

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON THURSDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2012 AT 2.15PM

Present:
Councillors:

D Sage - Chairperson
M E J Nott
H J David
M Gregory
L C Morgan

Invitees: Councillor M Butcher Councillor C L Jones
 Councillor C A Green Councillor C Rees
 Councillor D M Hughes Councillor C Reeves
 Councillor C Jones Councillor H Townsend

J Thomas - Vice-Chair - Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People
S Green - Chairperson - Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People

Officers:

S Kingsbury - Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
P Williams - Business Partner – Human Resources
N Davies - Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service
R Pearce - Manager Regeneration and Economic Development
E Winkley - Marketing Team Leader – Performance
J Monks - Democratic Services Officer – Committees

16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:

Councillor A Owen - Work commitments
Councillor P J White - Other Council business

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

18 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities dated 17 September 2012 were approved as a true and accurate record subject to the minute relating to apologies for absence being amended to include Councillor C L Jones due to work commitments. Also those present should have included Councillor C Jones who was not absent from the meeting.

19 LOCAL INVESTMENT FUND

The Manager Regeneration and Economic Development presented a report to provide an update on equalities issues in relation to the operation of the Local Investment Fund (LIF). LIF was introduced in 2009 to offer financial support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to encourage capital investment and job creation. The scheme, which is due to finish in 2013, runs regionally across six local authorities, led by Rhondda Cynon Taff Council and is mainly European funded.

He explained that in terms of equality, part of the agreement between the Welsh European funding Office (WEFO) and the six authorities was compliance with WEFO's Equal Opportunities guidance and processes were subsequently agreed with WEFO, which have evolved over time in order to maximise its contribution to cross cutting themes. Due to the extent of the take-up, publicity to raise awareness of the scheme has recently been scaled down, as 89% of available finance for Bridgend has been committed to SMEs.

He advised that the scoring criteria for grant applications gave extra weight to those businesses from Communities First areas and as part of the process; each successful applicant completes a diversity questionnaire which is collated and presented to WEFO on a quarterly basis.

He concluded by informing the Committee that to date 111 local businesses had been supported by the scheme, with 28 new businesses being started, resulting in a total of 237 permanent jobs being created within the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the actions set out in paragraph 4 of the report.

20 ISSUES FACING THE LOCAL DISABLED COMMUNITY

The Assistant Chief Executive – Performance submitted a report to inform the Committee of the issues faced by disabled people and to outline the influence the Council has on improving services and removing barriers to accessibility to services and information. Following various issues discussed at recent meetings of the Bridgend Equality Forum, as well as an extensive consultation and engagement exercise involving BCDP, Bridgend Visually Impaired Society and the Bridgend Deaf Club, the Council drew up an Action Plan to improve those services currently offered to disabled people, and to ensure that all services are fully accessible to them.

The Deputy Leader introduced all those in attendance and welcomed to the meeting Julie Thomas and Simon Green, representatives from the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People (BCDP) who provided Members with a presentation on issues facing the local disabled community.

Mr Green outlined for Members the work of his organisation, which was set up approximately eight years ago and had proved to be successful within the Borough. The Group, run by disabled people for disabled people, aimed to bring as many groups in the area together and was involved with national independent living consultations. He explained that there was still a great deal of work to be done with regard to issues facing disabled people, which was the reason he had come to speak to the Committee.

Ms Thomas commenced her presentation by highlighting the difficulties and challenges faced by the visually impaired and advised that a high percentage of sight

impairment could be avoided if people underwent regular eye tests. She commented that the Authority had a good shop mobility scheme, which she hoped could be extended, as the visually impaired often had difficulty accessing shops in Bridgend. She suggested this could be overcome by volunteer assisted travel on foot by assisted guides, which the Guide Dogs for the Blind offered free training on. As Bridgend town was pedestrianized, she suggested that businesses could work with the Authority and BCDP to make access to shops easier for disabled people, by applying a traffic light system, similar to that applied to licensed premises in the area, and to perhaps create an award for the shop which provided the best easy access. She explained that very often as well as poor access to shops it was also the poor attitude of staff, and she further suggested a star system for retailers who offered good service to the disabled, in order to create a positive vibe.

Mr Green commented that it was sometimes forgotten that disabled people as well as able bodied people, had disposable income and staff attitude was extremely important. He described to Members the Access Quest survey which took place 18 months ago where people with disabilities were shadowed to discover how they were received in shops. The survey had found that some shops provided good access for the disabled, but others had a long way to go. He referred to the automatic drop down bollard in the town centre, operated by CCTV, with restricted access ; BCDP receive regular complaints from disabled people who wished to access banks or the post office in the town centre, but could not due to those restrictions.

Ms Thomas then commented on the lack of access to sports facilities within the Borough. She referred to information supplied on the BCBC website which listed clubs and activities, but was out of date and inaccurate. She suggested that perhaps the Business Partner – Human Resources could assist in the promotion of accessible sports facilities for the disabled within the Borough, following on from the Paralympics which took place this year. She recommended that it could be incorporated into the current refurbishment taking place within Bridgend Recreation Centre. She concluded by saying that as the Group was unable to fund these issues, the Authority's assistance would be appreciated.

Mr Green concluded by saying that very often a sports facility would advertise its building as being DDA compliant, but on arrival access often proved difficult. He suggested that perhaps those venues could be investigated and removed if they did not comply.

Discussion took place and the Deputy Leader commented that he agreed with the suggestion of issuing an award for the shop which provided the best easy access. The Leader advised that if the Committee had been given prior notice, an appropriate Officer for the disabled could have been present at the meeting to answer questions on sports facilities in the Borough. The Executive had fought hard to get the town centre pedestrianized and believed that to go back on that could impinge on some disability issues.

One Member commented that Bridgend Athletics Club was involved with the group for visually impaired children, who he believed could be approached to take up the training for assisted guides. Another Member described how she had taken part in the Blindfold Walk around Bridgend and made reference to the street furniture, in particular the random advertising boards which were displayed on the streets without permission; the boards were a particular hazard for the visually impaired.

The Cabinet Member – Wellbeing referred to the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement Officers (CPEO) in April 2013 and suggested that one of their duties

could be to police those advertising boards. The Deputy Leader advised that despite having been made responsible for their advertising boards, proprietors were not complying and this would be enforced by the CPEOs. The Leader commented that although the pavements in Nolton Street were currently narrow, they would be widened as part of the current regeneration in that area.

Ms Thomas commented that she was pleased with the relationship her group had with the Authority and the training which had been carried out with frontline staff. However, she suggested that the training could be extended to staff at management level, carried out by a disabled person in order to gain greater understanding and awareness.

Ms Thomas then referred to the recent changes regarding blue badge holders, and the proposal to introduce charges. She believed that it had been passed through Cabinet without due consideration and that it went against the statements made by the Welsh Government relating to equalities for disabled people and creating a level playing field. She advised that one third of people in Wales were below the poverty line and believed that the decision to charge was made without consideration as to the impact on many people if charging blue badge holders was to be implemented.

The Leader explained that as yet, no decision had been made, and the proposal would be going out for consultation, with all responses being taken into account. He advised that the full report should be read in context, as it detailed the benefits charging could actually bring to existing blue badge holders. The Blue Badge Association had already been consulted and it could not see a problem with badge holders being charged. The Leader advised that blue badge holders would be given extra time to park and the CPEOs would be able to assist in enforcing those who used badges indiscriminately or illegally. The Deputy Leader referred to the changes made by the Welsh Government in 2010 to the allocation of badges, due to fraudulent use, which resulted in a change to the design of the badge. He advised that all issues in the report had been thoroughly considered and explained that in 2010 the Welsh Government made changes to the allocation and design of blue badges in an attempt to address those who misused them.

Mr Green commented that the vast majority of disabled people did not have a choice but to use a car and blue badges were the main issue. He informed Members that although there were now more accessible buses in the area many of the bus stops proved too steep for disabled access to buses. The Business Partner – Human Resources advised that as part of the Strategic Equalities Plan, a commitment had been made to continually improve raised bus stops.

The Deputy Leader thanked both Ms Thomas and Mr Green for their attendance and contribution.

RESOLVED: That the Committee received and considered the report.

21 WORK FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service presented a report to update the Committee on the progress of the Work Forward Programme and future plans for the Youth Service with regard to disabled young people.

She reported that Cymorth funding for the “Get Active” project had come to an end and there was no opportunity for staff to maintain the service. However, they were

still able to support young people with additional learning needs, including those with disabilities, offering them the opportunity to engage in outdoor sports and activities. She advised that funding was actively being sought to restart the “Get Active” project, which was vital in championing disabled groups in Bridgend; also new initiatives would be carried out in partnership with the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Service.

The Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service then informed Members of a pilot programme being launched in 2013, designed to raise awareness of disability hate crime. Training was being rolled out to young people and professionals, building on the current training provision, and in addition, an audit was being undertaken on all buildings being used for part time youth clubs to ascertain if they were, or could be adapted for disabled needs. She explained that the programme would also assist young people who attended mainstream youth centres, and they were currently in talks with Y Bont Leisure Services to tie up links with Bridgend. She reported that there had been positive feedback from drama and theatre groups in the area, which was a way to promote a positive learning experience informally. The programme would involve other stakeholders, as well as the children and their families.

One Member informed the Committee that she worked for Bridgend College Student Union, and two of the students at the College were Disability Officers. She asked whether the students would be consulted on the programme and invited the Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service to visit the College. The Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service confirmed that the College would be contacted, as the intention was to consult with as many organisations and young people as possible in order to gather evidence on what young people wanted.

One Member asked whether young people with physical disabilities were also being consulted and if they were fairly represented on School Councils throughout all areas of the Borough. She further asked how disabled young people were targeted and whether the same applied to those disabled young people who were in mainstream education. The Programme Manager – Bridgend Youth Service advised that there had been an increase in the number of disabled young people on School Councils, who were represented across the Borough; those children with physical disabilities would also be targeted from now on. She would report back on representation at those schools within Communities First areas.

The Cabinet Member – Children advised that it was important to ensure that those children and young people with disabilities, who attended local community mainstream schools, had access to the full range of youth provision. He was pleased that the Duke of Edinburgh Awards had a cohort from special schools, as well as a high number of pupils from the special units at Bryntirion, Cynffig and Pencoed Comprehensive Schools. He advised that there was a high percentage at Awards Ceremony and those young people found it particularly rewarding, as it was very often the only recognition they received; as many of them were unlikely to obtain academic qualifications, it played a vital role during their time in school. He requested a progress report on the issue.

The Deputy Leader advised that as a result of the “Get Active “ funding coming to an end, he would welcome proactive ways of obtaining other funding to replace grants which were expiring, rather than waiting for a fund to finish. He requested that this be included in any feedback.

RESOLVED: That the Committee discussed the report and noted the Youth Service commitment to actively seek further provision to support young people with disabilities within the service.

22 SIX MONTHLY REPORT ON EQUALITY IN THE WORKFORCE

The Human Resources Business Partner introduced a report to provide Members with data on the Council's workforce, which contained comparative information and an update on developments that are employment related.

He took Members through the report which included the half yearly profiles and data analysis of the contracted workforce for the period 31st March 2011 to 30th September 2012, attached at Appendix 1. A table which outlined the reasons for employees leaving was provided at Appendix 2 and a summary of workforce information, based on gender/pay grade was included at Appendix 3. He advised that data included at Appendix 4 was a pan Wales analysis of teachers, head teachers and assistant/deputy head teachers, as requested by the Committee at its June meeting. Finally, an analysis of disabled employees as at September 2012 was attached at Appendix 5.

One Member enquired if vision training was provided to particularly frontline staff. The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that training was targeted at staff that had customer contact, where it was known they would be dealing with persons who were visually and/or hearing impaired. The Vice-Chair - Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People assisted in those training sessions. He advised that training sessions could be extended wider to include other staff, such as librarians.

In response to a question from one Member, the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that exit interviews were not conducted with employees as a matter of routine, but were asked to complete a questionnaire. However, if a trend was spotted where a number of people were leaving in one area, then exit interviews would be considered.

One Member asked for a breakdown of teachers to observe the gender make up of different grades, also showing more comparisons. The Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development would arrange this additional information to be e-mailed to Members. Also, Members asked that Appendix 2 should include the number of staff who were dismissed during that period.

The Business Partner – Human Resources informed the Committee that the Council had been awarded the “Louder than Words” Charter from Action for Hearing Loss (formerly the Royal National Institute for the Deaf). The award was presented for the significant developments made by the Council in its approach to employees and customers who are deaf, or who have suffered hearing loss. He commented that the council is the first public body in Wales to be awarded the “Louder than Words” charter.

The Deputy Leader commended staff who had worked hard, in particular with the hearing impaired to achieve the Award which was the first in Wales and had achieved better than the Welsh Government.

RESOLVED: That the Committee received and considered the workforce report.

23 UPDATED ACTION PLAN FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2012-15

The Human Resources Business Partner presented a report which proposed an updated action plan for the period 2013-2014 for the Council's Welsh Language

Scheme 2012-15. The draft action plan was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. The Council's current Welsh Language Scheme was agreed in March 2012 and is due to expire either in 2015, or when the Commissioner for the Welsh Language formally introduces the national standards, whichever is the earlier. He explained that until the standards were developed and became operational, the Welsh Language Scheme would remain a live document.

He advised that the Commissioner for the Welsh Language had recently consulted on the proposed Welsh Language measures and that the original 57 measures had been consolidated into 37 measures. He advised that tourism had greatly improved, particularly in the Welsh transition. However, there was a problem in getting local businesses who used the website as a portal, to provide their copy in Welsh also, as they were obliged to.

He described how the Communications and Marketing team had a process in place whereby an English page would not be published on the website unless it was accompanied by a Welsh version. Staffing and recruitment were on-going issues within the Customer Contact Centre, as there were only four Welsh speakers in the team, two of which were Team Coaches, which meant they were not always available to answer calls or deal with a customer in Welsh. However future advertising of posts in the team would focus on the Welsh language in order to increase the number of Welsh speaking staff.

A Member of the Committee asked if a member of the public was viewing Welsh pages on the council's website, whether they would be able to click back to English halfway through, rather than having to go through the whole process again. The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that they could hover back and forth between the English and Welsh versions.

In response to a question from a Member regarding funding of Menter Bro Ogwr, he advised that he would find out about alternative funding for that service. He explained that the Welsh language was a crosscutting issue and there was currently a Welsh Government initiative in place called "More Than Just Words", which aimed to target older people who may have dementia, in order to ensure that if their first language was Welsh, that there would be Welsh speaking carers in place.

The Deputy Leader commented that he was pleased to see progress being made within the Welsh language.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approved the draft Action Plan.

The meeting closed at 4.10pm.