



Department for Communities and Local Government

The Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

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Ms Heather Lees
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Commission for Local Administration in
England
The Oaks Number 2
Westwood Way
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Dear Ms Lees

Diversity Monitoring / Lifestyle surveys

I am writing to you because I understand that the Commission for Local Administration in England currently asks everyone submitting a complaint to complete a diversity monitoring form. 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.

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.”

Also in December, Local Government Minister, Brandon Lewis, wrote to all local authorities on the issue of how councils do not need to produce Equality Impact Assessments. He noted: “This approach builds on our Best Value guidance released in September 2011 in which councils are asked to ensure that their policies and services are efficient, effective, appropriate and accessible to all – without resorting to unnecessary lifestyle or ‘diversity’ questionnaires of their local residents and suppliers.”

In light of the clear guidance we have given to councils, I hope you would agree that it is important that the Local Government Ombudsman adopts a similar and consistent approach in ceasing such surveys.

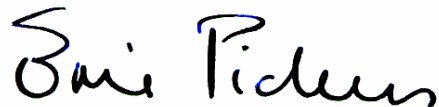
While the Commission rightly takes the accessibility of its services into account, it should be able to use its judgment to pay due regard to equality without resorting to unnecessary

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.

Of course, issues of discrimination may come up during the course of complaints or investigations, and you may be asked to consider complaints of discrimination in relation to maladministration. But any relevant material considerations should be contained within the submitted representations and subsequent investigations (for example, a complaint about a 'meals on wheels' service might consider whether a council is treating the elderly unreasonable or unfairly).

I know that the Ombudsman, like other public sector 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 authorities in the manner in which they conduct their own complaint procedures.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Pickles". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

RT HON ERIC PICKLES MP