

EQUALITIES PANEL

15 June 2009
4.00pm to 6.10pm

PRESENT

Acting Chair: Trevor Woollams, Head of Strategy and Partnerships

Councillors: Lynn, Shah, Smith and Walker

Staff Members: Nacer Dali, Jackie Hanson and Bridget Keady,

Public Members: Norah Al-Ani, Graham Lewis, Sigrid Fisher and Nicky Wrigley

Presenting papers: Truus Abbink, Amnesty International Cambridge City group; Deborah Simpson, Head of Human Resources; Paula Rae, Strategy Officer & Anette Grinsted, HR Diversity Adviser

In attendance: Paula Rae, Strategy Officer; Vicki Davidson, Organisational Development Manager.

1 ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOME

and

2 Introductions took place and the Chair welcomed all those present.

Apologies were received from Toni Ainley and Christine Leonard

3 MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

A new public member, Sigrid Fisher, has been recruited and was welcomed to the meeting.

Following comments at the last meeting, it has been decided that a twice-yearly Equalities Newsletter will be circulated to all Cambridge City Councillors. This will also provide links to the Equalities Panel minutes. In addition, an annual review of equalities work will be brought to the Strategy and Resources committee in the October cycle.

4 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: CASE STUDY AND OVERVIEW OF STATISTICS, Truss Abbink: Co-ordinator Stop Violence Against Women, Amnesty International and Angie Stewart of Women's Aid

TA gave an overview of her role and the purpose of the presentation. Domestic violence impact on the lives of one in four women and 80% of victims are female.

TA had come to talk about the problems faced by a group of women not protected by current initiatives; women on temporary visas and with no

recourse to public funds. She suggested that these women often have no choice but to remain in an unsafe situation. There were 7 known cases in 2008 and aid centres report around one call a week. Women who have children or are pregnant can apply for help but childless women have no right to funding and will often be turned away from aid agencies for this reason. UK law on this issue is patchy. However, this is a human rights issues and the state is required to show due diligence. Amnesty International is lobbying parliament and locally has support from the local MP and The Leader.

As outlined the local situation. Victims need more support and while the Police will step in an emergency there is no follow up service in place. Language issues and lack of awareness add to the difficulties and victims often have no choice but to return to the family home. Migrant workers need more help. It is possible for those on a spousal visa to apply in their own right but this does not solve the immediate problem of finding a safe place to stay. Oxfam can sometime offer short-term financial support but more consistent and systematic support is needed urgently.

Some Local Authorities have found a way to fund emergency accommodation by grant funding a voluntary organisation. Locally, a solution would be for 5 local authorities to pool resources, with each giving £10,000pa to fund three full time emergency beds. Supporting People could then fund the support worker needed to make the scheme work. It was agreed that the other LA's should be approached about this issue as soon as possible.

It was suggested that this could link into a current County initiative. BK will look into this. Consulting with the Anti Social Behaviour team and the Housing Department was also suggested.

BK

SF asked for confirmation that this issue was in the single equalities scheme.

5 EQUALITIES BILL BRIEFING PRESENTED BY TREVOR WOOLLAMS

TW introduced the report as per the agenda. He outlined the timeframes for the introduction of the new Equality Bill and the requirements and duties. Groups protected by the previous legislation have expressed concerns that the new provisions will water down the overall impact of equalities legislation.

The panel discussed aspects of the Bill. The cost implications to service providers, of the unjustifiable age discrimination in the supply of goods or services requirements, were highlighted. The change to employment tribunal rules allowing cases to benefit the whole workforce rather than just

the individual who made the claim was also seen as significant.

The Panel questioned the viability of extending positive action in recruitment and how this would work in practice. Employment panels do not see monitoring forms and therefore could not consider anything non visible.

DS

Deborah Simpson will investigate this issue.

The panel discussed EQIAs and how the guidelines and forms are being re-written and improved. It was suggested that the panel could be used to review and monitor progress with EQIAs. In future, Heads of Services will be asked to sign off EQIAs for their teams.

TW

The Council's EQIA programme to be brought to next panel meeting.

6 IMPACT ON THE EQUALITIES AGENDA OF THE OUTCOME OF SERVICE REVIEWS PRESENTED BY TREVOR WOOLLAMS

TW outlined the outcome of Service Reviews on the Council's equalities agenda. Dedicated officer time has been reduced and a risk based approach to monitoring EQIAs will to be used.

The Equalities Strategy Officer (PA) will be concentrating on providing policy support and guidance to managers which will mean that she will need to reduce her involvement with events such as LGBT History Month, Black History Month etc. The Council will still play an active role in these important events with managers across the Council being encouraged to work with partner organisations. For example, last year Arts and Entertainments included Black acts within their October events programme and earlier this year a number of services and councilors joined the 'Women's Coalition' at a 'Market Place' event at the Grafton Centre on International Women's Day.

The emphasis will be on embedding the equalities work as a central part of corporate decisions and front line services rather than a 'bolt on' provided by a different team.

SF expressed concerns that the reduced resources might mean that the specialised events no longer happened. She questioned how the decision had been made. PR stated that events would still happen but the lead may come from other teams or partners with PR providing support as necessary. The panel asked if equalities were in service plans as an objective or as good practice.

TW said that resources need to be targeted at ensuring front line services

were fully accessible and that managers were considering the wider equalities implications for their services. The panel felt that supporting the various diversity events demonstrates a corporate commitment to diversity and sends a valuable message to the workforce and the wider community. Cllr Walker was keen to reinforce the role of members and suggested that writing it into policy decisions could protect the equalities agenda. It was agreed that EQIAs should be given higher priority and always completed if reductions to services are being considered. It was suggested that the equalities implications section of committee reports should state whether an EQIA had been carried out.

7 SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME AND ANNUAL EQUALITIES REVIEW PRESENTED BY PAULA RAE

PR introduced the item and outlined the process. The initial consultation phase had been completed at the Diversity Forum. Priorities from the consultation will be fed into the Single Equalities Scheme draft document due to be completed in late July this will also contribute to the Annual Equalities Review.

8 DEVELOPING OUR SOCIAL COHESION WORK: REPORT TO THE CAMBRIDGE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PRESENTED BY TREVOR WOOLLAMS

TW introduced the report and explained the background. The Community Cohesion Group was originally set up to develop projects that will improve the integration of migrant workers and BME communities, so that they can contribute to community life in the City, utilising the Local Public Service Agreement Reward Grant that had been set aside by the Local Strategic Partnership to support work in this area.

The multi agency group, working with the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum, is developing projects with the aims of improved understanding of existing communities in Cambridge, mapping of existing interventions and identification of gaps in current provision. Bids for funding need to demonstrate that there will be a benefit to the wider community.

The Council has a provisional allocation of £130,000 under the 'Prevent' agenda. The grant is intended to help the Council and its partners work together with the Muslim community on projects to prevent people from having extremist views.

10 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Before considering the next item on the agenda, Chair of the Equalities Panel explained the need to exclude members of the public from this part of the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by Category 2 as defined in the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

11 HR REPORT / MONITORING DATA PRESENTED BY ANETTE GRINSTED

AG introduced the tabled, confidential, report outlining progress on equality related HR actions since the last meeting and council wide equality data. There was general agreement that Cambridge City Council figures are generally encouraging. However, work is still needed in some areas. Cllr Lynn suggested that the disabilities figures appeared low and wondered if under reporting was the cause. DS confirmed that staff are encouraged to disclose disabilities and were offered opportunities to update data regularly. Ways to encourage staff to disclose information were discussed and it was agreed that improvements could be made to data collecting. DS reported that the Unions are also asking for more detailed staff breakdowns. SF asked if the panel could receive feedback from the staff networking groups.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

23 November 2009
Browns Field Community Centre

Chair