LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM

A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EQUALITIES MONITORING AND ANALYSIS IN MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON SERVICE DELIVERY TO RESIDENTS

MARCH 2004

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FOREWORD BY TASK GROUP CHAIR

This review was initiated by recent audits that the council had undertaken that highlighted the need to improve monitoring within the council and to use the monitoring data to improve service delivery. The driving force behind this review was the need to improve corporate monitoring to drive forward our aspirations of reaching Level 3 of the Equality Standard for local government.

Four members of the Life Chances Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to take this review forward. The review was undertaken between October 2003 and March 2004 across all areas of the council and with community partners. A series of meetings were held with external organisations and with heads of service and chief officers. The panel would like to recognise that the quality of this review would not have been possible without the full cooperation of the directors of each area of the council. They were very open as to examples of good practice within their departments but also in what areas needed improvement. We have highlighted good practice within this report.

The panel has made a series of recommendations for endorsement by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission and approval by the Cabinet. The panel believes that these recommendations will focus departments' thoughts as to why they need data; is the data already available and what are we going to use this data for, with regard to improving service delivery to residents. These recommendations will help to implement the next stages Merton needs to undertake, to successfully achieve Level 3 of the Equality Standard for local government.

The Panel would like to acknowledge our thanks to those that contributed to this report, especially members from the Citizen Advice Bureau; Disability Alliance Merton; Greenwich Leisure and the Speak Out Group. We valued the opportunity to discuss equality issues with you and how equality was perceived within your organisations and how the council's equality policies impacted onto your work..

I would like to thank my fellow Members of the Panel for the dedication they have shown in bringing this review to its conclusion and to Monica Wambu and Robert Bowler Merton's Equalities Officers for their advice and to Barbara Jarvis Scrutiny Officer.

Councillor Deborah Shears
Task Group Chair

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LIFE CHANCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL TASK GROUP

Membership:

Councillor Debbie Shears (Task Group Chair),
Councillor David Chung (Life Chances Panel Chair),
Councillor Nick Draper
Councillor Andrew Shellhorn

Officers:

Monica Wambu, Equalities Officer, Policy and Performance Division
Robert Bowler, Equalities Officer, Policy and Performance Division
Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer, Policy and Performance Division

Acknowledgements:

The Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review, through preparing reports and attending meetings to answer questions. For further information relating to the review, please contact:-

Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer
London Borough of Merton
Chief Executive's Department
Civic Centre
London Road
Morden, Surrey SM4 5DX

Tel: 020 8545 3390
E-Mail: **barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk**

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CONTENTS

Background papers/Appendices:

_____
                                                                          4

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REPORT SUMMARY

Recent inspections and reviews had identified the need to improve monitoring and for Merton to be a learning organisation. Having learned from this advice, the Council has developed and continues to improve its monitoring systems e.g. the development of its corporate Performance Management Framework and the improved use of its human resources management information system PAHRIS.   These tools and other information management systems are in use across the Council and this review has provided an opportunity to identify how integral equalities monitoring is, in the overall performance of Council functions.

It was agreed in July 2003 by Merton's Overview and Scrutiny Commission that a scrutiny review should be undertaken to look at the effectiveness of equality monitoring and analysis in making a positive impact on service delivery to residents. This would provide an important focus on the Council's priorities under its Equalities Merton strategic objective. These are to:-

➢ Implement a Council-wide Equality Plan which values our workforce and improves service provision;
➢ Introduce changes to develop easier community access to services;
➢ Address poverty and reduce social exclusion

The Review findings will also inform the work being undertaken in relation to Equalities Service Monitoring and Equality Standard for Local Government. Merton Council is currently operating at Level 1 of this Standard, but aims to achieve Level 2 by March 2004 and Level 3 by 2006. This is in addition to work progressing in relation to the Equality Monitoring Standard and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Standard for Racial Equality in Local Government. Merton is currently at Level 2 of this Standard, but is working towards achieving Level 3 by March 2004.

The review was referred to the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel in September 2003, and a Task Group of four Panel Members was set up to take forward the review work.

The Task Group began to meet in October 2003, agreeing the scoping and draft terms of reference and also the approach to be used for hearing evidence. The following elements were agreed:-

- Presentations by service department directors;
- Visits to user groups;
- A case study of Greenwich Leisure Ltd, through a visit to a leisure centre;
- Identification of examples of good practice in equalities monitoring from other authorities;
- Relevant background information to inform the review;
- Involvement of Cabinet Members, particularly the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion;

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A timetable was drawn up to appropriately schedule the elements of the review and this was expanded at various stages as further visits and presentations were identified. Members formulated a series of key questions to use for the departmental directors' presentations, with another set for use on visits to user groups and for engaging the public.

The Task Group ensured that, as well as talking to Council officers, there was an opportunity to engage with local residents and hear their views. Therefore, the Members agreed that at least one Task Group Member would attend each of the Area Forums in February 2004, to meet local residents and a briefing paper on the review was placed on each Forum agenda.

The review was publicised on Merton Council's web site and in the magazine to residents, 'My Merton'.

The Task Group began drafting its report and recommendations during the second week of February. It was agreed that all the presentation materials presented by the departments should be published in their entirety and these are included in the appendices to this report. (See Appendix E)

This report contains the findings of the scrutiny review and the Panel's recommendations, which are contained throughout the report at the appropriate places, but which are also drawn together below for ease of reference:-

 (Note: These recommendations are not listed in order of importance).

1. **Quality and appropriate quantity of monitoring must be consistent across the Council.**

   - The Equality Standard lays down standards for monitoring. The impact assessment measures monitoring. These tools must be applied across the Council and results fed into service plans.
   - CMT must champion the cultural changes required.
   - Corporate Equality Group and Heads of Service must report regularly on equality monitoring to CMT and DMT
   - DMTs must ensure that high quality data is produced, analysed and acted upon. DMTs also must ensure departmental equality teams have sufficient resources and authority to achieve equality targets.
   - Departmental Equality teams must ensure monitoring and analysis is used to improve services.

2. **There must be clear evidence of best practice being shared across the organisation and with partner organisations.**

   - In order for the Council to be a learning organisation CMT must champion the sharing of best practice both internally and with external partners.
   - The Council must develop a robust programme of external benchmarking to measure performance and improve services.

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- Departments must develop and use internal benchmarks.
- Departments must use the corporate equality group more effectively to identify and share best practice.
- The intranet must be used more effectively to share information.

3. **Training on analysis to be provided by staff with expertise for example from Business Support Teams, supplemented by external training where necessary.**

- Training must be standardised and available to all departments.
- Workshop event to identify and share good practice between business support units.
- Each department must promote findings through managers forums.
- Corporate HR to develop a competency on the skills and knowledge required to carry out analysis of data. HR to identify appropriate training to develop the skills required.
- The competency must be included in staff appraisals.

4. **The reason for collecting personal data must be made explicit to customers to improve the level of collection.**

- Results of service improvements as a result of monitoring must be publicised to staff and members of the community.
- Identify key people in process and ensure they understand the purpose of collecting data and are comfortable with asking for it.
- Targets must be set to improve the quality of information collected.

5. **The review identified that Performance Review Boards and monthly monitoring reports produced by Housing & Social Services were examples of good practice that could be used across the Council.**

- Review content to ensure equality issues are addressed in the Housing & Social Services Quarterly Review Reports.
- Housing & Social Services to share method and learning with all departments.
- All departments to identify how they can apply the learning from Housing & Social Services.

6. **As a Community Leader the Council has a duty to ensure equality and diversity is promoted among partners including contractors. There are also opportunities to share data and information gathered by partners. This needs to happen consistently across the Council.**

- CMT must ensure that the Council fulfils its role as a Community Leader.
- Officers to work with external partners to utilise data to improve Council services.
- The Procurement Strategy must ensure that contractors use monitoring and analysis to improve services.

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- Partners must be supported to ensure they have the skills and capacity to use monitoring and analysis to improve services.

7. The review recognises that Corporate Human Resources have made improvements in producing workforce monitoring data.

- Corporate analysis must be carried out to identify trends and inform planning.
- Findings must be reported to CMT, Corporate Equalities Group and Departments.
- Departments must be more proactive in requesting appropriate data and carrying out analysis to improve services and employment profile.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed that a scrutiny review should be undertaken to look at how effectively the Council monitors and analyses equalities data, and whether this makes a positive impact on the delivery of services to the local community. A review of equalities monitoring and its effectiveness in improving services reflects the wider corporate performance management framework which was identified as a weakness by the Audit Commission in Merton's Corporate Assessment. In addition, the requirements of recent legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act, act as key drivers for change and improvement in delivering fair and equal access to services for the whole community.

1.2 Review Terms of Reference were approved by the Commission in November 2003 – see Appendix A. The review was referred to the Life Chances Scrutiny Panel, which set up a task group of four Members to take forward the review work, who reported back regularly to the Panel on progress being made.

2. THE PROCEDURE FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW

2.1 The review was progressed through a series of task group meetings, presentations to Members by chief officers and heads of service; there was also consultation with external groups, through visits to local user groups and leisure facilities. A timetable was agreed at the first task group meeting and this was updated as witnesses giving evidence were identified or visits were arranged.

2.2 The Task Group also considered that it was important to hear the views of local residents with regard to equalities issues and experiences in accessing Council services. Therefore, the four area forums were used for consulting local people, with a briefing paper on the review being added to the agenda of each area forum meeting in February 2004. At least one Task Group Member attended each forum. (See paragraph 4.5 for the outcomes).

2.3 Publicity was considered a vital element of the review. Therefore, a web page was included on Merton's Internet site, giving local groups and also individual residents the chance to respond to key questions formulated by the Task Group. There was also an entry in the Council's magazine for residents, 'My Merton'. Posters were used to advertise the visit to Wimbledon Leisure Centre, which took place on 26 January 2004. (See paragraph 4.6 for the outcomes).

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3.   CONSIDERATION OF DEPARTMENTAL EVIDENCE

3.1   Departmental Presentations:

3.1.1   Various key questions were used for the departmental presentations held in December 2003 and February 2004. Directors were asked to make a written submission based on these questions. (The questions can be found in Appendix B and have also been used to form the basis of some of the review recommendations throughout this report). Task Group Members had the opportunity to raise issues and points of clarification on these submissions. A final submission was then produced by each department and presented at the agreed time.

3.1.2   Each director was given a one hour slot at one of two Task Group meetings held on 9th and 18th December 2003.   Presentations were given to the Task Group of no longer than 20 minutes duration, followed by question and answer sessions.   For the Chief Executive's Department, there are two divisions which report to the Chief Executive: Policy and Performance and Human Resources. The Policy and Performance Division presentation was made to the Task Group on 18th December 2003. However, it was agreed that, in order to allow the PAHRIS payroll system to be further updated and for further data to be available, the Human Resources presentation would not be given until 3rd February 2004.

3.1.3   All departments chose to use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis as part of their presentation. The Task Group was particularly keen to ensure that areas of strength identified in the presentations were shared with other departments and that any weaknesses identified were being appropriately addressed through action plans.

3.1.4   Task Group Members found the departmental presentations very informative, as they highlighted some areas where good equalities monitoring work is having an impact. Areas of weakness which emerged have helped to develop recommendations in this report.   The detailed findings and recommendations arising from the departmental presentations are set out in the following sections.

3.2   The Importance of Monitoring to the Departments' Strategy

3.2.1   All departments underlined their commitment to equalities and social inclusion and confirmed that equalities monitoring is accepted by staff as an important process:-

Housing and Social Services emphasised its commitment to social inclusion, due to the nature of its work in dealing with vulnerable people, which is expressed in its service delivery.

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Environment and Regeneration expressed a determination to make sure that there is effective equality monitoring of its services, which can feed into the review, development and implementation of services.

Corporate Resources acknowledged the danger of seeing itself as a 'backroom' department, thereby making equalities monitoring in relation to service delivery not relevant. However, work was being done to ensure this did not happen.

Education, Leisure and Libraries stressed the value of access to pupil data to enable effective equalities monitoring to take place. It was important that school governors understood the importance of providing equalities information.

Customer Services & Development, as a new customer focused department, acknowledged the need to monitor equalities effectively in order to make a positive difference to the customer.

Chief Executive's: Policy & Performance Division as a corporate support service works alongside other departments to close gaps and drive forward initiatives. It was acknowledged that, although Merton Council was a leading light on equalities ten years ago, there had been something of a decline in progress, although this trend has been addressed. Merton is now on par with London. The Stephen Lawrence Scrutiny Review (which was the first pilot scrutiny review undertaken at Merton) had presented 77 recommendations relating to equalities within the Authority. In addition, equalities targets are key to the Authority's drive to improve services for local residents.

Chief Executive's: Human Resources

It emerged from the Corporate Human Resources presentation, based on the data contained in the Employment Profile, that schemes are now in place for improvement in recruitment, promotion, learning and development of Council staff. An Action Plan was circulated to the Task Group Members, outlining the key initiatives proposed to progress this work.

The Task Group recognises the improvements made in the six months since the commencement of the Scrutiny Review. For example, the schemes in place in Human Resources are welcomed; as a new department, the focus of Customer Services and Development seems to be to the future. Officers showed during the review, that they could deliver and they are now doing what they should be doing. However, it is vital that the impetus is maintained, so that standards do not start to slip. Departments have recognised the benefits of equality monitoring and how easy it is and how it can bring results. They have recognised that monitoring is an everyday function, and not an add-on.

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3.3   **Where Are We Now?**

3.3.1 Structure

All departments were asked to outline their current position and perception of how well they believe they are doing in relation to equalities monitoring. Every department stressed that, while work is on-going to ensure regular equalities monitoring and analysis is used to improve service delivery, there is more to be done and room for improvement.

Housing and Social Services advised that there is a departmental Equalities Steering Group and Commissioning Strategy in place. Census information and customer surveys are fed into the process. The Carefirst IT system is now in place, which will aid equalities monitoring and there is a need to ensure that monitoring impacts on service delivery.

Environment & Regeneration stressed that the role of its departmental Equalities Steering Group is to challenge and champion equalities as part of the day job, to ensure that it is properly embedded. In addition, the Business and Economic Partnerships Unit (BEPU) operates a loan fund to support local businesses and is targeting new start-up black and minority ethnic businesses with some success.

Corporate Resources advised that work on equalities is taken to the Equality Working Group which has a cross-departmental membership – acting as a catalyst to the unit managers' meetings and forums. There is also a Service Review Section which monitors all performance plans, including equalities issues. With regard to equalities data from contractors, there is a Corporate Procurement Work Group, led by the Acting Head of civic and Legal Services, on which all departments are represented.

Education, Leisure & Libraries uses its Research and Statistics Team to gather information, analyse it and generate key questions for the department to respond to. The importance of informal observation was also highlighted, for example, in identification of the need for a Vulnerable Children's Manager who is now in post.

Customer Services & Development has a Departmental Equalities Group which co-ordinates all equalities issues. There are two systems currently being put into place which will help the equalities monitoring process:-

- Pericles – for Council Tax and Housing Benefit, linking an individual to both areas, where they are only known in one;

- People and Places Gazetteer (a corporate system), which is an indexing system.

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Together these form a database on individuals, through desktop integration.

The Department is working towards a uniform approach in analysis of equalities data to inform its services.

Chief Executive's: Policy & Performance Division informed the Task Group of the Equalities Steering Group which was set up to support the Scrutiny Review Member Panel and which has continued to drive forward the Council's progress on equalities. Also, there is integration into one Corporate Equality Programme (CEP) all the various pieces of equalities work, to ensure a cohesive approach:-

- Stephen Lawrence
- CRE Race Equality Standard
- Equality Standard for Local Government
- Disability Discrimination Act – Council Action Plan

Chief Executive's: Human Resources Recruitment Team undertakes monitoring both of the employment application forms and the interview shortlists. Most of this is a statutory requirement; however, some additional monitoring has been included, so as to help improve the current service. In relation to Recruitment, most monitoring is quantitative and is requested for all posts. The following equalities information is requested by all applicants and conforms to statutory requirements:-

♦ Ethnicity
♦ Age
♦ Gender
♦ Disability

A note on how this information will be used is included on all applications, in compliance with the Data Protection Act. It needs to be noted that applicants have the option not to provide the information if they choose not to.

In overall examination of the current position on equalities monitoring, the Task Group considered the current Level 2 attained by Merton in relation to the Equality Standard for Local Government and looked ahead to what has still to be achieved, in order to reach Level 3 (out of the Standard's 5 levels) by the year 2006. This is one of Merton's Business Plan targets, which must be achieved as part of the council's strategy to realise its ambition to be and excellent authority be 2006. The recommendations in this Review report, once actioned will assist the organisation in reaching its target within the timeframe set.

It is recognised that information needs to be shared upwards and downwards in the organisation, for example in access to training. There is also recognition that departments are structured differently, for

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example within Education, Leisure and Libraries, schools are independent and the Council can try to influence them but cannot coerce them. Also, in Social Services, there are national guidelines that have equalities built in. However, despite these differences, the outcome needs to be the same – equality and access for all!

The importance of disseminating information and good practice has emerged from the Review. There is a need to listen to and accept good practice ideas without being defensive, or seeing suggestions as a slur on commitment or professionalism.

3.3.2 Expectations on Managers

All departments acknowledge that team managers are expected to oversee equalities monitoring and analysis to ensure that there is a drive towards continuous improvement of services (as part of the Authority's Journey to Excellence). Regular reports on equalities issues are presented by Policy and Performance Division to Corporate Management Team (the Chief Executive and departmental directors). Whilst managers hold such overall responsibility, however, the issue of equalities forms part of each individual officer's appraisal targets. Managers therefore review progress against these targets through Merton's appraisal system.   There is also a need for managers to ensure that examples of good practice are shared across the organisation and there is a good basis already for driving this forward. Feedback from service users needs to be more robust.

Managers should ensure that good practice in equalities monitoring and analysis is shared across departments. Equality initiatives need to be led from the top of the organisation, as this helps to reinforce good practice. The leadership accountability should start with the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team. It is acknowledged that action has been taken to address this.

Councillors also have a clear role to play in this process, for example, Cabinet Members and the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion in particular.

One example of good practice is from the London Borough of Harrow, a Beacon Council (awarded for commitment to promoting racial equality), which has worked in partnership for many years to promote racial equality. This has resulted in establishment of the Harrow Partnership, which comprises 1600 organisations to play a key role in improving the quality of life for local residents and co-ordinates activities, particularly for groups with racial equality as their prime focus. Progress on Harrow's Race Equality Scheme is reported to Cabinet annually, through the relevant portfolio holders (Partnership & Property; Finance, Human Resources & Performance). The responsible lead officer is at the highest level, i.e. the Chief Executive.

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This also happens in Merton, with an annual report to Council from the Leader (and the Chief Executive is the responsible officer).

3.3.3 Training:

Housing & Social Services has a training programme for staff dealing with anti oppression and discrimination issues.

Environment & Regeneration advised that all staff are required to undertake diversity awareness training and there is on-going dialogue with outside training and refresher courses.

Corporate Resources has inherited the former Finance Department's strong history of equalities training and work is currently under way to develop a training and development plan with equalities included.

Education, Leisure & Libraries The Research and Statistics Team provide support and training for staff and also governors in schools on the use of data. Managers also benefit from this service.

Customer Services & Development informed the Task Group that there is training provided for staff on equalities, which is cascaded down to all relevant staff.

Chief Executive's Policy & Performance Division advised that the Equalities Audit undertaken in the last twelve months had identified the need for more training and Human Resources had responded with equalities training for all new staff. However, the places are not always filled on these courses.

Chief Executive's: Human Resources Training and Development Team monitor staff participation to the corporate training courses as well as to record any training requirements listed in the annual personal development plans, addressing these accordingly. In addition, the Team monitors the annual selection of managers to attend the various Management Courses provided at Kingston College and other educational institutions. All training course participants are asked to reply to questions about their gender, ethnic background, disability, full or part-time employment status and salary grade. Priority is given to those for whom the need for the training has emerged as part of the annual performance appraisal. All information is entered into the PAHRIS (corporate payroll and human resources) system, to be produced now as quarterly reports, analysed to ensure it reflects the make-up of the work-force.

The Task Group's view is that there needs to be a more systematic approach to training, driven from above. All frontline staff should be prioritised for equality training. Merton Link staff in particular, should all have received equality training, as they work directly with the public on a daily basis.

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Training is an investment, not a cost. Managers should identify and prioritise those staff who need training. Training should include the principles which the Council has adopted, for example the Social Model of Disability.

Although more staff need to attend training, it is recognised that resources are limited. Equality training needs to be built into individual training plans through the appraisal scheme. In particular, appropriate training needs should be addressed for officers required to carry out analysis of data.

The Task Group Members have requested details on equalities training being planned by Human Resources for the first six months of 2004/2005.

3.3.4 Resources:

All departments acknowledged that, without additional resources for equalities monitoring, there is a limit to what can be achieved. Resources for training was identified as a particular area needing improvement. There are huge challenges to be faced, e.g. in joining up equalities monitoring in line with guidance from Government departments; the budget also impacts on the process, through growth and savings affecting equalities and social inclusion issues.

The Task Group acknowledged that there are issues about encouraging frontline staff to attend equalities training and recognises that there is not enough strategic training.

3.3.5 Step 1 – Gathering the Data:

Housing & Social Services advised that data is monitored monthly – this has identified that the percentage of older people from ethnic minorities will rise over the next 5 years from 9% to 13% - this will need an appropriate service response; also, members of the Asian community with learning disabilities are under-represented in our services.

The Asian Elderly Group was asked to do some work on accessing of services and St. George's Medical School has been undertaking some primary research on under-representation of ethnic minorities which is due to report early in 2004; there is also a lower level of younger people with physical disabilities using services and they have stated the reasons as being because the services are not socially inclusive and are condescending; the Best Value review of domiciliary care has not yet influenced the service.

With black and ethnic minority applicants, a lot of monitoring is undertaken and this has resulted in identifying a need to provide larger homes for some families;

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The ethnicity of all open cases is monitored; the Child Protection Register and numbers of children in care are monitored for ethnicity;

There is a definitive list of data collated for Government etc which is shared. The department uses outside agency data as much as possible.

Environment & Regeneration uses Contractline to assist monitoring of contracts. A large number of contracts are let by the department and, as procurement is a corporate issue, the assistance of the equalities officers in the Chief Executive's Department is sought. In addition, through consultation at neighbourhood level, small focus groups, the police, probation services etc, the department determines where to focus particular attention.

Corporate Resources handles a lot of data through externally supplied services and through key performance indicators. These are delivered by IT systems. With the support services, however, apart from the department's own benchmarking, it is difficult to find proper comparators.

Education, Leisure & Libraries use the Research and Statistics Team expertise for this purpose as already mentioned. Also, for adult education, there is support from their Management Information Systems Officer. The Leisure Development Team has gathered data from the Easter and Summer Plus schemes, which will be used to target particular groups. The School Sports Co-ordination Scheme requires monitoring of take-up in sport, in order to target those groups not involved in sport.

Customer Services & Development advised that within Merton Link there is a uniform storing of data, which should help to minimise the need to ask the same questions year on year. Other teams gather and analyse data as is pertinent to informing their specific services. It is acknowledged that encouragement needs to be given to persuade customers to provide monitoring information when requested.

Chief Executive's: Policy & Performance Division oversees the Residents Survey, which is undertaken annually and also the Residents Panel which comprises 1,000 residents involved in questionnaires and focus groups. The Division is also responsible for the Corporate Complaints System. There is also data collected from the Racial Incidents Panel. The Association for London Government (ALG) also provides data through residents surveys. The Performance Management Framework and monitoring of performance indicators is also managed by Policy and Performance. Data is shared with departments and performance challenged.

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<u>Chief Executive's: Human Resources</u> advised that there has been significant recent improvement in the recording of data and this information is now being shared with managers.

The Task Group considers that there is some degree of duplication of monitoring information collected. Departments therefore need to be more precise on information they are collecting, why they are collecting it and what they intend to do with it. A case can therefore be made for joined up working. An information audit should be carried out every two years, to assess data held and eliminate any duplication.

3.3.6   <u>Step 2 – Analysing the Data:</u>

The Task Group stressed the importance of analysis in equalities monitoring, so that appropriate action can be taken, rather than simply the recording of data collected.

Team managers are responsible for data analysis, but all officers have to do it. It is done at different levels – by operational managers or Policy Business Support, which pulls it all together and provides information on how we are doing. It is therefore made everyone's responsibility. There is a need to make the data work to bridge the gap.

All departments acknowledged the importance of effective analysis but accepted that, whilst analysis is done, there is room for improvement. Top level monitoring of equalities progress needs to continue, i.e.. monitoring gaps, monitoring changes, making best use of statistics and for planning ahead. Departments have to be very clear about how they want to use the statistics.

3.3.7   <u>Step 3 – Strategic Implementation:</u>

Joined up working is important, in order for equalities monitoring to be effective. For example, Housing has very good links with the Housing Corporation and registered social landlords, including two black and ethnic minority ones.

There are opportunities for all departments:-

▪ To monitor the wider equality issues relating to contractors;
▪ To fully integrate all guidance so that equalities is not an 'add-on';

Equalities should be regarded as part of the whole strategic planning process and must therefore be built in at the strategic planning level. Equalities need to be embedded into procedures to form a natural part of the decision making process.

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3.4   **How Well Are We Doing?**

3.4.1 Assessment and the Basis for the Assessment

All departments are currently undergoing Equalities Impact Assessments, which may reveal unmet needs. (See Appendix D). Action Plans will be drawn up in response to these assessments. Also, the filling of a second corporate equality officer post within Policy and Performance Division has meant that equalities issues can now be tackled on different fronts, rather than one at a time.

The Task Group considers that Corporate Management Team have a clear role in promoting equalities, with equality officers working in partnership to support managers across the Council.

3.4.2 Examples of Good Practice identified from each Department

During the departmental presentations, several examples of good practice in relating to equalities monitoring and analysis were highlighted. Although there are others, a few examples from each department are detailed below:-

♦ Housing and Social Services highlighted that an opportunity to include meaningful targets in the service and team plans for 2004/5 has been recognised and Equality Officers are being engaged to help the department extend the equality monitoring that it currently undertakes. Also, the Departmental Equality Steering Group intends to provide advice on target and action setting in the team plans, and to review the equality elements of team and service plans. The equality impact assessments will also provide an opportunity to produce meaningful actions and targets to include in team plans. The department has worked very hard to ensure that it has been removed from special measures in relation to children's services, imposed by Government. Promoting life chances is achieved through children's services; e.g. in relation to fostering and adoption, placements are now considered with non-traditional families, such as single parents, co-habiting couples and gay couples etc.

♦ Environment and Regeneration advised that service equality performance is analysed primarily through departmentally organised satisfaction surveys, both statutory and local, of services and procedures relating to applying for regulatory approval. In addition to local surveys, guidance has been introduced on the format and response level required to enable statistically valid conclusions to be made. There is also an annual survey of residents undertaken in relation to the services provided by the department.

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♦ <u>Corporate Resources</u> identified the development of service plans (some papers and charts were tabled) as an example of good practice which other departments could benefit from. There is also some good practice around some procurement, which is done in partnership with other local authorities and so verification etc is already checked on a wider scale.

♦ <u>Education, Leisure and Libraries</u> has a Research and Statistics Team which produces very good work. There has recently been training with managers to show what the Team does including the fact that its remit is wider that school effectiveness, where it is located.

♦ <u>Customer Services and Development</u> includes Merton Translation Service (MTS), which is an excellent example of a team undertaking effective equality monitoring and analysis. This has led to actions taken in relation to the services provided, including for example:-

 - targeted recruitment to cover specific languages;
 - extra freelancers to meet additional demand for the service;
 - monitoring of the service's use by other departments, leading to redistribution of the budget to ensure equal access;
 - a free language service to local voluntary groups redistributed to a maximum of £500 per group p.a. to ensure equality of access;
 - exploring possibilities of out of hours telephone interpreting service in collaboration with other services from the Association of London government in response to customer requests;
 - commissioning of posters and booklets to community organisations and Council reception areas on the service provided by MTS.

♦ <u>Policy and Performance Division</u> under the Chief Executive highlighted the substantial consultation undertaken through its ward survey programme, which has created new insights and information on residents' priorities and the whole consultation and community engagement process. There has been thorough evaluation of the whole process in order to learn lessons for now and for the future, which will include the introduction of different ways to engage with under represented groups, i.e. not relying exclusively on questionnaires.

♦ <u>Corporate Human Resources</u>, also under the Chief Executive, is now in the process of producing a comprehensive Employment Profile, containing data on staff employed by the Authority extracted from the PAHRIS system and providing information on a range of employee planning and monitoring topics, for example ethnicity, gender, disability, age, recruitment, leavers, salary, grievance, disciplinary and employment tribunal.

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The Task Group has acknowledged and welcomed all the examples of good practice which have emerged from the review, which it hopes can be shared across the organisation as a whole.

3.5 **How Well Are We Sharing Information Within and Across Departments?**

3.5.1 All departments accepted that more could be done to share information departmentally and also corporately. Some examples of information sharing emerged from the presentations, however, as shown below:-

Housing & Social Services advised that there is a need for investment in foster parents, through new legislation; an eye is kept on education and exclusion of children in care which is important; child protection goes across every part of the community and skills are needed in understanding different cultures.e.g. as in the Victoria Climbie case.

Also with the exclusion of looked after children, information is shared with Education There is the Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership and we are on this as well as education staff so it all comes together. The Life Chances Team in education also works closely with the Looked After Children Team in social services.

Environment & Regeneration shares information through its Equalities Steering Group which is currently being refreshed. The group will meet monthly, but may meet more often in the early stages in order to make up ground.

Corporate Resources stated that equalities data from contractors is disseminated to other departments, through a Corporate Procurement Working Group.

Education, Leisure & Libraries highlighted an opportunity as the integration of the Children's Information Service into the Early Years and Childcare Development Partnership. Also the Education Development Plan supports school improvement and work is done with different schools to identify under achieving groups and target these to improve overall results (these groups are different for each school). A good practice guide has also been produced in liaison with five other boroughs, with input to the Department for Education and Skills.(DfES). The Head of Access, Opportunity and Inclusion has meetings with colleagues in Social Services, mostly in relation to SEN cases, and so data is shared cross-departmentally in this way. Also, it was explained that the remit of the Research and Statistics Team is wider within the department than the School Effectiveness Division, which is where it is located in the structure.

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Customer Services & Development advised that the Gazetteer is a corporate system, overseen by IT Services. Also, there is a Customer Relationship Management System, as a customer database, which will be piloted in the next few months. The data will be shared with external organisations. In addition, Merton Translation Service shares expertise with and provides information/advice to all departments. The Data Protection Officer has drafted a data sharing protocol to help facilitate data sharing, not only across the Council, but also with external partners. This is in the process of being agreed.

Chief Executive's: Policy & Performance Division has a Research Team located within it, which contains specific research skills, which can be accessed by other officers.

Chief Executive's: Human Resources currently shares recorded data with all departmental managers. This information will be analysed and lessons learned shall then be provided in action plans to improve best practice, equal access, inclusion and the celebration of diversity.

Overall, the Task Group expressed the need for a process to be in place to allow managers to trickle down information to staff on a regular basis, informing staff of equality initiatives that are happening within the department. Managers need to keep the message simple and ensure it is made relevant to staffs' area of work.

3.6. **Where Are the Gaps?**

3.6.1 The Task Group has identified general areas of weakness and gaps in monitoring arising from the presentations:-

- There are pockets of excellence but these have not routinely been fed in to other parts of the department;
- There is a need to address the issues and engage the community, to identify what the barriers to access are;
- There are clear gaps in the training of staff undertaking monitoring and analysis of equalities data;
- A lack of resources contributes to the limitations in what has been achieved and what can realistically be achieved;
- Some school governors have some concerns when statistics on attainment are broken down by ethnicity;
- It is difficult to monitor with any formality or accuracy the informal use of parks by different ethnic groups;
- There needs to be more evidence that equalities is part of a systematic process for feeding into departmental service plans, so that assessment becomes part of the plans;
- Work on implementing the Disability Discrimination Act needs to be properly resourced and carried out, in line with the Action Plan;
- Corporate Management Team needs to see more equalities monitoring information, so that it is considered at an appropriate level;

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- Procedures have to be built in to check that monitoring is being maintained, rather than leaving it to chance.

3.7 Key Recommendations Relating to Departments

(Note: These recommendations are not listed in order of importance).

1. **Quality and appropriate quantity of monitoring must be consistent across the Council.**

   - The Equality Standard lays down standards for monitoring. The impact assessment measures monitoring. These tools must be applied across the Council and results fed into service plans.
   - CMT must champion the cultural changes required.
   - Corporate Equality Group and Heads of Service must report regularly on equality monitoring to CMT and DMT
   - DMTs must ensure that high quality data is produced, analysed and acted upon. DMus also must ensure departmental equality teams have sufficient resources and authority to achieve equality targets.
   - Departmental Equality teams must ensure monitoring and analysis is used to improve services.

2. **There must be clear evidence of best practice being shared across the organisation and with partner organisations.**

   - In order for the Council to be a learning organisation CMT must champion the sharing of best practice both internally and with external partners.
   - The Council must develop a robust programme of external benchmarking to measure performance and improve services.
   - Departments must develop and use internal benchmarks.
   - Departments must use the corporate equality group more effectively to identify and share best practice.
   - The intranet must be used more effectively to share information.

3. **Training on analysis to be provided by staff with expertise for example from Business Support Teams, supplemented by external training where necessary.**

   - Training must be standardised and available to all departments.
   - Workshop event to identify and share good practice between business support units.
   - Each department must promote findings through managers forums.
   - Corporate HR to develop a competency on the skills and knowledge required to carry out analysis of data. HR to identify appropriate training to develop the skills required.
   - The competency must be included in staff appraisals.

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4. **The reason for collecting personal data must be made explicit to customers to improve the level of collection.**

   - Results of service improvements as a result of monitoring must be publicised to staff and members of the community.
   - Identify key people in process and ensure they understand the purpose of collecting data and are comfortable with asking for it.
   - Targets must be set to improve the quality of information collected.

5. **The review identified that Performance Review Boards and monthly monitoring reports produced by Housing & Social Services were examples of good practice that could be used across the Council.**

   - Review content to ensure equality issues are addressed in the Housing & Social Services Quarterly Review Reports.
   - Housing & Social Services to share method and learning with all departments.
   - All departments to identify how they can apply the learning from Housing & Social Services.

6. **As a Community Leader the Council has a duty to ensure equality and diversity is promoted among partners including contractors. There are also opportunities to share data and information gathered by partners. This needs to happen consistently across the Council.**

   - CMT must ensure that the Council fulfils its role as a Community Leader.
   - Officers to work with external partners to utilise data to improve Council services.
   - The Procurement Strategy must ensure that contractors use monitoring and analysis to improve services.
   - Partners must be supported to ensure they have the skills and capacity to use monitoring and analysis to improve services.

7. **The review recognises that Corporate Human Resources have made improvements in producing workforce monitoring data.**

   - Corporate analysis must be carried out to identify trends and inform planning.
   - Findings must be reported to CMT, Corporate Equalities Group and Departments.
   - Departments must be more proactive in requesting appropriate data and carrying out analysis to improve services and employment profile.

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4. CONSULTATION WITH USER GROUPS AND LOCAL RESIDENTS

4.1 <u>Visits</u>

Task Group Members took the opportunity to visit the following local groups and speak to both staff and users. A set of specific questions were drawn up for use on the visits. (See Appendix C).

<u>Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Morden</u>

This organisation provides advice and information to the public, which is free, impartial, independent and confidential, on issues such as social security, immigration, housing and employment. The offices are accessible to wheelchair users and provide disabled parking and portable induction loop. Arrangements can also be made for interpreters.

The Task Group focused on talking to the CAB staff, who responded to questions about access to the service and the range of issues brought to them by members of the public.

<u>Disability Alliance Merton (DAM), Guardian Centre, Colliers Wood</u>

The Centre provides a base for all the activities offered for visually impaired residents of the Borough and it the home of the Merton Sports and Social Club for the blind. It also covers the Merton Talking Newspaper for the Blind. A 24 hour ansaphone service is provided.

The Task Group met staff and centre users and asked for views on the services provided in terms of equal access and the opportunities they provide.

After the visits had taken place, the Task Group drew together its findings. It agreed that:-

▪ Partner organisations such as DAM and CAB have specialist knowledge which, if it was shared with the Council, could help us to improve services to the community.   CAB is often made aware of residents' concerns before these are brought to the attention of the council. Developing a more formalised relationship with the CAB to share information between the two organisations would be beneficial to service users. There are ICT and data protection issues involved, but the possibility should be explored;

▪ In taking forward its Community Leadership role, the Council should reserve two places on all its corporate training sessions for the benefit of the voluntary sector. This would help to widen their knowledge in other areas in which they do not usually specialise, but where their clients might have issues. This would also widen their understanding of how the Council works.

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4.2   Greenwich Leisure Limited – A Case Study

4.2.1   A visit to Wimbledon Leisure Centre was arranged with Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) and posters were displayed at the Centre, and also at Merton Link in the Civic Centre, to advertise the visit. An area was set aside for those who wanted to speak to the Members in confidence.

4.2.2   The Task Group met with the Centre and Regional Managers of GLL, along with the contract manager from the Leisure Division. The Group also had a discussion with two service users. Both service users had been members of Wimbledon Leisure Centre for a number of years; one member used the centre every day.

4.2.3   The Task Group found that membership of the centre was diverse. There was compliance with the spirit of equalities, which was evident from the activities introduced to encourage social inclusion. The difficulties in purchasing new IT equipment and software had led to delays in GLL's production of comprehensive equality monitoring reports using all rather than some of the 2001 census categories. This has been resolved, draft reports were being produced and equalities information from members was being added to the new database. The Regional Manager was looking forward to making use of the information when it becomes available.

4.2.4   GLL had identified gaps in services from user-feedback and independent surveys. The company had responded positively to these for example by reducing the cost of junior membership, women-only sessions, 50+ sessions, youth basket-ball working with a church and a recruiting a Community Development Officer to do outreach work. DDA audits had been carried out and a programme of work planned. The men's changing rooms were not accessible for disabled men with mobility difficulties.

4.2.5   Although equality training is provided, it is possible for managers to slip through the net and not receive training. This might impact on managers sharing this knowledge with staff. The results of surveys seems to remain with directors, but not disseminated to staff.

4.2.6   The service users felt that from their observations the users of the centre were very mixed. They enjoyed using the centre but felt that opening hours could be extended and well advertised especially at weekends and during the Christmas period when normal opening hours were not observed. There was the acknowledgement that parts of the centre had been refurbished, but some sections such as the men's changing rooms, the sauna and shower facilities needed upgrading. Although the users supported equalities and had no objection to monitoring they felt that it had to be kept in proportion.

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4.3   **Presentation by The Speak Out Group**

4.3.1. The Speak Out Group meets monthly and comprises a group of local people with learning disabilities who make presentations to local bodies on the problems faced by people with learning disabilities and what can be done to make their lives easier and help them to integrate into society. The Group comprises fifteen members in total and four representative members, together with their helpers, came to the Civic Centre to meet Task Group Members and officers working on the Review.   The Group gave a fascinating insight into their daily lives and the particular problems they experience. The following key areas of concern were highlighted:-

- Bullying – This is a common problem faced by people with learning disabilities, for example in relation to school children on the streets at close of school. Awareness of the issue is being raised through liaison with local schools.

- Safety – People with learning disabilities often feel unsafe venturing outside their own homes. It is important to help people gain the confidence to make journeys outside the home to expand their horizon and empower them to feel they are part of the community.

- Transport – Being able to use local transport services with confidence is important to people with learning disabilities. One member of the Speak Out Group who used to feel unable to use local buses now regularly takes the bus without feeling vulnerable and has approached the bus service providers on the importance of welcoming people with learning disabilities onto local transport.

- Employment – It is really difficult for people with learning disabilities to gain paid employment despite efforts made with providing piecemeal work and voluntary work. The members of the Speak Out Group all expressed a desire to find useful paid employment.

- Housing – the need for suitable accommodation within the community is vital to ensure that people with learning disabilities are part of the local community and can lead more independent lives.

Generally, the Speak Out Group felt that, although the situation for them is improving and there are more opportunities to lead meaningful lives and develop as individuals, the progress is far too slow and people are still reluctant to really listen to their views.

4.3.2 The Task Group's view is that there needs to be a shift in perception of the public and staff who do not work with people with learning disabilities. Some of the views in the Speak Out Group's presentation matched up with details presented by Human Resources. Human Resources had highlighted the low numbers of disabled employees within the Council and the need to increase the proportion of disabled

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staff. Members of the Speak Out Group were concerned at the lack of employment opportunities available to them in the Council and in local businesses. As a result, their ambitions and potential were not being realised.   There appears to be a gap regarding the involvement of the Speak Out Group in more consultation across the Council, which needs to be addressed.

4.3.3   There needs to be steady progress with increasing the percentage of disabled staff within the Council.. Also, the apparent gap regarding the involvement of the Speak Out Group in more consultation with the council should be addressed, in order to ensure that the views and concerns of the group are heard.

4.4   Consultation with the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minorities (JCC)

4.4.1   A briefing paper on the Review was added to the agenda of the February meeting of the JCC. Task Group Members attended the JCC meeting to speak to ethnic minority group representatives and hear their views, experiences and particular problems they face in relation to

the fairness of the Council's service provision and the degree of social inclusion realised.

4.5.   Consultation through Area Forums

4.5.1   A briefing paper on the purpose of the Scrutiny Review was included on the agendas of all the February 2004 Area Forum meetings. At least one Task Group Member attended each Forum to meet local residents and the following questions formed the basis of the discussion:-

   ♦ Do you think the Council provides services fairly to all residents?

   ♦ Have you experienced any particular problems with accessing local services, for example through language difficulties, the clear presentation of information, access to Council buildings etc.?

   ♦ If you are asked to provide information as part of the monitoring process, for example in relation to ethnic origin or disability, are you aware of the reasons for this information being requested? (i.e. that it is used to analyse equalities issues so that access to services can be improved).

4.5.2   The main feedback from the JCC and area forums was that the Council does not always give service users reasons as to why we collect monitoring information and some are unsure as to how it will be used. People do not respond well to forms and need to realise that it is in their interest to provide the information requested. Different methods of asking for the information should also be used – not everyone has

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access to ICT. People can become cynical and will not bother to provide information, if they think that nothing will change as a result. Information on possible outcomes and feedback on changes made is therefore important.

4.5.3 The Council needs to ask the equality monitoring questions through different forms of communication. We also need to ensure that information on what the possible outcomes of completing equality monitoring details might be, together with feedback on changes when they occur.

4.6   **Consultation through Merton's Web Site and Publicity in 'My Merton' Magazine**

4.6.1 There was feedback from two residents as a result of the article in *My Merton* magazine. The residents were also both members of staff in the Council and raised issues relating to the Council's treatment in connection with their employment. The Task Group was concerned that staff had to bring their concerns to Members' attention, as the issues had not been resolved through existing internal personnel procedures.

5.   INFORMATION GATHERED FROM OTHER AUTHORITIES

5.1   The Task Group Members considered some information obtained from two Beacon Councils on work in relation to race equality.

5.2   Manchester City Council is a Beacon Council which has developed partnerships with other agencies to create a share vision on race equality and action to achieve change. Through its Agenda 2010, a community planning process for black and ethnic communities, Manchester has developed its approach its community leadership role.

5.3   The London Borough of Harrow is another Beacon Council which has worked in partnership for many years to promote racial equality. The council received beacon status thanks to the help and support of local community groups and its bid focused on the way it engaged with the community to promote racial equality. Details on Harrow's monitoring processes were also obtained.

5.4   The Audit Commission report 'Equality and Diversity' provides a wider overview of equalities issues, which include disabilities, gender etc. The Task Group particularly found that the checklists provided in relation to five key equality factors were useful as a guide to identifying priorities for the review.

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6.   OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   The Life Chances Scrutiny Panel will be asked to approve the 7 specific recommendations agreed by the Task Group, as outlined in this report. The report will then be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for formal endorsement and then to Cabinet for final approval and implementation, through the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Social Inclusion, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Resources and the relevant officers.

6.2   The Task Group invited Cabinet to attend a report drafting meeting; however the Leader declined the invitation on the basis that he was confident the scrutiny review process had been robust and Cabinet would be happy to consider all the recommendations in the Task Group's report.

6.3   Approved scrutiny recommendations are regularly monitored through a scrutiny tracking system to ensure that progress in implementing the agreed actions is being made. Panel and Commission Members will receive updates on progress at regular intervals, through briefing notes, or agenda items where necessary.

6.4   In conclusion, the Task Group suggests that, as a lesson learned and with regard to influencing the procedure for future scrutiny reviews, it may be helpful for feedback meetings to take place during the week following any presentations from departments.   The Task Group acknowledges the work being done in all departments of the Council and appreciates the time taken by departmental officers to take part in the review.