

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, ON THURSDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2015 AT 10.00AM

Present:

Councillor M Gregory – Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott MBE
H J David
C E Smith

Councillors

L C Morgan
P J White

Invitees:

Councillors

M Butcher
C A Green
R C Jones
A D Owen

Councillors

C L Reeves
M Thomas
H J Townsend

Officers:

S Kingsbury - Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development
P Williams - Equalities and Engagement Officer
A Harris - Consultation and Engagement Officer
J Monks - Democratic Services Officer - Committees

88 ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON

RESOLVED: That in the absence of Councillor D Sage, Chairperson of the Cabinet Committee – Equalities the Committee agreed that Councillor Gregory be appointed Chairperson for the meeting.

Councillor Gregory took the Chair.

89 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor C L Jones - Unwell
Councillor M Reeves - Work Commitments
Councillor D Sage - Unwell

90 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

91 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee - Equalities held on the 16th October 2014 were approved as a true and accurate record.

92 CONSULTATION IN BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Consultation and Engagement Officer gave a presentation to inform the Committee of the consultation work undertaken by the Council's Engagement Team.

He explained that consultation is a formal process in which the policy makers and service providers invite interested groups and individuals to give their views. Engagement is an active and participative process which can influence and shape policies and services and includes a wide range of methods and techniques. He advised on the importance of ensuring that all residents of the Borough are given the opportunity to share their views with the Council on changes that affect them, and took Members through the methods in creating a consultation or engagement exercise, in which an internal toolkit is used and includes the ten national principles for engagement, as devised by Participation Cymru:

1. Engagement is effectively designed to make a difference.
2. Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they choose so.
3. Engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way.
4. Work with relevant partner organisations.
5. The information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable.
6. Make it easier for people to participate.
7. Enable people to take part effectively.
8. Engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective.
9. People are told the impact of their contribution.
10. Learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer advised that constituents were beginning to understand the financial constraints local authorities were facing, and consultation with those likely to be affected by a decision increases the transparency of the process. Furthermore, knowing the audience can make for better use of resources and improve the success of a project. Consultations or engagement can be segregated into the following three categories:

1. Statutory obligation – when organisations have a legal duty to consult.
2. Policy commitment – when a particular service provider has its own policy to consult or engage.
3. Discretionary engagement – when engagement may be considered by services in order to learn from the experience of others, to confirm stakeholders' priorities, or communicate change and collect views.

The methods selected for consultation or engagement and the resources available are:

- Websites – Council website, dedicated site, partner sites;
- Social Media – Twitter, Facebook, Flickr;
- Push strategy promotion – press releases, bulletins, customer service screens;
- Internal promotion;
- Paid advertising – newspapers and radio stations;
- Posters/leaflet drops – hospitals, surgeries, community centres;
- Face to face – presentations, public meetings, events;
- Partnerships;
- Specific groups and organisations;
- Other consultations and engagement activities.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer advised that data collected is analyzed in depth, with the findings being made available to all, giving all stakeholders an equal opportunity to respond. He informed Members that the Citizens Panel is an integral part of the Council's key targets in order to increase the following:

- a) Ward representation
- b) Improve age representation (16 to 34 year olds)
- c) Improve Welsh language representation

He advised that there were currently 16 Wards in the Borough who were not represented which needed consideration and that people should be encouraged to communicate through e-mail. He commented that it was also important to encourage Welsh speakers to get involved, particularly as provision through the Welsh medium was already provided.

He then invited questions from Members.

Discussion took place and one Member asked whether visual impairment was addressed on consultations and whether publications were screen readable and dyslexia friendly.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer advised that the corporate colours were used in all publications; however there was an on-line version which turns everything into basic text. Also, “browse aloud” was available for those who were visually impaired. They were currently looking into making the system dyslexia friendly and throughout the whole process people are invited to contact his department if they were experiencing any problems.

Another Member referred to the recent issue regarding Welsh speakers and whether there was a strategy to transferring them. Also with regard to the consultation on learner transport and nursery provision, she asked how children and young people were consulted.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer advised that this issue would come under the easy read format. Research undertaken had not found an example of best practice in this area in any other local authority. He advised that the Authority worked with a charitable organisation known as Bridgend People First, a self-advocacy organisation for people with learning disabilities. He had been working with the Wellbeing team regarding children and as part of their annual review had requested one link on the website to include parents, foster carers, teachers and children which would make it more child-friendly.

In response to a question from a Member, he advised that the communication needs of Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people were taken into consideration as signing was always available.

One Member referred to the timing of consultations during half term times and school holidays and asked whether there was a process in place to ensure that consultation did not take place at such times.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer explained that if the consultations were directly linked to schools then they would have to be conducted at least 20 out of the 42 days during the school year; however if not linked to the schools they would be carried out during half term times.

Another Member asked whether Welsh media consultation had been carried out in secondary schools.

The Consultation and Engagement Officer advised that they had been working with secondary schools on learner transport and would build on that to include collaboration with the Headteachers.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the report and requested that details of the 16 Wards currently unrepresented are circulated to Members.

93 SIX MONTHLY REPORT ON EQUALITY IN THE WORKFORCE

The Equalities and Engagement Officer presented a report to provide the Committee with data on the Council’s workforce, together with comparative information and an update on employment related developments.

He informed Members that the data collection project, which includes Members, had been ongoing for the last two years. He advised that collecting data provided better understanding of the workforce, delivering regular training to staff which included dignity at work training, in order to promote equality and diversity across the workforce. He explained that the training was in the pilot phase and 90 people had already completed it. Three training sessions had been held so far, with a further three being run during February and the plan was to widen training across other service areas as well. He described the formation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Network and the first meeting held recently had been a success. Guidance on dealing with customers and service users who may be transgender had been developed as well as guidance on race and religion. They were currently in the process of developing a Carers' Network with an on-line Forum. He asked the Committee whether they wanted the data presented in a different way.

One Member suggested a swingometer column to show decreases and increases in the workforce to show movement. Another Member suggested a breakdown to show whether there were more females employed on a part time basis and what areas of the Authority they were predominant.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the number of part time employees had increased, which were generally taken up by females.

The Leader referred to the format and queried the actual data presented between the 31st March 2014 and the 30th September 2014, which showed the number of gay men had increased from 11 to 19. He asked whether this was due to the fact that people were now more comfortable in providing detailed information, which he believed was a positive step forward.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer confirmed that it was partly due to the fact they did feel more comfortable, but it was also the way agenda was managed and the fact that the data collection project was more in depth.

One Member asked whether they had sought the support of the Trade Unions in the data collection exercise and if it was advertised. She further asked whether they intended to have other networks and group mail boxes.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer advised that the Trade Unions had not been involved as they had considered best practice in other local authorities; however it was not too late to include the Unions. Other networks they were considering as part of the Strategic Equalities Plan were disabilities, race and religion. With regard to group mail boxes, he advised that there was a dedicated Equalities mail box which he was responsible for.

Another Member was encouraged by the fact that people felt more able to come out and asked how many of the 54 elected Members had completed their forms.

The Equalities and Engagement Officer stated that the figure was around 30%.

The Chairperson suggested placing the form electronically on the Members' page. A Member asked whether data was being collected on sign language. The Equalities and Engagement Officer advised that he was aware of two people.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the workforce report.

94 WELSH LANGUAGE (WALES) MEASURE 2011/WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS

The Equalities and Engagement Officer presented a report to update the Committee on developments with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and Welsh Language Standards.

He reported that following debate over the last 12 months in relation to the Welsh language, the First Minister announced a timetable for 133 new related standards to be introduced during 2015. The Welsh Government is due to debate all those standards on the 23rd March at which point either all or none of those standards will be approved. If they are approved, the Authority will then receive a Compliance Notice during April and May. A further consultation period will then take place whilst the standards are introduced and the standards would then become Law towards the end of the year with all local authorities in Wales being required to demonstrate they are working towards compliance.

He advised that the Annual Monitoring report would continue, and although the Welsh Language Scheme would cease to be a statutory requirement, when the standards are introduced it was hoped there would still be a scheme in place. He informed Members that it was envisaged there would be around 11 of those standards which the Authority would have difficulty in complying with; however support would be given to managers and service areas. Welsh language training would be provided to those staff with customer contact so that Welsh speaking customers are met and greeted in Welsh.

Discussion took place and Members agreed that this would have considerable financial implications for all local authorities at a time when they could ill afford it.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered the report.

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

The Equalities and Engagement Officer presented a report to inform Members of the casework undertaken within the Borough during the current financial year by VALREC (the Valleys Regional Equality Council). VALREC assists local authorities in complying with their duties to promote equality through consultation exercises and access to services and the Authority has worked with and part funded VALREC since 2008 making an annual payment to that organisation of £10,000 under a Service Level Agreement. The casework report for the six months from April to September in the current financial year was attached at Appendix 1 and related data was attached at Appendix 2.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development informed Members that the last presentation given by VALREC had been perplexing and in the interim a meeting was held with their Chief Executive as it was felt that the Authority was not being provided with adequate support. Despite having clearly informed VALREC of the expected requirements, communication had still proved difficult as the organisation had to be regularly contacted to chase up requested information.

She advised that the annual fee of £10,000, although being reduced to £8,000 was not meeting the expected conditions as laid out in the Service Agreement and the data provided appeared to be inaccurate. Therefore she recommended that the value of VALREC's service to the Authority should be reviewed.

RESOLVED: That the Committee recommended that the report be referred to Cabinet for consideration.

The meeting closed at 11.55am.