



Stand up for equality

If not us, who? If not now, when?

The Citizens Advice service equality and diversity strategy 2012-15

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Introduction



Photo by Justin Poppeger

John Gladwin



Photo by Ian Emness

Gillian Guy

We are in a time of rapid and far-reaching economic and political change that is having a huge impact on Citizens Advice service clients and the broader communities we serve across England and Wales.

Against this backdrop, we all need to redouble our efforts to stand up and speak up for those who face inequality and disadvantage. This strategy sets out how we can do that in Citizens Advice and in bureaux, by fully living our principles and:

- making sure we are able to give consistently high quality advice on crucial equality problems, and that our advice reaches the most marginalised groups
- making greater use of our ever-increasing evidence base to advocate for social and policy change on behalf of people who are most marginalised
- making ourselves exemplar employers and volunteer agencies.

From the start, the development of 'Stand up for equality' has been a collaborative effort, informed by the views of over 500 trustees, volunteers and staff in bureaux and Citizens Advice, stakeholder organisations and members of the public. It draws and seeks to build on the excellent practice and solutions that already exist within the service and our partners. It is also based on analysis of extensive internal and external evidence.

The strategy proposes a set of ambitious goals we want to reach by 2015. It will be underpinned by annual action plans for Citizens Advice within the business planning process, and bureaux will be supported in the development of equality actions for their own annual business plans.

The strategy acknowledges that all bureaux are unique and have priorities influenced by local need. Likewise, different teams in Citizens Advice have different roles to play. The Citizens Advice Trustee Board, Equality Committee, and Executive Team are committed to providing the leadership necessary for us all to contribute, in our own ways, to delivering on this essential strategy.



John Gladwin
Chair

Gillian Guy
Chief Executive

1 Why equality and diversity? Why us?

1.1 Our aims and principles

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

The service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

Our aims and principles and our definition of equality are all rooted in, but go beyond, our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. This means we take into account all the protected characteristics under the Equality Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation) as well as other key aspects of equality such as socio-economic background, Welsh language, rural isolation, and low basic skills.

1.2 What equality brings to the service

Equality and quality go hand in hand. There is growing external evidence that focusing on equality brings business benefits not just related to fulfilling equality objectives but also to achieving wider improvements in services, organisational culture and effectiveness. Our own experience of implementing previous equality strategies confirms that they improve our employment practice, our advice giving processes, and access and outcomes for clients; and give weight to our policy and campaigns work. Essentially, equality and diversity drive us to be and do better.

1.3 Why us?

Feedback from the public during the consultation on the strategy made it very clear that people often see us as their last hope for justice. They want to be able to turn to us for help on equality problems. They want us to stand up for them.

Our clients come from diverse backgrounds. In 2010/11 we helped:

- 315,000 people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (15 per cent of our total clients).
- 351,000 disabled people/with long term health conditions (23 per cent).
- 231,000 young people aged 16-24 (11 per cent).
- 252,000 people aged over 65 (12 per cent).

With these points in mind, and in light of the external context set out at appendix 1, there is a clear and urgent role for the Citizens Advice service to play on equality. It can be split into three main types of activity as follows:

- Identify – hidden greatest need equality problems, and build the evidence base.
- Empower – help people understand their rights and how to realise them, including through information, advice, casework and other support (often, though not always, provided by a CAB).
- Advocate – for equality, getting those in authority to do their job, and using the evidence base to influence policy, practice and social change.

The role is consistent with both our traditional strengths and the overall strategic direction for our development.

The need for us to play our role can be summarised by the expression 'If not us, who? If not now, when?' – the strap line for the strategy.



2 Overall aim and priorities

The overall aim of the Stand up for equality strategy is for the Citizens Advice service to live our principles and challenge discrimination, promote equality and value diversity.

To deliver this aim we need to achieve culture change on two levels – in society and in the service. To drive that change we will focus on priorities: three target areas of change, with progress in each helping to generate further change.

This is shown in picture form on the next page.

Culture change:

- Fully live our aims and principles
- Provide the equality advice and advocacy people need

2.1 Target areas

The target areas are:

One: Challenge discrimination through advice by:

- Identifying discrimination and human rights issues.
- Providing the equality advice people need.
- Empowering clients to act.

Two: Promote equality through advocacy by:

- Telling our diverse clients' stories.
- Ensuring those in authority do their job.
- Leading on and influencing key policy on equality.

Three: Value diversity through our roles of employer, volunteer agency and contractor by:

- Providing visible and committed leadership.
- Developing a strategic approach to diversity management.
- Implementing equality competences.





3 Where we are now: gaps and opportunities

There is considerable excellent practice on equality across the Citizens Advice network. In some work areas, that practice needs to be made more consistent across the network, or we have identified the need to build on our success to date to achieve a step change to the next level. This section provides a short rationale for each of the main areas the strategy needs to address. Further information is available in the appendices.

3.1 Target one: Challenge discrimination through advice

Discrimination takes place across a spectrum that covers unfair treatment, harassment and victimisation by employers, authorities and service providers, with common problems including pregnancy and maternity discrimination and failure to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. The discrimination spectrum also covers hate incidents and crimes that affect people from BAME and religious communities, disabled people and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people. And it includes gender violence. Research indicates that discrimination, hate and gender violence are often hidden and inter-linked issues that underlie clients' presenting problems.

Discrimination

Discrimination is in the top three problems for which people want, but cannot get, advice. Good progress was made under FAIR, the previous equality strategy, and discrimination is now a core advice topic under the Citizens Advice service Membership Scheme. However implementation of this remains varied across the service. Between 2007/08 to 2010/11 discrimination enquiries to bureaux increased by 25 per cent to 28,500, but audit results show that not all potential discrimination issues are explored by generalist advisers. An increased number of bureaux provide specialist discrimination casework and representation, but that funding is under serious threat through reform of legal aid and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Hate incidents and crimes

In 2009/10, 52,028 hate incidents were reported to the police. These were homophobic, transphobic, racial and religious and disability-related hate incidents. However, research shows that under-reporting, and lack of awareness and sources of support are major problems. One hundred and twenty three bureaux (31 per cent) are hate reporting centres, and while some are leaders in the field, many are reporting centres in name only due to a lack of infrastructure and support. Analysis of electronic bureaux evidence forms (known as EBEFs) on hate shows that our clients need bureaux to play a policy role in getting police, housing and other authorities to take hate seriously and respond appropriately.

Gender violence

Every year, one in eight women experience domestic abuse. This means that 150,000 of our women clients last year were potentially experiencing domestic abuse. In particular, bureaux support many thousands of women (and men) with debt or mental health problems – both closely correlated with the incidence of domestic abuse. However in 2010/11 in total we advised only 13,741 male and female clients on domestic abuse. Research shows that people experiencing gender violence want agencies to give them the opportunity to disclose their problems. Thirty bureaux provide targeted services for domestic abuse and other gender violence situations and are a rich source of good practice and guidance on appropriate roles for bureaux. Analysis of EBEFs on gender violence shows that our clients need bureaux

to play a policy role in getting police, housing and other authorities to take gender violence seriously and respond appropriately, not least because one in three local authority areas have no specialist domestic abuse services.

British Sign Language users

One hundred thousand people in England use BSL as their first language and a further 150,000 have significant hearing loss. Deaf people are among the most socially excluded in society, are far more likely to be unemployed and to experience physical and mental health problems than the rest of the population. There is a lack of awareness of the need to provide BSL interpreting and other reasonable adjustments (under the Equality Act 2010) for Deaf people. They have few sources of advice, and focus groups with Deaf people have identified the need for bureaux to improve access to services for, and the customer experience of, BSL users. There is however some excellent practice within the service that could be replicated.



Gypsies and Travellers

There are 200,000 – 300,000 Gypsies and Travellers in England, including those who are travelling or live on sites, and those who are settled. Gypsies and Travellers are ethnic groups who face some of the most complex and chronic disadvantage. They receive 'manifestly less favourable' treatment from authorities. The number of Gypsies and Travellers using bureaux has increased by 100 per cent over the past three years to 2,424 clients. However we need to develop this further in order to meet the need. The level of disadvantage experienced by Gypsies and Travellers is only likely to increase as a result of national and local policy changes. In addition, funding for many of the services that currently exist is under threat.



3.2 Target 2: Promote equality through advocacy

Client demographic data is gathered and used in policy submissions. There is much to build on, such as our national work on disability and debt, and disability and welfare reform; and at local level the use by some bureaux of disaggregated client data to successfully change public bodies' policy and practice. But neither demographic data nor client issues data are systematically analysed through an equality lens. Petra, our new customer relationship management system will give increased opportunities for us to do this and use the data to make a difference for clients, for example by conducting thematic reviews of the advice issues of our 315,000 BAME clients.

Our evidence on discrimination including hate and gender violence, and in relation to BSL users and Gypsies and Travellers, has improved but needs to develop to the next level so that we can realise our full potential to make an impact.

EBEF analysis and the 2010 greatest need survey show that a key advocacy role for bureaux is getting authorities to take gender violence and hate issues seriously and provide appropriate responses.

Finally, there is a major opportunity for bureaux to use their client evidence to influence public authorities' approach to the new Public Sector Equality Duties (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) and to hold them to account on their progress in eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations.

3.3 Target 3: Value diversity as an employer, volunteer agency, and contractor

FAIR, the service's previous equality and diversity strategy, led to some key improvements in our performance as an employer and volunteer agency. Eighty per cent of bureaux used the FAIR strategy and there were many excellent initiatives within Citizens Advice and in bureaux. Overall we are doing well compared to others in the sector, but because the sector's performance overall is poor, this is not a good measure of success and we have not achieved the desired step change.

Within bureaux the proportion of young and BAME volunteers increased: 20% of new volunteers are BAME and 20 per cent are under 25. However, while disabled staff and trustees increased by one per cent, there was a two per cent decrease in disabled volunteers.

In Citizens Advice progress has also been mixed. We were the top-performing charity in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index in 2010. We were awarded and have maintained the Positive About Disabled People symbol and increased the number and percentage of disabled staff. However we have only maintained the status quo for BAME staff and have made no progress in increasing diversity at executive management levels (although there is more diversity at lower and middle management levels). We need to move from an ad-hoc approach to diversity development and management to a strategic approach.

4 Where we want to be

The table below explains out what our ideal picture looks like.

What do we do in the Citizens Advice service: our principles and the target areas	Ideal outcomes by 2015
<p>Challenge discrimination through advice by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying discrimination and human rights issues. • Providing the equality advice people need. • Empowering clients to act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination (including hate and gender violence) is treated in practice as a core advice topic. • Citizens Advice Bureaux identify 100% of potential discrimination issues and provide correct advice. • 100% of bureaux are hate reporting centres. • 100% of debt and mental health advisers can identify and provide information on gender violence. • 100% of people know they can tell us their discrimination, hate and gender violence problems. • 100% of bureaux have reviewed the need to increase access for BSL users and Gypsies and Travellers and taken any actions identified.
<p>Promote equality through advocacy by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling our diverse clients' stories. • Ensuring those in authority do their job. • Leading on and influence key policy on equality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We identify the most important equality policy issues nationally and locally. • We deploy our available resources to effect change on equality policy nationally and locally. • We work effectively with individuals and partners to get their voices heard.
<p>Value diversity – as an employer, volunteer agency and contractor by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing visible and committed leadership. • Developing a strategic approach to diversity management. • Implementing equality competences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All trustees, staff and volunteers understand why equality is our core business; and what their role is in relation to both creating the working environment and delivery of their business area. • We broadly reflect the diversity of our clients nationally and locally. • We monitor outcomes for staff, volunteers and trustees.



5 How we are going to get there

5.1 Conceptual framework for the strategy

We will only achieve the changes we want if we hold fast to our core values and principles. To help do this we will adopt a human rights approach as the underpinning conceptual framework for the strategy, which will guide how we implement it.

Adopting a human rights approach as the conceptual framework means:

- Applying core values of dignity, respect, equality and non-discrimination, based on our common humanity. For example, this would help us develop standards for ensuring that when we describe client experiences we do so in a way that maintains their dignity.
- Acting in a way that fosters empowerment and participation at all levels, including in decision making – for individuals and partners as appropriate. For example, developing systematic methods of involving others in the co-design of projects, services and policy solutions.
- Integrating human rights into existing initiatives and processes. For example, using human rights to help improve the customer service standards.

5.2 Being clear about our role and partnerships

As outlined at 1.3 above, we have a clear and urgent role to play to:

- Identify – hidden greatest need equality problems, and build the evidence base.
- Empower – help people understand their rights and how to realise them, including through information, advice, casework and other support (often, though not always provided by the Citizens Advice service).
- Advocate – for equality, getting those in authority to do their job, and using the evidence base to influence policy, practice and social change.

In fulfilling that role partnerships will be critical:

‘If not us who?’ means we have to be willing to make a stand and play a responsible leadership role, especially on behalf of clients or about issues that may otherwise be ignored. It does not mean we have to – or should – do it all ourselves. Our work will be more effective if it is developed and delivered in partnership with others. Our aim should be to be proactive in developing strategic partnerships locally and nationally, to do the things we are uniquely placed to do, and to add value to the overall picture.



5.3 Action planning

Part of the consultation on the strategy gathered feedback on proposed actions and identified further actions that Citizens Advice and bureaux could take to implement the strategy. This included a key symbolic action for each target area and a combination of strategic and business as usual interventions that could drive change. The full list is available for reference on CABlink or by request. These will be used to develop action plans within the business planning cycle.

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice will publish a plan of actions for completion within the current financial year, a schedule for top-level actions over the following three years, and detailed annual action plans within its corporate business plan. Plans will make clear who is responsible for each activity or outcome.

Actions already agreed and in progress as at November 2011 include:

Target area one:

- Bidding for the contract to provide the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS).
- Developing a training strategy for discrimination advice (which will be valid irrespective of the outcome of the EASS bid).
- Seeking significant pilot funding to improve access to advice for BSL users, in partnership with a range of organisations.



Target area two:

- Lobbying for the continuation of discrimination casework and representation services.
- Developing a toolkit on the use of the Public Sector Equality Duties, in partnership with the Equality and Diversity Forum.

Target area three:

- Developing a strategic approach to diversity development and management as part of a wider People strategy.
- Extending voluntary client and bureau workforce monitoring on sexual orientation and religion and belief.
- Updating our policy and procedures on positive action in recruitment.

Bureaux

Citizens Advice will publish guidance on different levels of actions that bureaux can incorporate into their business plans in order to implement the strategy in their area. This will be refreshed each year of the strategy.



5.4 Governance and accountability

Citizens Advice

The Chief Executive and Executive Team will be responsible for providing the leadership required to ensure delivery of the strategy. The Equality Strategy Team, reporting directly to the Chief Executive, will support directors, communicate the strategy, coordinate delivery across divisions and teams, and provide expertise. Each division and team within Citizens Advice will be responsible for delivery of activities and outcomes within their business area.

The Equality and Diversity Working Group (EDWG) will support the delivery of the strategy in Wales through its advisory role to the Citizens Advice Cymru Committee. The full terms of reference of the EDWG can be found at cablink.org.uk/cymru_eopps_group.

Strategic leadership, oversight and guidance will be provided by the Equality Committee, a subcommittee of the Trustee Board. The full terms of reference of the Committee can be found at cablink.org.uk/committees. Progress will be monitored quarterly by the Equality Committee and annually by the Trustee Board.

The Self Organised Network Groups (SONGs) – the National Black Workers' Group, National Disabled Workers' Group, National Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Group, and National Women's Group – have an important role to play both in ensuring policies, activities and practices developed under the strategy meet the needs of and empower people from those groups; and through their membership of the Equality Committee.

Bureaux

Arrangements will vary depending on each bureau's circumstances, but the Trustee Board and Chief Executive or Bureau Manager will need to agree responsibility for oversight and delivery of the strategy.



Appendix 1.

Context for the strategy

The three target change areas were identified through analysis of evidence that reviewed the major internal and external developments that have taken place, are happening or are likely to happen over the course of the strategy. A summary of the context follows. The full PESTL, SWOT and evidence summary are available on CABlink and by request.

1.1 External context

In addition to the economic context and the equality impacts of cuts, our review identified the potential for significant negative impact on equality for our clients and communities, from the following issues or policy agendas:

- Transparency, accountability, localism and Big Society.
- The Government's 2010 equality strategy (the loss of focus on race equality).
- Legal aid reform.
- NHS reform.
- Welfare and social care reform, with the accompanying stigmatisation of groups such as Disability Living Allowance claimants.
- Digital by default and the potential exclusion from access to services of millions of people from a range of equality groups.
- Pay and income inequality.
- Infringement of human rights of specific communities, such as people with mental health problems in social care environments and Gypsies and Travellers.

- Victimisation through bullying and hate incidents of groups such as LGBT people and disabled people.
- Devolution and the different political and equality agendas in England and Wales.

The individual and cumulative impacts of these changes point to an even stronger advocacy role on equality for the service at national and local levels.

1.2 Key advice service gaps

Through our analysis of the evidence and consultation process, we have identified the need to provide infrastructure support at national, strategic level to support the development of advice services in three areas. These are areas where equality and greatest need intersect, where people's rights are most at threat, and where they have least access and face barriers to advice (from bureaux or elsewhere):

- Discrimination, including hate crime and gender violence.
- British Sign Language users.
- Gypsies and Travellers.

In addition to the above, our desk research also covered other groups in greatest need, including older people in poverty, young people not in education or employment, people with mental health problems, prisoners, and people with learning difficulties. At the local level bureaux will also have specific marginalised BAME and migrant communities who need advice and advocacy to achieve their rights.

We found that these groups should not be the focus of strategic intervention because their advice needs are already relatively well-covered

by bureaux and/or by other agencies – for example 59 bureaux already provide services to offenders covering approximately 40 per cent of the prison estate.

We concluded that while Citizens Advice should continue to support bureaux to identify and support greatest need communities specific to their locality, there is a need for strategic national intervention to improve services for discrimination, BSL users and Gypsies and Travellers.

The evidence to support these conclusions is summarised in section 2 of the strategy and give in detail on CABlink.

Our conclusion is that we need a step change and for that we need cultural change, a strategic approach to diversity management, and the development of equality competence.

1.3 Key internal diversity issues

Overall there has been insufficient progress on trustee, staff and volunteer diversity since the 2004 baseline. Citizens Advice and bureaux do well in many equality areas compared to others in the voluntary sector, but it is not enough to be complacent on that basis, because the sector's performance overall is poor.

Specifically, we have more BAME and young volunteers in the service than before, and Citizens Advice consistently scores well in the Stonewall Equality Index (and were the top performing charity in 2010). But the proportion of disabled volunteers in bureaux has decreased and the proportion of BAME staff in Citizens Advice increased and then reverted to its original level.

On the positive side, equality is far better embedded in our day-to-day work, our thinking, planning and delivery of advice and policy work, with many notable achievements.

