One programme initially focused on race awareness and was then expanded to include all aspects of diversity. Most of the disability awareness programmes were offered using classroom approaches; however, one council used a distance learning approach. There were four examples of programmes that focused on equal opportunities and/or diversity; one was entitled ‘Dignity at Work’.

Table 5.8 Awareness-training						
	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	5	0	7	0	0	0

Awareness-publicity

Most of the publicity campaigns again focused on the issues of race in the area of ethnicity, the exceptions being traveller awareness and one aimed at raising cultural competence in care management. The disability awareness campaigns were generic in nature, except in one case, where the aim was to encourage people with disabilities to use leisure services.

Table 5.9 Awareness-publicity

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	9	0	4	0	0	0

Development of policies and strategies

Two of the policy and strategy developments in the area of ethnicity focused on culturally appropriate commissioning and the others on equality in service delivery. Three of the strategies in the area of disability focused on access issues. Four policies and/or strategies focused on the topic of diversity: one discussed creating a 'champions model' of diversity, one created a communications strategy, one was aimed at evaluating existing policies to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation and one stipulated the need for each department to have an equality action plan.

Table 5.10 Development of policies and strategies

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	4	1	4	4	0	0

Service initiatives

These refer to changes in service delivery and are usually focused on one specific area. For example, five of the ethnicity initiatives were the introduction of extra personnel as outreach or link workers or interpreters. Other initiatives facilitated access to translation and/or interpreters. A women's refuge was given funds from the council towards upkeep.

Table 5.11 Service initiatives

	Ethnicity	Gender	Disability	Age	Religion	Sexual orientation
Total	14	1	2	1	0	1

The two initiatives in disability were the development of a gallery for the visually impaired and the employment of an access officer. One council stated that it had opened youth drop-in centres and another had altered the tenancy rules to give same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples. One initiative was a project that collated cultural oral history for diverse communities.

6. Challenges and solutions

Finally, we informed those surveyed that the government wants local authorities to become flagships for equality and diversity in England. We then asked respondents what they consider to be the main challenges in achieving this and what might help overcome these challenges.

Using the same methodology as described above, the data on perceived challenges and solutions was analysed by separating them into the following topics:

- Resources
- Leadership, ownership and commitment
- Systems
- Engagement and consultation
- Attitudes and organisational culture
- Policy and legislation.

This section describes the challenges that were seen as significant by respondents, and their proposed solutions. Absolute numbers and not percentages are reported. Initiatives that encompass diversity and equality or address more than two areas are noted below.

CHALLENGES

Resources

There were thirty-four instances when lack of sufficient resources (unspecified) was noted. The need for more funding and personnel was also identified. Only one respondent specified lack of time and another noted the lack of appropriate physical environments.

Table 6.1 Resources				
Unspecified	Lack of adequate funding from central government	Lack of sufficient personnel	Lack of time	No appropriate physical site
35	13	10	1	1

Leadership, ownership and commitment

The most popular response in this category was the need for overall leadership, ownership and commitment that was felt to be lacking: ‘Leadership – a lack of recognition that it is an important topic’; ‘ We need commitment, understanding and mainstreaming’.

Table 6.2 Leadership, ownership and commitment

An overall lack of leadership	A need for leadership from members	A need for leadership from central government
15	1	4

Only one respondent specified the need for leadership specifically from members: 'Member involvement ensuring effective leadership.'

Four respondents saw a need for leadership from the centre. For example: 'Central government leadership –template models for achievement and resources'; 'Commitment and resources – a single equalities commission'.

Systems

Three respondents noted that the current performance management systems were inadequate and one suggested that the current financial and pensions systems needed to be improved. Comments included: 'Improve performance – establish basic systems and controls'; 'Align financial systems to support diversity needs'; 'Change pension entitlements to support broadening the retirement age range and same gender partnerships. There were fifteen responses stating that there needed to be more consultation and engagement with diverse groups such as black and ethnic minority people: 'Need information about service users.'

Service delivery

Five respondents noted the need to improve services: two suggested that it would be necessary to identify what is missing from current service provision and one suggested that the issue of diversity and equality needed to be prioritised. Two saw the need to mainstream: 'Try to find out what is missing from service provision'; 'To ensure that it is given sufficient priority especially with contracting out'.

Attitudes and organisational culture

The need to alter current attitudes toward diversity and equality were seen as important by 19 respondents, and one suggested the need to change attitudes towards customer care: 'Raising cultural awareness and getting change'; 'We need community awareness and changes in culture and attitudes'. Others suggested that there was a need to mainstream through the organisation.

Policy and legislation

Eighteen respondents emphasised the current initiative and policy overload as opposed to stating that there was a lack of adequate policies: 'finding a place in an overburdened policy agenda'; 'difficult to meet all the governments demands'.

Five respondents noted that there were difficulties in understanding and implementing the current legislation. One stated that the inconsistencies in the legislative framework made implementation difficult: 'Inconsistent legal framework – implementation of EU Directives'.

SOLUTIONS

The solutions that were generated by respondents fell into the same categories as the challenges:

- Resources (49)
- Policy and legislation (28)
- Engagement and consultation (20)
- Changing attitudes through training (17)
- Leadership, ownership and commitment (13)
- Service delivery (6)
- Systems (5)
- Review services (1)
- Multiple solutions (11)

There is again an emphasis on the need for more resources, and also on the need for a clearer steer from central government through more 'joined-up working' and fewer initiatives. One respondent stated that there ought to be 'more concrete penalties'. Some respondents also felt that it was necessary to consult with diverse groups, although one or two (especially in rural areas) felt that this would be difficult.

CHALLENGES AND ASSOCIATED SOLUTIONS

The data that was obtained was analysed by challenge and associated solution. The response for each challenge was collated using the categories above: resources, changes in policies (national) and better legislation, increased engagement and consultation, leadership, ownership and commitment, improvements in services, better internal systems and changing attitudes.

This analysis allows you to investigate whether the solutions generated are obviously linked to the challenge. For example, if leadership is seen as a key challenge, then you would expect to see solutions that directly impact on leadership, such as training and development.

Resources

Table 6.3 indicates that if a lack of resources was identified as the problem, then the solution was seen as an injection of resources. There were also four suggestions for changes in national policy and legislation. It is important to note that the solutions all suggested that more resources were needed, instead of thinking about utilising current resources differently.

Table 6.3 Challenges and associated solutions: Resources

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	More resources (42)	eg Message to be sent that equality and diversity are vital (4)	More consultation (1)	0	0	0	0

Changes in policy and legislation

All of the solutions that were made appear to be directly related to the challenges that were identified. There were some contradictory suggestions. Some suggested that there were too many policy initiatives, whereas others wanted a much clearer steer, even to the point of introducing penalties.

Table 6.4 Challenges and associated solutions: Changes in policy and legislation

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	More resources (12)	Fewer initiatives (4) eg More joined-up initiatives (13)	0	Greater ownership (1)	0	0	0

Increased engagement and consultation

Two of the respondents were unsure about how to obtain increased engagement and consultation from diverse groups. Others were able to suggest a range of ideas. Many focused on the need to research the issue further and gather more information, which is not a particularly proactive strategy.

Leadership

These solutions to the challenge of leadership place the onus of responsibility clearly at the door of central government. Only three of the solutions were seen to lie with local government itself. One respondent was unable to suggest a solution. None of the suggestions focused on personal characteristics and skills.

Table 6.5 Challenges and associated solutions: Leadership

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	From central government (1)	eg increase role of inspectorates	0	More support from CRE, EO	0	Mainstream in all aspects	Better ownership (1)
		Practical advice on consultation (7)		More support from government (2)		Better member involvement (2)	

Changing attitudes

This table very clearly demonstrates the extent to which responsibility tends to be located outside the local infrastructures. The emphasis is on targets and guidance, rather than on more practical solutions that could be aimed directly at changing attitudes, such as shadowing, mentoring or awareness training. The rationale underlying these suggestions is not clear.

Table 6.6 Challenges and associated solutions: Changing attitudes

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	Increased funding-6 (1)	eg Government to focus less on targets and encourage creativity	Identify isolated groups (1)	Collective responsibility	Target initiatives at customer care	0	0
		Templates for local achievement (4)		Top down support from all parties	Incorporate local REC into local services (2)		
				Training for members (3)			

Improvements in services

Only three of the solutions were located at the local level. The others placed the onus of responsibility on external sources, such as central government and inspection regimes and performance indicators.

Table 6.7 Challenges and associated solutions: Improvements in services

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	More resources (1)	Performance indicators to reflect the diverse population and joined up government Emphasis on inspection regimes (2)	Networking -community involvement (1)		Gap analysis Place RES at the centre of planning and monitoring-2 (1)	0	0

Better internal systems

A few respondents made suggestions on how to improve internal systems. These are practical and can be implemented and may be a response to local problems.

Table 6.8 Challenges and associated solutions: Better internal systems

Area	Resources	Changes in policy and legislation	Increased engagement and consultation	Leadership, ownership and commitment	Improvements in services	Better internal systems	Changing attitudes
	A directory of people (1)	0	More consultation- (2) Capacity networks (1)	0	0	Align financial systems (1)	0

Multiple solutions

Eleven respondents suggested solutions that were aimed at more than one area of local and/or central government. This could be seen as an indication of a holistic approach.

Challenge – ‘to instil greater awareness, effecting ownership and facilitating implementation’

Solutions – ‘clear simple implementation methodology supported by clear guidance with existing case studies, development of competencies for equality and diversity’

Challenges – ‘to mainstream all aspects so that it is the work of all officers and members’

Solutions – ‘support from central government, extra funding for proactive councils, chances to share good practice and problem resolution. Affordable and ongoing training, coaching support and resources’

Summary of qualitative analysis (sections 5 and 6)

Most of the initiatives that were mentioned were focused in the areas of ethnicity and disability. There were fewer initiatives in the other areas. It is interesting to speculate whether this is due to the emphases in these areas in recent legislation. If this is the case, then one would expect to see more initiatives in other areas as the EU directives come into force.

The initiatives that were most popular, establishing internal and external groups and fora and conducting surveys, could be seen as relatively passive interventions, as they simply provide means of gathering views and opinions from diverse groups, without these groups actually becoming involved either strategically or operationally on a permanent basis.

The challenges that were perceived were what you might expect – with few surprises. A few participants wanted further discussion and guidance that would enable them to understand what diversity and equality meant. A number of respondents also emphatically stated that they worked in rural areas and that this meant they served fewer people from diverse backgrounds. They therefore felt that many of the current policies and guidance were not helpful to them. It would be interesting to investigate whether there were actually fewer diverse people in rural areas, as implied, if you take into consideration ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and religion.

The solutions that were generated were not strikingly creative and fell within the range that would be expected. Only a few councils appeared to have taken a holistic approach across equalities and diversity. The reliance on input from central government was clear in all of the solutions that were generated.

The overwhelming impression is of the paucity of creativity in this area, both in terms of the initiatives that have been reported and in the solutions to challenges that were outlined. These conclusions are, of course, based on the data provided, which one assumes is a relatively accurate reflection of the current situation in local government.

Baseline Survey Questionnaire

The aim of this survey is to collect information about how local authorities in England manage their equality and diversity agenda. The findings will inform a wider study of equality and diversity, commissioned by the ODPM, which aims to help **promote equality and diversity in local government** across England.

The survey findings will also be used by the Dialog team in the Employers' Organisation. EO intends to use the information gathered to profile current resourcing of equalities functions in local government and to help target resources where they are most needed.

Your individual responses are anonymous and will be treated **confidentially** by OPM. No individual responses or details of specific authorities will be disclosed, unless you agree to it.

Please fill in the questions below and return to OPM as soon as possible and no later than 2nd December 2002. Thank you very much for your time.

Section one About your local authority

Q1.a: Is your council a...? Please tick as appropriate

- County Council
- District Council
- London Borough Council
- Metropolitan Borough Council
- Unitary Council

Q1.b: Is the council led by...? Please tick as appropriate

- Conservative
- Labour
- Liberal Democrats
- Independent
- No overall control
- Other (please list)

Q1.c: Please estimate what proportion of the population in your area is from BME

groups: Please round up to nearest percentage and tick as appropriate (for example if 1.8% of the population are from BME groups, please tick second box 2-5%)

- 1% or less
- 2-5%
- 6-9%
- 10-13%
- 14-17%
- 18% or over
- Don't know

Section two About the records you hold			
Q2.a: Do you monitor your internal workforce on ... Tick one box for each line			
	Records held on full workforce	Records held on part of workforce	No records held
Ethnic origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q2.b: Do you monitor your councillors on ... Tick one box for each line			
	Records held on all councillors	Records held on some councillors	No records held
Ethnic origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q2.c: Do you hold statistical data on your community in terms of ... Tick one box for each line			
	Records held on all of our community	Records held on part of our community	No records held
Ethnic origin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section three About your policies and practices						
Q3.a: Do you include equality and diversity issues in your organisation's written policy on... Tick one box for each line						
	Yes, to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	Only to a little extent	No not at all	No policy developed yet	Don't know
Recruitment & selection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training & development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grievances & disciplinary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible working	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying and Harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service procurement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Service delivery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best Value performance plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
						<i>continued</i>

Section three About your policies and practices (continued)

Q3.b: Has your authority published a Race Equality Scheme? Please tick as appropriate

- Yes, as a separate document
 Yes, integrated into a corporate policy strategy
 No
 Don't know

Q3.c: If yes, is it available on your website? Please tick as appropriate

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

Q3.d: The Equality Standard explains the steps that local authorities need to take to identify and remove barriers to ensuring fair and equal treatment in services and employment, with regard to gender, race and disability. The Standard is included as a Best Value Performance Indicator for 2002-03.

Has your authority adopted the Equality Standard? Please tick as appropriate

- Yes
 No, but will do within the next year
 No, but will do in more than one year
 No, will not adopt the Standard for the foreseeable future
 Don't know

Q3.e: Which of the following methods, approaches or indicators does your organisation use to monitor the effectiveness of its practices, policies and procedures in relation to diversity and equality of opportunity?

Please tick one box for each line

	Yes, to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	Only to a little extent	No not at all	Don't know
Annual employee surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
User surveys and other forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other consultation with communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best Value reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local performance indicators	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management assessment frameworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complaints and grievances from staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complaints and grievances from users	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baseline audits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equality impact assessments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q3.f: Is the outcome of the monitoring subject to scrutiny by members?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes, to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	Only to a little extent	No not at all	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

continued

Section three About your policies and practices (continued)

Q3.g: Which of the following does your authority have? Please tick as appropriate

- An interdepartmental equality group supporting the equality and diversity function
- A separate budget to assist with corporate equality and diversity initiatives

Q3.h: Please indicate whether the post holder or post holder(s) responsible for equality and diversity deal with any of the following? Please tick as appropriate

- Employment
- Services
- Community development
- Representation, participation and leadership
- Other: _____

Q3.i: Where in the authority is the post holder(s)/unit responsible for equality and diversity situated? Please tick as appropriate

- Chief Executive's department
- Corporate policy unit
- Service departments
- Other: _____

Q3.j: Are the staff that are responsible for equality held accountable?
Please tick as appropriate

Yes, to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	Only to a little extent	No not at all	No staff directly responsible for equality and diversity	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.3.k: Which member holds the equalities portfolio?

- Leader
- Deputy leader
- Executive member
- Other member
- No one

Q3.l: Who, if any, in your local authority are required to attend equality and diversity training? Please tick as appropriate

- Members
- Senior managers
- Middle managers
- Front line/service staff
- HR staff
- Others
- None

Q3.m: Are contractors assessed on their compliance with equality legislation?
Please tick as appropriate

	Yes	No	Don't know
In the tendering process	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the post contract period	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q3.n: For your organisation, do you think that the following equality and diversity policies will be more or less important to you in the next five years?

Please rate 1-5, where 1 is most important and 5 is least important

- Family friendly policies for staff
- Flexible working
- Support to staff and members from under-represented groups
- Out-reach to under-represented groups in the community
- Other (please list): _____

Section four Good practice

Q4. a: Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to increase wider representation, participation and leadership for any of the following groups?

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Religion

Q4.b If so, please give one example of the initiative, you find is/was most innovative/effective

Area:

Initiative:

Q4.c: Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to support changes and developments for structures, committee organisation and staff for any of the following groups?

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Religion

Q4.d: If so, please give one example the initiative, you find is/was most innovative/effective

Area:

Initiative:

Q4.e: Has your organisation implemented any targeted initiatives or programmes to ensure that services meet the needs of any of the following communities?

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Religion

Section four Good practice (continued)

Q4.f: If so, please give one example the initiative, you find is/was most innovative/effective (we are particularly interested in initiatives in areas where there are small numbers of people from diverse groups)

Area:

Initiative:

Section five Challenges

Q5.a The government wants local authorities to become flagships for equality and diversity in England. What do you consider to be the main challenge in achieving this?

Q5.b And, what would help overcome this challenge?

Section six Next steps

The ODPM and EO would like to thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire. We would like to request further help with this work. This survey is the first element of a larger piece of research on equality and diversity commissioned by ODPM. Later on we will carry out in-depth case studies with selected local authorities. The work in the case studies will inform the wider study, but will also be an opportunity for the local authorities to work on these issues in more detail with experienced consultants from OPM. All the case study work will involve about 2 days in each local authority.

Yes, I would like to be considered as one of the authorities for the ODPM case studies.

The survey findings will also be used by the Dialog team in the Employers' Organisation to enable them to target their resources effectively to support equality functions within authorities. They would like to request that, to assist them in this process, you disclose your authority to them. If you elect to identify yourself to the EO, they will treat your data as confidential, and will not identify your responses to ODPM or any other party.

Yes, I would like to identify my authority, in confidence, to the EO.