

**Results from the Scottish Councils' Equality Network Self  
Evaluation and Benchmarking  
Scooping Exercise 2013**



**February 2014**

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## Executive Summary

Knowing and being able to show how well Local Authorities are eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations, is a current key area of interest and research, not only for Councils themselves, but also for the Scottish Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Service users and voluntary and community organisations are also concerned about maintaining adequate services, usually from a perspective of the impact of cuts, and fairness.

The need to balance these two things has to an extent guided our approach to this work. This self-evaluation exercise in respect of equalities in which 20 Councils have participated, was structured after the completion of Audit Scotland's Best Value Review for equalities. It was NOT designed to produce a definitive scoring on everything about equalities within Councils. The results do allow us to look at how we think we are doing and acknowledge both these perspectives and with an eye on providing 'Best Value'. Indeed the subjective elements of the process, provided by expert practitioners are a strength of the process as they add local knowledge while the process of answering the questions can lead to self reflection about how well we are doing and what we might improve.

So what are the headline results? An organisation that ranked itself as having 'Advanced Practice' in all the areas identified in the toolkit would have a score of 48 (using the scoring system agreed for our exercise). The highest self assessment score from our study was 39 and the lowest was 7. There was a wide spread of results across participant organisations.

The results suggest a gap between knowing about diversity and needs and delivering improved outcomes. Practice improvements therefore might be in involving communities in consultations/Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) in the evidence planning/phase and in making sure that in the assessment/EIA follow up phase they are also involved; this would include appropriate service monitoring.

In areas where equality portfolio staff were likely to have had the greatest influence in terms of designing formal processes, for example "how effectively is equality build into decision making and scrutiny processes?" there was less variation between organisations although this did not necessarily produce 'high' scores. It is likely that the Legal requirements which loom large in this area (such as assessing impact) have had an influence. In areas where such staff might have less direct influence there was evidence of more variation in scores between organisations.

Seven organisations have self scored at least one individual question each as 'Advanced Practice', and for 10 of these questions there is an 'Advanced Practice' self score. There should therefore potentially be some good practice to

share; it would be interesting for organisations to study the good practice examples that have been identified.

At the EHRC event in November 2013 on the results of "Measuring Up - Three" there were requests that the results for individual organisations should be shared. The results of this work would also provide a good opportunity for the group to check our self-perception with that of the EHRC. SCEN members could take the work forward in a number of ways including peer review, or other augmentation to the work carried out so far.

During the presentation from ODS at the November EHRC it was noted that participants had expressed a desire to get some feedback on how well they are doing, this small study gives us evidence at least on how we think we are doing.

## **Methodology**

Conducting benchmarking work between Councils was raised at SCEN in early 2013, from a desire to help provide Council's with information on the spread of overall results, and stronger and weaker areas, to help drive improvements.

SCEN members agreed in August 2013 that the option of taking part in a quick and simple self evaluation/benchmarking exercise between Councils on equalities should be offered.

There was examination of potential toolkits to use by a small SCEN steering group. The options examined were creating a bespoke tool, the Equality Framework for Local Government and the Toolkit from Audit Scotland.

It was agreed that Council's could progress (using the Audit Scotland Tool) and pass the result to one SCEN member in confidence for collation and analysis. Only individual Councils would know their scores; this was to encourage an honest self appraisal and avoid a 'league table approach.'

The data gathering took place from late September to early November 2013. There were a total of 18 individual questions; each question was scored;-

'0', does not meet basic practice

'1', minimum acceptable practice

'2', basic with some good elements of good or even best practice

'3', consistently demonstrating good or best practice

The 18 questions were grouped into 4 practice areas.

20 responses were received by email using the scoring sheet supplied and following the instructions agreed by the steering group. The return represents 63% of the total number of Local Authorities.

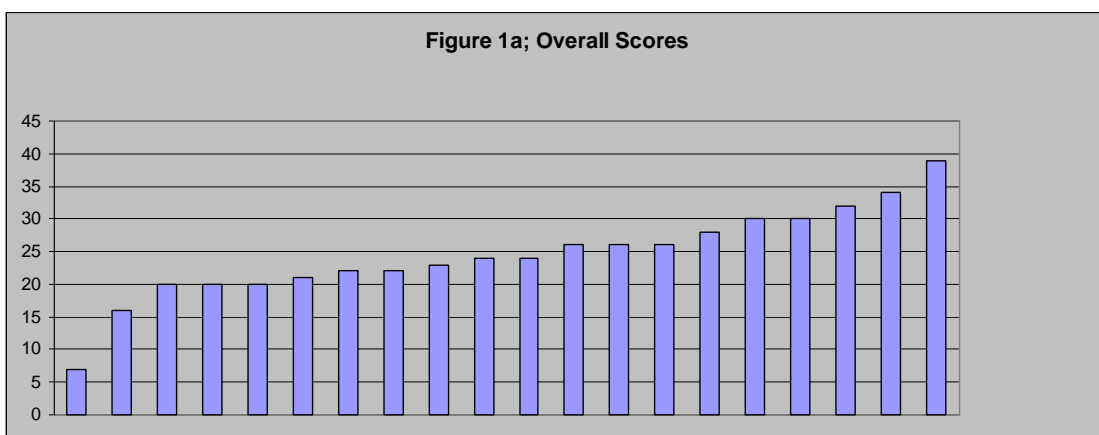
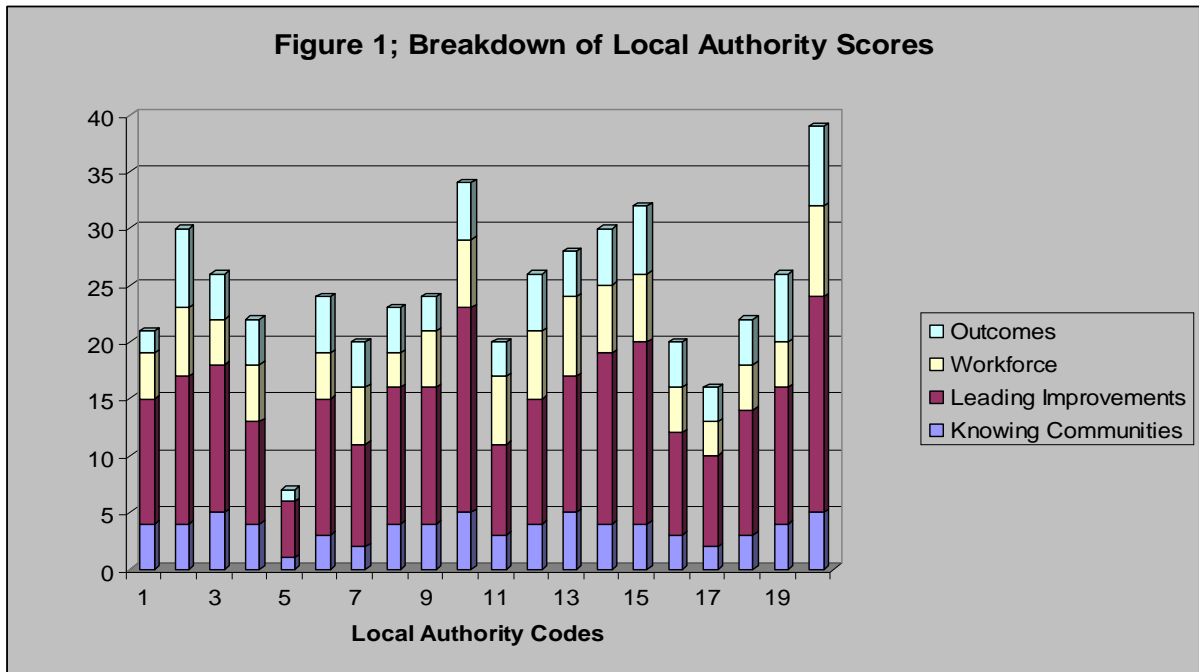
The statistical elements use means (averages), medians (half way points) and modes (most common scores) as tools for examining and comparing the data. Each individual practice area was scored on a percentage basis, the result being generated from the average score in each area compared to potential maximum score. This allowed areas with different numbers of questions to be compared with each other in a more meaningful way. Other systems of weightings were considered but any advantages they offered were outweighed by potential disadvantages.

During the November 2013 an analysis of the results was undertaken. Advice was sought and from a local authority data analyst on the statistical methods used, to ensure that they were appropriate for the sample size and type of the information gathered. A draft was examined by the SCEN steering group for quality assurance and comment.

## Detailed results

The Audit Scotland Best Value Toolkits are designed to “...provide an evaluation framework that will help auditors to reach robust judgments on how public bodies are achieving Best Value....” It was expressly not designed as the sole method for assessing Councils on equalities practice and its effectiveness and efficiency. The results should therefore be viewed with this in mind and need to be set in the context outlined in the Executive Summary.

The results are set out below narrative and in table and graphic form. Figure 1 shows the range of overall scores with a breakdown on individual areas. Figure 1a shows the overall scores ranked from lowest to highest.



The absolute range of scores was wide, with the top scoring Council nearly 6 times that of the lowest scoring one; however there is clear clustering in middle

ranging scores. The median score (the half way point of scores) was 24 and the modal score (the most common result) was 26, from 3 Councils.

Average score as a percentage of maximum score for whole exercise was 54%

In terms of the 4 practice areas defined by the toolkit, Councils on average rated themselves strongest in the areas of knowing the profile of their diverse communities and for employment diversity, and weakest in terms of delivering positive outcomes for its diverse communities, and leading improvements in equality effectively.

Overall the result could suggest that respondents feel their organisation can evidence engagement and its effectiveness on the one hand, but on the other cannot evidence improved outcomes. This might indicate that mechanisms are not in place to measure impact in terms of protected groups e.g. service monitoring and appraisal, and/or groups are engaged with in terms of needs, but have not been in terms of results/outcomes.

This chimes with the areas of weakness identified in “Measuring Up Three” which were; organisations setting outputs rather than outcomes; lack of clear purpose and for outputs/outcomes; lack of clear monitoring regimes to measure impact.

## **The Four Practice Areas**

The toolkit is divided into 4 practice areas. The last three areas chime well with legal requirements on setting and delivering Equality Outcomes and with the Outcome based approach generally, the first area deals with how well we know our communities and engage with them.

The graphs in figure 1 to 5 are ordered with the lowest scores to the left and the higher scores to the right

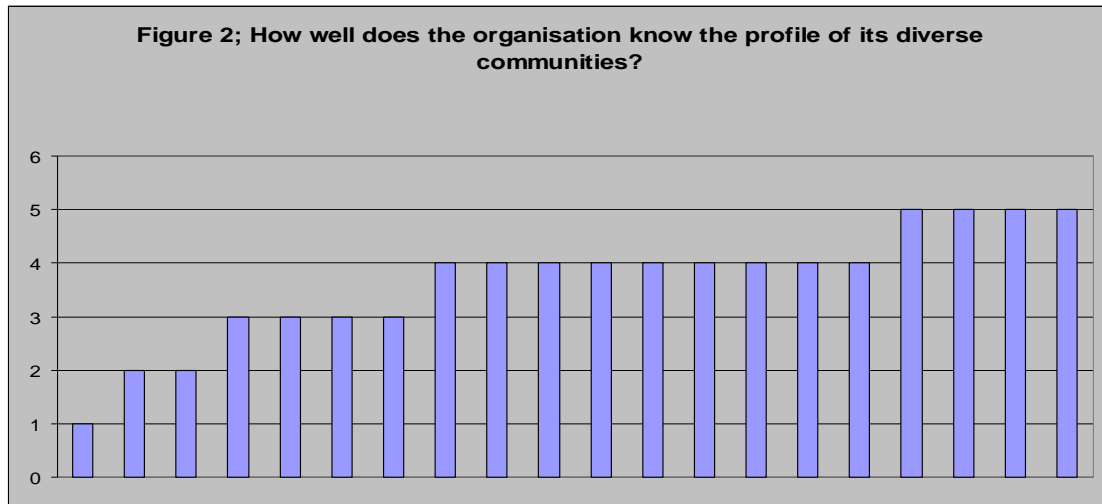
### **1. How well does the organisation know the profile of its diverse communities?**

Average score as a percentage of maximum possible score for the area = 62%

This section was made up of two questions.

The highest average score for any question in the toolkit was for (Q1.2), “How effectively does the organisation engage its diverse communities to understand their needs?” with an average score 2.0, and modal score 2.

In terms of Q1.1, “How effectively does the organisation understand the diversity and inequality within its communities?” The average score was slightly lower at 1.7.

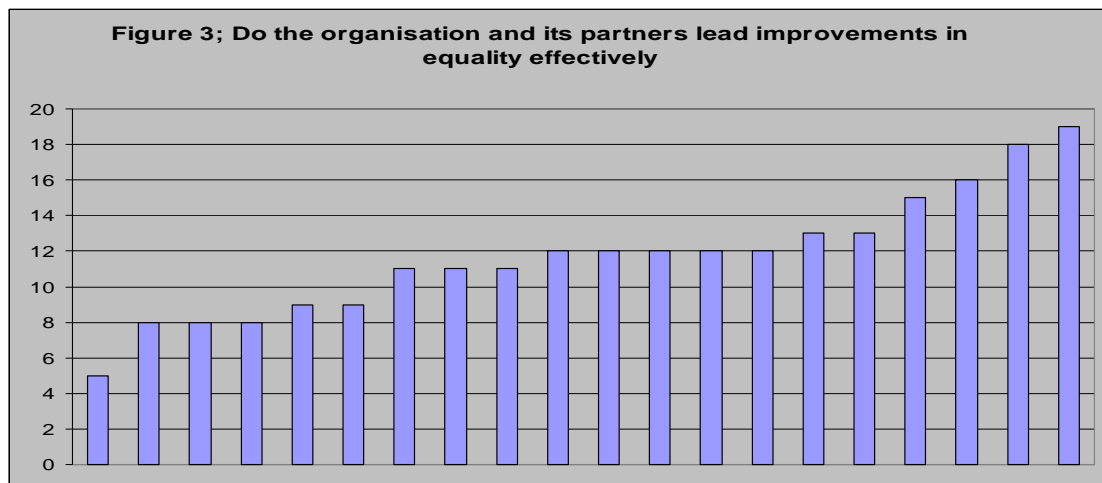


These results stand in contrast to the lowest scoring question of all “How effectively can the organisation demonstrate improved outcomes for diverse communities”, from section 4 on outcomes and delivery.

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

Average score as a percentage of maximum possible score for this area = 49%

This section had the highest number of individual questions with 8 in total.



There was large variation in individual scores to Q2.1, “To what extent do senior officers and elected members/board members promote and lead an equality improvement agenda?” – The average score for this was 1.3, and the standard deviation was 0.8; this is an area where equality portfolio staff might have less direct influence.

The highest score was for Q2.2a, “How well is the commitment to improving equality outcomes reflected in policies strategic objectives and actions (1.9)



The joint lowest average score was for the question Q2.3a how effectively is equality build into decision making and scrutiny processes? The average score for this was 1.3; this was question with the smallest standard deviation of responses, meaning that scores tended to close to the average. This is an area where equality portfolio officers might have some formal input in terms of recommending standard items on equality for committee reports, and producing guidance on how EIAs should be used.

For the related area 2.3b the score was 1.3 out of 3; this part of the question was about the level of priority attached to Equality Impact Assessment work.

A low score of 1.3 for question 2.4, to what extent is equality imbedded in a culture of continuous improvement? Was returned.

This is one of two weaker practice areas, and the results would suggest there is a way to go to on making equality a mainstream consideration. Improving practice here might reasonably be expected to contribute to bolster it elsewhere, especially in area 4.

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

Average score as a percentage of maximum possible score for this area = 60%. This was an area where higher scores where returned (similar to area 1). This section was populated by 3 questions.



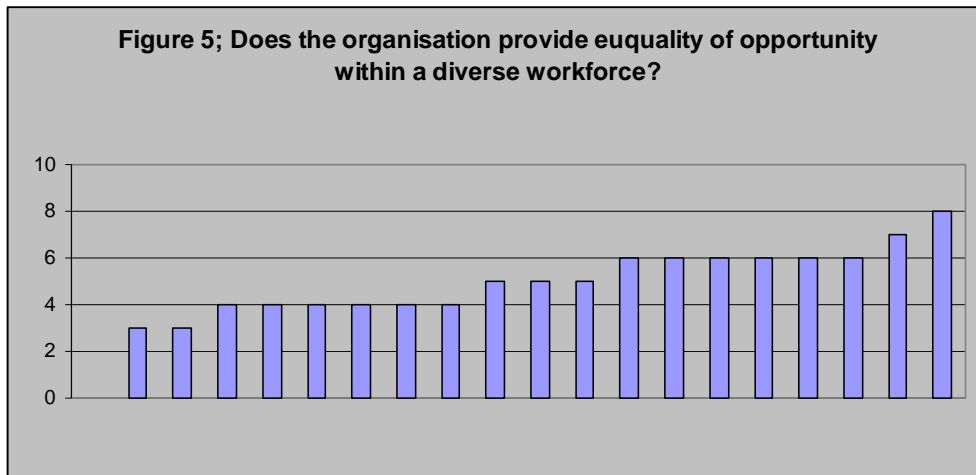
For Q3.2, How well are staff supported in meeting the organisation’s equality and diversity goals an average score of 1.9 was calculated with modal and median scores of 2.

For Q3.1a and Q3.1b there where lower scorings; these elements were about valuing diversity in the workforce and providing equality of opportunity for staff. The results would support a view that organisations were good at getting messages out, but not so good at listening to needs, or acting on information.

#### 4. Does the organisation deliver positive outcomes for its diverse communities?

Average score as a percentage of maximum score for this area = 48%

This section was made up of 3 questions, 2 concentrating on shape and accessibility of services and one on being able to demonstrate improved outcomes for diverse communities.



Organisations rated themselves stronger on accessibility of services than in user satisfaction. These two elements were in turn considerably stronger than the results for the final question in the survey (4.2) “How effectively can the organisation demonstrate improved outcomes for diverse communities?” with an average score of 1.3 and with modal and median scores of 1.

#### **Possible Areas for Action (for discussion by steering group)**

- Better service monitoring both in terms of equalities group breakdown, but also in terms of qualitative measures of services
- Continuing engagement after plans have been set and delivery beginnings to ensure that intended outcomes materialise and that they can be evidenced
- Better leadership on equality ‘from the top’, direct engagement with senior leaders to be examined
- Peer review among SCEN members to identify best practice and how this can be best transferred
- Evidence based ‘hard target’ setting reviewed Via EIAs, at April 2014 remove weak outputs with strong outcomes.

## Appendix 1

Invitation email sent to SCEN members 26/09/2013

Dear Colleagues

At the SCEN meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August we agreed that the option of taking part in a quick and simple benchmarking exercise between ourselves should be offered.

We agreed that I that you could self score your Council (using the Audit Scotland Tool) and pass the result to me in confidence,

I would then collate the scores and present the results in graphical and narrative formats with some analysis on the spread of results.

We also agreed that the results would be coded, so that the resultant output would not be linkable to particular authorities, this would aid honest self evaluation and prevent the creation of any kind of league table.

I include a [link to the Audit Scotland toolkit](#). There are four self assessment areas in the toolkit (list in the assessment matrix section at the end). For the purposed of scoring each question with in these areas, please use the following for each level of practice identified in the toolkit;-

Below Basic Practice	= 0
Basic Practice	= 1
Better Practice	= 2
Advanced Practice	= 3

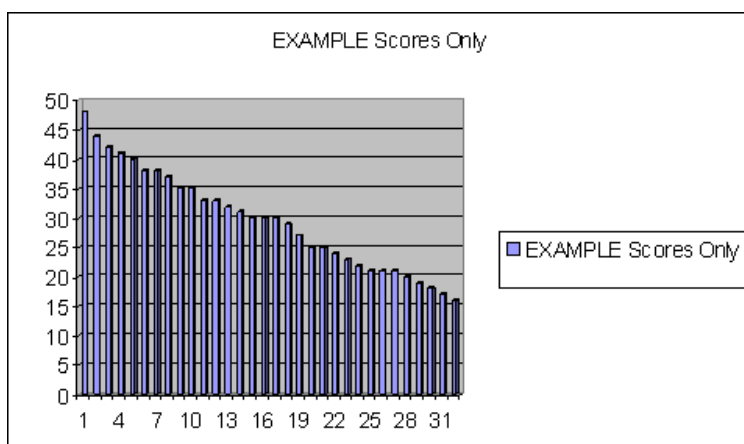
This means that for;-

Section one the maximum possible score is 6  
Section two the maximum possible score is 24  
Section three the maximum possible score is 9  
Section four the maximum possible score is 9

Giving a maximum theoretical score of 48

A self scoring sheet is provided for your use (it will add up as you go along). If you would prefer I am happy to take a note of your self scoring over the phone.

An example chart output for the overall score would be seen below...



I will also provide a comparative breakdown for each of the four areas to help establish patterns of results.

Please let me if you are planning to participate and note that a self score supplied to me no later than **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> October** would be most useful.

Please let me know if you have any other queries.

Thanks and regards, Ric

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## Appendix 2

### Scoring Sheet

Question	Score
1.1	
1.2	
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>0</b>

2.1	
2.2a	
2.2b	
2.2c	
2.3a	
2.3b	
2.4	
2.5	
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>0</b>

3.1a	
3.1b	
3.2	
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>0</b>

4.1a	
4.1b	
4.2	
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>
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## **Bibliography**

“Measuring up Three”

“Measuring up Two”

“Measuring Up One”

All Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013