Communities
and Local Government

Formative evaluation of community strategies
Equalities and Community Strategies:
Research Report

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**Equalities and Community Strategies:
Research Report**

Dr Surya Monro
Policy research institute
Leeds Metropolitan University
August 2008
Department for Communities and Local Government: London

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List of Acronyms

BME   Black and Minority Ethnic
CEHR   Commission for Equality and Human Rights
CPA   Comprehensive Performance Assessment
CRE   Commission for Racial Equality
CVS   Community and voluntary sector
LAA   Local Area Agreement
LGBT   Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (members)
LPSA   Local Public Service Agreement
LSP   Local Strategic Partnership
NRF   Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
PI   Performance Indicator
PM   Performance Management

Summary of findings

Guidance issued by the government in 2000 on *Preparing Community Strategies* highlighted the role of community strategies in addressing equalities and the needs of interest groups, as well as locality based communities.

Since 2000, there have been a number of important policy developments that have raised the issue of equalities within the local government arena. Key drivers of this agenda include a raft of new legislation, the enhanced Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) as well as the Equalities Standard.

This report draws upon evidence from the national evaluation of community strategies to consider how equality and diversity are addressed within community strategies in a selection of local authorities between 2003 and 2007.

Background to equalities in local government
Equalities work has developed in an uneven fashion across local authorities in England. A small minority of localities began work in the 1980s, and in some cases this was very comprehensive. Work developed across a broader range of authorities during the 1990s, often around specific initiatives or service areas, with a variety of structures being developed to support this.

Planning and strategic issues
Equalities work has become increasingly legitimated and mainstreamed since 2000, as statutory drivers have brought it within the day-to-day remit of all local authorities. In particular the CPA has acted to raise the profile of equalities within local government. The Equalities Standard appears to be a genuinely useful tool for local authorities. There are a range of other policy drivers that relate to specific groups, certain groups or service areas.

Overall, research findings indicate that there is a trend towards:

- in authorities where equalities is more established, the consolidation of work regarding the higher profile equalities groupings (usually race and disability) and ongoing development of work with other groups, perhaps through less established means (specific interventions, one-off events);

- in authorities where equalities is less well established or not established at all, there is increasing awareness and acknowledgement of the need for greater progress- although work may still be seen as 'sensitive'; and

- despite a range of developments, there is still a tendency for the approach to equalities to be somewhat piecemeal.

The role of the community strategy in promoting equalities
Authorities varied widely in the extent to which they included equalities in their community strategies. Survey findings indicated that in 2004, the majority of community strategies included BME equality, disability equality and age equality to some extent, and around half addressed gender equality to an extent.

Other evidence suggests a similar picture in 2007. There now appears to be a considerable amount of activity taking place in terms of equalities targets and performance indicators.

Overall, the way in which equalities were addressed through community strategies varied widely- in some localities, the two were closely coordinated and equalities was seen as a significant cross-cutting theme, in others there was little evidence that equalities were being addressed in a systematic way through community planning processes.

Balancing priorities
As noted above, equalities work has generally increased in priority. However, this must be balanced against other concerns, including locality-based interventions concerning deprivation and disadvantage. In practice, equalities – especially equalities work with faith groups, sexual and gender minorities, and recent immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers – still tends to be marginalised in comparison to other areas of local authority work.

Implementation mechanisms
The extent to which implementation mechanisms have been developed by authorities varies considerably, with some authorities having cohesive mechanisms that drive equalities through the different policy areas and others taking more fragmented approaches.

For instance some authorities have a centralised equalities team where as in others work takes place in different departments without a strong corporate approach. There are a wide range of specific means that are being employed to take the work forward, and lots of examples of good practice.

Performance management and audit
Findings from the evaluation indicate that authorities are putting greater emphasis on performance management of equalities work. Some authorities have developed mechanisms for performance managing their equalities work at different levels, to bring them in line with the Equalities Standard and a broader means of assessment against internal equalities objectives.

Factors that facilitate and block equalities work
The key factors that appear to be facilitating equalities work include not just the drivers discussed above, but also resources, political will, a well-developed community and voluntary sector, and good partnership working.

The key barriers are a lack of resources, political opposition, organisational inertia or ineffectiveness, wider social tensions and discriminatory forces, and overriding but related issues such as a focus on locality-based.

Community engagement and representation

There is wide recognition amongst key local authority staff of the importance of community engagement in both community strategy work and equalities work.

By 2005, authorities were engaging some of the equalities groupings as part of more wide-ranging consultation processes and in some cases specific efforts to reach equalities groupings were being made. This work continued into 2007, with examples of good practice emerging in some localities. In some cases the impetus for engagement came from the communities, rather than the council or other statutory players, and the levels to which communities were engaged did vary. There were some indications of a need to improve engagement mechanisms with equalities groups, via capacity building and the resourcing of groups, as well as attention to factors such as the timing of consultations and means of making them accessible to less able or experienced community actors.

Issues of representation emerged as a topic of importance – both in terms of the representation of communities across the equalities groupings and representation within groups, where these exist.

Inevitably, the larger, more vocal, more visible and more capable community groups tended to have more prominence. Legislative drivers which until recently affected only race, gender and disability, also meant that minority ethnic and disability groups tend to have more clout.

Sexual orientation minorities, transgender people, ethnic minorities who have recently arrived and travellers, and some other groups such as people with mental health problems still tend to be overlooked, although there were some examples of good practice.

The findings also suggested that it is important for authorities to be aware of 'minorities within minorities', and to attempt to ensure that the needs of these groups (for example minority ethnic women with disabilities, or older gay, lesbian and bisexual people) are addressed.

Conclusion

Overall it is clear that progress is being made in the way that community planning processes are addressing equalities.

A number of issues do emerge, however, in particular:

- the **balancing of local priorities** so that the interests of equalities groups can be addressed as well as the needs of those in the most deprived localities – bearing in mind that these groupings overlap;

- the **development of effective structures and implementation mechanisms** to enable statutory and public duties to address equalities issues to be met. The Equalities Standard is a useful tool;

- the need to undertake equalities **work across the range of equalities groupings**, including not just race, gender, age and physical disability but also sexual orientation, transgender, mental and intellectual disabilities, and the more marginalised minority ethnic groups. Obviously, this must be balanced by attention to localised concerns, but there is a danger that the less visible communities get overlooked;

- the **development of Local Area Agreements (LAAs**) within localities does seem to be acting as a mechanism to address equalities issues; and

- **performance management should address equalities issues**, but it is recognised that it is hard to quantify these in some cases and also that interest groups may span the geographical boundaries on which performance management is based.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Equalities is an increasingly complex and dynamic field, with a range of drivers now having been introduced to promote equalities within local government, including through community planning processes.

This research report focuses specifically on the way in which issues of equality and diversity are being addressed through the development and implementation of community strategies in England.

The Policy Research Institute (Leeds Metropolitan University), together with Janie Percy Smith (Independent Researcher), has been commissioned by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Communities and Local Government) to undertake the evaluations of plan rationalisation and community strategies. Both evaluations have been undertaken between 2004 and 2007 and focus on assessing the effectiveness of the processes which underpin each policy area, as well as linkages between them. A list of forthcoming and published outputs from the evaluations can be found at annex 1.

It is important to note that equalities work overlaps with work in a number of other areas, including social cohesion, social inclusion and work with 'hard to reach' groups. However, this report will focus on work that specifically addresses equalities and diversity (the term 'equalities' will be used in the report).

1.2 Definitions of equalities and diversity

The Government white paper *Fairness for All: A New Commission for Equalities and Human Rights* emphasises human rights, tackling barriers to equality of opportunity, and the business case for equalities. This perhaps represents a shift towards a cohesive and more substantial definition of equalities, as opposed to the weak liberal (individualistic, equality of opportunity-focused) approaches that previously predominated.

Fairness and Freedoms: The Final Report of the Equalities Review defines an equal society as one in which equalities regarding freedoms and opportunities are protected, and differences are recognised.

At a local authority level, the stronger definitions[1] of equalities are found amongst authorities with a substantial record of work in the field. For example Croydon's website states that "*Equality is about recognising and valuing fundamental human rights and ensuring equality for all, with due*

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1   As opposed to those that simply support some level of equality of opportunity.

regard to ability, age, beliefs, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion". It notes that discrimination can be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional.

1.3 Methodology

This paper draws on a range of sources of evidence from the evaluation of community strategies. These include:

- **case studies –** eight case studies[2] have been undertaken as part of the wider evaluation. These case studies involved interviews with a range of actors involved in policy making and the implementation of community strategies (including officers, members and representatives of partner agencies). The report includes material from phases two and three of the case studies (case study synthesis reports from 2005 and 2007);

- **review of community strategies –** two detailed analysis of community strategies have been undertaken and these included questions regarding equalities. The May 2007 analysis aimed to assess the extent to which equalities work is explicitly included in community strategies, focusing on vision statements, and targets and indicators; and

- **survey data –** a small element of the 2004 survey of local authorities focused upon the issue of equality and diversity. Within a broad research agenda this information is understandably fairly limited but it has been included where relevant.

Outputs from these elements of the research are listed in annex 1.

A series of additional **'light touch' case studies** have been undertaken which focus specifically on the issue of equalities in community strategies. These light touch case studies aimed to provide a fairly in-depth account of the ways in which equalities work is being conducted in a selection of authorities.

The fieldwork took place in the latter half of 2006. The four case study authorities were selected on the basis of a geographic spread taking into account type of authority, level of deprivation, urban/rural makeup, population makeup, and history of equalities work. We have included one borough council, one county council, one London borough, and one district council. The research has involved semi -structured interviews with key stakeholders and documentary analysis[3].

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2   The main case study authorities were: Barnsley Metropolitan District Council; Bath and North East Somerset Council; Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council; Liverpool City Council; London Borough of Croydon; Mansfield District Council; Nottinghamshire County Council; and Ryedale District Council
3   Interview material has not been identified by locality except where agreed with contributors or where it is public knowledge, as anonymity is important in enabling interviewee openness.

1.4 Structure of the report

The report begins with a section that addresses planning and strategic issues, including the history of equalities work in local authorities, the impact of current drivers, and the relationship between community strategies and equalities.

It then moves onto implementation, performance management, and the factors that facilitate and impede work in this field, before addressing a number of aspects of community engagement in relation to equalities work.

Lastly, the report provides an analysis of findings and some concluding comments. Findings from the different strands of the evaluation are used where relevant, and sources of material are clearly identified throughout. It is important to note that findings from this report are indicative, as the source of the majority of the material is based on a relatively small number of cases.

2 Equalities and diversity within local government

2.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the overall strategic approach that is being adopted to equalities within local government. It addresses the history of equalities work within local government and the impact of current policy interventions.

2.2 Policy and legislative context

Part I of the Local Government Act (2000) places a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies which promote the economic, social and environmental well-being. The Act aims, among other things, to ensure that councils actively engage the community in local decisions and that services are continually improved.

Community strategies should, according to guidance produced by the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions[4] (DETR) in 2000, "*...allow local communities (based upon geography and/or interest) to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities*" (paragraph 10) and in addition, "*...in preparing their community strategies, local authorities should comply with the new statutory duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups*". (paragraph 13).

The guidance states that community strategies should provide opportunities for partnership working, in many cases towards common objectives including the reduction of inequalities (paragraph 23). The voluntary and community sector is seen as having an important role to play, and "*...specific efforts should be made to involve representatives from under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities, women, faith communities, older people, young people and children, and disabled people. Such groups should be taken seriously as contributors to both the preparation and delivery of a community strategy. Partnerships should therefore, ensure that community and voluntary organisations are in a position to play a full and equal part in multi-agency partnerships...*" (paragraph 48).

In short, therefore, equalities work is at least to a degree built into the guidance produced for authorities developing their community strategies in terms of community engagement, planning, and implementation, and the

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4   DETR (2000) Preparing Community Strategies: Government Guidance to Local Authorities London: Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions.

need to include interest groups as well as geographically located groups has been recognised from the beginning.

Work on community strategies in localities is now several years in progress, and important new developments have come into play, notably the introduction of Local Area Agreements (LAAs), which have changed the nature of the local service delivery landscape.

There have been a number of important recent developments in relation to equalities work which have significant implications for local government and partner organisations. In summary, there has been a move away from earlier, somewhat fragmented approaches to equalities work to more comprehensive approaches. The publication in May 2004 of the Government white paper *Fairness for All: a New Commission for Equalities and Human Rights* means that, for the first time in the UK, the different strands of equalities work are being dealt with in a cohesive manner. The white paper outlines the vision and structures for the new Commission for Equalities and Human Rights (CEHR), which will took over its full functions in October 2007.

There are a number of other key developments regarding equalities which have relevance to local government. The current Discrimination Law Review (launched in February 2005) is overhauling the anti-discrimination legislative framework, and it will lead to a single Equality Act which covers sexual orientation, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, transgender, and age. The Discrimination Law Review has led to the *Framework for Fairness: Proposals for a Single Equality Bill for Britain* (a consultation running from June 2007-September 2007). The Single Equality Bill will follow on from significant recent legislative developments, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment Regulations (2003)), the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, the Equality Act (2006) which addresses religion or belief, and sexual orientation, and amends the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and the Gender Equality Duty for Public Bodies (from April 2007).

In tandem with the establishment of the CEHR and the current Discrimination Law Review there has been a comprehensive independent Equalities Review, which culminated in February 2007 with the publication of *Fairness and Freedoms: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*[5]. This review describes substantial progress in equalities in the UK, but discusses the way in which this progress is fragile and uneven. The Review makes recommendations that are relevant to local government work concerning equalities, including in particular:

• the establishment of a framework of measurement to be used by all public bodies;

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5 Equalities Review (2007) *Fairness and Freedoms: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*. London: Cabinet Office.

- the suggestion that Public Service Agreements should reflect the importance of equalities;

- the integration of equalities into the performance management framework, with strong leadership supporting this; and

- the positive use of public procurement and commissioning regarding equalities.

A report from the House of Lords Communities and Local Government Committee[6] provides further evidence of government's concerns with equalities issues. In summary, the report acknowledges deep and entrenched inequalities within British society. It provides the policy context for equalities work at a central government level, including the ways in which responsibility for equalities is allocated across departments. It discusses the social justice, and business cases for equalities, and also emphasises the social cohesion and integration case. The report addresses in detail the arrangements for the CEHR, and flagging up some concerns that the CEHR would not be fully prepared for operation in Autumn 2007. It also discusses the case for the Single Equalities Act, and the reasons for its delay.

There are other key developments of relevance to equalities work in local government. These developments are set in the context of increasing policy concern around community cohesion, and with the sometimes difficult relationships between different minority groups, as well as within them. Key developments include:

- **the Equalities Standard**, which was launched in 2001, and which has now been adopted by 90 per cent of all local authorities. It was developed primarily as a tool to enable local authorities to mainstream equalities work and is a voluntary Best Value performance indicator. Following a review of the Equality Standard in 2005/6, the revised Equality Standard 2007 includes the development of a participation scheme, the requirement for external assessment for levels 3 and 5, and the inclusion of three strands in addition to gender, race and disability (age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation)[7];

- **Local Government white paper (2006)** with its focus on community empowerment and engagement, as well as the accountability of local government to local communities, provides a framework within which the development of Equalities and diversity work is ongoing; and

6 House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee (2007) *Equality: Sixth report of Session 2006-7. Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence*. London: House of Commons, The Stationary Office Ltd.
7 LGA, IDeA, dialog (2007) *The Equality Standard for Local Government, revised May 2007*. London: LGA, I&DeA, dialog.

- **Local area agreements (LAAs)**, which aim for the improvement of local services by strengthening coordination between central government, local authorities, and partners[8]. The role of LAAs has been strengthened following the Local Government white paper (2006), and LAAs will be set within a statutory framework, becoming the main delivery agreement between central government and local areas (and the implementation mechanism for community strategies), with all funding streams in an area being available to support delivery against targets selected from a new set of 200 national indicators[9]. The LAA Toolkit, which outlines some of the lessons from the earlier LAAs (2005, 2006) provides examples of successful inclusion of equality and diversity objectives into mainstream outcomes, with the integration of vision, service delivery and action plans enabling equalities issues in particular service areas to be addressed.

There are a number of other important documents relating to equalities in local government, as well as a growing body of academic literature.

In 2006 ODPM published *Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England*[10]. This research report concludes that whilst most local authorities monitor their workforce on gender, age, disability and ethnicity, equality and diversity policies tend to focus on staffing issues rather than service delivery and procurement. In addition only a few councils take a holistic approach to equalities, and a third of authorities have yet to adopt the Equality Standard. The majority of initiatives undertaken by local government focused mainly on ethnicity and disability. This report did not highlight the role of community strategies in promoting equalities.

Other key policy documents include the guidance on race equality and procurement in local government provided by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)[11]. These guidance documents examine the implications of the 2001 amendments to the Race Relations Act (1976) in relation to ethnicity but also have some relevance to other equalities areas.

Recently published research by the Black Training and Enterprise Group and Urban Forum[12], found that most Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) did not monitor their membership by ethnic origin, and most could not explain the reasons for this. Based on research with 31 LSPs in localities in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) funding, the research found that less than a third had set aside places for ethnic minority representatives in their core LSP group and 42 per cent had done so within their wider structures. None of the LSPs monitored retention of any BME members. These findings are set in the context of guidance from the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit that LSPs in receipt of NRF funding should monitor the ethnic makeup of their membership. The report recommends a stronger approach to

8   ODPM (2004) *Local Area Agreements: A Prospectus*. London: ODPM.
9   IDeA (2006) *A Very English Revolution: Delivering Bolder and Better Local Area Agreements*. London: IDeA.
10 ODPM (2006) *Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England- Research Report*. London: ODPM.
11 Commission for Racial Equality (2004) *Public Authorities and Partnerships: A Guide to the Duty to Promote Race Equality*. London: Commission for Racial Equality.
12 Black Training and Enterprise Group and Urban Forum (2007) *Commission for Racial Equality: Participation and Local Strategic Partnerships*. A research project for the Commission for Racial Equality.

monitoring and the specific inclusion of BME representatives in LSP structures.

The State of Equalities in London report produced by the London Equalities Commission[13] in 2007 provides a recent account of equality in the capital and also provides equality indicators in relation to some of the equality groups.

The academic literature concerning local governance and equality and diversity is quite substantial, and a comprehensive review of this is beyond the remit of this paper. A literature review was conducted by the ODPM in 2003 on the subject which, although now quite dated, draws much of this material together[14].

A number of themes have been addressed in academic work on this area. For instance Francis[15] looks at definitions of diversity amongst local authorities; Creegan et al[16] examine the implementation gap concerning race equalities work in local authorities; Williams and Lima[17] address devolution and equalities; Gains et al[18] address changing council constitutions and diversity/democratic renewal; Booth[19] analyses equalities in relation to planning and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004); Prabhakar[20] discusses tensions between the new localism and Equalities; Rhys et al[21] deal with workforce diversity in the public sector; Corry et al address the new localism and equity/diversity; Page and Gilby[22] discuss the CPA and ethnic diversity; Monro[23] examines and develops performance indicators for evaluating equalities work in local government (focusing on Lesbian Gay Bisexual (LGB) Equalities); Monro[24, 25] explores organisational cultural issues and LGB Equalities work in local government.

Other work has focused upon specific groups, for instance Carabine and Monro[26] and Cooper and Monro[27] examine lesbian and gay equalities work in local government; Bangura[28] looks at ethnic inequalities and public sector governance and Abbas and Anwar[29] address race equalities work in Birmingham; Beckford et al[30] examine the 'faith' communities and local

13 London Equalities Commission (2007) *The State of Equalities in London*. London: London Equalities Commission.

14 ODPM (2003) *Equality and Diversity in Local Government in England: A literature review*', London: ODPM.

15 Francis, J. (2005) 'A Question of Thought (Promoting Diversity)', *Local Government Chronicle, 1 April pp. 16-17*.

16 Creegan, C., Colgan, F., Charlesworth, R. and Robinson, G. (2003) 'Race Equality Policies at Work: Employee perceptions of the "implementation gap" in a UK local authority', *Work, Employment and Society*, 17(4): 617-640.

17 Williams, C. and Lima, P. (2006) 'Devolution, Multicultural Citizenship and Race Equality: From laissez-faire to nationally responsible policies', *Critical Social Policy*, 26(3): 498-522.

18 Gains, F. et al (2004) A Summary of Research Evidence on New Council Constitutions in Local Government. London: ODPM.

19 Booth, C. (2006) 'Managing Diversity and Mainstreaming Equality: Reflections on initiatives in the planning inspectorate', Planning Theory and Practice, 7(1): 47-64.

20 Prabhakar, R. (2003) 'Does the New Localism Threaten Equality?', Renewal, 11(4): 73-80.

21 Rhys, A. et al (2006) 'Workforce diversity in the public sector: an evaluation of the performance of English local authorities', Policy & Politics, 34(2), pp. 287-306(20).

22 Page, B. and Gilby, N. (2003) 'The Future is in Your Hands (Comprehensive Performance Assessment Scores)' , Local Government Chronicle, 10 Jan p. 14.

23 Monro, S. (2006) 'Sexualities Initiatives in Local Government: Measuring Success' Local Government Studies, 32(1): 19-39.

24 Monro, S. (2005) Gender Politics: Activism, Citizenship and Sexual Diversity. London: Pluto Press.

25 Monro, S. (2007) 'Governance and Institutional Hybridisation: The Case of Sexualities Initiatives at a Local Level', Gender Work and Organisation, 14(1): 1-19.

governance; Varya[31] addresses travellers and local authority issues; Cook[32] deals with disability and staffing in local authorities; Roberts[33] addresses disability and equality in the public sector more generally, and Lupton[34] addresses women's equality and staffing in councils.

2.3 The history of equalities work in local government

Our research with authorities as part of the national evaluation of community strategies highlights the wide variations in progress and approaches to equalities and diversity amongst local government. This reflects the variable historical development of equalities in local government.

The literature highlights a small number of authorities who started significant work on equalities during the 1980s. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, many of these early pioneers made considerably less progress and subsequent equalities work in these localities began almost from a zero base. The approach that was adopted tended to be framed mostly in administrative, rather than political terms (see Monro 2005).

The London Borough of Hackney was one of the early developers of work on equalities. It was described by one contributor as being "*...for a long time ahead of the game regarding Equality and Diversities – it had a Women's Unit, Disability Unit, and Race Equalities unit with wide community representation, which were started in the 1980s and disbanded around 1995 when the council was restructured*." In this authority, equalities were sidelined for some time due to other priorities; it then started following the issue with a Non Discriminatory Notice by the Commission for Racial Equalities. There is now a greater commitment to equalities work than previously and a range of structures have been put in place to support it.

Other authorities began work around equalities in the 1990s or later, perhaps with the introduction of equalities initiatives in particular service areas such as social services or education. A further wave of authorities came on board with the introduction of the Equalities Standard, the new legislation, and other drivers. Some of these authorities may be reluctant partners – this is perhaps indicated by the difficulties the research team had in accessing authorities to take part in case study research – three authorities refused to take part, and one of these explicitly pulled out because the topic was seen as being '*too sensitive*'.

26 Carabine, J. and Monro, S. (2004) 'Lesbian and Gay Politics and Participation in New Labour's Britain', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 11(2): 312-327.
27 Cooper, D. and Monro, S. (2003) 'Governing from the Margins: Queering the state of local government?', *Contemporary Politics*: 9(3): 229-255.
28 Bangura, Y (2006) (ed) *Ethnic Inequalities and Public Sector Governance*. Houndmills, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
29 Abbas, T. and Anwar, M. (2005) 'An Analysis of Race Equality Policy and Practice in the City of Birmingham', *Local Government Studies*, 31(1): 53-68.
30 Beckford, J. et al (2006) Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities: A review. London: ODPM.
31 Varya, S. (2007) 'A hard road', *Local Government Chronicle*, 19 July, pp.20-22.
32 Cook, I. (2006) 'Making Access Easy for Everyone (Disability Equality)', *Local Government Chronicle*, 30 March pp. 16-17.
33 Roberts, S. (2006) The Public Sector and Equality for Disabled People. Leeds, CDS.
34 Lupton, M. (2006) 'Women in the Middle (Equality Targets)', *Local Government News*, 26(5): 38-39.

A further wave of authorities began work much later. This was the case with three of the authorities that we included in the light touch case study research. For example, in Warrington equalities has historically been supported at a policy level but there has been little real emphasis on addressing it, partly due to the demographics of the locality (in particular because the proportion of BME people is small). The council is working towards aiming for level 2 of the Equalities Standard in 2007 (in Autumn 2006 it was at level 1). Similarly, Buckinghamshire has had a Race Equality Scheme in place since 2002. Work has taken place regarding human resources, and consultation regarding social inclusion has included young people, older people, and BME groups. An equalities group and a Community Relations Forum are now in place. At a district level one district is at level 5 of the Equalities Standard (this district has the highest population of BME people in the county).

The most recent findings from the evaluation do indicate that progress is being made regarding equalities and diversity and that equalities work is increasing in profile within local government. Through our case study work in Liverpool for instance, it emerged that there has been a significant growth in work on equality and diversity, in terms of both of engaging the community and implementation. One officer noted that: "*a lot of work has been going on in last 12 months, its more a part of what we are doing now rather than just an extra thing to think of*". (Local Government Officer).

There is some evidence to suggest that work relating to ethnicity was particularly well developed in the earlier period of the evaluation, but more recent findings indicate that other aspects of equalities were receiving more attention.

Despite these developments, it is clear that there is still significant variation in the extent to which local authorities are taking on board the equalities agenda. For example, within another case study authority there was significant variation in the perceptions of officer in relation to the extent to which the equalities agenda was being addressed. Some officers were relatively positive about the approach that has been adopted suggesting that that work around equalities and diversity was "*more than lip service*" (officer), whilst others said that they did not think issues of equality and diversity had been addressed fully, perhaps owing to a "*lack of a joined-up approach across partners*" (officer).

2.4 The role of current policy interventions

There are a range of factors affecting the current development of equalities work in local government. This section explores – through the findings from the evaluation – the role that recent policy developments have played in promoting equalities within local government.

There were a number of policy interventions that emerged as of key importance in driving the equalities agenda within local government. These are:

- corporate performance assessment (CPA): the CPA emerged as a key driver promoting equalities work both corporately and also across service areas. One contributor said that:

    "*The CPA was a good driver especially because we were weak and the Best Value inspections have highlighted the legal requirements , equalities was raised in the CPA but also in the different service areas – we are doing quite well concerning the service areas but there is no corporate framework.*" (Officer)

- **Equalities Standard:** the Equalities Standard is generally viewed as a driver, providing a framework for work concerning equalities. The role of central standards in driving performance was highlighted by one officer: "*...the Equalities Standard has made a difference because we tend to perform on everything we are measured on...central control drives us to distraction but it focuses us'*" (Officer);

- **specific legislation and plans:** some contributors discussed the impact of legislation in driving equalities work. For instance, in one locality the Disability Access Officer discussed the Councils' work towards Access for All as a driver to work concerning disability;

- **Race Equality Strategy:** the Race Equality Scheme was generally perceived to be important to the equalities and diversity agenda. For instance, an officer said that the Scheme was one of the three big agendas their authority was dealing with regarding equalities and diversity (the others being the Disability Equality Duty and mainstreaming equalities);

- **community strategy guidance:** the original DETR guidance on community strategies appears to have been played a role in driving the equalities agenda in relation to community strategies. The findings from the 2004 survey of local authorities indicate that a higher proportion of those authorities which used the guidance 'to a significant extent' also included equalities in their community strategy to a 'significant' or 'moderate' extent. It is important to note, however, that these findings are indicative only and do not imply causality; and

- **Local area agreements (LAAs):** findings from the case studies indicate that LAAs are generally having a positive impact on equalities work in terms of planning services to address gaps and the incorporation of targets relating to equalities. For example contributors noted:

    "*What I think will come out of the LAA will be invaluable in terms of making it easier – if we do it right – to design projects to meet gaps in services and move forward – a well written strategy will have priorities*

built in that you will be able to link need with." (Disability community group representative involved in the LSP)

"*We are well pleased with our LAA – it focuses on the blocks and it is all about Equalities – Equalities is written in, in terms of structures, and we have targets across the County.*" Officer)

"*Through the LAA the community strategy is now significant in driving Equalities, via targets and so on.*" (VCS representative)

It is clear that a range of factors are likely to drive equalities work. The exact nature of these factors, and the relative importance of each, will vary in each locality. For example in Buckinghamshire their Community Cohesion and Equality Strategy and Policy ('*Stronger and Cohesive Communities in Buckinghamshire*)' identifies a range of reasons for developing the strategy, including government publications and white papers such as the Youth Matters green paper 2005, local plans such as the Social Inclusion Improvement Plan 2004, and partnership plans.

The relationship in different authorities between community strategies, which tend to be visionary and community-led, and LAAs, will be crucial to the role of community strategies regarding equalities – as will the engagement of equalities-related community members in the mechanisms supporting LAA implementation at service level. It is too early to be able to provide a comprehensive insight into the way in which LAAs will affect equalities work – as the *National Evaluation of LSPs: Formative Evaluation and Action Research programme 2002-5 Final report*[35] indicates, *"One effect of LAAs might be to increase the focus on the "most important" issues at the expense of others seen locally as less important, but alternatively the process could provide an opportunity for government to bring such neglected issues up the agenda.*"

Overall there is considerable variation in terms of progress with equalities work in local authorities. The extent of progress depends on factors such as the demographic make-up of the locality and the perceived importance of equalities work, as well as external policy drivers such as the Race Equalities and Disability Equalities legislation.

2.5 Added value of equalities

Aside from specific policy interventions it is clear that there is a general awareness and appreciation of more fundamental reasons from undertaking equalities work.

Interviewees emphasised social justice as a rationale for undertaking work on equalities. Social cohesion issues came onto the agenda increasingly during

35 European Institute for Urban Affairs, OPM, University of Warwick, University of the West of England January 2005). Source: LSP evaluation, 2004 survey.

the course of the research. Unsurprisingly, equalities was seen as particularly important where the population was diverse:

> "*We have a diverse society, especially in this Borough. So it is crucial and in line with the Council's values and priorities – making it a better place and improving life chances. There is also a business case – responding to the diverse needs of a very mixed community.*" (Officer)

Equally important however was the 'business case' for equalities, which emphasised the economic drivers for undertaking work on equalities. Some players emphasised the financial benefits associated with a more equal society. For example one interviewee noted that "*...the economic driver speaks to our Council as we are a Conservative Council so it is about ensuring that everyone has access to services, especially preventative ones, and that the labour pool is sufficient.*" (Officer).

Over the last few years, the 'business' case has perhaps seemed the strongest driver of equalities work. However, recent developments have led to an increasing emphasis on social cohesion and integration as providing a rationale for work in this field. For example, the House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee (August 2007) *Equality: Sixth report of Session 2006-7* highlights the social cohesion and integration case, as well as the social justice and business cases for equalities. Contributors to this evaluation mentioned the business case for equalities quite frequently, in terms of knowing the community and targeting their services.

Equalities was seen as adding value where it was relevant to corporate and partnership aims, for example Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire's LSP information pack36 discussed the importance of partnership work in relation to local people being able to influence decision making, social regeneration, and service provision that meets people's needs – with improved quality of life for the population as the overall goal. Social justice models were also apparent. For example, the impacts that were discussed included access to choice based lettings via the internet, which raises issues for people without English or with certain disabilities.

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35 *CHART Local Strategic Partnership Information Pack* (May 2006), Chesterfield and N.E Derbyshire Councils.

2.6 Summary

Overall, the history of equalities and diversity within local government has been somewhat mixed. It is clear that there are a number of key policy interventions that are acting as drivers to this agenda, including for example the CPA, the Equalities Standard and the Race Equality strategy. In addition there is evidence of a shift in attitudes suggesting that practice in local government is moving towards a greater recognition of the social justice and also economic benefits of adopting a more robust approach to addressing equalities.

3 Community strategies and equalities

3.1 Introduction

This section of the paper more specifically addresses the role that community strategies are playing in promoting equalities within local areas. It also considers the impact of LAAs on the way that localities are approaching work on equalities before discussing the ways in which authorities are balancing priorities regarding equalities. A range of sources of evidence are drawn upon to consider how equalities are being addressed through the development and implementation of community strategies.

3.2 Content of community strategies

As part of the evaluation, two reviews of the content of community strategies have been undertaken, in 2004 and again in 2007. The reviews provide evidence of how the content of community strategies has changed over the period of the evaluation, which includes content relating to equalities.

The 2004 review of community strategies indicated that equalities were quite strongly represented within the community strategy documents themselves, with BME equality, age equality and disability discrimination all reflected in around two thirds of the documents assessed (see table 1).

Table 1: Extent to which community strategies included equality issues (2003)			
	To some extent	**Not at all**	**Don't know**
Gender Equality	22	26	2
BME Equality	33	16	1
Age Equality	35	14	1
Disability Equality	31	18	1

Source: 2004 Assessment of community strategies, Base 50

The 2004 analysis highlighted the importance of context in relation to progress with equalities. In particular NRF authorities were much better advanced in relation to equalities with approximately twice as many non-NRF areas including BME, gender, disability and age equalities in their community strategies.

Findings from the 2004 survey of local authorities indicated other differences in relation to equalities. Of the authorities which addressed equalities to a significant extent in their community strategy, the majority were unitaries[37] or districts. However, of those authorities which did not address equalities at all in their community strategy, the majority were districts. Practice seems therefore to be more widely differentiated across districts than elsewhere.

Findings from the main case studies are illustrative of the varying approaches to the inclusion of equalities issues in community strategies. Some examples are provided in box below.

Box 1: Community strategies and the inclusion of equalities

The **Nottinghamshire** Community Strategy 2005-9 includes equality as one of its guiding principles. It notes that diversity enriches the community, argues that no-one should be disadvantaged by where they live, what they look like or what they believe and states that it will work with communities to remove barriers to participation and to promote community cohesion. The consultation-based element of the community strategy does not, however, highlight equalities; as with other aspects of governance there are issues concerning the balancing of sensitivity to stated local concerns with broader policy issues and directives.

In **Croydon** the first community strategy included a priority relating to 'tackling inequalities and improving access to services'. In the revised strategy this has been divided into 'Tackling poverty and financial exclusion', 'Valuing diversity' and 'Improving access to services', thus demonstrating the commitment to equality and diversity by the Strategic Partnership. This implies an increased importance accorded to these factors. In addition to becoming specific priorities, equality and diversity are seen as major cross cutting themes that need to be address throughout the strategy. The introduction to the strategy states, *'every Section of this Strategy has a part to play in promoting inclusion'* (Croydon's Community Strategy, p. 6).

In **Ryedale**, there are clear linkages between the Equalities Scheme and the community strategy – explicit reference is made in the Scheme's introductory section to the community strategy's themes, and it states that: 'these themes are reflected throughout this document and link the combined scheme to our community strategy policy framework'. The Scheme includes reference to the LSP's proposals to revisit the Imagine process, and commits to incorporate equalities issues into this consultation, and use the findings to inform the Equalities Scheme. Additionally, the Action Plan incorporates a commitment to: 'develop the policy framework of the Ryedale Strategic Partnership in line with the requirements of equalities legislation'.

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37 For analysis unitary authorities are taken to include all single tier authorities including metropolitans, new unitaries and London boroughs.

The 2007 analysis of community strategies explores in more detail the way in which equalities are included strategy documents. Table 2 below summarises 2007 findings regarding whether community strategies specifically address equalities.

Table 2: Community strategies and the specific inclusion of equalities (2007)				
	Race/ ethnicity	**Gender**	**Disability**	**Age**
To a great extent	0	1	2	3
To a moderate extent	7	1	4	9
To a slight extent	25	14	28	25
Not at all	17	33	16	12
Don't know	1	1	0	1

Question: To what extent is the theme of (race/gender/disability/age) equality explicitly addressed in the community strategy?
Source: 2004 Assessment of community strategies, Base 50

These four dimensions of equalities are considered in more detail in subsequent sections exploring the extent to which targets and indicators are included within community strategies and also highlighting examples of good practice. It should be noted that because this analysis is only based on a relatively small sample of all community strategies (50 strategies were assessed in detail) these results should be considered to be indicative rather than conclusive.

3.2.1 Equality concerning minority ethnic communities
The 2007 analysis of community strategies found that only 14 per cent of authorities explicitly addressed BME equality to 'a moderate extent', with 51 per cent addressing BME equality to 'a slight extent' and 35 per cent 'not at all'. The extent of inclusion differed across type of authority, with district authorities being the least inclusive (58% of all districts not including BME equalities at all), unitaries tending to address it (89% of all unitaries addressed it to either a moderate or slight extent). County authorities addressed BME equality in most instances (86% of all counties addressed it to either a moderate or slight extent).

In terms of targets for BME equality, the analysis found that overall only 21 per cent of all authorities had specific targets regarding BME equalities. Inclusion of such targets was spread unevenly across authorities, with 57 per cent of all counties including at least one such target, and levels of BME-specific targets being much lower amongst districts and unitaries. The analysis found that slightly under half of all authorities (48%) included

specific actions regarding BME equality. Unitaries and counties were the most active (78% and 71% of these authorities respectively included specific actions relating to BME equality) and districts the least active (only 30 per cent of all districts included specific actions relating to BME equality).

Authorities had developed a range of indicators regarding equalities and race/ethnicity. These typically addressed community safety (tackling racist incidents), increasing the satisfaction of members of the BME communities with life in the locality, reducing the gap in life chances that people form different ethnic backgrounds face, establishing anti-racist educational programmes, and increasing the employment rates of people from minority ethnic groups in line with other sections of the population. Examples include:

- **Cheshire County Council:** Public sector employment rates of people from ethnic minorities to increase, to mirror those in Cheshire of working age. Also, in the short term recorded racist incidents will increase as members of the BME communities become more confident in the willingness and abilities of agencies to deal with their complaints.

- **West Dorset District Council:** To increase the percentage of those in ethnic minority groups who are satisfied with West Dorset as a place to live.

- **Mansfield Borough Council:** A reduction in racist harassment, and the establishment of support programmes on race issues in schools.

- **Thurrock Borough Council:** To increase the numbers of people from BME groups recorded or reporting that they have engaged in formal volunteering.

The main case study research provided further evidence of the way in which BME equalities is being addressed through community strategies in some localities. Box 2 below sets out the approach that Liverpool has adopted to the integration of BME equalities into community planning processes.

Box 2: Community strategies and the inclusion of BME equalities

In **Liverpool**, equality and diversity is explicitly addressed in their community strategy, and underpins each element of the strategy.

Equalities work related to race/ethnicity is particularly well established within LSP structures. There is a well established Black and Racial Minority (BRM) Network, which is supported by and sits underneath the Liverpool Community Network. The BRM Network has representation on the LSP and on each of the Strategic Issue Partnerships.

Inclusion and Equality is a key theme within the community strategy and the LAA. A separate consultation event was held with the area's BRM community to ensure the issues of particular pertinence to them are incorporated in the LAA.

Additionally, a BRM Strategy has been produced by the BRM Network and 'sits alongside' the community strategy, and 'has implications for each of the strategic issue partnerships'. The Community Network also facilitates effective representation of other groups on the LSP and Strategic Issue Partnerships (people with mental health issues, learning difficulties, physical disabilities, older people and faith communities).

3.2.2 Equality concerning gender

The analysis of community strategies found that gender was significantly less well represented in strategies than race and ethnicity. Only two authorities (one London borough, one district) addressed gender equality at overall to a great or a moderate extent. The remaining authorities (47) addressed it to a slight extent (28%) or not at all (66%), or it was unclear (2%). 85 per cent of all authorities did not have gender-specific targets.

In terms of specific actions ten authorities (20%) did have gender-specific actions, with activity being somewhat unevenly distributed across types of authority (London boroughs were the most active at 33 per cent of all London boroughs, counties the least at 14%). The picture overall, therefore, is of little gender-specific work explicitly taking place via community strategies; where gender is included, it is usually in relation to specific actions.

Those community strategies that explicitly addressed gender demonstrated a number of targets and indicators. These addressed employment and training equality issues, access to childcare, access to child-related facilities such as baby changing in public places, access to housing, levels of breastfeeding, and domestic violence. Examples include:

- **Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council:** To reduce the incidence of domestic violence, particularly aimed at women and children, also to increase access to good quality childcare, especially in disadvantaged areas.

- **Thurrock Borough Council:** to reduce the numbers of sexual incidents to police and increase the proportion of incidents of sexual violence which result in sanctioned detentions.

- **Cheshire County Council:** To increase the numbers of girls participating in Active Sport.

3.2.3 Equality concerning disability

The analysis of community strategies found that disability was also not strongly represented overall in the strategies – only two authorities explicitly addressed it to a great or moderate extent. A higher proportion of authorities addressing disability overall to a slight extent (33% of all London boroughs, 55% of all districts, 56% of all unitaries, 67% of all metropolitans, 71% of all counties) but 33 per cent of all authorities did not address it at all.

Disability was also poorly reflected in targets amongst the majority of authorities. 73 per cent of all authorities had no disability-specific targets and only 21 per cent did – of these, a large proportion were counties. However, 49 per cent of all authorities did include specific actions regarding disability. This was most common at county level where 86 per cent of all counties had actions relating to disability and least common amongst metropolitans, where the majority (83%) did not.

Community strategies contained a range of targets and indicators relating to disability and equalities. These typically concerned employment levels, satisfaction with living in the locality, improved support facilities, and access to facilities. Examples include:

- **Bath and North East Somerset:** The numbers of disabled people the council has helped into long term employment, the number of employers who hold the 'Positive about disabled people' award, and the number of toilets offering disabled access.

- **Eastleigh Borough Council:** Increasing employment rates for disabled people, and increasing the number of modified properties to enable disabled people to stay at home.

- **Wear Valley District Council:** To increase the number of registered carers in Wear Valley at NVQ Level 2.

- **Cheshire County Council:** To increase the numbers of disabled young people participating in Active Sport.

3.2.4 Equality concerning age (older people)

The analysis found that half of community strategies addressed age equality 'to a slight extent' overall. 24 per cent addressed it to a great or moderate extent and 24 per cent did not address it at all. The most inclusive authorities were London boroughs (33% of all London boroughs addressed it to a great or moderate extent overall) and counties (43% of all counties addressed it to

a moderate extent). As is the case with other areas of Equalities, districts tended to be less inclusive, with 27 per cent of all districts not addressing age explicitly.

In terms of targets, only 27 per cent of all authorities had age-specific targets and counties stood out as being the least active, with the majority (86%) having not age-specific targets. However, the majority of counties included age-specific actions (57% of all counties). Overall, across all types of authority over half (55%) did have age-specific actions and action was fairly evenly spread across type of authority, with metropolitans being the least active at 67 per cent.

There were a range of actions and indicators in the community strategies that explicitly addressed age. These included an increase in job opportunities for older people, in support for older people living in their own home, in participation in older people's forums, and increases in the number of people from all age groups who report positive attitudes to those in other age groups. Examples include:

• **Plymouth City Council:** A better quality of life for older people. Indicators are included under the PSA target and include the number of older people receiving direct payments.

• **Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council:** To increase the number of attendances at events in the Older People's Consultation Event Diary.

• **Northumberland County Council:** To increase the employment rate for people aged over 50.

3.2.5 Other equalities
Data from the analysis of community strategies was unavailable concerning sexual orientation equalities and faith equalities. However, some of the targets and indicators that were analysed did address these strands of equalities, particularly in relation to community safety. For instance, Thurrock Borough Council: Include the proportion of young people and adults saying they feel safe, increase the proportion of incidents of sexual violence which result in sanctioned detentions, and increase in the numbers of hate crimes that are reported to the police.

3.3 Community strategies as a driver for equalities work

The findings from the four light touch case study areas suggested that, overall, equalities has become a greater priority for councils over the last few years. For instance:

> "*Equalities has climbed rapidly up the agenda over the last couple of years and it is now a priority. For example in the Corporate Performance Framework we are looking at equalities Indicators for*

each of the service areas – we are introducing this at the moment."
(Officer)

"We are pushing on an open door at present but it always has to be balanced against other priorities- there is a lot more that needs to be done." (Officer)

It is clear from the analysis of community strategies that in some cases, community strategies are being used to drive equalities via a range of indicators and targets. Nevertheless community strategies as documents will only tell part of the story about how community strategies are driving equalities work. The light touch case studies were used to explore in more detail exactly if and how community strategy processes are serving to drive forward equalities within local areas.

Overall the light touch case studies highlighted that equalities are starting to play a more strategic role within community strategies in a variety of, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, ways:

- **as a cross cutting theme which underpins all activities –** for instance in one locality an officer noted the way in which *"...all themes make reference to BME, children and young people and so on. Equalities is cross-cutting, and we ensure that all the themes are relevant to everyone."*

- **in developing specific targets and/or action plans –** in one light touch case study, the LSP is currently developing floor target action plans that sit under the community strategy including infant mortality, focusing on African Caribbean families; and '*guns and gangs*' which focuses on two neighbourhoods and on African Caribbean and Kurdish youth. In another locality equalities officers saw themselves as wanting to work closely with the LSP, supporting the LSP aims. They noted that equalities is supported more actively at the higher levels of the LSP than in the thematic groups.

A key question for the evaluation to consider is the effectiveness of community strategies in driving the equalities agenda. Whilst it is relatively easy to find evidence that community strategies are starting to engage much more significantly with the range of equalities, evidence of the impact of this work is much harder to ascertain.

Whilst a detailed analysis of the evidence of impact of the inclusion of equalities is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that the inclusion of equalities within community strategies does have spin off benefits in terms of formalising and legitimising action on equalities. For instance:

"I'd say that it [the community strategy] has been quite effective in driving certain aspects of Equality of Older People. It helps to ensure accountability as things are written down and there are deadlines.

The areas of work where there is no strategic plan won't get done."
(Older People's representative)

"I use it for quotes when I do bids. It's not rocket science – it's obvious – 'we need to do more for certain groups of people'."
(Orthodox Jewish representative)

Our evidence suggests that whilst progress is being made within a significant number of localities in relation to equalities and community strategies, there are a significant number of localities where there is a little or not mention of equalities or, if it is included, it is in a piecemeal fashion.

3.4 Priorities and tensions

It is worth noting that equalities work has tended historically to be a rather marginalised aspect of local authority work, although authorities differ greatly in the level and extent of activity in this area. For instance, as noted in the introduction, the *National Evaluation of LSPs: Formative Evaluation and Action Research programme 2002-5 Final report*[38] indicated that LSP activity on equalities in the areas of gender, sexual orientation, and some minority ethnic groups (travellers and refugees/asylum seekers) was minimal, although there is more activity in the areas of age, disability and race/BME groupings.

Overall authorities varied very considerably as to the extent to which equalities was being addressed. In one locality an officer said that *"...we are still at the point of identifying priorities, we are not yet at the stage of balancing them. It will be interesting for us – it is quite difficult as we have a very small BME population and there are issue of isolation but we are not yet aware of all of the areas of need."*[39]

Within authorities, the ways in which emphasis on equalities areas was prioritised varied – although there was an inevitable tendency to prioritise equalities work that was driven by statute and by the Equalities Standard, and also a tendency for equalities work to be associated primarily with ethnicity. There seemed to be a shift towards a focus on greatest need and on community cohesion for example: *"Our greatest priority is making [locality] a better place – recognising that we must tackle the issues associated with the most disadvantaged in the community."*
(LSP Coordinator). In one case a contributor described the following:

"We have moved away from the gender, 'race', disability, sexual orientation etc model of equalities to focusing on the evidence about greatest need. It's difficult for example lesbian and gay – what outcome would you need – social inclusion? 18 -24 year olds would

38 European Institute for Urban Affairs, OPM, University of Warwick, University of the West of England January 2005). Source: LSP evaluation, 2004 survey.
39 It is important to point out that in one case equalities work was driven for several years by the Non Discriminatory Notice concerning ethnicity, which skewed equalities work towards ethnicity. The authority described reporting to the Commission for Racial Equality as very resource intensive and said that the data which they were required to produce was difficult to use for internal equalities planning processes.

include lesbians and gay men, and African Caribbean people. At present we are letting down African Caribbean boys from school onwards... There are tensions at the planning level but also in practice. It's about being hard sometimes and about using evidence. If we try and do everything the funding will dwindle into nothing. The outcomes should impact on everyone but will affect some more than others." (LSP Coordinator).

There appeared in some cases to be tensions between area-based interventions and interventions that address equalities but which may not be locality-based.

There was some cynicism regarding the real priority of equalities work amongst a minority of contributors. In one case a community member said that *"...their consultation methods are insufficient and also people only generate an opinion once they actually do things – you can consult until you are blue in the face."* (Older People's representative). In another instance, a community member said that *"I'm sure they do prioritise it as it's tick boxing for the government."*

It was indicated in the main case study research conducted in 2005 (and elsewhere) that some authorities recognised that it was important to acknowledge the complexities around balancing the emphasis placed on particular groups within the community strategy. For example, this entails making a judgement about how a small population with very specific needs should be represented, or balanced against other groups. One authority noted a need to be careful about targeting specific equalities groups, given the cohesion agenda, and to avoid excluding anyone.

A key issue that emerged was that community strategies were viewed as being too vague or general to effectively be able to address equalities in a systematic way. For instance some interviewees criticised community strategies for not mentioning equalities specifically or for 'tagging groups on'. In one instance the community strategy was criticised for generalising about groups – for example a community contributor emphasised the diversity amongst the older population and the fact that many older people contribute significantly to the community.

Overall, equalities work has moved up the local authority agenda in recent years, but the ways in which priorities are balanced against other demands vary across authorities. There is also variation concerning the way in which the interests of different equalities groupings are prioritised, with an historical trend towards emphasis on ethnicity, but indications that the focus for equalities work is broadening out to a degree. There may be some tensions between locality/deprivation-oriented interventions, which may be prioritised over equalities-oriented interventions, but indicative findings show that there is overlap between the groups these interventions are targeted at in some cases. There are also some tensions between the interests of different groups addressed by equalities initiatives. Whilst equalities initiatives are welcomed by community representatives, there were ongoing areas of

challenge, for example in terms of whether aspirations towards equalities initiatives were actually manifested by authorities.

3.5 Summary

Overall, findings from the different strands of the evaluation indicated that community strategies varied regarding the extent to which equalities was addressed and the ways in which this was done. In some cases equalities was integrated as a cross-cutting theme, with well-established structures to support implementation, and in others it was barely touched upon.

In some localities the community strategy was being used to drive equalities, but this was not the case across the board by any means. In localities with perceived high levels of equalities issues, community strategies are more fully inclusive than in localities with perceived low levels of equalities concern.

It is important to note that there may be hidden populations relevant to equalities work which are less easily picked up in via consultation regarding the community strategy (for example people with mental health issues, and sexual orientation minorities), which is discussed in more detail in section 4.

4 Implementation mechanisms

4.1 Introduction

There were a range of implementation mechanisms in place to support equalities work in local authorities. In some cases work was fully mainstreamed, strategically coherent and apparently very effective, and in others, work was less well developed and in some cases, quite piecemeal. This section considers the implementation mechanisms that support equalities work, performance management, and the factors that facilitate and impede work in this field.

4.2 Structures

Findings from the evaluation indicate that equalities work is being implemented through a variety of internal and external structures.

The 2007 case study synthesis report emphasised the way in which the structures supporting the development and implementation of equality and diversity work in the case study authorities depended on the level of the Equalities Standard which had been attained (several authorities were at level 2, and working towards level 3).

In terms of internal structures a number of different models of structures emerged. Some authorities had a centralised equality and diversity team and (in some instances) officers within departments with responsibility for equality and diversity issues.

In other authorities there has been, relatively recently, a shift in the importance of equalities with responsibility for equalities shifting upwards. For instance in one case study authority, equalities work shifted from initially being located within human resources towards being located at chief executive level and member level. In another authority a high level equalities steering group had been established.

For instance there were clear divergences in the extent to which authorities had clear implementation strategy. In one of our light touch case studies a comprehensive approach had been adopted whereby equalities work had been 'fast-tracked' and external consultants had been brought in to support with the training of officers and members.

In other cases the structures developed to address equalities were described as a 'bolt-on'. For example in locality, a part time equalities worker and a disability access officer had been appointed, but this was not been embedded within senior management structures.

> **Box 3:** Internal mechanisms for implementing equalities
>
> In **Mansfield** a corporate equality and diversity team made up of middle level managers responsible for pushing equality and diversity through their departments and also the equality and diversity team does direct work with Heads of Services. A sub-monitoring group has been set up to monitor the Equalities Standard and the local authority's own Scrutiny work is within that group. There is a designated officer working four days a week and the process is driven by the Deputy Mayor who chairs meetings.

A key debate that emerged through the evaluation was the most effective structures to support the mainstreaming of equalities throughout all service areas. Clear divergences of opinion emerged about the extent to which designated officers were the most effective structural component or whether, for example giving directors of directorates responsibility for mainstreaming equalities within their service areas was more effective. Whilst our research was not sufficiently comprehensive to answer this, there seemed to be a tendency for those localities with the more robust approaches that had some sort of corporate equalities forum or board which meets regularly and which works with the directors and heads of service from all service areas.

In terms of *external structures*, the research findings again indicated a wide range of approaches to addressing equalities through partnership structures. For example, in the light touch case study research, there were various types of partnership work regarding equalities taking place, through the LSP, and other partnerships. Examples of practice are included in Box 4 below.

> **Box 4:** External structures for implementing equalities
>
> In **Blackburn** the LSP which has an Equalities group and which includes VCS public and private partners. They deal with under- representation and address a range of equalities areas – sexual orientation, disability, age, ethnicity and others – both internally (in staffing) and within the community. Blackburn's LSP larger partners also have Equalities champions or representatives who push the Equalities agenda. All the partners are at different stages but partnership working enables the sharing of good practice.
>
> The **Bristol** Partnership has an Equalities Action Group. The Partnership has an Equalities statement which includes a commitment ensure the centrality of Equalities to all the work it does and it includes BME communities, disabled people, women, older people, young people, LGBT people within the Equalities remit. It emphasises recognition of inequalities and the need to work towards creating and sustaining a cohesive society in which diversity is valued (statement produced in 2004).

The research findings indicated areas of ongoing challenge regarding the implementation of equalities.

A key issue that emerged was that equalities may be viewed as a high level strategic issue meaning that implementation on the ground was difficult. It was suggested that officers may have had difficulty linking equalities to their day job – it was seen as an add-on by some people, to be addressed after the (more pressing) budget and central government priorities have been dealt with.

There were also some tensions around what might be seen as the prioritisation of certain groups over others as well as issues of representation within external structures.

To summarise, there were a range of examples of good practice regarding the implementation of equalities work in local authorities but also ongoing challenges in terms of equalities being seen as a 'bolt-on' in a minority of cases. The extent to which equalities is mainstreamed as opposed to driven by a central, corporate unit, depends on the authority – it may be that a mixture of the two approaches works best. In terms of establishing structures to support equalities work overall, key success factors appear to include:

- support from high levels and forums to facilitate high level planning;

- the establishment of mechanisms to ensure that high level planning translates into service delivery;

- the involvement of front line staff and middle management in mainstreaming equalities; and

- ensuring that LSPs are knitted into these mechanisms, and are supported in engaging representatives from the communities from the 'equalities' groupings.

4.3 Performance management

The research findings indicated that performance management is becoming increasingly important in relation to the equalities agenda.

The most recent findings from our case studies indicate that authorities were moving towards greater emphasis on performance management and audit of equalities work. Some case study authorities had developed mechanisms for auditing and performance managing regarding equality and diversity, although in most cases this was still somewhat aspirational.

Box 5: Example of good practice regarding performance management

In Bath and North East Somerset, the Corporate Equalities Team has devised guidelines against which the Council's performance on equalities and diversity can be monitored in both employment and service delivery. It is intended that this should become an integral part of the performance management practices of all services and areas of council operation, and identifies the following objectives of equalities monitoring:

- To find out if the Council's equality policies are working.

- To find out which groups are using Council services (and how satisfied they are with them).

- To determine whether the Council is offering equality of opportunity and treatment to all groups.

- To highlight areas where the Council is not complying with its equality policy.

- To enable the Council to find solutions and make changes, rather than using guesswork or assumptions.

- To provide evidence that the Council knows who its users and non-users are, and that it has found out what their needs are.

- To avoid what could be costly complaints of discrimination, by making sure that the Council identifies problems and issues at an early stage.

- To improve the Council's reputation as a good and fair provider of goods or services, and as a good employer.

The research findings indicated that performance management mechanisms relating to equalities were at different stages, depending on the Equalities Standard level that the authority was working towards.

In Ryedale, for instance, plans have been put in place to audit and manage performance against the Equality Scheme's objectives, in order to assist the council in working towards level 2 of the Equalities Standard. The council aims to monitor and audit all aspects of the Equality Standard (including consultation processes, impact assessments, monitoring systems, employment and service delivery targets, review procedures and annual improvement plan).

In other case studies there was evidence that resources were being invested in developing robust mechanisms for managing performance in relation to equalities. For instance one authority was currently investing in Performance Plus, partly because this had a reputation for dealing effectively with equalities.

In other authorities where performance management did not adequately take into account equalities – in general – there was the intention to put appropriate mechanisms in place.

It is worth noting that equalities outcomes are difficult to monitor, with many interventions having longer term and/or hard-to-measure impacts, and may not contribute well to a target-driven agenda in the short term. This issue was recognised by contributors, for example in one locality, the LSP Coordinator said:

> "*You mustn't lose the equalities bit as you can get very tied up in performance. You can do well on floor targets but lose sight of the different groups – there is geography and there are the different group issues to think about. Also there is the issue of performance for who? Performance targets would look good if the middle classes moved to [locality] but that is not the point.*"

Overall, the extent of the development of performance management in relation to equalities did vary considerably. Authorities were at different stages regarding equalities performance management. There were indications that the performance management agenda is being engaged with in a number of ways, but also that equalities is hard to 'performance manage'.

4.4 Drivers and barriers to equalities work

There are a range of factors that facilitate, or impede, equalities work in local government. This section outlines that factors that were highlighted by the research, focusing on findings from the case study research and the light touch case studies.

The research findings showed that there are a number of general factors that facilitate equalities work in local government. Findings from the light touch case studies indicated the importance of, in particular:

- the Equalities Standard, which provides a clear structure for the development of work;

- strong political commitment, especially at senior levels;

- resourcing, including designated staff, and training;

- good implementation mechanisms, including communication systems;

- well-established partnership networks;

- an organisational culture that supports the changes associated with equalities work;

- support from external organisations such as the IDeA; and

- the presence of visible diversity within the locality.

Our research has highlighted a number of barriers to progressing work on equalities. A lack of resources – in particular in terms of staff time – emerged as a major barrier. For example:

> "*The barriers are a lack of time. We decided that the LAA blocks needed to do an equality and diversity Impact Assessment but how can we do this as 3 people are off sick, and three people are external? Everyone is overworked. But there is some agreement in the management group of the LAA that it is necessary. We use the statutory obligations to drive it. Also we point out that we need evidence of including equality and diversity groups and if we get it right this time we wont need to backtrack later.*" (Officer)

A further barrier that emerged was around community cohesion. For instance one contributor discussed tensions between the non-Muslim and Muslim population. This highlighted the need to promote tolerance within and between the communities as well as challenges associated with gaining the confidence of communities and providing a representative means of engagement.

Overall key barriers include a lack of political will, difficulties with implementation, issues concerning organisational culture, resource issues, and challenges associated with engaging with diverse and sometimes conflicting communities. Crucial factors in facilitating equalities work include not just the statutory drivers and public duties, but also resourcing, political support on different levels, and good ongoing relations with the equalities communities.

4.5 Summary

Equalities have been driven through a variety of mechanisms and structures within local government. In terms of internal structures high level support to develop a strategic approach to equalities appears to be important. In terms of external structures equalities needs to be 'knitted' into LSP partnership structures ensuring good level of representation from the 'equalities' groupings.

Performance management of equalities, although not well developed in some authorities, appears to be 'on the radar' of many authorities, linked in part to the development of LAAs.

A number of drivers to equalities work within local government were identified. Key drivers included the Equalities Standard, strong political will at senior levels as well as adequate resourcing.

5 Community engagement and representation

5.1 Introduction

Community engagement forms a key part of equalities work in local authorities. It forms a crucial area of interest for local authorities[40]. Although community engagement does not necessarily reflect the interests of the equalities groupings (as other voices may be more vocal, and other groups more dominant in the public sphere), it can provide a means of representation in terms of planning and service provision.

This section addresses, firstly, forms of community engagement and representation, and positive and negative views of these. It then moves on to discuss the range of groups represented – an important issue, given the historical dominance of certain forms of equalities work, and the current policy move towards a broader approach which includes age, faith, sexual orientation and transgender together with race, gender and disability.

Lastly, the section looks at equalities issues within the equalities groupings. Needless to say, many people inhabit identities that span different equalities groupings – someone might be female, disabled, and Muslim, for instance. How able are the structures that local authorities and their partners put in place to represent the minorities within minorities?

This section builds upon a previous research report from the evaluation which focuses specifically upon the issue of community engagement in community strategies (see annex 1 for further details of other outputs from the evaluation).

5.2 Mechanisms supporting community engagement

The evaluation has identified a range of mechanisms supporting community engagement in relation to equalities.

Levels of engagement vary widely across equalities groups and across organisations, although attempts were made in some cases to include all of the groups. In some instances the impetus for engagement came from the communities, rather than the council.

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40 As reflected key reviews such as the Lyons review, which discusses the front-line role of councillors, and in documents such as the Leadership Development Commission (2003) *An Emerging Strategy for Leadership Development in Local Government*. This latter report discusses the role of councillors in 'bridging groups and interests' which is 'critical to the hard nosed prioritising of service delivery and resources as well as community engagement and enhancement' (2003: 19).

The research findings showed that the importance of including equalities groups in consultation and other forms of community engagement was generally recognised.

> "*We have been doing good partnership work with the Council for about 20 years. We have made a positive decision to take a gentle partnership approach with the LA and we find this is a good way to work. If you explain why barriers are significant people can work with that.*" (Disability Community Representative)

> "*It could be any of the partners [who bring the issues to the table]. We have good representation of voluntary groups. The County Council and District Councils tend to dominate but the VS is getting more of a voice...we have quite an open approach – if someone wants to be on the LSP we will invite them.*" (Officer)

> "*North East Derbyshire have worked very hard because of the economic effects on the community in North East Derbyshire...you get communities that are massively out of balance – there are young single mums and older people, a lack of volunteer care, the infrastructure has been very negatively affected [by coalfield closure]... I sit on the Housing and Support Strategy Group which has two North East Derbyshire representatives who have been strong on taking on the Decent Homes Standard which impacts on Older People...the North East Derbyshire representatives are good.*" (Older People's representative)

> "*We have a few key officers that we work with, and also three Kurds elected to the Council. There is a big difference as our community now feels that we are part of Hackney.*" (Kurdish Community Representative)

Community groups were engaged through a variety of structures. Community group representatives discussed a range of strategies for engaging with the council, including in one case using the draft priorities of the LAA to help restructure the LSP – in this locality there was consultation across the community and voluntary sector which resulted in the LSP restructuring. In some instances community groups may go straight to service areas if they have specific concerns, rather than going through the LSP.

There was some evidence that the development of LAAs had meant that engagement mechanisms were more 'action-focused' and this was impacting on engagement with equalities groups: *"The LAA will have a stronger engagement strategy which looks at the different groups, working closely with the VCS almost as outreach. It will focus on specific issues, not just doing consultation for the sake of it."* LSP Coordinator).

Whilst examples of good practice were evident from our work with case study authorities, there are ongoing concerns around community

engagement mechanisms in relation to equalities. This was raised as an issue in the report A description of the history, scope and needs of the BME voluntary sector in Hackney (January 2003) Hackney Council for Voluntary Service, which described insufficient infrastructure and support for the BME community and voluntary sector in Hackney.

Overall, therefore, the light touch case studies indicated that there was general awareness of the need to include equalities groupings in mechanisms concerning community engagement. In some cases community groups were proactive, and some community groups have well established relationships with their local authority and partners, sometimes focusing on specific aspects of service provision and in some cases on high level planning. There were a number of examples of good practice and positive experiences concerning equalities community engagement. Key factors facilitating work in this field include:

- A cooperative, mutually understanding relationship between authorities and community representatives;

- action on the part of authorities in response to consultation – or if this is not possible, adequate communication with the communities;

- capacity building of the equalities communities;

- the existence of officers with whom community representatives can work in an ongoing way;

- an open, inclusive approach on the part of the LSP and the authority, which helps to break down suspicions and alienation amongst the equalities communities; and

- diversity awareness training for local authority players which really enables them to be sensitive to the differences amongst and between the equalities groupings, and also more broadly relevant issues (such as community cohesion).

There were also instances where community engagement with equalities groupings was in need of improvement. Key problems include 'rhetorical' consultation (where the authority pays lip service to community engagement without actually engaging effectively or taking the results of engagement on board), time and resource constraints, and a lack of awareness and capacity within the community sector. There is evidence that local authority players are aware of these issues.

5.3 The range of equalities groups represented

As noted previously, there is an historical issue relating to the patchy representation of different equalities groupings, with certain groups being more fully represented than others.

Our evidence suggests that the extent to which authorities engage with the different groups was related to their stage of development regarding equalities work more generally as well as the way in which work is framed. To a degree, this depends on the relationships that authorities built up with community groups over time, and there was some indication that "*...we all prefer to work with people we know – it's prevalent between the Council staff and the community and voluntary sector.*" (Community representative). There is evidence that there may be improving relations between the community sector and statutory players, as engagement methods improve and as trust develops over time.

It is also clear that gaining adequate representation from all relevant groups is to some extent a developmental process, for example:

> "*We haven't mentioned sexual orientation but we have just had a conference about community cohesion with workshops on sexual orientation and on faith. Until recently it wasn't recognised as an issue but people have moved from social inclusion to community cohesion to Equalities and the latter requires identifying different groups where as before the focus was just on BME groups.*" (Officer)

> "*We had problems getting youth representatives for example but this is now sorted – it was an issue of getting meetings to take place at the right time of day. There is low BME representation in [locality] but we have identified a strategy to get them involved – we work with the community and voluntary sector who had Change Up funding, and we contributed a bit more, to ask the BME groups in the area how they best see themselves getting involved, given that most groups are voluntary....we have decided to set up a virtual group with 5-6 BME groups being represented, so that the representatives only have to go to a meeting a couple of times a year but will also come to the LSP Coordination group to present their needs and interests. It is not ideal for us but the groups wanted to have a virtual meeting, where they send the information to their different communities.*"
> (LSP co-ordinator)

Despite these developments, contributors did identify a number of voices might remain unheard. Potentially overlooked groups included the following:

• **sexual and gender minorities:** in all the authorities in the light touch case study research LGBT people were either omitted, or attempts to engage them had generally been unsuccessful, and in three of the localities LGBT equalities issues were only just beginning to hit the agenda;

• **certain forms of disability and certain needs of disabled people:** people with mental health difficulties or non-visible sensory or physical disabilities/impairments might be less well represented; and

- **some minority ethnic groups:** this might be due to a change in the ethnic composition of the locality, with the influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants not getting the representation they need.

A key issue emerged around the capacity of the equalities communities to engage with LSPs. For example one contributor discussed the way in which *"...sometimes when they [community members) are dealing with very difficult issues it makes it harder to cope with other things – sometimes it is about reducing stresses so they can look outwards."* (officer). More generally, there are difficulties about the ways in which certain individuals and groups are more able to engage than others. A number of contributors discussed issues such as people feeling comfortable speaking in large forums, and groups being organised and vocal. Illustrative quotes include the following:

> "*The more articulate young people get engaged and those young people who are more disengaged are harder to reach.*" (VCS representative).

> "*The County Council are using the 50+ Forums as a consultation mechanism but this is consulting with active, able bodied 50 year olds who are not the inactive, ill 80 years olds. Also it is the twin set and pearls deciding what women in the coalfields want – most participants are better informally and formally educated...they move into the forums as they can see the power base...it's very difficult to engage the average older person...*" (Older People's representative).

> "*Some groups are very organised about how to access things through forums etc. Some groups especially some of the ethnic groups are very loud. But there are other voices for instance the growing Eastern European population who don't have a voice yet on the Multiethnic Forum. There is an issue about the LA listening to one BME group and not all from ethnic backgrounds. Also within the ethnic groups we have people who purport to represent the group but who have not got there by what we perceive to be democratic means. Women's and teenager's voices are missed out. For example if a minority ethnic teenager thought he was gay I don't know how he would be heard. We have a very proactive youth service here though who are doing work re sexual orientation...*" (Officer).

Overall, a number of key issues emerged from the findings concerning representation of different equalities groupings. These can be classified in the following way:

- issues about the size of LSPs. Where the LSP was theme-based or had an executive structure, with community representatives not being represented in a comprehensive way there is a danger of creating a 'closed shop' (LSP coordinator), whilst in authorities where the LSP aimed to include all the equalities communities this could then be '*a bit unwieldy*' (LSP coordinator);

- an understandable tendency for authority officers to engage with 'known' or 'tame' community representatives, with more marginalised, unorganised, or oppositional groupings falling through the net;

- the danger of LSPs electing community representatives who are not very representative. For example in one authority "*With the Geographical LSP Representatives we fell into the trap of having 70% white retired gentlemen. We now have a person spec for locality groups, we won't do this for BME and elderly people but we will try for a mixture of gender and class.*" (LSP Coordinator);

- issues about neighbourhood targeted interventions, as opposed to equalities group targeted interventions. For example in one authority, there was a concern with replication of equalities groups by the neighbourhood groups, and a decision had been made to filter the concerns of the equalities groups through the neighbourhood groups. This authority did not have a strong record of equalities work and there could be a concern that interest based groups (including BME, faith, disability and LGB communities) could be overlooked;

- difficulties with raising the profile of (or justifying) equalities work with groups that are invisible or assimilated, and whose existence can be denied (for example sexual minorities, white-skinned minority ethnic or minority faith groups);

- insufficient capacity (including small size, lack or organisation, and/or lack of awareness, skills and confidence) amongst more marginalised groups;

- alienation amongst some minority communities;

- organisational cultures within authorities/statutory partners, which may impact on engagement with different communities;

5.4 Representation within community groups

Authorities may work hard to ensure that they are engaging with the full range of equalities groupings, only to find that the community representatives they have on board overlook the interests of certain sections of their own communities.

The community groups that were involved in the research through the light touch case studies did attempt to be representative across their communities, including younger people, older people, people with disabilities, in some cases LGB people, and BME groupings. The majority of contributors said that tensions between equalities groups and/or different localities were not apparent (although it is important to point out that the sample was not representative of all authorities and that tensions are likely to be more apparent in some other localities).

Research findings provided examples of good practice concerning inclusion within community groups. In particular, a Kurdish Community Centre ran courses specific to the wide range of community members, including capacity building trainings for women and support for a Kurdish Women's parliament as a means for tackling the lack of female representation of their management committee. In another case, an Asian community group has a number of groups specifically set up to represent across their community for example young women, older women, and young men.

Despite progress concerning representation within some community groups, the findings did reveal ongoing challenges regarding inclusion. These included for example ensuring adequate BME representation on disability groups due to low up take of services, issues around engaging new residents, and instances where cultural norms within a particular community made it difficult to engage women. One contributor noted:

> "*Brown skinned people are not well represented...we don't have LGB people – it's not on the agenda – gay guys are married off which leaves them in a position of how to continue their lives, and a lesbian would be on the other side of the moon – women are not supposed to have a libido.*"

Overall, whilst it is not the place of statutory players to attempt to control the internal workings of community groups, our findings suggest that structures can be put in place at LSP level and via outreach/capacity building to try to ensure that community representatives are indeed representative. Engagement needs to be adequately resourced, and flexible. In the most cosmopolitan locality, acceptance of difference (including differing views regarding sexual orientation, women's roles and faith) was normalised, making it harder for community groups to viably maintain discriminatory attitudes – this provides a model for other authorities to follow.

5.5 Summary

Overall, the engagement of different equalities groupings was in the process of development. Findings from the evaluation indicate various strategies that may be used to facilitate this.

These include developing an LSP structure that supports representation of a broad section of the equalities groupings (whether a large LSP, or a small executive with community representatives properly engaged with theme groups), finding ways to balance locality-based and equality-group based interventions, providing services that are tailored to specific equalities groups (and general sensitivity to the norms and needs of these groups) as well as outreach and capacity building work with the smaller and more marginalised groups.

Our evidence suggests that the extent to which authorities engage with the different groups was related to their stage of development regarding equalities work.

6 Analysis and conclusion

The research upon which this paper is based includes depth work with a relatively small number of authorities. It is important therefore that the findings are considered to be indicative rather than conclusive. This section outlines these findings, reporting firstly on the positive developments that have taken place before outlining some of the ongoing challenges.

The research findings indicate that the field of equalities work in local government is at a stage of fast, if still rather patchy, development. There are many examples of good and interesting practice, in terms of consulting, planning, mainstreaming and implementing equalities initiatives.

In some authorities, well-developed structures are in place to support equalities work. Even where these structures are somewhat piecemeal, there are examples of good practice in terms of community engagement, particularly where community groups have a long and well-established relationship with their local authorities.

A number of authorities have targets and actions specific to equalities in place. Performance management mechanisms are being developed regarding equalities in some cases, although it is acknowledged that it is difficult to measure the impact of equalities interventions.

Despite the patchiness that is evident, the research indicated that movement is in the direction of more cohesive, mainstreamed, and stronger approaches to equalities. Equalities can still be a 'bolt-on', but this is perhaps less likely now, especially within authorities that are really engaging with the Equalities Standard.

As is to be expected, the statutory and other drivers to equalities work that have been introduced since 2000 (notably the raft of equalities-specific legislation, the Equalities Standard and developments surrounding the 2006 Local Government white paper) are impacting on the ways that authorities are doing equalities work.

Firstly, there appears to be a greater acknowledgement of the need for equalities work in authorities, even where this is not the traditional fare for particular authorities or where there has been little work in the past, perhaps because of demographic factors.

Secondly, there is some broadening out of the equalities remit, to include work around age, sexual orientation and faith – even though this can be very marginalised and fragmented. This is important, in part because future local relationships with the CEHR, which will integrate the different equalities groupings at a central level.

Thirdly, although it is too early to provide more than very indicative findings regarding equalities work and LAAs, the early signs are that the LAA may be having a positive effect and is being used to implement equalities work in a more robust way than was possible via the community strategy.

The picture has changed over the period of the evaluation to a degree, with a shift towards evidence of a greater focus on equalities, and some maturing overall, with movement towards achievement of the middle and later stages of the Equalities Standard in some authorities. There is work in some authorities regarding actions and targets regarding equalities, and performance management, as opposed to equalities work that remains at the visionary or rhetorical level. In fact, there was some evidence from the analysis of community strategies themselves, that some authorities are more inclusive of equalities at the level of targets and actions than at the level of community strategy vision.

Community engagement mechanisms were in place across authorities, although these did vary in quality and substance, with some contributors expressing a need for improvement and for greater sensitivity amongst statutory sector players to the needs of community sector partners. It was noticeable that there was far greater inclusion of some groups than others – typically, disability, the main BME communities, and perhaps age were more likely to be addressed than gender (women), sexual orientation, faith, or transgender, and more marginalised BME groupings such as refugees and asylum seekers.

LSP structures varied considerably in relation to the inclusion of equalities groupings, with some adopting an 'executive style' structure which could more effective than large LSPs, which were more inclusive of equalities groupings but could be unwieldy. Where 'executive' style LSP boards were in place equalities community representatives were in some cases included in thematic groupings or via broader, less frequent consultation forums or events. Issues concerning the extent to which representation across the range of equalities groups in all policy areas are of course ongoing. Overall, when community engagement worked well, the LSP and/or related forums provided space for community players to usefully inform actions at every stage.

Despite these advances, a substantial proportion of local authorities do entirely overlook equalities work in their community strategies. This does not necessarily mean that they do not conduct equalities work at all, as findings also indicated that the relationship between equalities work and the community strategy did vary across authorities – equalities work was in some cases quite divergent from the community strategy, and in others there was close integration. Service-level equalities-related interventions continued to play an important role, and it is worth noting that some community groups went direct to specific service providers, as well as using mechanisms such as the LSP or broader consultation events, so that there may be equalities-related work going on 'on the ground' without it being very noticeable in terms of higher level community planning. It does indicate however that low

priority is still accorded to equalities work at a strategic level in a substantial number of localities.

A further issue is concerned with the tensions between locality related consultation and interventions and interest group related ones. The renewed emphasis on localism (in for example the 2006 Local Government white paper) presents an alternative, although in some cases overlapping, focus, as the needs of equalities interest groups intersect with (or diverge from) locality based consultation and locality-based interventions. Possible tensions may be heightened as climate change adds another variable to area-based disadvantage[41]. People affected by flooding, for example, become subject to a range of disadvantages. The requirements on councils that civil emergencies make, if these occur, will have to be prioritised to an extent against ongoing work, including equalities. Any large-scale local changes made to help prevent further climate change and its effects will also have to be factored into the equation.

A further issue in some areas it seems that there had been a lack of support to build voluntary and community sector capacity to engage with the community strategy. For example in one authority there were reports of a lack of council support for Racial Equality Councils at a district level, and in others, there were reports that there simply was no group representing LGBT people, with no attempts being made to foster such a group. It was noticeable that the larger, more visible, better organised, and longer standing groups tended to be better represented on LSPs.

Overall, the key factors that appear to be facilitating equalities work include not just the drivers discussed above, but also resources, political will, a well-developed community and voluntary sector, and good partnership working.

The key barriers are a lack of resources (including staffing problems), political opposition, organisational inertia or ineffectiveness, wider social tensions and discriminatory forces (especially in relation to social cohesion), and overriding but related issues such as a focus on locality-based deprivation (although of course there is overlap and there is a need to balance work concerning different vulnerable groups).

Some key ongoing challenges regarding equalities work and community strategies are as follows:

• the obvious operational and organisational cultural challenges associated with conducting equalities work to the different levels of the Equalities Standard, in different service areas;

• ensuring that equalities issues are included in community strategies, especially where these area reflection of local concerns;

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41 London Equalities Commission (2007) provides a useful analysis of issues regarding flooding and the increased vulnerability of some minorities, such as travellers.

- ensuring that equalities issues are included in implementation mechanisms, including the LAA, as it is currently unclear whether the LAA will end up focusing attention away from equalities, or provide a means by which government can drive work in this area;

- making sure that targets, performance indicators, and performance management reflect the increasing priority that equalities work is taking – although there are challenges associated with quantifying equalities, as well as with the way in which performance-management is locality-based and interest groups may cut across local boundaries;

- a focus on operational issues and specific targets may be a good way forward, in particular where equalities work is sensitive politically, or there is a lack of support at a local level for work of this kind;

- the balancing of equalities related work against other priorities, in terms of basic service provision, and locality-related interventions concerning social inclusion, deprivation and social cohesion;

- the balancing of different types of equalities work, and the need to ensure that the less visible equalities groups are included;

- capacity building within the voluntary and community sector, including the resourcing of community engagement – and ensuring that this gets to the range of equalities groupings; and

- a recognition of the dangers of certain voices dominating within groups as well as certain groups dominating, and the establishment of mechanisms to tackle this where possible (perhaps quota systems). Cultural sensitivity is necessary (for example regarding gender roles and sexual orientation) but ways must be found to include those people who are stigmatised or marginalised within their communities of origin[42].

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42 Of course, this applies as much to minorities within traditional white communities as it does to those within ethnic minority communities.

Annex 1: Outputs from the process evaluation of plan rationalisation and formative evaluation of community strategies

All published outputs from the evaluation of community strategies and plan rationalisation are available from the Communities and Local Government website (www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1136870).

Annual Reports/Evaluation Frameworks
Consultation Findings and Evaluation Framework London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [published December 2004]

Annual Report 2004 London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [published 8 December 2005]

Annual Report 2006 London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [published 6 September 2006]

Survey Reports
Report of the December 2004 Survey of local authorities London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [published 8 December 2005]

Report of the May 2006 Survey of local authorities London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [published April 2007]

Case Study Reports
Interim Case Studies Synthesis Report 2005 London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [published April 2007]

Review of community strategies
Review of community strategies – Overview of all and more detailed assessment of 50 London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. [published 8 December 2005]

Issues Papers
The Use of Evidence in community strategies Issues Paper London: Department for Communities and Local Government.
[published October 2006]

Plan Rationalisation Issues Paper London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [published April 2007]

Community strategies: Working at different levels Issues Paper London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [published April 2007]

Forthcoming Reports
Community strategies: The Role of Elected Members Issues Paper London: Communities and Local Government

Local Development Frameworks and community strategies Issues Paper London: Communities and Local Government

Local Area Agreements and community strategies Issues Paper London: Communities and Local Government

The role of Community Engagement in community strategies Issues Paper London: Communities and Local Government

Equality and Diversity and community strategies Issues Paper London: Communities and Local Government

Review of community strategies 2007 London: Communities and Local Government

Final Evaluation Report London: Communities and Local Government