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Date: 18 April 2011

Dear Johanne

Thank you for the recent report 'Exploring health and social care needs of people in black and minority ethnic communities in North Tyneside', which you sent to me on 29 March 2011.

I have read the report with interest and discussed the contents with colleagues in Adult Social Care and the team that is dealing with the equalities agenda on a corporate level.

I think it is fair to point out that the Council uses information from the Office of National Statistics mid year estimate from 2007, which states that 5.9% of the population in North Tyneside is of a minority ethnic group, in papers and reports regarding the demography of the Borough. I believe that this information was provided to you when the Council received the first draft of the report, but the report appears to rely on different data sources.

Whilst I acknowledge the difficulties that the adverse weather posed the sample size used gives us cause for concern. Only 25 people were consulted with which equates to less than 1% of our minority ethnic population and it would appear that no white minority ethnic groups were included in the sample. The data we use states that over half of our minority ethnic population is from white ethnic minority groups so it is disappointing that the views of these communities were not gathered.

Taken together, the sample size and composition does raise questions about the reliability and generalisability of the data. Whilst the report does state that the sample size was smaller than expected, it does not clarify quite how small the numbers of people spoken to were in comparison with the population.

That being said, I do recognise the validity of the individual comments raised by participants, but feel that these need to be addressed as individual comments rather than a representative community view.

I feel that many of the findings summarised within the report would be addressed if people were aware of where to find information about services. Over the next year, we will be working towards an improved system of providing advice and information about social care services. The initial improvements will surround a web based system but we would wish to engage with the minority ethnic communities in North Tyneside to ensure we provide information in appropriate formats so people can understand how the system works, how it can help them and what services are available.

We have had discussions with the corporate team regarding sharing intelligence about our communities and how we can appropriately engage with people about services and developments. Clearly this will be an incremental process across the coming year and beyond but I can assure you that we are committed to working with the community when we are planning and shaping services to take their views, needs and wishes into account.

It is hoped that the information from the 2011 Census will provide us with up to date accurate information about the composition of our Borough, and that this will allow the JSNA to reflect the needs of the people of North Tyneside in an appropriate way.

I read the comments within the report about interpreting services with interest. It would always be our aim to commission services of high quality. To be clear, the Council buys into a consortium arrangement with Newcastle in relation to interpreting services and whilst this means that staff do have easy access to the service, North Tyneside Council are not the lead commissioner for the service. We have issued staff with good practice guidance about using interpreters rather than family members. Clearly it is important that issues and difficulties with the service are raised and dealt with appropriately and in line with providing accessible information, we need to ensure that people do know how to raise concerns and complaints in a timely way. The issues raised in the report do appear to have been dealt with appropriately by the Trust in question which is reassuring and suggests that the person concerned was able to raise the concern, and that the Trust took the matter seriously.

We are also giving consideration to the way in which interpreting services are provided in the Borough, to determine whether a community based approach to provision might realise better outcomes for the people of North Tyneside. Whilst no definitive plans have yet been made, hopefully this indicates the importance with which we view the availability of high quality services and the potential of providing employment opportunities for local people too.

The Council values the relationship with LINK in terms of being able to garner the views of people in the Borough and I look forward to working with you in the future to develop the services offered to people in North Tyneside.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JA Old". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left. The letters "A", "O", and "ld" are written in a cursive, handwritten style.

Jacqui Old
Head of Adult Social Care