

# Equality Information

## What to collect and how to do it!



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The aim of this guidance is to help services within Bury Council collect and publish sufficient equality information to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

### **What do we need to do?**

The Public Sector Equality Duty is part of the Equality Act 2010. The specific duties require that **on an annual basis** we publish sufficient equality information to show that we meet the general duties.

The general duties require the Council to have due regard to the need to: -

1. eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic and those who do not
3. foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who do not

This means that we should give appropriate weight and priority to the need to: -

- remove or minimise disadvantages
- take steps to meet the needs of people with protected characteristics
- encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life
- take steps to take account of people's disabilities (for example by making reasonable adjustments)
- tackle prejudice and promote understanding

### **What is equality information?**

Equality information refers to information about performance of the equality duty. It includes information about the protected characteristics of staff and service users and local or national research on equality issues. The information can be quantitative (numerical) or qualitative (descriptive).

The term 'protected characteristics' refers to race, disability, gender, gender reassignment, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, caring responsibilities, pregnancy or maternity and marriage or civil partnership.

### **What equality information should I collect and publish?**

Where relevant and useful for improving outcomes and effectiveness, services should publish information that illustrates: -

1. performance and outcomes, related to furthering the aims of the duty
2. knowledge of service users/access to services
3. satisfaction rates
4. complaints

In all cases the information should include: -

- information on the effect that our policies and practices have had on employees, service users and others from the protected groups
- how our policies and practices will (or have) furthered the three equality aims in the general equality duty
- details of the information used in that analysis
- details of engagement with people with an interest in the aims of the duty

You should publish enough information so that an interested person could make a robust assessment of whether you are fulfilling the 3 general equality duties in exercising your functions.

Where there are gaps in the data you are able to collect, you should aim to fill them within a reasonable timeframe. Prioritise the gaps which are most relevant to your performance of the general duty.

Whatever you decide to publish, you need to ensure that you are meeting the requirements of the Data Protection Act and protecting both employees' and service users' rights to confidentiality.

### **What are the benefits of equality information?**

Equality information will help you to know more about who your service users and communities are. More detailed engagement with service users from across all the Borough's diverse communities will also help you to establish what their needs are.

By monitoring your service users, you will be able to see where you are reaching all the people that need your services, and where you are not. You will also be able to assess how effective your services are, and how satisfied or otherwise the different communities of Bury are with them. This will then allow you to set realistic targets for improvement in your service plan, or inform any Equality and Cohesion Impact Assessments (ECIAs) you are required to carry out.

### **What are the risks in not collecting any?**

If you do not collect and publish relevant equality information then you are at risk of breaching the specific Public Sector Equality Duties. Compliance with these is monitored and enforced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Should it be deemed necessary, they have the power to take the Council to a judicial review.

### **How do I collect equality information?**

The relationship you have with service users will assist you in determining the most effective and appropriate time and way to gather equality information. For instance, you could ask questions at the first point of contact, or as part of an exit survey or customer satisfaction survey.

In all cases it is essential that service users are confident as to the reason why they are being asked for such information, what it will be used for, and that the data will be stored confidentially.

Different methods of collecting information include: -

- **Written surveys** - Anonymous surveys, which are sent to service users to capture their satisfaction after receiving a service, are one of the most effective ways of capturing equality data. They often have the highest rates of completion and return, as service users have the opportunity to express their views on the service received.
- **Face to face** - Confidentiality is often an issue when asking questions in a public office. Service users should never be asked questions if there is a chance they may be overheard by other service users or staff. It may be more appropriate to ask people to fill out a form themselves and return it in a sealed envelope or response box. Surveys which remain anonymous increase completion rates.
- **Over the phone** - As information being requested over the phone is often linked to a person's details, it is important staff explain why the information is being asked for, how it will be stored and what it will be used for.
- **Feedback forms** - It is often useful, and effective, to attach a monitoring form to questions asked on a feedback form at a scheduled event. The response rates can be quite high, although there is an issue of confidentiality.

Before you collect any monitoring data you need to be clear about what analysis you are going to do, and how you will use the information. You should also tell your service users exactly why you are collecting equality monitoring data, otherwise they may feel their privacy is being invaded unnecessarily.

Explain that you want to make sure that your service meets the needs of everyone in Bury, and that the monitoring process will allow you to check that you are reaching **all** the diverse communities, and identify areas for improvement.

Remember that all monitoring information is classed as sensitive data under the Data Protection Act, and so needs to be treated as confidential. You must only gather data for lawful and specified purposes and should not publish data in any way that makes it possible to identify an individual, without the individual's permission. As this is sensitive personal data, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that it is not inadvertently disclosed and is kept secure and up to date. You should plan to review any equality monitoring data on a regular basis.

Personal data is subjective, so the responsibility to disclose lies with the service user. The categories for equality information should be reliant on self-identification. You should never fill in a question on behalf of a member of the public based upon what you perceive to be their gender, race etc.

It is recommended that any equality information is gathered using the questions set out in the Corporate Equality Information Form for Services at the end of this guidance.

### **What do I do with the information once it is collected?**

Collecting equality information must not be considered as an end in itself. It is simply a useful tool to help you plan, improve or change your services.

By analysing and interpreting equality information you can inform practice and develop your service more effectively. For example, if your data shows that your service is not being equally used by the whole community, or if there is under-

representation from a particular group, you can investigate why and take the necessary action to remove any barriers.

Similarly, it is important to know who your service users are, and ensure they are representative of the diverse communities within the Borough of Bury.

Analysis and interpretation of equality monitoring findings will enable you to: -

- identify gaps in your services
- help with target setting
- identify where you can take positive action through service planning
- help you allocate resources appropriately, and
- provide evidence of your progress

Gathering equality data must not be carried out in isolation, and should be part of an overall strategy. Setting up a monitoring system does not mean that you have achieved equality – it just shows that you what the current position is. To achieve real change and improvement you should also: -

- engage with your customers and communities (see our 'Engagement' guidance)
- audit and assess your services and their impact on the public
- train your staff, and
- ensure appropriate actions are included in equality impact assessments and action plans.

### **Where do I publish my equality information?**

The Public Sector Equality Duties state that, where relevant, equality information should be published on an annual basis. If the information is collected at the same time every year it will allow you to benchmark your progress.

All the information should be published on your service's web page on the Council's internet site.

**For further information and support please contact Corporate HR**

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