

EQUALITIES PANEL 19 November 2012
4.00 - 6.20 pm

Chair: Antoinette Jackson

Public Members: Graham Lewis

Elected Members: Councillor Abbott, Councillor Bick and Councillor Brown

Staff Members: Jackie Hanson, Ari Henry and Joe Obe

Officers:

- Head of Human Resources - Deborah Simpson,
- Diversity Advisor - Paul Williams
- Strategy and Partnerships Manager - David Kidson
- Strategy Officer - Graham Saint
- Head of Revenue and Benefit Services - Alison Cole
- Support Team Leader - Naomi Armstrong

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

12/10/EP Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received from, Councillor Bird, Nicky Wrigley (public member), Norah Al-Ani (public member) and Karen Hobbs (staff member).

12/11/EP Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor Brown	12/14/EP	Personal: Member of the Cambridge and Peterborough Mental Health Trust

12/12/EP Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th June 2012 were agreed as a correct record.

12/13/EP Public Speaker

Mrs Blair addressed the committee and made the following points:

- In her role as a school governor on a finance committee, she had once been told she would never need to take any action. In her opinion, the Equality Panel were adopting this approach toward the Affordable Housing Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA).
- Residents had concerns about the ways in which the Council was fulfilling its equalities duties.
- The Panel should be asking for evidence of how the Council was meeting objectives 1, 2 and 3 of the Single Equality Scheme 2012 – 2015 Action Plan.
- The Panel should request more information on the nature of the resident complaints regarding the lack of consultation and insufficient EqIA of the Affordable Housing Programme and should respond to those complaints.

The Chair thanked Mrs Blair for her contribution and stated that the January meeting of the Community Services Committee would be looking at this matter.

12/14/EP Change to Agenda Order

Under paragraph 4.2.1 of the Council Procedure Rules, the Chair used her discretion to alter the order of the agenda items. However, for ease of the reader, these minutes will follow the order of the agenda.

12/15/EP Council Tax Support Scheme

The panel received a report for the Head of the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service regarding the progress to date in developing the Council's proposed Council Tax Support Scheme. She stated that her team are currently engaged in reaching out to stakeholders and support networks with a view to spreading awareness about this, and other benefit changes. The aim was to providing assistance before household reach a crisis point. A range of

methods were being used to generate awareness including: an Officer Working Party, Open Door, Cambridge Matters, mail shots (members to be copied in), and inter agency working.

The panel made the following comments:

- i. The financial settlement is as yet unknown and although the understanding is there will be 10% less, it was a 10% reduction of an unknown amount.
- ii. A high number of people were currently not claiming all the benefits there were entitled to and changes would hit them hard.

The Chair asked the panel for their comments on EqIA regarding the Localisation of Council Tax Support which was included in the agenda pack. The panel were satisfied with the document and noted that there would be further changes to incorporate the comments raised at the Diversity Forum.

12/16/EP Mental Health Awareness

The Panel welcomed Jeannette Harding an Independent Service User Trainer and Researcher who outlined the work she had been doing with City Council employees to improve understanding of mental health issues. The training was based on Mental Health First Aid, formerly Mental Health Awareness.

Ms Harding raised the following points:

- i. The user voice is often missing from the debate.
- ii. Service user needs fluctuate and new processes were being developed to facilitate a quick route back into services.
- iii. Physical needs are often found alongside mental health needs.
- iv. The impact of imminent changes to the benefits system was having a serious impact on the mental welfare of service users.
- v. Voluntary sector support had been reduced.
- vi. Service users become the illness (a schizophrenic rather than a person suffering from schizophrenia) .
- vii. Attitudes need to change and City Council staff can help.
- viii. The loss of the Citizens Advice Bureau specialist advisor had had an adverse impact on mental health service users.

The Panel commented that double standards are apparent with people feeling more comfortable talking about physical health than mental health. Training of

front line staff was seen as key to a good standard of service to mental health service users. Staff members suggested that requests for training in this area were sometimes rejected due to costs. The Head of Human Resources stated that training needs of this kind could often be delivered in a more cost effective way such as bringing in a trainer. It was suggested that the current training programme could be extended to include a session at the depot.

Jackie Hanson reminded the Panel that members of staff may also suffer from mental health issues and that managers needed to treat this matter with sensitivity. Papworth Health Trust support was reported to be very helpful. The Panel agreed that the key issues were to raise awareness and to treat everyone with respect.

12/17/EP Update on the Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme 2012-15

The panel received a report from the Strategy Officer regarding the update on the Implementation of the Single Equality Scheme 2012-15. Staff had tested the simplified EqIA template and had found it easier and more rewarding to use. The opportunity to highlight positive impacts had been welcomed by users of the template. A mystery shopper survey had been carried out and the results were expected shortly.

In the discussion, the following points were made:

- i. There was an inherent weakness in the drafting of EqIAs as there was no consultation with affected groups.
- ii. The inclusion of EqIA information on committee report templates was welcomed.
- iii. Using the panel as a quality assurance group was suggested.
- iv. The EqIA process is dependent on the skill of individual officers. A formal sign off process would improve consistency and quality.

The Chair outlined the Council's preferred approach to EqIAs. All staff had been trained to think in about equality issues as a central part of their duties rather than viewing this separate and additional work to be carried out by a central 'expert'. Staff know their own work areas and are best places to assess the impact of any changes. Staff are able to call in experts for assistance if needed.

Alternative approaches to monitoring EqIAs were discussed. These included, using the unions, using the staff groups (some of which are currently not

active) and the Joint Equalities Staff Group. The Chair asked the Strategy and Partnerships Manager to consider how the monitoring of EqIAs could be improved.

Councillor Bick requested that the information be presented in such a way that members and the panel could see clearly any areas where there was a risk of target not being achieved. He also suggested that the devolved approach would only achieve results if there was robust monitoring and consistent training.

In response to Councillor Bick's comments, the Strategy and Partnerships Manager stated that the outcomes of the Census were being released slowly and that incorporating them into the portfolio plans would be challenging. In addition, feedback from stakeholder groups had suggested that there was additional work needed on the Code of Practice. The web, corporate advertising and consultation processes were highlighted as areas that could be improved.

Members discussed the Diversity Forum and agreed that the event held earlier in the day had been successful, as it had focused on matters of concern to attendees. Previous meetings had shown a decline in attendance which was thought to be due to a perception that the Forum was being used to fulfil the Council's need to consult.

Panel members welcomed the range of events in Cambridge that celebrated diversity and stated that they would not want to lose any of those events.

12/18/EP Equality in Employment

The Panel received a report from the Diversity Advisor regarding Equality in Employment. Members noted the trends highlighted in the City Council's workforce profile. Future targets would be reviewed when more information was released from the recent Census.

Panel members suggested that the inclusion of longer-term trends, and accompanying commentary, would make this report more meaningful. The Panel also stated that they would like this to be an annual item rather than a standing item on the agenda.

12/19/EP Future work programme of the Equalities Panel

The Panel discussed items they would like to consider in future. Previous suggestions had included high demand families and mental health (with a focus on children and young people). The County Council were currently reviewing mental health provision and it was suggested that the Panel might look at learning disability and complex needs groups instead. The Panel agreed that these could be useful discussion as they did not want to repeat work being undertaken elsewhere.

Reviewing the Affordable Housing EqIA was suggested, as there had been an external challenge. It was suggested that the Panel could add value to the process before the revised EqIA was presented to committee.

The Panel discussed how best to proceed, as they did not want to interfere with an established process. Timeframes were tight as the Community Services Scrutiny Committee would consider the final report in January. The Panel agreed that it was not practical to arrange additional full panel meeting before January. Panel members approved a briefing as an alternative. Dates would be agreed by email.

The Panel resolved the following Future Work Programme:

- i. A Panel member briefing regarding the Affordable Housing EqIA.
- ii. High Demand Families.
- iii. Learning Disabilities and Complex Needs groups.

12/20/EP Date of Next meeting

The next meeting would be held on 17th June 2013 – venue to be agreed nearer the time.

The meeting ended at 6.20 pm

CHAIR