

**Scrutiny Review of the Access to Gravesham Borough Council Services by  
Minority Groups**

**March 2008**

## **Contents**

### **1 Executive summary**

- 1.1 task group
- 1.2 terms of reference
- 1.3 recommendations
- 1.4 context of review
- 1.5 evidence gathering

### **2 Background**

### **3 Outcome of review**

### **4 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Results from North West  
Kent Racial Equality  
Council questionnaires

Appendix 2 – BrowseAloud software  
prices

Appendix 3 – Gravesham Access Groups  
'Wish' list for the short,  
medium and long term

Appendix 4 - Results from Connexions  
questionnaire

Appendix 5 – Notes from evidence  
gathering sessions

<p><b>1 Executive summary.</b></p> <p>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</p> <p>1.2 The terms of reference for the review were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To review the current level of accessibility to council services for minority groups</li> <li>• To identify shortfalls in how minority groups access services</li> <li>• To research best practice in other local authorities that have successfully addressed the issues associated with access to services for minority groups</li> <li>• To make recommendations to cabinet on the outcome of the review.</li> </ul> <p>1.3 Recommendations</p> <p>1.3.1 <b>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.</b></p> <p>1.3.2 <b>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</b></p>	<p>in the council's Disability Equalities Scheme.</p> <p>1.3.3 <b>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.)</b></p> <p>1.3.4 <b>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</b></p> <p>1.3.5 <b>The council's senior officers to become more involved in community networking</b></p> <p>1.3.6 <b>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</b></p> <p>1.3.7 <b>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.</b></p> <p>1.3.8 <b>To make more use of voluntary groups within the borough to help with the council's equalities agenda.</b></p> <p>1.3.9 <b>Consultation should be managed, relevant, targetted and focussed on</b></p>
---	--

- 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 ammendment of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which placed a duty on all
- 1.5 Evidence gathering
- public sector authorities to promote disability equality.
- 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.

## **2. Background.**

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to place a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality. In response to this local authorities were required to produce publish and implement a Disability Equality Scheme (DES) by December 2006.

The council's Disability Equality Scheme says that "The involvement of disabled stakeholders in drawing up this scheme is vital, and this must take the form of "active engagement" of disabled stakeholders, rather than just 'consultation'. The guidance from the Disability Rights Commission states clearly that such involvement must: "use accessible mechanisms and must be focused, proportionate, influential and transparent." Disabled people must be involved throughout the design and development of the DES and associated Action Plan, and with the regular reviews and subsequent evaluations of the scheme once in place."

Gravesham Borough Council has councillor representation on Gravesham Access Group, Age Concern, Citizens Advice Bureau, Dartford and Gravesham Women's Aid amongst others.

A statutory duty has been placed on authorities to carry out Disability Impact Assessments on its policies, strategies and services. Carrying out these assessments can ensure that the services it provides fulfil the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation.

## **3 Outcome of review**

### **3.1 Gravesham Borough Council**

The authority has a Community Cohesion Steering Group chaired by the Director of Regeneration and its membership includes the Lead Member for Health and Well-being.

The council is unable to quantify the level of accessibility to the council's services by minority groups. However, the perception is that as the council has not received any complaints that the system is working fairly well.

As part of the council's Disability Equalities Scheme (DES) a group called the Disability Equality Reference Group (DERG) has been established jointly with Dartford Borough Council. The DES describes the role of this group as "...to identify barriers to services for disabled people and propose suggestions for effectively removing those barriers. The group will also assist with prioritising elements of the DES Action Plan, and help to develop policies that support disabled people to participate in public life."

When carrying out this review the task group wanted to take evidence from this group as it had been established to address the very issues that were the subject of the review. However, it was unable to contact the group as it had no identified point of contact or chairman. The only person who seemingly had any knowledge of the DERG was an ex employee of Gravesham Council who was now a partner in a private consultation agency.

Some minority groups, such as young people, get their services from KCC. It would be beneficial if the delivery of these and other similar services could be devolved to local authorities so that the money could be spent more effectively.

A General User Satisfaction survey carried out in 2006/07 as part of Best Value asked the question:

### Overall how well does the council keep its residents informed about its services & benefits?

Of those who responded (1288)

	All	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	White	BME
Very well/well	40%	27%	36%	35%	40%	46%	49%	55%	40%	44%
Not very well/not at all well	47	64	58	58	48	46	34	23	47	40

- Nearly 3 times as many people in the 18 – 24 year age group considered themselves not well informed as those who thought themselves well informed.
- Only in the over 65 age groups do more people feel well informed than not.
- More people from the Black Minority Ethnic groups feel better informed about council services than non BME residents.

At the 2008/09 council tax workshop involving representatives from the authorities resident's panel the research agency facilitating the event concluded, in its final report, that "Resident's attending the workshop had little knowledge of the range of services provided by the Borough Council or the County Council. There were also issues with the way in which the Council groups and labels services, with many residents confused as to what services actually provided" (sic).

As part of the review North West Kent Racial Equality Council (NWKREC) carried out a survey of members of the BME community knowledge and experience of council services. Unfortunately only 10 completed questionnaires were returned. Of this very small sample **50% said they were aware of the services offered by GBC, 30% said they were not** and **50% were satisfied with the helpfulness of the staff whilst 20% were not**. The NWKREC also very kindly

made available the results of a previous 'Connecting Communities' survey they had carried out which sought the BME communities views on the services delivered by Kent Police, the Council and Kent Fire and Rescue Service. One question was "**Do you have confidence in the services delivered by your local council?**" in reply **160 said yes, 60 said no and 76 didn't know**. The full results of both these surveys are shown in appendix 1.

#### Recommendation

**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.**

#### Recommendation

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

#### Recommendation

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

### **Recommendation**

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

### **Recommendation**

**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**

#### 3.2 The Council's website.

When the World Wide Web was set up some guidelines under the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative, to ensure that websites were accessible to all users, were drawn up. The content management system that GBC uses to update our website complies with these strict guidelines.

The council offers lots of opportunities to download information and pay bills through the website and it is in the council's interest that people from minority groups are able to take full advantage of all that the website has to offer.

Software is available to enable people to read and understand text on a web page but there is a set up and ongoing cost in deploying this type of software. The cost of this 'screen reader' software was looked at sometime ago but the current costs are not known.

Currently BrowseAloud would charge £2495 for the main site plus £495 each additional sites operated by Gravesham, although they do offer discounts for longer contracts and have other special offers occasionally (Appendix 2).

Due to a lack of funding no 'user' testing to ensure full compliance of the council's website has been carried out. With all the groups that have been established to help the council meet the needs of disabled

people in accessing services there should be some individuals who would be prepared to carry out some simple checks on our website at little or no cost to the council.

### **Recommendation**

**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 from disabled users of the website on its accessibility.)**

#### 3.3 Gravesham Access Group

The group were of the opinion that the council had done a lot of work over the years to improve access for disabled people. However, it wasn't just about installing a ramp and assuming everything was alright. Access was a much broader issue than that and needed thinking through. It was often the smallest of changes that brought the biggest benefits.

It was a generally held view that it was unrealistic to expect that every council document could be made available in every format. A common sense approach was necessary.

The group also thought that the council often made beneficial changes to how services could be accessed but didn't publicise these changes as well as they could.

The GBC website was not very accessible which was a bit of a problem as more and more services are being made available through the website.

The group thought that a dedicated officer covering diversity would be a good thing. This didn't need to be a full time post. The post holder would be able to bring together all the departments in the council to address the different issues and raise awareness.

The group thought that perhaps the council didn't take full advantage of the voluntary groups in the borough that could help the council to meet the needs of the disabled community. For example, the council's magazine Your Borough was not available in audio format but a local amateur dramatic society would be more than happy to read for any recording of the magazine for circulation to the visually impaired and those who had difficulty reading.

The chairman of the review asked the group to produce a 'wish list' for the short, medium and long term. This list is reproduced in Appendix 3

#### **Recommendation**

**The council to actively promote any changes it makes to the accessibility of its services through the many agencies representing minority groups in the borough.**

#### **Recommendation**

**To make more use of voluntary groups within the borough to help with the council's equalities agenda.**

#### 3.4 Lewisham

Lewisham has achieved level 5 of the Government's Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) in 2005. The authority uses ESLG as a framework for evidencing and managing progress on the equalities agenda.

The council makes the equalities agenda work as well for the organisation itself, with its cultural and language sensitivity, as it does for the wider community.

Lewisham uses the Mayor's consultation board as a streamlined mechanism for ensuring that all consultations are relevant and achieve the required outcomes. This best practice is shared across the authority.

The council uses many different forms of consultation. Their annual resident's survey asks similar questions each year and uses scientific sampling methods to ensure that those who respond represent the demographic profile of the borough. The answers, some going back as far as the 1990s, are then fed into equalities schemes and service plans for actions on issues as they arise.

Regular engagement with community leaders, other community and faith groups is also promoted.

#### **Recommendation**

**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.**

#### 3.5 Gravesham Age Concern

Many of Age Concern's clients would go to them for advice rather than the council which they saw as being large and impersonal. There was a general lack of knowledge about the council's services and how to access them. Any information leaflets sent through the post were generally ignored and it was suggested that the leaflets be made available through the centre where staff could explain things.

The centre's staff had contact with a large number of elderly residents through its meals and other services carried out in people's homes. This contact could be used by the council to impart information and get feedback on any issues of concern. Another idea put forward was that a representative of the council visit the centre and give the clients and staff a presentation on what the council did for elderly residents of the borough and to repeat this visit occasionally.



## **Recommendation**

**That the council work more closely with Age Concern and other similar agencies to publicise the council's services and to engage with the people that they represent.**

### 3.6 Tunbridge Wells

Tunbridge Wells District Council has two councillors who are "Champions for Accessibility". Although this practice is at an early stage these councillors have regular meetings with officers to discuss accessibility issues. This may be an alternative to appointing someone at officer level to promote the equalities agenda and warrants further investigation.

## **Recommendation**

**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.**

### 3.7 Connexions

Connexions Kent & Medway provides a free, impartial and confidential service offering advice, guidance, support and personal development services to all 13 to 19 year-olds whatever their background and needs.

This service is extended to help those up to the age of 25 who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

One of the major issues affecting young people is housing. The problems arise with those in the 16 -18 age range where there are no short term housing options for those trying to deal with violent relationships, as well as other issues affecting their lives. Young people in this age group who have left home and, as a consequence, are deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless fall outside the remit of the council.

Although some issues are addressed through the local Youth Strategy they cannot change current policy, it was discussed that there could be an opportunity to work with a housing association to address this issue.

A good way of getting council information into schools and colleges in the borough would be to use the Connexions network of links.

Connexions, on behalf of the review, asked their clients to complete a short questionnaire. Twenty one questionnaires were completed.

In response to the question "How well informed do you feel about what services the council delivers?" 19% felt very well or well informed, 48% felt not well or not at all well informed.

When asked "where would you go for information about council services?" 34% said they would go to the Civic Centre and/or the council's website, 66% said that they would choose one or more from - the CAB, Connexions and the Gr@nd.

Other comments were:

"They (the council) do not take young people seriously"

"It's too difficult to speak to the people you want to. You get promised a call back but it doesn't happen....."

"They (the council) need to be more supportive to young people and listen to what we need. They need to help more quickly when in trouble with housing"

"I think they (the council) need to provide more things for young people and teenagers. But it's good that you have redeveloped areas in Gravesend"

The full results from the survey are shown in Appendix 4

### **Recommendation**

**Explore the possibility of setting up, in partnership with a housing association, a 'half way house' for those 16-18 year olds trying to get out of violent relationships and those with other issues affecting their lives.**

### **Recommendation**

**Use organisations like Connexions to help the council to engage with young people and distribute information on council services.**

#### 3.8 The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The CAB's main problem, probably shared by the Council, is the lack of a common language.

The Bureau are working on a basic pamphlet giving information on the kinds of things newly arrived people need to know about - from TV licence to what services are available and how to get them. Currently, all that is available is basic info in the A8 languages (Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian) on employment rights – which is a start, but not enough. Once the pamphlet is complete the Council will be very welcome to make use of it.

The major languages in Gravesham are probably covered - i.e. Punjabi. But there's a

shortage of information available to the other groups in the borough, particularly written information on the services available to them. Some examples that are available are the Worker Registration Scheme which has an application form in English plus some guidance notes in the 8 "A8" languages. Also available in these languages is basic information from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) on employment rights and the 5 CAB fact sheets available via Advice Guide ([www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)).

(Other languages likely to be required due to recent additions to the EU are Bulgarian and Romanian)

Accessing services themselves is always going to be a problem where the person speaks little or no English and whilst it wouldn't be appropriate for the Council to spend a fortune on interpreters, having access to Russian speakers could solve the problem to a degree as many of the people from the A8 countries have some Russian.

So in summary more information printed and on the internet and more staff training. A large number of people attend the Bureau because they have fallen into difficulty, don't understand the systems, can't communicate in English to the 'authorities' - and the CAB along with other organisations are in the situation of not having the languages readily available to help their clients.

## Appendix 1

# Scrutiny review of the access to GBC services by minority groups

## Joint survey with North West Kent Racial Equality Council

<p><b>Q1 Are you aware of the services GBC offers?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 50.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 30.0%</p> <p><i>don't know</i> 20.0%</p>	<p><b>Q11 What is the first part of your postcode eg DA11?</b></p> <p>60.0%</p>
<p><b>Q2 Have you accessed any GBC services in the last 12 months</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 50.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>don't know</i> 10.0%</p>	<p><b>Q12 Would you describe yourself as having a disability?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 40.0%</p>
<p><b>Q3 How did you access this service</b></p> <p><i>at the civic centre</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>by telephone</i> 10.0%</p>	<p><b>Q13 How old are you?</b></p> <p><i>Under 18</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>19 - 25</i> 20.0%</p> <p><i>36 - 45</i> 20.0%</p> <p><i>46 - 55</i> 20.0%</p> <p><i>56 - 65</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>Over 65</i> 10.0%</p>
<p><b>Q4 Were you satisfied with the helpfulness of the staff?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 20.0%</p>	<p><b>Q14 What is your ethnic group?</b></p> <p><i>White British</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>White Irish</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>other white background</i> 0.0%</p>
<p><b>Q5 Are you aware that information on GBC services is available in different languages and formats?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 60.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 40.0%</p>	<p><b>Mixed</b></p> <p><i>White and Black Caribbean</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>White and Black African</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>White and Asian</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>other mixed background</i> 0.0%</p>
<p><b>Q6 Have you accessed any of our services through our website?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 60.0%</p>	<p><b>Asian or Asian British</b></p> <p><i>Indian</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>Pakistani</i> 20.0%</p> <p><i>Bangladeshi</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>other Asian background</i> 0.0%</p>
<p><b>Q7 If not why not?</b></p> <p><i>no access to a computer</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>too difficult</i> 30.0%</p>	<p><b>Black or Black British</b></p> <p><i>Caribbean</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>African</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>other Black background</i> 0.0%</p>
<p><b>Q8 Do you have confidence in the services delivered by your local council?</b></p> <p><i>yes</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>no</i> 10.0%</p> <p><i>don't know</i> 40.0%</p>	<p><b>Chinese or other ethnic group</b></p> <p><i>Chinese</i> 0.0%</p> <p><i>other ethnic group</i> 10.0%</p>
<p><b>Q9 Any other comments?</b></p> <p>10.0%</p>	
<p><b>Q10 Are you?</b></p> <p><i>male</i> 40.0%</p> <p><i>female</i> 30.0%</p>	

## Appendix 2

### Results of Connecting Communities Survey

Have you used services delivered by Kent Police, the council or Kent Fire and Rescue Service in the last 12 months?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>112</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>296</b>
Were you happy with the level of service received?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>72</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>148</b>
Did you make a complaint?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>12</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>52</b>
What was the outcome?			
Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Still ongoing	total
<b>12</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>68</b>
Did you think that the service delivered was culturally sensitive?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>36</b>	<b>16</b>		<b>52</b>
Do you think that you received a better or worse level of service due to your ethnicity?			
Better	Worse	No different	total
<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>
Do you have confidence in the services delivered by Kent Police			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>184</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>296</b>
Do you have confidence in the services delivered by Kent Fire & Rescue Service?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>176</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>296</b>
Do you have confidence in the services delivered by your local council?			
Yes	No	Don't know	total
<b>160</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>296</b>

## Appendix 3

TOPICS		
SHORT-TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG-TERM
<b>Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term targets to achieve as many as possible of these items – and others which may come to mind of those not present at Nov. Mtg.</b>	To continue with the <b>Group's aims in making more people aware of disability issues</b> and assist with education if required. Also <b>improving publicity</b> for awareness.	<b>Total awareness by everyone</b> , starting from schools onwards <b>regarding disability issues</b> . Also ongoing, <b>improvements in publicity in all formats/ languages</b>
Appointment of <b>dedicated GBC Officer</b> to deal with all issues relating to <b>diversity and equality</b> .	As above.	As above.
<b>GBC Website and links</b> being made totally <b>accessible to ALL</b>		
<b>Improving and widening publicity</b> regarding accessibility of <b>all Borough services and relative documentation</b> .	<b>Borough Magazine/News Sheets/Official Forms</b> , etc., to also be made available on <b>audio disc/tape</b> , possibly using voluntary help offered by a local Amateur Theatre group.	
Keeping <b>Community Post Offices open</b> until all proposed future premises fully comply with DDA for <b>access to ALL</b>	(Concern expressed about access/availability to Post Offices throughout the <b>wider Borough</b> , not just town centre)	<b>All Post Office premises</b> to be fully DDA compliant with wide aisles, no obstructions, etc., and information available in formats <b>suitable for ALL</b> .
Officers don't always understand people's problems in form completion of forms. Sadly, <b>people tend not to approach their local Councillors</b> , but go direct to the Council, where they get passed from person to person. <b>A map covering what streets are in which Ward</b> would be very helpful	Again, training on <b>changing biased thinking</b> regarding <b>individual choices</b> on aids being offered and possible offence being taken by offering help.	Perhaps the suggested <b>map</b> could be incorporated in the <b>Borough Magazine</b> , alongside the contact details for Councillors?
Accessibility to <b>Police</b> ? Some felt removal of Police Services from Windmill Street Police Station to <b>Civic Centre</b> with shared Reception Area would be a big improvement.		
	<b>Enforcement re misuse in Blue Badge Parking Spaces</b> .	
	<b>Enforcement re parking</b> partially on <b>kerbs</b> , causing <b>obstructions</b> .	
	<b>Enforcement re obstructions</b> caused in pedestrian areas by <b>'A'-Signs, etc.</b>	
		Whilst it was appreciated that GBC had taken DDA into account with <b>Public Toilets</b> , all cafes, shops, etc., should also be totally compliant.
<b>Accessible taxis</b> – encourage more firms to change to these or suitably adapted vehicles.	<b>Awareness Training for Taxi Licence Holders</b>	<b>ALL Taxi Licence Holders</b> to provide accessible vehicles.

## Appendix 4

**Gravesham Borough Council's overview scrutiny committee has appointed a task group to carry out a review of the access to council services by minority groups. By minority groups we mean the elderly, young people, the disabled and black minority ethnic groups.**

**The task group would welcome your input to the review and would appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete this questionnaire**

**Q1 How well informed do you feel about what services the council delivers?**

<i>very well informed</i>	9.5%
<i>well informed</i>	9.5%
<i>neither</i>	33.3%
<i>not well informed</i>	28.6%
<i>not at all well informed</i>	19.0%

**Q2 Where would you go for information about council services?**

<i>The Civic Centre</i>	33.3%
<i>The council's website</i>	14.3%
<i>The CAB</i>	4.8%
<i>Connexions</i>	66.7%
<i>The Gr@nd</i>	19.0%
<i>Other</i>	0.0%
<i>please specify</i>	0.0%

**Q3 Have you accessed any council services in the last 12 months?**

<i>yes</i>	28.6%	Go to Q4
<i>no</i>	66.7%	Go to Q5

**Q4 How did you access this service?**

<i>directly</i>	14.3%	Go to Q5
<i>through the council through another organisation</i>	14.3%	Go to Q6

**Q5 Were you satisfied with the service you received?**

<i>yes</i>	19.0%
<i>no</i>	23.8%

**Q6 Did you choose not to go to the council because?**

<i>you weren't sure whether the council offered the service you required</i>	33.3%
<i>you think the council is too big and impersonal</i>	9.5%
<i>you got an unsatisfactory response from the council with previous enquiries</i>	42.9%
<i>other</i>	9.5%
<i>please specify</i>	14.3%

**Q7 Is there anything else you would like to add about the council and its services**

33.3%

**Q8 How old are you?**

85.7%

Connexions questionnaire

Literal responses to Q7 – Is there anything else you would like to add about the council and its services?

- 1) They do not take young people seriously
- 2) I think they need to provide more thing for young people and teenagers. But its good that you have redeveloped areas in gravesend.
- 3) Its too difficult speak to the people you want too. You get promised a call back but it doesn't happen. I asked my connexions worker to help me with the council.
- 4) Not helpful, need to ask people what they need
- 5) i think they should do more for teenage mums. I have been waiting ages I'm pregnant and homeless
- 6) they need to be more supportive to young people and listen to what we need. They need to help more quickly when in trouble with housing.
- 7) not for young people. not helpful 2 years ago housing.

## Appendix 5

Evidence gathering session with Gravesham Access Group.

Date: - 5 November 2007

Location: Civic Centre, Gravesend

Task group members - Cllrs Burden and Collins.

The council had done a lot of work over the years to improve access for disabled people. However, it isn't just about installing a ramp and assuming everything will be alright. Access is a much broader issue than that and needs thinking through. It is often the smallest of changes that bring the biggest benefits.

It was a generally held view that it was unrealistic to expect that every council document be made available in every format. A common sense approach was necessary.

The group thought that a dedicated officer covering diversity would be a good thing. This didn't need to be a full time post. The post holder would be able to bring together all the departments in the council to address the different issues and raise awareness. It was pointed out that Christopher Woodley, Head of Policy and Partnerships had responsibility within the council for diversity.

The group also thought that the council often made beneficial changes to how services could be accessed but didn't publicise these changes as well as they could have.

The GBC website was not very accessible which is a bit of a problem as more and more services are being made available through the website.

People who have difficulty writing can find the completion of forms that have been emailed to them much easier.

The group held the view that it was important to offer people the choice of taking advantage of any aids that were available rather than to assume that by offering help they would be offended.

The group then discussed the relocation of the main post office in the W H Smiths store. They felt that this relocation would compromise accessibility for those the group represents. The further closure of sub post offices in the borough would only add to the difficulties. It was suggested that some council services could be made available through sub post offices and make them more viable.

The other issue was the closure of the police station and the proposed police presence in the civic centre.

The police would have a presence in the civic centre from the spring of 2008 and would be sharing reception. The service would be starting earlier, finishing later and be available on Saturdays. An out of hours service will be available by telephone.

The group felt that this may be an improvement as the existing reception area at the police station was very intimidating.



The group thought that perhaps the council didn't take full advantage of the voluntary groups in the borough that could help the council to meet the needs of the disabled community. For example, the council's magazine Your Borough was not available in audio format but a local amateur dramatic society would be more than happy to read for any recording of the magazine for circulation to the visually impaired and those who had difficulty reading.

The chair of the task group asked the group to provide a list of improvements for the short, medium and long term that would bring the most benefit to the disabled community. This list is shown in Appendix 2

Evidence gathering session with GBC

Date: 6 November 2007

Location: Civic Centre, Gravesend

Interviewees - Christopher Woodley and Kevin Burbidge

Task group members - Cllrs Burden & Collins

Kevin Burbidge chairs the Community Cohesion Steering Group and its membership included the lead member for Community Health and Well – Being.

The council's comprehensive equalities policy and the dignity at work policy offer clear guidelines as to the relationship between the council and its employees. They have also been instrumental in bringing about an increase in the percentage of its staff from the minority ethnic communities, up from 2.5% to 8.5% over the last 5 years, which means that the make-up of the authority is now more representative of the borough as a whole.

It is difficult to quantify the level of accessibility to the council's services by disabled groups. The perception is that as the council has received no complaints that the system is working fairly well.

There are a number of groups that are consulted on disability issues.

Gravesham Borough Council is involved in the Peer Support Initiative (PSI) along with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Bristol City Councils. This is a national project that aims to develop more effective approaches to undertaking equalities impact assessments.

The carrying out of impact assessments is part of the action plan which is itself part of the Disability Equalities Scheme that all councils have to have in place. Impact assessments are intended to gauge the effectiveness of new and existing policies in delivering services to minority groups.

GBC has been very successful in bringing communities together through a series of community activities and awards.

However, there is always room for improvement in the way the council engages with the community. The senior officers group doesn't do enough to get out and about in the borough. There needs to be more involvement in community networking

The council prides itself on its partnership working with the Racial Equality Council, in housing and community safety amongst many others. The meeting thought that it would be an advantage to have a 'gateway' centre in Gravesham that could enable residents to plug into, for example, KCC and PCT services directly.

It would also be beneficial if services such as youth services could be devolved to the local authority from KCC. The local authority needed to have more say in how the money was to be spent.

There needs to be more equalities training for both members and officers.

### **How do you inform the public of changes?**

Through pamphlets, the website and Your Borough.

There are many options for access to and payment for services made available through our website but not all our residents are able to take advantage of them.

There are major developments currently and in the future where the council is going to have to manage expectations. New communities particularly those from Eastern Europe are going to make demands on the authority not least for additional translation requirements and it may be necessary to divert resources to settle these new communities.

The government should be continually lobbied to provide additional funding but it isn't just about money, the council needs to look at its way of working in order to free up resources. Much of the expertise on equalities issues is concentrated in one area and the council needs to increase the knowledge base about equalities across the council to meet the growing needs of its existing and future residents.

It was generally accepted that members and officers need to work more closely together to deliver services to minority groups.

**From:** Houstoun, Andy  
**Sent:** 28 January 2008 12:36  
**To:** Finch, Doug  
**Cc:** Daly, Robin  
**Subject:** Scrutiny review of access to services by minority groups

Doug,

The Content Management System that we use to update the website complies with the strict W3C Web Accessibility Initiative guidelines (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php>).

This ensures, among many things, such as:

- All images should have 'alt' text associated with the image to enable technologies such as screen readers to read out the alternative text which should describe the image to the web user.
- Links/Downloads has alternative text associated with it.
- Any tables also have a description/summary of what it contains

There are companies that employ disabled web users to try and navigate your site to see if they can use it fully and report on any issues so that the web developer can then rectify any faults.

- One such company is the Shaw Trust, who has a Website Accessibility Accreditation Service (<http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk/page/3/59>)
- The RNIB also has a Web Access Centre ([http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public\\_tools.hcsp](http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_tools.hcsp))

There are many automated testing software packages available, but although these claim to check fully for accessibility, it is only a piece of software and will interpret each and every accessibility guidelines literally, without using common sense and the remainder of information on the page.

It is recommended that automated accessibility testing tools, although useful, should be used alongside manual checking to ensure accuracy of testing.

Since we have had no funding allocated to this sort of user testing, we have never gone to suppliers for any costs to check fully our compliance with accessibility.

There is also software applications that can help people 'read' and understand the text on a web page. BrowseAloud and ReadSpeak are companies that provide software that will read out the webpage to a visitor to our site. They can help people whose first language is not English, people with dyslexia, and people with slight sight impairment to mention just a few. In general, people with sever disabilities are likely to have specialist software to help them navigate websites.

We do not have any current costs for either of the 'screen reader' software mentioned above as it has been quite a while since we last looked at these, but the pricing policy include an on-going cost too.

Hope the above is of some help to you.

Regards,

Andy  
Andy Houstoun  
Senior IT Developer

Evidence gathering session at London Borough of Lewisham

Date: 30 Jan 2008

Location: Lewisham Town Hall

Interviewees:-

Councillor Helen Klier – Cabinet Member for Resources and Lead Member for Equalities

Barrie Neal – Head of Corporate Policy & Governance

Lesley Lee – Head of Strategy & Performance, Regeneration

Dawn Bayley – Policy & Strategy Manager, Customer Services

Geraldine England – Principal Policy Officer, Policy and Partnerships

Task group members – Cllrs Burden and Collins

The London Borough of Lewisham has a population of 250,000 with over a third being from BME groups with this figure expected to rise to 45% by 2026.

The borough, with 120 different languages, has been at the forefront of the Equalities agenda having been one of first authorities to establish a race relations committee and womens committee in the 1970s

The authority has values the diversity of its workforce and as a consequence when it needs to recruit it can call on a bigger labour market. The equalities agenda works as well for the organisation with its language and cultural sensitivity as it does for the wider community.

The council has developed a Comprehensive Equalities Scheme which has the statutory duties (race, disability and gender) embedded and is working on the integration of age, sexual orientation and religion.

Under the strong leadership of the directly elected Mayor, Steve Bullock, Lewisham sought to achieve level 5 of the Government's Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) by 2005. This was achieved though the council had to be reassessed in May 2007 when the IDeA formally introduced a new external assessment procedure. Lewisham will again be next assessed on the ESLG framework in 2010. The value of the ESLG is that it provides a framework for evidencing and managing progress on the equalities agenda.

Lewisham had recently let a contract for interpretation, translation and transcription services and will be monitoring the requests for languages and where in the borough they were coming from. This information will be used by service areas across the Council to ensure they are providing services to meet the needs of new and emerging communities.. Service users and Community Groups are also being surveyed as to the quality of the service received and as a result any necessary changes to the contract would be made. This service had been expanded to include British Sign Language and was beginning to be used by other public sector bodies such as Lewisham hospital.

Lewisham had introduced a streamlined consultation process in which all consultations had to pass through and be approved by the Mayor's consultation board. The board would ask questions like why? who with? how? This makes sure that consultations are relevant and achieve the required outcomes. Best practice can thus be shared across the organisation through this mechanism.

The authority carries out each year an annual resident's survey. The answers to some of the same questions can be tracked back as far as the early 1990s. The survey is face to face and scientific sampling methods ensure that those who respond to the survey are representative of the borough profile. Questions range from strategic concerns down to service specific views. Answers are mapped against the demographic profile of the borough and responses can then be fed into equalities schemes and service plans for action on issues as they might arise.

No single body can be used to get the communities view so Lewisham uses a variety of engagement techniques – focus groups, area forums, citizen juries, e-govt but the borough doesn't currently use a citizen's panel.. Regular engagement with community leaders, and other community and faith groups is also promoted.

The authority is seeking to learn from the private sector lessons and other public sector agencies. Useful input to the borough's work has come from such wide ranging interests as the Metropolitan Police and Lloyds-TSB.

In an effort to engage the younger people of the borough the council has introduced a young mayor and deputy mayor. The mayor and deputy are elected by the pupils across the borough's schools. The young mayor is elected for a one year term and is supported by a deputy mayor and team of mayoral advisers. The young mayor has a budget of £20,000 to support delivery of their manifesto. This scheme has credibility and is fully supported by schools and the young people.

Lewisham has introduced an 'Equalities Impact Assessment' toolkit. Lewisham sees Equalities Impact Assessments not only as a means of identifying the effects of a policy or service on different groups in a community but also as a way of analysing the impact of the delivery of a service or policy on these groups. EIAs cover the equalities impact across race, gender, disability, age, faith/belief and sexual orientation.

Evidence gathering session with Age Concern

Date: 1 February 2008

Location: The Fleming Resource Centre.

Marilyn Curtis - Manager

Annette Davies -

Members of the committee

- Many would go to Age Concern rather than the council for advice
- Council seen as big and impersonal.
- Most never read any leaflets that come through their door
- "Don't have much need to access council services".
- The list of contact numbers distributed by the council is useful.
- Many private home owners and those who had bought their council houses thought that everything was now their responsibility and the council no longer had a role to play
- Some had a "stay in doors and don't tell anyone in case 'they' do something" approach when they had a problem
- It was suggested that it would be a good idea if someone from the council went to the centre and gave a presentation on what the council had to offer older people, what they were entitled to, how to get help etc. and went back occasionally to see how things were going.
- The council could make better use of the centre and its staff by keeping a supply of leaflets at the centre which would help the staff to explain what services were available and how to access them. They already had a stand with leaflets about pensions
- The centre had email updates from trading standards about rogue traders and the council could use similar methods to update details of changes to services.
- Staff from Age concern carried out 130 baths a week and delivered 80 meals a day so this would be an opportunity to distribute information from the council and for the council to pick up on any issues.
- There was a general lack of information on what council services were available and how to access them.

Evidence gathering session with Connexions

Date: 11 March 2008

Location: Connexions offices, Gravesend.

Interviewees:-

Jan Fenning – Manager (Dartford/Gravesham)

Julia Ward

Task group members - Cllr Burden

Connexions Kent & Medway provides a free, impartial and confidential service offering advice, guidance, support and personal development services to all 13 to 19 year-olds whatever their background and needs.

This service is extended to help those up to the age of 25 who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Connexions is a registered charity and is funded by KCC

The service is delivered by Personal Advisers who are based in schools, colleges, at Connexions Access Points and in a range of community settings.

The services for young people include information, advice and guidance on careers and learning, jobs, training, housing, money, relationships and health.

Connexions work in partnership with a number of agencies including local authorities, schools, colleges, educational services and youth and social services.

One of the major issues affecting young people is housing. The problems arise with those in the 16 -18 age range where there are no short term housing options for those in possible violent relationships, as well as other issues affecting their lives. People in this age group are deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless and therefore fall outside the remit of the council although some issues are addressed through the local Youth Strategy they cannot change current policy, it was discussed that there could be an opportunity to also work with a housing association to address this issue.

There is a general lack of knowledge of what the council does among the people that come to Connexions for help and advice. When the council tries to engage young people it needs to use methods and language that they are familiar with. Organisations like Connexions have great experience of what works when communicating with young people which could be of great benefit to the council when trying to get their message across to this age group.



Young people feel unlistened to and go to Connexions for advice rather than the council because they don't know who to ask. If they have been able to contact someone and they have promised to be in touch nothing happens and calls are not returned.

In the rural areas there is a transport barrier that affects young people's ability to get to and from work. Bus services are regularly cancelled leaving users to seek alternatives such as cabs, which can be costly for those on a low income. Fastrack is good if you are on the route or can get to it easily.

It was suggested that a link to the Gravesham website from the Connexions website would be a good idea. A good way of getting council information into schools and colleges in the borough would be to use the Connexions network of links.

Young people need to be introduced to local services and developments in the borough from an early age. People need to be informed about the impact of developments like Ebbsfleet in a language that they can understand. The economic and social implications, answers to questions like are there going to be enough hospitals, schools etc. Kent Thameside has done some work on this subject through links into the school curriculum using information sessions and competitions, also working in partnership with other agencies. This year they will be addressing the types of job sectors that will be here from now until 2026.

Woodville Halls is not seen as being part of the council so young people are quite happy to attend events there. The newly revamped foyer area of the Civic Centre along with the cafeteria is seen as being much more friendly and inviting.