

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 19 JULY 2010 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage - Chairperson and Deputy Leader

Councillors

H J David  
L C Morgan

Invitees:  
Councillor P A Evans      Councillor P A Hacking  
Councillor C A Green      Councillor R M James  
Councillor M Gregory      Councillor M Thomas

Officers:

D MacGregor      - Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships  
D Beeke            - HR Business Partner  
P Williams        - HR Business Partner  
R Lewis            - Legal Officer  
M A Galvin        - Senior Cabinet and Committee Officer

71      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members/Officers:

Councillor M E J Nott            - Holiday  
Councillor J C Spanswick        - Holiday  
Councillor A E Davies            - Other Council business  
Councillor N Clarke              - Personal commitment  
Councillor M C Wilkins         - Unwell  
L Smith                              - Holiday

72      DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

73      MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED:                      That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities dated 12 April 2010, be approved as a true and accurate record subject to Minute 66 being slightly amended to read as follows:-

RESOLVED:                      That Members agreed to receive the Notes of the above Management Group dated 28 January 2010.

In relation to the paragraph immediately below the bullet points on page 49 of Minute 70, the Deputy Leader advised that he had recently received an e-mail which confirmed that the WLGA would be using the Authority's Domestic Abuse Protocol as a Framework to extend this across the whole of Wales, due to the Protocol containing a number of positive areas of good practice.

The Cabinet Member - Resources congratulated the Human Resources Business Partner for the work she had undertaken on this issue.

74 NOTES OF CORPORATE EQUALITIES MANAGEMENT GROUP

RESOLVED: That the notes of the above Management Group dated 17 March 2010 be received.

75 PROPOSAL TO REVIEW CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships submitted a report, which advised the Committee that a review is to be carried out on the Corporate Equality Scheme by September 2011, to meet the requirements of the new Equality Act.

He then proceeded to outline a Presentation on the new Public Sector Duties.

He commenced by summarising the new equality duty that would come into force in April 2011, under the new Equality Act 2010. It was anticipated that the new regulations would be introduced in Autumn 2010, outlining how the Authority should set, consult and review its equality objectives. A directive had been received from National Government during consultation on the Equality Bill, that this secondary legislation will direct local authorities to adopt an objective setting process that was evidence-based and integrated into the business planning process of the Authority.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships, advised that in addition to the existing duties on race, disability and gender, the Act would extend the public equality duty to age, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation. The age element could for example remove the discretion the Authority has to allow employees to continue to work beyond the present retirement age.

Under the new scheme, the Authority would be obliged to in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to equality issues.

This would mean having due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages that are connected to a relevant protected characteristic, and take steps to meet the different needs of individuals who share a relevant protected characteristic. There would also be a need to encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation is disproportionately low.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships explained that there would be cost implications in relation to some of the anticipated changes, at a time when there was a significant restraint on public spending.

He added that work was being undertaken to promote community cohesion and fostering good relations by tackling equality issues and promoting understanding between groups who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

Though the Authority adopted a positive attitude to discrimination, such as through the 'two ticks' scheme with Job Centre Plus and recruiting staff who are Welsh speakers for the Customer Service Centre, there was more to achieve in order to further promote and develop issues of positive discrimination he added.

In relation to issues relating to the enforcement of the public sector duty, further consultation would be required, as well as awaiting guidance on the wider framework of the Act and EHRC.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships stated that under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, the Authority were required to make arrangements to secure improvement with regard to seven areas, including fairness by reducing disadvantages faced by particular groups in accessing, or taking full advantage of services or improving social well-being as a result of the provision of services.

He emphasised that measuring what we provide will be a major challenge when the guidance is received to assess how well placed the Authority is and what further progress is required. He felt that the obligations were challenging at best and perhaps unrealistic given the limited resources available.

He then outlined the timelines for the new public equality duty.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships concluded the Presentation by advising of some potential implications.

These were that Members, Managers and employees would need to be made aware of the new duty and how it may impact upon specific services.

There would be a need to consider updating certain policies, especially in the areas of employment and procurement, and the performance management framework for the Authority may also need to be reviewed..

As a result of the review of the Corporate equality Scheme, actions would be identified and a further report would be prepared for Members to consider at a future Committee meeting.

The Chairperson thanked the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships for his presentation.

Members concluded that any improvements required under the new duty would need to be prioritised in view of the current and future financial restraints local authorities were facing and that the Council needed to be realistic in terms of what it could achieve in this regard.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Equalities Committee note the points covered in the presentation on the Equality Act 2010 and that a review of the Corporate Equality Scheme will be carried out by officers and a report will be presented to a future meeting of the Committee setting out the outcomes of the review and recommendations for future action.

76 WORK PLANNING FOR THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships submitted a report, the purpose of which was to identify topics for consideration at the scheduled meetings of the Committee in the forthcoming year.

Paragraph 4.1 of the report referred to Appendix 1 which outlined a draft programme for 2010-2011 for the Committee in terms of reports to be submitted to meetings during this period.

This contained the regular items that are reported such as the Corporate Equality Scheme, Welsh Language Scheme and equality in the workforce, etc.

Paragraph 4.2 of the report suggested that Members also receive additional reports from a variety of topical areas identified within the published Equality Scheme.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships added that if Members agreed to these topics being considered, then representatives would be invited to the meeting to speak on the topic. The invitees would not only be officers from within the Authority but also from partner organisations, so as to achieve a broader review and wider engagement of the work area.

An example of this would be an update on the Support for Carers (particularly for young carers) which had been the subject of a presentation to Members at a Committee recently, and in light of the recent launch of the Carer's Strategy.

It was suggested that a representative of the Bridgend Carer's Forum could be invited to the meeting that considers this item.

An Invitee of the Committee also suggested receiving a Presentation from VALREC, similar to the one made at the Richard Price Centre through Communities First a couple of months ago, on issues of prejudice and other matters of equality.

Members agreed to the suggested topics covered in the report being placed on future agendas over the course of the next twelve months.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities agreed the topics for consideration at its meetings during the period 1 July 2010 - 31 May 2011, as outlined in Paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the report, and suggested at the meeting.

77 REPORT ON EQUALITIES IN THE BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL WORKFORCE

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships submitted a report, which provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's workforce and informed Members, of the intention to progressively develop comparative data to enable the Committee to see how the structure of the workforce is changing on an ongoing basis, therefore giving a broader view rather than just the supply of data.

The Human Resources Business Partner introduced the report, and advised that a workforce report would be produced twice yearly, and would address the equality strands identified in the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

He then outlined some background information, and advised that under legislation, and as a requirement of the Wales Programme for Improvement, the Council were required to report at least annually, on ethnicity and disability rates within its workforce.

Attached at Appendix 1 to the report, was a summary analysis that compared the Council's workforce as at 31 March in 2009 and 2010.

The Human Resources Business Partner then gave a résumé of the data in the Appendix, which covered total number of staff (full and part time), the number of male and female staff, disabled staff (declared/recorded), carer responsibilities (declared), ethnic minority, Welsh language speakers and age profile, which covered six categories of age range from 16 - 65 plus.

He advised that the majority of the data used for analysis was generated by the Trent integrated HR/Payroll system, upon which work was ongoing to review and cleanse the data, so as to improve reporting and to reflect structural changes being made under the Transforming Bridgend programme. Improvements to data capture were also going to be examined to allow for summary profiles of applicants for posts to be produced. Additionally, some employee equalities data is incomplete, as this is dependent on employees voluntarily providing information.

The HR Business Partner confirmed that other local authorities and the WLGA had been contacted, with a view to assessing what comparative data could be included in the future and in turn reported to Committee.

Paragraph 4.5 of the report then expanded upon notable developments in respect of the equalities agenda within 2010, which included the "two ticks" disability symbol, a proposal for all employees to complete and return an Employee Record Form in order to obtain accurate and up to date equalities data, a Protocol and Managers Guidelines on Domestic Abuse (near completion), involvement in the South East Wales Future Jobs Fund Partnership which had developed 118 placements in Bridgend that would terminate in March of next year, the development of comparative data on Bridgend, South East Wales and all Wales, and the Human Resources Organisational Development Team providing courses such as ESOL (English as second or other language).

An Invitee asked Officers how many people in the County Borough had been unemployed during the last year, and could this figure reflect how many of these are younger people.

The Human Resources Business Partner advised that he would endeavour to obtain this information from statistics that show who are claiming benefits.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships added that details on levels of unemployment could be obtained from Job Centre Plus and included in a future report to Committee.

He pointed out that Appendix 1 reflected a small increase in the 'Headcount' of employees, that when broken down had reflected a decrease in full time staff and an increase in part time staff.

In response to a point made from the floor that it appeared that there was a suggestion of there being a recent reduction in Welsh speakers within the Authority, the Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that this would probably increase in the long term when the new Welsh medium school was fully established.

He added that there was a growing number of posts in the Authority, where Welsh speaking was either a requirement or a desirable requisite.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships advised that as part of the current savings process, staff were being allowed flexibility in terms of working reduced hours in service areas that could sustain this, as an addition to the flexitime provision. He stressed however, that this was an option that would be made available in respect of certain staff groups but there would be a need to maintain front line services.

RESOLVED: That the Equalities Committee received, considered and noted the report.

78 WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME - ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2009 - 10  
RESPONSE FROM THE WELSH LANGUAGE BOARD

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships presented a report, which informed the Committee of feedback received from the Welsh Language Board, regarding the Council's Annual Monitoring Report on the Welsh Language Scheme.

He reminded Members that at the last Committee meeting, it was agreed that the Council's Annual Monitoring Report for 2009/10 be submitted to the Welsh Language Board for consideration.

This had been undertaken and feedback was received from them on the document in May 2010.

The Board expressed their appreciation that the Council had worked positively with them over the last year, expressing praise for positive development and examples of good practice that were reflected in the Annual Monitoring report.

The Board also expressed some concerns and in relation to these, made certain recommendations for improvement.

Both these and the positive elements of the report were shown as bullet points within Paragraph 4 of the report.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships confirmed that a meeting had been planned, which would involve a Welsh Language Board Officer and the Deputy Leader, the Policy and Performance Management Officer (Research) and himself, to systematically go over both the positives and the areas of suggested improvement of the scheme.

The Welsh Language Board had acknowledged the improvements the Authority had made during the last few years in promoting Welsh language, and it was anticipated that the Action Plan would be subsequently revised and placed before the Cabinet Committee for further consideration accordingly.

The Deputy Leader advised that he would be stressing in the above meeting, the difficulty the Council would encounter in delivering improvements in the areas where any significant resource was required, as this could lead to a compromise to front line services of the Authority, which simply could not be accommodated.

A Committee Invitee stated that any advertising suggested to further promote the use of the Welsh Language should be pursued via the website rather than printing of literature which was expensive. As long as obligations were being met these could be achieved by the least expensive methods, she added.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Corporate Development and Partnerships agreed, and confirmed that this would be the intention in relation the advocating of not only Welsh language but English language literature as well.

The Cabinet Member - Resources stated that the authority needed to emphasise that it was actively promoting the Welsh language, and this was evidenced by the building of the new Welsh medium school in Llangynwyd, where education at an early age in the speaking of Welsh would be introduced.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities noted the feedback received by the Welsh Language Board.

The meeting closed at 11.05am.