

The Equality Standard for Local Government in Wales

Summary

The Equality Standard recognises the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment and has been developed as a tool to enable authorities to mainstream race, the Welsh language, gender and disability into council policy and practice at all levels.

The Equality Standard

The Standard is a means to combat the institutional processes that lead to discrimination and which form part of the culture and administration and governance in Britain. Current assumptions and practices can set up barriers that prevent access and discriminate against people through race, the Welsh language, gender and disability. Working with the Standard will allow local authorities to mainstream equality, thereby ensuring that discriminatory barriers which prevent equal access to services and employment are identified and removed. The Standard has been written to provide a common approach for dealing with equality for race, the Welsh language, gender and disability. This common approach is important because it means the same framework can be used for addressing all disadvantaged groups. However, this should not lead to the view that race, the Welsh language, gender and disability can be dealt with as a single issue – the barriers will vary and each strand requires separate treatment.

What is the Standard?

The Equality Standard is a framework that sets up a way of working within local authorities which will make mainstreaming equalities into service delivery and employment an issue for all aspects of the council's work. Using five levels, authorities will introduce a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equalities. These levels cover all aspects of policy-making, service delivery and employment.

The first task is to get the system in place and the standard sets out a level-by-level checklist for getting the system up and running. It will take time, resources and commitment to get these systems in place and local authorities will move at different rates. For this reason, it is important that progress through the levels is monitored and audited in a way that measures the achievement of each level.

Once the system is in place (the local authority has reached level 5) the system provides a

continuous framework for reviewing policies and services.

The Standard will:

- Provide a systematic framework for the mainstreaming of equalities
- Help local authorities to meet their obligations under the law
- Integrate equalities policies and objectives with Best Value and the Wales Programme for Improvement
- Encourage the development of anti-discrimination practice appropriate to local circumstances
- Provide a basis for tackling forms of institutionalised discrimination
- Provide a framework for improving performance, over time.

Putting the Equality Standard in place

The standard builds on the principles of:

- Quality
- Leadership
- Community involvement.

Local authorities will be able to assess their progress based on five levels:

Level 1: Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy

Level 2: Assessment and Consultation

Level 3: Setting equality objectives and targets

Level 4: Information systems and monitoring against targets

Level 5: Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Successful implementation of the standard will depend on a partnership between the council

and the community and should involve

Councillors é to provide leadership and support

é to ensure resources are available

é to engage with the local community

é to provide a scrutiny role

Managers/Staff é to work towards speedy implementation

Trades Unions é to organise and participate in training

é to challenge existing cultures and traditions

é to engage with the community

Community/ é to work with the equality planning process

Voluntary Sector é to participate in scrutiny

é to extend knowledge of equality standard within

community

The Standard represents a tool that can bring about change but this can only be achieved through an active engagement in the processes it sets out.

The Equality Standard framework document describes the context within which the Standard works as follows:

- Local government and equality
- Local authorities and anti-discrimination law

- Working with the Equality Standard
- Working with existing performance systems
- Working with the Equality Standard – structure
- Auditing progress through the Equality Standard

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Extending equalities – beyond race, the Welsh language, gender and disability

The Standard provides a framework that can be easily extended to anti-discrimination policies for age, sexuality, class and religious beliefs. Local authorities can readily adapt the principles to these other categories of equality by extending their equality objectives, targets and monitoring systems. These additional equality objectives, which should be consistent with published guidelines on age and sexuality, would be driven through the self-assessment procedure.

Following the development of this framework, guidance is being developed to assist implementation.