

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON WEDNESDAY, 18 JULY 2007 AT 10:00AM

Present: -

Councillor C A Green BA - Chairperson

Councillors

D A D Brett
L Davies
R D Jenkins
J Radford

Councillors

K T Rowlands
M Thomas
K Watkins

Officers

T Garthwaite - Executive Director - Strategic Change
A Phillips - Assistant Director - Finance
B Jones - Projects Manager
L Smith - Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator
S Kelly - Policy and Performance Management Officer
P Miles - Pay and Reward Officer
R Dare-Edwards - Cabinet and Committee Officer

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor M M Bertorelli
Councillor R D L Burns - Other Council Business
Councillor R G Hughes - Other Council Business
Councillor D Sage - Other Council Business

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

45 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2007

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 21 February 2007 be approved as a true and accurate record.

46 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

Members noted the issue of the Welsh Language Scheme, proposing that constant engagement, rather than the occasional meeting, with the Welsh Language Board was required.

Following further discussion on the Welsh Language Scheme, Members also proposed the idea of having 'taster sessions' for Members to learn Welsh, as well as improving monitoring what business within the Authority is conducted in Welsh.

The discussion was concluded with the suggestion that the Executive Director-Strategic Change and the Corporate Equalities Coordinator review the reporting

arrangements between CEMG and the Committee to provide Members with a more effective way of reporting progress the CEMG work programme.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group held on 21 February 2007 be noted.

47 EQUALITIES IN THE BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH WORKFORCE

The Executive Director - Resources, submitted a report of which amendments were highlighted by the Pay and Reward Officer on Page 5 of Appendix 1, namely:

- In reference to the percentage part time employees, this should read 33.23 for 2006 and 33.85 for 2007.
- The number for the part-time employees should be amended to 2782.

Following these amendments, the Pay and Reward Officer presented the report, which incorporated information gathered from two time periods; 31 May 2006 and 31 May 2007, which had been validated by officers in the Corporate Human Resources and Information Technology departments of the Resources Directorate. It was noted that the Directorate Total was different from the Bridgend County Borough Council Total, due to some staff working part time for two different directorates. It was also noted that the ethnicity percentage on page 5 of the report did not equal 100% due to some staff choosing not to disclose their ethnicity.

The Executive Director - Strategic Change advised Members of the three categories of non-respondents that need to be addressed; those who were not sufficiently vigilant in completing forms, those who may have a deep principle against declaring, and those who choose not to declare for fear of revealing information, such as having a disability. He stated that the main area of concern were those who fear declaring their disability or ethnic origin, and that a message of reassurance must be conveyed here.

The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator advised that one of the main issues encountered was giving staff a contact for enquiries and advice on definitions, such as what the "disability" status actually covered, like illnesses such as depression classed as a disability? It was also advised that there was a need to look at whether a particular area was not being declared.

Members enquired about the figures for male and female Welsh speakers and readers, to which the Corporate Equalities Officer noted that as the data indicates, the Authority's staff is predominately female. However, she added that there may be a need to investigate where the Welsh speakers are in terms of level within the organisation, and the possibility of more Welsh speakers being required at an administrative level, rather than at a more senior level.

The Executive Director - Strategic Change noted that the next task would be to undertake further analysis the figures and engage with people, so as to find answers to the questions and concerns raised. Members further noted the opportunity to develop the data system, TRENT, in order to assist with the management of Equalities issues.

RESOLVED: (1) That the Equalities Committee endorse the recommendation that the Human Resources Officers continue to work with the Equality Co-ordinator to provide a more detailed report for the

Equalities Committee on 10 September 2007 that will inform the development of the Authority's statutory equality schemes.

48 MAINSTREAMING EQUALITIES INTO CORPORATE PROCUREMENT

The Executive Director - Resources submitted the above report which sought the approval of the Equalities Committee to mainstream equalities into the corporate procurement process. The Projects Manager, Procurement Department, outlined the background to the report, which proposed that a standard equality clause be included in all contracts, and included in tender assessments and vendor appraisal questionnaires, as well as equality specifications being included in tenders set up by Directorates. Equality requirements are currently being set up in vendor appraisals, which, once approved by the Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator, will go out to contractors.

Members were advised that training and guidance will be required for Officers who let contracts, as well as for the procurement team, as to what information will be needed from contractors, and how to probe to achieve these answers. It was proposed that all such guidance be included on the intranet.

In response to queries from Members over the balance of appealing to local SME and large national businesses, the Procurement Projects Manager clarified that the training of Officers and the guidance will aim to support smaller, local businesses to develop a better understanding of equal opportunities. Any new contractors who are interested in working for the authority can apply, and following the approval of their appraisal, would be added to the list of suppliers for the Authority to use. In addition, rather than discarding contractors who fail the appraisal, they would be written to, explaining why they have failed, and upon rectifying the issue, would be allowed to re-submit their appraisal.

Members were informed that support would be available through surgeries run by the Procurement department, at which Officers would be available to assist contractors face-to-face with their appraisals and any other queries they may have. The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator also advised that if a case arises where the Authority is unable to help contractors with their issues, the Council could refer them to SME Equality Project at the Welsh Assembly Government Department of Enterprise, Innovation and Networks. This project helps put small to medium sized enterprises in contact with specialised consultants who will help them meet the equalities requirements and move their businesses on.

Members also expressed concern over the issue of contractors adhering to their requirements, such as health and safety, and whether problems such as language issues with foreign workers have been anticipated. The Assistant Director - Finance advised Members that when checking contractors answers, the Council could check their certificates, and also ensure that contractors knew and understood the health and safety regulations. However, it was more difficult to ensure compliance by them when on site. The Authority only had control as far as checks carried out on sites, where the local authority had hired the contractors, not on other work carried out in the community.

It was agreed that it was therefore essential to ensure that Officers were aware of the issues and trained to carry out the appraisals and checks, and assist contractors in any way they can.

RESOLVED: That the Equalities Committee approve the proposal to mainstream equalities into the corporate procurement process.

49 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Executive Director - Strategic Change presented the above report, which proposed the development of a single Corporate Equality Scheme for Bridgend County Borough Council, with the aim of mainstreaming equalities. He advised Members that under the current situation, there was too much sub-division with each scheme covering various factors, whereby, to get a full understanding, all must be read together. The Executive Director - Strategic Change therefore proposed the need for joined up thinking with one approach to equalities through one scheme, therefore making greater sense of some of the equality strands, rather than separating them.

Members were advised that there would still be a need for a separate Welsh Language Scheme, as the legislation involved was different. They were also informed of some concerns that have been voiced, in relation to disability, as it was only relatively recently that the issue had gained recognition as a public sector duty.

The Executive Director - Strategic Change advised that under the new single scheme an individual could be dealt with holistically resulting in a better understanding for both staff and service users.

In response to Members' queries over support for individuals experiencing discrimination may receive from the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights, the Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator advised that currently very few cases are actually being brought to the Courts. For instance, the Disability Rights Commission recently reported that only 1 court case had been taken forward compared with 1600 calls received by the Commission's helpline. Under the current legislation, individuals have to take a case themselves to the Courts. Therefore, a main concern of the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights for the future was its capacity to assist individuals to take cases forward and provide guidance to those where necessary.

It was agreed that such issues would have to be re-visited and discussed in future meetings.

RESOLVED: That the Equalities Committee approve the proposal to produce a single Corporate Equality Scheme by March 2008, incorporating the Authority's draft race and disability equality schemes and covering faith, sexual orientation, age and career status.

The meeting closed at 12.35pm