

From: Lindsey Ambrose [lambrose@northampton.gov.uk]
Sent: 14 April 2011 14:25
To: Specific Duties
Subject: FW: Public Sector Equality Duty - Policy Review Paper - response - Northampton Borough Council

Importance: High
Dear Sirs

Northampton Borough Council welcomes the proposed changes and the balance in the government's ambition

- to ensure that local government works transparently and accountably to all the people it serves; and
- to ensure that local government is enabled to work flexibly to meet the particular and changing needs of local communities.

The Council welcomes the retention of the requirement to publish information accessibly under the duties:

the outcomes of achieving this should see improved inclusivity and efficiency of services that make the most of limited resources to serve customers better. The social model of disability recognises that it is the way society works that often 'disables' people - so the policy approach of removing barriers should help more people participate equally and support their human rights to be involved in their local community. The Council's research into making web-based information more accessible, has also highlighted increased potential for income generation, take up of services etc - which while not equalities drivers per se, offer potential real benefits to local communities e.g. where information is easier to search for online because it's not just in a pdf document but is also in .docx or .rtf formats.

The Council welcomes the lighter-touch requirements about the details of equalities engagement.

The proposed revisions maintain the evidence-based benefit of ensuring councils listen to their customers. In contrast to the earlier proposals, these new proposed regulations should better support working with smaller and vulnerable groups (such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities, people with mental health disabilities and minors). Our LGBT and Q People's Forum's experience for example is to engage with the council in safe ways that allow protection of their identities - respecting people's human right to be treated with dignity and respect - while also allowing networking and appropriate use and publication of information about the equalities engagement through the Forum. The new proposals should help us to continue to do this - importantly helping people to feel safe to engage with the council.

Equality Impact Assessments which show due regard to the public sector equality duty, including the need to involve and consult with people and to base judgements on identified information, should ensure that the public can be assured councils are having due regard to relevant matters when making decisions about services. They should 'tell the story' to help people understand decisions, proposals etc. The removal of the need to ensure publishing of details of the information used in assessment and analysis should particularly help where information is sensitive in nature - supporting the council's ability to have due regard to privacy, safety and human rights and fostering good relationships with some of its most vulnerable customers.

The amendments in relation to equality objectives better recognise the integration of equalities into services - particularly given the retention of the equality information publishing and an overall evidence-based approach. Increased participation by under-participating groups, for example, should become apparent from routine equalities information gathering; perception of satisfaction should be reflected in customer feedback.

Regards

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