

Hitting the Mark on Equality & Diversity

'The inspectors want to know how we evaluate the effectiveness of our work on equality and diversity'. It seemed a fairly straightforward inspector type question. But it made senior managers think about outcomes and how they could be measured.

I have had a full career in public sector housing including two posts as a Director. I contributed to regional and sub regional housing strategies, attended the Regional Housing Board and extended input to the sub regional strategy from key stakeholders.

Much of my career has involved improving services; ensuring residents get the best housing management and property service. In the early days of Best Value, I worked with colleagues across the county to develop a robust methodology and hold a conference to understand what these new fangled performance indicators were all about.

I have worked on a consultancy basis over the last two and a half years, including preparing for an ALMO to go live, completing and delivering service reviews and establishing and monitoring an improvement plan.

'Bums on seats' wouldn't do it, although inspectors have been critical where board members, temporary staff and main contractors haven't been included in diversity training.

It would be reasonable to expect a rise in satisfaction among targeted groups, a reduction in complaints, an increase in participation – but these are medium to long term results and something more immediate was needed.

We worked with The Communication Challenge Ltd, a specialist consultancy offering employee engagement solutions, to develop a new questionnaire. The result gives a window on to equality and diversity and much more.

equalityDiversityindex360© is easy to use with all types of staff – out in the field, part time, office based – with minimal disruption to operational services. It uses an online questionnaire to draw together perceptions; its anonymity encourages honesty.

Reports are tailored to the organisation, giving analysis by team or management tier or a combination of both. The end result is authoritative information, graphically presented and easy to use in developing the business. At a glance you can read across colour coded bar charts to see strengths and spot gaps.

It set the scene to have difficult but dispassionate conversations with the teams that needed development. It brought out the star players and allowed them to describe their good practice to colleagues. This year's perceptions are a baseline to measure changes across the whole business and in specific teams.

Often operational team leaders need to be persuaded that improving the business is an important part of their role. Feedback from staff provides objective evidence of where management styles need to develop. These, and other gaps, are used to set personal targets for the year ahead.

Training in equality and diversity can be expensive, especially when you take account of the opportunity costs. By showing where learning is working you can avoid the scatter gun approach of so much equality training.

Health checks, diagnostic work and research often provide a wealth of information aimed at improving the business, but how often do large chunks of reports gather dust? With index360© the effort to get from analysis to tangible result is minimised – managers and team leaders took responsibility for their strengths and weaknesses and started to improve straightaway.

Importantly the process provides reassurance that values of respect and putting the customer first, really are at the heart of an organisation.

Valerie Corrigan, Local Progress Consulting