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To: Environment & Regeneration Policy Overview Committee
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**Subject: EQUALITIES IN ENVIRONMENT & REGENERATION DIRECTORATE
ANNUAL REPORT**

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The Environment & Regeneration Directorate contribution towards the County Council achievement of gaining Equality Standard for Local Government Level 3, and the recommendations for action in achieving 'Excellence' in the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Environment & Regeneration Directorate has clear ambitions for equalities and diversity, aligned to those of the wider Council. These ambitions ensure its services help to create a fairer society where everyone can participate and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The directorate also strives to ensure its practices recognise, respect, value and harness difference for the benefit of those who use the services and for staff who work in E&R.

"What does this mean for every person within the directorate? It means we should have high expectations that we will treat all people fairly irrespective of their background. It also means we celebrate the rich diversity of people whom we serve whether as residents, customers, workers or visitors."

E&R's Equality & Diversity Action Plan 2007 - 2010

The E&R Directorate's equalities progress, issues and activity, is submitted in this report for the purpose of:

- a) An annual overview of the contributions towards the County Council's achievement of being externally assessed at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
- b) Recommendations for the way ahead in 2009 for achieving the new EFLG rating of 'Excellent' by 2010/11 as stated by the Cabinet.

2. EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ESLG)

The Environment & Regeneration Directorate helped towards the County Council achieving ESLG Level 3. The ESLG Self Assessment and Action Plan report for the directorate is provided in the Appendix, and our strengths and weaknesses are explained below.

2.1 Strengths in Equalities and Diversity

- E&R have a strong and committed leadership team with recent experience of equalities and diversity best practice in other public authorities.

- E&R have a focus on accessibility issues in Highways and Countryside Access with some strong relationships with local access groups.
- There is significant focus throughout regeneration projects on people who are socially excluded which encompasses many of the traditionally vulnerable groups.
- E&R has demonstrated strong support for all four KCC staff groups; two of the group chairs are within E&R.
- There is increased awareness across the directorate around issues regarding disability, race, age and gender.
- There is focus on attracting more women and more younger people into KHS in particular through its recent transformation programme and more widely across E&R through supporting the Kent Success Apprenticeship Scheme.
- E&R's Managing Director tasked a "change group" of staff from across the directorate to review equalities and introduce best practice to our work.

2.2 Weaknesses in Equalities and Diversity

- Staff and managers require a greater understanding of how issues around sexual orientation and religion and belief affect those who use E&R's services.
- There is a need to involve a greater variety of community groups more informally in E&R's activities.
- A need to continue to embed future impact assessments in E&R's culture so it becomes part of "how E&R does things".

2.3 SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON EQUALITIES STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT E&R (REPORTING FOR 2008)

2.3.1 Equality Impact Assessments

Allowing for flexibility amongst divisions to ensure the approach worked effectively for everyone, the screening process on existing policies identified 2 policies as high impact, 13 medium and the remainder low. The main themes of policies requiring full assessments are disabled access and parking, roadworks planning, health and safety, travel planning and public rights of way improvements.

2.3.2 Engagement & Involvement

At times, E&R consult through set piece activity at one off intervals and not necessarily joined up with other services within the Council or with other partner organisations. E&R needs to review how it engages with the community and to ensure it is responsive to the public's desire for dialogue and debate at times when they are calling for it.

2.3.3 Environment & Waste Division

- Converted traditional stiles to more accessible kissing gates in footpaths across Kent, for example 15 stiles have recently been replaced with kissing gates at rail crossings in Swale.
- Involved a number of groups when introducing changes to the countryside paths and byways for example the Disabled Persons Liaison Committee.

2.3.4 Kent Highways Services

- Spent around £4 million a year from KCC's transport budget to provide bus services that are not commercially viable, but that are socially necessary.
- In partnership with Stagecoach (the bus operator) and Thanet District Council Introduced the Thanet Loop, a service that runs every 10 minutes during the main part of the day between Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate. The loop provides an easy connection between key services to the hospital and the local shopping centre. The new, low floor

buses, ramps and the specially raised kerbs at bus stops, allow much better access for those with mobility difficulties, as well as for pushchairs.

- Kent Freedom Pass offering unlimited travel anytime and anywhere made available to all Kent young people.

2.3.5 Regeneration and Economy Division

- Access via District websites to Housing Needs Market Assessment Surveys to assist input to Local Development Frameworks for future service requirements.
- Kent 2012 Tourism Objectives includes a target to increase the number of accessible accommodation providers in relation to the Paralympics Games. This is being supported by the regional and national tourist boards and will be a four year strategy.

2.3.6 Strategy & Planning Division

- Built in increased technical requirements to the tender for the new computerised system to support the planning application system. Ensure this meets the highest accessibility needs
- Piloted using text messages as a way of involving young people in prioritising transport planning and understanding their public transport issues.

3. EXAMPLES OF GOOD EQUALITY PRACTICE IN E&R DIRECTORATE

- Inviting participation from gypsy and traveller communities on access to key facilities and services.
- Working with BME businesses on business needs and how other Kent businesses can learn from them.
- Focus groups with visual and mobility impaired users to influence the design of Dover Station Approach Public Realm project.
- Engaging with young offenders on public transport issues using mobile phones to reach them and receive feedback.
- Holding a seminar on local government procurement aimed specifically at BME businesses to inform them of the steps that need to be taken to tender for local government contracts.
- One representative spoke at a Black Business Expo in Virginia and promoted Kent as a place for African American companies to forge business alliances and do business.
- Canterbury Environment Education Centre were awarded a 'BIG' Lottery Fund grant to improve access at the centre by replacing treads to bridges and building a new accessible bird hide.
- Delivering a pre-school literacy project together with a Sure Start Centre using the environment at the centre to make literacy fun.
- Hosting a range of people in Environment & Regeneration to find out what its like to work in E&R including young people, disabled people and young offenders.
- Working closely with Kent Probation Service and ex-offenders on the Clean Kent campaign.

4. THE WAY AHEAD IN 2009

Action planning recommendations are born from the requirements to work towards the new Equalities Framework for Local Government level 'Excellent', but also covering the essential requirements of sustaining the old ESLG level 3 that we are currently aligned with.

Commitment and workable support to the Equalities agenda from the Members, Directors and Senior Managers, are essential for the people of Kent to experience access to services without feeling and being excluded or unfairly treated.

4.1 ACTION ALREADY PLANNED FOR 2009

4.1.2 Engagement & Improvement Business Unit Level Business Plan 2009/10

From the outset, the new Equality & Diversity Officer has worked with the equally new and innovative Engagement & Improvement Unit in E&R, in setting out the Unit's purpose and objectives as a fundamental part of Resources Division. This task was paramount as the Unit supports and advises all other parts of the E&R directorate, especially in Equality & Diversity practice.

The role of the Equality & Diversity Officer in this new Unit is identified, together with the level of support in equalities and engagement the officer shall pro-actively experience. The key equalities actions and initiatives the Equality & Diversity Officer has built into this Unit's Business Plan for actioning from 2009 are explained below:

Engagement & Communication Strategic Equalities Objectives:

1. Increase public awareness of how to communicate with the directorate's services.
2. Seek customer feedback about the directorate's services, to guide promotional activities and service improvements.
3. Investigate and identify new ways of improving customer experience of Environment & Regeneration, utilising new technologies and communication methods for consultation with community groups and individuals across the different equality and diversity strands.
4. Establishment of a new directorate-wide Equalities Forum to be chaired by our directorate Equalities Champion Linda Davies. The directorate Equalities Action Plan sets out a wide range of actions and a key role for the new Officer will be to ensure that the Equalities agenda is fully understood and embraced and delivered by operational teams.

Organisational Improvement Team Equalities Actions:

1. Ensuring our planned procurement will comply with and exceed equalities legislation and satisfy the needs to those of the different equality strands.
2. Engaging and involving different groups across the diversity strands more regularly and more informally so we can demonstrate a clearer and more evidenced understanding of the needs of service users across Kent by the following:
 - Update Equality Mapping to include Gypsy & Traveller, rural and deprived communities in order to empower and involve different community strand groups through community managed and KCC organised focus groups
 - Provide guidance and assistance to equality community groups for history month events i.e. Black History Month, LGBT History Month etc

- Ensuring systems in place for equal access to E&R services such as: parks, countryside, heritage & waste, natural environment, Public Rights of Way and KHS
 - Lead engagement activities with user groups (including hard to reach) working in partnership with SILK (Social Innovation Laboratory for Kent)
 - Explore opportunities to work with Access Kent Interreg IVa project re: Mosaic
 - Focusing on completing Equalities Impact Assessments across directorate with KCC Equality Staff groups and public community groups
3. Promoting equality and diversity across directorate and key partnerships by:
- Establish new Equalities Board and update directorate Equalities Action Plan
 - Guide staff and departments on sound equality practice to making inclusive across the diversity groups the design promotional material and practice
 - Promoting latest Equality legislation such as Communities living in Urban and Rural Areas receiving equal access to services
 - Active member of the Kent Equality Partnership and KCC Equality & Director Officer Group and Directorate Equality Leads meetings
 - Managing evidence collation for the new EFLG through staff and departmental meetings
 - Coordinating input from the directorate Equality Champions
 - Updating the Equality Strategy
 - Leading and guiding equality practice to directorate Members and staff at all levels

4.2 FURTHER ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

4.2.1 E&R's Working Culture

The Equality & Diversity Officer will be a key provider of induction and Equality & Diversity training at all levels (including procurement advice) throughout the directorate. Understanding of equalities issues around race, disability and gender, was shown to be below average through the ESLG Level 3 assessment process, therefore an immediate task will be to update the training and make it more accessible. Knowledge and sound practice of equalities must be an essential requirement when providing public services to the people of Kent, especially across the new Equality Strands.

4.2.2 Embedding and Monitoring Equalities in E&R's Service Units

The communication and embedding process of equality actions by the Equality & Diversity Officer across all Business Plans within the Directorate will be prioritised with support of the Senior Managers. This requirement was identified via the ESLG level 3 assessment and will contribute towards E&R achieving EFLG level Excellent.

4.2.3 E&R Service Accessibility

Documented and frequent staff and departmental meetings, and empowered Internal and External partnership working led by the Equality & Diversity Officer will form the foundation for this to happen in practice. Assessment, planning and delivery of greater access to E&R services to the people of Kent across all the equality strands will be a high priority.

4.2.4 Equality Leadership

In collaboration with Equality Officers, consistent support from Members in achieving and surpassing our equalities aims must be continued to be experienced. This will comprise:

frequent local and regional community engagement across all of the equalities strands on E&R directorate matters; an up-to-date understanding of equalities legislation through training and awareness of services accessibility (such as awareness raised by Sukhi Bains at the Kent Community Engagement Conference Nov '08); and providing leadership publicly and internally.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving 'Excellent' in the EFLG five new areas of Equality Change Management will be a huge challenge. However, this process of equality practice is something that we as the E&R directorate of the County Council should already be using as a measurement tool for providing equal access, practice and fairness throughout the county for the people of Kent.

The recommendations outlined above will need to be focused upon, and building upon the examples of good practice already in place (see section 3 above), the directorate will move towards achieving its equality aim.

We therefore recommend the E&R Policy Overview Committee:

1. Welcomes the new Equality & Diversity Officer and endorses his planned action for 2009 (at 4.1 above).
2. Endorses the further actions (at 4.2 above).
3. Endorses the leadership roles its Members can play in internally and externally promoting this agenda for E&R, guided by the new Equality & Diversity Officer.
4. Will look to ensure that Equality & Diversity is fully embedded in all E&R Business and Service Plans for 2009/10, through their scrutiny of these in the forthcoming months.

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