

CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES - THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2016

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2016 AT 2.00 PM

Present

Councillor HJ Townsend – Chairperson

CL Reeves

CE Smith

PJ White

HM Williams

Invitees:

MW Butcher

N Clarke

N Farr

CA Green

M Gregory

RC Jones

A Owen

M Reeves

M Thomas

S Hawas

Apologies for Absence

HJ David

D Sage

Officers:

Emma Blandon

Marketing and Engagement Officer

Paul Williams

Equality Officer

Julie Ellams

Democratic Services Officer

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee Equalities dated 14 July 2016, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the minutes being amended to reflect that Councillor N Farr had attended the meeting.

3. ABERKENFIG MOSQUE AND BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH'S MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The Chairperson introduced to the meeting Mr Suleman Hawas, who gave a presentation on the background to Bridgend County Borough's Muslim community, the issues faced and an overview of activities taking place at Aberkenfig Mosque.

Dr Khan and other Doctors in Cardiff started to worship together in 1990 and by 1997 numbers had increased to 11 when they moved to Bridgend. By the time the mosque was established in Maesteg there were more than 150 followers with numbers still growing. Mr Hawas joined the Independent Advisory Group to the Police and advised regarding any issues affecting the community. In 2000 he joined the Bridgend Cohesion Group (formerly Race Equality Relations) and the mosque moved to Aberkenfig. Local residents were suspicious of the Muslim community at first and there were also issues regarding parking at the mosque. Mr Hawas attended local PACT meetings to improve relations with the local community.

Following the 11th September attacks on the Twin Towers, there were attacks on the mosque including attempts to damage the building. The Police and local residents acted very quickly and were very supportive. In 2004 there was an attack at the mosque and shoes stolen and once again, local residents contacted the police and were very concerned and supportive.

When visitors arrived at the mosque and stayed for a few days, local residents were suspicious. If they were advised in advance of new arrivals, they were less concerned.

In 2002, Mr Hawas became Deputy Mayor of Bridgend County Borough Council and attended more functions which helped to cement relationships and to promote Bridgend as a multi-cultural town. In May 2003, Mr Hawas became Town Mayor of Bridgend and this was a very proud moment for him and his family. Functions were held at the mosque rather than the Civic Offices and with support from IT, a fantastic day was had by many different people from different religions. Since then a number of open days had been arranged and enjoyed including one promoting Mental Health issues. The 2009 Open Day was attended by BNP and people were frustrated by their attendance and actions.

Links with schools had been promoted and there were regular visits from children of all ages. Mr Hawas had been impressed by the questions being asked by the children, and their level of understanding after hearing the explanations and the emotion they demonstrated. He explained how the Koran could be misunderstood and gave examples demonstrating the importance of intelligent interpretation. The mosque offered free Arabic language courses and were keen that Muslim teachers taught Muslim children in schools.

The number of Muslims in Bridgend had continued to increase and part of the cemetery in Laleston had been set aside for their use.

Mr Hawas and other members of the mosque will be assisting BCBC in the placement of Syrian children and can speak Arabic so would continue to help with other families.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Hawas for attending the meeting and for his presentation.

Committee Members asked Mr Hawas if there had been an increase in the level of hate crime since the recent Brexit result. Mr Hawas confirmed that he was not aware of any increase so far. Members commented that certain areas appeared to be more tolerant than others. Mr Hawas explained the background to ISIS, the impact on Muslim families and the way the current position was viewed by the rest of the world.

Committee Members commented on the increase in the numbers of Muslims to approximately 600 and asked if the position in Bridgend reflected what was happening in the rest of the UK. Mr Hawas explained that Bridgend and South Wales were very good, particularly when it came to relationships with the police. Bridgend is multi-cultural and lots of other areas could learn from what was happening in Wales.

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The Equality Officer stressed the importance of the support provided by the Aberkenfig mosque when it came to settling Syrian refugees and that this work could only be done with the continued support of Mr Hawas and the mosque committee.

Mr Hawas believed that integration was important no matter what religion and equality also played an important part.

Members discussed the benefits of visiting the mosque and suggested holding a future committee meeting at the mosque so that all committee members were aware of the facility.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Hawas for attending the meeting and for his presentation.

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

4. UPDATE REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WELSH LANGUAGE (WALES) MEASURE 2011 AND WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The Equality Officer presented a report updating the Cabinet Equalities Committee on the implementation of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards.

The council received its final compliance notice on 30 September 2015 and had since been working to determine the implications involved in implementing the 171 standards by 30 September 2016. All standards were now in place and updates on progress and any changes made would continue to be submitted to each committee meeting.

Key progress/updates since July 2016 were summarised in paragraph 4.1 of the report. The Equality Officer gave a resume of each for the benefit of Members.

The Committee were frustrated by the complaint that the council did not offer all its swimming lessons in Welsh. This did not take into account other non-english speaking groups or children with sensory loss and did not demonstrate fairness from an equality perspective. If there was an increase in cost then they could lose the service altogether. Members queried the position if the complaint was upheld and questioned whether or not the authority had to continue to provide lessons. The Equality Officer explained that the Commissioner could impose a number of conditions and the authority could be fined £5,000 per breach. The Committee acknowledged that the Equality Officer had met the deadline for submitting appeals.

The Committee discussed how a complaint was recorded, was it only if an individual stated "I wish to complain" or if they contacted the authority highlighting a fact was this also recorded as a complaint. The Equality Officer explained that he would check and email Members with the information.

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

5. URGENT ITEMS

None

The meeting closed at 3.00 pm