

JUST Lincolnshire – Response to Government Review of the Public Sector Equality Duty

JUST Lincolnshire is the only single equality organisation in the county of Lincolnshire and aims to:-

- Eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation or religion.
- Advance education and raise awareness in equality and human rights.
- Promote activities to foster understanding between people from diverse backgrounds.
- Conduct or commission research on equality and diversity issues.
- Cultivate a sentiment in favour of equality and diversity.

JUST Lincolnshire works with a wide range of partners across the private, public and third sector and many groups for who the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) provides an important form of redress.

There is widespread agreement that eliminating discrimination and advancing equality has wide reaching effect across all sectors of society and a robust and fully implemented Public Sector Equality Duty provides a good way for the Public Sector to display its commitment to reducing inequality. The PSED puts the onus on public bodies or those representing them to get things right at an early stage rather than 'after the event'.

JUST Lincolnshire recognises that although the PSED is the right tool there is still some distance to travel in the effective use of the framework. JUST Lincolnshire would suggest that rather than any further 'watering down' of the PSED focus should on ensuring that it can be used smartly as a tool to ensure that organisations improve their approach to equality in the long-term.

It is fair to say that in Lincolnshire at present the evidence of the effective use of the PSED is sketchy. For example in the Police and Crime Commissioner's recent consultation on his Police and Crime Action Plan and the associated impact assessment only 2 weeks were given for individuals, groups and organisations to formulate a response.

Directors of Just Lincolnshire have had extensive experience of Police Consultation on equality affecting minority communities.

Chair participated in an Equality & Diversity Forum Toolkit workshop to prepare communities for the Equality Act Consultation duty in 2011. Minority communities were invited to an Equality & Diversity event in Lincolnshire on the Police 'Equality Standard' but this was held on Police, not community premises. We would hope that the spirit of the Equality Act would now facilitate meetings in more appropriate venues.

We would draw attention to the uncertainty for community engagement following the introduction of Police & Crime Commissioners. (PCC's). We had no prior knowledge of consultation processes on the PCC's 2013/14 local Policing Plan, despite previous work on the Police Equality Standard referred to above.

Our Chair met the PCC and CEO from Commissioners office on **Monday 14th January 2013**. We were informed that the draft Policing plan was on the PCC website on 14th January, with a two week deadline. This is in breach of Compact and other accepted arrangements for appropriate consultation. We have submitted comments and on 22nd March 2013 asked for feedback. We have to date had no response to this, despite our concerns regarding the quality of the Policing Plan and the lack of a 'credible' Equality Impact Analysis.

Policing is a major public spending budget affecting every individual within Lincolnshire, their liberty, their reputation and their place in a just society. Our local experience indicates that much more specific guidance to 'due regard' must be issued to PCC's and Police services. We cannot accept that the existing timescales and structures will make best use of the Equality Act unless a much more specific measure of audit is introduced. In conclusion, we can submit practical evidence that the local population and HM Government is receiving poor value for money in Policing as a result of failure to adequately consult on priorities and outcomes

JUST Lincolnshire would suggest that in order for organisations to effectively comply with the PSED sufficient time for consultation needs to be given.

There is also evidence of local authorities seeking to approach the PSED in a positive manner. **South**

Kesteven District Council has initiated a community forum which enables the council to be informed by Grass Roots representatives as well as councillors and officers on issues pertaining to their PSED.

It is important that it is recognised that it is still early days with regard to the PSED and there has yet to be developed a substantial body of evidence with regard to its impact.

JUST Lincolnshire would highlight the unhelpful and negative approach to viewing equality within organisations as unnecessary red tape.

JUST Lincolnshire would support an approach to the PSED that seeks to develop and improve its effectiveness, but this needs to take place over the medium to long-term.

JUST Lincolnshire suggests that a robust approach to the PSED would include:-

- Positive and visible leadership from managers and leaders that advance equality of opportunity. This would include a focus on what public bodies need to do to meet the PSED rather than what they can get away with NOT doing.
 - The PSED needs to be robust AND proportionate.
 - Organisations need the resources to implement the PSED effectively.
 - The PSED needs to be embedded into the business planning of organisations.
 - Public bodies need to be able to demonstrate active engagement with service users, residents and employees, particularly those from protected groups in their decision making.
 - The process needs to be open and transparent.
 - The PSED must not be seen purely as a 'tick box' exercise.
- JUST Lincolnshire clearly supports a robust and effective Public Sector Equality Duty and will continue to act as a critical friend within Lincolnshire to ensure that public bodies consider the implications of this duty on them.

JUST Lincolnshire strongly urges that there be no further diminishing of the Equality Act (2010) and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty.

For and on behalf of the Directors of JUST Lincolnshire



General Manager