

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN HERON HALL, HERONSBRIDGE SCHOOL, BRIDGEND, ON WEDNESDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2013 AT 2.08PM

Present:

Councillor M Gregory - Acting Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott
H J David
L C Morgan

Councillors

D Sage
P J White

Invitees:

Councillors

M W Butcher
C L Jones
R C Jones

Councillors

C A Green
D M Hughes

Officers:

S Kingsbury - Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
E Blandon - Marketing and Engagement Manager (HR)
P Williams - Equalities and Engagement Officer
K Ferri - Senior Practitioner (EAL)
M Galvin - Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

Invitee:

E Clayton - Chief Executive VALREC

45 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor H Townsend - Family Commitment
Councillor C Reeves - Other Council Business
Councillor M Thomas - Work Commitments

46 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

47 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities held on the 1 October 2013 be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the reasons for Councillor C A Green's absence at the meeting being changed from hospital appointment to holiday.

48 MINUTES SILENCE

The Deputy Leader suggested that Members and Officers have a minute's silence as a mark of respect to the recent death of peace leader Nelson Mandela.

All those present stood for a minute's silence.

49 ISSUES FACING THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITY IN BRIDGEND

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) presented a report on the above matter, the purpose of which, was to inform Members of the issues facing the gypsy and traveller community in Bridgend.

She advised that the Authority had made an annual bid to the Welsh Government in January/February requesting an allocation of funding to support the needs of gypsies and travellers to which the local authority contributed 25% of the total bid amount.

In terms of last year, the Senior Practitioner (EAL) explained that the bid supported around 50 pupils in 10 schools, 8 of these being primary schools and 2 secondary schools.

She tabled at the meeting, a poster that was issued to all schools giving some general information with regard to the needs and heritage of gypsies/travellers, the majority of which in Bridgend were of Welsh or Irish decent and who lived in Cae Garw near Port Talbot. The nearest school to this site was Pyle Primary School, and therefore the majority of the above children of gypsies/travellers received education at this school.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) explained that latterly it was noticed that gypsy/travellers children from different backgrounds were becoming more apparent, and that also children were entering school at an earlier age and staying in school for longer, with there becoming less gaps than there used to be in terms of their education.

In relation to this point, she advised that teachers and support officers in Pyle Primary School were targeting these pupils educational needs, and in particular, ensuring that they have a solid foundation in numeracy and literary skills.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) explained that if gypsies/travellers are in the area and their children were receiving the benefit of education, and then they subsequently moved on to another area, primary schools teaching these children (or the Education Department) would link in with the schools in these other areas, and forward them education packs for the children, in order to assist them in continuing support with their education.

The schools in the County Borough who were supporting gypsies/travellers young families, also encouraged parents to attend language and play sessions in schools, so as to develop their own skills in activities, and participating in these with their offspring.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) confirmed that if these children did not receive education for full school days then teaching staff would try and ensure the bridging of any gaps, through adopting accelerated learning techniques.

She added that it was important to also note however, that individuals could not be judged on their backgrounds, and that all children in schools had to be treated equally.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) added that workshops had also been held in schools on the subject of racism, and recognised under the title of "show racism the red card". These were funded jointly by the local authority and Welsh Government grants, and that if Members were interested, a short presentation could be arranged for a future meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities.

A Member asked if gypsy/traveller children did not attend school regularly, i.e. on full days every day, did this have a detrimental impact on the schools attendance figures.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) replied that gypsy/travellers children were given dispensation for travelling time to/from school during school hours, and due to this any hours they may miss in school time had a limited effect on school attendance records.

A Member noted that gypsies/travellers spent a significant amount of time travelling from one location to another and then perhaps returning back to their original location. She asked if the schools they were taught in were comfortable with this ad-hoc arrangement.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) advised that schools were relaxed with such an arrangement as culturally this type of lifestyle was very much part of their heritage, and schools acknowledged this.

A Member noted that there was more success with younger children of gypsies/travellers families being educated, however, he was mindful that their education did not necessarily continue from Key Stage 3 age onward.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) confirmed that this was the case, and efforts were ongoing to try and maintain levels of education for these children as they became older. There was a problem, in that historically the culture in these type of families was that as boys grew older they started work at still a fairly young age with their father, whilst the girls then looked after their younger siblings.

There were some young people receiving education in Duffryn which was a Unit within Cynffig Comprehensive School. A Member asked if children from these types of families were being taught in other schools in the County Borough other than in Pyle and Cynffig.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) confirmed that there were, only in smaller numbers. She was aware that schools in Pencoed, Penybont, Brackla, St Mary's and Porthcawl also educationally supported children from this background.

She added that the Education Department were, not always made aware of the fact that gypsies/travellers children were being taught in some schools, and if they were not, then no alternative support mechanisms were put in place for them at these schools.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) further added that 8 years ago, records indicated that there were a total of 30 children from gypsy/traveller backgrounds being taught at Bridgend County Borough schools and as of today this had doubled. This rise in numbers had helped in obtaining increased funding to support these children. The Authority were also looking to work with other agencies to receive increased support for these families.

A Member advised that a paper would be presented to a meeting of the Corporate Management Board in January on a protocol that was being developed by the Planning Department, entitled management of gypsy/traveller encampments.

It was noted that there was an influx of gypsy/travellers in neighbouring towns and city's to Bridgend, including Cardiff, Newport and Swansea. It was asked if this would impact upon the County Borough and lead to a large increase of numbers within the Bridgend County Borough.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) was aware of this fact, but could confirm that up to now the increase in numbers which other parts of South Wales had not in turn resulted in an increase

of numbers within Bridgend. One reason for this, may be that there was no permanent site with the Bridgend County Borough to accommodate gypsy/travellers long term.

The Deputy Leader thanked the Senior Practitioner (EAL) for her submission, and he welcomed further updates on this topic in the future.

A Member added that the Authority like others, had a role and responsibility to play in the supporting of all areas of society, and that there was land allocation in the Local Development Plan for gypsy/travellers.

The Leader asked if extra funding could be pursued via the Welsh Government to possibly support the accommodation of gypsy/travellers within designated areas of the County Borough.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) advised that she could not answer this question as she only dealt with the provision of funding for the education of children from these families, though she would explore this issue and perhaps give an update to Members at the next meeting, or outside of this meeting..

A Member also asked for Officers to look at any possible community cohesion funding also, to help counteract the negative perception that some people had regarding gypsy/travellers and other minority groups.

The Senior Practitioner (EAL) concluded by stating that there was also a loophole in the law in terms of educating children of gypsy/travellers, as it was contradictory in that it stipulated that they could be educated at school and/or in their home.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

50 VALREC - OVERVIEW OF SERVICE REMIT AND DELIVERY

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting, E Clayton, Chief Executive of VALREC.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) presented the report that informed Members of the services provided by VALREC in Bridgend County Borough.

She explained that VALREC was a charity organisation consisting of 11 members of staff.

VALREC's objectives were to be an independent advocate for equality and human rights, and to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations and protect human rights. As an organisation, it challenged prejudice and disadvantage and ensured that equality and human rights remained top priorities for public service providers.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) advised that VALREC had a dedicated officer for Bridgend that attended community cohesion groups, hate crime groups and the Bridgend Equality Forum and also undertook specific work in County Borough schools.

She further advised that Bridgend was one of six local authorities that were members of VALREC some of which who contributed a level of grant funding in its specific area. She added that BCBC and Rhondda Cynon Taf funded the staffing side of VALREC, whilst Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Torfaen supported on a job by job basis.

VALREC also she explained worked to promote equality across the mandates of age, disability, gender, race, religion and/or belief, sexual orientation, transgender and human rights.

A representative of VALREC also sat on the Welsh Government's Advisory Committee for race, religion and transgender, and currently three projects were being developed, i.e. on the topic of ethnic priority, migrant workers and securing employment for people from minority groups.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) confirmed that a large part of her role, was carrying out general training, awareness training and seeking avenues of funding in order to keep the organisation in-being and viable.

She explained that Bridgend had worked with and part-funded VALREC since 2008, and in such time they had undertaken some unique case work and provided support services across protected characteristic groups outlined within their Strategic Plan 2010.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) advised that she would share more information with Members on the next agenda item and outline a six monthly report on casework undertaken in the Bridgend County Borough, and elaborate upon certain information in respect of the Service Level Agreement 2013-2014 report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report.

51 VALREC 6 MONTHLY REPORT ON CASEWORK UNDERTAKEN IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH

The Corporate Director - Resources submitted a report, the purpose of which was to inform Members of the casework undertaken by VALREC in Bridgend County Borough in the present financial year.

The report confirmed that the Cabinet Committee had previously agreed to receive reports and presentations on topics that come under its remit, including from community representations or organisations sharing information on relevant topics, in order for Members to gain a broader understanding of issues people were facing in communities.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) reiterated that the Council had worked with and part funded the organisation for five years and this year entered into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with them. Appendix 1 to the report detailed this SLA which contained certain information, that included casework undertaken along with other developments that had taken place this current financial year.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) explained that the SLA gave some information about VALREC, some of which she had touched upon in the previous report.

The organisation had been in-being since 1997 and from April 2013 onward it had supported and worked with 146 individuals with various backgrounds including those who were transgender. People such as these were looking to the future with increased confidence due to the part organisations such as VALREC played in their lives.

In the current financial year, the Chief Executive (VALREC) advised that the organisation had worked with 15 individuals who had been the victim of ongoing low level hate incidents through to those suffering as a direct result of hate crime. These could be broken down as race 6, disability 4, homophobic 3 and transgender 2.

She explained that in terms of all the above cases, the organisation asked the victims key issues such as what they were thinking and how they were feeling.

Of the 146 people VALREC had played a part in supporting, these had mostly been referred by other organisations, for example the Citizens Advice Bureau, or alternatively other service providers.

A lot of work VALREC committed within schools through workshops particularly in relation to more common problems such as bullying, though more support and funding was required in order to carry out work in the wider communities with key organisations such as Communities First.

The organisation like others, had to make savings due to the current financial climate, and this included redundancy of staff.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) advised that bids for further funding would be made in the future, and that the organisation were presently awaiting the outcome of two bids which had been submitted to the Welsh Government's Equality and Inclusion Grant. The first bid was to run a pilot project in Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taff for transgender people and their families, with the second bid being part of a consortium to support the Hate Crime Framework for Wales and once more Bridgend were being recognised in this bid. Details of other work ongoing were outlined in the Service Level Agreement report.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) emphasised that the organisation were looking at large authorities for example such as the Police, to support ongoing work, including hopefully in the form of funding for further such project work.

The Chief Executive (VALREC) then proceeded to elaborate more on casework, and the provision of support for this, which had a significant impact on their limited resources.

She explained that costs for funding this could range from £1,000 for a straightforward case, to as much as 3 or £4,000 for more complex casework, where increase staffing resources were required to support this more complex work.

Using the above examples, the Chief Executive (VALREC) confirmed that two complicated cases and five straightforward cases could cost the organisation £11k, and VALREC have/are working with more cases than this in Bridgend.

The Deputy Leader thanked the invitee for her contributions, and he welcomed despite ongoing financial pressures, the Authority confirming its support to VALREC, on a vice-versa arrangement. He also welcomed the Service Level Agreement 2013-14, as this reflected levels of accountability between the organisation and the local authority.

A Member asked what level of funding the Council committed to VALREC.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer confirmed that the Council initially contributed £10k per annum to VALREC, however, under the terms of the MTFs, this was showing a reduction year on year up until 2017.

Members felt that it would be beneficial sometime in the future to receive a pre-Council presentation on the role of VALREC and the support work it was involved in.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That the Cabinet Committee – Equalities noted the progress report.
- (2) That consideration be given to arranging for Members to receive a pre-Council presentation at a future date, on the role and remit of VALREC.

52 6 MONTHLY REPORT ON EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The Corporate Director - Resources submitted a report which provided Committee with data on the Council's workforce, (together with comparative information), and an update on employment related developments.

Appendix 1 to the report provided half yearly profiles and a data analysis of the contracted workforce from 31 March 2012 until 30 September 2013.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer advised that in previous such reports on this topic there was attached to the report an Appendix that reflected a percentage of pay grades for staff of a different gender. It was now however more difficult to adequately portray this, since different for those existed previously, grades had been introduced as part of the new Pay and Grading Scheme (i.e. Job Evaluation).

The report advised that the Domestic Abuse Protocol and Manager and Employee Guidelines had been updated as part of the Council's commitment to work with the Welsh Government, to deliver workplace policies for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer advised that the 'Council's role as an employer' objective within the SEP contained ten actions, some of which had been completed with the remainder having future completion dates. Details of these were outlined in the report.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer also advised that previous reports analyses of council employees by gender and pay grade had not been included with this report as the new pay and grading system had recently been introduced and any new data collected would not be comparable to the original data set. He added that if Members still wished for this information to be included as part of future reports, then perhaps they could advise him of this at the next scheduled meeting.

In terms of some of the data extracted from Appendix 1 to the report, a Member noted that the number of employees able to speak Welsh had increased by 376 since September 2012. He asked what had contributed to such an increase.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer replied that this had been largely due to a more improved reporting mechanism being in place since employees had completed a data capture exercise.

He added however that this statistic would be even more improved if further employees had completed the data collection form/questionnaire, as only 975 responded to this out of a total workforce of 6,500 (i.e. 20%).

This exercise was going to be re-sold to employees following the Project having been reviewed.

In terms of the number of employees aged 65 and over increasing by 21 since September 2012, a Member asked if this increase applied primarily to full time or part time posts.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer was unsure of the answer to this point, so he advised the Member that he would review the data on this and provide a response to him outside of the meeting.

A Member stated that he was aware that the rules relating to flexitime affected all Council employees. He asked however, if employees over 65 years of age continuing their employment with the Council worked reduced hours.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that if it suited both the employer and employee there was scope within the Authority for staff aged 55 to access the VER policy and also to consider flexible retirement ie remain with the Council on reduced hours.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer then confirmed that an equality and diversity training and development plan formally approved by Committee, was now being worked upon and would be implemented in due course.

He added that the Council was awarded the 'Louder than Words Charter by Action on Hearing Loss' in January 2013, and this had been successfully re-assessed and the award had been retained.

Finally, the Equalities and Engagement Officer reminded that in 2012, the Welsh Government introduced "More than just Words" (a three year strategy promoting the use of Welsh language in health and social care settings). The Council updated the Welsh Government on year one developments and progress in Adult Social Care and Children's Services in November 2013, and was awaiting feedback on this.

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

53 UPDATED ACTION PLAN FOR THE WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2012 - 15

The Corporate Director - Resources submitted a report, the purpose of which was to report on progress made in the above Action Plan for the period 2013 - 2014.

The report outlined some background information, and confirmed that new Welsh language Standards would in due course replace the Welsh Language Scheme.

Until the new standards were set, the Equalities and Engagement Officer advised that an updated Action Plan had been prepared to monitor progress on meeting duties under the Welsh Language Act.

He proceeded to refer Members to Appendix 1 of the report, which showed a draft progress report on the Action Plan 2013 -14 for the existing Welsh Language Scheme. This Plan included new actions to further deliver on the objectives of the current Welsh Language Scheme in those areas identified in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

In terms of tourism, the Deputy Leader asked if the new Content Management System Umbraco was used in the production of road signage and for the purpose of interpretation and spelling of for example street names in Welsh.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer stated that Umbraco was a Content Management System and was not therefore used for the above purpose.

In terms of road signage (and not street nameplates) he added that the Council had agreed that when these need replacing, then they should be provided in both Welsh and English, i.e. bi-lingually.

A Member asked if there was any data available, that would confirm how many more Welsh speakers there were in the County Borough since the Welsh Language Act 1993 was introduced.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer advised the Member that he would endeavour to obtain this figure and share it with Committee Members outside the meeting or at the next meeting.

A Member then asked if there was an option to book seats through the booking system for shows at the Grand Pavilion, Porthcawl, via the box office, in both Welsh and English.

The Marketing and Engagement Manager (HR) advised that these could only be booked through the Box Office in English rather than bi-lingually. The Council had no control over altering this, as the box office data system was externally hosted as opposed to being directly controlled by the local authority.

A Member asked if perhaps officers could check with the theatres in Cardiff and Swansea and see if they considered bookings bi-lingually, and if so, what systems they used to accommodate this.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approved the draft Action Plan.

The meeting closed at 3.40pm.