

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
INFORMATION REPORT TO CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

29 SEPTEMBER 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER

VALLEYS REGIONAL EQUALITY COUNCIL (VALREC) – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To feedback to the Cabinet Committee – Equalities information presented at the Annual General Meeting of VALREC.

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

- 2.1 This report connects to the strategic theme of strong communities..

3. Background.

- 3.1 It has previously been agreed by the Cabinet Committee Equalities, that the Deputy Leader would attend VALREC's Annual General Meeting as the Authority's representative and provide feedback to the Cabinet Committee.

4. Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 The Annual General Meeting of VALREC was held on 28 July 2010 at the Llancaiach Fawr Manor House in Nelson. There were representatives from a wide spectrum of organisations dealing with equality issues and individuals from across the diverse communities of South Wales.

- 4.2 The Chair's report was given by Dr Randhawa. He informed the meeting that the organisation had continued to broaden its remit and operate across the full spectrum of the Equality Act 2010. He praised VALREC's staff for their high level of commitment. 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 VALREC developed its role.

- 4.3 The Director Mr Ron Davies, explained that during the 2009-10 year, there was an improvement in the financial position of VALREC. He expressed his thanks to 5 local authorities who fund VALREC, including Bridgend County Borough Council, Blaenau Gwent CBC, Caerphilly CBC, Torfaen CBC and Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC for their continued support. VALREC has also maintained close relationships with South Wales and Gwent Police Services and continue to provide a range of equality services to H.M. and YOI Parc Prison in Bridgend.

- 4.4 Mr Davies expressed particular concern that the Equality and Human Rights Commission is no longer providing any funding to the organisation and he has met with the new Commissioner and the Director in Wales on this issue. Although the organisation covers 25% of the population of Wales and 50% of the Communities First wards VALREC currently receives no core funding from either the Commission, central Government or the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 4.5 However good progress had been made with the EU Convergence funded project to tackle economic inactivity for people from black and minority ethnic communities across West Wales and the Valleys area, including Bridgend County Borough. Also the Big Lottery Funded project, 'A Voice in the Valleys', which aims to strengthen the capacity of people and communities in the Valleys of South East Wales to access their entitlements for equality and human rights continued to make good progress with its mapping exercise. In addition, VALREC had secured funding through the new WAG Community Cohesion Fund, including a successful bid in Bridgend CBC. 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 radicalisation and recruitment to political extremism or terrorism. VALREC will also be working closely with Working Links on a contract to be delivered through the National Offenders Management Scheme. The project will cover all the area of benefit covered by VALREC and is designed to assist and support ex offenders from black and minority ethnic backgrounds into work and training.
- 4.5 Mr Davies concluded by expressing concern that the economic climate may impact seriously on community cohesion. The year ahead is expected to bring its own challenges including the tightening of expenditure across the public and voluntary sector. VALREC is the only locally based provider of equality services in the valleys area.
- 4.6 During the AGM, VALREC officers made presentations about their work with individuals and minority communities in the 6 local authorities that VALREC cover. This included a presentation on the work VALREC had carried out in partnership with Community First Partnerships in Bridgend CBC under the Community Cohesion Funding stream. A copy of the Annual Report and newsletter 2009/2010 is at Appendix 1.
- 4.7 Subsequent to the AGM the Wales European Funding Office has approved two additional EU Convergence funded projects with VALREC relating to support for migrant workers and black and ethnic minority young people. These projects will run in the six local authorities that are within VALREC's area of benefit. This funding will enable VALREC to recruit additional project workers and administrative support which will give the organisation greater capacity.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

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

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this report to assess its relevance to the Authority's public equality duties and potential impact on protected equality characteristics. As an information report it has been assessed as unlikely to have any differential impact on any specific equality groups and having low relevance to the Authority's general and specific duties to promote equality, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation and foster good relations between people from different backgrounds with regard to gender, disability and race.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 There are no financial implications.

8. Recommendation.

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

**D SAGE
DEPUTY LEADER
29 SEPTEMBER 2010**

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Background documents

None were used in the production of this report.