

## **1 Executive summary.**

1.1 The Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of the access to council services by minority groups. A task group of 5 members of the Scrutiny committee carried out the review

1.2 The terms of reference for the review were:

- To review the current level of accessibility to council services for minority groups
- To identify shortfalls in how minority groups access services
- To research best practice in other local authorities that have successfully addressed the issues associated with access to services for minority groups
- To make recommendations to cabinet on the outcome of the review.

1.3 Recommendations

1.3.1 **The council to be more pro active in assessing the accessibility of its services to minority groups rather than rely on a perception that everything was working fairly well because no complaints had been received.**

1.3.2 **To identify a point of contact for The Disability Equality Reference Group (DERG) so that the group is more easily contactable and can fulfil its role as outlined in the council's Disability Equalities Scheme.**

1.3.3 **To ensure that the facilities offered through the council's website are available to ALL the borough's residents who have access to the internet.  
(Get some input/feedback from disabled users of the website on its accessibility.)**

1.3.4 **To examine whether the funding and delivery by KCC of services to some minority groups could be devolved to the local authority for more targetted and effective outcomes**

1.3.5 **The council's senior officers to become more involved in community networking**

- 1.3.6 **The council to increase its knowledge base about equalities through both officers and members to meet the growing needs of its existing and future residents**
- 1.3.7 **The council to actively promote any changes it makes to the accessibility of its services through the agencies representing the relevant minority groups in the borough.**
- 1.3.8 **To make more use of voluntary groups within the borough to help with the council's equalities agenda.**
- 1.3.9 **Consultation should be managed, relevant, targeted and focussed on achieving the desired outcome. The results of any consultation must be fed back to the consultees.**
- 1.3.10 **To investigate whether the Tunbridge Wells approach of appointing councillors to be "champions for accessibility" offers an alternative method of addressing and promoting accessibility issues.**
- 1.3.11 **The council works more closely with Age Concern, Connexions and other similar agencies to publicise the council's services and to engage with the people that they represent.**
- 1.3.12 **Explore the possibility of setting up, in partnership with a housing association, a 'half way house' for those 16-18 year olds who have made themselves intentionally homeless trying to get out of violent relationships and for those with other issues affecting their lives.**
- 1.3.13 **Use organisations like Connexions to help the council to engage with young people and distribute information on council services.**
- 1.4 The context in which the review was carried out was the amendment of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which placed a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality.

#### 1.5 Evidence gathering

Evidence gathering sessions were held with Kevin Burbidge the Chair of Gravesham Community Cohesion Steering Group, Christopher Woodley Head of Policy and Partnerships, Gravesham Access Group, Gravesham Age Concern, Connexions, London Borough of Lewisham. Additional evidence came from Tunbridge Wells District Council and the Citizens Advice Bureau.