

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 21 JULY 2008 AT 10:00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage - Chairperson

Councillors

H J David  
L C Morgan

Invitees

Councillor D A D Brett  
Councillor N Clarke  
Councillor P A Evans  
Councillor C A Green  
Councillor M Gregory  
Councillor R M James  
Councillor R D Jenkins  
Councillor M Wilkins

Officers

D MacGregor - Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships  
L Smith - Policy and Performance Management Officer  
A Rees - Senior Cabinet and Committee Officer

1 ROLE OF EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

The Committee received a presentation by Linda Smith, Policy and Performance Management Officer on the role of the Equalities Committee and an overview on the current equalities issues within the County Borough. The objectives of the training was to familiarise Members with the Committee's role within the Authority; to inform Members of the commitment required from those Members appointed to the Committee and to outline equality and human rights duties.

The Policy and Performance Management Officer outlined the terms of reference for the committee and highlighted that they will require amendment to remove references to the Equality Standard for Local Government in Wales and that a proposal will be brought to the next meeting. Meetings take place on a quarterly basis and must have a minimum of three Cabinet Members present to be quorate.

Members queried the role of invitees to the Committee and whether voting rights at the Committee were limited to Members of the Cabinet only.

The Committee was informed of the general equality duties that the Authority must have due regard to which covered employment, service delivery and procurement.

The Committee was also informed as to the grounds on which people were protected and also people's human rights.

In terms of national developments, the new Equality and Human Rights Commission, has an office in Cardiff and which has good links with the Welsh Local Government Association.

The UK Government recently introduced a new Equality Bill – A Framework for a Fairer Future in Parliament.

Members expressed concern at the lack of the use of the Welsh language in the newly opened Customer Care Centre.

The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships provided the Committee with an example of steps being taken by the Council to address this issue. This included recruiting people with Welsh language skills to be employed at the Customer Care Centre with a view to the Council discharging its obligations under the Welsh Language Act.

Members also raised concerns about meeting the communication needs of members of the local community for who English is not a first language, notably migrant workers from EU countries.

The Committee was informed as to the reasons for equality duties, but that inequality persisted in our society. The Committee was informed that the term "equality" did not simply mean treating everyone the same. It meant understanding and tackling the different barriers to equal opportunities that different people faced so that everyone had a fair chance to fulfil their potential.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Policy and Performance Management Officer informed the Committee that the Council employed eighty persons who had self-identified as a disabled person, although it was believed there were a number of employees who had chosen not to do so. The Council had worked with the Shaw Trust to make adjustments in the workplace for disabled employees. Funding was also available through the Government's Access to Work Programme to make adjustments to the workplace and more could be done to raise awareness about this among managers and staff.

The Policy and Performance Management Officer provided an outline of the definition of discrimination, the different types of discrimination and social barriers to equality. The Committee was also provided with a profile of the community to which Bridgend County Borough Council serves and a profile of its workforce. Members were advised that equality monitoring of workforce data had revealed a high level of no declaration around ethnicity and disability and that action would be take to address this issue.

The Policy and Performance Management Officer then outlined the key objectives for the Authority in the coming months which included achieving 'improving authority' status under the new Equality Improvement Framework for local government in Wales; to satisfy the WPI requirement to provide an annual equality assessment. The Authority will also be developing a single Corporate Equality Scheme and that the revision of its Language Scheme was nearing completion. The Assistant Chief

Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that the Committee's work programme would include an opportunity to take an in-depth look at the Equality Improvement Framework so that the Committee could advise Cabinet on what actions were needed to meet the Council's requirements.

The Committee were advised that an independent audit had been undertaken to identify priorities for the Authority to action. These include:-

- Promote compliance with the Council's equality policies and statutory duties
- Promote a clear vision on equality for the Authority
- Improve knowledge, understanding and training on equality
- Improve use of data collection and analysis
- Improve methods of reporting and accountability

The activities of the Corporate Equality Management Group were outlined, namely:-

- Identifying priority actions and bring to the attention of the Committee
- Training needs assessment for staff
- Data collection audit for Authority
- Pilot on Equality Impact Assessments
- Draft Corporate equality scheme

The Committee considered that it needed to have more of an outcome focus in the way it conducted its business and the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that a work programme will be developed for consideration at the Committee's next meeting.

In response to questions from Members the Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships advised the Committee that the Authority had a duty to respond to correspondence in the Welsh language and the Authority was working with the Welsh Language Board on bi-lingual issues and was also working towards a bi-lingual Web site.

The Chairperson thanked the Policy and Performance Management Officer for her informative presentation.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) The minutes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group continue to be presented to this Committee.
  - (2) The workforce data presented to the previous Committee be presented to the next meeting of this Committee and the Committee be provided with information on steps that can be taken to encourage employees to self declare, especially as disabled people.
  - (3) The training needs assessment for staff to be considered by the Corporate Equality Management Group be reported back to this Committee.

- (4) A report on the work undertaken on the Equality Improvement Framework, the development of a single Corporate Equality Scheme and on the revised Welsh Language Scheme be reported to the next meeting of this Committee.
- (5) A report on a draft work programme for the Committee be presented to the next meeting for discussion.
- (6) That the draft work programme reflect the Committee's wish to consider the Council's Disability Facilities Grant as a policy area for the Committee to review.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following:-

|                          |   |                           |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Councillor A E Davies    | - | Holiday                   |
| Councillor M E J Nott    | - | Holiday                   |
| Councillor J C Spanswick | - | Holiday                   |
| Councillor M Thomas      | - | Other Council commitments |

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

4 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Equalities Committee dated 17 March 2008, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following amendments being made:-

Minute Number 73 the following words being deleted from paragraph 7 "non-British people, i.e. enhanced linguistic skills" being deleted and substituted with the following "people whose first language is not English".

The following words from paragraph 9 "to cater for the afflicted, i.e. deaf and dumb persons" being deleted and substituted by the words "to support people with limited literacy and communication needs such as people with sensory impairments."

The second resolution being amended as follows:-

The words "Equalities Management Team" being deleted and substituted by the following "Corporate Equalities Management Group".

Minute Number 74 being amended as follows:-

The word "bi-lingual" being deleted from paragraph 4 and substituted by the words "English /Welsh Translation Officer"

Paragraph 9 of minute number 74 being amended as follows:-

The following words "application forms in English and Welsh were required and both" being deleted and substituted by the words "bilingual application forms were required and."

The word "national" being inserted prior to the word "equality", and the word "improvement" being inserted prior to the word "framework".

The meeting closed at 11.30am.