

By: Nick Chard, Cabinet Member for Environment Highways and Waste
Mike Austerberry, Executive Director (EHW)
Linda Davies, Chair Equalities Group (EHW)

To: Environment Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 18 January 2011

Subject: Equalities Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: Recent changes in the strategic context for Equalities is summarised and a progress report on EHW's work on Equality and Diversity during 2010 is provided.

1. Introduction

In common with all other aspects of public life, the political and economic landscape for the Equalities agenda is rapidly changing. Since taking office, the new Coalition government has been giving out clear messages about its vision of a fair and equal society, and has given some indications of how it expects the public sector to deliver Equalities. Further, more detailed guidance is expected in the next few weeks.

Tackling disadvantage is one of the three main aims of **Bold Steps for Kent**, KCC's medium-term plan for the next four years. This theme runs throughout the plan, with the stated objective - of making Kent 'a county of opportunity, where aspiration rather than dependency is supported, particularly for those who are disadvantaged - or who struggle to help themselves and their family.'

2. Context

2.1 National policy context:

(1) One of the major changes in relation to Equality and Diversity has been the introduction of the Equality Act 2010. The purpose of this Act is to harmonise over 40 years of equality legislation and case law in order to provide clarity and consistency. The Act received cross-party support prior to its enactment. Further, the Coalition government has continued with this commitment by having this agenda led at Cabinet level.

(2) The majority of the Act's provisions came into force on 1st October, although we still await clarity over the Public Sector Equality Duty, which is due to come into force in April 2011. Government is currently considering the responses to a public consultation on this issue and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is expected to issue guidance in January 2011 on how public bodies might deliver their duties.

(3) The cross-Government Equality Strategy was published on 2nd December 2010. It focuses on making equality a key part of everyday business rather than a bureaucratic add-on. The strategy aims to deliver accountability by "shining the light of transparency on organisations, allowing their performance to be challenged and acting as a driver for change".

(4) The Government Equality Office (GEO) has been brought in to become a unit in the Home Office. This is intended to signal the Government's commitment to make Equalities a core part of Government business.

2.2 Kent County Council context

(5) Prior to the implementation of the Equality Act, Kent County Council adopted revised draft Equality policy and strategy statements. These documents provide the framework for reporting on our equality and diversity activity, until we receive further guidance from government on the approach that will be required of the authority.

(6) Assessing the impact of our policies, services and projects is carried out through Equality Impact Assessments (formerly Customer Impact Assessments). Streamlined guidance to officers has been drafted and made available via KNet, and promoted with an awareness-raising campaign.

(7) The new Equality Act places new responsibilities on public bodies to deliver Equality outcomes via its procurement processes. A Task Group has been established, to examine what needs to be done to deliver our legal obligations in this respect.

2.3 Environment Highways and Waste directorate context:

(8) Since September 2009, when EHW's full-time Equalities officer was replaced by a part-time project manager, EHW has worked to embed Equalities into business as usual, initially via the business planning process. Officers and managers have been delivering their responsibilities within their own service areas by assessing their projects, services and policies for Equality impacts, and mitigating those impacts where feasible.

(9) In support of this approach, EHW has worked collaboratively with colleagues across KCC, drawing in expertise and advice both within and outside the organisation, and accessing networks to consult with particular groups. To

ensure managers and staff fully understand the legal obligations upon KCC, and everyday practice required, training has been ongoing and extensive.

3. Achievements against Action Plan

The following highlights some achievements against the current action plan, to deliver the KCC Equalities Strategy. More detailed information about our achievements is included in the appendix to this report.

- There continues to be a developing culture within the directorate with Heads of Service requesting advice, guidance and support on implementing equality and diversity in their services.
- The Sustainable Transport team in KHS co-ordinates the Kent Reference Panel. This group, which is chaired by Cabinet Member, Nick Chard, brings together representatives of Kent-based Access Groups and KHS staff to engage on issues relating to transport and the public realm.
- Kent Highway Services' Winter Service policy prioritises service to particular groups and organisations including hospitals, doctors' surgeries and old peoples' homes.
- In 2010, 509 stiles have been removed from Public Rights of Way to improve access for all, especially the ageing population;
- Staff capacity continues to be built through the EHW local induction processes. Clear corporate messages are enabled through the use of KCC's "Together... making a difference" corporate induction video, along with a short presentation introducing staff to their responsibilities. This has been well received by new staff and contributed to raising levels of awareness in services.
- The directorate Equality Champions delivered a bridging session to staff, to improve understanding of Equality issues and their relevance to the services we deliver.

4. Next Steps

- Continue to raise awareness of, and support staff to carry out, Equality Impact Assessments, with particular focus on service and staff reductions prompted by budget constraints
- Support staff in preparing for and implementing new duties brought about by the Equality Act and the public sector Equality Duty
- Align to business planning process in order to identify and manage equality outcomes in service planning and delivery.

Recommendation:

Members of the Environment Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report

Linda Davies
Director of Environment and Waste
01622 221500
Linda.davies@kent.gov.uk

Denise Eden-Green
Public Involvement and Equality Manager
01622 221934
denise.eden-green@kent.gov.uk

Background Documents: None

Other Useful Information: See the attached appendix for more detailed information about how equality outcomes have been improved in 2010.

Equalities report

Achievements against Action Plan

This appendix provides more detailed information about EHW's achievements against the current action plan, to deliver the KCC Equalities Strategy. These achievements are reported against the headings of the Equalities Framework for Local Government, (EFLG) which is the framework currently adopted by KCC as a reporting mechanism.

(1) Knowing your community and equality mapping – this category of the EFLG is designed to ensure that an accurate picture is created of the differing needs and backgrounds of the people in Kent.

- Two 'bridging sessions' were delivered in March and April 2010, to raise awareness of the range of resources, guidance and insight that is available to help us understand our communities. One session was dedicated to a series of case studies about the use of MOSAIC, the segmentation tool provided by Experian.
- Four briefing sessions providing similar information, but targeted to Communication staff were also delivered.

(2) Place Shaping and Leadership – this category of the EFLG is intended to reflect the strategic leadership and culture of the organisation in relation to Equalities, and also evidence of improved efficiency, outcomes and use of resources through effective partnership working.

- There continues to be a developing culture within the directorate with Heads of Service requesting advice, guidance and support on implementing equality and diversity in their services.
- Kent Highway Services (KHS) has established a service-specific Equalities group to focus on ensuring KHS policies and services are assessed for their Equality impacts, and a systematic cycle of assessments is being put in place.
- A presentation was delivered to the 90+ Senior Managers at KHS' senior managers' conference to raise awareness of Equalities issues and of managers' accountabilities.
- A briefing was delivered to EHW's Senior Managers' Forum to provide information about the new Equality Act, and raise awareness of managers' accountabilities.

(3) Community Engagement & Satisfaction – this category highlights where the organisation engages directly with and involves (in particular) groups who may experience disadvantage and inequality in order to improve service delivery and outcomes

- The Sustainable Transport team in KHS co-ordinates the Kent Reference Panel. This group, which is chaired by Cabinet Member, Nick Chard, brings together representatives of Kent-based Access Groups and KHS staff to engage on issues relating to transport and the public realm. The most recent engagement activity for the panel was on the Local Transport Plan (LTP3). Forthcoming issues include the taking over by the county council from district councils of the Concessionary Fares scheme, and also the supplementary guidance to the Kent Design Guide.
- The Country Parks have established two park user groups at Lullingstone and Shorne Woods, to enable users to be involved in the parks and their development.
- The Country Parks Service plans to build a new visitor centre and café at Trosley Country Park. The public and stakeholders requested a hatch be installed, and the design was modified to accommodate this.
- A Discovery Trail was created at Lullingstone Country Park, following consultation with families and a local school, who helped develop the trail;
- Exit surveys with visitors to Shorne Woods Country Park revealed that the public were unhappy with the length of the queues in the café. This has been resolved with the introduction of a self-service system

(4) Responsive Services and Customer Care – this category seeks to demonstrate where services are adapted or improved to meet the needs of people with different backgrounds and ensure fair access.

- Kent Highway Services' Winter Service policy prioritises service to particular groups and organisations including hospitals, doctors' surgeries and old peoples' homes. In the recent bad weather, KHS has been able to respond to the following requests for service that have reduced the impact of the weather on priority groups. All of these requests relate to clearance of side roads, which would not normally be treated.
 - Staff from a Care Home were enabled to get to work when blockages caused by snow-ploughing were cleared;
 - An Otford resident in need of regular dialysis was able to attend hospital for treatment when the route was kept open for the ambulance;
 - A residential road was cleared for a funeral to take place, and carers providing services to the elderly in their own homes were enabled to maintain regular visits.
- Kent Highway Services has installed just over 60 new salt bins in priority locations since January 2010, with a further 45 funded by the Member Highway Fund. An example of where the new salt bins have made a positive difference include the following example:

- Thanks to the provision of a salt bin in Heathfield Drive Ashford, one hospital consultant, one doctor and two nurses were able to get to work whereas last year they were snowed in. Meals on Wheels were able to deliver to the elderly in sheltered flats in the same neighbourhood and the pharmacist was also able to deliver supplies. The salt bin was provided by County Member, Mrs Elizabeth Tweed from her Highway Member Fund and was on site within 3 days of receiving the application.
- The Countryside Access Service has delivered the following improvements to the network of footpaths, bridleways and public rights of way over the past year:
 - 509 stiles have been removed from Public Rights of Way to improve access for all, especially the ageing population;
 - Explore Kent's Guided Walks website has graded all walks to make it easier for customers to find a walk that meets their needs. Each grade has a detailed description of exactly what the obstacles, gradients etc on each walk are so customers can make an informed choice. Over 40% of all the walks are graded as either easy or suitable for all abilities;
 - A significant number of path surface improvements in or near residential areas have been carried out across Kent to enable more people to use and enjoy their local rights of way. For example:
 - Path ZS16 Minster has been improved by replacing a narrow muddy path with a wide strip of tarmac, that leads from a residential area to the primary school, shops and pedestrian crossing of busy road; particularly used by primary school mothers;
 - Path ZU35, Sittingbourne, is an urban fringe restricted byway that was impassable without scrambling along adjacent bank covered in thorn bushes. It has now been cleared and surfaced and is used by local residents to access their local countryside and wider network of public paths;
 - Path ZF1, Faversham, a section of this path, which is a popular promoted route traversed the rear of the sea wall and was repaired at the beginning of December. It has already been used by people on electric mobility scooters.
- During the recent snow, the staff at Kent Country Parks gave help to the emergency planning team:
 - Country Parks Rangers have the use of 4 wheel drive vehicles which can assist in bad weather conditions.
 - The Head Ranger from Lullingstone Country Park was called out one evening to help an old couple in Southfleet who were low on

food supplies and who also needed a top up card for heating and electricity. He also spent a night taking two district nurses out and about on their rounds.

➤ At Shorne Woods Country Park, a Ranger was called upon to deliver "meals on wheels" for people in the Gravesham area.

- The EHW complaints process provides consistency and clarity to the complaints process. This is leading to service improvement as the organisation responds to issues which may be managed and improved.

(5) Modern and Diverse Workforce – The skills, understanding and commitment of a workforce support the delivery of responsive, personalised services.

- Staff capacity continues to be built through the EHW local induction processes. Clear corporate messages are enabled through the use of KCC's "Together... making a difference" corporate induction video, along with a short presentation introducing staff to their responsibilities. This has been well received by new staff and contributed to raising levels of awareness in services.
- The Directorate Equality Champions delivered a bridging session to staff, to improve understanding of Equality issues and their relevance to the services we deliver.
- A programme of Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) workshops has enabled staff to develop competence to undertake EIAs and support colleagues to undertake them by acting as 'critical friends.' In 2010, 37 members of staff attended EIA workshops, and a further three workshops are planned for the current financial year. Each workshop can train up to 15 staff.
- Other training undertaken in EHW in 2010 includes 33 members of staff participating in the corporately provided Diversity in Action course, and 21 who studied via the Online Equalities tool.
- By the end of the March 2011, an additional 4 people will have attended the Positive Action in Recruitment course. All recruitment panels must include a member who has attended this course, and EHW has a number of trained individuals in all teams and units.
- The Oracle Learning Management system (OLM) is used to report back to the directorate's Learning and Development representatives on activity in their individual areas. This report can then be used to identify whether there is a fair allocation of funding as well as a fair spread of Learning and Development activity
- OLM also delivers the ability to report back on Learning and Development activity specifically on each of the Equality groups within our directorate workforce, again to ensure fair allocation of resources.