

CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE – 6 APRIL 2009

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE HELD IN
COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 6
APRIL 2009 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage - Chairperson

Councillors

H J David
A E Davies
J C Spanswick

Invitees:

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

Officers:

D MacGregor - Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships
S Pryce - Head of Regeneration and Development
L Smith - Policy and Performance Management Officer (Equalities)
S Kelly - Policy and Performance Management Officer (Research)
L Hutton - Transformation and Development Manager
J Jordan - Accessible Homes Project
A Rees - Senior Cabinet and Committee Officer

In Attendance:

Naomi Alleyne - Director of Equalities and Social Justice, Welsh Local Government Association

27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:-

Councillor P A Evans - Work commitments
Councillor L C Morgan - Other Council Business
Councillor M E J Nott - Other Council Business

28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

29 NOTES OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

The notes of the meeting of the Corporate Equalities Management Group held on 6 February 2009 were noted.

30 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2009 were approved as a true and accurate record.

31 PRESENTATION ON THE EQUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR WALES

The Committee received a presentation from Naomi Alleyne, Director of Equalities and Social Justice, Welsh Local Government Association on the Equality Improvement Framework for Wales. The Director of Equalities and Social Justice was pleased to see that the Council was one of a few local authorities in Wales to have established an Equalities Committee.

She informed the Committee that there were a number of changes to equalities legislation which impacted on equality standards. The WLGA was looking at processes and ensuring equality schemes were in place in local authorities. Since 2002 there had been public sector reform, namely the Beecham review and Making the Connections, there remained a lack of understanding on equality issues which would be addressed by the Equality Improvement Framework. The key focus of the Framework was on service improvement and the need for a joined up approach. It had been designed to 'talk' to local authority approaches to the Wales Programme for Improvement. The aim of the Framework is to promote equality outcomes through a performance management system that supports the development of equal opportunity as a value within local government. The Framework supported local authorities with meeting their equality duties for service delivery, employment and community leadership. It also supported improvements to equality outcomes for race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age and Welsh Language. She informed the Committee that there was a need to ensure legal duties were met and also to ensure that training was provided on equality issues throughout Wales. The aim is to secure continuous improvement of equality outcomes for local communities, responding to local needs and circumstances and engagement with stakeholders throughout the improvement process.

The Welsh Assembly Government had developed the Community Cohesion Agenda for Wales which promoted equality and diversity and set out a vision of community cohesion and understanding. The Framework had been developed to work within the context of community cohesion and is intended to improve quality of services through the application of equality principles.

The 11 key improvement elements were outlined:

- Values
- Vision
- Leadership
- Outcomes
- Performance Management
- Self-Assessment
- Engagement

- Evidence based systems
- Challenge
- Transparency and accountability
- Capability

She highlighted the importance of Member involvement in scrutinising the approach by officers to equalities on achievements and outcomes. The WLGA was working on pilot aspects of the Framework with 3 local authorities, namely, Blaenau Gwent, Neath Port Talbot and Flintshire.

A discussion took place on the performance of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission since it came into being in October 2007 and what the Commission was to do in terms of enforcement. The WLGA had met the Commission to discuss equal pay, issues around domestic abuse and the lack of diversity across Wales in elected Members. The Commission was in the process of defining its role, but its focus would be human rights issues. She advised that the cohesion strategy placed more emphasis on structures, rights and responsibilities. The Government had announced a £35m fund in respect of the equalities agenda, the WLGA was of the view that most of these resources should be devoted to local government.

The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships was encouraged by the comments made by the Director of Equalities and Social Justice in relation to the work being undertaken by the Committee, namely the Action Plan on the Draft Corporate Equality Scheme which was considered by the Committee today. He highlighted the importance of the Action Plan being championed through the Council's services.

The Committee thanked the Director of Equalities and Social Justice for presenting an excellent overview of equalities.

32 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT AND THE BRIDGEND ACCESSIBLE HOMES PROJECT

The Head of Regeneration and Development presented a report regarding Disabled Facilities Grant and the Bridgend Accessible Homes Project which aimed to provide the best use of adapted housing stock and reduce the number of adaptations to non-adopted social rented properties.

She stated that there was growing pressure on local authorities to provide adaptations to assist people to remain living at home independently, this was set against a background of an ageing housing stock. The Council had sped up the process of delivering DFGs during 2007/08 being the second quickest performance in Wales. This was due to revised working arrangements, including the introduction of fast-tracking schemes, however, this had brought budgetary pressures. A Working Group had been established to look at budgetary pressures, the effect upon applicants, a review of the entire DFG process, budgetary control measures and the impact upon applicants for all categories of grants. Issues relating to procurement, contracts, quality and accountability had been the subject of review.

The Project Co-ordinator informed the Committee that the Accessible Homes Project was recently established to provide a service that matched those people in need of social rented adapted housing to meet their physical needs. The aim was to reduce the need for adaptations in social rented properties, thus controlling the budgetary

pressures from this type of applicant. The project was proving very successful, with 37 households (66 people) having been relocated to suitably adapted properties, through the Disabled Housing Register during the period October 2007 to September 2008. Close working links had been established with the Community Occupational Therapy Team which continued to be a vital part of the process of matching applicants to adapted properties. The Assistant Chief Executive Corporate Development and Partnerships informed the Committee that the ethos of the service is to promote independence and he commented on the success of the service. The Policy and Performance Management Officer (Equalities) commented on the importance of equality impact assessments in the project.

The Committee commended the project and in particular the database which was used to match people to available adapted and accessible homes.

The Committee thanked the Head of Regeneration and Development and the Project Co-ordinator of the Bridgend Accessible Homes Project for their contributions.

RESOLVED: That the actions and progress being made to deliver Disabled Facilities Grant, including that made through the Bridgend Accessible Homes Project be noted.

33 PROGRESS ON THE CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships presented a report which summarised the responses to the public consultation on the Authority's draft Corporate Equality Scheme and sought comments on the draft action plan which was almost finished with Directorates. He outlined the consultation and involvement activities undertaken between the 23 February and 23 March 2009 based on the draft scheme. He also outlined an initial analysis to the responses received, the points highlighted had been addressed in the draft scheme and the action plan. The structure of the Equality Scheme and action plan included Corporate equality objectives that aimed to eliminate discrimination based on age, disability, gender, gender re-assignment, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. In addition to these, corporate equality objectives there were priorities that relate to the Authority's specific duties on disability, race and gender equality. The Policy and Performance Management Officer (Equalities) informed the Committee that following its previous special meeting the Bridgend Equality Forum had met to consider the initial draft of the action plan.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships informed the Committee that there would be an opportunity to present regular progress reports against the action plan. He also advised that the Corporate Equalities Scheme would be presented to the Cabinet on the 26 May 2009 for approval of the scheme.

The Policy and Performance Management Officer (Equalities) informed the Committee that equality and diversity training for staff and managers had been implemented and an interim report was expected from the trainer together with feedback from course participants.

The Committee suggested the following amendments to the draft Corporate Equalities Scheme:-

Section 1 of the scheme to include reference to the Equalities Committee;

The last column of the action plan to read “by whom”.

RESOLVED: That :-

- (1) The Cabinet Equalities Committee consider the draft Corporate Equality Scheme and action plan which was subject to further development by relevant Directorates.
- (2) A glossary of terms used in the scheme be added to the scheme and action plan.

34 WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME - ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

The Policy and Performance Management Officer (Research) presented a report which sought approval of the Authority’s Annual Monitoring Report on the Welsh Language Scheme, to be submitted to the Welsh Language Board. He outlined the progress made during the financial year 2008/9 and summarised progress against the timetable, in particular the Customer Service Centre which had seen the recruitment and training of Welsh speaking staff, bi-lingual electronic signage and touch screens. The Council had opened its first Welsh medium comprehensive at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd, which was officially opened by the First Minister. The availability of front line services through the medium of Welsh. The Council was working with the University of Glamorgan to ensure that the recruitment of staff was backed up by the provision of bespoke “Welsh in the Workplace” training. The University would be using the Customer Service Centre as an example of “Welsh in the Workplace” case study to present to the Welsh Assembly Government. A project team had been established to take forward the development of a bilingual website during 2009.

The Policy and Performance Management Officer (Research) reported on statistical data on the number of Welsh speakers, readers and writers employed by the Authority per Directorate.

He also reported that the scheme had been judged to be in “full compliance” of the Welsh Language Board’s review of the complaints systems.

The Committee considered that it would be helpful for the level of Welsh language skills amongst Councillors to be reported to the Committee. The Committee also wished to see Welsh language courses being offered to Councillors at above entry level.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Monitoring Report to the Welsh Language Board be approved.

35 ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS TO COUNCIL PROPERTIES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

The Head of Property and Finance presented a report with information relating to Access Improvement to Council Properties for Disabled People. He reported on a list of properties completed to date and projects planned for the new financial year. To date twenty three schemes have been completed and one scheme was currently underway. An approximate guide of the total cost of all DDA works required at this

point in time was in the order of £4.9m. However this figure would reduce all the time with the Asset Management Planning asset rationalization process.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the information presented in the appendices.

36 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CHARTER AND THE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

RESOLVED: That consideration of this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee and the Committee noted that it should have been informed by the appropriate officers that they were not in a position to attend the meeting.

37 EQUALITIES IN THE BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL WORKFORCE

The Transformation and Development Manager reported on equalities in the workforce data as at the 31 December 2009. A statistical overview of the current workforce in the Council was found at Appendix 1 of the report, an analysis of the current workforce based on gender and pay grade was captured at Appendix 2 of the report. Detailed analysis for the current workforce for the whole of the Council and excluding schools based on the equality strands identified in the report were appended at Appendices 3 and 4 respectively. The data used for analysis was generated by the Trent Integrated/HR Payroll System. The collation of equalities-related data was dependent upon employees disclosing personal details as there was no mandatory requirement to provide certain aspects of equalities information to an employer.

The Transformation and Development Manager advised that the Council was exploring the introduction of modern apprenticeships.

RESOLVED: That the quarterly workforce data reports produced as at December 2008 be noted and used to carry out comparative analyses of the Council's Workforce Reports produced for past and subsequent quarters at the end of each March, June and September.

The meeting closed at 12.00 noon.