

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 13 DECEMBER 2010 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage - Chairperson and Deputy Leader

Councillors

A E Davies
H J David
L C Morgan

Invitees:

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

Officers:

D MacGregor	- Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships
L Smith	- Policy and Performance Officer (Equalities)
P Williams	- Human Resources Business Partner
S Kelly	- Policy and Performance Officer
D Beek	- Human Resources Business Partner
F Blick	- Group Manager, Property Services
P Vukashin	- Access Officer - Property Services
R Kingsley	- Town Centre Manager
B Neville	- UNISON Representative
R Lewis	- Legal Officer
C Branford	- Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitees:

S Green	- Chair, Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People
J Thomas	- Chair, Bridgend Visual Impairment Society

88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor M E J Nott	- Attending South Wales Police Authority meeting
Councillor P A Hacking	- Doctor's appointment
Councillor J C Spanswick	- Other Council business
Councillor M C Wilkins	- Unwell

89 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

90 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2010 were approved as a true and accurate record subject to the following amendments:

'Councillor A E David' be amended to 'A E Davies'
Councillor R D Jenkins be added to the list of attendees.

91 NOTES OF CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

RESOLVED: That the notes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group dated 6 August 2010 were noted.

92 PHYSICAL ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

The Chairperson welcomed the Group Manager – Property, and the Access Officer to the meeting, and explained that they would be giving a presentation to the Committee on the Access Improvement Strategy for Council Premises. He also welcomed Simon Green, Chair of the Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People and Julie Thomas, Chair, Bridgend Visual Impairment Society who would be talking about the 'Access Quest' event held in September 2010.

The Group Manager - Property introduced a report, the purpose of which was to inform the Committee how the Authority was responding to access issues for disabled people in the Borough's communities. She advised the Committee that the Authority continued to make good progress in improving physical access to its properties in line with its Asset Management Plan (2021). The Authority had also demonstrated improvement against the Consortium for Local Authorities (CLAW) performance indicators.

The Group Manager - Property then gave a presentation outlining recent work undertaken by the Authority to improve access to Council premises.

The Chairperson thanked the Officers for their presentation, and invited the representatives from the disability groups to comment on the improvements that had been made to Council premises as outlined in the presentation.

The Chair, Bridgend Visual Impairment Society (Bridge VIS) advised that although the physical access improvements were to be welcomed there was also a need for an improvement in attitudes towards disabled people and for staff to receive training on meeting the needs of disabled people. She advised that, on visiting a Council facility to attend a meeting she had been repeatedly asked to sign the visitors book despite making it clear that she was unable to do this because she was visually impaired.

The Chair, Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People (BCDP) advised that attitudes varied widely from person to person, and unfortunately many people would not speak to a wheelchair user directly but instead spoke to the person accompanying them whom they assumed was their carer.

The Group Manager - Property advised that although the Access Improvement Strategy was concerned with physical access to buildings, the points made were helpful and would be followed up.

A Member asked if the consultation on the new street A-Board Licensing Scheme in town centres had included the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

The Chair, Bridgend VIS explained that a lot of their members did have guide dogs and that the dogs had been trained to follow routes and lead their owner around any obstacle. However, A-Boards were a problem if they were not regulated in terms of positioning and time, especially for those visually impaired people who did not have a dog. She explained that while having more dropped kerbs was welcome for wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments, guide dogs are trained to wait at kerbs until it was safe to cross a road, and this should be considered when road layouts are being designed.

The Chairperson clarified that Cabinet had recently approved a policy to license street furniture and signage, and had appointed an enforcement officer to ensure that the policy was enforced.

The Chairperson invited the representatives of the disability groups to describe the 'Access Quest' event held in Bridgend town centre in September.

The Chair, Bridgend BCDP advised that the Coalition had been in existence for three years, and in order to revive the organisation following a drop off in membership it had been decided to hold an event to raise public awareness of the issues facing disabled people. The event had been supported by the Assembly Member, BCBC and HMP Parc.

The Chair, Bridgend VIS explained that the main purpose of the event had been for able bodied people to put themselves in the position of a disabled person and understand the challenges they might face when undertaking everyday tasks such as shopping and going to the bank.

There were many positives to note about the access improvements, however, in some instances the signage to make people aware of facilities for the disabled such as hearing loops was too small.

The Coalition hoped to interact in a more formal way with others in the future in order to bring about further improvements and also to give advice on training of staff.

The Town Centre Manager advised that she had spent her time on the 'Access Quest' shadowing a group of deaf and hearing impaired people. The experience had revealed that although people were not necessarily negative towards disabled people they were not always aware of what help to give and of the services available such as, for example, the availability of British Sign Language Interpreters working in the Bridgend area. The event had highlighted the need for disability groups to be consulted on any public realm improvement work, and shown that pedestrianisation alone did not make an area totally accessible for disabled people. The Chair, BCDP added that there was also a problem with accessibility inside shops, especially for wheelchair users.

The Chair, BCDP advised that the event had proved successful and it was hoped to replicate it in Maesteg and Porthcawl town centres in the future. Membership of the Coalition currently stood at 100 and it was hoped that more active members could be encouraged to join. Following the event, letters had been sent to local businesses pointing out positive and negative experiences, and suggesting ways in which improvements could be made. It was also hoped that BCDP would organise an event to highlight the impact of disability hate crime on individuals in the near future.

The Chair, Bridgend VIS advised that it was important to be positive about disability, and to continue to organise groups events rather than focus on the negative. She thanked the Policy and Performance Officer (Equalities) for all her help with organising the event, and emphasised the importance of the role within the Authority.

The Chairperson thanked the invitees for their contributions to the meeting and emphasised the need for raising awareness of the challenges faces by disabled people and the need to make Bridgend safer and more accessible for people with disabilities.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee – Equalities:

- (1) Noted the content of the report and the presentations by Officers from the Council's Property Services and the representatives of Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People and Bridgend Visual Impairment Society.
- (2) Agreed to receive a report on equalities training for Bridgend County Borough Council staff at its next meeting.

93 WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON SPECIFIC EQUALITY DUTIES ON THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN WALES

The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships presented a report the purpose of which was to seek the view of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities on the draft response to WAG on its proposals to develop specific equality duties for public sector organisations in Wales.

He explained that the Equality Act passed in Spring 2010 introduced a new general public equality duty towards groups with protected equality characteristics. Under the Act the Welsh Minister was given powers to impose specific equality duties on the public sector in Wales. WAG had published a consultation document on the draft Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, and were now seeking views and suggestions from stakeholders. The Authority's draft responses were set out in the report, and the Committee were invited to comment on the points made.

The Committee considered the responses and made the following amendments:

- Q ii - The word 'No' be deleted and replaced by 'Neither'
- Q v - The word 'No' be inserted as the first word of the response.
- Q ix - The words 'None to be included or removed' be added behind the word 'No'

The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that responses were required to be returned to WAG by 17 December, and an outcome report would be published by WAG in January 2011. The duties were expected to come into force on 6 April 2011.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee - Equalities considered the issues raised in the report and identified the changes to be included in the Authority's response as set out above.

94 CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME - HALF YEARLY PROGRESS REPORT 2010-11

The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships introduced a report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with a half-yearly progress report on the Corporate Equality Scheme. He advised that seven of the objectives had not been achieved because new regulations from WAG were yet to be published; and the self-assessment process had been delayed due to delays in the rollout of the WLGA self-assessment guidance. Examples of improvements included the launch of the new domestic abuse protocol in September 2010, the launch of the 'Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan', the hosting of a workshop as part of the 'All Wales Hate Crime Research Project', and the 'Access Quest' event.

Members suggested that greater progress needed to be made on Objective 60, encouraging greater take-up of Youth Service activities among disabled young people by removing barriers which prevented them taking part.

The Policy and Performance Officer (Equalities) advised that this was an example of services needing to recognise that their activities were achieving equality objectives, and ensuring that outcomes were recorded. A series of events had been held in the last year to make activities accessible to more young people but further work needed to be undertaken with the service area to gain feedback on the outcomes.

In response to a question on Objective 12, the Policy and Performance Officer (Equalities) advised that the objective had not been fully achieved because a permanent Customer Participation Group to review delivery against the Customer Service Charter had not been established and that this was an action that would need to be reviewed.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee - Equalities received and considered the half-yearly progress report.

95 HALF-YEARLY REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2008-11

The Policy and Performance Officer presented a report the purpose of which was to update the Committee on progress with implementing the Council's Welsh Language Scheme 2008-11.

He advised that one of the most significant areas was the development of a bilingual website. To date more than 1290 web pages had been translated at a cost of £17,000. Staff had been asked to produce all new website content in both Welsh and

English. Although it had not been possible to make the entire website bilingual, the most important areas had been targeted.

Another significant area was the development of a Welsh Language Skills Strategy which had been drafted and shared with the Welsh Language Board. The Policy and Performance Officer thanked colleagues in Human Resources for their work on the Strategy. Work was currently ongoing to investigate development opportunities for fluent Welsh speaking staff members. In many cases staff did not have formal Welsh language skills but had simply spoken it within their homes or communities. Staff often found it difficult to translate technical terms and jargon when dealing with Welsh speaking customers and some training would be developed to meet these needs. The Welsh Language Board had advised that the Authority needed to plan in a systematic way where training for staff was required.

Member asked how many hits had been made on the Welsh Language website.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that as the Welsh Language website had only been live since October the data had not yet been analysed, but should be available for the next meeting.

Members asked if bilingual advertising was used when advertising in the national press.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that the majority of job advertising was done on-line which was far more cost-effective than using newspapers.

Members congratulated the Policy and Performance Officer on his report and wished him well in his new role at Hafod Housing.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the progress being made in implementing the Welsh Language Scheme action plan.

96 EQUALITY IN THE BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL WORKFORCE

The Human Resources Business Partner presented a report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with data on the Council's workforce together with comparative information. He explained that he had attempted to provide the Committee with a set of meaningful data which would allow for assessment of Council's performance against its statutory duties. He advised the Committee that the total number of employees had increased by 60 between September 2009 and September 2010, however, the workforce remained 75% female. He explained that there were movements in the numbers employed between the different categories and school amalgamations contributed to the decrease in that area. There had also been some changes in the way that data was recorded on the Trent system.

The Human Resources Business Partner drew Members' attention to Appendix 2 which showed trends across Wales and South East Wales in comparison to Bridgend Borough and Bridgend County Borough Council. The age profile data revealed that Bridgend County Borough Council had a lower ratio of employees aged 15-24 which had implications for workforce planning.

Members thanked the Human Resources Business Partner for providing the data which they had requested. Members noted that there was a far larger proportion of female teachers than male in schools in the county. They expressed concern that there was a lack of positive male role models in some children's lives.

The Policy and Performance Officer – Equalities advised that this imbalance reflected a national trend which was causing concern throughout the country. The UK Government had recently been debating whether this was an area where positive action measures may be reasonable and proportionate to reverse the trend by targeting teacher training at men.

The Cabinet Member - Resources suggested it may be possible for the Authority to take action at a local level to address the issue locally by recruiting more male classroom assistants.

The Chairperson thanked the Human Resources Business Partner for his report.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Policy and Performance Officer - Equalities would soon be leaving Bridgend County Borough Council to take up a post with Oxfam. The Committee thanked the Officer for all her work and support and wished her well for the future.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet Committee - Equalities received and considered the workforce report.

The meeting closed at 12.10pm