

Bridgend County Borough Council

Report of the Chief Executive

Equalities Committee

21 February 2007

Proposals on Bridgend Multi-Agency Equalities Forum

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek the endorsement of the Equalities Committee on the new terms of reference for the Bridgend multi-agency forum on equalities.

2. Background

2.1 This proposal forms part of the Authority's Corporate Equality Policy and plan which includes commitments to put in place appropriate governance structures for equality policy development and strategic management and to work with our partner organisations to have a more inclusive county borough.

2.2 The Bridgend Race Equality Forum was established as part of the Authority's first Race Equality Scheme. The forum enjoys the support of all of the Authority's key local partners from the public and voluntary sector, including South Wales Police, Parc Prison, the Crown Prosecution Service, Bridgend Campaign Against Racism and the Valleys Race Equality Council.

2.3 In response to changes taking place in the national equality agenda and the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for transforming public services in Wales, (*Making the Connections – Delivering Beyond the Boundaries report*, November 2006), the forum members proposed that the terms of reference of the group be reviewed. At the forum's meeting on 1 February 2007 it was agreed that new terms of reference be adopted by the forum and its member organisations. It was therefore proposed that as a first step the new terms of reference for the forum be submitted for approval to the Council's Equalities Committee.

3. Proposal for adoption of new terms of reference for the Bridgend Multi-Agency Equalities Forum

3.1 Following a review of relevant legislation the members of the forum determined that by adopting the new terms of reference it will be able to respond to issues of social inclusion and contribute to meeting legal obligations covering gender, race, disability, language, faith, sexual orientation, age and human rights as they apply to the public sector.

3.2 Following a review of other equality forums in operation across the UK, and specifically those in neighbouring local authorities, the members of the forum concluded that a change in status for the forum would be beneficial in a number of ways:

- *The Equality Standard for Local Government in Wales* – The Forum could perform a peer role in monitoring the Authority’s progress towards the standard, and also meeting the specific requirements of the Standard in terms of community engagement.
- *Statutory Equality Schemes* – The Forum should perform a vital function in helping shape statutory equality schemes, and also monitor the effectiveness of their delivery.
- *Bridgend Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)* – The Forum might perform a very useful role linking with the LSP, which is the strategic body bringing together the local public, private and voluntary sectors to tackle joint priorities. Equality and inclusivity is a specific priority in the vision. The Forum might provide a means for voicing equalities issues to the LSP, and might also act as conduit for information from the LSP to the local community.
- *Commission for Equality and Human Rights* – With the establishment of the new CEHR, the Forum should be the local embodiment of the new pan-equality agenda, linking in with whatever structures emerge regionally and nationally.

4. Legal and financial implications

This report contributes to the Authority meeting its statutory duties on equality and there are no financial implications arising.

5. Recommendations

That the Equalities Committee approve the new terms of reference for the Bridgend Multi-Agency Equalities Forum (attached at Appendix 1).

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Chief Executive
21 February 2007

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Background papers:

- Equality Standard for Local Government in Wales

Appendix 1

Draft Terms of Reference for the Bridgend Equalities Forum

Chair

Richard Landy, Assistant Director Learning & Skills, Bridgend County Borough Council, shall act as inaugural chair the Forum. Subsequently, a chair shall be elected annually on a rotating basis.

Secretariat

Administrative assistance shall be provided by the Policy and Performance Management Unit, Bridgend County Borough Council.

Terms of Reference

The aim of the Forum is to promote equality and good community relations, and eliminate discrimination in Bridgend County Borough. It will take a pan-equality approach, encompassing age, carers, disability, faith & religion, gender, race, sexuality and the Welsh language.

The Forum shall:

- Discuss emerging issues relating to equalities, such as equalities legislation, and how they impact upon Bridgend County Borough and the work of members of the Forum;
- Discuss any equalities-related matters or incidents that may have arisen or may arise within local communities;
- Provide a means for members to express views or concerns on behalf of their organisations and the people they serve or whose views they represent;
- Provide a means for members to share information, experience, intelligence and best practice on promoting equality and tackling discrimination;
- Facilitate and promote joint working between public sector agencies, service providers and equalities organisations;
- Provide a pool of expertise for consultation and offering guidance and best practice when partners are formulating plans to promote equality and tackle discrimination, although the Forum shall not in any way act as a replacement for the statutory duties and regular channels of consultation between public bodies and their communities;
- Provide a means for members to request feedback on whether their initiatives to promote equality and tackle discrimination have proven effective, and how they might be improved and further progressed;

- Communicate and liase with the relevant decision-making bodies of the member organisations, as and where necessary to further the above actions; and
- Establish links with the Bridgend Local Strategic Partnership to assist with mainstreaming equalities in the formulation and delivery of the local Community Strategy.

Membership

Membership of the Forum shall be comprised of public sector bodies, service providers and voluntary sector equality organisations in Bridgend County Borough, as specified in Appendix/Annex/Schedule. Amendments to this will require the approval of the Forum.

Meetings

Meetings of the Forum shall take place bi-monthly.