

CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES 17 SEPTEMBER 2012

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON MONDAY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2012 AT 10.00AM

Present: -

Councillors

D Sage - Chairperson
M E J Nott
M Gregory
L C Morgan
P J White

Invitees:-

Councillor M W Butcher	Councillor C Rees
Councillor C A Green	Councillor C Reeves
Councillor C Jones	Councillor H Townsend

Officers:

S Kingsbury	- Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
P Williams	- Business Partner, Human Resources
A Williams	- Genesis Project Manager
T Guy	- Head of Strategy Partnerships and Commissioning
R Ronan	- Democratic Services Officer - Committees

9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

Councillor A Owen	- Work commitments
Councillor C Jones	- Family commitments
Councillor H David	- Other Council business

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities dated 26 June 2012 be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the minute relating to apologies for absence being amended to include Councillor C A Green - Holiday.

12 GENESIS PROGRAMME - REPORT ON ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

The Deputy Leader introduced the Genesis Project Manager who would give a short presentation on the key features of the Bridgend Genesis 2 Project.

The Genesis Project Manager explained that the main aim of the Genesis 2 Project was to reach and work with individuals who are furthest away from the labour market and enable them to take their first steps towards a brighter future. She told the Committee that the Project is funded via a European Social Fund grant of 1.8m and match funding by the Local Authority of 1.2m.

The Genesis Project Manager told Members that to benefit from the Genesis 2 Project individuals must adhere to a set criteria. They must:-

- Live in the Bridgend Borough
- Be over the age of 16
- Be economically initiative and not claiming Job Seekers Allowance
- Be legally entitled to work in the UK

She explained that the Project specifically targeted lone parents in receipt of Income Support whose youngest child was five years old or under, parents on Income Support with other caring responsibilities, parents of dependent children where the eligible parents are not in receipt of benefit and not in work. Special dispensation has been given for a small cohort of employed individuals who have been diagnosed with post natal depression in order to help them return to work.

The Genesis Project Manager told Members that there are often multiple barriers that stop these individuals obtaining employment, such as childcare responsibilities, lack of confidence and lack of work experience. Many participants also left school early without formal qualifications and are often trapped by debt and housing problems. She explained to Members that transport can also be a major barrier to participants, especially in valley areas where it can be sparse, inconvenient and not always child friendly. It is the aim of the Genesis 2 Project to help remove these barriers and support individuals with appropriate advice and guidance.

Identifying future and suitable training needs is important in terms of progression towards employment. A lot of work is carried out on building confidence via community based activities and access is given to volunteering and work placements. Help is also given with transport and there is provision for assistance with childcare costs - this is a particularly expensive undertaking and is therefore subject to there being no other funding source available. To help with childcare costs one of the key features of the Project is mobile crèche teams, who set up crèche facilities in suitable community venues.

The Genesis Project Manager explained that various non-accredited confidence building courses are also available and are geared towards subjects that would be of interest and encourage participation. They include food hygiene, debt management, crafts and yoga. Taster courses in conjunction with Bridgend College are offered under the banner of "Breaking the Barriers". These include DIY, plastering, plumbing and decorating and their aim is to ease participants into a college environment which they may find otherwise daunting.

The Genesis Project Manager told Members that the Genesis 2 Project employed a team of nine staff and worked with various partners including social workers; health visitors; Job Centre Plus; Mental Health and the aforementioned Bridgend College.

The Genesis 2 Project has to date enrolled 553 participants, 129 of which have subsequently gained qualifications and 294 have seen “other positive outcomes” which effectively means that they have progressed on their journey towards employment. 29 participants have gone on to employment and 78 participants have entered the further education system.

The Chairperson thanked the Genesis Project Manager for her informative and well received presentation and invited the Committee’s questions and comments.

The Committee asked if the Project was achieving its targets. The Genesis Project Manager said that the Genesis 2 Project was actually over the target set by the European Commission which was to take on 930 participants during its life. The Project is currently touching on 600 participants since October 2008 and considering the numerous barriers this is a very high success rate.

A Member of the Committee asked if future funding was dependent on maintaining this high success rate. The Genesis Project Manager explained that the new round of funding has already started and the Welsh Government have identified that worklessness in early years will be high and emphasis would be put into helping people into work through initiatives with strong employment outcomes. The Head of Strategy and Partnerships explained to Members that across the participating Local Authorities there was a fair amount of under performance and after we moved to regional arrangements funding was reduced, in Bridgend’s case this equated to a 5% reduction. In this context our high numbers were particularly impressive.

A Member of the Committee asked if the 5% who achieved employment after participating in the Genesis 2 Project would have done so anyway and therefore was the main aim of the project employment. The Genesis Project Manager explained that priority two is about increasing economic activity and getting participants into work. The target of 28% was set up pre 2008; this has now been reduced to 10% against a national background of severe economic downturn. Realistically if we can simply prepare participants for work we have achieved something positive.

A Member of the Committee said that they had been a former participant in the Genesis Project and had found the experience extremely positive. They had received invaluable support in relation to childcare and had recently graduated from Bridgend College with a distinction. She explained that without the Genesis Project she would not have had the opportunity to go into further education and then on to employment.

A Member of the Committee congratulated the Officers on a very successful project and in reference to Item 4.5 of the report asked what the criteria for visiting a particular area was. The Genesis Project Manager told Members that this was often dictated by there being a suitable venue; the requirement was to have two good standard rooms, one for the provision of childcare and one for training. Unfortunately some areas did not have venues of an acceptable standard and this was therefore a restriction. She explained however that the Project had funds to provide transport so that participants in these areas would not be excluded.

The Chairperson asked if in relation to equalities the Genesis 2 Project was open to male single parents. The Genesis Project Manager confirmed that although the

numbers were low male single parents were included and Genesis employed a male adult advisor.

The Committee asked if Genesis had seen an increase in demand over the life of the Project. The Genesis Project Manager said that since June 2011 they had seen a huge increase in participation. The national Government have lowered the age to 5 years of age when parents of children in receipt of Income Support move onto Job Seekers Allowance. Parents are therefore not waiting until their children are older before entering the Project. As a consequence of this increased demand this year's applications for support to enter further education have increased by between 20 - 30%.

The Chairperson asked when the application for future funding will be initiated and if it will be increased to take into account this rise in numbers. The Genesis Project Manager responded that planning for future funding is underway and work streams are being established to consider the details of future programmes.

A Member of the Committee asked if Bridgend had seen an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies and were these in any particular areas. The Head of Strategy Partnerships answered that there appeared to be a small rise although it was difficult to talk about trends in certain areas. He told Members that as part of its remit "Just Ask" was the service that would deal with issues of sexual health.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities received and considered the report.

13 WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME - ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2011/12

The Business Partner Human Resources presented a report to the Committee that introduced the annual monitoring report on the Council's Welsh Language Scheme and sought the Committee's approval for its submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner. He explained that it is a requirement of the Authority to submit an annual monitoring report to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

The Business Partner Human Resources summarised the main points of the monitoring report and the updated Action Plan 2011/12 and invited the Committee to comment.

A Member of the Committee asked when the provision of the Welsh voicemail facility would be available. The Business Partner Human Resources confirmed that this was already in use.

A Member of the Committee asked if in relation to difficulties in recruiting Welsh speakers to Welsh essential posts the problem lay with the Human Resources recruiting procedure and asked if all applicants receive a written acknowledgement of their application. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that applicants are only written to if they have been shortlisted and this was explained in the application literature. The problem with recruitment in this instance has been that if applicants are Welsh speakers they have no relevant experience and conversely if they have experience they are not Welsh speakers. She told Members

that if in specific cases applicants needed help filling in the forms they should contact Human Resources who would assist.

A Committee Member asked a number of questions which were noted by the Human Resources Business Partner and he advised that he would look into the issues raised and provide the Member with a response.

The Committee commented that the number of Welsh web pages has increased significantly and asked if in terms of hits this was commensurate with the money the Authority has invested. The Business Partner Human Resources told Members that it was a requirement of the Authority to publish its web pages bilingually and from an equalities point of view Welsh has been given equal status he would however research the costs and report back. He told Members that a mechanism has been put in place by the Web Development Officer that would not allow an English web page to be published if it was not accompanied by the equivalent page in Welsh. The Committee asked if there have been any clashes between the Authority and the Welsh Language Commissioner. The Human Resources Business Partner said that he was not aware of any issues being raised by the Welsh Language Commissioner. He would however investigate and report back.

The Committee asked why if Welsh was obligatory the Tourism Web site was still not bilingual. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development told Members that although it was our responsibility as a Council to provide information bilingually we could not impose, it was also difficult to police as some sites are linked to external providers for example the 'What's On' site. The Committee asked for clarification as to which of the Tourism pages were the Authority's and how the issue of them being made bilingual was being addressed. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the Communications team were looking into the issue and she would liaise with them and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the annual monitoring report and approved its submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

14 STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN - ACTION PLAN

The Business Partner Human Resources presented a report the purpose of which is to provide Members with an update on the conclusion of the Strategic Equality Plan - Action Plan and equality objectives. He explained to the Committee that it was identical to the plan approved by Cabinet on 6 March 2012 but had been updated to include the factors listed at item 4.1. The proposals contained within the report cover a wide range of services and all protected characteristic groups. A full EIA is provided at Appendix 1.

A Member of the Committee was pleased to note that the EIA identified in reference to transport an awareness raising campaign and provision of training relating to the issues facing disabled people. As far as improved provision of wheelchair access on transport was concerned they felt that individual taxi drivers would find it difficult to

expand their vehicles and therefore the issues would need to be addressed across companies as well as individuals.

A Member of the Committee asked to what extent subsidised bus routes would be de-selected bearing in mind that some routes have been established for many years. The Business Partner Human Resources said that he would look into the matter and report back.

The Committee asked how strong our links are with the visually impaired community. The Business Partner Human Resources explained that the Authority works very closely with Bridgend VIS and facilitates regular meetings and consultation.

A Member of the Committee asked if raising awareness of school bullying throughout the county borough and reviewing our anti bullying policies would include remote bullying. The Business Partner Human Resources confirmed that it would.

The Committee asked for clarification as to the difference between marginalised groups and protected characteristic groups and how providing leisure concessions for these groups would translate on a business level. The Business Partner Human Resources explained that marginalised groups referred to groups who were often economically inactive e.g. lone parents. The Authority would be looking at identifying where there are gaps in the services that we are providing. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development told Members that consultation exercises would help us to ensure that we were inclusive and welcoming to all groups.

The Committee commented that the proposal to promote direct payments to landlords in order to secure or retain tenancy makes good business sense. They asked however if landlords will be pursued for any over payments which arise from changes to benefit entitlements. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development said that she would clarify the position with the Housing Benefit Manager.

The Chairperson said that he was encouraged to note that the proposals were comprehensive and that improvements were being considered as interlinked.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities approved the revised Strategic Equality Plan action plan.

15 6 MONTHLY UPDATE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN

The Human Resources Business Partner presented a report to the Committee the purpose of which is to provide Members with an update on the implementation of the Strategic Equality Plan and equality objectives. He explained that initial meetings with public transport companies have been set up to promote equality and diversity training provision for drivers. Meetings will shortly be held with taxi companies

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operating in the Bridgend area to promote an increase in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis and hackney carriages in use.

The Human Resources Business Partner told Members that in terms of the council's role as an employer basic and advanced equality and diversity training courses are being developed, targeting managers and front line customer facing staff. A data collection exercise will begin before the end of the financial year to capture the equality and personal sensitive data of all employees.

He explained that five British Sign Language videos have been produced on key areas of information as listed at item 4.6 and these are now available on our web site.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Committee - Equalities considered the progress being made.

The meeting closed at 1.00pm.