

A short guide to equality frameworks used by public bodies

Introduction

Public bodies are subject to legislation that is aimed at ensuring they are open and transparent and deliver best value to their local citizens in addition to the Equality Duty. In addition there is a range of sector-specific equality frameworks to support delivery of these aims. These typically set out different standards or levels of performance, going beyond minimum legal compliance to good and excellent practice. They are often drawn up by public sector umbrella organisations. In many cases compliance with them is voluntary.

This section draws together the key equality frameworks within which public bodies are expected (although are not legally obliged) to operate.

How VCSOs can use the frameworks

It is important to find out whether the public body you are engaging with is signed up to the equality framework that applies to their sector or not. If they are, find out their level of attainment.

As a VCSO you can use the frameworks in a number of ways, to:

- Encourage the public body to sign up to and implement the relevant framework, as part of how it will meet the Equality Duty.
- Encourage the public body to follow the principles and good practice in the frameworks, even if they do not sign up to it, as part of how it will meet the Equality Duty.
- Use the standards within the framework as a benchmark when assessing your public body's performance.
- Hold them to account if they have signed up to the framework but are not meeting its standards.
- Use the standards to persuade the public body to engage with you, your community or service users.
- Use your knowledge of the framework - any performance areas and levels of achievement and what public bodies are expected to do to achieve the different levels of attainment within the framework, to help you decide on your influencing objectives and activities.
- Use your knowledge of the framework to demonstrate that you are adopting a professional, well-researched and informed approach to engaging with them.

Common themes

While the equality frameworks vary according to the sector they refer to, there are common themes that apply:

- Public bodies need to be clear and transparent about how they make decisions and take into account equality issues and the Equality Duty at all levels of their decision making.

A short guide to equality frameworks used by public bodies

- It is essential that public bodies collect data and information about their local communities, whether they be geographical or communities of interest, so that they are in a position to make accurate and informed decisions about the effect their decisions will have on different/protected groups within the locality.
- Engaging with and consulting with people who will be affected by changes in policies, service delivery or funding cuts is key.

In addition, these equality frameworks provide invaluable insights into:

- How promoting equality sits within and relates to the public body's key public service goals
- What is expected of a particular public body or sector when it comes to delivering their equality objectives
- How they are expected to engage with and consult individuals and groups in their locality or to whom they provide services
- What evidence or data they are expected to collect and interpret in order to effectively deliver their equality objectives

and in the case of local government:

- How they might succeed in their "achievement journey" and attain the status of an "excellent" authority

The Frameworks

Local Government

The [Equality Framework for Local Government](#) (EFLG) is a comprehensive tool developed by Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID, formerly the IDeA).

The Equality Framework sets out five performance areas:

- Knowing your communities and equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern and diverse workforce

There are 3 levels of achievement:

- A 'developing' authority
- An 'achieving' authority
- An 'excellent' authority

When engaging with a public body about the Local Government Equality Framework, in addition to their attainment level, it is worth finding out if they have maintained their level, improved or slipped back.

Health

The [Equality Delivery System](#) (EDS) is designed for the NHS by the NHS to fit into the new NHS structure. It is designed to make improvements for patients and staff and will help the NHS to comply with the Equality Duty.

It is designed to help the NHS deliver on the:

- NHS Outcomes Framework
- NHS Constitution for patients and staff
- Care Quality Commission's Essential Standards

Organisations will analyse and grade their equality performance against 18 EDS outcomes, grouped into four EDS goals:

The goals are:

- Better health outcomes
- Improved patient access and experience
- Empowered, engaged and included staff
- Inclusive leadership

The EDS states that, for it to be effective, it has to include and involve local interests such as patients, communities, staff, staff-side organisations and voluntary organisations.

Local Government and Health

The [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA), while not an equality framework as such, is useful because of the potential for VCISOs to engage with it on equality issues.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) was introduced by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007). It places a legal duty on the local NHS and local authority to develop a detailed understanding of the health and well-being needs in a local area. The Coalition Government's stated intention is to further strengthen the role of the JSNA.

The JSNA analyses all the available data (both 'hard' data like statistics and 'soft' data like the views of the local population) to identify any major issues to be addressed in respect of health and well-being of the local population, including mental health, and the actions that local agencies will take to address those issues. It determines planning and funding for health and wellbeing services, and informs other strategies such as Local Development Plans for housing.

Local Councils and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) or their successors provide strategic leadership for the JSNA and it should be used to identify the most important key areas for change, such as:

- Health outcomes that are not being met
- Health inequalities that need to be addressed

A short guide to equality frameworks used by public bodies

- Client groups with unmet needs
- Services that require change

In the process of undertaking the JSNA, partners are encouraged to work closely together to generate a shared picture of local needs. Active community engagement in the process is recognised as crucial to developing an accurate JSNA.

Finding out about and contributing to your local JSNA could be a key part of your engagement and influencing activities.

Housing

The [Social Housing Equality Framework](#) (SHEF) was developed by Local Government Improvement and Development and is a bespoke equality performance measurement and improvement tool for the social housing sector.

It is 'designed to test how organisations demonstrate the following proposals in carrying out their duties:

- Be transparent – organisations communicate their achievements and priorities
- Enable citizens to exercise greater choice – customers are engaged
- Devolve power – customers have the ability to influence the organisation
- Focus on measurable results – the SHEF is an outcomes based framework and organisations will set equality objectives at all levels and in all performance areas.'

Finding out if your local housing department has signed up to SHEF, and how it is doing against these priorities, could be a useful starting point for influencing the way they deliver services.

Police

The [Equality Standard for the Police Service](#) was developed by the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). It is a 'continuous improvement framework mainly for police use'.

'The Standard is about improving confidence in the workforce and in the communities served by ensuring the different needs, perceptions and experiences are understood and taken into account when dealing with local concerns and priorities.'

Finding out if your local police force measures itself against the Equality Standard, and if it has plans to improve its performance against it in particular areas, could be a useful starting point for engaging with them.

Fire service

The [Fire and Rescue Service Equality Framework](#) (FRS EF) was developed by the LGID and is a bespoke version of the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).