



Meeting the Equality Challenge is a new project being sponsored by Improvement East to support authorities to make progress on their Equality Standard – soon to be migrated to the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

Drivers for change

According to a survey with local authorities in the East of England in 2006/07, over a third of local authorities in the region have assessed themselves to be at either Level 0 or Level 1 of the Equality Standard. 44% described themselves as having achieved Level 2 and only 20% had progressed to Level 3. There was no authority recorded at Level 4 or Level 5.

Although this reflects to some extent the national picture and accepting that some progress would have been made since the survey was undertaken, there remain some major gaps in our equality achievement. Therefore, the aim of the equality project is to identify the key barriers and measures of support in meeting the equality challenge in the region.

Another impetus for the project is the Government's reform of the existing Equality Standard. A new Equality

Framework has recently been through the consultation process and is due to be implemented in February 2009. The new Framework will have 3 levels which will be known as Developing, Achieving and Excellent. Achievement on the previous Equality Standard will be recognised and a migration model to the new Framework has been suggested by the Improvement & Development Agency. The key areas for performance assessment will be focussed on Five Areas of Change Management:

- Knowing your community – equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern and diverse workforce

It is clear that the new Framework is more closely aligned to the Comprehensive Area Assessment regime and more community and customer-focussed. In other words, equality is to be embedded in all areas of the business of local government rather than a process-driven paper exercise!

Partnership working

Improvement East is funding this project but the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) is a key partner and will take responsibility for its overall delivery. However, the theme of partnership runs deep – EERA will be working closely with colleagues in all authorities in identifying the key barriers that have hindered progress and developing the most appropriate models of support to help authorities to migrate to and make progress on the new Framework. The key aim of the project is to support authorities to make significant progress in the key performance areas. The EERA Equality and Diversity Steering Group which comprises representatives from across the region will act as the coordinating/monitoring body for the project. The project will also identify successes and achievements which will be disseminated across the region to ensure learning and good practice are shared.

Project programme and timetable

Stage 1: A survey will be carried out with all authorities to obtain an up to date regional picture of the progress made on the previous Equality Standard in terms of the 5 Levels. The survey will also identify the barriers and issues that have been hindering progress, as well as examples of successes. (November/ December 2008)

Stage 2: A report of the survey findings will be produced and disseminated across the region in determining a set of regional targets for the new Framework. A programme of support will also be developed to match the needs of the authorities. (January 2009)

Stage 3: Delivery of the support programme which will consist of a variety of measures including training activities, master class workshops, and in-house support for some authorities. (February 2009 – March 2010)

Stage 4: Evaluation and review of the programme (March 2009 and March 2010)

Main outcomes

The project aims to deliver the following outcomes:

- Increased awareness of the new Equality Framework and how it links to the assessment regime of local government
- Better understanding of the organisational issues that impact on the equality progress and performance
- A regional strategy of support identifying key actions, milestones and resources in making progress on the Equality Framework and meeting the regional targets
- Wide participation by local authorities in the support programme and involvement of best practice authorities and partners, thus promoting regional wide learning
- Regional targets on the Equality Framework to be achieved by April 2010

How to get involved

All authorities can get involved in this project. If you have particular lessons or issues to share with progress on your Equality Standard, please get in touch with Rowena Kerr at EERA.

Contact

Rowena Kerr, Regional Learning & Development Adviser
East of England Regional Assembly
Tel: (01284) 729474
Mobile: 07500 445911
Email: rowena.kerr@eera.gov.uk