

Committee:	Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Date:	13 July 2009
Title of Report:	Children's Services Equality Strategy
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To share equality data and progress towards Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion for Children's Services

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor progress of the Strategy, and in particular encourage Equality Impact Assessments and improved equality data collection.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 Children's Services has integrated key functions relating to Equality and Participation/Engagement and established an Equality & Engagement Team. This team includes the work the department does on the participation of children & young people and the work of the Youth cabinet. In 2009/10, the budget for the Equality & Engagement Team is £385,000. The Equality related projects are mainstreamed within the overall budget and linked directly to Engagement and Participation activities, reflecting national best practice.

2 Supporting Information

2.1 At the last Scrutiny Committee, the report shared the Children's Services Equality Strategy. This report responds to the Scrutiny Committee's request for an update against the priorities identified in the Strategy and for more information about the make-up of children, young people and families' population. Work has focussed on improving systems and process, development of resources, increasing staff understanding, leading to improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

3 Priority 1 – Effective data collection and monitoring

3.1 The Equality Information Report has been shared with partner agencies and across the Children's Services department. A Data Quiz has been an effective means to engage in discussions with colleagues about issues relating to over and under-representation in services, and differences in outcomes achieved by some of our most vulnerable children and young people. It is proposed to spend 15 minutes at the Scrutiny meeting on this activity.

3.2 Feedback from these data sessions has shown an improved shared understanding of what should be the areas of focus to ensure better outcomes for all minority and marginalised groups. Specifically, good local data analysis linked to national priorities has identified the need to focus on improving attainment for children and young people eligible for Free School Meals, a socio-economic indicator of inequality & other strategies to 'narrow the gap'. Such as tackling health in equalities.

4 Priority 2 – Developing inclusive services and better outcomes

4.2 The Support Worker (Race Equality) has supported individual children and young people who have experienced racism and racist bullying to ensure they feel safe and supported. She has worked with schools to improve their understanding of preventing and responding to racism.

4.3 In response to a needs assessment, Children's Services worked with minority ethnic children and foster carers to develop a resource and training which has helped increase their confidence in meeting the needs of minority ethnic and mixed heritage looked after children and young people.

4.4 The Gender Equality resource has been piloted with schools and Children's Services department staff to improve their understanding about gender inequality and help them meet their statutory duties.

5 Priority 3 – Effective engagement with minority individuals and groups

5.1 The partnership project with Sompriti (community group for black and minority ethnic people) and seven public agency partners across the Children's Trust has supported vulnerable minority ethnic people particularly in semi-rural areas to access services.

5.1 The Disabled People's Participation Group, developed in partnership with Adult Social Care, Primary Care Trust and East Sussex Disability Association has attracted the involvement of parents and carers. Disabled people have been supported and trained to encourage more effective participation.

5.4 The Youth Cabinet is made up of young men and women from diverse backgrounds, including

members who are looked after, from minority ethnic backgrounds and disabled to help ensure better reflection of a diverse range of voices.

5.5 The newly appointed Participation Worker has involved disabled children and young people in the shaping the development of strategy for short breaks.

6 Priority 4 – Effective and inclusive commissioning and procurement

6.2 Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) are being carried out in all Children’s Trust partner agencies, and shared through the Equality Steering Group and through the East Sussex wide coordinating Group. Key impact assessments carried out by Children’s Services this year have been on: Extended Services; Aiming High – developing short breaks for disabled children; Youth Crime Prevention Strategy. Current EQIAs ongoing include the development of the Play Strategy for East Sussex, and the plans for the Contact Centre.

7 Priority 5 – Tackling harassment and discrimination

7.1 There has been a continued increase in the number of schools reporting on racist incidents and also in the number of incidents being recorded. This reflects good practice around issues being picked up in schools and appropriate monitoring being undertaken.

7.1 The Staff well-being project in schools addressed issues of racism, homophobia and gender stereotyping and discrimination to help staff identify discrimination and respond appropriately.

8 Priority 6 – Workforce development

8.1 The Annual Conference focussed on recognising how improving equality helped us meet our duties on community cohesion and well-being. It attracted over 120 delegates from Children’s Services, particularly from school settings, partner agencies and the voluntary sector. 93% of the delegates felt it met the objectives of improving practice.

8.2 Targeted workshops on equality, diversity and cohesion have been delivered for new Children’s Services staff within the Welcome Days, for schools staff, school governors and Children’s Services Planning Group partnerships on the new equality duties and carrying out equality impact assessments. Feedback showed that staff felt better informed and competent.

8.3 East Sussex County Council has developed three staff forums: BME (Black and minority ethnic); LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered); and for Disabled staff to act as a network and support forum, and to include a space for discussions around experiences of discrimination and finding practical ways forward.

9 Priority 7 – Achieving community cohesion

9.1 Children’s Services worked with independent creative organisation on a project with three schools and the University of the Third Age. The project promoted positive relationships between young and old people in East Sussex through arts and drama. The project facilitated a marked reduction in discrimination levels between the groups.

9.3 The pilot Belonging project was extended to two primary and two secondary schools, involving children and young people in exploring what community cohesion meant in their schools, and sharing this with staff through staff training. The project has helped schools meet their specific duties on community cohesion.

9.4 Schools have received targeted training on community cohesion for a range of different audiences including small, rural schools, Special Educational Needs Coordinators, Citizenship Coordinators and Governors, to help them identify and improve their practice.

10 Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1. The Equality Strategy is being refreshed in 2009, to formally take into account the new duties on community cohesion and there are plans in place for consultation with the public and other partners. It would strengthen the visibility of equality work if the Scrutiny Committee were to continue to monitor progress of the Strategy, and in particular encourage Equality Impact Assessments, and improved data collection.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: Equality Strategy