

EQUALITIES PANEL

16 May 2005
4.00pm to 6.00pm

PRESENT

Independent Chair: Andy Yacoub, Diversity Manager, Suffolk County Council

Councillors: Downham, Slatter, Ward

Staff Members: Norah Al-Ani, Aasia Bibi, Graham Watts

Public Members: Graham Lewis, Gerri Bird, Ila Chandavarkar, Phil Vasili

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

In attendance: Antoinette Jackson, Head of Strategy & Partnerships

1 WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER

The Chair introduced himself and then invited members to introduce themselves to Ila Chandavarkar, the new member of the Panel.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Hughes and Bridget Keady.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No additional members of the public were present.

4 MINUTES

The minutes for the meeting held on 8 November 2004 were approved.

5 MATTERS ARISING

Re: Item 1 Panel Membership: Graham Lewis had been able to remain a Panel member despite starting a new job in London.

Re Item 5 Matters arising. Access issues had been highlighted to managers and information added to the Human Resources intranet pages.

Re: 6.1 Disability Discrimination Act:

Confirmed that there are 14 car park spaces for the disabled which is 6% of the current capacity which is in line with the DDA requirements. Temporary passes have been issued to staff.

A leaflet about the Access Grant fund was tabled at the meeting. The fund helps community groups with adaptations to buildings to improve physical access.

Re: 6.2 Equality Impact Assessments: Graham Watts said that he had been advised by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) that the word "race" is a legislative word with a wider definition than the word "ethnicity". Phil Vasili who had raised the issue said he understood the explanation but was still not happy about the use of the word "race". The Chair added that legislation tends to use the word "he" and not "s/he" and that the CRE tend to use the word "race" to

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mean the human race. Sigrid Fisher said that the word “ethnicity” had been introduced in the Council’s Equality Impact Assessments.

Re: 7 Employment Matters: Louise Harrington reported that all the action points agreed by the Panel had been acted on – questions had been added to the exit questionnaire asking staff if they had experienced discrimination at work and if so, had they talked to a Dignity at Work rep about it; the adverts for Council jobs in newspapers would include a statement saying that the Council would welcome applications from BME groups who were under-represented in the staff; there was to be an article in the August edition of City Scene (the Council staff magazine) highlighting the role of Dignity at Work reps;

Re: 8 Duty to promote: Norah Al-Ani said that the suggestion to involve the local school children’s “dramatic piece” on the Holocaust had been taken back to the organising committee. It had not been possible to include it in the current year’s plans but it was to be part of the next year’s event.

6 MEMBERSHIP

Sigrid Fisher introduced the item concerning the constitution of the Panel. Staff and public members had initially been appointed for 2 years. Given it had taken the panel a while to develop its work programme, the report suggested it might be more helpful if existing members served an extra year. There were 3 options proposed:

- i) that the current members serve for 3 years;
- ii) that the period of membership be changed from 2 years to 3;
- iii) that those due to stand down in October 2005 did so as originally planned.

Antoinette Jackson explained that councillor members of the Panel were appointed each year at the Annual Meeting of the Council, which this year was to be held on 19 May.

Councillor Slatter said she was in favour of option ii) and she also explained that the Liberal Democrat councillors were proposing an additional Liberal Democrat councillor join the Panel, which, if the panel agreed, would make five councillors in total

Councillor Downham said that Lib Dem Councillors were also proposing to reduce the number of Labour Councillors on the panel to 1.

The discussion focused on the importance of keeping the membership of the different representative groups equal and on how staff and public members were recruited.

Agreed

To keep to 4 members from each of the representative groups.

That the term of office for staff and public members be 3 years rather than 2.

7 RACE EQUALITY SCHEME 2005

The Chair introduced the item and said that in 2002, all local authorities were required to produce a Race Equality Scheme. The scheme was to run for a period of 3 years and then reviewed and a new one introduced. The aim of the scheme should be to achieve constant improvement and to get Race Equality into the mainstream work of the authority. This was the time for review of the existing Scheme and learning from the first 3 years.

Sigrid Fisher drew the Panel's attention to the themes arising from the consultation on the review of the first 3 years of the scheme. There was a strong emphasis on employment issues from staff and the BME staff group. They also expressed concern that there was no recognition of cultural events other than Christmas and Easter.

Ila Chandavarkar gave a short presentation on the work of MENTER (the Minority Ethnic Network for the Eastern Region) and some of the research data they were compiling.

Phil Vasili made a plea for more depth behind the statistics.

Cambridge City Council Travellers Group was listed as a group that had been consulted and the Panel asked for information about who was on this group. It was confirmed that this was staff from the Department of Environment & Planning, from Legal Services. Norah Al-Ani and Sigrid Fisher have recently joined. Gerri Bird said she had useful experience she could bring to such a group.

The Panel also wished to explore the issue of access to housing and the monitoring undertaken by the Council in this area. Issues they were particularly interested in were:

- monitoring of how Council housing stock is allocated to BME groups compared to other groups? (The panel was advised that monitoring information is considered by the Council's Housing Management Board and could be reported to the Panel.)
- The proportion of BME applicants on the Housing needs register and trends over time.
- Was access more difficult for those whose first language is not English?
- Where were those from BME groups asking to be housed as this might be to areas of the city where they felt there were links and contacts?
- Were problems of overcrowding taken into account?
- What monitoring was undertaken of disabled issues e.g. home aid work was often not done properly?

Agreed that it would be helpful for the Panel to look in detail at delivery in a specific service area. An officer from Housing to be invited to the next meeting of the Panel to address the issues raised.

AJ

8 DISCUSSION PAPER: RECRUITING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE – BARRIERS PREVENTING THE RECRUITMENT OF UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

Louise Harrington introduced the report. She said that there had been progress in some areas. A major issue was how to work with local communities as well as with the BME staff group.

Panel members made the following points:

1. Lesbian/Gay group was missing from those experiencing barriers to recruitment.
2. There was a culture of lack of openness about disability.
3. Staff should only be re-deployed as a last resort following becoming disabled.
4. The importance of training managers in how to interview applicants who had two languages.

Noted that a Disabled Staff Group was being formed following a staff briefing session on the DDA.

9 TRAINING

Sigrd Fisher introduced a paper showing what Equalities training had been offered by the Council over the last year.

Panel members raised the following issues:

1. How to ensure that basic Equalities Training which is compulsory is actually undertaken.
2. A request that councillors could be included in staff training sessions to optimise the opportunities for members to undertake training.

10 ROLE OF THE PANEL IN MOVING FORWARD THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITIES AGENDA

Sigrd Fisher introduced a paper exploring the role of the Panel.

The Panel agreed to the recommendations:

1. That a training-needs audit is conducted to help Panel members to identify their individual and collective training and support needs.
2. That the panel hold a separate session in July to discuss how it wishes its future role to develop and to identify future training and support needs – the results of the audit could be collated to inform discussion at that session.

11 REPORT FROM CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL VISIT TO BARNET MULTI-CULTURAL CENTRE

Due to shortage of time, the Chair suggested that Panel members contact Norah Al-Ani with any issues or comments they had on the visit.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed that the next meeting be held on Monday 14th November 2005 as this date is free within the Committee cycle.

Suggested venue: City Services' Mill Road Depot Meeting Room is available, and there is parking at the site.

SF

13 STONEWALL RECEPTION

The Stonewall organisation is holding a reception on 9 June 2005 from 5.30-7.30pm in London. The Leader of the Council is to attend and nominations were invited from the Panel to take up the second place. Graham Lewis was willing to go if a member of the staff group was not able to attend.