

DWP Customer Reference Group on Equality

23 November 2011

Background

The Department's Customer Reference Group on Equality met to discuss the Department's proposals for meeting its duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Duty requires the Department to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Equality Duty, and to set equality objectives.

There was a first meeting in March 2011 preparing for the implementation of the Duty in April; however the formal legislative guidance was changed shortly after the meeting. The Department therefore reviewed its proposals and shared these with the group at the meeting on 23 November.

The meeting was also a chance for stakeholders to meet the new Diversity and Equality Director Janet Hill, who formally welcomed group members to the meeting and introduced herself (giving detail of her background experience in the Department). She offered the opportunity to stakeholders for separate discussions.

Public Sector Equality Duty – Departmental approach to publication of data

The main presentation of the event for discussion was on the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty – DWP Equality Information. Officials explained the DWP approach setting out the principles of data transparency and accessibility.

The approach is to use:

- a table of “raw” data
- a brief overview /explanation of what this tells us and how an improvement will be shown and
- links to other information (eg linked source data) that the audience may find useful.

There will be two sections in the formal published report grouped under 4 main areas.

- Section one will display information and data relating to the Department's policies, practices and service users.
- Section two will cover information and data relating to the Department's employees.

Officials outlined the Departmental approach under the headlines separated into service delivery and its role as an employer. In Section one, officials explained the indicators in each area of:

- employment
- poverty, inequality and incomes
- pensions and
- the operational working of the Department.

For information about the Department's employees, officials outlined the areas covered which will be:

- DWP workforce
- disciplinary procedures
- exits
- working patterns
- grievances
- performance markings
- promotion
- recruitment process
- pay gap and training.

Officials gave details of a worked example (around pensioner poverty) to show group members how the approach would work – explaining the details of the indicators, what does this tell us; how will an improvement be shown and the data sources and availability of data by protected characteristic.

Group members discussed the proposed indicators. There were a number of suggestions and detailed questions from stakeholders which officials agreed to consider the suggestions further and respond in detail.

Equality Objectives

Officials explained the Departmental proposed approach to setting equality objectives (as required under the Public Sector Equality Duty). The proposed approach is to embed the equality objectives into Departmental planning cycle and to set specific equality objectives aligned to Departmental priorities. The details of the process have not yet been agreed within the Department and part of the consultation is to seek stakeholder views.

As an illustration as to how the approach might work the group discussed the possibility of setting equality objectives around the Departmental priorities of:

- the reform of the welfare system
- the Work programme – for example setting objectives about reducing unemployment amongst young people
- help tackle the causes of poverty

- achieving disability equality and
- improving the service to the public.

The approach proposed, to link the objective with the relevant management information so that the public could see how the Department is meeting the objectives.

Officials agreed to update stakeholders as work on the objectives developed. Stakeholders agreed to consider the suggestions and feedback their views to officials as necessary.