

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON WEDNESDAY, 30 AUGUST 2006 AT 2.15PM

Present:-

Councillor C A Green - Chairperson

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Councillors</u>
D A D Brett	R Hughes	K T Rowlands
R D L Burns	R D Jenkins	J H Tildesley
L Davies	J Radford	K Watkins

Officers:

H Anthony	- Executive Director - Learning
R G Jones	- Executive Director - Environment
L Smith	- Equalities Co-ordinator
S Kelly	- Policy and Performance Officer
R Harries	- Trainee Cabinet & Committee Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Bertorelli who had business commitments.

2 NON-ATTENDANCE DUE TO OTHER COUNCIL BUSINESS

None.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4 MINUTES OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES - 10 APRIL 2006

RESOLVED: That the above minutes be noted.

5 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITY MANAGEMENT GROUP

- (i) 8 February 2006
- (ii) 15 March 2006
- (iii) 26 April 2006
- (iv) 5 June 2006

6 PRESENTATION - "MEETING THE EQUALITIES CHALLENGE"

The Executive Director - Environment gave a presentation on the above subject.

He outlined statistics regarding the ethnicity and Welsh language profile of the Directorate, noting that the majority of the 618 staff considered themselves to be British or Welsh, but only a small minority considered themselves Welsh speakers or readers or writers. He also outlined statistics regarding the age and gender profile of staff, noting that the majority of staff are male and a significant number are aged over forty.

He outlined the measures in place to tackle equalities issues, including:

- The involvement of hard to reach groups in the Local Development Plan.
- Access to Town Centres, including issues such as the Shopmobility scheme and introduction of dropped kerbs;
- Transport - concessionary fares for the over 60's and 16 - 18 year olds and subsidised bus services for 'uneconomical' routes;
- Safety - the new bus station, CCTV cameras in all car parks, street lighting. He noted that new legislation would allow the authority to provide gates to close off alleyways and thoroughfares in certain problem areas;
- Assisted collection services for refuse and recycleables, with subsidised garden waste collection for households with people of pensionable age;
- Enhanced access to cemeteries;
- Redesigned wheelchair friendly Planning Services reception;
- Investment in a new centre and wheelchair accessible "mini reserve" at Kenfig Nature Reserve;
- Housing inspections carried out by Public Protection to ensure that no one is suffering a disadvantage from inadequate or inappropriate housing;
- Disability Discrimination Act advice, available from Planning and Building Control Officers;
- The use of interpreters where necessary;
- Educational activities aimed at vulnerable or disadvantaged customers, such as the Safe and Sound Roadshow;

The Executive Director - Environment noted that, whilst equalities issues could be recognised, the solutions were often less clear, given the need to balance all the demands made on services.

Members noted the real and positive difference that initiatives such as kerb dropping could have on people's lives, but noted the difficulties still faced when, for example, a dropped kerb led onto a pavement which was then blocked by a road sign, thereby still not allowing access to wheelchair users. The Executive Director - Environment agreed the importance of looking at the experience of disabled people as a whole, not just in terms of single issues such as kerb heights.

Certain Members noted the accessibility of Port Talbot shopping centre and Neath town centre in comparison to Bridgend. It was suggested that the Committee might arrange a visit to one or both of these locations in the future, possibly in the company of disabled people to provide valuable insight from their personal experience.

Certain Members queried the costs associated with administering the over 60's bus pass scheme and whether there was any evidence available that those who applied for them actually used them. The Executive Director - Environment replied that there was currently no information regarding the number of cards in use in comparison to the number of cards issued. However, he advised that there had been an increase in the use of buses, possibly as a consequence of the free bus pass, which had resulted in some bus companies investing in additional stock, thereby improving the service. He noted that the costs involved were reimbursed by the Welsh Assembly Government.

It was noted that, as the bus services were run by private companies, the amount of input the Local Authority could have on this issue was limited. However, it was also noted that the Authority had a fleet of vehicles which could be utilised in some way to fill the gaps left by the private sector. The Executive Director - Environment confirmed that the public transport strategy was being looked at, and that he was not averse to the concept of utilising Local Authority vehicles where circumstances allowed.

Certain Members commented that there was a planning issue to be considered regarding public transport, in that some new estates and small developments were inaccessible to buses. The Executive Director - Environment agreed that new developments should incorporate access to public transport, but noted that it would not be desirable to allow buses access to all areas of an estate: for example, to quiet, low speed streets.

In response to questions from Members, the Executive Director - Environment confirmed that a number of street lights had been fitted with energy efficient bulbs. Regarding the issue of vandalised inspection covers, he noted that it was a manufacturer issue, but there was currently no design available that was proof against all types of wilful damage.

He expanded upon the impending legislation, to be implemented next year that would allow the Local Authority to provide gates to close off alleyways or thoroughfares that had become a focus for anti-social behaviour. However, he noted that this could then result in people with mobility difficulties being unable to access the most direct route between two points. The Equalities Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Disability Rights Commission had already expressed concern regarding this. Their argument was that blocking a shorter route could cause a number of difficulties for people, therefore, by attempting to tackle what might be a perceived problem (fear of crime, as opposed to actual crime) an actual problem could be created for disabled people.

It was agreed that the gating of alleyways should be considered carefully in each case, for the above reasons, but also to ensure that resources remained available to tackle the causes of issues such as anti-social behaviour, as well as the effects.

Regarding housing, the Executive Director - Environment clarified that the Public Protection department had carried out inspections on approximately 30 houses where seven to eight people were living. The houses were well kept and there was no problem at present, but the Authority has the responsibility of ensuring that this remains the case.

The Equalities Co-ordinator added that there was a lot of monitoring of housing in relation to ethnicity, as there were known problems regarding inappropriate and badly maintained housing in city environments. Although this did not appear to be

the case in Bridgend, it was as well to monitor the situation. This also helped the authority to monitor patterns of migration with regard to the authority's duties under the Race Relations Act, to ensure that no one was suffering from discrimination and to help maintain good community relations.

Members agreed the importance of a corporate approach to equalities. The Executive Director - Learning confirmed that consideration was currently being given to having the equalities impact of a policy or plan indicated on each report to Council and Cabinet, to ensure that equalities issues are considered at every juncture, in line with the Authority's statutory duties. She also noted that it would be difficult to identify all the budgets that were used in relation to equalities issues as they would not necessarily be additional expenditure - to do otherwise ran the risk of potentially marginalising the area as a separate issue, rather than seeing it as intrinsic to the work of every part of the Council.

7 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

The Assistant Director Legal Services and Monitoring Officer submitted a report proposing how the schedule of meetings of the Equalities Committee for the forthcoming year is determined.

Members noted that the date and time of meetings was not as important as consistency in sticking to the dates, once agreed. It was anticipated that the change from a Cabinet Committee to a Committee of Council, thus removing the requirement for three Cabinet Members to be present at each meeting, would facilitate this

- RESOLVED
- (1) That all previously proposed meeting dates for the Cabinet Committee - Equalities be disregarded.
 - (2) That the next meeting of the Equalities Committee be held on 20 September 2006 at 3.30pm.
 - (3) That the proposed method for determining subsequent meetings of the Equalities Committee be noted.
 - (4) That a report be presented at the next meeting with the schedule of the most accommodating dates for meetings of the Committee up to December 2007.

8 DRAFT EQUALITIES STATEMENT

The Equalities Co-ordinator outlined a report which sought the endorsement of the Equalities Committee on the revised versions of the general and race equality statements following consultation. The revised statements were attached at Appendix 1, as were draft versions of specific equality statements on gender, disability, sexual orientation, faith, age and carer status for consultation. It was noted that on page 6 of Appendix 1, 'believes' should read 'beliefs'.

Members queried what actions would be taken to achieve support for Councillors in their ward roles, as mentioned in Appendix 1. The Equalities Co-ordinator advised that it was for the Committee to consider what training may be needed by Members, then work could begin with Member Services to implement this. She noted that the WLGA were producing a framework to assist with this. Members noted the

importance of enabling Members not on the Committee to communicate any ideas or issues that they might have.

Members noted that the response rates to consultation had been disappointing. The Equalities Co-ordinator advised that the Policy and Performance Management Unit were looking at ways to improve the level of engagement.

- RESOLVED:
- (1) That the Equalities Committee endorse the amended general and race equality statement and recommend them to Cabinet
 - (2) That the Equalities Committee endorse the draft specific equality statements on gender, disability, sexual orientation, faith, age and carers for consultation.
 - (3) That the Equalities Committee note the contents of the briefing paper (attached at Appendix 2) and agree to the findings of the consultation forming the basis of the revised Welsh language scheme and race equality scheme.

9 PRESENTATION ON DISABILITY EQUALITY DUTY

The Equalities Co-ordinator gave a presentation on the above subject, which covered the following points:

- Existing duties on employers under the Disability Discrimination Act, such as the duty not to treat disabled people less favourably because of their disability, and to make reasonable adjustments to the working environment so that a disabled person is not placed at a substantial disadvantage;
- New public sector duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 focus on organisational change rather than individual adjustments;
- The new duty helps to tackle institutionalised discrimination;
- The variety of disadvantages that disabled people are likely to face; for example, they are more likely to be economically inactive and more likely to live in poverty;
- Statistics related to disability in Bridgend, which reflected a substantial number of unpaid carers (13%, compared to an average of 11% across Wales) and an above average number of people reporting a limiting long-term illness (25%, compared to 22% across Wales, Census 2001);
- The new Disability Equality Duty, which is to:
 - Promote equality of opportunity;
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
 - Eliminate disability-related harassment;
 - Promote positive attitudes to disabled people;
 - Encourage participation in public life;
- The need to produce a Disability Equality Scheme;
- The ways in which the new duty will be enforced;

- The social model of disability;
- The principles of inclusive design;

In response to questions from Members, the Executive Director – Learning advised that the statutory duty that each school produce its own disability equality scheme by April 2007, is because each school had a different location, physical structure and staffing structure. The purpose of these schemes would be to ensure that all pupils had access in the broadest sense possible and that achievement of all types was recognised, whilst acknowledging that for many people, a disability need not be a barrier to academic achievement.

Members queried what would be included in the annual progress report on the Disability Equality Scheme. The Equalities Co-ordinator advised that there was currently quite a wide scope for determining how the authority's duty had been addressed, particularly as the Disability Rights Commission was less prescriptive than some other bodies.

Members raised the possibility of involving Town & Community Councils more in the consultation process. The Equalities Co-ordinator advised that the Town & Community Councils had already been approached as part of the consultation process on the equality statements, but only four had replied. However, it was possible that this was due to the six week time period for responses being too short for community and town councils as many Town and Community Councils may only meet once every eight weeks.

It was suggested that the Corporate Equality Management Group give consideration to setting aside a proportion of existing budgets specifically for equalities issues.

The meeting closed at 12.26pm