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To: Cabinet – 16 April 2007

Subject: EQUALITY STRATEGY 2007 - 2010

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This paper asks Cabinet to agree an Equality Strategy, which brings together the Council's existing Disability and Race equality schemes, and new Gender Equality Scheme, into one document.

The Strategy aims to support continuous improvement in service delivery across all areas of the Council, with a greater focus on meeting the needs of diverse service users. It is underpinned by a commitment to achieving best value for available resources, working in partnership and encouraging more people to have their say locally to influence decisions which affect them and their community.

1. Overview

The Council has a statutory obligation to produce Disability and Race equality schemes, which it already has in place. From 30 April this year, it is also required to publish a Gender Equality Scheme. Following discussion at the Strategic Equalities Group in November last year, it was agreed to amalgamate these three documents, to enable multiple issues to be addressed more effectively, and ensure that the Council's approach to equality is consistent and integrated across the organisation.

2. About the Strategy

The Council's existing Disability and Race equality schemes form the basis of the Equality Strategy, together with supplementary statistical information.

The Disability priorities and actions remain identical to those contained in the Disability Equality Scheme, which was the product of extensive involvement work with disabled people last year. The priorities and actions identified in relation to Race reflect those set out in Year Three of the current Race Equality Scheme.

Although the Strategy mainly focuses on Disability, Gender and Race equality, it also provides a summary of current issues in relation to poverty, deprivation and cohesion, and associated initiatives being delivered across the Council. This includes the Supporting Independence Programme, reducing teenage pregnancy, migration, and work on the Equality Standard for Local Government.

3. The five priority outcomes

The Strategy identifies five priority outcomes, which support the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy Statement:

- Equal and inclusive services and information for all, regardless of age, disability, gender, faith, race or sexual orientation.
- Creative opportunities for participation and involvement in service planning and decision-making.
- Work with our partners to ensure the county's most vulnerable groups feel safe and free from harassment, and can report incidents in the knowledge that issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
- Enhance the quality of our intelligence and monitoring systems, to ensure we can target disadvantage in the county where action is most needed and best reflects effective use of resources.
- Maintain our reputation as an excellent employer, promoting a culture where the Council recruits on merit, diversity is valued, and where employees are proactive in anticipating the needs of service users.

4. Next steps

Consultation is currently taking place on the document with service users and employees. Engagement with service users on the Strategy will continue over the next six months, to explore issues in greater detail and reflect ongoing activity in Directorates and work on equality impact assessments. This will inform a review of the Strategy at the end of the year.

Cabinet will be updated orally at the meeting on any key issues to emerge through current consultation activity.

5. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- (a) Agree the Equality Strategy and Summary Action Plans;
- (b) Authorise the Lead Member to approve any minor amendments to the Strategy or Summary Action Plans indicated between now and 30 April;
- (c) Note that engagement with service users on the Strategy will continue over the next six months, to inform a review at the end of the year.

Jo Richardson

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Background documents: KCC's Disability Equality Scheme 2006/09
KCC's Race Equality Scheme 2005/08