

By: Graham Gibbens, Cabinet Member, Adult Social Services
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To: Adult Social Services Policy Overview Committee - 15 January 2009

Subject: **EQUALITIES IN KENT ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES – ANNUAL REPORT**

Introduction

1. (1) This report provides an Annual update on Directorate progress, in particular noting its contribution to the County Council's achievement of being externally assessed at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and the actions necessary to work towards Cabinet's stated aim of achieving 'Excellent' rating under the new Equality Framework for Local Government by 2010/11.

"As a major employer and provider of services, Members and Officers of KCC are committed to promoting equality, valuing diversity and combating unfair treatment. Equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination is a fundamental right and we will exercise leadership and commitment in promoting this right. KCC will achieve this through our roles as Community Leader, Service Provider, Employer. The principles of understanding and respect for others are central to what we believe."

Equality & Diversity Policy Statement - KCC Cabinet

External Assessments

2. (1) The provision of detailed equalities evidence in services and staffing is a key component to all inspections. This has particularly been the case during the past year, with visits from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) assessors.

(2) The ESLG results and action plan are reported in the Appendix, but in summary the Inspectors:

- praised the good equalities practice examples in KASS;
- suggested that this work needed consolidation within the Directorate;
- that good practice in service Directorates be shared across KCC;
- that community engagement and the participation of diversity groups in scrutinising policies needs much more attention (note: this was also recommended by CPA);
- KASS was the only Directorate to have completed Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) on all of its existing policies, practices and procedures. The Assessment of new policies continues. However, EIA processes are likely to be revised to enhance external scrutiny as recommended;

- the recruitment and retention of disabled staff remains a priority;
- although KASS had reflected equalities actions in Business Plans, greater emphasis was deemed necessary, eg to better understand the needs of and to engage with BME (Black and minority ethnic) and the 'new' communities in the county;
- to improve equality monitoring and performance management systems.

Active Lives – Putting People First

3. (1) Having established that people's needs are unique, including carers needs and that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' service solution to meeting those needs, it is essential that the person whose needs are being addressed is in the driving seat. The way people live their lives should be determined by themselves, and not by professionals unless they so choose. What people wanted is to be:

- Treated with dignity, respect and as leading partners in the delivery of services. This requires staff, whether directly employed or agency or other professional staff to have both a set of values about promoting independence and working in partnership with the people using our services and the professional competencies to put those values into practice. This is also about person-centred planning and self-assessment, and training is critical to its implementation;
- Involved from the start in shaping future service developments. This does not mean asking whether they agree with a particular proposal, but involving them in drawing up proposals in the first place. This should happen both strategically [ie in developing new projects, or stopping services] and in relation to individuals' own support packages.

(2) We will ensure that people shape service development, and are a critical part of service monitoring by:

- Working with people and service providers to develop a wide range of personalised services in the future that are what people want. Through our Strategic Commissioning role [jointly with other agencies] we need to influence the market to develop new ways of responding to individual need so that future needs can be met.
- Proactively reaching out to minority communities and groups who are not in regular contact with services to work with them to develop the services and support they want in the way they want it.
- Ensuring that people who are susceptible or subjected to abuse or mistreatment where known will receive the highest priority for assessment and support services.

Further Work

4. (1) Although public involvement and engagement with service users is a key factor in the Directorate's work, it is recognised that we need to step up our community engagement in particular with disabled, BME and sexuality groups.

- 1,000 disabled people were surveyed about the compilation of our Disability Equality Scheme [KASS led for KCC] and 99 disabled people were actively involved in the process. We now recognise the need to build on this and have more regular and systematic engagement.
- Similarly, some KASS staff regularly engage with BME groups across the County. It is planned to do this more systematically in future and to find better ways to engage established and 'new' BME communities in service planning.
- The Directorate will play an important role in providing evidence for the review and update of KCC's three statutory Equality Schemes (Race, Disability and Gender) in the coming months.

(2) Finally, we will be able to better co-ordinate responses to the harassment of staff and service users on discriminatory grounds. A KCC policy "Respect and Dignity at Work" has been developed drawing on the experience of Directorate staff and good practice in three other local authorities. This has been disseminated to teams and its application will be monitored.

Conclusion and Recommendations

5. (1) Equalities and Diversity underpin all aspects of activity within KASS. Much has been achieved over the past year and is now embedded in practice. The Directorate has many good practice examples to showcase and to build on. However, more work needs to be done to consolidate and sustain progress, and as already highlighted to ensure there is meaningful engagement with hard to reach groups and communities. As the Commission for Social Care Inspection said: "We service most people well but also understand what we need to do better and have plans to improve."

(2) Members are asked to NOTE the continued progress made by KASS on Equalities and Diversity, and future plans to strengthen its achievements and consolidate good practice.

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Appendix:
 Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) – KCC Assessment and Action Plan
 (Report to Corporate POC – 14.1.09)

Background Documents:
 None.