

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2007 AT 10:00AM

Present: -

Councillor C A Green BA - Chairperson

Councillors

R D L Burns
L Davies
E P Foley
P Hacking
R G Hughes
R D Jenkins

Councillors

J Radford
K T Rowlands
D Sage
M Thomas
K Watkins

Officers

L Smith - Corporate Equalities Co-ordinator
S Kelly - Policy and Performance Management Officer
C Bellis-Williams - Legal Officer
L O'Brien - Cabinet and Committee Officer

62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor M M Bertorelli -
Councillor D A D Brett -
Councillor M C Voisey -

63 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

64 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2007

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 7 November 2007 be approved as a true and accurate record.

65 MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP 21 NOVEMBER 2007

Members reviewed the minutes and indicated that only certain Stellant pages were possible to view bilingually. The Corporate Equalities Coordinator (CEC) explained that the focus of the Authority should be to review the purpose and content of the web pages and then rationalise them. She further explained that this had been put to the Welsh Language Board (WLB). Members were informed by the Chair that the wholesale translation of Committee papers would not help many in Bridgend, but that Stellant was a bilingual system. Members agreed that the Authority has a statutory obligation to present information bilingually. The CEC explained that the Welsh language version of the webpages had been under construction for a long time and work needed to be done to resolve this situation. The Chair explained that the £20K

earmarked was essential to avoid litigation and uphold the statutory obligation regarding bilingualism. The CEC concluded that if the Authority was not seen to be taking rational steps now then there would be concerns for the future.

Members asked the CEC how the meeting with the WLB had progressed. The CEC explained that the meeting had gone well and that it had enlightened officers as to the direction taken by the WLB and how the Authority could develop schemes to enhance bilingualism. She further explained that the WLB had expressed great interest in the access to Welsh language in front line services.

66 LEGAL OFFICER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Legal Officer introduced the respective roles of Members and invitees in relation to the fact that the Equalities Committee is now a Cabinet function. She also explained that the quorum for the meeting will be 3 Members.

67 REPORT ON REVIEW OF MECHANISMS FOR TACKLING AND RESPONDING TO HATE MOTIVATED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

The Report was introduced by the Corporate Equalities Coordinator, who emphasised the purpose of the report in providing an update on current legislative changes and how the Authority had been tackling the issues of hate motivated violence and harassment. She explained that the local and national press had raised the profile of such incidents and that increased Community Leadership and the good work with the Community Safety Partnership were key features of the response in Bridgend.

The CEC explained that the UK Government views the introduction of a Single Equalities Act as being essential in drawing together the various equalities legislative strands, and that the Green Paper aims to extend the current protection to cover a wide range of areas.

The CEC explained that definitions of harassment and hate crime as highlighted in the report and pointed out that there were a lot of local activities that the Authority should be proud of having introduced. She went through the initiatives introduced and partnerships made in relation to Hate Crime, Domestic Abuse/Violence, Children and Young People and Bullying and Corporate Policies on Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace. The CEC concluded with a run through of the recommendations.

In response to the report, Members requested information on the efforts to raise awareness of harassment and hate crime. The CEC explained that Union involvement has given access to poster proliferation and further cooperation would help raise awareness. She confirmed that the South Wales Police (SWP) also circulated posters to local firms who had experienced such matters and that it would be best not to duplicate the work of SWP. The Cabinet Member – Community explained that the Community Safety Partnership was dealing with matters on an ongoing basis.

Members suggested that the Authority should highlight respecting all people rather than just identifiable groups. They also suggested that domestic abuse figures were a concern and that a closer look should be focused on prevention. The CEC explained that a programme was under development to help target potential perpetrators of domestic abuse/violence. She also explained that the programme will create a basic model to apply to all perpetrators, both male and female, whilst recognising the Police experience of having to deal with male on female domestic abuse and violence.

Members suggested that bullying information and initiatives were good, but that young suicides were a concern and needed addressing. The CEC explained that the Welsh Assembly government guidelines were comprehensive in relation to all forms of bullying, but that distinction is made in relation to bullying on the basis of race, gender or disability. She further explained that bullying had a more marked effect upon those in vulnerable groups. Members disagreed with the final point raised and explained that all bullying had a marked effect no matter the target victim. Members queried as to the use of restorative justice and meetings with bullies. The CEC explained that VALREC had had success in developing meetings between bullies and the bullied and that it would have to be considered further in order to apply to the whole of the Authority.

The Cabinet Member – Community suggested that preventative measures relating to domestic abuse would have a knock on effect to the numbers of Looked After Children who are removed from the parental home when faced with increased levels of domestic violence. He explained that domestic abuse and bullying had a marked effect upon the mental health of children. He also commented that he was alarmed at the point made in the report that some groups of people were expressly protected from harassment, while others were not. He stated that he was of the opinion that harassment and bullying should not be exclusive in terms of protection. The Chair explained that certain groups were given added protection due to their particular vulnerability in society. The CEC also explained that the Green Paper has highlighted addressing the inequalities in relation to protection.

Members explained that the buddy system has worked well in Blaengarw Primary School, as well as helping with transition to secondary school, due in part to better liaison links with Ynysawdre Comprehensive School. The CEC explained that the Youth Council and Anti-Bullying Forum had highlighted transition from Primary to comprehensive as being an area of concern.

Members commented that domestic abuse required more work on getting people to realise that they were victims of abuse or perpetrators. They also returned to an early point raised that bullying was bad for all concerned irrespective of race, gender or physical ability. In their view, political correctness had gone off course and created an unequal situation. The CEC explained that this legal distinction had been made by government and that they were seeking to address the distinctions and inequalities within the new legislation.

The Chair asked whether or not the Authority had a responsibility to seek monitoring information from schools regarding their bullying incidents, given that the report suggested that the Authority had no statutory obligation to do so. The Cabinet Member – Resources explained that it was not unreasonable to suggest that the Local Education Authority should monitor and present information regarding bullying. He did query as to what the Authority would be able to do with the information it received. The Chair explained that the Authority could use the information to develop a better idea of how schools apply anti-bullying strategies and how the policy can be modified and updated.

The Cabinet Member – Resources commented that the research carried out by the Policy and Performance Management Unit and that the Members webpages should include links to help support their continued awareness of equalities issues.

Members queried as to what training teachers received in relation to bullying. The Chair confirmed that they did receive training through INSET.

In relation to the collection of information on bullying from pupils, Members commented that there needed to be a clear picture of the situation in schools. The Policy and Performance Management Officer explained that pupils could report online and were anonymous, in addition to more conventional incident reporting mechanisms. The CEC confirmed that VALREC were keen to develop different systems of reporting for pupils using the Viewpoint package.

Members were concerned that domestic violence remained a grey area. They queried whether all police call outs regarding domestic violence complaints were recorded in the official statistics. The CEC explained that this was the case and that the police were thorough in recording details and supporting those wishing to take matters further in legal terms. She also explained that the Authority could still do more in its Community Leadership role to develop better preventative mechanisms. The Cabinet Member – Community confirmed the recording of all police visits regarding domestic violence call outs, and explained that this helped to create an audit trail of incidents.

Members raised the concern that 1:4 women and 1:6 men were recorded victims of domestic violence, but that the report did not indicate those who did not report their subjection to domestic abuse. It was also suggested that domestic abuse had a marked effect upon how children perceived right or wrong in terms of behaviour.

Members suggested that the information from schools would help to create a similar process throughout the Authority as a responsible and responsive employer. It would be useful to see whether or not harassment and hate crimes were issues for all Authority employees, including Councillors.

The Cabinet Member – Resources raised the point that an online forum would be a useful way of providing feedback on anti-bullying strategies and could then be replicated as an online Intranet version for BCBC staff to report bullying and harassment in the workplace. The CEC explained that the Authority would have to be mindful of the ICT capacity of schools to be able to support online reporting systems. It could however, be a useful pilot in some schools throughout the County Borough. The Policy and Performance Management Officer explained that school councils played a proactive role in anti-bullying and that all schools sent representatives to the Anti-Bullying forum, as well as utilising information from the Viewpoint package. He concluded that reporting mechanisms did exist and included peer driven and buddy solutions. Members suggested that vertical registration systems did help to create a greater mix amongst age groups at registration time, as well as providing an informal mentoring system.

The Chair concluded that the recommendations should include the presentation of bullying monitoring reports from all schools. The Policy and Performance Management Officer explained that HR policies are currently being reviewed, and suggested that this might be an opportunity for a monitoring function regarding bullying and harassment to be built into the Harassment Policy. These policies are being presented to the Cabinet for ratification, so Members would be able to review the possibility at that stage.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted, along with the recommendations. However, Members agreed to include the additional recommendation that Committee requests a report of bullying monitoring in schools, to be compiled by the LEA. Members also commented that the last recommendation in the report include Members as well as Officers in the review of employment policies.

The meeting closed at 11.50am.