

Developing an Equalities Hub
Consultation Report Summary



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Developing an Equalities Hub: Consultation Report Summary

Consultation

Glasgow Community Planning Partnership wanted to develop and improve links between Community Planning agencies and services and equalities groups in Glasgow. Glasgow Equalities Partnership (GEP) is an independent voluntary organisation, established by the four equality networks in Glasgow. GEP undertook a consultation in 2007 about the potential development, roles and functions of an 'Equalities Hub' that would have a strategic role in co-ordinating and supporting engagement. The consultation process involved events at a wide range of venues and included workshops, stalls, meeting, printed and online questionnaires.

Overall, 603 people participated at consultation events and a further 15 paper questionnaires and 4 electronic responses were received over the consultation period. The importance and value of bringing groups of people together and having face to face discussions is reinforced by the balance of methods that people used to contribute to the consultation exercise. Participants reflected a wide range of groups and interests across the city. Comments about the consultation events themselves were very positive. There were 3 main questions in the consultation:

- *What are the equalities issues that the Equalities Hub may need to address?*
- *How might the Equalities Hub address these issues?*
- *How could the Equalities Hub be structured and organised?*

Equalities Issues

The responses highlighted a wide range of issues and concerns. Attitudes, stereotyping, stigma and discrimination remain key barriers to participation and inclusion in services, communities and employment. Many responses focused on concerns about services such as housing, transport, education and social work, but also lack of employment opportunities and low levels of awareness of the needs and issues for equalities groups. Some responses highlighted concerns about barriers and tensions between equalities groups.

Responses pointed to lack of consistency in translating improved policy into practice and suggest that both managers and front-line staff in



services may benefit from support to raise awareness and build capacity. The perceived remoteness of planning services added to concerns about access to services, including physical access, and lack of flexibility and choice. Some felt that this resulted in the creation of avoidable barriers. Service provision was most under pressure in poorer areas although demand was likely to be higher. Few mentioned the EHRC and those who did were unclear about its future role and accessibility.

Communication and involvement were key concerns. Participants raised lack of meaningful consultation and involvement, lack of feedback from consultations, poor communication and engagement with community planning structures and between equalities groups. Lack of knowledge about community planning that was compounded by the lack of accessible information. Similarly, monitoring concerns centred on inclusiveness and quality and lack of information about how monitoring information influences or informs community planning.

Lack of funding and knowledge of funding sources, short-term funding and competition all put voluntary organisations under pressure. Implementing equality main-streaming and engaging with groups that they found 'hard to reach' stretched the capacity of some organisations to their limits. However participants expressed the desire to improve practice in groups as well as community planning structures.

Some issues raised were outwith the direct control or influence of community planning partners, but were identified as having an impact on the process of engagement and access to services and employment. They included: income poverty, problems with benefits, particularly for asylum seekers, fuel poverty and the limitations of equalities legislation and access to advocacy or support with accessing rights under the legislation.

Functions of an Equalities Hub

Most often, consultation participants thought the Hub should work with groups and communities across Glasgow and community planning partners and officers. It should not duplicate existing service provision or representation, but some thought the Hub should support groups with a weaker voice.

Participants envisaged the Hub undertaking information and awareness raising roles for: GCPP as service providers and employers; and for



equalities networks and groups in relation to different equalities strands, community planning services and individual rights and responsibilities. They were divided about the need to have a public access point to provide, for example, information about services, rights and group information. There was more agreement about the need to improve involvement of harder to reach groups, encourage engagement in communities and raise the profile of equalities.

Some thought a stronger campaigning, advocacy and lobbying role was needed, but others thought the role should be more about co-ordinating and supporting engagement between groups and community planning structures, fostering partnership working and facilitating events and new networks. The Hub's role in monitoring was seen as working to improve the quality and relevance of monitoring and to review progress in service provision and employment in community planning structures.

Consultation responses suggested a range of tasks and activities including audits and mapping of organisations and training provision, consultation with equalities groups, promoting good practice and developing links with the new Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Structure of an Equalities Hub

Views about the structure of the Hub depended on whether its role was considered strategic (where equalities groups and networks are the access point for service users and the Hub supports engagement between groups and GCPP structures) or a provider of services to individuals (where the Hub could potentially provide a wide range of services at a central point and/ or in localities). For some participants, the ideal would be a Hub that could conduct strategic and service delivery functions, but with staffing levels to match the skills and functions involved.

Some key principles for the culture and ethos of the organisation were identified across the consultation including that the Hub should be service user led, inclusive, accessible, strategic and high profile with a Board representing a wide range of equalities groups

Draft framework for the Equalities Hub

The main issues and suggestions brought forward were sometimes in conflict, but there was a great deal of common purpose overall. Much



work remains to be done, but only some can or should be undertaken directly by the Equalities Hub. The GEP Board has developed a draft framework that takes account of the consultation responses and reflects the need for an advisory and strategic role without duplicating roles and functions. The Hub needs to be strongly placed to act as a conduit to ensure concerns can be addressed. A draft framework that provides the basis for future development of the Hub is summarised below.

Purpose: The Equalities Hub will aim to ensure that local and city-wide Community Planning bodies follow equalities and diversity best practice in their engagement with organisations and citizens in Glasgow. The Hub will seek to improve the linkages between equalities networks and groups and increase participation of marginalised groups in community planning processes.

Role: The role includes facilitating and supporting engagement and consultation between GCPP with the 4 established Equality Networks and a broad range of equalities groups.

Functions: These should include the following:

1. Support for GCPP partners and equalities groups to improve awareness and understanding of a wide range of equalities groups and encourage better practice (e.g. through co-ordination of events, training)
2. Bring together relevant networks, groups and services to: promote engagement in and raise awareness of community planning; link services with groups and networks who require their support; and improve communication, information provision and standards in consultation and involvement
3. Build capacity amongst the Equality Networks and groups to engage with community planning processes and each other, providing support for groups with a weaker voice
4. Monitor the progress of community planning partners and services towards improved practice in equalities mainstreaming in service delivery, employment and in engaging with marginalised groups
5. Support the development and implementation of good practice in monitoring employment and service use or provision
6. Provide information and signposting for GCP partners and equalities groups to relevant groups or providers or services



7. Develop strong links with relevant organisations (for example the EHRC and advice service) to ensure groups and services get the advice and support they need
8. Produce accessible information to inform Glasgow citizens of the work and progress of the Hub
9. Implement processes and procedures (business, project plans and consultation processes) to prioritise activities and inform future development and planning

Structure and Operating Principles

The Equalities Hub will be managed by GEP. Key principles on which to build the Equalities Hub include the following:

- It should be led by representation from service user networks and groups and accountable through them to funders, equalities groups and networks
- It should reflect the movement towards single equality legislation and build the connections with the developing human rights approach
- It should demonstrate broad understanding of equalities issues and human rights and encourage inclusive approaches in all its work
- Its use of resources should reflect best practice in facilitating participation and involvement, drawing on the expertise of others
- It should seek to work in partnership with relevant networks and organisations wherever possible.

Issues for further discussion

Some issues will be considered further following discussion with funders. They include: the structure for leadership of the Hub and the potential to co-opt people with specific knowledge and expertise to support the Board in decision-making; securing funding for longer term development and the development of strategic partnership arrangements with key networks and organisations.

The diagram shows the key links for the Equalities Hub and the groups and agencies that will be key to the networking and partnership work and development envisaged for the Equalities Hub.