

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2011 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillor D Sage, Deputy Leader - Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott
H J David
A E Davies
L C Morgan
P J White

Invitees:-

Councillor N Clarke Councillor M Gregory
Councillor C A Green Councillor R D Jenkins

B Neville - Equalities Officer UNISON
M Fowler - Bridgend Deaf Association (accompanied by an interpreter)

Officers:

D MacGregor - Assistant Chief Executive - Performance
P Williams - Business Partner, Human Resources
R Crocombe - Improvement Team Trainee
A Bracey - Group Manager - Wellbeing
J Chatterton - Chairperson of the Carers Forum
M A Galvin - Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

126 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members for the reasons so stated:-

Councillor J H Tildesley - Other Council Business
Councillor P A Hacking - Family Bereavement
Councillor M Thomas - Mayoral duties
Councillor M C Wilkins - Unwell
Councillor R M James - Other Council Business

127 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Clarke declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 (a)(ii) as a volunteer for guide dogs for the blind.

128 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities held on 22 August 2011 were approved as a true and accurate record.

129 ISSUES FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance presented a report, which introduced M Fowler of the British Deaf Association who was to give a Presentation entitled Bridging the Gap between the Deaf Community and Council Services.

The Chairperson on behalf of Members welcomed Ms Fowler and her interpreter to the meeting, and all those present introduced themselves.

She opened her submission by confirming that she was the Community Advocacy Officer for the deaf in South Wales.

Ms Fowler gave by way of introduction information regarding her upbringing and how she had initially struggled when she was younger communicating with other people.

When she was 13 years of age she was introduced to sign language, which helped her considerably, so much so that she went on to gain qualifications in English and law.

The British Deaf Association (BDA) Wales was an organisation that was led by deaf individuals and she gave some background information how this came into being.

Ms Fowler explained that the BDA wished to see a society where every deaf person using BSL could participate freely without hindrance or discrimination.

She added that the definition of Advocacy was "taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights represent their interests and obtain services they need". Advocates also promoted social equality and justice.

She confirmed that she wanted to become an advocate for deaf people, as she saw herself as a role model due to her previous personal experiences. She was a fluent BSL user, she had knowledge of the deaf culture and identified with deaf people, therefore having empathy for them and being able to relate to them.

Ms Fowler confirmed that on behalf of the BDA she covered all areas of Wales, and received funding for this purpose. Her range of advocacy included areas of a corporate, personal and peer and collective nature which covered the following:-

Personal Advocacy

Cases including:

- Employment
- Child Protection
- Education
- Legal Issues
- Discrimination
- Health
- Housing
- Benefits
- Police
- Council / Local Authority
- Social Services
- Signposting

Collective Advocacy

Bridgend Deaf Forums

- Expert Patient Programme
- Census 2011
- Referendum
- Diabetes Information
- Digital Switchover
- Interpreters
- Sign Translate
- Deaf Pact Meeting
- Residential Care Home for BSL users
- Welsh Ambulance
- Council Equality Officer
- Community Health Council
- National Assembly for Wales

Corporate Advocacy

- Work with service provider to improve access to deaf people
- To promote best practice
- To provide a link between services and the deaf community

Ms Fowler hoped that as a result of her presentation, Authorities such as Bridgend would improve existing services and methods of communication which would benefit the deaf community.

For this to take place, she advised that the Council would need to improve contact levels to those that currently exist particularly in forms of communication such as e:mail, text/sms, Fax and sign language.

Some examples of best practice Ms Fowler explained, were:-

- Information in BSL on Websites - Deaf signer
- Information about events where interpreters are booked
- Information about how a Deaf BSL user can contact the Council
- Build good relationships between the Council and the Deaf community by visiting the Deaf Club
- Consult with the Deaf community about decisions that affect them
- 'Did you Know'? Booklet - information about services relevant to Deaf and in a Deaf friendly way
- Deaf are able to contact Council via Webcam in BSL

She added that there were authorities that promoted BSL effectively via their web sites, examples of these being Cardiff and Bristol.

She was pleased to see that Bridgend were reacting positively on the above too, and noted that on 18 December 2011, there was an event being held at Bryngarw House on 'Communicating with deaf people'.

Ms Fowler concluded her presentation by stating that the BDA wanted to see organisations taking positive action to support deaf people, as the deaf community had suffered for too long, and to achieve this was her main aim and objective.

The Chairperson thanked her for the presentation which he considered to be very inspiring.

He confirmed that BSL signs had been put up in the Customer Services Centre, and there would be a commitment from BCBC to look at some of the issues Ms Fowler had raised today.

The Chairperson referred members back to the report and in particular Paragraph 4.4 that included a number of suggestions Ms Fowler had made which were being explored and addressed internally.

The Chairperson asked Members if they had any questions.

A Member asked how many Members were in the Bridgend Deaf Association, and how many deaf people there were in the County Borough.

Ms Fowler in relation to the second point replied that there were about 300-400 deaf people in Bridgend, though Social Services may be able to give a more exact number.

In terms of the Deaf Club, she confirmed that around 30 - 40 people regularly attended this for sign language communication and most of these were older people. The younger deaf people tended to visit deaf clubs in Ponytridd (20 - 30 in number) and Swansea (around 50 in number).

A Member felt that there should be improved links with outside organisations for the deaf, particularly transport links such as with national bus and taxi companies.

Ms Fowler explained that Radio Cabs had a facility to allow texts to be received from deaf people, though this was done by way of a code which was quite complicated.

This meant that you could not book a taxi until you set up a code system. Though Radio Cabs were being proactive, they needed to simplify and think things through a little better she felt.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance stated that when working upon the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP), what had become clearly evident was the need for some improvement in transport related issues for deaf people. Action would be taken over the next three years to influence providers external to the Council, so as to improve quality of life for those who were disadvantaged he confirmed.

As part of the consultation process on the SEP, Council Officers would be attending deaf club meetings in order to identify improvements that needed to be considered.

A Member asked if the Council could consider basic training for staff (and Members) in BSL.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance confirmed that such a programme had been running the last 18 months for staff who regularly had contact with customers. This could look to be extended to a wider audience as was suggested he added.

Ms Fowler explained that there were more options now for deaf people to become proficient in BSL than had been given to her when she was young. This enabled them to become more involved in society and gain benefits of an educational nature,

allowing them to have a voice and being able to participate and express themselves more freely.

The Trade Union representative noted that unemployment for young people who were deaf was quite high. She asked Ms Fowler if she had any support in her work.

Ms Fowler confirmed that she did have an apprentice advocate and that the BDA had asked the Welsh Government for further support in the form of two part time officers in North Wales and two full time officers in South Wales (i.e East and West), and she would hear this week if the request was successful.

The Cabinet Member - Resources felt that training in BSL would be important for all staff in schools in order to communicate effectively with young people who were deaf, as part of the integration agenda.

As this concluded debate on the item, the Chairperson thanked Ms Fowler for her excellent presentation. He also extended his thanks to (Paul Williams - Business Partner, Human Resources and Rhiannon Crocombe - Improvement Team Trainee) for the work they were undertaking in relation to developing the links with the local deaf community.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities received and noted both the presentation and Officer's report.

130 CORPORATE EQUALITY SCHEME - HALF YEARLY PROGRESS REPORT 2011/12

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance submitted the final half yearly progress report on the Corporate Equality Scheme (Appendix 'A' referred).

This progress report confirmed that improvements had been made in a number of areas, but also identified actions that had slipped since the Annual Monitoring Report was submitted to Committee last May.

Examples of the improvements were outlined in paragraphs 4.2 - 4.8 of the report, whilst Appendix 'B' detailed a summary of progress against specific actions.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance explained that this will be the last such report the Committee will receive, as the Scheme will be replaced in April by the new Strategic Equality Plan, which as members were aware, would be completed in the coming months.

A Committee Invitee considered that the future Strategic Equality Plan, should include proposals to improve accessibility of public transport for the blind, as what applied to deaf people in terms of life's challenges also often applied to those who were blind. She added that she may be able to pass information to Officers that could assist them to this end.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance took this on board, and reminded Members that Julie Thomas had spoken at a previous meeting, on the subject of blind people and transportation issues. There was definitely room for improvement in terms of communication and awareness for the blind when using public transport which

would not necessarily involve a significant cost. He confirmed that this would be addressed in the new Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities received and agreed the content of the half yearly progress report.

131 SIX MONTHLY REPORT ON EQUALITY IN THE WORKFORCE

The Human Resources Business Partner presented a report, which provided the Cabinet Committee with data on the Council's workforce, together with comparative information and an update on developments that were employment related.

Paragraph 4.1.1 of the report confirmed that Appendix 1 provided profiles of the workforce as at 31 March 2010, 30 September 2010, 31 March 2011 and 30 September 2011. This included numbers of employees in relation to the equality strands identified in the Council's corporate equality scheme and action plan.

The Human Resources Business Partner advised of some points to note from the data in this Appendix, and these were:-

- (a) The total number of employees has increased by 54 since 31 March 2011 and by 61 since September 2010
- (b) The number of part time employees has decreased by 55 since March 2011
- (c) The number of full time employees has increased by 70 since March 2011
- (d) The number of employees with caring responsibilities declared has remained static since March 2010
- (e) The number of employees able to speak welsh has remained static since March 2011
- (f) The number of employees aged 65 and over has remained almost constant since 31 March 2011.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Performance explained that the trend between March 2010 and September 2011 showed a movement towards increased part-time working.

Paragraph 4.1.3 of the report then outlined the reasons why employees (i.e. 575 in total) left the Authority between 1 October 2010 - 30 September 2011. The majority of these were either through resignation (277) or having come to the end of their contract (155).

The next part of the report explained that there were 722 new starters within the above period, where 41% of these were aged 16 - 25, i.e. 10% of the total 16 - 25 age group applicants.

The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that improvements to data capture had been made at recruitment stage, and that Appendix 2 to the report included the equalities data obtained via the Council's recruitment and selection processes between the above dates. Data from Appendix 2 was summarised in paragraph 4.1.5 of the report. .

Paragraph 4.1.6 provided a summary of workforce information as at 30 September 2011, based on gender/pay grade for all BCBC staff excluding casual/relief employees. This placed employees in six categories Scale 1 - 6, Senior Officers, Principal Officers, Chief Officers Soulbury and Youth Officers and Teachers.

In terms of further developments in this area, the Human Resources Business Partner advised that Officers were piloting an exercise with regard to collecting sensitive information from employees, concentrating in particular upon disability and ethnicity, as this would be a requirement under the new Plan. He added that not all employees may wish to disclose such information.

The Human Resources Business Partner confirmed that information would also be made available to the Committee in respect of the employees who changed jobs within the Authority, together with other proposals contained in Paragraph 4.2.2 of the report.

Paragraph 4.2.3 of the report confirmed that arising from the Job Evaluation and Equal Pay exercise there would be an improvement or narrowing of the gender pay gap.

Paragraphs 4.3 outlined areas where Human Resources would focus upon in the next 12 months. It was explained that the Default Retirement Age introduced by the Coalition Government in October, may now result in more employees working beyond the age of 65.

He then concluded his submission by advising that the Council were awarded the two Ticks symbol in 2010, and were currently being reassessed by Job Centre Plus for the Award to be renewed until 2012.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee Equalities received the workforce report.

132 UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance submitted a report, that provided Members with an update on the work being undertaken to develop the Strategic Equality Plan, and to outline the key stages in the process.

He explained that the Equality Act 2010 had introduced a new general duty for public bodies to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relationships with individuals within the equality groups with protected characteristics. These were listed in Paragraph 3.1 of the report.

In connection with the above, the Assistant Chief Executive - Performance explained that it would be incumbent upon the Authority to publish equality objectives and a Strategic Equality Plan by April (2nd) 2012.

To ensure compliance with requirements, an outline plan had been prepared setting out certain key stages and responsibilities as well as a timetable for completion of certain elements that will comprise the Plan, as shown in Paragraph 4.2 of the report.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance explained that collating information and other data was now being carried out. Some examples of internal and local data collated to date were:

- Age and disability of local residents involved in the Exercise Referral Scheme
- Age, disability, ethnicity and religion of local residents whose needs had been addressed by Social Services

Other issues had been looked at as alluded to in the previous items discussed at today's meeting, i.e. increased engagement and support for deaf and blind people, increase in public conveniences, and accessing improvements for people confined to a wheelchair, such as reducing kerbside height.

Increased engagement with individuals such as the above and other key groups and organisations through bodies such as the Bridgend Equality Forum would help with the development of actions that would have a positive impact on people's lives.

It was therefore proposed that the Equality Objectives forming the basis of the draft Strategy Equality Plan would be developed on the following themes:-

- Transportation
- Fostering good relations
- The Council's role as an employer
- Equal pay
- Consultation, engagement and communication
- Domestic violence
- Adult Social Care/Mental Health
- Leisure
- Benefits, and
- Data Collation for sharing

These were the type of areas that would form a basis for consultation the Assistant Chief Executive - Performance explained.

The draft Strategic Equality Plan detailing the approach to be taken together with links to supporting information was attached at Appendix 1 to the report, with an Action Plan outlining the reasons for themes/priorities being chosen, protected characteristics affected and lead officers was attached at Appendix 2.

The final Strategic Equality Plan would be submitted to Cabinet for approval in March 2012. This would then integrate in future with Directorate Business Plans, with progress being monitored via the Quarterly Business Review process.

In terms of some issues being fed into the Strategy, the Cabinet Member - Resources confirmed that he would like incorporated into the Priority Mental Health/Social Care, a provision that will ensure that there is a strong engagement process with Local Health Board's regarding future provision for adults with mental health problems, as part of a wider equalities role. Secondly, in terms of transportation issues, he felt that in terms of major structural developments such as the Bridgend Interchange Infrastructure, robust consultations should take place with contractors on the works required, before the design stage is set. The same applies to other major projects such as the Porthawl Regeneration proposals and Bridgend public realm

improvements. The reason for this he stated, was to ensure that works required are fully agreed beforehand and that these works are followed through and of a high standard.

An Invitee also asked for a progress report to be submitted to a future meeting, on why Bridgend was higher than the Welsh average when it came to people receiving Mental Health and Adult Social Care support.

On Page 16 of the document the Leisure Services Review, the Cabinet Member - Wellbeing asked if the word 'high' in the third line of the second paragraph could be changed to 'higher'.

The Assistant Chief Executive - Performance confirmed that this amendment would be made.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee – Equalities:-

- (1) considered the progress being made;
- (2) agreed the outline equality objectives proposed as a basis for local consultation;
- (3) receives a further report at its next meeting on the draft equality objectives

133 SUPPORT TO CARERS

The Chairperson introduced the Group Manager - Wellbeing and J Chatterton - Chairperson of the Carers Forum. They were attending the meeting to update the Committee on support to carers in Bridgend County Borough.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing advised the Committee that Bridgend were committed to supporting carers and ensuring they were valued as equal partners in the provision of care, so that they could continue to undertake their caring role. There was a Strategy in place which set out how the Council can continue to develop the appropriate support and services to achieve this.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that the Carers' Strategy, built upon priorities identified by the Welsh Government Carers Strategy for Wales and aimed to recognise the needs of carers in Bridgend.

There were around 16,000 carers in Bridgend, providing different forms of support when devoting their time for care work, and Carers UK estimated in 2007 that the financial value of care provided in Bridgend equated to £279 million.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010, set out how local authorities and local health boards should work together to develop a joint strategy, so as to provide essential services linked to care provision.

She confirmed that the Bridgend Carers Strategy 2010 - 2013 was developed by the Bridgend County Carers Forum through partnership with key organisations such as the local authority, the ABMU, the Health Board, BAVO and third sector organisations.

The Strategy set out a framework through which the partnership would work toward helping carers in Bridgend maintain their health and wellbeing, whilst continuing in their caring role, and to value them as equal partners in the delivery of planning of care, treatment and support of carers and the cared for.

The Group Manager - Wellbeing advised that the Bridgend County Carers Forum was going from strength to strength now having over 70 Members from all the different organisations it was made up from.

The Forum was reviewing the Strategic Action Plan through Autumn 2011, and there would be a focus on ensuring that the partner organisations were continuing to support carers.

The remainder of the report, explained the Group Manager – Wellbeing, referred to some of the issues that would be covered within the Strategy, and she proceeded to share some of these with the Committee.

In terms of the next steps, the Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that the Bridgend Carers Forum intended to hold a Bridgend Carers Conference in the Spring of 2012, with the focus being on young carers, carers of people with mental health problems and the emotional wellbeing of carers.

The Chairperson of the Carers Forum added that the Strategy was forming well and in terms of the time-frame for different elements of it, these were falling into place.

There were some concerns she expressed however, and these were as follows:-

1. There was a need to consider introducing a Carers Officer, even though there was no funding available for this. She asked Members to consider this, as ultimately it would save the Council money.
2. The closure of Maes y Gwyn hospital was a further concern in terms of taking away key respite care. She hoped this would not lead to more service users being accommodated in residential homes.
3. In terms of the young carers project workers, she hoped that due to the extent of their role and how heavily they were relied upon, this wouldn't lead to them being restricted in terms of their development and being unable to take on new assessments due to being overworked in other areas.

An Invitee was pleased to see that the Strategy had addressed certain issues around the Carer's Assessment, including a simplified version of the Carer's Assessment Form now having been introduced.

In terms of the proposed Bridgend Carers Conference, an Invitee asked if there were proposals being considered to attract potential younger carers to this.

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The Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that an aim during the build up to the Conference would be to attract young carers through groups such as 'Action for Children', as this was one of the priorities of the Strategy.

In terms of proactively linking with associated organisations, the Group Manager - Wellbeing confirmed that this was ongoing, though there was scope to do more work with schools.

With regard to respite care, she added that the Authority needed to look at different forms of this and be more imaginative.

The Corporate Member - Wellbeing explained that there was a Centre in Brackla where a service was commissioned for young carers, where they could go and engage in activities for people in care.

With regard to the point made earlier about the Authority having a dedicated Carers Officer, the Cabinet Member - Wellbeing added that there was no such post in existence at present as the Authority in this service area, as well as others, were attempting to do more for less in view of the current economic downturn.

The Cabinet Member - Resources asked if Members could at a future date have sight of the Service Level Agreements for Crossroads and the Carers Centre, Park Street, in view of the fact that the Authority allocates a considerable amount of funding to them each year. Members could then look at and consider whether or not there is scope for facilities such as these to function more effectively to better reflect the aims and objectives of the Carers Forum..

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted progress made in providing support to carers.

The meeting closed at 11.55am.