Taking a whole council approach to making fair decisions

The places: As areas change so must local government to meet local needs. Councils have to provide more customer-orientated services with a clear focus on tackling vulnerability and inequality. Local places are becoming more diverse - ethnically, communities are older, more transient; there are more women in the workforce, more people with disabilities, more openness about lesbian, gay and bisexual equality and greater debate about the role of religious belief in public life. Local government is required to change radically the way it does business - to develop expertise in commissioning private and voluntary sector organisations, as well as its ability to think creatively about what's best for the local area, and take a contemporary community leadership role. And of course all of this change is framed in the context of significant on-going cuts to funding.

The context: The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) is designed to support systematic and structured improvement and encourage a 'whole organisation' approach to fair service delivery. Using the EFLG as a tool for service improvement enables organisations to be:

- **Confident** in their understanding of local communities;
- **Collaborative** in their approach to building and sharing this knowledge across different council services, with elected members and, in turn, with partners;
- **Creative** about how they use this understanding and these relationships to engage with communities in meeting their challenges;
- **Committed** to the improvement agenda

The programme: With the support of the Local Government Association a programme of learning has been developed to:

- Encourage a more sophisticated interpretation of what 'equality' means for an organisation;
- Enable officers and members to demonstrate how they embed this within their policy development and service delivery;
- Use equality analysis to demonstrate evidence-based decision-making and 'due regard' to the public sector Equality Duty.

The challenge: 'Knowing your community' sits at the heart making fair decisions and evidence from across the country shows that councils who focus on getting this right are better able to meet their current challenges. The heart of this programme focuses on encouraging participants to think about what makes a real difference to people and places rather than just the delivery of individual services.

The activity timeline: The broad outline of the programme is as follows but can be refined to address local requirements.

Step 1	Pre-meeting to agree the local challenges as a focus for the programme
Step 2	Half day tailored workshop with senior managers using “live” data
Step 3	Half day workshop with service managers using “live” scenarios and equality analysis good practice methodology
Step 4	Seminar with elected members to explore recommendations from workshops
Step 5	Half day final feedback seminar to include wider council panel debate
Step 6	Evaluation and final report to agree next steps

The outcomes: Deciding on the desired outcomes can change to the meet the needs of local places but could include:

- Greater co-ordination of an organisation’s knowledge about local communities and improved sharing of this knowledge, including the importance of breaking out from the inevitable silos of day-to-day working

- Ensuring that equality analysis is carried out effectively and provides practical assistance in service planning, particularly in savings exercises

- Stronger leadership and more effective partnerships by building a clear organisational narrative and the ability of officers to communicate this more robustly when explaining how your organisation is responding to and addressing key policy and service challenges

- Utilising elected members as community leaders, receptacles of community intelligence and knowledge and instigators of strong partnership relationships to build on the expertise of officers and members to create more problem-solving dialogue with residents

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