

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON WEDNESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2006 AT 3:30PM

Present: -

Councillor C A Green BA - Chairperson

Councillors

M M Bertorelli  
L Davies  
R D Jenkins  
K T Rowlands

Councillors

D A D Brett  
R G Hughes  
J Radford  
D Sage  
M Thomas

Officers

H Anthony - Executive Director Learning  
L Smith - Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator  
A Phillips - Assistant Director Finance  
G P Jones - Principal Cabinet and Committee Officer  
S Kelly - Policy & Performance Management Officer

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors RDL Burns & K Watkins (on holiday) and Councillor J H Tildesley (on other Council Business).

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 30 August 2006 be approved as a true and accurate record.

13 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Corporate Equalities Management Group held on the 10 August 2006 be noted.

14 MEETING THE EQUALITIES CHALLENGE A PRESENTATION FROM THE CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

The Assistant Director Finance informed the Committee how the Corporate Services Directorate was "Meeting the Equalities Challenge". He commented that poverty was a common factor that affected many people that suffered inequality. He quoted one of the Core Values and the Macpherson Report before giving an example of how an

employee considered that he had suffered inequality because the Authority had tried to be fair to everyone. He explained that attempts to address race related issues within the County Borough would be made more difficult because Bridgend had a small percentage of ethnic minorities from many diverse cultures.

The Assistant Director Finance described some of the situations encountered by the Housing Benefits section and the way that members of the public consider people from other ethnic backgrounds. Training for staff can help them deal with these situations but it cannot change the local community's attitude to others.

He described the various Corporate Policies that had been developed to ensure that the key criteria equalities had be considered and incorporated within them. He continued by stating some of the courses that were organised by the Directorate which were requisite for mainstreaming the Equalities Agenda.

The Assistant Director Finance outlined the Policy and Resource allocation, Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) budget and how it was being used. He described the Equalities Review undertaken in 2004 where no issues were raised but awareness of equalities issues were not fully understood. Each member of Corporate Services has access to the Staff Handbook which includes equalities guidelines. Most documents adhere to the Welsh Language Act by being available in both English and Welsh. The Assistant Director Finance also expressed the benefits of work-life balance and the potential benefits to allow staff to work from home.

The Assistant Director Finance explained the actions currently being undertaken by the Directorate which included dealing with the issues of poverty and improving the provision of the housing benefits team by partnership working with the Citizen's Advice Bureau. He continued by stating the importance of the "Job Evaluation" process to deliver equal pay and policies to address poverty.

He commented that the Directorate would be working on addressing the "Legal Services Commission Compact", which was a revised version of legal aid to provide advice to the community. The Directorate would also be proactive with benefits issues to provide a better understanding of poverty and attempt to change the "hearts and minds" of individuals to enhance the communities of the County Borough.

The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator informed the Committee of a recent national Equalities Review where research had established that poverty was a key factor in inequalities. Poverty appeared to be a link and provided a concept of disadvantage. Many equalities issues were not covered by a single piece of legislation which would make infringements easily identifiable.

Members queried aspects of Corporate Parenting and if the diversity of ethnic minorities was catered for in schools and community residential care. It was explained by the Executive Director – Learning that the proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities was about 1% and that in terms of school meals, special needs and vegetarian options were provided but that it was not possible to provide a hallal menu.

Members expressed their concerns regarding community attitudes to each other without even contemplating any race or other equalities issues. This problem may be further exasperated with the potential influx of EU based populations into the area.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Equalities Committee noted the details of the presentation.

15 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That the preferred dates and times of future meeting as listed in the report be approved.

16 DRAFT CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY AND PLAN

The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator presented a report seeking the Committee's endorsement of the Draft Corporate Equality Plan and Policy in order to achieve a level 2 of the Equality Standard by March 2007. Progress to-date had been limited but with approval of this plan the Equalities Statements would be able to be distributed for consultation. She commented that performance indicator data would be collected for the items listed in pages 21-27 of the report and that information gathering from the 2001 Census, Department of Work & Pensions and other sources.

Members welcomed the report and recognition of the harmful effect discrimination can have in the community and that it was necessary to have a more inclusive County Borough. It was suggested that Equalities should be taken as a whole issue and not be separated into various categories such as race etc. The Chairperson commented that it was important to have quantitative and qualitative information to provide the best outcomes for addressing equalities issues inside the organisation and outside in the County Borough.

The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator highlighted the annual workforce analysis which will profile changes with the organisation and help us to monitor the mix of people work for the Authority and those that leave. Members argued that the youth were prejudiced against because of their lack of experience.

RESOLVED: That the Equalities Committee endorse the draft Corporate Equality Policy and Plan recommend it to Cabinet.

17 CITIZENS PANEL SURVEY ON NEIGHBOURHOOD AND SOCIETY

The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator presented a report describing the results of a Citizen's Panel survey regarding Neighbourhood and Society. She explained that the survey was similar to those carried out in Cumbria and Scotland and that the Citizen's Panel was equally balanced in line with the make up of the residents of the County Borough.

There had been a high response (73%) so views were likely to reflect general attitudes towards groups including Black and Minority Ethnic. Members gave examples of negative attitudes towards minority groups which they had observed and needed to be addressed. The Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator commented that the Authority should provide fair treatment for all residents of the County Borough and that staff and Member development was ongoing to raise equalities awareness and

practices. Members suggested that this issue was similar to the equal rights for women or for the abolishment of slavery. Attitudes can be changed.

The Members requested that it would be beneficial to have a youth representative on the Equalities Committee and requested further investigations to include a member of the Youth Council attend future meetings or special meetings be arranged to allow the Youth Council to be involved.

RESOLVED:

That the Equalities Committee:

- (1) Note the report and the summary report on neighbourhood and society.
- (2) Agree to investigate the inclusion of a Youth Member onto the equalities Committee

The meeting closed at 5.20pm.