

EQUALITIES PANEL

8 November 2004
4.00pm to 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillors: Downham, Slatter, Ward

Staff Members: Norah Al-Ani, Aasia Bibi, Bridget Keady, Graham Watts (Chair for the meeting)

Public Members: Graham Lewis, Gerri Bird, Redge Carpen, Phil Vasili

Presenting papers: Sigrid Fisher, Strategy Officer (Equalities) & Louise Harrington, Head of Human Resources

In attendance: Antoinette Jackson, Head of Strategy & Partnerships and Karen Price, Senior Personnel Adviser

1 PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Graham Watts in the Chair.

The Chair invited members to introduce themselves as there were several new members.

The Panel endorsed the changes to Panel Membership including the appointment of Andy Yacoub, Diversity Manager at Suffolk County Council, who had agreed to take on the role of independent Chair until the end of March 2006. A review of the role would take place by the end of 2005.

Graham Lewis told the meeting that he was starting a new job in London in early December and therefore may have to resign from the Panel. He would inform the Panel in due course regarding his decision, in time to select a new public member before the next meeting if necessary. SF

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hughes.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No additional members of the public were present.

4 MINUTES

The minutes for the meeting held on 5 April 2004 were approved.

5 MATTERS ARISING

Re: Items 7 & 8

Members made the following points:

- Disappointment that there were no specific plans for a programme of access improvements to office space.
- Was it possible to pool resources with South Cambridgeshire District Council to provide resources for those with communication difficulties eg a communication aid would help.

Agreed that access to work issues be highlighted to managers and that this would be added to the HR Action Plan. LH

The Chair said that it would help managers if practical examples were highlighted.

6 SERVICE DELIVERY

Sigrid Fisher introduced the report which updated the Panel on progress with implementing the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The need to do Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) stemmed from the latter and the Council's Race Equality Scheme. Panel members were invited to take part in the EIA process.

6.1 Disability Discrimination Act

Members of the Panel made the following points:

- Where the Council is providing services through a third party, it was important to ensure that the third party was complying with the regulations. AJ replied that funding was available to help community organisations make physical improvements through an access grant fund.
- That the closure of two thirds of the capacity of the Lion Yard car park during the Grand Arcade development could cause problems for disabled staff.

The Chair reported that City Services was now in charge of parking services and the person to talk to about any problems was Paul Necus, Head of Parking.

Agreed

1. to check whether the number of disabled spaces provided when the closure occurred conformed to the recommended guidelines; LH
2. to ensure that staff have temporary passes if necessary; LH
3. to make the information about temporary passes and the access grant fund more widely known LH/AJ
4. to circulate the information to Panel members. AJ/SF

6.2 Equality Impact Assessments

Members of the Panel made the following points:

- Objection to the use of the word "race" rather than the word "ethnicity" as "race" had political and other labels attached to it.

The Panel noted that the terminology used was not that which the Council would prefer but that it had to follow that used by the Government which named the relevant Acts.

Agreed

1. Equalities Panel should model good practice and use the word

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- “ethnicity” rather than the word “race”. Other Council documentation should follow accordingly. SF/All
2. The Chair should write to the Commission for Racial Equality, the government and other relevant organisations raising the issue. GW

7 EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Louise Harrington introduced the report. She said it had been very useful to meet with the BME Staff Group and that they had a valuable contribution to make. Other staff groups would also provide good insights on employment matters.

The Panel noted that the Recruitment & Retention Strategy was intended to attract young people to work for the Council. There were plans to bid for a graduate trainee from the National Scheme as well as ways to attract 16 year olds.

Members of the Panel made the following points:

- A request to add questions about experience of discrimination to the exit questionnaire sent out when staff leave – **Agreed.** LH
- A suggestion that exit interviews would also provide more depth than questionnaires - Desirable but not feasible because of lack of staff resources in Human Resources Section.
- A request that statements be made in adverts saying that BME groups were under-represented in the Council - **Agreed** to add ‘welcome statement’ LH
- Two members of the Panel were unaware that Council staff had access to a person outside their own department if they wished to talk about issues of discrimination –

Agreed

1. to make this more widely known via departmental newsletters and City Scene and other appropriate methods LH
 2. Dignity at Work reps to be approached and trained where necessary to be ‘safe contacts’ for equality issues. KP
- The Panel asked were there any diversity criteria for the staff focus groups planned for November? AJ replied that the emphasis had been to recruit across departments and grades. She would update the Panel on the profile of groups outside the meeting.
 - Was sexual orientation included in the recruitment monitoring form? – LH replied that staff were asked re all categories with emphasis on confidentiality as regards sexual orientation; not asked about sexual orientation at the recruitment stage.
 - Was the outcome of such monitoring public information. – AJ replied that the numbers of staff in each category is published in reports to council meetings and in other documents.

8 DUTY TO PROMOTE

Sigrid Fisher introduced the report. It gave examples of pro-active work already going on.

Members of the Panel made the following points:

Draft until the next meeting on 16 May 2005

- Request that local school children who performed a 20 minute “dramatic piece” on the Holocaust be invited to perform at the next Holocaust Memorial Day – **Agreed** to inform Bridget Barclay-Munro. NA-A
- Concern that some panel members did not know when public consultation was carried out relating to matters in their remit – **Agreed** to feed in consultation reports of all targeted consultation as a standard item to the Panel. AJ

Norah Al-Ani introduced Appendix 1 of the report which described the outcome of explorations with faith groups about having a Multi-Faith Centre for Cambridge. The outcome was that what was wanted was a Multi-Cultural Centre and that was what Community Development was now working on. Such a centre would be open to everyone. A visit to Barnet Shared Space was planned.

Members of the Panel made the following points – with replies given:

1. If space had to be set aside for a centre, representations might need to be made to have that included in the Local Plan. NA-A to
2. As there were many community centres in the city why was there a need for a new physical space? – NA-A replied that such a centre would bring together smaller groups and provide much-needed storage space. raise with Ken Hay

Panel Members were encouraged to offer ideas and resources to support duty to promote activities. All

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted the question raised about frequency of meetings, and whether these were sufficient.

Agreed

1. That Members of the Panel contact Sigrid Fisher between meetings with suggestions about any issues. All
2. To hold informal meeting between the two formal meetings each year. SF
3. That an informal meeting between Panel Members and the new Chair, Andy Yacoub be arranged before the next Panel meeting. SF
4. Panel members be invited to the planned International Women’s Day 2005 events and other Council-led cultural diversity activities. All
5. That the next meeting of the Panel would be on 16 May 2005 in Lion House.