

Public sector

Briefing for members
and non-executives



audit
commission



The journey to race equality

Delivering improved services to local communities

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local and national services for the public. Our work covers local government, housing, health, criminal justice and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we monitor spending to ensure public services are good value for money.

Since the chair and chief executive took on the issue senior managers have really shifted ... you could see the behaviour really starting to change.

Senior manager, PCT

- 1 Race equality is an issue that affects all public services as local populations become increasingly diverse. People of black and minority ethnic origin continue to experience multiple inequalities and discrimination.
- 2 Tackling these inequalities locally benefits the whole community: services will be better able to respond to individual needs and aspirations and wealth creation will be stimulated – for example, through improving educational attainment, reducing unemployment and increasing the capacity to attract a diverse range of people to the locality. Community cohesion will also be improved. All public sector organisations now have a positive duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to promote race equality, while the Human Rights Act (1998) enshrines everyone’s right to be treated with dignity and respect. Many of our research findings are also applicable to gender, sexuality, disability and other areas where inequalities exist.
- 3 We found that public sector organisations are at different stages on what we have called ‘the journey to race equality’, characterised by the following features:
 - **resisting** agencies believe that race equality is not an issue that affects them;
 - **intending** agencies feel over-confident, but have little motivation to make real change;
 - **starting** agencies are motivated and ambitious, yet are under-confident;
 - **developing** agencies have set ambitious targets and are improving outcomes across all services; and
 - **achieving** agencies have clear priorities for their local community and a track record of delivering race equality.
- 4 Delivering race equality by improving services and quality of life requires a strategic, systematic and coherent approach led from the top. Visible and committed leadership is critical to getting started and sustaining progress. Members and non-executives must use their influence to:
 - represent the views, experiences, needs and aspirations of **all** local communities;
 - communicate to local communities, staff and partners how and why race equality is relevant and important;
 - ensure that race equality is given sufficient priority, and that this is reflected through resource allocation; and
 - monitor and challenge progress so that activity is focused where it will make the most difference.
- 5 This briefing draws on our research to help you to explore in greater depth your role in delivering race equality locally.

Understand why race equality matters

Q1

Do you understand how and why race equality is important to your local community and staff?

- 6 One-third of chief executives told us that race equality was not an issue that significantly affected their organisation or local community. We heard some common assumptions underpinning this perception:

There aren't very many minority ethnic people in our area so race equality is not really a problem.

If we prioritise race equality, there will be a 'backlash' from the white community.

We make a lot of effort to ensure that we treat everyone the same. There are no race equality issues.

- 7 These assumptions can contribute to the behaviours and attitudes that characterise institutional racism. They perpetuate the view that race equality is a 'problem' that is difficult to address, and are used as rationales to justify continuing the way that things are currently done, or worse, inaction. This means that black and minority ethnic people continue to experience poorer-quality services and unequal outcomes.

*Public services have a duty to respond in a way that **is proportionate to the level of need, rather than to the size of the population**. It is only by understanding the issues and views of the local community, including black and minority ethnic groups, that the appropriate response can be determined.*

Journey to Race Equality, national report

- 8 Members and non-executives can actively challenge the assumptions by:
- recognising that people of black and minority ethnic origin have a right to expect fair access to good-quality services and employment, regardless of the size of their community;
 - acknowledging that people of black and minority ethnic origin contribute to the funding of public services through taxes, and that those services should meet their needs and aspirations; and
 - understanding that delivering race equality is something positive that will improve their organisation's overall performance, through providing more appropriate and inclusive services for all people who live, work, study or visit the area.

Create a clear vision

Q2

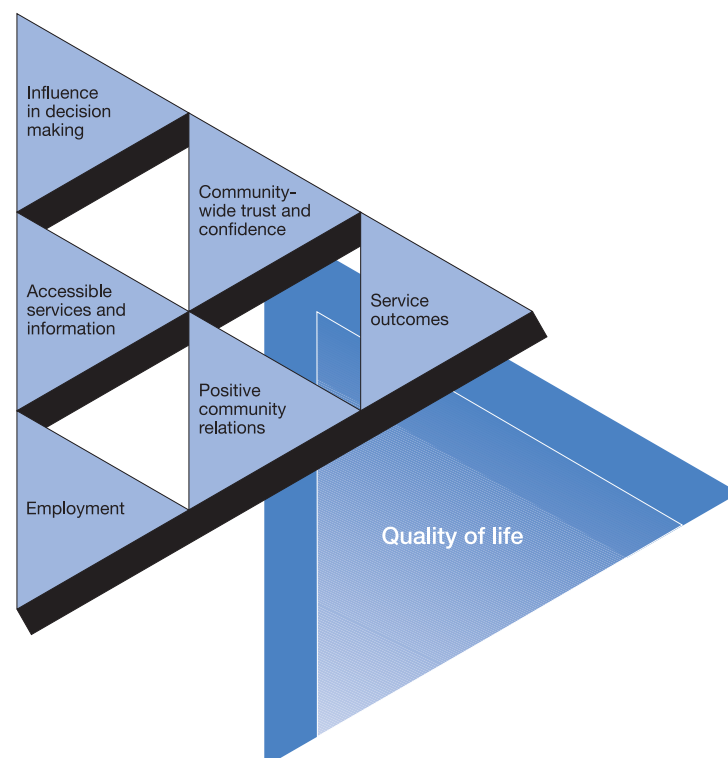
Do you have a clear vision for race equality that describes the outcomes for your local black and minority ethnic communities that need to be improved?

- 9 Although 'race equality' is a widely used term, we found that many people of black and minority ethnic origin have a limited understanding of what it means. This may be because public services themselves often struggle to paint a picture of what race equality would look like locally. Forty-one per cent of the organisations we surveyed told us that they had made little or no progress in identifying race equality outcomes.
- 10 Public services need to have a practical vision of race equality in order for activities to be clearly focused on improving the quality of life for all local black and minority ethnic communities. This vision must be based on a good understanding of the current areas of inequality and describe how things will be different in the future.
- 11 We have identified the key race equality outcomes where clear and focused action will improve quality of life **[Exhibit 1]**. These are interrelated, so focusing on a single area will not be enough.

Exhibit 1

Local outcomes for race equality

Local agencies will need to deliver these outcomes in a way that reflects local circumstance.



- 12 You have a crucial role to play in setting strategic priorities for race equality by:
- seeking out the views and experiences of **all** your communities, and reflecting them in your decision making;
 - leading and encouraging early discussions about the sorts of outcomes that need to be improved locally; and
 - setting priorities that will deliver those outcomes, and aligning them with existing corporate objectives.

Q3

How do you ensure that your organisation understands the needs, experiences and aspirations of all your local black and minority ethnic communities?

- 13 Nearly one-half of the organisations we surveyed reported having made little or no progress with engaging local black and minority ethnic communities. The communities themselves told us that despite many years of consultation, public services did not seem to be learning from what they heard. This poor progress is underpinned by some common fears and assumptions within organisations about the difficulty of engagement:
- black and minority ethnic people do not attend traditional consultation meetings;
 - it is hard to get beyond ‘community leaders’;
 - expectations that cannot be met will be created; and
 - it is easy to inadvertently offend or alienate people, for example, by using the wrong language or failing to invite representatives from all communities to an event.
- 14 Overcoming this mindset means recognising the benefit of dedicating time and resources to engaging your diverse communities, and doing so as part of existing consultation and participation activities. You can build the trust and confidence of your black and minority ethnic communities by:
- improving their capacity to participate, for example, through funding community groups or delivering training;
 - using creative forms of engagement to get a wide variety of people involved; and
 - developing a mature exchange of views by being honest about what you can deliver and demonstrating how you are responding to what you have heard.
- 15 Successful consultation and engagement with diverse communities is dependent on making a sustained effort and having the confidence to experiment with a variety of approaches to find out what works.

Making progress

Q4

How do you involve your staff in race equality work?

- 16 Race equality is often an emotive issue, with a long history of negativity attached to it. This can mean that people are afraid to start talking about race and are sometimes unsure of the 'correct' language to use. These attitudes and behaviours are often the main inhibitors of progress, particularly where race equality is not seen as important or relevant.
- 17 Those organisations making the most progress have involved staff at all levels, including those from black and minority ethnic groups, in developing their race equality work. Giving them the opportunity to discuss and influence activity ensures that internal expertise is harnessed. It also helps staff to understand how race equality impacts on their specific area of work.
- 18 You and your senior officers are crucial influencers of the culture within your organisation. You can change thinking and practice by:
- regularly communicating how and why race equality is important;
 - creating open environments for discussion, stimulating positive debate and removing the discomfort that some people feel when talking about race;
 - sending clear and consistent messages regarding what constitutes acceptable behaviour, and ensuring that these are enforced;
 - recognising and supporting the contribution of those staff who 'champion' race equality; and
 - rewarding improved performance in race equality.

Consistent lead from the top has been important, people are now being asked to think and work in different ways and this will improve things.

Executive director

Q5

How are you working with local partners to achieve race equality?

- 19 There needs to be a co-ordinated approach across the public sector to tackle the multiple causes of inequality (for example, the relationship between sub-standard housing, unemployment and poor health) to achieve race equality. Ultimately, one organisation or sector working alone will not be able to deliver race equality in their area. The localities making the most progress have started to develop a shared vision, and to address race equality within existing partnerships. Ten per cent of those we surveyed told us that working with partners had been one of their main areas of success so far.
- 20 Leaders can move partnership working on race equality forward by:
- harnessing local partners as valuable sources of information, support and advice;
 - supporting partnership working at an operational level, for example, implementing a multi-agency protocol for reporting racial harassment;

- recognising the contribution made by black and minority ethnic community organisations by funding their development and procuring services from them where it will improve priority outcomes; and
- influencing more resistant local organisations, for example, by demonstrating appropriate behaviour and promoting race equality issues at meetings.

Q6

How do you ensure that you and your colleagues have the necessary skills and confidence to implement race equality?

- 21 A lack of skills, knowledge and confidence is the second most cited barrier to progress. If staff and leaders do not have the right skills and sufficient confidence, you will struggle to make race equality a reality. Training can be a useful way of providing the space to discuss race equality issues in an open and honest environment. We found that training was most effective in those organisations that had identified specific skills gaps in more detail. These organisations were clear about how any training would fill these gaps and ensured that it was relevant to specific roles of the attendees.

Develop the business case

Q7

Do you know the cost of delivering race equality and where the resources will come from?

- 22 Forty per cent of our survey respondents said that they needed extra funding and resources to deliver race equality. The assertion that there are always more important things to fund can reflect the low priority given to race equality, even where an organisation says it is committed. Such sentiments illustrate a limited appreciation of the extent to which delivering race equality is an indicator of how user-focused an organisation is. We found that race equality action plans were often uncoded, giving rise to myths about how much delivering race equality costs in reality.
- 23 Central funding is already allocated to local agencies based on the diverse needs of the local population. Additional central funding for race equality is unlikely to be made available. This means that you will need to seek ways of releasing internal funds, reflecting the fact that delivering race equality is part of improving services overall.
- 24 Those organisations that are effective in this area have made some key breakthroughs:
- integrating race equality into their mainstream budget planning system, so that race equality implications of all resource allocations is assessed; and
 - identifying the resources needed to deliver race equality, allocating internal funding and making use of existing capacity where possible.

Q8

Encourage local ownership

How will you know your organisation is successfully working towards delivering race equality locally?

- 25 We found that the main driver of race equality activity is the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The influence of members and non-executive directors, and local black and minority ethnic communities, is seen as less important than that of the legislation. This has meant that much of the activity to date has been focused on systems and processes that comply with the letter, and not the spirit, of the Act. It is critical to move beyond this and take local ownership of the race equality agenda.
- 26 Making and keeping race equality a high priority for your organisation and community requires setting clear goals and targets that are aimed at delivering tangible outcomes, and reflect the specific needs and aspirations of your local black and minority ethnic communities.
- 27 You can demonstrate your long-term commitment to delivering race equality by:
- setting targets that help you to monitor and measure progress towards race equality and being clear about who is responsible for delivering them within both your organisation and in local partnerships;
 - being clear about where meeting race equality targets will help you to deliver your other 'must dos'; and
 - frequently reviewing and challenging progress towards delivering improved outcomes, ensuring that activity continues to be focused where it will make most difference.

Further help and advice

- 28 Our national report, *Journey to Race Equality*, explores the themes in this briefing in more depth. We have also produced a self-assessment tool to help organisations to think about what stage they have reached on the journey, and where they need to focus in order to move forward.

For more information, visit www.audit-commission.gov.uk/raceequality.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Steve Bundred, Audit Commission,

1 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PN

Tel: 020 7828 1212

Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421