

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 16 October 2008

Subject: Report on Equality Standard Level 3 Validation Process

Report of: Equality Standard Level 3 Validation

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Purpose / summary: This report provides feedback on the Equality Standard Level 3 validations and peer review process which took place on 8, 9 and 10 July. I am pleased to report that we have now achieved level 3 of the standard.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: Wigan Council has a number of legal duties to implement equality, diversity and fairness. It is essential to meet our legal and statutory responsibilities that we meet the Equality Standard. The Equality Standard for Local Government is an established and accepted framework for implementing our equality and diversity duties.

Recommendation / decision: This report asks Cabinet to note this position and agree to work towards excellent status within the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

Key Decision: This report does not involve a key decision

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	Within existing resources
Staffing:	Within existing resources
Policy:	Equality and Diversity
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	Impact assessments are a key element of this work. A separate assessment of this report is therefore not required.
Wards affected:	All.

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

Yes. Achievement of the ESLG 3 standard

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

The Council has examined all of its policies and procedures in preparation for ESLG 3. Further work may be required as we work within the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? **Yes ***

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget? **Yes ***

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No ***

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only:

Categorisation of the report:	x		x
Discussion leading to a decision		Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	X

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
		16 October 2008	

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer Sue Johnson
 Date 25.09.08

1.0 Background

The Equality Standard for Local Government is a tool devised to support Local Government to structure, manage, measure and improve equality practice.

The standard aims to provide:

- A systematic framework for mainstreaming equality
- Integrate equality policy objectives with best value
- Provide a framework for the consistent improvement of performance

Wigan Council has already achieved Equality Standard Levels 1 and 2, where we outlined our commitment to equality and diversity, and assessed our services and carried out consultation. Level 3 of the Equality Standard focuses on setting equality objectives and targets. This report provides feedback on the Equality Standard Level 3 validation and peer review process which took place on 8, 9 and 10 July.

Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust have chosen to continue to work alongside the Council to achieve Level 3. However some years ago Wigan and Leigh Housing took the decision to work alone on the standard. They already have ESLG Level 3 accreditation.

2.0 Overall Opinion of the Validation Panel

2.1. The panel's view for the Council as a whole is that with the addition of a little more information, we achieved what is required for the standard. We have now provided this additional information and can claim Level 3.

2.2 This is a great achievement and the result we were hoping for. Level 3 is a key milestone on the equality and diversity journey. We could not have reached this point without the hard work, determination and support of employees, managers and elected members.

3.0 Summary Findings of the Validation Panel by Department

3.1 Chief Executive's Department

The panel were pleased with the work of the department including partnership working arrangements. The Citizen's panel and workers forums were seen as good tools, important to tailoring services to customer needs. The panel would like to see more equality monitoring of consultations to ensure they are inclusive across the seven social identity model.

3.2 Business Support Services

Business Support Services showed a lot of activity was being carried out and was commended as "good work". The panel were particularly pleased with the provision of elected member training and ensuring accessibility of the Council's website. The department strongly demonstrated they had the systems and processes required to meet level 3. The panel would have liked to see more evidence of systems and processes have helped develop the equality and diversity culture of the department.

3.3 CYPS

The department was commended as "Good". Marked out for particularly positive comments were Sentinel, diversity leaders, extensive consultation with young people from across the 7 social identity model (plus looked after children). The department

also clearly demonstrated the link from the business planning process to Equality and Diversity.

3.4 Environmental Services

The panel commented that the department was “Very good. Pragmatic and realistic”. Clearly a lot of good work has been done. The panel was particularly pleased with work to address homelessness and worklessness, PACT and engagement work.

3.5 Adult Services

The department was commended for its work on age, disability and carers and seen to be excellent on consultation and involvement. There is a need to ensure that the department continues this good work across the seven social identity model as a whole.

3.6 WLCT

The panel commented that Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust (WLCT) was “Excellent with a pragmatic and realistic approach”.

4.0 Summary Findings of the Validation Panel by Theme

The validation process looks at a number of key processes when assessing performance against the Equality Standard. These are

- Leadership and corporate commitment.
- Community engagement and accountability
- Service delivery and customer care
- Employment and training

4.1 Leadership and corporate commitment.

4.1.1 The presence of senior management and elected members in the equality and diversity agenda and the validation process showed a good corporate commitment to the agenda. The structures put in place were seen as positive in mainstreaming the agenda and encouraging two-way communication.

4.2 Service delivery and customer care.

4.2.1 The panel were pleased that Wigan Council had adopted the seven social identity model (including class) and saw a lot of positive work being carried out particularly in the difficult area of class and poverty.

4.2.2 The Council as a whole was working hard to ensure services are accessible and meet the needs of our diverse community. The Equality (impact) assessment and consultation were seen as positive in achieving this.

4.2.3 The Equality (impact) assessments have created a lot of positive actions but there needs to be more work to turn these into SMART targets. The panel recommended introducing a quality assurance system for equality impact assessments.

4.3 Community engagement and accountability

4.3.1 The corporate consultation tools and the departmental work around consultation demonstrated involvement of customers from diverse groups. Further work needs to be done to ensure that there is systematic equality monitoring across the seven social identity model in order to ensure that this translates into involvement by all kinds of people.

4.3.2 The panel commented that elected members could become more involved in the scrutiny of the equality and diversity agenda.

4.4 Employment and training

4.4.1 The panel were pleased with employee involvement in the support services review, and through the employee survey. However, they felt that further support and resources needed to ensure the worker forums are able to function properly.

4.4.2 The availability and quality of training was welcomed and they were particularly impressed with the elected member training.

4.4.3 The panel commended the way in which training attempts to make cultural changes as well as providing information and explaining processes.

5.0 Proposals

It is proposed that Cabinet note Wigan Council's achievement of Level 3 of the Equality Standard in Local Government and that this is communicated to IDeA.

6.0 Next Steps:

The ESLG is to be replaced by a new equality standard from April 2009. This will include a far more rigorous assessment process than we have experienced so far. However we are working with IDeA, who have developed the new standard, in order that we understand what is required under the new regime.

We have also recently restructured and added to our corporate resource to support the equality, diversity and cohesion agenda across the Council. This resource alongside of the continued commitments of departmental colleagues puts us in a strong position to prepare for the new standard.

7.0 Conclusions

The achievement of the Equality Standard for Local Government Level 3 is a key milestone on our journey to develop a truly inclusive culture. Once again this is a great achievement and the result we were hoping for.

Congratulations are due to all those that have been involved.