

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INFORMATION REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

5 OCTOBER 2009

REPORT OF THE VALREC REPRESENTATIVE – THE DEPUTY LEADER

VALLEYS REGIONAL EQUALITY COUNCIL (VALREC) – ANNUAL MEETING

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet Committee – Equalities of the information arising at the Annual Meeting of VALREC.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 There is a need for 'Committees' to maintain or improve the communication of the outcomes of the Authority's meetings to support all Corporate priorities, via the decision making process.

3. Background.

- 3.1 At the previous meeting of the Cabinet Committee Equalities, it was agreed that the as the Authority's only representative with VALREC the Deputy Leader would attend its Annual Meeting and provide the Cabinet Committee with any relevant information arising from the meeting.

4. Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 The Annual General Meeting of VALREC was held on 29 July 2009 at the Llancaiach Fawr Manor House in Nelson. There were 89 representatives from a wide spectrum of organisations dealing with race and equality issues.
- 4.2 The Chair's report was given by Surinder Singh Randhawa on behalf of Dr Randhawa. He informed the meeting that a number of changes had been made to the Constitution to broaden the remit of the organisation and operate across the full spectrum of the Equalities Act 2006. The challenges that had been encountered were being addressed with the support of a number of partners and it was hoped that the support from these organisations would continue as the identity of VALREC developed.
- 4.3 The Director Mr Ron Davies, explained that during the 2008-09 year, there was a change in the funding regime following the merger of the Commission for Racial Equality into the new single Equality and Human Rights Commission. The credit crunch had also effected the organisation which was further impacted by the Welsh Assembly Government decision to reassess the Communities First Equality and Diversity funding in response to new proposals on community cohesion. There had also been a delay in the Wales European Funding Office approving EU Convergence Funding applications. Applications submitted in 2007 were still to be

dealt with. This had resulted in reserves being used to maintain staffing levels as long as possible but unfortunately 5 members of staff were made redundant in March 2009. Funding has now been received for 2 new projects and additional staff had been recruited. EU Convergence funding for a project which aims to tackle economic inactivity for people from black and minority ethnic communities across West Wales and the Valleys area, including Bridgend County Borough. It will also help people furthest from the labour market, particularly women, to gain new qualifications and enter further education. Also Big Lottery Funding has been secured for the 'A Voice in the Valleys' project which aims to strengthen the capacity of people and communities in the Valleys of South East Wales to access their entitlements by creating a voluntary sector forum for equality and human rights.

- 4.4 The role of the organisation had been updated to cover all the mandates of the Equalities Act and VALREC has also registered with the Charity Commissioners. The work remains substantially the same i.e. to campaign for equality and to support people who considered themselves victims of hate crime, harassment or any other form of discrimination. Close relationships had been maintained with South Wales and Gwent Police and service level agreements are in the process of being agreed with Blaenau Gwent CBC,, Caerphilly CBC, and Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC. Specific work programmes had been undertaken with Merthyr Tydfil and Torfaen Councils and at H.M. and YOI Parc Prison in Bridgend.
- 4.5 VALREC has been exploring ways to support public authorities to deliver on their statutory duties to promote equality and good community relations and how this relates to proposals from WAG on community cohesion. This work is linked to the Home Office "Prevent" agenda which is designed to ensure that minorities do not become so isolated, marginalised and alienated as to become vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment to political extremism or terrorism.
- 4.6 The year ahead is expected to bring it own challenges including the tightening of expenditure. VALREC is the only locally based provider of equality services in the valleys area which is one of the largest pockets of deprivation in Western Europe.
- 4.7 A copy of the Annual Report 2008/2009 is at Appendix 1 with the latest VALREC Newsletter attached at Appendix 2. It should be noted that the newsletter refers to Bridgend YOS Opportunity Unite Activity Day held on 7th November 2008. This is an error and should read Bridgend County Borough Youth Service.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 There will be no effect on the Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

6. Legal Implications.

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 There are no financial implications

8. Recommendation.

8.1 That the Cabinet Committee Equalities notes the contents of the report.

**D SAGE
DEPUTY LEADER
22 SEPTEMBER 2009**

Background Documents: None were used in the production of this report

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Background documents

None were used in the production of this report