

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Customer & Communities
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Business Strategy, Performance & Health Reform
Kevin Lynes, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise
David Cockburn Corporate Director Business Strategy and Support
Amanda Honey, Corporate Director, Customer & Communities
Meradin.Peachey, Director of Public Health
Business Strategy and Support

To: Customer & Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Subject: Annual Equalities Report 2010/11

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides Customer & Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee with an update on equalities and diversity structure within Kent County Council and the statutory Equalities and Diversity Annual Report for 2010/11.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Corporate Diversity and Equalities function transferred from Business Solutions and Policy Directorate to Communication and Community Engagement, Customer and Communities Directorate in April 2011. This is the first report to this committee on Diversity and Equality

2. BACKGROUND

The Equality Act came into effect on 1 October 2010. The Act uses one common language and puts all of equality law into one place. It also sets out to give people with different Protected Characteristics, consistent rights and protection. By simplifying and streamlining the law, the Act makes it easier to understand, easier to comply with and easier to enforce.

In simple terms, the Equality Act 2010 sets out the things that different organisations and individuals must do to avoid unfair discrimination. The Equality Duty has three aims. It requires public bodies to have **due regard** to the need to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act

- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic¹ and people who do not share it
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The Act also contains provisions that build on public bodies' previous duties, combining these into one overarching equality duty and expanding the scope to include age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

To comply with the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010, KCC must produce an annual Equality and Diversity report that provides information on the council's performance against the objectives set in the KCC Equality Strategy on meeting its duty.

The report covers the period from April 2010 to March 2011. The report highlights some key achievements and progress against the existing KCC Equality and Diversity Strategy. It gives monitoring information on its performance over the last year and includes statistical information on our workforce. It also covers our progress on:

- effective leadership, partnership with the community
- responsive and accessible services
- equal and appropriate treatment in employment

Some key developments over the 2010/2011 period have been:

- A Kent-based Sign Language Service has been established through public partnership, involving Kent County Council, Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, and the Kent Mental Health Partnership Trust. This service will ensure the provision of interpreting services for deaf and deaf/blind people in Kent through the Royal Association for Deaf People
- KCC is one of a small number of councils nationally that have continued webcasting meetings, even though this is not a statutory service, providing access to and participation in democratic processes
- KCC is helping people improve their computer literacy skills by offering training opportunities through the computer buddy scheme and dedicated UK online centres located in some of our libraries and Gateways
- KCC's Dignity and Respect Policy and Guidance re-launched in 2010, describes how we expect our staff to be treated by those they work for and with and include steps we take to protect them.
- A combined staff group leaflet has been produced and promoted across the organisation to reflect and promote the role staff groups play in supporting the organisation.

¹ Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex sexual orientation

Further work will be carried out on KCC's Equality Impact Assessment framework, governance structures for equality and fair and inclusive procurement in 2011/12.

3 RISK

The last year has witnessed a rise in Judicial Reviews in relation to decisions made in local government. This has proven costly in terms of financial management, service delivery and organisational reputation for many local authorities. As such it is critical that KCC is able to effectively expedite its Public Sector Equality Duties in order to reach and fulfil its strategic ambitions as defined in Bold Steps and Vision for Kent and will allow the organisation to be accountable and transparent in its decision making. Further this will ensure that customers of Kent receive the correct level of services.

4. CONCLUSION

Kent County Council has made a real difference to the lives of Kent residents with its 'Towards 2010 programme'. We now face very different challenges. Hard and difficult choices lie ahead and in this context there will need to be a focus on real priorities which can and must be informed and enabled by our Public Sector Equality Duty.

There are also clear implications for KCC's strategic priorities as set out in Bold Steps. In order to enable the economy to grow, put citizens in control and to tackle disadvantage, the organisation must understand the community it serves. This will also enable greater transparency and accountability in decision making.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Customer & Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the contents of this report and the attached Annual Equalities & Diversity Report

Matt Burrows, Director of Communications and Engagement

Contact Officer: Akua Agyepong
Title: Diversity & Equality Officer
Contact Number: 01622 22696112
Email Address: Janice.hill@kent.gov.uk

Background reports:

KCC Equality Strategy, 8 September 2010, Scrutiny Board
11 October 2010, Cabinet

Please follow this link for a copy of the full report:

<http://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s29367/Item%20B9%20-%20Equalities%20and%20Diversity%20Annual%20Report%202010-11.pdf>