

**Statement of
Scrutiny Board (Central &
Corporate Functions)**

**ALMO Inspections -
Meeting the Equality
Standard and Preparing
for Inspection**

Introduction



Introduction

1. At its meeting on 9th June 2008 Scrutiny Board (Central & Corporate Functions) established a Working Group to look at whether diversity and equality issues were being adequately addressed by ALMOs. The drivers for this were the pending Audit Commission Inspections in which diversity is higher on the agenda and the Council's ambition to achieve Level 4 and beyond of the Equality Standard.
2. Our decision to undertake this piece of work was based on the desire to reassure ourselves that when inspected by the Audit Commission the ALMOs would not fall down on this key cross-cutting theme.
3. Our discussions centred on the ALMOs ability to meet to a sufficiently high standard the Audit Commissions key lines of enquiry (KLOE). KLOEs represent sets of questions and statements around either service or judgement specific issues which provide consistent criteria for assessing and measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of housing services. These KLOE are designed to provide inspectors, inspected bodies and others with a framework through which to view and assess services.
4. It is worth stating that our Inquiry only focused on diversity issues. This is just one part of the inspection process. Achieving 'full marks' in this area does not guarantee an overall successful inspection, if other parts of the service are deficient.
5. On the statements made by the officers present the following report represents the general consensus of the members.
6. The Scrutiny Board will have further opportunity to consider this issue post ALMO inspections, anticipated to be late December 2008.
7. The Working Group would like to thank those officers who assisted us with this piece of work.

Comments and Recommendations



1. We are pleased to say from the outset that any fears we may have initially had about the ALMOs readiness to meet the KLOE in this area have been greatly reduced.
2. We consider that the ALMOs are in a significantly stronger position than they were in 2003 & 2005 in terms of meeting the Audit Commission diversity KLOE.
3. During our Inquiry a number of key strengths in both the ALMOs and the City Councils approach to equality and diversity were evidenced. We were pleased to find that ALMOs are working corporately with the City Council to meet the Equality Standard Level 4. This has been praised by the Audit Commission.
4. Similarly we were pleased to see that each ALMOs has an Equality Manager to act as champion in this field. We believe that this is a good use of resources and should be maintained. We also noted that a Working Group involving all ALMOs exists to disseminate good practice and to work around impact assessments.
5. These examples, in our view, show a clear commitment from ALMO Chief Officers and ALMO Boards to maintain the necessary momentum to achieve the highest standards possible.
6. We believe that this momentum is crucial to future success. We are confident that in terms of documenting what ALMOs do improvements since 2005 can be evidenced, for example clear and comprehensive Equality Impact Assessments are now in place. We are also confident that structures and processes can be shown.
7. The acid test however is how ALMOs evidence to the Audit Commission that these processes have been translated into improved service delivery outcomes which result in positive experiences for tenants.
8. Whilst we remain positive about progress made there is work to be done. We acknowledge that the ALMOs have made significant progress in collating their evidence for the Equality Standard Level 4. However at the time of the interim assessment in March 2008, it was recommended that ALMOs needed to evidence the implementation and embedding of processes for example impact assessments and how the outcomes of the assessments were being used to influence services, monitoring of action plans/ service improvements plans, use of customer profiling

Comments and Recommendations



across all equality areas to inform target setting and monitoring participation of different groups. We were pleased to note that since the interim assessment, work has started to ensure that these processes are built into the culture of the organisation.

9. We acknowledge translating processes and structures into influencing service delivery improvements is difficult especially when running in parallel within each of the Audit Commissions cross-cutting themes is the issue of value for money. However again we are confident that it can be achieved if best practice is highlighted and recorded and particularly if the ALMOs continue to work on embedding a culture that supports equality and diversity.

Recommendation 1

That ALMO Chief Officers continue to work towards analysing service delivery feedback in order to ensure that the organisation reflects the community it serves.

10. We acknowledge that each ALMO is different in terms of geography, population and service needs and each can

show strengths in championing equality and diversity. This should be positively emphasised and not be seen as a weakness during the inspection process. We believe this position can be supported if when making service delivery decisions evidence of appropriate risk assessments and value for money considerations have taken place.

Recommendation 2

That ALMO Chief Officers ensure appropriate evidence is collected to demonstrate the effective translation of policies and procedures into improved service deliver.

11. During our discussion we were also interested in the sometimes conflicting issues of equality verses suitability. That is the judgments required to be taken in ascertaining a persons suitability to become a tenant in a community and the perceived equality issues that same person may present. Whilst we do not profess to come up with an answer to this conundrum, it is our view that ALMOs need to be sensitive to the needs of existing communities. Again the adoption of robust processes, the

Comments and Recommendations



recording of actions taken and the sensitive use and collection of personal data will provide the necessary evidence if required.

12. As stated in our introduction, this piece of work focuses on diversity issues. This is just one part of the inspection process. Achieving 'full marks' in this area does not guarantee an overall successful inspection, if other parts of the service are deficient. The Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods) may wish to consider pursuing other lines of inquiry.