equality + efficiency = excellence

local perspectives on tackling inequality for greater efficiency

capital ambition

what's in this guide?

In response to the recession and squeeze on public sector finances, Capital Ambition has been working with London authorities to deepen our understanding of the impact of the recession on London and share information on how councils are responding to the challenge. Earlier this year we produced an innovation and good practice guide called *Responding to recession* showcasing the actions local authorities in London are taking to help their areas through the recession.

This booklet continues to build on this work showcasing local perspectives on tackling inequality for greater efficiency. It provides innovative and practical examples of how authorities have been promoting equality to deliver efficient and effective everyday services.

The Audit Commission is clear that promoting equality and tackling discrimination is central to their core role of assessing whether public services provide value for money. Councils and their partners will be judged in the Comprehensive Area Assessment upon how well they understand the local impact of the recession and are responding to mitigate the impact on their communities and prepare for the upturn. This booklet is intended to kick start local and Londonwide thinking on how equality and efficiency is reconciled to deliver excellent and effective public services.

foreword

Strong leadership is required in public service over the next period. Leadership will face tough choices and implement hard decisions. A service is in the public sector if it is vital that it is democratically accountable and if fairness is central to its design and delivery. Over the coming period, the 'big squeeze' on public finances will force all of us to look harder at the effectiveness and efficiency of our services. If the service is ineffective it really doesn't matter how efficient it is. And if it is effective we will want it to be provided at the lowest cost possible. In this way our attention is bound to focus more acutely on the issue of 'cost effectiveness'. It is entirely right - London's councils will want to provide ever more cost effective public services. But effective and efficient services that are grossly unfair are poor public services. This means that the challenge for leadership over the next period is how best to strike a balance between fairness and cost effectiveness – not in abstract but in practice. In each and every service area and in each and every part of London.

Londoners have high expectations about the quality and accessibility of local public services. And over the recent past, London's councils have made huge advances in understanding the different needs of their communities, challenging inequality and improving the performance of their services so as to deliver fairer service outcomes. However, we are beginning to look at how we improve the quality of Londoners' life chances in new ways. The upcoming legislative changes heralded by the Equality Bill, together with changes in our own approaches to performance management (such as the new Equality Framework for Local Government), will help us address issues of equality, fairness, diversity and service delivery in more appropriate ways.

In this booklet you will find examples of how London's councils are responding to these challenges with imagination and determination. Use these to help tackle your local challenges and to stimulate discussion and debate in your local area about how you can harness equality and cost effectiveness in the pursuit of excellence.

Barry Quirk
Chief executive
London borough of Lewisham

Barking and Dagenham

benefit outreach services

The benefits service aims to ensure that all residents have equal access to the benefits they are entitled to, so as to maximise the take-up of benefits in the borough, reduce poverty, assist people whilst returning to work and to gain independence from financial assistance.

In Barking and Dagenham, this service has managed to achieve significant efficiencies by boosting the take-up of benefits in the borough by £2.2 million in five months, within existing resources, and reducing inequality and poverty through improved access to benefits for some of its poorest and most vulnerable residents.

A recent customer survey found that satisfaction with the benefits service was higher among pensioners than those of working age. This is probably because in previous years, a joint visiting team set up with the pension service visited pensioners, boosting the level of benefits by an extra £2 million.

Building on the success of this work, a visiting team undertook outreach work with all vulnerable people who may otherwise slip through the benefits net and be left at an unacceptable level of poverty.

The new outreach partnerships are proving highly productive with their combined impact resulting in additional benefits being paid out during 2008/09. It is hoped that the extension of this initiative to a wider range of people, and boost in benefit take-up, leads to an increase in satisfaction levels.

Travellers have also benefited from outreach work. Following the refurbishment and opening of the travellers' site in June 2004, the benefits visiting team made sure they were on site as each occupant returned. Each family was given the opportunity for a complete benefit review. This was a particularly welcome service for the residents as most of the adults had very basic levels of literacy.

Since then an officer has visited the site on a regular basis to deal with queries, complete benefit reviews and welcome new residents. The residents have a high level of confidence in the benefits team and often turn to them for help on other matters such as passport applications or reading and explaining the contents of important mail. Another benefit for the council has been virtually zero rent or council tax arrears.

More information is available from:
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equality
equal access to benefits

+

efficiency
£2.2 million in additional benefits

=

excellence
reduction in poverty, increased satisfaction and reduction in arrears

Bexley

accessible transport

Bexley Accessible Transport Scheme (BATS) aims to provide affordable, accessible and safe transport for community and voluntary groups. The scheme started in 2004 with three buses, and today operates a fleet of 12 vehicles, with over 30 staff and volunteers, providing transport to 148 member groups.

BATS has been successful in increasing the provision of accessible and affordable transport whilst also generating £100,000 savings in the first year.

It also operates an individual membership scheme for people with disabilities or who have mobility problems. The ultimate goal is to have a sustainable scheme, where the reliance on grant funding reduces as income is generated from within the scheme to support its sustainability.

The success and established track record of BATS has led to it delivering other services on behalf of the council. This includes a contract to take clients to nursing homes in Bexley for respite care, which has reduced the unit cost of transport. It also delivers savings through managing the social services fleet of 21 buses and 40 staff.

The Hop n Shop mobility bus service was launched in July 2008 in partnership with the council. The service takes members of the scheme, who find it difficult to get out and about, to local shops and other services. A door-to-door service, the scheme is borough-wide, has 150 members and is aimed at older people, people with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities and families with young children.

Hop n Shop has gone from being 100 per cent council-funded to being approximately 16 per cent council-funded, with the remaining 84 per cent met from income and other external funding. There is still the potential to generate additional income from membership fees and from use by other groups.

It also offers volunteering opportunities, with six volunteers supporting the scheme on a regular basis and receiving training to become passenger assistants.

The Hop n Shop service promotes healthy eating to users through its links with nutritionists at Bexley Care Trust, a local fruit and vegetable project, and regular trips to local farm shops, markets and garden centres.

More information is available from:
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equality
increased provision of accessible transport

+

efficiency
£100,000 in savings, reduction in the unit cost of transport and partnership working

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excellence
a better quality of life for disabled and older people and healthier outcomes

Greenwich

mystery shopping scheme

Mystery shopping is a well known method of testing a range of services at random. However, the pilot set up within the neighbourhood services directorate in Greenwich in November 2007 is unique in that, instead of paying for 'professional' mystery shoppers, it gives local residents a chance to test and monitor service standards.

Through this scheme, Greenwich has engaged residents, achieved significant service improvements at the same time as freeing up resources to be used elsewhere.

Seventy residents are registered on the scheme. The shoppers are diverse in terms of gender, age, disability, caring responsibilities and ethnicity. The scheme has enabled some disabled and house-bound residents to get involved too, by allowing them to assess services by telephone, email and post.

To date, mystery shoppers have concentrated on housing and environment services, but the scheme has proved so successful that it is to be widened across the council, and other councils have also expressed an interest in the scheme.

Although the scheme is relatively new, there have already been some significant service improvements, particularly where communication is concerned. For example, information in letters has been updated, as has signage in public buildings.

The shoppers have taken on more complex tasks, such as helping the council to develop a new 'lettable standard' for properties, regular inspections of empty properties and monitoring repairs.

There have been other spin-offs. Mystery shoppers have gained confidence and it has helped at least one of them back into work, while eight others have found paid employment with a commercial mystery shopping company.

The scheme is proving to be good value for money too. Initially, about 60 days of staff time per year were required to maintain the initiative. However, as the mystery shoppers themselves have taken over more of the running and administration of the scheme, less than 35 days of staff time per year is required, thus freeing council resources, which can now be directed elsewhere.

More information is available from:
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equality
improved resident engagement and scrutiny

+

efficiency
value for money – achieving improved services for almost half the resource

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excellence
high quality responsive and accessible services, improved customer care, resulting in increased customer satisfaction

Hillingdon

making allotments more accessible

In 2003 the council drew up a joint allotment strategy with the Hillingdon Allotment and Horticultural Federation (HAHF) to encourage a wider cross section of the local community to take up allotment gardening.

The allotment strategy has led to a much better use of resources and an increase in take-up of nearly 60 per cent. In 2003, only around 700 plots were let, out of more than 1,600. Today the figure stands at 1,215. Parts of under-used sites have been hired out for grazing for farm animals, generating extra income and reducing maintenance costs.

Allotment sites across the borough were reviewed and a programme of improvements undertaken, which included installing toilets for disabled people, along with improved fencing, water supply and car parking facilities.

Other initiatives to encourage more people to take up an allotment include free plot rotavation for new allotment holders, and a 50 per cent discount for people over 60, those registered disabled and those in receipt of state benefit. Information is provided on the council's website and free gardening courses are available to introduce people to the benefits of having an allotment.

The increased allotment take-up is linked to the council's Sustainable Community Strategy, which aims to improve people's health and well-being and create more social networks.

A diverse range of people are now renting an allotment – ranging from 16 year-olds to the over 75s. Men and women are equally well represented, there are more disabled plot holders, and school groups have a number of plots across the borough. Also, Hillingdon Mind and an older people's dining club have plots at reduced rates.

A recent customer satisfaction survey showed that allotment users have welcomed these changes, with comments such as: "The perimeter fence looks good. Our site has been improved and we have many new people."

More information is available from:
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equality
wider section of the community involved

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efficiency
more efficient use of resources and increased use of allotments

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excellence
better health and social outcomes and community cohesion

Kensington and Chelsea

improving scrutiny

Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local government remains effective and accountable. It ensures that decision-making processes are clear and accessible, and provides an opportunity to consider how efficiently services are being delivered, and how they could be improved, from the point of view of those receiving services.

About 18 months ago Kensington and Chelsea piloted an innovative way of scrutinising its performance with regard to equality. A list of priorities was identified and scrutiny members visited frontline services to test whether equalities issues were being addressed effectively. The initiative has proved so successful that it is to be made permanent.

A variety of services have been reviewed including a park, leisure centre, youth centre, housing advice services and the town hall customer service centre.

As Cllr Keith Cunningham, chairman of the scrutiny committee says: "Councillors want to see equalities being delivered in practice as an integral part of service delivery. By visiting organisations which the borough funds we can learn more about the services being offered and can speak with service users and staff to ensure that all diverse needs are being fully addressed."

Two councillors undertake each review having received information relating to the service and the relevant equalities implications. Suggestions from the visits are considered at a scrutiny committee meeting. As a result, agreed recommendations are raised with the relevant cabinet member and those with longer term implications are incorporated into the relevant service plan while more immediate improvements are acted on straight away.

In one instance, councillors have improved outcomes for local young people by scrutinising services and targeting resources where improvement is needed most to tackle inequality.

Improvements include an expansion in the council's weekend offer to young people at a youth centre. This has been achieved at no extra cost by re-prioritising resources and rationalising hours across all provision.

Another outcome has been improved services for looked after children. Previously, the cut off point for access to youth services was 19 years, as for all other young people. This will now be extended until the age of 24, bringing them in line with services offered to disabled young people, thus improving their life chances.

Scrutiny of the customer service centre has also resulted in improved signage and waiting areas.

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Angela Chaudhry, corporate equalities officer
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Clive Mentzel, scrutiny development manager
email: clive.mentzel@rbkc.gov.uk

equality
scrutiny and challenge of performance with regard to equality impacts

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efficiency
resources are targeted where improvement is needed most to tackle inequality

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excellence
visible political leadership in improving equality outcomes and ensuring that tackling inequality is integral to the council's performance

Lambeth

getting it right first time

The revenues and benefits division is responsible for administering housing and council tax benefits, and collecting council tax, sundry debt and business rates. It provides a vital service to some of Lambeth's poorest residents and it is accessed by one in three of its 125,000 households. It was assessed as failing in 2004, and by 2005/06 was on special measures.

By improving customer access to this service Lambeth has increased customer satisfaction across all equality groups and reduced the number of complaints, whilst making savings for local taxpayers.

Lambeth's population is diverse, dense and highly mobile. Its population is made up of 38 per cent of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. It has approximately a 20 per cent population churn each year which provides extra challenges for the division.

The last few years have seen a dramatic turnaround in the service resulting in it moving from the bottom to the top quartile for performance by the end of 2007/08. The council was also the most improved council in London in 2008.

Pulling together customer service, performance management and workforce development has delivered a dramatic turnaround in the service, with a focus on savings.

A key element in delivering these improvements has been the evolution of Lambeth's customer centres, which are run in partnership with other agencies to improve the quality of service and equality outcomes.

Other initiatives include, 'Every pound counts', a successful welfare benefits take-up campaign which supports older people and a campaign targeted specifically at carers (of which there are 18,500 of in Lambeth, about 7 per cent of the population) to come forward and make sure they take up all the benefits they are entitled to receive.

As a result, customer satisfaction across all groups has increased by 20 per cent, while the number of complaints has dropped over the last 12 months.

The improvements and efficiencies made by the division have saved the council £10 million. Achievements include increasing council tax collection for the fifth year in a row to 93.4 per cent, increasing revenue by over £1 million, and cutting the number of benefit over payments.

The revenues and benefits team has also moved from being penalised £1 million by the government, to being awarded £1 million for good performance.

More information is available from:
Tim Hillman-Brown, head of benefits, revenues and benefits division
email: thillman-brown@lambeth.gov.uk

equality
tailoring customer services to meet the needs of a diverse population

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efficiency
savings of £10 million, increase in council tax collection, £1 million increase in revenue and cut in the number of benefit over payments

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excellence
most improved council in London in 2008, increase in customer satisfaction across all equality groups and fall in the number of complaints

Lewisham

translation and interpretation service

Effective translation and interpretation services ensure that all sections of the community have equal access to council services. However, a survey by Lewisham revealed that its service provided inconsistent levels of quality and offered poor value for money. The review involved a wide range of stakeholders, including key community representatives to understand customer needs.

By contracting a single supplier to manage and provide translation, interpretation and transcription services, Lewisham has been able to make a wide range of local services more accessible to over 2,300 customers, at the same time as making savings and offering excellent value for money and a consistently high level of service to both staff and customers.

Moreover, the new contract is flexible enough to enable partners such as Lewisham Homes, the primary care trust and third sector to use the service. The range of customers using the service has increased by 25 per cent.

By monitoring use of the service, the council is able to identify emerging communities, such as users from eastern Europe and the Congo, and use this information to tailor service delivery more appropriately.

Of the 261 clients that commission services, 165 are from Lewisham council, 87 are from schools, while nine are from other voluntary or independent organisations.

Most importantly, customers are consistently receiving an excellent translation, interpretation and transcription service. Views of the service are positive, whether it is the interpreters or people using the service.

Comments include: "The interpreting service is very good, reliable, and very professional in dealing with referrals and assigning the interpreters to attend visits to clients"; and "As an interpreter who worked in the borough through other agencies before, I have been very impressed with how the services are managed. I always receive full instructions via email for each assignment, a map for the venue, transport suggestions as well as a text message reminder a few hours before the booking."

New technology is being used by customers, including an innovative language identifier to help service users flag up which language they speak to frontline staff and therefore ensure that quick, appropriate support is given.

The service has delivered £125,000 of cashable savings between October 2007 and February 2009 and future annual savings of around £50,000 are predicted, to form part of the medium term planning process.

More information is available from:
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equality
improving equal access to services

+

efficiency
partnership working and effective use of resources resulting in savings of £125,000

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excellence
the delivery of high quality, tailored and accessible services leading to improved quality of life for residents

Redbridge

improving recycling rates

Redbridge has exceeded targets for recycling by tailoring its promotion to effectively reach black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. In 2007/08, Redbridge recycled more than 22 per cent of its household waste and the authority is recycling more than 26.5 per cent of its waste in 2008/09, well above its target. It is aiming to recycle 30 per cent in 2010/11.

Redbridge has targeted poorly performing areas across the borough in order to increase levels of recycling, using a range of techniques.

A recent review confirmed that, although overall household participation in the door-to-door scheme was approximately 72 per cent, it varied greatly across the borough, with the lowest performance in the south, where the highest proportion of BME communities live.

The BME Outreach Programme was set up in May 2007, following research which indicated that working with faith groups is the most successful way of accessing BME communities. Through the different religious teachings, the team communicated the clear links between recycling and looking after the environment in a number of different ways, including:

- a tailored communications programme with interactive presentations and activities designed to suit the target audience
- linking recycling to the 'environmental teachings' of the faith, while considering how different faiths regard the environment and their different cultural perceptions towards recycling
- delivering workshops, including paper-making, junk modeling, cloth bag painting and basket weaving with reused materials
- linking their work with religious festivals
- encouraging faith leaders to tailor one or more sermons to an environmental theme, including references to wastefulness, natural resources, caring for our planet and the importance of recycling
- carrying out the 'Give them a box scheme,' which involves providing recycling boxes and information to all households without one.

A key feature of the programme has been the involvement of an officer who speaks four Asian languages.

Through a combination of the BME Outreach Programme and other initiatives, a 20 per cent increase in tonnage of recycling collected has been recorded in the targeted area.

More information is available from:
Sarah Partridge, recycling promotions and communications officer
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equality
tailored approach to involvement reaching all sections of the community

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efficiency
better targeted use of resources

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excellence
20 per cent increase in tonnage of recycling and a greater and greener place to live for all

Sutton

improving employment opportunities for disabled people

Sutton has been recognised as a centre of excellence for employing people with learning disabilities. The council has achieved this by making our recruitment and selection policy more flexible in order to open the door to people who, through lack of work experience opportunities, are often excluded from employment.

When a vacancy arises within Customer Services, the job content is reviewed and those tasks that are suited to a disabled person are packaged into a part-time job opportunity. The nature of disability means attendance at work may only be for short periods, as little as two hours per week in some cases.

To date, the council has employed almost 40 people with a learning disability, in a wide range of job roles that meet their needs and abilities. These staff are not only doing their day job, but as part of Sutton's Learning Disability Mystery Shopping Team, they are helping Sutton to ensure all services are accessible. To date this team has conducted mystery shopping exercises to test the accessibility of the council's website and mystery shopped telephone services. Next, they will test face-to-face services to make sure they're accessible too.

But the story does not end there: like many other councils, young people are under-represented in Sutton's workforce, so the borough has been looking at how they can attract more young people to join them. The Head of Customer Services has worked with the Shaw Trust to develop a programme to help young people with disabilities to gain the skills and knowledge they need to gain paid employment.

Initially seven young people came to Sutton on six months' unpaid work experience while still claiming their benefits. During this time, they were trained in all aspects of customer service and all achieved an Institute of Customer Service Communications Award. These young people were fulfilling essential tasks; six are now employed by Sutton and they are all no longer in receipt of benefits.

It is a win-win situation: Sutton's young residents securing paid employment, while the community as a whole benefit from council staff who now have a greater understanding of the challenges faced by residents with disabilities across the complete spectrum.

More information is available from:
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equality
improved employment opportunities for young people with disabilities

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efficiency
accessible services tailored to meet the needs of young people with disabilities

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excellence
a better quality of life for residents with disabilities

Capital Ambition is London's Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP). It is one of nine in England, funded to support authorities to deliver significant improvements in services, reduce costs and introduce new ways of working.

It works with all local authorities in London and their partners, helping members and officers work more collaboratively, sharing good practice, leading joint working and supporting improvement across the whole range of local authority services.

Supporting London local authorities to tackle inequality is a key element of one of four core themes, 'Raising the Bar'. This booklet provides a flavour of a much wider programme of work in place to support London local authorities and their partners to provide excellent public services by tackling inequality.

There are a number of ways to get involved in the work of Capital Ambition. If you would like to find out more about the equalities programme please email selena.lansley@londoncouncils.gov.uk or for more information on this or any other aspect of Capital Ambition's work please visit www.capitalambition.gov.uk

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