EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA)

Background

1. This paper provides an update to previous discussions on Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and steps being taken to embed an EQIA electronic system into the working practices of the organisation. OMG are invited to consider the application of this new system at an operational level. For the purposes of this discussion a hard copy of the tool has been attached as an annex to this paper along with guidance that has been incorporated into the system.

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Timing

2. The timing is urgent. On 3rd November 2009, the SPCB will be giving evidence to the Parliamentary Equal Opportunities Committee on its progress on promoting equality in the Parliament. As we envisage the Committee will raise a question on EQIA, our intention is to have the system up and running in advance of the Committee evidence session in November.

3. OMG will also be aware of an email that was sent to all Office and Group Heads on Thursday 1st October 09 requesting the Equality team attend office team meetings to raise staff awareness of the system and how it should be used. OMG members are being asked to assist the Equality team in making sure that they are invited to attend team meetings during the months of October and November.

Discussion

4. The SPCB along with other specified public bodies, are legally required under the existing equality duties for race, disability and gender to put in place arrangements for EQIA to ensure that equality is consistently factored into the design of our policies and services. It has been devised as a systematic process to assess whether existing or proposed business activities have a differential impact on equality groups. Where there is likely to be an adverse impact, EQIA will help remove barriers that could potentially lead to the exclusion or participation of equality groups.

5. Our approach to meeting this duty has been based on our stated aims of minimising bureaucracy, creating a more streamlined approach to equality and having the right processes in place to effectively delivery equality in practice. As you will be aware from previous discussions, we have already started making progress in meeting these aims by
revising the SPCB equality annual report to reflect the SPCB’s organisational priorities, and removing directorate annual equality reports. EQIA is the next phase of the development programme.

Developing a New EQIA Toolkit

6. Over the last six months, we have been working towards creating a tailored approach to EQIA which fits into the organisation’s structures. To this end, a new EQIA toolkit has been designed that will help to improve how we consider and take account of equality issues in the decisions we make. It incorporates an electronic tool to assist staff with the process along with clear and concise guidance on how to use it.

7. To make it user friendly, the tool consists of a two stage process to avoid staff from having to carry out a full EQIA every time they use it. The initial stage helps the user to assess whether the business related activity has any relevance to equality. If there is no relevance, the EQIA is closed but if there could be a differential impact the user will be asked to assess whether there is a positive or/and negative impact (high, medium or low) and to provide an explanation on how they reached their conclusion. If it is a high negative impact they must conduct a full EQIA.

8. OMG members should be made aware that EQIA is not a new approach to equality. Up until now, we have taken an informal approach to EQIA that has led to successful outcomes in the advancement of equality. Business areas have proactively taken steps to consider and take account of equality issues in various activities they have taken forward such as the review of all HR policies under the HR realignment process, the review of the main hall and the new security measures which have recently been put on place. EQIA is simply a new system to assist staff with considering equality in their day to day work rather than to replace the good work which has already been achieved.

Reviewing Existing Policies and Business Activities

9. A more challenging part of the duty is to impact assess existing policies/business activities. As every organisation is likely to have a vast number of policies it has been recognised that it would not be feasible to carry out such an exercise within the three year business cycle with which the SPCB Equality Schemes operate. Organisations are therefore being encouraged to prioritise which of their existing policies should be impact assessed.

10. Given the number of SPCB policies that are available, our aim is to work closely with offices to determine which of their policies need to be prioritised, but only once we are confident with the system will we
embark on this exercise. We will of course discuss our plans with OMG before taking any action.

11. It is worth noting that, in parallel to the EQIA work, SDO is working to develop a “policy bank”. This will involve the systematic reviewing and updating of all existing corporate policies, over a period of time to be agreed with the policy owners. We would ask the owners to carry out an EQIA whenever a policy comes up for a scheduled review. This would avoid the need to impact assess all corporate policies simultaneously, as we appreciate that this would create a very significant amount of work for business areas. So we see this as a suitable alternative that would help meet the legal requirement without placing too much burden upon business areas in a short space of time.

**Monitoring, Publishing and Authorising of EQIAs**

12. Equality impact assessments will be carefully monitored in the first year of their implementation. The Equality team will have access to a database which provides a list of all EQIAs which are currently open and those which have been completed. They will also check whether the forms have been carried out correctly, particularly those which suggest that there is no impact when clearly there is. The Equality team will discuss this with the EQIA owner and provide some assistance in completing the EQIA.

13. As there is a legal requirement to report and publish the results of all EQIAs, OMG members should be aware that as part of the EQIA process, all fully completed EQIAs must be authorised by a nominated person whether it is the relevant SRO or Head of Office/Group to ensure that it has been carried out and that they are informed about any further action needed as a result of the EQIA.

14. A brief summary of the results of all EQIAs and any action being taken forward as a result of EQIAs will be included in the SPCB Equality Annual Report. A more detailed report will be provided to SLT for monitoring the impact of EQIA and how well they have worked in delivering better policies and services.

**Resource Implications**

15. There are no significant resource implications arising from this paper. However, the main resource is around staff time in the Strategy and Development Office who are responsible for ensuring that EQIA is effectively being carried out for business activities where it is most relevant. They will also be providing training for staff on how to conduct EQIAs. Staff time will be required from other offices to conduct equality impact assessments as well as those staff assisting with the incorporation of EQIA into other SPCB processes.
16. There was no external cost to producing the tool as this was created by an IT specialist in BIT. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Ian Etherington and other colleagues in BIT for their invaluable support.

**Dependencies**

17. The successful delivery of EQIA depends on input from other offices to make use of the toolkit. It would helpful for OMG members to ensure that offices are effectively using the EQIA toolkit and that it is being widely promoted at an operational level.

**Equalities Implications**

18. Equality impact assessment will replace the current equalities implications section which exists in the OMG template. If EQIA is done correctly it will mean that the equality issues will already be incorporated into the main discussion of the proposal. As this may not always work in practice it would be helpful to seek the views of OMG members on whether the EQIA should be attached as an annex to the paper, or whether a brief summary should be included in the paper explaining that an EQIA has been carried out and what are the outcomes.

**Publication Scheme**

19. The documents should be published under the SPCB’s publication scheme. It is also a legal requirement to publish the results of all EQIAs which have been carried out. This legislative requirement will be met by publishing a brief summary of the results of all EQIAs in the SPCB Equality Annual Report.

**Next Steps**

20. Our next steps are to embed the EQIA toolkit into the organisation by making sure that everyone is aware of the new tool that it is being used effectively, and becomes recognised as a standard form of practice. EQIA will be included as part of the standard corporate templates for OMG, SLT and SPCB which will replace the existing equalities implications section. As this will take some time to embed properly we would be grateful for some assistance from the relevant Secretariats to monitor its use and uptake, particularly in the first few months of its implementation.

21. EQIA will also become part of the project initiation process where each project owner will be required to complete an EQIA as part of this process. The Projects and Best Value Manager has already agreed to include it in the process.
22. In order for EQIA to work successfully, an effective communication strategy will be put in place which will involve creating new SPEIR pages dedicated to the EQIA toolkit, awareness raising sessions at team meetings and EQIA workshops.

**Decision**

23. OMG is invited to:

- Consider the new process and the impact this will have at an office level.

- Provide their support to the Equality Team in embedding the new process and making sure that is communicated to all staff.

- Note the required authorisation for all full EQIAs to check that they are being completed correctly and that resources are allocated appropriately for any further action which may be required as a result of an EQIA.

- Note the change to the OMG template where EQIA will replace the equalities implications section. It would be helpful to seek the views of members on whether this should be attached to all papers as an annex or whether a brief summary of the EQIA is included in the paper.

Strategy and Development Office

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