



Single equality scheme

Partner engagement feedback summary report – March 2010

Partnership Version

“Working together to make sure that everyone has equal opportunities, is free from discrimination and harassment, and is able to participate and feel valued in our work”

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Wiltshire & Swindon User's Network for their help in organising two extremely useful and enjoyable events with their members, to all who attended the meetings and who took time to discuss the issues with us or respond to the survey. We promise to tell you what we've done with your information!

Introduction

Each Public Sector body has a duty to develop and adopt a Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan. The joint engagement process took into account the existing duties around race, gender and disability, as well as the proposals outlined in the pending Equality Bill.

During the autumn of 2009 informal discussions took place between Wiltshire Police, Council, Fire & Rescue Service and NHS Wiltshire which revealed that each of the organisations was at a similar stage in the development of their Single Equality Schemes. It was felt that a joint engagement process would provide an opportunity to ask questions once, share costs and resources, and make better use of volunteers' time by not asking them to be involved in four separate processes.

It was agreed that the engagement process would take the broad principles from the Local Government Equality Framework, which mirrors those of the NHS, the Police and the Fire & Rescue Service, as a basis for discussion. However, it was recognised that each organisation would also need to have more detailed discussions about its own services and so provision for this was built in.

The broad principles for the engagement were:

- Knowing our communities
- Shaping our communities
- Engaging with our communities
- Responding to individual needs
- Employment opportunities

This report will explain the process undertaken by the partner organisations, the broad conclusions drawn from the feedback and the specific comments that will be used to shape the NHS Wiltshire Single Equality Scheme Action Plan.

The engagement process

A joint engagement document was produced, explaining the aims of the four partners, their achievements to date and the themes for discussion along with a questionnaire. This document was also available in an easy read format, and in hard copy or electronically. The questionnaire was incorporated into an online SNAP survey, hosted and managed by NHS Wiltshire, but available on all of the partners websites and also on the Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership website via a link.

165 separate organisations were contacted on two separate occasions, firstly to introduce the engagement process, invite responses and outline how people could get involved, and secondly to invite all those on the mailing list to a public meeting on 24 February at the Sports Club in Devizes. The list of those contacted and the activity generated is attached at Appendix 1. Some of the organisations approached, such as the Council's for Voluntary Services, sent the details of the consultation on to the small single issue groups that make up their wider membership.

In addition to the public meeting it was felt that a particular effort should be made to engage with disability groups to make sure those people had adequate opportunity to give their views. To achieve this the Wiltshire & Swindon User's Network were commissioned to organise and facilitate two meetings for their members where the Single Equality Scheme engagement was the focus of the discussion. These meetings were held in Chippenham and Salisbury in February 2010 and captured a broad range of views and ideas which have been incorporated into the overall feedback.

The three engagement meetings were attended by approximately 120 people; however the partner organisations committed to attending any scheduled meetings on request and this ensured the issues were discussed more widely.

The partners have agreed to work together to make sure all those who contributed to the engagement process receive feedback about how their views have been used to shape services and policies.

Summary of the SNAP survey responses

123 people formally responded to the survey. The full survey report is available on request and will be used by the agencies to develop action plans. The responses are summarised below.

Knowing our communities

Do you agree or disagree that local public services are good at communicating and interacting with all of Wiltshire's different communities?

Strongly agree	10%
Agree	38%
Disagree	28%
Strongly disagree	9%
Don't know	15%

How good do you think local public services are at knowing how Wiltshire's different communities are changing?

Very good	6%
Good	44%
Bad	18%
Very bad	5%
Don't know	27%

How can the way local public services find out about Wiltshire's different communities be improved?

General Responses

"To understand that those living in rural Wiltshire do not have access to similar services as those in urban Wiltshire..."

Health Specific Responses

"Be more open and honest about the challenges that are faced with a decreasing public service budget so people can understand compromise has to occur....health has had huge investment that will not continue, staff and patients need to appreciate that this means life will be tougher."

"As a disabled person, when I had ME I was housebound, at no time was I contacted by any public service organisation to offer their services or support...it was isolating enough to be housebound, but leaflets or screening can be introduced to assess other inter-agency support needs."

Police Specific Responses

"Increase interaction with local communities."

"Hold regular "surgeries" in each village or town."

Fire & Rescue Service Specific Responses

"Visit supermarkets and talk to people who use them about public services. Visit venues used by black and ethnic minorities, including food shops."

Council Specific Responses

"Wiltshire Council has strategies to aid certain groups, my experience being as a boater/traveller. However, these are not freely advertised so people are often not aware of them. By better advertising (at sites where boaters meet or obtain information such as libraries and marinas/chandleries) people would be more aware. The Council could also approach boaters groups direct, e.g. K&A Boating Community, Residential Boaters Association, National Association of Narrow Boat Owners."

"When a person becomes disabled through inability to work route, perhaps involvement at the time by the Benefits Agency, for those registering for Disability payments/DLA's can offer signposting to other agencies in their communities."

Do you belong to an organisation that represents your interests?

Yes	38%
No	60%
No reply	2%

Organisations Represented:

Parish council and a community partnership
Develop & Ridgeway
The Community Foundation for Wilts & Swindon
Muslim Association of Salisbury. Salisbury & District Bangladeshi Sport & Social Club.
Malmesbury Town Council
Partnership Board - Network People
Wiltshire & Swindon Users Network
Age UK
Wiltshire Council (Sheltered Housing)
Local Health and Social Care Forum
DADARA (Dursley & Drynham Residents Association
Unison
Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service
Church
NHS Wiltshire
Kennet & Avon Boating Community
Wiltshire Council
DEVELOP
Ps and Qs
Wiltshire Racial Equality Council
Trowbridge Community Area Future Partnership
Department of Children and Education
Parish Council
Pewsey Area Health Partnership
Westbury Patients Forum

Shaping our communities

How confident are you that public service staff believe in equality and inclusion?

Very confident	12%
Confident	40%
Not very confident	22%
Not confident at all	17%
Don't know	9%

How strongly do you agree or disagree that people in authority in local public services take equality and inclusion issues into consideration when making decisions?

Strongly agree	11%
Agree	43%
Disagree	20%
Strongly disagree	8%
Don't know	16%
No reply	2%

How could local public services improve their commitment to equality and inclusion?

General Responses

“Remember that many people, including most elderly people, do not have access to the internet, so that information must still be available in other forms.”

Health Specific Responses

“Discharge from hospital is too early for the elderly and disabled. Neighbourhood teams should be 24 hours.”

“Staff training and the inclusion agenda to be part of all service design.”

Police Specific Responses

“Staff training and inclusion agenda to be part of all service design.”

“Realise that people of faith have rights as well.”

Fire & Rescue Service Specific Responses

“In the fire service, for example, no differentiation is made when dealing with people or property at incidents with regard to race or religion – everyone is treated equally and fairly. We do, however, need a better understanding of the differences in culture and beliefs through education of our own personnel which could help us better understand them. The military in conflict areas are taught the language. The difficulty in this area is the large number of different cultures and languages.”

Council Specific Responses

“By listening to the public at events such as Area Boards or seeking to get input at the policy formulation stage locally.”

“Wiltshire Council cannot do anything alone. It is the national structure that needs radical change.”

Engaging with our communities

How good do you think public services are at providing different people in our communities with a fair chance to get involved in local issues?

Very good	8%
Good	45%
Bad	27%
Very bad	6%
Don't know	12%
No reply	2%

Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decision making in local public services?

Strongly agree	7%
Agree	39%
Disagree	30%
Strongly disagree	15%
Don't know	8%
No reply	1%

How can local public services increase your influence and involvement in the ways services are delivered?

General Responses

“By showing true interest in the opinions of the users of the service.”

“Be better at telling people how their views have helped shape services.”

Health Specific Responses

“Hold more public meetings, but allow them to cover lots of topics, health (both mental & physical), council, local crime, safety, advice...A meeting that is held about access to health may trigger so many more things”

Police Specific Responses

“Hold more public meetings, but allow them to cover lots of topics, health (both mental & physical), council, local crime, safety, advice, people to point you in the right direction. A meeting that is held about access to health may trigger so many more things”

“Police community consultation meetings are a good model for grass roots engagement.”

Fire & Rescue Service Specific Responses

“I would like to stay involved in organisations that have a Swindon and Wiltshire network.”

Council Specific Responses

“More accessible local government meetings. Identified local points of contact who will pass on and feedback issues.”

“Whilst the new Community Area Boards are an excellent idea, not everyone can get to the meetings. Online opportunities will reach more people, albeit probably not those most at risk of exclusion.”

“I would be more likely to be involved if I didn't see so much disregard for the citizen's opinion on how to improve services. Local government in my town is totally self centred and shows little regard for its “average” citizen.”

“By getting my local councillor to come to my community to talk about local issues – something I have not seen in 8 years.”

Responding to individual needs

How well do you think local public services listen to what you tell them?

Very well	4%
Well	33%
Not well	34%
Not well at all	15%
Don't know	13%
No reply	1%

Do you think local public services are flexible in the way they deliver to you?

Very flexible	5%
Flexible	32%
Not flexible	30%
Not flexible at all	8%
Don't know	15%
No reply	10%

What can public services do better to meet your needs?

General Responses

“Regular surveys of needs and views and evidence of change as a result, keep communication channels very transparent.”

Health Specific Responses

“Improve out-of-hours medical services.”

“Some staff should have more flexible contracts in order to deliver services in a more individual way.”

“Longer opening hours for GP surgeries or weekend clinics for Allied Health Professionals.”

“Dieticians currently do not have weekend clinics.”

Police Specific Responses

“The Police Service and other related public services should spend less on diversity activities and reduce community charges.”

“Enforce existing regulations or tell us why they are not being enforced.”

Fire & Rescue Service Specific Responses

“Enforce existing regulations or tell us why they are not being enforced.”

Council Specific Responses

“Provide bus services which attract people out of their cars – long overdue.”

“Some staff should have more flexible contracts in order to deliver services in a more individual way.”

A Modern & Diverse Workforce

Are you aware of career opportunities within public services?

Very aware		24%
Aware		36%
Slightly aware	18%	
Not aware at all		12%
Don't know		7%
Did not reply		3%

Would you consider a career in public services?

Yes		65%
No		18%
Don't know		8%
Did not reply		9%

How can public services improve the way they promote employment opportunities?

General Responses

“Need more disabled people to work with Police, Councils, Fire and NHS to get other people that are disabled involved more. We need polite people.”

“Provide evidence of how they can already meet the needs of a diverse workforce, therefore appearing welcoming to people who may not have considered it.”

Health Specific Responses

“Public services in particular the NHS in Wiltshire have poor recruitment & retention, this is largely because their attitude to training is poor, communication within the service is poor which results in poor job satisfaction.”

Police Specific Responses

“Young people: would they really want to work for the Police?”

“My friend works for the Police and was made to feel very welcome.”

Fire & Rescue Service Specific Responses

“Again, in reaching out to the community and opening our doors to them. They do tend to build enclaves and generally keep to themselves, probably through mistrust or misunderstanding. For example, the Fire Service in most eastern European countries are or were military organisations – the Romanian Fire Service paraded with Kalashnikovs until fairly recently and their public don’t trust them, so why should they trust us?”

“Offer more apprenticeships and work experience.”

Council Specific Responses

“By not using jargon and complicated language when composing job advertisements. By getting a feel for an applicant when interviewing rather than ticking all the right boxes on the day.”

“Have not worked for the Council: workers can be rude, they see the wheelchair and not the person.”

From the priorities below, which one is most important to you? – (respondents could tick more than one priority)

Knowing our communities	44%
Shaping our communities	21%
Engaging our communities	57%
Responding to individual needs	37%
A modern and diverse workforce	26%

Do you have any other comments or suggestions to make?

Comments

“Treat everyone how you would want to be treated, with dignity and respect and you will not go far wrong.”

“Feedback would be good and in particular why views haven’t been taken on board. We always hear about what has been accepted but never about why something did not resonate.”

“Thank you for initiating this survey and hope the results will be published widely.”

Summary of feedback from the engagement meetings

The feedback from the meetings fell into a number of themes, with some health service specific information which is included at the end of this section.

Key theme – Rural Inequality

There were over 40 comments from people highlighting the problems of rural isolation and inequality. By far the most comments related to issues of access and transport, especially difficulties accessing other services by public transport. However, several comments related to a perception that services had been eroded in rural areas, and in particular urgent care health services. More broadly it was suggested that there needs to be greater recognition of the differences between rural and urban communities and policies that are tailored more toward rural needs.

Key theme – Ways of Engaging

Meetings and events were still seen as a popular way of engaging with organised groups. 21 comments made the point that there is no substitute for meeting face to face. However, people did agree that this method does not suit everyone and there was support for much better use of more creative techniques for involving people, such as street meetings, soap boxing, fun days and voice box/stands at supermarkets, sports clubs and other places where people gather. Some participants had experience of using these methods themselves and were willing to share what they'd learned. There were 16 suggestions for more use of new technology, in particular Facebook, Twitter and text messaging as a way of gathering and disseminating information. It was felt that public services need to be much braver in publishing honest comments from people about their services, especially as in the private sector the experience has been that people do take a balanced view. Some of the housing associations have been running pilot text messaging schemes, the outcomes of which they will be happy to share with other agencies, as well as providing clearer information about how to get involved.

Key theme – Feedback & Communication

At the workshop sessions every group emphasized the importance of giving clear feedback following engagement processes to show exactly how people's views have been used to shape services and organisations. The biggest criticism of the four partner organisations was that we do not do this well enough as standard. There were 26 comments that either confirm this view, or suggest ways that feedback can be given more effectively. In particular, people want to know what concrete changes were made as a result of the engagement. They also want to know, if changes can not be made, why not.

Related to this was a need for clearer communications, with 23 specific comments requesting public services to be more explicit about alternative services when changes are made.

Key theme – Voluntary & Community Sector

The role of the voluntary & community sector in the promotion and delivery of equality was heavily emphasized, especially in the public meeting of 24 February. 26 specific comments relate to this issue with several people stating that better use of voluntary sector services and volunteers would improve the provision of services for minority groups. There was a clear direction from all the groups for closer working between the voluntary and statutory sectors, although a small number of people working within the voluntary sector felt their main role was that of critical friend, rather than partner. This view was not shared by everyone, but did prompt heated debate.

Key theme – Staff Training & Visibility

The visibility of front line staff was debated on a number of occasions, with delegates reaching a general consensus that front line staff should work alongside corporate staff to engage and deliver on equality issues. It was highlighted by a number of individuals that public sector services can not expect to know their communities if they don't actually go out and meet them, and that this especially affects rural communities where services have closed or been removed over the last few years.

There were 18 comments that strongly advised organisations to give specific equality & diversity training to front line staff, in particular to focus on raising cultural awareness, improving staff attitudes and creating a better understanding of the difficulties facing disabled people who need to access services.

Key theme – Area Boards

Area Boards were mentioned under knowing our communities, shaping our communities and engaging with our communities. There were 30 specific comments and suggestions. It was generally felt that Area Boards could provide a good opportunity to promote inclusion, but that not enough is currently being done at a local level by the Boards to take on equality issues. Notable exceptions were Amesbury Area Board, which carried out a successful workshop session looking at disability issues in the community, including accessibility to services and the experiences of disabled people, and Bradford on Avon Area Board, which has been looking at implications of revised mooring policies by British Waterways on the local boating community.

There were a number of discussions that reflected on the nature of the relationship between the Area Boards and the Area Partnerships, with 19 comments emphasizing the need for dialogue and strong leadership from local councillors.

Comments and suggestions for taking equalities issues forward in partnership

“Reaching out to the less well off, less articulate – probably the most effective way of getting at ethnic minorities and other minorities.”

“Spend more time meeting us in our own settings, not expecting us to go to them.”

“Share information with partner agencies.”

“Ask voluntary organisations about groups they are involved with and how best to communicate and interact with them.”

“Routine gets boring, need to shake it up a bit and do different things.”

“Encourage the voluntary sector to work together more to put on events like this to avoid duplication.”

“Let everyone who has been involved know the outcome of the whole process.”

“Having a robust procedure for keeping Community Plans up to date can help to deal with issues as part of a rolling programme.”

<i>"Integrity, honesty, openness and transparency are the principles by which the public sector should work."</i>
<i>"Public sector needs to use social media/marketing techniques more – but must be prepared to hear all sorts of comments, not just what it wants to hear."</i>
<i>"The public sector needs to be prepared to take risks, but it is risk averse. The culture of risk aversion is driven by people who benefit from that."</i>
<i>"If we are asking the public sector to change its culture we must accept that this takes time."</i>
<i>"Develop more of a partnership approach to engagement to utilise networks and resources."</i>
<i>"Use mailing lists and Facebook/Twitter/Mumsnet to reach large numbers of people."</i>
<i>"Maintain involvement in initiatives like 'No Barriers' which allow contact with particular groups of people."</i>
<i>"Encourage personal responsibility within individual capability."</i>
<i>"Stop putting information about how to access documents in other languages/formats on the back – put it on the front or inside of the front cover – who is going to bother to go all the way to the back to find that?"</i>
<i>"Tell people what has changed as a result of consultation and engagement processes."</i>
<i>"Provide feedback on positive influences local communities have made in local decision making."</i>
<i>"Understand that there are some hard to reach communities – identify representatives within that community and approach in the most appropriate way."</i>
<i>"When services are being cut, explain and publicise alternatives otherwise people worry!! Start with positive outcomes rather than the negative."</i>

Conclusions

- Reducing inequalities is a real issue of concern for people and, as well as maintaining emphasis on the recognised strands of equality, special consideration must be given to rural inequalities in Wiltshire as being of particular relevance.
- Increased knowledge and understanding of individual's rights, in turn increases the desire for control and influence over how services are designed and delivered. This is in line with the principles of the NHS Constitution and therefore presents an opportunity to work with service users and the public over longer periods of time to develop more meaningful opportunities for engagement, influence and decision making.
- The most vulnerable people in society are disadvantaged, even by processes designed to support them in accessing services. For instance, the majority of information is still produced in written format with all details about how to obtain other formats and languages generally printed on the back. There needs to be a

more “common sense” approach to the production and dissemination of information if we are to reach people that we know suffer the greatest health inequalities, such as Gypsies and Travellers and people with learning disabilities.

- While people in Wiltshire broadly agree that public services work hard to know and engage with communities, there is still room for improvement, and a particular need to encourage certain groups who are not well represented to become involved. In particular, younger people and certain ethnic minority groups that we know are living in Wiltshire.
- There is a level of cynicism about the ability to shape the development of public services, with people often feeling that their views are gathered to “tick a box”. It was widely agreed that the only way to demonstrate the benefits of engagement is to improve the way we feedback to people about how we have used the information they give us.
- Responding to individual needs is the area where improvements really need to be made as the majority of people who responded said that public services do not do this well. People felt that front line staff do not receive enough training in equality and diversity to be able to understand different perspectives and it was also suggested that those who actually deliver services need to be more involved in corporate engagement work in order to know more about what residents of Wiltshire really think.