Best Value Toolkit: Equalities

Revised May 2014

Contents

Introduction

Auditing Best Value

"Achieving Best Value is about ensuring sound governance, good management, public reporting on performance and a focus on improvement"

The duty of Best Value applies to all public bodies in Scotland. It is a statutory duty in local government, and in the rest of the public sector it is a formal duty on Accountable Officers.

Best Value has already been a powerful force for improved performance and accountability in local government, and it will play an important role in Community Planning and the development of Single Outcome Agreements between the Scottish Government, councils and their partners, and in streamlining and coordinating the scrutiny of public services. It also underpins the National Performance Framework and the 'management scorecard' elements of Scotland Performs.

On behalf of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland has identified a set of principles that form the basis for a consistent approach to auditing Best Value across the public sector, although its application will differ to reflect factors such as the different accountability regimes and reporting arrangements in place in different sectors. This will enable us to apply a consistent set of expectations across all the bodies that we audit, and to reflect and support the reality of partnership working between organisations.

Judgements about Best Value involve consideration of service standards and performance, outcomes and how effectively continuous improvement is being achieved. The framework through which these various elements are brought together in audit work, to arrive at an overall conclusion on the extent to which an organisation is achieving Best Value, is outlined below:

Exhibit 1

Framework for a BV audit of a public body
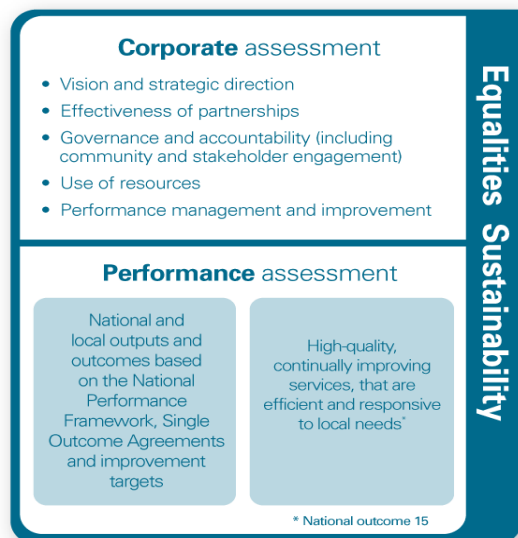
Source: Audit Scotland

As the diagram illustrates, Audit Scotland's approach to the audit of Best Value entails both corporate assessment and performance assessment elements. The former focuses on how an organisation plans and conducts its business and manages its resources while the latter looks at the quality of those services and the outcomes for service users.

Audit Scotland is committed to ensuring that auditing Best Value across the public sector adds value to existing arrangements, is risk-based and builds on our existing knowledge of individual public bodies, and that of our scrutiny partners. Specifically we aim to:

- report on the delivery of outcomes for people who use services

- protect taxpayers' interests by examining use of resources

- put an increasing emphasis on self assessment by public bodies with audit support and validation

- work collaboratively with other scrutiny bodies to ensure our work is aligned and to prevent duplication.

The Best Value toolkits

The Best Value toolkits are a series of audit diagnostics, which will help reviewers establish the extent to which public bodies' arrangements are designed to achieve, and are actually delivering, Best Value. They have been developed to support the corporate assessment process around the five corporate assessment areas noted in Exhibit 1, and the two cross-cutting themes of equalities and sustainability. However, as each toolkit also incorporates a series of questions on the impact of the area under review, they will also provide some evidence to support the assessment of service performance and outcomes.

The Best Value toolkits have been developed as audit tools in consultation with specialist practitioners, and representatives of public bodies and professional groups.

The toolkits take the form of structured key questions, with a matrix of possible levels of performance, ranging from basic to advanced practice. The matrices cannot of course capture all of the ways in which a public body may address the requirements of Best Value, so there is clearly scope for auditors to exercise balanced judgement and for public bodies to respond flexibly in demonstrating how the key areas of challenge are addressed. Individual evaluations are made about the level a public body has attained in each question or area. However, these have not been weighted and it is not intended that these be used to determine an overall scoring for any toolkit. They are designed to contribute to sound professional judgements, not to replace them.

Using the toolkits

The toolkits are designed for application by Audit Scotland's auditors when carrying out Best Value audit work in public bodies. In practice, the toolkits will be applied as part of an audit process, whereby the auditor makes enquiries, seeks supporting information and forms conclusions based on the evidence obtained.

Audit Scotland recognises that bodies themselves may also find the toolkits helpful in carrying out general organisational reviews or specific service reviews and are therefore available in the Audit Scotland website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk. (It should be stressed however that public bodies using the toolkits do sowithout Audit Scotland support). The toolkits are designed principally as audit tools that are part of Audit Scotland's overall Best Value audit methodology and are not expressly produced for self-assessment purposes.

Any organisation using the toolkits to inform their own corporate or service-based self-evaluation processes will need to consider the local context when applying them, and also the indicative rather than conclusive nature of the findings when interpreting the results. The toolkits were designed to elicit contextual information and provide evidence for arriving at professional audit judgements. They are not intended to be, and cannot be, used in a "tick-box" fashion.

The Best Value toolkits are generic in nature, in that they are not specific to any one type of public body or to any one sector and are designed so that they can be applied to all public bodies. Auditors will require to be sensitive to the differences between organisations, for example, in terms of different sectors and varying scales of operation.
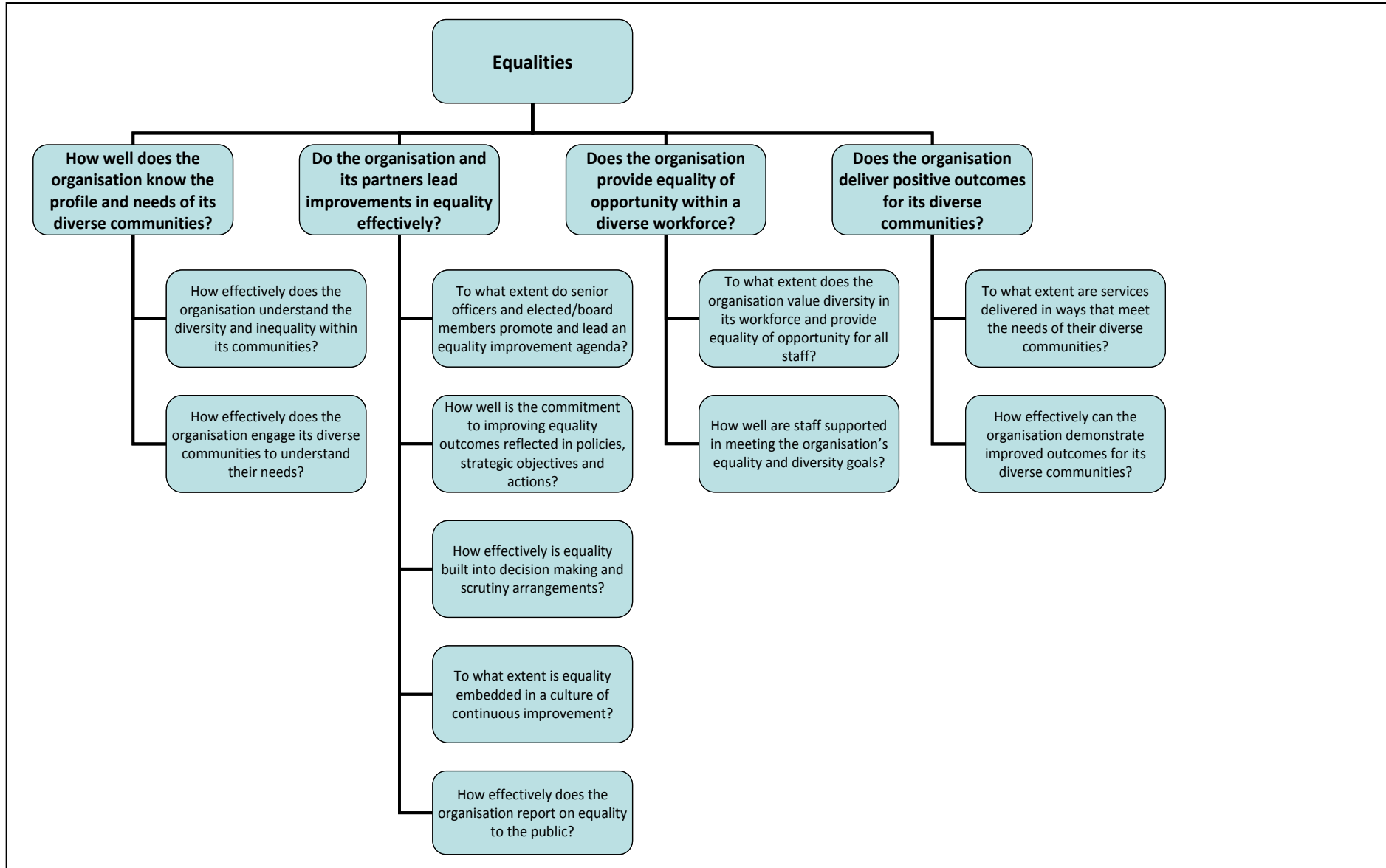
This toolkit forms part of a suite of audit products that will be applied, over time, to support a structured, evidenced based, judgment on an organisation's approach to the use of the resources with which it has been provided and its achievement of Best Value.

Auditors' evaluations

The toolkit takes the form of a series of questions based on identified good practice. It then offers four sets of descriptors, these being:

Does not meet basic requirements	An organisation does not yet demonstrate the basic practice level in any particular category.
Basic practices	Minimum acceptable standards, which would be sufficient to allow an organisation to demonstrate some performance.
Better practices	As basic, with some elements of good or even best practice, but not on a consistent basis.
Advanced practices	Consistently demonstrating good or best practice and contributing to innovation.

Best Value Toolkit: Equalities

Equalities

How well does the organisation know the profile and needs of its diverse communities?

Do the organisation and its partners lead improvements in equality effectively?

Does the organisation provide equality of opportunity within a diverse workforce?

Does the organisation deliver positive outcomes for its diverse communities?

How effectively does the organisation understand the diversity and inequality within its communities?

How effectively does the organisation engage its diverse communities to understand their needs?

To what extent do senior officers and elected/board members promote and lead an equality improvement agenda?

How well is the commitment to improving equality outcomes reflected in policies, strategic objectives and actions?

How effectively is equality built into decision making and scrutiny arrangements?

To what extent is equality embedded in a culture of continuous improvement?

How effectively does the organisation report on equality to the public?

To what extent does the organisation value diversity in its workforce and provide equality of opportunity for all staff?

How well are staff supported in meeting the organisation's equality and diversity goals?

To what extent are services delivered in ways that meet the needs of their diverse communities?

How effectively can the organisation demonstrate improved outcomes for its diverse communities?

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
1. How well does the organisation know the profile and needs of its diverse communities?			
1.1 How effectively does the organisation understand the diversity and inequality within its communities?	The organisation uses census data and other local research to understand diversity and inequality within its communities. This could more clearly inform priorities and objectives. There is scope for greater usage and sharing of information between partners.	The organisation and its partners use a broad range of information to understand diversity and inequality within their communities. The quality of the data used varies by equality group but this is being addressed to better inform organisational and partnership objectives.	The organisation and its partners have good quality, up to date information about how diversity and inequality are changing within their communities. They use this information to ensure shared priorities for the area remain relevant and make a difference to diverse communities.
1.2 How effectively does the organisation engage its diverse communities to understand their needs?	The organisation's engagement with its diverse communities is generally based on consultation with representative groups/ bodies. Representative groups are involved in the preparation of equality outcomes. Consultation could be carried out more systematically to better understand their needs.	The organisation and its partners have explicitly designed their community engagement structures to include some equality groups. These groups are involved in setting equality outcomes. Success in engaging equality groups to inform priorities and objectives has varied but the organisation and its partners are proactively working to build capacity within community groups to support more meaningful engagement.	The organisation and its partners use community engagement effectively to gain an in-depth understanding of the changing needs of diverse communities in reviewing priorities and informing policy developments. Individuals and representatives from all relevant equality groups are involved in the preparation of equality outcomes.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
2. Do the organisation and its partners lead improvements in equality effectively?			
2.1 To what extent do senior officers and elected members/ board members promote and lead an equality improvement agenda?	Elected/Board members and officers understand the significance of improving equality and have established forums to address potential inequality. Ownership of the equality agenda is predominantly the responsibility of a portfolio holder and/or specific officer. There is scope for greater shared ownership across members and senior officers.	Elected/Board members and officers demonstrate clear leadership and shared ownership in building partnerships and taking action to improve equality. They review progress and make changes in approach where necessary.	Elected/Board members and officers have a reputation for championing equality issues and ensure that the equality issues relevant to their communities, partnerships, plans and strategies are effectively owned by all. The organisation has established a culture where officers and members take account of equality in routine day-to-day work and have improved their behaviours as a result.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
2.2 How well is the commitment to improving equality outcomes reflected in policies, strategic objectives and actions?	The organisation and its partners have publicly committed to corporate equality objectives and actions aimed at improving outcomes for all equality groups. Relevant evidence relating to equalities groups is not always available to inform the development of outcomes but the organisation is developing systems to gather information. There is scope to better translate the needs of diverse groups in the local area and develop more sophisticated objectives and actions for delivering equitable outcomes. Equality outcomes are published and reported on as required by statutory duty	The organisation and its partners have set clear and stretching equality objectives and actions to improve outcomes for all equality groups. Objectives and actions have been developed through consultation with the public and voluntary sector. The organisation has good data and information on equalities groups and service users to support the preparation of equalities outcomes. Where the organisation's outcomes do not cover every equalities protected characteristic, the reasons why are clearly articulated and published.	Clear and stretching partnership priorities, actions and targets to deliver equitable outcomes underpin partnership activity and are understood by all key stakeholders. The organisation works closely with local and national partner agencies to share objectives, co-ordinate management arrangements and resources, and deliver joined-up services that are known to make a positive impact on outcomes. Equalities outcomes are reviewed and evaluated regularly based on updated equality data.
	Services demonstrate a commitment to equality objectives and actions aimed at improving outcomes for equality groups. There is scope for these to be more sophisticated and better linked to corporate objectives.	Services have set SMART equality objectives and actions, linked to corporate policies and commitments, for delivering improved equality in service outcomes. Service standards take account of some equality issues.	Equality issues are systematically integrated into service planning, with ambitious, SMART equality objectives and actions that clearly link to corporate commitments, are based on good quality information about the profile and needs of diverse groups and have clearly identified resources. Service standards take account of equality issues. There is a high level of understanding and ownership of equality objectives across services.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
	The organisation's equality schemes comply with statutory expectations. Reviews of equality schemes have led to some small scale changes.	Actions to implement commitments are routinely monitored by members and senior managers to ensure they are having a positive impact. The organisation can demonstrate some improvements although there is scope for this to be more consistent.	Elected members and senior managers demonstrate effective ownership of equality schemes. The organisation demonstrates good and improving outcomes for all as a result of implementing equality schemes.
2.3 How effectively is equality built into decision making and scrutiny arrangements?	Some CMT/committee/board reports to support decisions contain equalities information, but there remains scope for greater consistency and coverage across reports. There is scope for better quality scrutiny and debate around equality issues to support decision.	Most CMT/committee/board reports to support decisions contain a good analysis of equalities information. There is often a good quality scrutiny and debate around equality issues, although there remains scope for greater consistency in the provision and quality of relevant information and scrutiny.	Important equality implications and actions needed to address them are clearly and consistently identified throughout decision making processes. The success of actions taken is regularly debated through scrutiny processes.
	The organisation has a prioritised programme of equality impact assessments (EQIAs), based on relevant evidence, for new and revised major policies, practices and functions. There is scope to improve the quality of EQIAs, to more clearly identify necessary actions required, and to more routinely build EQIAs into decision making processes. The organisation publishes the results of its equality impact assessments (EQIAs).	The organisation has a prioritised programme of equality impact assessments (EQIAs) for new and existing major policies, practices and functions. EQIAs involve relevant community and stakeholder groups and actions to address any adverse impacts are clearly identified. A good understanding of EQIAs is frequently reflected in decision making processes.	The organisation has a prioritised programme of equality impact assessments (EQIAs) for new and existing major policies, practices and functions. Staff have the appropriate skills, knowledge and capacity to carry out EQIAs effectively. Community and stakeholder groups are routinely involved in the EQIA process and results are shared and discussed with them. EQIAs are effectively built into all aspects of decision making, with early action taken to mitigate any potentially adverse impacts and to improve outcomes. The organisation understands the potential for cumulative impact of decisions and monitors them across the organisation and its partnerships.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
	When acting as a contracting authority, the organisation considers whether it should include conditions which would help it better perform the equalitiy duty in the criteria for the award.	When acting as a contracting authority, the organisation stipulates conditions which will help it better perform the equality duty in the performance requirement of the agreement.	The organisation can demonstrate that commissioned / procured services support its equality objectives.
2.4 To what extent is equality embedded in a culture of continuous improvement?	Equality issues feature in local guidance for reviews, self-evaluation and other improvement processes. The organisation could do more to demonstrate the outcomes of improvement activity.	Equality is built into improvement activities and there are pockets of good practice that have driven real improvements. Mechanisms to share good practice and learning across the organisation and its partners have been established, although there is scope to apply them more effectively. Some benchmarking of performance takes place.	Equality issues are considered routinely and effectively in improvement activity across the organisation and consistently drive real improvements. There is effective sharing of good practice and learning across the organisation, with partners and others in the public sector. The organisation demonstrates a range of best practice for promoting equality and is highly regarded by partners and stakeholders for the outcomes it has achieved.
2.5 How effectively does the organisation report on equality to the public?	The organisation publishes reports on equality and diversity issues in accordance with its statutory duty. Reports could be made more accessible and provide a better assessment of the organisation's overall performance on equality and diversity.	There is good coverage of equality issues in reports to the public. Reports are widely accessible and show progress against the organisation's equality objectives. There could be better coverage by some services and across all equality strands.	There is consistently good coverage of equality issues in reports to the public. They are linked to the organisation's equality targets. Reporting is timely and balanced and readily accessible to diverse groups through a range of appropriate formats.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
3. Does the organisation provide equality of opportunity within a diverse workforce?			
3.1 To what extent does the organisation value diversity in its workforce and provide equality of opportunity for all staff?	Employment monitoring information is reported to elected/board members and officers periodically. However it does not comprehensively cover all equality strands or recruitment, development and retention information The information is not used to inform activity to reduce inequality within the workforce. The organisation publishes employee monitoring information in accordance with its statutory duties. For organisations with over 150 employees at any point throughout the reporting period: The organisation publishes a statement on equal pay. including data on the occupational segregation of its workforce.. The organisation publishes information on the percentage difference among its employees between men's average hourly pay and women's average hourly pay as required by the statutory duty.	Employment monitoring information covering the whole workforce is routinely analysed by members and officers and action is being taken across the organisation to reduce inequality. Employee information gathered and published is comprehensive and includes recruitment, development and retention data.	The organisation routinely explores a range of options for achieving a more representative workforce (e.g. targeted positive action in recruitment). It strives to implement best human resource practices to overcome barriers identified through employment monitoring and can evidence that it is eliminating inequality.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
	The organisation has arrangements to engage with staff and understand their diverse needs. Staff believe these arrangements could be more effective and the organisation could do more to demonstrate the outcomes of these arrangements.	Staff are positive about the impact of the organisation's efforts to respond to their diverse needs. These views could be more consistent across equality related workforce issues.	Staff report that they are satisfied that the organisation understands and responds to their diverse needs.
3.2 How well are staff supported in meeting the organisation's equality and diversity goals?	Equality and diversity training and development opportunities for staff and elected/board members are provided through the corporate training and development strategy. The range of training provided can be fairly limited and there is scope for greater take-up amongst both staff and elected / board members to improve their understanding of how equality issues are integrated into their work.	There is corporate equality training and development for all staff and elected/board members. In addition, the organisation provides training tailored to the needs of individual services and staff groups. It gathers information on training needs and training impact to inform future training objectives. There is scope for staff and elected /board members to feel more confident that they are equipped to meet service users' diverse needs.	Equality training and development for all staff and elected/board members is regularly reviewed. It takes account of the outcomes of training, the needs of different staff groups and their various service settings. Equality is well embedded in the roles of staff and elected/board members. They are satisfied with the range of learning and development opportunities and are confident that they are equipped to meet service users' diverse needs.
4. Does the organisation deliver positive outcomes for its diverse communities?			
4.1 To what extent are services delivered in ways that meet the needs of their diverse communities?	Equality tends to be an add-on, rather than a core element of service delivery. While changes have been made to the way services are delivered to improve accessibility for diverse groups, there are opportunities for changes to make a greater impact on diverse communities and be more consistent.	Services have improved their accessibility and have made changes where relevant to meet diverse needs. There are some pockets of good practice that could be shared more widely across the organisation and its partners.	The organisation and its partners cater for a wide variety of needs, through well-designed, flexible services. Services consistently demonstrate they meet customer care standards related to equality and diversity. Good progress is being made in achieving objectives across services and equality strands. Services work in partnership where appropriate to deliver more customer-focused services for diverse groups.

BEST VALUE TOOLKIT: ASSESSMENT MATRIX - EQUALITIES

	Basic practice	Better practice	Advanced practice
	Service user satisfaction data reflects the diversity of user groups. These groups believe the organisation could meet their needs more effectively.	Service-user satisfaction information shows the organisation is meeting users' differing needs well. High levels of satisfaction can be more consistent across all equality groups and services.	Service users across all equality groups are highly satisfied that the organisation meets their needs effectively, and this is consistent across all services.
4.2 How effectively can the organisation demonstrate improved outcomes for diverse communities?	Performance information shows that many parts of the organisation are working to better deliver their equality and diversity objectives. This information needs to better demonstrate the overall impact in terms of equality outcomes for diverse communities. This may be due to a lack of information collected on outcomes.	The organisation and its partners are delivering improved outcomes and reducing existing inequalities for diverse communities. This can be evidenced by a range of equality related performance information. Good quality/ improved outcomes can be more consistently delivered across all equality groups and service areas.	The organisation and its partners clearly demonstrate they are successfully meeting their objectives and improving outcomes for their diverse communities. The organisation consistently demonstrates that it is reducing existing inequalities within its communities and there are good relations between different groups and communities. This is supported by a broad range of good quality evidence.