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To: Specific Duties

Subject: Responding to consultation re specific duties

I am an equality & diversity professional with over 25 years experience the last decade as a trainer/consultant.

I am very worried about the quality of equality & diversity work once outside of Manchester & London.

Black and minority ethnic communities don't have the resources or the skills to hold public authorities to account. E.g. while working in the north-west of England people were still being told to bring a friend or neighbour to interpret for them in medical examinations. This is despite this practice has killed somebody and was still part of the oral history...

An elderly man was taken ill and the ambulance service was using his grandson to interpret for him. They asked the boy "is he allergic to penicillin?" The boy said "No". They injected him with penicillin; the old man had an allergic reaction and died.

Another example ...

The primary care trust had no mechanism for getting a sign language interpreter for a deaf patient. The patient would be given an appointment, they would attend find that they couldn't communicate with the clinician and have to leave again. The appointment would be wasted and had to be re-booked.

In terms of LGBT work often a public authority will be relying on the work of poorly resourced volunteers. E.G

In a north-west NHS organisation two or three people from the LGBT community were providing input but both of these people were on benefits. They were so poor that the fares attending local meetings were an issue. Their poverty meant that they were out of touch as they wouldn't have been able to afford to go to conferences in London and Manchester to network with other LGBT voluntary organisations. Also as much information is on line people need access to computers and so this can be difficult if you are poor – a computer is an expensive piece of equipment to maintain.

Once away from the big cities minorities are powerless to influence NHS trusts and local authorities – all this talk of localism just mean that outside of London and Manchester minorities get a really poor service and discriminatory practices are entrenched.

Here is a training example that I used to show how service delivery can be improved and money saved if good quality equality analyses are the regime. The responses from a typical training session are in italics.

Case study

In this borough, 50% of an urban district is made-up of flats, some of which are of old style 60s high rise design with others being more desirable private developments. Other housing includes some large Victorian terraces that are often let to multi-occupancy tenants.

The last census revealed that 20% of the residents are 65 or over with another 20% who self-define as disabled. In terms of ethnicity, a large number of Asian people live in the borough with the largest community being Bangladeshi Muslims. The rest of the population describes itself as white or black British. The A& E department at the local hospital reports a 4 fold increase in the number of patients requiring Eastern European interpretation services. This is backed up by anecdotal evidence that a significant number of Eastern European people have come here to work.

A – Recycling

The borough has to improve the amount of domestic waste that is recycled. They change their policy of asking residents to take recyclables to collection points (e.g. outside supermarkets or at local landmarks). Instead they issue every household with a box (no lids are provided) and the instructions written in English with a strap line about different communication needs.

Paper – should be put into a plastic bag

Cardboard – should be put into a separate plastic bag

Glass bottles should be rinsed out

Cans should have their labels removed, rinsed and flattened.

And other recyclables (foil, clothing, batteries and plastics) should still be taken to the dump.

1. In your group, decide whether any of the equality target groups would be disadvantaged by this system.

BME

Poor literacy levels in the Bangladeshi community may mean they won't receive the message.

Eastern Europeans' probably won't be able to read English

AGE

Older people might not be able to crush the cans.

Disability

Some people who have been deaf from birth cannot read or write English as sign language is their mother tongue.

Some People with learning disabilities and /or learning difficulties may have poor literacy skills and do not understand printed information written in English

Some people with physical disabilities may have trouble with the physical requirements of this scheme.

2. Are there any other groups who may be disadvantaged by this system?

People who live in flats may not have the space to keep their recycling as opposed to a house dweller that may have a front garden.

People who are living in houses of multiple occupancy may feel less committed to the area and so may need additional engagement to change their behaviour.

The overall effect of this is that the council will miss its recycling targets and spends more on land-fill.

Reducing the duty to provide an action plan to one equality objective will undo all of the good work that many local authorities and government departments have done over the last decade.

I think public authorities should have to produce a plan which prioritises the plans, services and policies that are going to given a full equality analyses.

A regime of equality objectives should include publications with authorities setting objectives that reflect the complexity of the their work.

Regards

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