

The Highland Council
Community Safety, Public Engagement
and Equalities Committee
12 June 2014

Agenda Item	6
Report No	CPE 16/14

Report on actions from meeting with HUG and members of the Community Safety, Public Engagement and Equalities (CPE) Committee on 26 March 2014

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

Summary

Following each CPE committee, Members have agreed to sessions to hear the testimonies of local equality groups. This report summarises the issues that arose from a meeting with members of HUG which took place after the CPE on 26th March 2014. Issues raised by HUG are noted and Directors are asked to provide service responses where appropriate indicating activities already underway or proposals for new actions.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 places a positive duty on the Council to consider equality of opportunity in all its activities. The Act provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of the “protected Characteristics” of disability, race, gender reassignment, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 1.2 Members have agreed to private consultation sessions being held with local equalities groups to follow after each committee and that feedback on outcomes from previous private consultation sessions is provided. Groups attending these sessions are asked to highlight experiences of discrimination, prejudice and harassment, as well as examples of good practice in removing barriers, for example to accessing services or employment.
- 1.3 It has been noted that the stories behind the statistics, which are often very personal in nature, have helped Members to understand the complexities involved in delivering supportive solutions. These sessions have proved beneficial towards the Council developing equality outcomes based on evidence and involvement, and supporting the requirements placed on the Council by the Public Sector Equality Duty to give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality and foster good relations.
- 1.4 Following the CPE committee on 21 March, Members and key officers met with a number of representatives from HUG (Action for Mental Health).

2. HUG (Action for Mental Health)

- 2.1 HUG is a collective advocacy group established in 1996, representing the interests of users of mental health services across the Highlands and with a

network of 500 members and volunteers. Key aims include:

- reaching out to both users of mental health services and the wider community to ensure that user voices are heard
- challenging stigma and raising awareness and understanding of mental health issues
- breaking down the barriers that surround mental health by campaigning to improve the rights, services and treatments of people with mental health problems.

2.2 The HUG Communications Project challenges the stigma surrounding mental health problems through working with young people, the media and delivering awareness training to professionals. HUG works on a local, Highland and national level to influence policy and planning, and strives to ensure that the user voice is heard clearly in the development and delivery of services.

3. Issues arising from the meeting with HUG

3.1 HUG members were invited to tell Councillors and officers about their experience of access to Council services or employment, as well as any concerns about harassment, prejudice or community safety issues. A police representative was also in attendance.

3.2 A number of HUG members spoke on topics of interest following a concisely constructed programme and discussions took place on the following topics:

- Issues for parents whose children are taken into care
- Welfare reform
- Domestic violence
- Creative expression
- Mainstreaming mental health
- SPEAK (young people's group)
- Mental health in a remote area
- The Live Life Well project

3.3 The presentations and discussions that followed resulted in a number of potential actions for the Council. This was facilitated by HUG's presentation format where each speaker was asked to include "one thing that the Council could do". The issues raised by HUG are noted below.

3.4 Services that HUG members value

The HUG members present highlighted the importance and value they placed on the following services:

- The opportunities to take part in creative and arts groups. Those running in Merkinch, Inverness, were specifically mentioned.
- CAB services, especially given some of the difficulties group members have faced with Welfare Reform changes.
- Services for people affected by domestic violence. (This area of partnership working is addressed separately at this meeting of the Committee, and in the consultation session following it.)
- The support from HUG and the advocacy it provides.

3.5 Service improvements

The following improvements were requested:

- With young HUG members present, they focused on issues that mattered most to them and asked for more local services to help with eating disorders and for more flexibility in school to enable young people who are self-harming to feel included.
- Others talked about the difficulties Welfare Reform had brought and the stigma they felt about claiming benefits. They talked too about how people with mental ill-health can be more prone to self-stigmatising and that there should be better awareness of this from all service providers.
- HUG members felt passionately about the need to tackle discrimination in society. They felt that services should be designed, and staff should be trained, with human rights in mind.
- HUG members felt that 'to live life well needs community support.' This extends to services in general, and to public attitudes.
- HUG members also talked about living with mental ill health in rural communities and raised issues of the lack of confidentiality, the additional costs of rural life, care and support required for carers, the need for more affordable transport and subsidies to travel to hospital.

3.6 It is proposed that to take forward the issues raised:

1. They are considered in the Improvement Group for Adults with Mental Ill health and the Improvement Group for Children and Young People affected by Mental Ill Health and feed into their work plans;
2. The Council's approach to responding to Welfare Reform changes can include some additional targeted advice and support through HUG (currently under discussion with HUG);
3. HUG will be invited to form a focus group as part of the Council's budget consultation from mid-September 2014; and
4. That further awareness raising sessions are organised with HUG to involve the Council's senior management, including all Heads of Service, on the service issues people with mental ill health face and how the Council can respond sensitively.

3.7 Continuing engagement

There are three areas of engagement HUG would welcome:

- The opportunity to continue to engage with staff on training on mental health issues, whether through training materials or in person.
- Awareness raising for teachers and pupils of mental health issues, building on the work done so far in schools, including using the medium of drama; and
- An understanding of how HUG can feed into District Partnerships.

All of these can be organised and information has been passed to HUG on accessing discretionary grant funding to support training and awareness raising and on whom to contact to arrange attendance at a District Partnership

meeting, including the opportunity to present information to it.

4 Conclusion

4.1 It is estimated that 1 in 4 of us will experience a mental health problem at some time in our lives and three quarters of us know someone with a mental health problem¹. Highland Council signed the See Me Pledge in 2012, committing us to a range of activities to reduce the stigma of mental health and to promote inclusion of people living with mental illness which are monitored through our Mental Health Inclusion Plan. Progress on this Plan was last reported to this committee in December 2013. This is consistent with, and includes activity towards our obligations under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, sections 25-31, to promote wellbeing and social development for those who have, or have had, a mental disorder.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial implications: Resources are allocated to services raised in discussion with HUG, e.g. to support the annual Mental Health Arts and Film Festival, funding for CAB contracts and the range of social care services. HUG will be encouraged to apply for discretionary grants available to support its aims and discussions will take place to consider the extra support that may be needed to assist people with mental ill health in claiming eligible benefits.
Risk implications: There are no risks to the Council arising from this paper.
Legal and Equalities implications: Continued engagement with equality groups in Highland will positively contribute to the Public Sector Equality Duty placed on the Council to eliminate unlawful discrimination; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The Equality Act states that meeting different needs involves taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities. It states that compliance with the duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.
Climate change implications: There are no climate change implications arising from this report.
Gaelic implications: There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

6. Recommendation

6.1 Members are asked to consider and note the issues raised by HUG members, namely: the services they value, the improvements they seek and how they would like to continue to engage.

6.2 Members are asked to discuss and agree the action proposed in response.

Authors: Rosemary Mackinnon, Equal Opportunities Officer Tel (01463) 702094 and Carron McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform (01463) 702852

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¹ 'see me' Scotland <http://seemescotland.org.uk/about/whyweneedtotacklestigma>