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To: Corporate Policy Overview Committee 14th January 2009

Subject: Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) – KCC
assessment and action plan

1. Introduction

This report formally confirms KCC's successful achievement of Level 3 against the existing Equality Standard makes it one of only 12 County Councils to hit this mark (with none at Level 4).

This report identifies the key actions needed to consolidate this achievement and the challenges to be addressed in reaching the 'Excellent' level of the proposed Equalities Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

- A summary of the key elements of the new draft Equality Framework is attached as Appendix 1 of this report

2. Consolidating performance at Level 3 of ESLG - the 'Achieving' level of the new EFLG

The assessment report recognised that over the past 2 years a great deal of work has been undertaken by the KCC to secure achievements in equality areas; that KCC has made detailed public commitments to equality improvement and in many ways has made good progress in setting a wide range of equality objectives for both employment and service delivery.

In general and taking account of the evidence presented by the Council, the assessors felt that KCC should set out a programme of work that addresses the improvements that it needs to make for ensuring that level 3 of the Standard is fully embedded. Whilst the assessors acknowledged the progress made by the Council, it was felt that there were a number of areas requiring considerable improvement.

The assessment report offers a series of suggested actions to ensure that achievement at Level 3 of the current standard is consolidated. These are -

- i. The Chief Officer Group and elected Members need to continue to encourage and lead a culture across the organisation which ensures that strategies and actions are implemented that eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity.
- ii. The Impact assessment process needs to be strengthened. Currently the focus has been primarily on initial screenings with limited analysis. Even where full impact assessments have been conducted they appear

to lack the necessary rigor to challenge institutional discrimination and secure meaningful outcomes. Attention should be paid to impact assessment team membership (to include sufficient 'challenge' in the process); the quality and breadth of data used including that which derives from consultation and engagement exercises; as well as the various types of data available from partners, surveys and from direct equality monitoring

- iii. The Business Planning Guidance should in future ask each service to set equality objectives and targets flowing from the equality impact assessments that have been conducted within the framework of Business Plans. This would then provide the 'golden thread' in terms of mainstreaming equalities
- iv. Similarly, in the area of employment, there is need to conduct robust equality impact assessments (with sufficient challenge, meaningful data and proper analysis) to better understand the reasons for lack of success in recruitment and retention of some equality groups, for example in the retention of disabled people. This would contribute to achieving the council's ambition of having a workforce that is more closely representative of the communities served.
- v. Equality monitoring should be a feature of the general systems for performance managing service delivery in each business unit, not a separate mechanism.
- vi. The same applies to the processes adopted by service units for awarding and monitoring contracts with organisations that supply goods and services to the Council.
- vii. The Council needs to improve the processes for involving a much more broad range of external groups in commenting on policy and procedures in order to improve the opportunity for dialogue and external challenge from equality communities and interest groups
- viii. There is a need to consolidate the recent initiatives introduced as part of meeting Level 3 requirements to ensure that they are effective in achieving key objectives, for example, the Blank Sheet consultation (see previous bullet point), Positive Action training programmes and initiatives to recruit and retain staff from key equality groups

3. Achieving EFLG 'Excellent' by 2010/11

To achieve an EFLG rating of 'Excellent by the end of 2010/11, the Council will have to show that it has consolidated its ESLG Level 3 achievements and achieved significant progress against the new Framework. Much of this new Framework cross-refers to the new national Customer Service Excellence standards and to the evidence base for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The authority should set itself a realistic time-frame for achieving this and follow up with a self-assessment as described below. Kent County Council should continue its progress towards the 'Excellent' standard, and is well placed to achieve this, given the resources and high level of commitment identified throughout the Council, allied to the improved engagement of stakeholders set out in para 2 vii above.

The four priority areas that the ESLG Level 3 assessment report suggests that KCC focus on, fit directly into the new EFLG framework. They are -

3.1 Leadership and Corporate Commitment

- The Member development programme should be strengthened to cover key areas of the equality and diversity agenda. These include overview and scrutiny, customer insight in public policy making/review and improving advocacy. The programme should acknowledge and meet the needs of the differing Member roles, for example, front-line councillor, scrutineer and Cabinet Member.
- KCC should continue to revise and consolidate business planning processes to ensure effective action on equality is part of the process. This will enable the Council to track and learn from those service areas that are performing well and improve those areas that are lagging behind. Support will need to be given to service managers to meaningfully input equalities considerations into Business Plans
- KCC needs to put in place a clear and robust system for annual review, monitoring and reporting against the new EFLG standards across workforce and service delivery issues. This could take the form of a self assessment, but must include input from Diversity Staff groups and external organisations.
- KCC should establish and monitor targets for all diversity strands in service delivery, based on robust impact and needs assessment. This will enable the council to understand and take a more coherent approach to meeting the needs of the people of Kent and the challenges required by changing legislation.

3.2 Consultation and External Scrutiny

- The Council should improve its systems for review and scrutiny of service delivery and employment reports – particularly at middle management levels where evidence was somewhat patchy - by designated consultation and community groups.
- There is an urgent need to improve links with key external groups and designated forums across all diversity strands. At the same time groups that are currently under-represented within the existing

consultation structures need to be more pro-actively engaged in mainstream activities.

- It seemed to the assessor that some of the current relationships between the external groups and the Council may be quite fragile. Attendance at the arranged session was disappointing with a substantial number of participants not attending some of the sessions. The current 'Blank Sheet Consultation' should be reviewed to assess the extent to which it has resulted in the active engagement, participation and involvement of those groups that are currently under-represented and what new structures or mechanisms need to be in place to formalise these relationships.

3.3 Service Delivery and Customer Care

- Develop robust monitoring systems for all aspects of service delivery including those services delivered by other organisations on behalf of the Authority to record the involvement of and take-up by diversity groups. This also applies to monitoring of complaints/compliments to better understand the experiences of customers from different backgrounds.
- Service managers need to be fully involved in monitoring and review processes and in the setting of equality and diversity targets.
- Equality Impact Assessments should focus on access to services and the customer experience across all diversity strands.
- Additional effort is required to improve sophistication around equality monitoring in those areas where data is not readily available or currently collected. Local citizen "intelligence" and customer insight data could be developed further to feed the policymaking and scrutiny process.
- All monitoring reports should be published widely and shared with stakeholder groups

3.4 Employment and Training

- Address under-representation both in the wider workforce and at senior levels in the organisation through positive action particularly through review and scrutiny of recruitment and selection and talent management
- Priorities for action in terms of addressing the existing workforce demographic and future service need to be determined by reference to available data about the Kent community whenever possible.

- Generic and equality-specific training to be reviewed with the aim of enhancing the understanding of all staff on diversity and work and improving customer care standards
- Enhance KCC's people management capacity through the review of the equalities elements of management selection, induction, training and performance appraisal
- Actions resulting from impact assessment for employment policy to be made widely available to staff quarterly and assessments broadened to encompass the wider definition of policy.
- Explore potential for extending the staff group network to identify the potential for representation of under heard or represented groups within the workforce.
- Develop KCC's 'dignity at work' philosophy through the enhancement of support and reporting facilities and improvement in managerial handling and response to complaints from staff.
- Integrate the framework for equality in service delivery and employment within the Member development programme

3.5 Diversity Mapping

There fifth element of the new EFLG relates to 'Diversity Mapping', to ensure that an accurate picture is created of the differing needs and backgrounds of all Kent communities.

Further work is being developed on this to link it to the wider customer profiling work related to Access Kent and to the data held by KCC and public sector partners in projects such as the Public Health Observatory.

Progress on 'Mapping' will form part of future reports on progress toward the EFLG 'Excellent' standard.

4. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the actions at paras 2i to viii and agree the proposals at paras 3.1 to 3.5