

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **External Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Monday 24 November 2008**

#### **Diverse Communities – Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Report of:** Senior Overview and Scrutiny Committee

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Committee on 15 July 2008, Members began their review into community cohesion and the integration of ethnic minorities in the Borough. At this meeting, Members discussed potential witnesses for the review and suggested that it would be useful to speak with the Chief Executive of Maidstone Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- 1.2 The Chief Executive of Maidstone Citizen's Advice Bureau, Bonni Malhotra, was due to attend the Committee's meeting on 19 August 2008, however this meeting was cancelled due to an administrative error. Mr Malhotra has kindly agreed to attend this rescheduled meeting to contribute to the review.

#### **2. Citizens Advice Bureau**

- 2.1 The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice, and by influencing policymakers.
- 2.2 Citizens Advice's Strategic Plan sets out its commitment to become "a first point of contact for discrimination advice<sup>1</sup>". The Citizens Advice website states that:

"We believe the service has an obligation to provide high quality discrimination advice to our current clients, and to make sure traditionally excluded groups can exercise their right to get help from mainstream services like CAB. We believe that working in partnership is the most effective way to make the most of our various strengths and of limited resources.<sup>2</sup>"

This relates to all strands of diversity, i.e. race, religion, disability, gender, age and sexual orientation.

#### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to interview the Manager of the Maidstone Citizen's Advice Bureau with regard to its review of the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/publications/challenging\\_discrimination.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/publications/challenging_discrimination.htm)  
[accessed 31/07/08]

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

integration of ethnic minorities in the Borough, in particular considering the terms of reference for the review (attached at [Appendix A](#)).

## **Diverse Communities and Community Cohesion**

### **Final Scoping Document**

#### **What is the focus of this review?**

- The focus of this review is community cohesion and the integration of diverse communities, in particular ethnic minorities, in the Borough of Maidstone.
- The four categories of ethnic minorities that the review will focus on are:
  - The settled community
  - Economic migrants
  - Refugees and asylum seekers
  - Gypsies and travellers

#### **What are the questions that need answering?**

- What are the 'diverse communities' in Maidstone?
- What is the Council already doing to promote community cohesion?
- How do people living in Maidstone already feel about their communities?
- What are the main issues facing Maidstone with regard to community cohesion?
- How will the growth of Maidstone affect cohesion, particularly in rural areas which traditionally have less transient communities?
- How has the make-up of Maidstone's communities changed since the 2001 census? How is this information collected?
- What should the Council be doing to encourage integration and community cohesion?
- How is social housing allocated and how do providers of social housing in the Borough view their responsibilities towards encouraging integration of and between diverse communities?
- How do major employers cater for their staff from other countries when they first arrive in Maidstone?

#### **What are the objectives of this review (the terms of reference) and the desired outcomes?**

- Assess the make-up of Maidstone's communities.
- Identify areas of tension or potential areas of tension.
- Influence Council plans and services and the plans of external service providers to ensure they promote community cohesion and cater for all sectors of the community.
- Encourage integration in the Borough.