

CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES - THURSDAY, 9 MARCH 2017

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON THURSDAY, 9 MARCH 2017 AT 10.00 AM

Present

Councillor HJ Townsend – Chairperson

CL Reeves

PJ White

HM Williams

Officers:

Jonathan Flower
Sarah Kingsbury

Senior Strategy Officer - Housing
Head of Human Resources, Organisational and Development and
Customer Services

Andrew Rees
Claire Saralis
Paul Williams

Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Communications, Marketing and Engagement Manager
Equality Officer

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor N Clarke
Councillor HJ David – Other Council Business
Councillor M Gregory
Councillor D Sage
Councillor CE Smith – Other Council Business
Councillor M Thomas

7. COUNCILLOR M BUTCHER

The Chairperson announced that this was the first meeting of the Committee following the recent passing of Councillor Butcher who would be sorely missed for her contribution made to the work of the Committee.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

9. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Committee Equalities of 10 November 2016 be approved as a true and accurate record.

10. SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSONS RELOCATION SCHEME

The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration provided an overview on the progress of the UK Government Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in the County Borough of Bridgend. He stated that the UK Government is committed to resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees during the lifetime of this Parliament, with the number of refugees likely to be received in Wales increasing from 1,500 up to 1,800 over the Scheme.

The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that Cabinet at its meeting on 5 July 2016 had approved the Council's participation in phase 2 of the Scheme. The Council had procured the Welsh Refugee Council to provide support to refugee families and he outlined the support which would be given to support the families. He stated that the families which had settled in Bridgend had been housed by Cartrefi Hafod who had been awarded the contract for the provision of housing management and who had experience in managing Syrian refugees in other local authorities and had the resources to assist with a variety of tenancy issues.

The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that to date, 2 Syrian families had been resettled in the County Borough, with the first family arriving in November 2016, with the second family arriving in February 2017. A third family would be arriving in the County Borough during this month and a further 3 families arriving in the months that follow. Six families would be resettled in the County Borough by June 2017. A report would be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet on proposals to resettle further families. He informed the Committee the families already resettled were settling in well in the County Borough having good housing support and the children attending local schools with support from an Arabic speaking Learning Support Officer. The families' religion is Sunni and they attend the mosque in Aberkenfig. To date, 294 people had resettled in Wales and 4,400 resettled in the UK which would be increasing to 20,000 during the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Committee questioned whether the authority had been a quota for resettling families. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that the Home Office had not given authorities for the resettling of families and that the numbers were determined based on the availability of housing, school spaces and health care. He stated that Bridgend's population accounts for 4.5% of the population of the whole of Wales and the authority could resettle up to 84 people. The Committee requested that the future Cabinet report also outline the methodology for resettling families in the County Borough.

The Committee referred to the rent allowance of £425 per month for 3 bedroom properties when the rental for such properties is approximately £575 per month and questioned how the shortfall would be met. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that the housing allowance is just below £500 per month and also below the market rent. He stated that the support service procured for refugee families would ensure that 100% housing allowance would be allowed. He also informed the Committee that Hafod would arrange for gas certification and the Council would use Home Office funding to support the families in their homes, with the Council being able to pay up to 12 weeks rent allowance to landlords. An approach had been received from a local church with an offer of a property in their ownership to resettle families. He stated that the Council would also use empty properties to house resettled families. Properties used as part of the programme would be leased for a minimum of 3 years and once the lease had been signed the owners of the properties could not withdraw from the lease, giving security of tenure to the families. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that the operational group established for mobilisation and delivery had been very effective in terms of its partnership working.

The Committee asked what assistance was being given to assist the people being resettled in accessing employment. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that people would be assisted in registering with the Job Centre for employment opportunities. The biggest barrier to obtaining employment is the language, however, English lessons are provided by Bridgend College for the families to attend. However as the families had only arrived recently, it was likely too early for job opportunities to be accessed.

The Committee asked how families are selected to be resettled in the County Borough. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that the Home Office are informed by the Council of the availability of housing and school places. Medical needs and whether the properties require adaptation for disabilities would need to be assessed by the Operational Group as to whether a family could be accepted in the County Borough.

The Committee questioned the geographical areas where the families would be resettled. The Senior Strategy Officer – Housing and Community Regeneration informed the Committee that as the families religion was likely to be Sunni, the area around Aberkenfig would be considered for resettling, however there was a lack of capacity at local schools in that area. He stated that some communities in the County Borough were isolated and communities in proximity to town centres, public transport, the mosque and also the availability of halal food were considered.

RESOLVED: That the Committee received the report and considered there had been a great deal of multi-agency work and volunteering in helping families resettle in the County Borough.

11. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017-2018**

The Equality Officer sought approval of the proposed Forward Work Programme for 2017-18. He informed the Committee that the report on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme had replaced the proposed item on the Gypsy and Traveler Community in Bridgend as difficulties had been encountered in getting a representative from that community to attend Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Equalities Committee approved the proposed Forward Work Programme 2017-18 and that an additional meeting of the Committee be arranged to take place in December / January.

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

The Equality Officer reported on a update on the implementation of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards.

He informed the Committee that the Authority had received its final compliance notice on 30 September 2015 and had since been working to determine the issues and challenges involved in implementing the 171 standards assigned to the Council. The Council had continued to work towards compliance with the standards and he summarised the progress which had been made. He stated that a decision was awaited from the Welsh Language Commissioner on the ten standards appealed in March 2016 and the eight standards appealed in September 2016.

The Committee in supporting the Welsh Language was concerned about the recurrent budget pressure and costs of implementing the Welsh Language Standards and that a common sense approach needed to be adopted.

The Committee questioned whether candidates for positions with the authority were asked to express their language of preference for interview. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that the authority would not know the language of preference new job applicants, but is developing a Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) data base in order to collect information on language preference of citizens. He

also informed the Committee that the Minister for Lifelong Learning was producing a White Paper revisiting the Standards as the general consensus is that the Standards were not doing what they were intended to do. The Committee questioned whether there had been an increase in the number of people speaking Welsh since the introduction of the Standards. The Equality Officer explained that this would not be known until the results of the 2021 Census were known. He stated that the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy included a target to increase the number of Welsh speakers to 1 million by 2050.

A member of the Committee stated that she had recently heard some innovative ideas for the teaching of Welsh from teachers. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that there was a need for a piece of work to be done as there is evidence of parents taking their children out of Welsh medium education by the time they go to secondary school education. One possible reason could be that parents may not feel confident that their Welsh language skills put them in a position to support their child with homework at secondary level but are able to do so at primary school level. The Committee also considered there may not be resources to provide SEN for pupils with ALN through Welsh medium education. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that a bilingual leaflet promoting Welsh medium education was being produced by the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan working group and would be ready for distribution at the Urdd Eisteddfod. The Committee considered there was anecdotal evidence of pupils leaving Welsh medium education and whether exit surveys were conducted to ascertain the reason why pupils had left Welsh medium education. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that he would clarify whether exit surveys were done and advise the committee accordingly.

The Committee asked whether comparisons were made with other local authorities on complying with the Standards. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that it would not be possible to make comparisons with other local authorities as each authority has to adhere to a different set of standards.

The Committee considered that the Council was in compliance with standard 67 in that it displayed a sign in Civic reception stating that persons are welcome to use the Welsh language in reception. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that this standard applied to all reception areas the Council has. The Council was attempting to have in place as many Welsh speakers as it could on reception points.

The Committee questioned whether the Council's website would give users a choice of language. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that the Council is reviewing its Web Site and that some councils have in place a 'splash' page as the first page on its website which gives users a language preference.

The Committee questioned the financial implications on the authority if it was unsuccessful in its appeals on the Standards and the complaints received. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that 7 complaints had been received, 2 complaints were received directly by the authority and were copied to the Commissioner. Some of the complaints related to areas which were not the responsibility of the authority while the Commissioner decided not to investigate 2 complaints. He stated that the cost for each breach of the Standards is £5,000 per breach. A fine levied by the Commissioner would be the final stage in the process, but the Commissioner could direct that the authority develop an action plan. He confirmed the authority had not received any fines yet.

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

13. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS - ANNUAL REVIEW 2016/17

The Equality Officer reported on the requirement to undertake Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), an overview of the Council's approach to EIAs and an outline of EIAs undertaken in the Council's service areas in 2016/17.

He reported that an EIA is a tool to assess whether new (or changes to existing) policies/services/functions could impact on different sectors of society in different ways. EIAs also help the Council make better decisions, identify how services can be more accessible or improved and consider the protected characteristics of race/ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, age, disability, faith/religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity and civil partnerships and marriage.

He informed the Committee that Initial Screening EIAs are undertaken to identify those policies and decisions requiring Full EIAs and enable the Council to get a sense of whether a particular policy is likely to have a differential impact on any group of people, and whether mitigating action needs to be taken or a Full EIA carried out. A Full EIA is a systematic process of evidence gathering and analysis to ensure the council is meeting its equality duty. Full EIAs follow the same format and process as Initial Screening EIAs but require greater resources in terms of time and commitment to gather and analyse a wider range of evidence than would be required for an Initial Screening EIA.

The Committee questioned who would make the decision to proceed to a Full EIA. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that this would be the appropriate Directorate's decision and that he would also offer advice on whether to proceed to a Full EIA.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the Committee that managers who write and approve reports and aspiring managers had been identified to undertake the e-learning module on EIAs

The Committee considered that Equality Impact Assessments be considered as part of the Councillor Induction Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Equalities Committee noted the progress made in the Council during 2016/17 with the completion of Equality Impact Assessments.

14. DRAFT STRATEGIC EQUALITY PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2015 / 2016

The Equality Officer reported on an update on the work being done to develop the Council's fifth annual report 2015-2016 on the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP). The SEP annual report specifically sets out:

- The steps taken to identify and collect relevant information
- Any reasons for not collecting relevant information
- Where appropriate employment information, including information on training and pay.

The Equality Officer reported on the key points to note from the annual report:

- The Council continues to build good relationships with representative groups e.g. the Muslim Community at Aberkenfig Mosque;
- The Council delivered training on equality and diversity, and equality impact assessments, during the reporting period. 85 employees attended face to face Valuing Difference training, while 216 completed the

CABINET COMMITTEE EQUALITIES - THURSDAY, 9 MARCH 2017

Introduction to Equality and Diversity e-learning course. 24 employees completed the EIA e-learning module;

- In 2015, the Council was awarded an Action on Hearing Loss Cymru Excellence Wales Award.

The Equality Officer informed the Committee that there is a need to further break-down data on teaching staff. He stated that legal advice had been sought in relation to the non-disclosure of data on grievance and disciplinary hearings as to do so would breach the Data Protection Act.

The Committee questioned whether the council's employees reflect local demographics. The Equality Officer informed the Committee that the employees do not fully reflect the demographics of the County Borough as the Council could not compel employees to share data with the Council. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed the Committee that the Council did not run positive action campaigns, but promotes equality at job fairs. She stated that the Council has low levels of Welsh speaking employees and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) employees. She also stated that many employees do not want to regard themselves as having a disability. The Committee commented that the Trade Unions may have a role in encouraging employees to provide data on disabilities. The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development stated that she would take this issue up with the Trade Unions at her next meeting with them.

The Equality Officer informed the Committee that he would provide the Committee with data on raising awareness of bullying in schools.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet Equalities Committee noted the progress being made and approved the Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2015/16.

15. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 12.00 pm