

By: Linda Davies, Chair of Environment & Regeneration Equalities Group

To: Environment & Regeneration Policy Overview Committee

Date: 3 July 2007

Subject: KCC's Equality Strategy

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report presents Kent County Council's Equality Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet on 16 April 2007.

The Strategy sets out how the Council will promote equality and community cohesion and tackle unfair discrimination in Kent.

The Strategy is the product of extensive data analysis and consultation. Work will be ongoing over the next six months to undertake further engagement work on the Strategy with Members (through POCs), service users and employees, to explore issues highlighted through consultation, identify appropriate responses and take forward key actions. This will inform a review at the end of the year.

For consideration

Members views are sought on the following:

- (a) Does the Strategy have a clear direction of travel?
 - (b) Does the Equality Strategy capture the main issues?
 - (c) What are its strengths/weaknesses?
 - (d) What other issues might inform development work over the next six months and the end of year review?
 - (e) How can the Strategy maximise its impact to improve quality of life for everyone in Kent?
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Introduction

1. 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 was 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:
 - Address multiple issues more effectively

- Ensure that the Council's approach to equality is consistent and integrated across the organisation
 - Make sure that we are not duplicating information.
2. 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.

About the Strategy

3. The Equality Strategy brings together the Council's Disability, Gender and Race Equality Schemes, and focuses primarily on these three areas. It spells out what Disability, Gender and Race equality mean for those who live, work in and visit Kent, and the priorities to be tackled in each area. It also deals with community cohesion, poverty, deprivation, and the cross-cutting issues of age, faith, and sexual orientation. In doing so it summarises specific initiatives being delivered across the Council to tackle these issues, such as reducing teenage pregnancy, migration, and work on the Equality Standard for Local Government.
4. The Disability priorities and actions remain identical to those contained in the Disability Equality Scheme 2006/09, which was the product of extensive involvement work with disabled people last year. Similarly, the priorities and actions identified in relation to Race reflect those set out in Year Three of the current Race Equality Scheme 2005/08.

The five priority outcomes

5. 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.
6. The five priority outcomes are underpinned by a range of priorities that relate specifically to Age, Disability, Gender, Faith, Race and Sexual Orientation. These have been identified to address specific need within the county and the Council, and gaps in understanding or service provision. They are supported by a series of robust action plans, which set out a phased approach to achieving the five outcomes. The Council's Strategic Equalities Group will monitor performance against the action plans.

How the Strategy was developed

7. The Council's agreed Disability and Race Equality Schemes form the basis of the Equality Strategy, together with supplementary statistical information. This includes:
- Census data
 - National research
 - Directorate Management Data.
8. The Strategy also draws upon a wide range of recent consultation data with both service users and employees, including:
- Consultation on the existing Race Equality Scheme 2005/08
 - Engagement with over 400 disabled people on the Disability Equality Scheme 2006/09
 - Residents satisfaction and Best Value survey data
 - Two gender focus groups and two mini depth interview days with men and women from across the county, reflecting a range of different life stages and demographics
 - An employee questionnaire made available on KNet.

The role of the Strategy in delivering the agenda of Environment & Regeneration Directorate

9. The services E&R provide and the future that the directorate helps to shape affects every household in Kent. Through the authority's efforts on regeneration, KCC aims make a real difference to communities in Kent. Therefore, it is important E&R has a clear focus on meeting the needs of diverse service users.
10. Through partnership work, E&R is driving and influencing physical and economic regeneration in Kent's coastal zone and coal fields and in the government priority areas of Ashford and North Kent. These projects address the considerable issues of poverty and deprivation in all these areas of Kent.

This is a crucial area of work, because KCC knows for example that between 40 to 60% of people of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin live in poverty in Britain, compared to 10% of white people. This means that around two-thirds of Bangladeshi and Pakistani-origin children are raised in poverty, depriving them of a whole range of opportunities from birth.¹

11. Kent Highways Services (KHS) works with the bus and rail services to better integrate their services providing financial support for 200 bus routes and improving accessibility for mobility impaired customers. This is another key area of work, because providing accessible roads, footpaths and public transport is a major factor in reducing social exclusion for disabled people.
12. Environment & Waste hosted a three-year project called “By All Means”. The project, commissioned by Natural England (formerly the Countryside Agency), explored ways in which all sectors of society can have the opportunity to enjoy the countryside. This project has increased the authority’s understanding of how disabled people can enjoy Kent’s beautiful countryside and has identified a variety of ways to ensure disabled people can fully participate.
13. Staff from across E&R attend a range of training activities focussed on equality and diversity topics for example, managers attended recruitment workshops aimed at understanding the impact of the recent age legislation. Various Out and About days were held in Gravesend earlier this year attended by staff from across the directorate. These days enabled staff to meet a range of different community groups in North Kent and to understand the issues and challenges they face. This is important because it helps to ensure that the Council maintains ongoing dialogue with service users.
14. The directorate has reviewed over 600 policies in the last six months to understand their impact on diverse groups, including men and women and older and younger age groups. This work has identified a number of areas where services across E&R can continuously improve to meet the needs of different groups. The lessons learnt range from common themes across the directorate, for example ensuring Plain English is used across all policies to identifying a need for reviews in certain areas with service users for example Bus Strategy. This evidence will contribute significantly to achieving Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and to KCC’s Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2008.

Next steps

15. The Strategy is currently being considered by all Policy and Overview Committees. In addition, further engagement work is taking place over the next six months on the document with service users and employees, to explore issues in greater detail and reflect ongoing work in Directorates on equality impact assessments. This work will feed into a formal review of the Strategy at the end of the year.

¹ The Equalities Review Final Report, January 2007

16. Although the Strategy is already shorter in length than the existing Race Equality Scheme, a summary version will be produced and made available for ease of access.

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- (g) Does the Equality Strategy capture the main issues?
- (h) What are its strengths/weaknesses?
- (i) What other issues might inform development work over the next six months and the end of year review?
- (j) How can the Strategy maximise its impact to improve quality of life for everyone in Kent?

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