



Department for Communities and Local Government

Sir Michael Pitt
Chief Executive, Planning Inspectorate

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Dear Sir Michael,

Diversity Monitoring / Lifestyle surveys

I am writing to you because the Planning Inspectorate currently asks those submitting planning appeals to complete a diversity monitoring form.

http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/pins/diversity_monitoring.pdf

In his [speech to the CBI](#) in November of last year, the Prime Minister explained that it is possible to adhere to the Equality Act without adopting an unduly bureaucratic approach. Consequently, I am sure that you will agree that it is no longer necessary to conduct this monitoring process.

Indeed, in September 2011, my department issued Best Value Statutory Guidance which was sent to all local authorities. The guidance – which councils are legally required to have regard to – states: “it is not necessary for authorities to undertake lifestyle or diversity questionnaires of suppliers or residents.”

In December 2012, my department issued the cost-saving best practice document, *50 Ways To Save*, which was sent to all local authorities. The document stated as one of the recommended savings: “End lifestyle and equality questionnaires: Some councils spend time and money on asking suppliers and residents to fill out intrusive questionnaires about their sexuality, religion and other personal details – be it to take out a library book or make a planning application. Statutory guidance from DCLG has stated that this is simply not necessary.”

In light of the guidance we have given to councils / local planning authorities, I hope you would agree that it is important that the Planning Inspectorate adopts a similar and consistent approach in ceasing such surveys.

Public authorities should be able to use their judgment to pay due regard to equality without resorting to time consuming tick-box exercises such as unnecessary diversity questionnaires. Collecting and administering this information can take resource away from the important public services you deliver. The key is to take a proportionate, timely

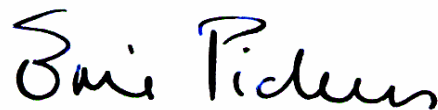
approach to assessing equality and that this is properly considered from the outset with a simple audit trail.

Moreover, specifically in relation to planning, the planning regime should consider the consequences of development. Ministers believe that the planning system should be applicant-blind, and focused on the spatial impacts not the background of the applicant. At an appeal level, many applicants act through agents, consultants or lawyers: I cannot see how collecting, say, the religion or transgender status of the applicant is particularly relevant. Any relevant material considerations will be contained within the submitted representations (for example, an application to build a care home would no doubt advance the public benefit arguments from providing more accommodation for the elderly).

In addition, as you will know, we are intentionally seeking to reduce the excessive information requirements required of planning applicants, as part of our broader deregulation reforms to planning administration. Such surveys strike me as a prime example of an information gathering exercise which is unnecessary and can be stopped.

I know that the Planning Inspectorate, like other public bodies, is seeking to reduce administrative costs; I hope this advice will be helpful in reducing the bureaucratic burdens on your organisation.

I will be placing this letter in the public domain, so that it can also provide further steer and advice to local planning authorities in reducing their information requirements.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Pickles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink color.

RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP