

TOPIC BRIEF

TOPIC TITLE

Access to Services

PPB(s) responsible: Corporate Services Officer Lead: Tel...

Planned start/end dates...May 2008 – March 2009.....

Target PPB meeting

Topic description and scope

The Employment Learning and Skills PPB received the final report of the Community Cohesion Topic Group in September 2007. One of the recommendations was that the Corporate Services PPB be alerted to emerging concerns about perceived barriers to accessing services. These were stated to include opening hours, disabled access, transport, difficult locations, information and communication, bureaucracy, quality of response and perceived attitudes to certain client groups. Corporate Services PPB were invited to consider whether the issue was worthy of investigation or scrutiny.

At a basic level, community cohesion requires services that are sensitive to the needs of individual users and accessible to everyone who wants to use them. Discrimination can happen indirectly, for example when a particular facility is placed far from a community which may want to use it, or is inappropriate for their use. Services should not just avoid discrimination, but they should actively encourage interaction and provide opportunities for local people to meet others. They can also provide opportunity for the Council to reach hard to help communities. As a minimum, any public service should meet its duties under the whole range of equalities legislation, and have in place arrangements to monitor provision for adverse impact on sectors of the community.

The Community Cohesion Topic Group found that the core values at the heart of community cohesion were widely accepted by all people, ie the need for greater respect and tolerance, for mutual understanding and for a greater fairness and equity in all that happens in Halton. In evidence gathering, it was clear that communities believed that across Halton there was a wide range of services and facilities on offer. However, given the geography and topography of the Borough, low levels of car ownership and poor public transport (especially after 6.00 pm), many found it difficult to access the services available. In addition, the different life styles people now lead are sometimes out of kilter with the 9.00-5.00 availability of many services. It was also suggested that for some groups –

especially young people and vulnerable people –there were a range of other barriers that prevented people accessing services. These findings lead to the recommendation that Corporate Services PPB be alerted to the issues.

Why this topic was chosen

The topic was chosen to look into the perception of barriers to accessing services.

Key outputs and outcomes sought

To examine the way people currently access Council services and might prefer to access them in the future, explore the impact and opportunities for better service access provided by changing technology and media and pay special attention to people who were hard to reach and failing to access services they want and need.

Which of Halton’s 5 strategic priorities this topic addresses and the key objectives and improvement targets it will help to achieve

The topic touches upon all of the Council’s 5 strategic priorities. It is important that the Council considers the provision of its services across all of its areas to ensure that they are provided as fully as possible to all sectors of the community.

Nature of expected/desired PPB input

To look into the provision of services and consider whether the needs of the community as a whole are being met in the best possible manner.

Preferred mode of operation

By carrying out investigations and discussions with persons affected and looking at a sample of reports.

Media/communication implications

None at this stage

Agreed and signed by:

PPB Chair Officer

Date:.....

Date:.....