

Appendix 6 COMMUNITY COHESION AND EQUALITIES SCHEME

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS AND COMMENTS RECEIVED

This report outlines the consultation process and summarises the responses received. The consultation open in June and closed in September 2008.

A range of information already exists regarding priorities in relation to race, gender and disability as a result of prior work undertaken in the development of the Race, Gender and Disability Equality Schemes. There is also data from the MORI Survey 2006 and the BMG Residents Survey in 2007. Therefore, the approach was to target stakeholder groups, particularly those umbrella organisations who are able to bring together or offer views from a range of perspectives.

The process has consisted of:

- Distributing the draft Scheme to 107 community and voluntary sector people, representing community and voluntary organisations in High Wycombe (45), Aylesbury (43), Amersham (2), Bierton (4), Chesham (6), Haslemere (1), Stoke Mandeville (2), Weston Turville (2), Winslow (1) and Milton Keynes (1).
Analysing the type of organisation:

- 11 are Faith related;
- 38 based around ethnicity
- 25 provide a support service
- 12 are community groups
- 16 provide gender specific services/support
- 02 based around sexual orientation

- Presentations were made to:

- Bucks Equalities Network
- Bucks Ethnic Diversity Advisory Group (BEDAG)
- Bucks Strategic Partnership Implementation Group
- BCC Cohesion & Equalities Steering Group
- Chiltern Race Equality Council Management Committee
- Chiltern & South Bucks Disability Access Group
- Community Cohesion and Equalities Forum
- South Bucks Community Cohesion Group
- Wycombe Race Equality Council Management Committee

- Discussions at meetings focussed on the following questions:
 - Are the proposed changes to our strategic outcomes right for Bucks?
 - Are the priority themes and actions relevant and appropriate?
 - Are the performance measures the right ones?
 - Are the progress reporting arrangements adequate?
 - What else needs to be considered for inclusion in the scheme?

Attendees were also invited to submit further comments, collectively or individually, and either orally or in writing.

- A copy of the Scheme and questions were available on the council's Website and the consultation was recorded on the Consultation Portal.

On the whole, the draft CCES was positively received and attracted praise for setting a clear and ambitious agenda for the County Council. Where there was criticism this focussed on the:

- Absence of comment on the role of the Race Equality Councils in supporting the County Council's progress to date
- Failure to demonstrate how this Scheme will directly benefit residents
- Draft Scheme seen as too process orientated
- Not reflective of local priorities

Consultees suggested:

- Comment on the role of faith groups going forward
- Comment on the role of the voluntary and community sector
- More information on the actions underpinning individual performance indicators together with baseline data
- Consideration of how local priorities can be reflected
- Further development of the Scheme as a county wide partnership framework
- Greater clarity around who will be held to account for failure to deliver
- Caution around the use of language in relation to the PVE agenda so that the Islamic community is not stigmatised.

The proposals for performance reporting were welcomed as suitably comprehensive and there has been praise for the desire for open and honest dialogue. The BEDAG have particularly welcomed the opportunity to act as a "critical friend" and would wish to focus on two/three priority areas for in-depth discussion/development. They have also recommended that the local authorities in Bucks jointly review their equality impact assessment schedules with the aim of achieving a more joined up approach across common areas of focus.

County Council's Response to Consultees' Comments

As a result of the comments so far received, the following changes were implemented prior to the draft Scheme being submitted to Cabinet:

- A brief history of County Council's journey to date has been added
- Recognition of the work Race Equality Councils has been added
- A section about how the County Council will work with the various organisations that make up the faith, community and voluntary sectors
- Amendments to the performance indicators appendix so that it reflects baseline data and actions going forward

There is already work planned, to start in September 2008 and conclude in February 2009, which should result in the identification of community cohesion issues within the 19 local areas delivery framework. This work was included as part of delivery implementation plan for National Indicator 01. This work, together with the wider community cohesion research project being commissioned will inform priorities in the medium and longer term and will be reflected in annual report and refresh of the CCES.

The draft CCES was written to address a particular audience, namely the various inspectorates and Government departments/agencies that will assess the County Council's performance in relation to community cohesion and equalities. It was not intended as a document for residents as many will be unfamiliar with the terms "community cohesion" or "equalities" or consider them unimportant. However, comments from the Wycombe Race Equality Council and the Chiltern & South Bucks Access Group suggest that it would be helpful to provide more information and explanation about the context within which the county council is operating. It was felt that this would be beneficial for anyone wishing to learn more about community cohesion and equalities.

There are already proposals within the draft CCES for reporting performance to other audiences and tailoring messages accordingly. These proposals are intended to complement existing communication practices by individual Services as well as ensure that the Authority meets its legislative requirements. The issue of communication with residents is, however, very important. We will revisit this issue once the wider research project referred to above is completed, as specific issues may be identified.

As regards accountability, the existing Community Cohesion and Equalities Strategy already outlines the roles and responsibilities of the County Council, senior managers and Members, managers and employees. Therefore it is not considered necessary to replicate this information; but the draft CCES will be amended to include a reference to the information within the Strategy.

The issue of al-Qaeda inspired terrorism is already a national and a local priority. The draft CCES also seeks to identify the county council's approach to building community resilience and preventing violent extremism through tackling hate driven crime and behaviour and developing meaningful interaction which will help to breakdown people's fears and negative stereotyping of difference.

Three of the four district councils already have their own single equalities schemes. The draft Scheme, therefore, was written primarily as a framework for delivering the County Council's priorities across community cohesion, equalities and preventing violent extremism. However, through the Bucks Strategic Partnership and the Bucks Equalities Network, partners will be invited to work on developing a county wide framework.

ENDS