

PRESENT

Chair: Toni Ainley - Director of City Services and Equalities Champion

Councillors: Shah, and Walker

Staff Members: Jackie Hanson and Bridget Keady,

Public Members: Graham Lewis and Nicky Wrigley

Presenting papers: Trevor Woollams, Head of Strategy and Partnerships;
Diana Aitchison, Cambridge Beaumont Society; Deborah Simpson, Head of
Human Resources & Anette Grinsted, HR Diversity Adviser

In attendance: Vicki Davidson, OD Manager

1 ATTENDANCE, APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND WELCOME
and

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Stuart and Lynn

For consistency, the minutes are given in the order of the original agenda. However, the Panel decided to discuss item 5, The Transgender Dining Study, first.

3 MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2008 were agreed as a correct record.

The skills audit has been completed and no immediate training needs were identified.

A new public member, Nora Al-Ani has been recruited. Unfortunately, she was unable to attend this meeting.

Public member Nicky Wrigley and staff member Nacer Dali and both agreed to extend their term as members of the committee and will serve for a further three year period.

4 PINK 2008 CONSULTATION

TW introduced the report. The survey was carried out in conjunction with the County Council and using MRUK to carry out the research. The survey followed the same format as in 2004 to provide comparable information.

The results showed how popular the event is with non City residents and some people had travelled a considerable distance. However, this may skew feedback in other areas of the study. The web was generally thought to be a successful way to reach LGBT interest groups and individuals. Further detailed work to unpick the results has not yet been completed. However, the results will be used to inform service delivery and Heads of Services are aware of them.

Discussion followed on what some felt to be missed opportunities to engage with those attending. Displays were seen as unexciting and stands were not consistently staffed.

Underreporting or withholding information was discussed and the study was considered too small to be representative. However, it did provide some useful insights.

5 TRANSGENDER DINING STUDY PRESENTED BY DIANA AITCHISON

Di Aitchison introduced her study. Discussions followed on what factors had influenced the reception the party received. The size of the group did not appear to make a difference. However, the ladies tend not to go out for meals alone and this remains untested. Cambridge was generally thought to be a very accepting City and the party did not encounter hostility or ridicule. The committee wanted to know if the group felt they had a voice and if they would be interested in being a representative group of body. This is not the aim of the Gourmet Girls. Support organisations, such as Beaumont Trust, are available for such function. However, there is a role for a group that offers 'mates down the pub' type events.

Discussions followed on how 'hard to reach' groups could be enabled to place their issues on the agenda. There was a general view that consultations are shaped by the body doing the consultation. Responding to questions is limiting, as they may not be the correct questions. A blank page approach would be welcomed. For example, Di suggested housing was a big issue for many of the group.

Members were concerned that minorities were grouped together when the problems and issues are not the same. The distinction between sexuality and gender issues can be blurred and this is not helpful.

The Chair thanked Di for her interesting and thought provoking presentation.

6 DISCUSSION ITEM

This discussion item was requested by members of the panel. Concerns

were raised that not all Councillors were fully informed about the role of the Equalities Panel or of equalities issues in general.

A. How is the work of the panel fed back to Councillors who are not part of the panel?

Cllrs Shah and Walker, stated that while members and groups met regularly, this is no systematic mechanism for the Equalities Panel to feedback. Members currently have no way of knowing if the recommendations they make are having an impact.

TW reminded members that equality issues have to be identified in all Scrutiny Committee remits and so members should feel free to raise concerns and challenge officers and Executive Councillors at Scrutiny Committees.

Discussions followed on how much training members are offered on equality issues and it was suggested that this be added to the members training programme. There is currently a requirement that those making decisions on social housing have equality awareness training.

It was suggested that Ward Councillors might need training on specific issues relevant to their wards.

Action: TW and TA to investigate feedback structures.

B. How can community groups access this forum?

The panel were concerned that the general public are not aware of the work of the panel. Discussion followed on how to address this. The following were suggested:

- dates could be published in local newsletters,
- better use could be made of Cambridge City Council web pages,
- groups could be encouraged to add things to the agenda ,
- specific groups could be invited if an item of interest is on the agenda.

The time and location of the meeting might not be the best for some groups. However, it was agreed the panel needed to be realistic about what outcomes could be achieved.

C. How can staff access the forum

It was agreed that the panel was outward looking and was not intended as a staff forum. There is already a number of staff groups fulfilling that role. However, raising staff awareness of equalities issues was seen as a legitimate goal. The Chair referred members to the Terms of Reference.

Action: Terms of Reference to be circulated.

EQUALITY BILL

TW introduced the report and discussions followed. Members felt that funding was not always allocated to those in the highest need. It was suggested that high profile equality issues gained the highest funding at the expense of other sectors. More information was needed to aid the assessment of need. It was acknowledged that some issues are cross cutting and some individuals may experience more than one potential equality issue.

The panel felt that equalities policies should strive to achieve fairness and justice for all sectors and not just the most vocal.

8 BRIEFING NOTE: EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TW introduced the report and explained the background. The introduction of the new Equality Framework for local Government along with Comprehensive Area Assessments will bring all sectors of the organisation together under a new framework that will be simpler to understand.

Cambridge City Council are likely to be initially graded 'Achieving' based on performance under the old standards which will be migrated over. To maintain this assessment there will need to be a peer review within the next 2 years.

The panel hoped this would improve standards and increase understanding.

9 ORAL UPDATE ON VACANT POST OF STRATEGY OFFICER (EQUALITIES)

Following a review of the service, it was decided that the post should remain largely unchanged. Initial recruitment failed to produce a suitable candidate and the post will be re-advertised in the New Year.

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 DIVERSITY IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRESS REPORT

The panel discussed the tabled report outlining progress on equality related HR actions since the last meeting and council wide equality data. Discussion followed on the criteria used to identify ethnic groups. The figures are recorded using the Census criteria. Some members thought this produced inaccurate results for groups such as Eastern Europeans and Irish. There was general agreement that Cambridge City Council figures are generally encouraging.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

DATE TO BE AGREED

Brownfields Community Centre

Chair