

The impact of the race equality duty on council services

Summary impact report, June 2009

The study report's findings and recommendations

1. The Accounts Commission performance study report '*The impact of the race equality duty on council services*' was published in November 2008.
2. The study report concluded that while councils had developed policies on race equality and many had taken a range of initiatives, the race equality duty had not had a significant impact on the delivery of services or on people from minority ethnic communities.
3. The report made eight recommendations to help councils improve their performance and five recommendations to a range of national bodies with a role to play in equalities.
4. This report summarises the initial impact of the study report, within each element of Audit Scotland's impact assessment framework.

Initial impact – media coverage and Parliamentary scrutiny

5. The national report generated over 30 articles in various print media. At a national level, there were good feature articles in the Herald's '*Society*' section, '*Holyrood*' magazine and the '*Diversity and Equality Professional*' periodical. Local newspapers featured some positive initiatives by councils – eg Shetland, Fife, West Dunbartonshire, Falkirk and North Ayrshire.
6. Between publication and the end of May 2009, there were 1,192 downloads of the study report in 'pdf' file format from the Audit Scotland website.
7. The study report has been raised in Parliamentary business, for example through formal questions by MSPs and in discussion by the Equal Opportunities Committee.

Initial impact – local authorities

8. In March 2009, auditors appointed by Audit Scotland gathered information from each council about the initial impact of the study report. Nearly all councils agreed or strongly agreed that the report had made a good impression on them.

9. Auditors found that:
- In seven councils, every elected member had been given a copy of the study report. Four other councils made the report available to members through their Intranet.
 - In 10 councils, the report had been discussed at a meeting of the full council/cabinet, a committee/scrutiny panel meeting, or another meeting of elected members.
 - In 17 councils, the report had been considered by a meeting of the corporate management team or equivalent.
 - In 15 councils, a corporately-owned action plan addressed our recommendations.
10. In February 2009, the study team was invited to make a presentation to elected members from the three joint boards (police, fire & rescue, valuation) in the Central Scotland area. Feedback from elected members was positive. Following this event, we provided further input to the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland's Business Group on Equalities.

Initial impact – national bodies

11. The Scottish Government published a '*Statement on race equality*' in December 2009 and has been asked by Parliament to explain its position on equalities, with reference to our report. It is committed to a programme of action on race equality through to 2011.
12. The Equality and Human Rights Commission in Scotland (EHRCS) welcomed the Audit Scotland report in an open letter to the media, stating that "*The Commission believes the Audit Scotland analysis of barriers to progress, and how these can be overcome, is sound and presents some productive recommendations which local authorities and national bodies, such as the Commission, can act upon. Many of the lessons can be equally well applied to other areas of equality work such as disability and gender.*"
13. We were invited to speak at a national conference of equality stakeholders in March 2009, featuring delegates from across the public sector. EHRCS again welcomed the study report and committed to further work in support of public bodies. In particular, EHRCS pledged to rationalise the complex array of guidance on the various equality strands. It planned to publish accessible guidance on equality impact assessments (EQIAs) in 2009 as a matter of priority.
14. COSLA commented "*This is a timely report which clearly shows progress by all councils in developing policies and processes on equality issues, including many examples of good practice. We are aware that there is more to be done – local government never*

rests on its laurels, and we are aware of the issues. In particular, as we move further into delivering on outcomes, we will need to be better at demonstrating the positive impact of services on communities. This is something that needs to happen across the whole of the public sector."

15. During the course of the study and since, we have been in dialogue with the Improvement Service (IS) regarding its work to develop an equality management framework for councils. Just before publication, the IS Chief Executive praised the report and pledged the support of the IS in helping councils to improve their performance.
16. We are optimistic that the recent request to councils from local auditors for information on the initial impact of the national report will help to stimulate the interest of chief executives in equality issues.
17. The study report focused on two services – libraries and planning. The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) welcomed the report, featured it on its website, and covered it in the periodical for public sector librarians in Scotland. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has started to update its policy and practice on race equality issues and plans to draw on our report. The RTPI's periodical '*The Planner*' is to feature an article about the study report in June 2009.
18. Several universities have approached the study team for assistance and/or given positive feedback, including Edinburgh University and Heriot Watt University. Liverpool University invited us to speak at a conference in May 2009, which it jointly organised with the EHRC, about '*Evidence-based interventions and policy making*'.

Longer-term impact

19. We will prepare a second impact report after 12 months have passed since publication – around November 2009 – by which time councils and national bodies will have had more opportunity to act on our recommendations.
20. In the interim, we will track councils' progress through their auditors and by engaging with relevant national bodies.

Appendix 1. Details of impact achieved against recommendations in the study report

Recommendations in the study report are shown below in bold.	Assurance & accountability	Planning & management	Economy & efficiency	Quality & effectiveness
IMPACT ON COUNCILS				
<p>Councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify clear objectives and actions to improve the impact and outcomes of service delivery on minority ethnic communities. • adopt a more effective programme of race equality impact assessments that covers all service areas in a consistent manner, and ensure that results are properly implemented. • equip councillors to undertake their responsibility for race equality by providing them with regular training on the race equality duty and regular progress reports, including information about performance, outcomes and the monitoring of impacts by services. • deliver improved learning and development programmes for staff at all levels, to provide them with the information, skills, knowledge and understanding they require, and monitor the impact of this. • regularly publish information on minority ethnic communities, the inequalities they encounter and their needs – and use this information to improve services. • improve consultation and engagement with minority ethnic communities, to ensure a deeper understanding of their service needs and priorities. • make use of the guidance and good practice on Best Value to ensure that race equality schemes are integrated effectively in mainstream policy, management and services delivery processes. • work with partner agencies, including other councils and through community planning partnerships, to: share information, expertise and resources; provide training and guidance for councillors and staff; disseminate good practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • •
<p>In, our survey of councils in March 2009, all councils agreed or strongly agreed that the national report tackles topical issues. Nearly all councils agreed or strongly agreed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the report is easy to read (31 councils). • the examples of good practice are helpful (30). • the exhibits are helpful (30). • the recommendations clearly follow from the findings (31). • the recommendations are justified (31). • that the recommendations are relevant to the council (30). <p>The survey found 15 councils had developed an improvement action plan in response to the national report's recommendations. Of these 15:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four had developed an action plan specific to the report. • Five had embedded improvement plans in their other race equality work. • Six had taken a wider corporate approach to equality issues. <p>• Seven councils were developing improvement actions in response to the report and ten had yet to develop concrete proposals.</p>				

Recommendations in the study report are shown below in bold.	Assurance & accountability	Planning & management	Economy & efficiency	Quality & effectiveness
IMPACT ON NATIONAL BODIES SUBJECT TO RECOMMENDATIONS				
The Scottish Government, working with other key bodies, should ensure the availability of more up-to-date and useful social and demographic data on minority ethnic communities.		•	•	
Action taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2008 – the Scottish Government (SG) SG published guidance on data collection pertaining to equality issues. It produced guidance notes that cover how to ask social survey questions on age, ethnic group, gender and religion/belief. SG is currently undertaking work to develop questions on disability and sexual orientation/identity. 				
Action pledged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SG has committed to hold a conference on race equality in 2009 and to publish an updated Polish Welcome Guide. An English version will be available as a template for local authorities to use if they wish and will serve as a model for guides in other languages to be published by SG. 				
In consultation with councils and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Equality and Human Rights Commission should clarify its various roles in relation to councils, and its expectations of them.		•		•
Action taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2009 – the EHRCS Director said at a conference that she is part way through a ‘road trip’ around Scottish councils to discuss EHRCS’s expectations of public bodies and to better understand the diversity and equality issues councils face. 				
Action pledged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2009 – EHRCS advised us that it will publish guidance on how public bodies should impact-assess their budget proposals. 				
The Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Improvement Service should work with councils to develop guidance on the race equality duty, including equality impact assessments and the linking of community views to service delivery.		•		•
Action taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2009 – EHRCS published guidance on good practice in the public sector, across a range of equality strands, at a conference attended by 100+ delegates. At the conference, the EHRCS Director recognised the array of guidance and support for public bodies is piecemeal and complex. 				

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Action pledged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> March 2009 – EHRCS committed to rationalising the disparate current guidance into a coherent framework more accessible to public bodies and aligned with the imminent Equality Bill. This Westminster Bill is expected to introduce a single, over-arching equality duty for public bodies across the UK. EHRCS has prioritised the publication of guidance on impact assessments, in 2009. 				
The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers should develop its leadership role in the field of equalities and promote support for councils' equality officers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been no feedback from SOLACE. 	•	•		
Bodies that govern professional standards and continuing professional development should ensure their members are equipped to play an active role in helping councils meet the race equality duty.		•		•
Action taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2008 – the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) listed our report on its website. The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) has been supportive of the study and our report's recommendations. Action pledged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 2009 – the RTPI told us they are updating their policy and practice on equality issues, and will be informed by our report. June 2009 – the RTPI told us the June 2009 edition of their periodical '<i>The Planner</i>' would feature the study report. 				