

Compact Voice
Regents Wharf
8 All Saints Street
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21st April 2010

Harshbir Sangha
Specific Duties—Policy review
Government Equalities Office
Zone J9, 9th Floor
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

RE: 'Equality Act 2010: The public sector Equality Duty: reducing bureaucracy' – response from Compact Voice

Dear Mr Sangha,

We are writing to express our concern about the proposed changes to the public sector Equality Duty, and its impact on the Equality Act 2010. In particular, we are concerned about proposed changes to the requirement for public bodies to publish how they have engaged with communities and assessed the impact of policy decisions.

Most local areas in England work in partnership between the sectors by following principles established in Local Compacts, which adapt the principles of the national Compact to better meet local need. The Compact has emphasised the importance of clear, transparent and meaningful engagement when developing policies, and this is supported by the highest levels of Government.

When the renewed Compact was published in December, it established key principles on consultation, and made specific reference to considering the impact on specific groups. It commits government to:

4.2 Assess the impact on beneficiaries, service users and volunteers before deciding to reduce or end funding. Assess the need to re-allocate funds to another organisation serving the same group.

5.1 Work with CSOs that represent, support or provide services to people specifically protected by legislation and other under-represented and disadvantaged groups. Understand the specific needs of these groups by actively seeking the views of service users and clients. Take these views into account, including assessing impact, when designing and implementing policies,

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The voluntary and community sector also commits to:

5.4 If receiving funding from a government body, show how the value of the work can help that body deliver its public sector duties on promoting equality and tackling discrimination.

We believe that those principles are in danger of being undermined by the proposed changes introduced in this policy document. Specifically, we believe there should be explicit reference to the importance of Compact principles – both those undertaken nationally and locally versions – when delivering the public sector equality duty.

The Equality and Diversity Forum – which Compact Voice belongs to as an observer, and whose Chief Executive contributes to the work of our board – has also expressed their concern with the proposed changes. In their submission to the policy review paper, they have stated:

“If data is to be able to facilitate the decision making process and achieve the aims of the general duty it will also be important that it is produced in accessible form... While the EDF recognises the government’s reluctance to be prescriptive about the detail of the method of assessing the impact on equality of relevant changes, the duty means nothing without assessment. This assessment needs to show how the authority in question reached the recommendation that they are making. If equality groups, community groups and citizens generally, particularly those from stigmatised groups, are to be able to hold public bodies to account they will need to have adequate resources to enable them to fulfil this function.”

Compact Voice shares this view and supports the other concerns highlighted by the Equality and Diversity Forum to the proposed changes.

We are concerned that the mixed message offered by government in seeking to amend local requirements does little to help local organisations work more effectively in partnership. Many local groups and organisations have benefited from the publication and recognition of assessments undertaken to consider the impact of policy proposals, and there are numerous examples on Compact Voice’s website where those partnerships have led to better outcomes for communities. We also support the importance of groups and organisations being able to challenge decisions.

As EDF states in their submission:

“We consider that transparency is important if the government is to give people the information that they need to create a climate that empowers local people and communities and enables them to hold their public bodies to account. However, the benefits of transparency are rendered almost completely ineffective if it takes place too long after the event. Transparency can only aid decision making if the data in question is available to those affected at the time the decisions are made so the people who are affected by the decision have the opportunity to use the data to put their point of view and to challenge any misinformation or misunderstandings.”

We would encourage government to reconsider the changes they are proposing in light of these comments and submissions. In particular, we encourage recognition of the role and importance of local Compacts to facilitate greater understanding between the sectors, also recognising the role of those local partnerships who promote the principles of the Compact in their work. The Compact provides a key mechanism to help share and develop greater understanding between the sectors both locally and nationally.

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By showing strong leadership and recognition to the principles of the Compact, government will strengthen the status and significance of local Compacts, particularly as they relate to our collective commitment to promote and advance equality. Any proposed changes to the public sector equality duty must not diminish the role of local Compacts, nor any of those principles and practices which ensure greater understanding, recognise the importance of meaningful engagement, and properly assess the impact that proposed policies will have on communities.



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