Strengthening Resident Voices

BITE SIZE GUIDE

CORNERSTONE TOWER HAMLETS

CAPTURE consulting

thcvs Council for Voluntary Service

Overview

This bitesize resource is designed to support public sector staff in addressing inequalities through understanding protected characteristics. It shows how to strengthen resident voice through community engagement and coproduction, in order to influence policy development, commissioning, service design and delivery approaches. It focuses on enabling staff to explore how to create a partnership with residents and community organisations representing people with lived experiences, who can give insights into how to make services more targeted and cost effective. It also seeks to inform the ways partners can effectively work together and in collaboration with public sector bodies.

This bitesize guide, Strengthening Resident Voices, is part of a series of four bitesize guides that summarise the key points from the Cornerstone Good Practice Guide on developing inclusive Equality Impact Assessments into a more accessible format:

1. Strengthening Resident Voice.
2. Unlocking the True Power of Coproduction.
3. Understanding Intersectionality.
4. Protected Characteristics and Beyond.

The Tower Hamlets Cornerstone Project

The Tower Hamlets Cornerstone Project is a partnership between Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service (THCVS) the infrastructure organisation supporting the voluntary sector in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and six community organisations representing protected characteristics.

The two-year project, funded by The National Lottery, developed an approach to influence more inclusive decision-making across public sector agencies in Tower Hamlets. The project created a model for voluntary sector partnership for public sector bodies wanting to work with local communities to address inequalities within policy making services in Tower Hamlets. The continuing goal is to ensure that all residents benefit from improved planning and decision-making that better reflects the experiences and needs of disadvantaged and marginalised communities across London.

The project developed a Good Practice Guide to support council and NHS officers to undertake inclusive Equality Impact Assessment: , in order to raise awareness and improve the visibility and understanding of the different equalities' issues and experiences across our communities through practical, lived understanding of intersectionality and how this applies to residents.

As part of strengthening resident voice, through raising awareness with communities, the project developed a leaflet for residents in English, Somali and Bengali, both as a written and audio resource.

Introduction

Embedding residents' voices in Equality Impact Assessments (EqiAs) is vital for fair and inclusive decision-making. Drawing on local knowledge and lived experience leads to better decisions, builds trust and improves outcomes. EqIAs are designed to ensure those affected by policies have a say, strengthening community involvement in local authority decisions. Actively involving residents, especially those from underrepresented groups, boosts accountability and helps create services that meet diverse needs.1 The following sections outline good practices for resident input, co-production, intersectionality and inclusion in the EqIA process, with clear steps and key takeaways for local authority officers.

Sections

1. Resident input and consultation.
2. Co-production - shared decision making with communities
3. Intersectionality - understanding overlapping identities.
4. Inclusion - building an inclusive EqIA process king beyond' show?
5. Conclusion and key takeaways.

Section 1:
Resident input and consultation

Summary

Effective consultation means truly listening to those affected by a policy and reaching beyond the usual voices. Good consultation hears a range of perspectives whilst great consultation actively seeks out seldom-heard voices most impacted by decisions. Engagement should be a continuous dialogue, not a one-off tick-box exercise. By listening early and in partnership, local authority officers can surface issues, build trust and achieve more equitable outcomes.

Engage early and widely

Involve residents at the start of policy design, not only at the final review or when difficult decisions are imminent. Early engagement allows concerns to surface and be addressed proactively. Always record who was consulted and ensure it reflects the diversity of the local area. Include protected characteristic groups as well as people of different socioeconomic backgrounds, those who are carers, and others likely to be affected by proposals.

Listen to seldom-heard voices

Make an extra effort to reach groups that are often overlooked or mislabelled “hard to reach.” Use community networks to include ethnic minorities, disabled residents, older people, LGBTQ+ communities and others who might not come forward on their own. Seeking out those most impacted, rather than relying on the same voices or self-appointed community leaders, prevents blind spots and provides a more inclusive picture of community needs.

Use accessible methods

Plan consultations to be accessible and inclusive. Use multiple formats (public meetings, surveys, focus groups, one-to-one interviews) across different channels, and offer both in-person and online options at convenient times and venues. Provide necessary arrangements such as interpreters or translations, disability access, and culturally appropriate adaptations. Meeting people where they are comfortable encourages honest input. Finally, incorporate feedback from these engagements directly into your EqIA and demonstrate that it genuinely influences decision-making.

Key takeaway

Consultation lies at the heart of EqIAs. This is about getting it right for residents, not just doing what the local authority wants. By truly listening and adapting to feedback, officers can challenge assumptions and make equitable, well-informed decisions that hold up to scrutiny. In short: consistent, genuine engagement with residents leads to stronger, more trusted policies from the start.

Section 2:
Co-production - shared decision making with communities

Summary

Co-production goes beyond consultation by sharing decision-making power with residents. Instead of only gathering feedback, this means working with communities as equal partners to design policies or services. This approach recognises that residents bring essential expertise about their own needs and local context. Co-producing EqIAs (and managing the actions arising from them) builds deeper trust and leads to solutions that are more effective and widely supported.

From consultation to co-creation

In co-production, residents are actively involved in shaping decisions, not just consulted after the fact. They might sit on EqIA working groups, help define the questions to ask or co-design mitigation measures. The difference is clear: consultation is asking for input, whereas co-production is sharing power in decision-making. Involve residents as early as possible and maintain their involvement throughout the development of the policy or project. Early, continuous co-creation ensures community ideas and concerns inform the options and helps prevent unintended impacts. Co-production need not be complicated, but it must be thorough and include diverse voices from the start.

Establish equal partnerships

Treat community participants as equals in the process. This requires transparency, respect and mutual trust. Address power imbalances by acknowledging that council officers usually hold more information and authority and create an environment where community members feel comfortable speaking openly. Agree on shared goals and clearly define each participant's role. Co-production can involve joint workshops where residents and officers review data and develop recommendations together or having community representatives help draft or quality-check the EqIA.

Value and support resident contributors

Participants are more likely to engage as partners when their contributions are respected and supported. Provide information and context in plain language so residents can participate meaningfully. Consider what support participants might need. This might include training on the EqIA process or help understanding the data involved. Where appropriate, recognise the time and expertise residents and VCS partners bring by covering travel costs or offering incentives or catering. Always close the feedback loop by letting participants know how their contributions influenced the outcome and reinforce that the co-production effort is genuine.

Key takeaway

Embrace co-production to design policy with the community rather than for the community. By treating residents as partners, officers can tap into a wealth of local insight and creativity, leading to solutions that people support and that truly meet community needs. Co-production requires flexibility and humility, but it can result in more inclusive, effective policies.

Section 3:
Intersectionality - understanding overlapping identities

Summary

Intersectionality means recognising that people's identities and experiences overlap, so the impacts of decisions are not one-size-fits-all. Effective EqIAs consider how overlapping characteristics (such as race, gender, disability, socioeconomic status) combine to shape unique disadvantages or needs. An intersectional approach ensures we don't overlook those who might fall through the gaps of single-issue thinking.

Consider the whole person

Don't evaluate impacts in isolation instead look at how different characteristics intersect in real life. A resident is never just one label. For instance, a disabled Black woman may face different barriers than a disabled white man or a non-disabled Black woman. Assessing only one characteristic at a time risks missing compounded impacts. For example, a policy aimed broadly at "women" might mostly benefit white, non-disabled women while leaving behind women of colour with disabilities. Always ask how various attributes might intersect for the groups affected to avoid such blind spots.

Avoid homogenising groups

Be wary of treating any community as monolithic. Within any broad group (such as older people or LGBTQ+ communities), there is diversity of race, disability, class and other factors. Assuming everyone in a category shares the same experience can fail those with multiple marginalised identities. Instead, explicitly acknowledge intersectional sub-groups. For example, consider the specific needs of older residents from ethnic minorities or the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with disabilities.

Engage and gather intersectional data

Make sure to engage with people at the intersections of identities. Where they exist work with groups representing these intersectional communities to uncover challenges that broader consultations might miss. Collect data that can be broken down by multiple factors and gather qualitative evidence (like personal stories or case studies) to capture nuanced experiences. This way, your EqIA will reflect the real-life complexity of the local area and reveal inequalities that more basic analysis might overlook.

Key takeaway

Applying an intersectional lens is essential for an inclusive EqIA. It ensures policies are examined for impacts on people with overlapping identities, not just in isolated categories. For local authorities this means anticipating who might otherwise slip through the cracks and designing interventions to reach all parts of the communities. Think broadly and include voices at the intersections to get a full picture of impact.

Section 4:
Inclusion - building an inclusive EqIA process

Summary

In the EqIA context, inclusion means making sure all likely affected groups have a voice and that the process and outcomes leave no one behind. This goes together with intersectionality, co-production, and consultation as the aim is to create policies and services that include all residents. An inclusive approach is proactive in reaching those who might otherwise be excluded and adapts to meet diverse needs.

Promote inclusive practice

The goal of an EqIA is not only to avoid discrimination, but to actively include and benefit all groups in the communities. At every stage ask if the needs of each protected group (and others) have been considered and if policies are inclusive of all residents, not just the majority or the vocal. If a potential negative impact is identified, design a mitigation for that specific group rather than assuming a general fix will work for everyone. By taking this approach EqIAs become tools to reduce exclusion and advance equality.

Increase participation of underrepresented groups: An inclusive EqIA actively

empowers underrepresented communities to take part. Use targeted outreach to engage those who might not respond to general consultations. For example, connect with youth councils, disability forums, cultural community centres or refugee organisations as needed. Sometimes this means stepping outside the usual methods and attending community events, working with outreach workers or co-hosting sessions with community leaders. The goal is to hear from those who typically have less voice in local authority decisions so that they can influence outcomes. This not only improves the quality of the EqIA but also empowers these communities as partners in the process.

Ensure accessible processes

Review your EqIA and consultation process for any barriers that might prevent people from participating. Consider all aspects of accessibility including ensuring venues are physically accessible, providing information in plain English and other languages as needed and offering alternatives for those who cannot attend. Even small adjustments can make a big difference. For example, providing a non-digital option can enable residents who struggle with online forms to participate. Ask communities what they need to take part. Meeting people where they are shows that every voice is important. Inclusive, accessible engagement can yield richer input and demonstrate the local authority's commitment to equality.

Key takeaway

An inclusive EqIA is one where everyone affected has a fair chance to be heard and policies are designed with the full diversity of the community in mind. For council officers this means actively seeking out missing voices, adapting engagement methods to different needs and committing to equitable outcomes. When the resident voice is central, the resulting actions and services are more likely to be accessible, appropriate and welcomed by communities.

Section 5:
Conclusion and key takeaways

Embedding the resident voice in EqIAs leads to more effective, equitable policies by harnessing the insights of those who know the communities and local area best. Strengthening meaningful resident participation requires deliberate effort and openness from local authorities. Below are key takeaways for officers:

- **Start with engagement:** Begin EqIAs early with residents at the table. Continuous engagement before, during and after decisions ensures those affected guide the process rather than only reacting later. These builds trust and leads to more robust assessments.
- **Combine data with lived experience:** Use both quantitative evidence and qualitative input from residents to inform your EqIA. Hard data provides breadth, whilst lived experiences add context. Together, they give a fuller picture and challenge assumptions. Where data is lacking, go to the communities rather than proceeding without.
- **Engage diverse and seldom-heard voices:** Go beyond the "usual voices" to include those often left out of consultations. Prioritise input from groups likely to be affected unequally and listen to seldom-heard voices (e.g. small faith communities, people with disabilities, or other minority groups). Their perspectives can reveal issues that mainstream views might miss and help prevent unintended harm.
- **Embrace co-production and partnerships:** When appropriate, work with residents as partners in designing solutions. Leverage the expertise of local community organisations. They can connect to seldom-heard groups and co-create solutions. This approach yields better outcomes and shares ownership of decisions thus making implementation smoother.
- **Apply an intersectional and inclusive lens:** Consider how different segments of local communities might experience a policy together. An intersectional perspective catches compounded inequalities that a narrow focus could overlook. Make sure to consult intersectional groups and break down data by intersecting identities. Designing EqIAs this way ensures no group is unjustly excluded or burdened.

By following these practices, local authority officers can make EqIAs a powerful tool for community-driven change. Elevating the resident voice is not just a procedural step. Rather it is a commitment to better governance where decisions are made with communities, leading to fairer outcomes for all.

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