

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 29 JULY 2010 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage - Chairperson and Deputy Leader

Councillors

A E David  
L C Morgan

Councillors

M E J Nott  
J C Spanswick

Invitees:

Councillor N Clarke	Councillor P A Hacking
Councillor P A Evans	Councillor M Thomas
Councillor M Gregory	Councillor M C Wilkins

Officers:

D MacGregor	- Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships
L Smith	- Policy and Performance Officer
P Williams	- HR Business Partner
E L Maher	- Community Safety Partnership
B Neville	- UNISON Representative
R Lewis	- Legal Officer
C Branford	- Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

K Kurowski	- Bridgend People First
S Austin	- Bridgend People First
C David	- Bridgend People First
Inspector S Rees	- South Wales Police
D Ralph	- VALREC Representative

79 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members/Officers:

Councillor H David	- Holiday
Councillor C A Green	- Holiday
Councillor R M James	- Unwell

80 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

81 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the meeting held on 19 July 2010 be approved as a true and accurate record.

82 NOTES OF CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

RESOLVED: That the notes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group dated 20 May 2010 be received for noting.

83 LAUNCH OF THE COUNCIL'S DOMESTIC ABUSE PROTOCOL

The Deputy Leader welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that he was especially pleased to be using this Committee as the setting to launch BCBC's new Domestic Abuse Protocol. He was delighted also that BCBC's partners from the trade unions, Bridgend Women's Aid, South Wales Police and VALREC were present to show their support for this important initiative.

He explained that BCBC was dedicated to providing every employee with a safe and supportive workplace. Whilst BCBC had always sought to offer support to colleagues affected by domestic abuse, this new protocol was a very clear statement of how seriously the Authority took the issue.

Domestic abuse affected all kind of people and could take many forms. It was also frequently hidden, but BCBC wanted to make it much less of a taboo by offering affected employees this guidance and help.

He stated that he hoped the new protocol would not only raise awareness of domestic abuse but help managers to recognise early signs and respond sensitively and effectively to those needing help and support.

84 REPORT ON COMMUNITY COHESION AND TACKLING HATE MOTIVATED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

The Chairperson introduced a report the purpose of which was to introduce presentations from partner organisations to inform the Committee about how the Authority and its partners were responding to hate crime issues.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development advised the Committee had last discussed hate crime at its meeting in July and Members had asked that the Committee revisit the issue. The discussion was timely as in recent months there had been a number of incidents in the UK, some of which had resulted in deaths. It was necessary for all Members to raise the profile of hate crime in their local communities so that action could be taken to respond to and prevent it.

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that representatives from the Bridgend People First organisation were here today to provide feedback from the hate crime summer school held in July. Inspector Rees of South Wales Police was also in attendance to provide the Committee with an overview of the role of the police in responding to such incidents and crimes.

Inspector Rees thanked the Committee for inviting him to today's meeting. He explained that whilst all Police Officers had a responsibility to respond to hate crime, ownership rested with himself and there were a number of specialist roles and

processes in place which enhanced how hate incidents were dealt with. It was important to recognise that hate crime was likely to have a significant impact on the quality of life of not only the victim themselves but of their family and the wider community. Victims of hate crime were particularly vulnerable members of the community due to their individual circumstances. Failure to deal with incidents typically led to increased community tension and reduced confidence in the police service. Unfortunately, minority groups tended to accept verbal abuse as an inevitable part of their lives and did not always report it. The Police's primary aim was to prosecute perpetrators of crime but responses to incidents were very much victim led, and depended on cultural, individual or local needs.

Within South Wales Police there were a number of specialist resources in place to tackle hate crime, including dedicated BCU Hate Crime Officers who had expertise in co-ordinating the response to hate incidents. In recognition of the link between anti-social behaviour and hate crime, resources had now been combined to tackle problems in local areas. Under-reporting remained a common feature of all hate crimes as victims were often reluctant to seek help.

The figures provided in the table at paragraph 4.7 of the report outlined the number of incidents and crimes over the last 6 months with the previous 6 months figures shown as a comparison. The figures showed a substantial increase in racist incidents over the last 6 months, and these incidents tended to centre on business premises such as takeaways and taxis. The increase was due in part to increased reporting as people gained the confidence to report incidents to the police. There had been a hidden picture on crimes against people with learning disabilities which was now starting to become clearer.

Members asked if figures were available for hate incidents that took place in schools.

Inspector Rees advised that he did not have a breakdown of the incidents in schools but there were generally 15 a month across the Borough. Significant incidents had occurred at Brynteg and Bryntirion comprehensive schools some of which involved the use of Facebook to bully vulnerable individuals. A multi-agency response had been put in place involving the Youth Offending Team, and dedicated police officers had given diversity lessons in schools. The majority of incidents were perpetrated by people who were causing a general nuisance in their communities.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development welcomed the processes put in place by South Wales Police to tackle hate crime such as the monthly hate crime review group. He advised, however, that when he had attended a meeting earlier in the year with the Community Safety Partnership and VALREC it had been evident that over a period, a small number of the same people continued to report hate crimes but there was not a clear sense of how the agencies were responding.

Inspector Rees explained that the response would be specific to victims' needs and could include a police patrol to provide visibility and reassurance. Risk assessments were now undertaken and action plans developed, however these processes had only been introduced 5-6 months ago. He explained that an action plan typically involved working with partner agencies to generate an appropriate response to the incident, regular contact with hate crime officers to build up trust, and patrol strategies.

In many cases, alarms and audio-visual equipment would be installed in a victim's home to provide them with additional safety and reassurance.

The Community Safety and Welfare Officer explained that attempts had been made via a partnership approach to encourage people to report hate crimes, including making hate crime report forms available on the Safer Bridgend website which when completed could be returned freepost to the Safer Wales organisation which would collate the data and signpost people to services. A Community Cohesion Fund has been allocated to the Community Safety Partnership by the Welsh Assembly Government to work closely with Community First Partnerships. A Community Cohesion mapping exercise was currently out to tender and would result in a Community Cohesion Strategy and action plan, with remaining funding used to provide a number of beneficial projects in communities across the Borough.

The Chairperson welcomed Katrina Kurowski, Catherine David and Sharon Austin of Bridgend People First to the meeting.

Katrina explained that Bridgend People First were an advocacy organisation who helped people to develop self advocacy skills and also provided advocacy for people. The organisation received its core funding from BCBC.

The hate crime summer school run by Bridgend People First had been established in order to develop new materials for use in schools. The summer school had been attended by people of different ages and abilities who had helped to produce the materials. Participants had been asked to find out about and present a project on different types of hate crime, and had been given a choice of format in which to present the project. There had also been an opportunity to question an expert panel which included the Deputy Leader, VALREC representatives, PCSOs and representatives from the Adult Protection Committee. The summer school had also involved a day of drama which gave participants the chance to act out a hate crime with a skilled drama worker. A video clip of some of the drama work done by the participants was shown to the Committee.

Katrina described some of the materials produced for schools which had been designed by people with learning difficulties some of whom had experienced hate incidents themselves. Examples of the learning materials produced were distributed for Committee Members. Katrina advised that the bingo game they had designed would be piloted in 3 local primary schools in the period up to Christmas. The aim of the materials was to give teachers a vehicle for teaching children about hate crime and to enable children to think and ask questions about these issues. Katrina advised that participants had learnt that they should report hate crime to parents, friends and the police, and also that they were not to blame for the colour of their skin, disability or sexuality. She thanked all those involved for their support.

The Chairperson thanked the Bridgend People First team for an excellent presentation. He invited Darren Ralph of VALREC to outline the work that had been done by that organisation.

The VALREC representative explained that VALREC had until 18 months ago been the Valleys Race Equality Council but now embraced all equalities strands to become the Valleys Regional Equality Council. VALREC had service level agreements with

the five local authorities and Parc Prison. The majority of work undertaken by VALREC involved case work and advocacy on behalf of people discriminated against. Referrals to VALREC came from South Wales Police, local colleges, schools and universities. VALREC also undertook training and community activities focused on community cohesion. There were also sub-projects underway such as the economic inactivity project which assisted minority groups to get into the workplace. The 'A Voice in the Valleys' project attempted to strengthen and sustain the lines of communication between equalities groups.

During the last year a number of workshops on community cohesion had been delivered in Communities First areas in the Borough. The workshops had focused on raising awareness of the importance of building cohesive and inclusive communities. In addition to the workshops a Diversity Day had been held in Bridgend which reflected the work carried out with the Communities First Partnerships.

VALREC had undertaken an increasing amount of casework in Bridgend over the past year, and had received 29 referrals already this year. At present VALREC were working with a transgender person; with 2 families subjected to abuse by their neighbours because of their ethnicity or a disability; helping a person from Afghanistan to integrate into the community in Caerau, and assisting an African person in the Bryncethin area.

The Chairperson thanked the invitees for their presentations.

The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People advised that the presentation had really brought to life the issues and what was being done to tackle them.

The Cabinet Member - Communities expressed concerns about the rise of cyber bullying and asked what could be done to tackle the problem.

Inspector Rees agreed that this was a significant issue and tackling it was problematic as technology advanced much faster than the ability of agencies to respond.

The VALREC representative explained that bullying via e-mail, internet or text message produced evidence which the victim could and should take forward to the police.

The Cabinet Member - Children and Young People advised that all schools had an anti-bullying policy in place and she was aware of a school which had permanently excluded pupils who had been bullying others via the internet.

The Chairperson advised that in his experience awareness of hate crime was increasing in communities and people were increasingly prepared to report it. Following this afternoon's presentations Members had a clearer idea of what work the partners were doing to tackle hate crime. He thanked Bridgend People First, the Valleys Regional Equality Council, Bridgend Community Safety Partnership and BCBC's own Officers for their work. He stated that hate crimes were senseless and evil acts which had no place in Bridgend County Borough. Bridgend was a County which prided itself on the strength of its communities. It was up to each and every one to stand up to prejudice and intolerance however and wherever it manifested itself.

Failure to tackle hate crimes meant failing its victims and failing local communities. He thanked everyone for the work they were doing to create a safer, fairer Bridgend County Borough.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet Committee - Equalities noted the content of the report and the presentations by representatives of South Wales Police, Bridgend Community Safety Partnership, Bridgend People First and VALREC.

85 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

The Policy and Performance Officer presented a report the purpose of which was to inform the Committee of the progress that had been made by the Authority in implementing equality impact assessments.

She advised that the Authority was required to complete equality impact assessments (EIA) on policies and practices and the need to evidence this process had been confirmed by recent court decisions. The new public sector equality duty introduced by the Equality Act 2010 covered seven equality strands and BCBC needed to ensure that its processes complied with these new duties.

Committee reports now included an EIA section which met the requirement to evidence the process and provided Members with sufficient information to consider the equality impact before making a decision. The measure also assisted in safeguarding the Authority from legal challenge. An EIA toolkit and guidance had been provided on the intranet. EIA training had been delivered to 121 officers to date. Following feedback from CMB the toolkit would be simplified and made compliant with the new Equality Act 2010.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that the EIA process needed to be made manageable but also had to comply with legal requirements. Current arrangements would be reviewed in the light of EHRC guidance. It was also important to be aware of what was being implemented in neighbouring authorities who were undertaking a similar review of processes.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities noted the content of the report.

86 EQUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced a report the purpose of which was to inform the Cabinet Committee - Equalities about developments in relation to the WLGA Equality Improvement Framework (EIF).

She advised that delays to completing pilot projects by the WLGA and the 3 local authorities concerned had impacted on the timescale for implementing the EIF in Wales. It had now been agreed that a revised framework and guidance would be developed by November 2010. Following the development of the EIF, the WLGA would be developing a peer review process based on the model used in England.

Officers were continuing to monitor the situation and were in contact with colleagues in the WLGA.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities noted the information provided in the report.

87 VALLEYS REGIONAL EQUALITY COUNCIL (VALREC) - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Deputy Leader introduced a report the purpose of which was to feedback to the Committee information presented at the VALREC AGM.

Members asked what the likely impact would be of the economic downturn on the work of VALREC.

The Deputy Leader advised that VALREC were reliant on grant funding mainly from local authorities and would find it difficult to continue to provide equality services if this funding was no longer made available. Service level agreements between VALREC and the 5 local authorities who funded it had recently been implemented which should result in specific pieces of work being undertaken. VALREC had had success in raising community awareness and was now looking to recruit more members from different groups in the community, particularly younger people. VALREC had also been working closely with the Youth Offending Team to challenge the attitudes of those involved in hate incidents.

The Deputy Leader advised that he would continue to report back to the Committee on the work of VALREC and its outcomes.

In response to a question from a Member, the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that there was a risk of VALREC not being able to operate as it did now if its funding sources were affected by the economic situation. He explained that VALREC's funding base included significant levels of grants from local authorities and WAG.

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that VALREC did receive some European grant funding, and had recently had approval for two EU Convergence Funded Projects relating to support for migrant workers and ethnic minority young people. The funding would enable VALREC to recruit additional staff from more diverse backgrounds and so add capacity and increase its knowledge base.

In response to a question from Members, the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships confirmed that VALREC did have a number of voluntary staff who came from different ethnic groups but its caseworkers were salaried staff.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities noted the content of the report.

The meeting closed at 3.50pm.

