

EQUALITIES PANEL20 June 2011
4.00 - 6.05 pm**Present:**

Chair – Antoinette Jackson

Councillors Al Bander, Bird, Brown, Marchant-Daisley, Dali, Hanson, Keady, Lewis, Niangane and Wrigley

Public members – Graham Lewis, Nicky Wrigley and Bintou Niangane

Staff members – Bridget Keady, nacer Dali and Jackie Hanson

Officers:

Deborah Simpson: Head of Human Resources

Andrew Limb: Head of Corporate Strategy

Vicki Davison: Organisational Development Manager

Toni Birkin: Committee Manager

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**11/24/EP Attendance and Apologies**

Apologies were received from public member Norah Al-Ani.

11/25/EP Welcome and Introductions

Introductions took place and the Chair welcomed all those present.

11/26/EP Declarations of Interest

| Name | Item | Interest |
|------------------|-------------|--|
| Councillor Brown | 6 | Personal interest as her wife works for the Citizens Advice Bureau |

11/27/EP Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd November 2010 were approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following correction:

10/20/EP The panel had recommended an amendment to the report to include service provision for transgender individuals.

Matters Arising

10/17/EP Equalities Act 2010 – Briefing Note on provisions in force from 1 October 2010.

The Panel had recommended that equalities training be mandatory for Councillors. However, whilst all members are offered this training, it is not possible to make it mandatory. Members agreed that this might be something that could be encouraged using the Councillors who are Equality Champions. It was agreed that equalities training should include discrimination and harassment related to the protected characteristics.

10/21/EP Cambridgeshire Inequalities Charter.

This item was omitted from this agenda due to changes in personnel. The Charter has now been adopted and will be circulated to Panel members.

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.

11/28/EP Single Equality Scheme

The committee received a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy regarding the Single Equality Scheme. The document was not yet fully completed and was brought to this committee for initial comments. The Corporate Strategy Team had experienced changes to key personnel and it was expected that the new staff would take this report forward. The actions had been front-loaded. The panel asked why they had not yet seen the results of the Peer Review. The Chief Executive responded that the report was still under discussion and currently lacks detail and contains inaccuracies. When agreed, it would be circulated to panel members.

Councillor Brown was concerned that the Equalities Act focuses on protected characteristics rather than discrimination. The Leader agreed and suggested a comment to reflect this be added to the Single Equalities Scheme.

Panel members discussed the Single Equality Scheme Action Plan and the following points were raised:

- I. Google translations can be of questionable quality.
- II. In response to member questions the Chief Executive explained that poverty mapping was carried out periodically at a sub ward level to produce the most accurate picture possible.
- III. It was suggested that the Citizens Advice Bureau could supply useful statistics regards debt advice.
- IV. Panel members agreed that partnership working would improve understanding of mental health issues.
- V. A number of organisations are working on similar issues related to tracking the impact of welfare reforms on the local population.
- VI. The Housing Benefits team were reported to be working with agencies such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- VII. It was suggested that there could be some funding available from the County Council for advocacy and advice.

Members agreed that working with tenants to keep them informed of the changes to the welfare benefits system and to offer assistance where possible was the best way forward. Staff member Bridget Keady would be organising an event for Registered Social Landlords. Information on would also be available on the website. Members suggested inviting John Frost (Head of Revenues and Benefits) to a future Equalities panel meeting.

Action

Councillor Merchant-Daisley suggested area committees offered opportunities to work with local communities on these issues. The Leader suggested we also needed to think about area working, outside the committee structure and discussions could evolve out of issues communities identified for themselves.

Councillor Al Bander was concerned that leaflets in support of English Defence League (EDL) were in circulation. The planned EDL march was discussed. A pro-active approach was suggested and members suggested that factual information could be released to dispel myths. The Leader agreed that using a range of a media to get clear and correct information into the public domain was a good approach.

Members requested more information on the planned march and it was agreed that this would be circulated.

Action

The panel discussed page 25 regarding Cambridge City Council's employment practices. The Organisational Development Manager outlined what training staff received on diversity issues and Domestic Violence. Complaints are also used to inform training needs.

The initial draft of the Diversity Peer Review had suggested that the Equality panel should meet quarterly. Members suggested this should be kept under review and that additional, ad hoc meetings could be useful if community relations were deteriorating. The Chief Executive suggested possibly having themed around a single issue with experts invited to inform the debate. Members felt the informal nature of the meetings should be preserved.

The Peer Review had also suggested that staff groups felt they should be offered more support. This will be discussed next time the staff groups meet with the Strategic Leadership Team.

11/29/EP Future Work Programme of Equalities Panel - Discussion

The panel discussed their future work programmes and made the following suggestions:

- I. The panel asked for an additional meeting in late July to allow them to reflect on the actions of the English Defence League. Councillor Bick would be invited to this meeting.
- II. Welfare benefit reforms to be discussed in November and the Head of Revenues and Benefits would be invited to attend.
- III. A further review of the Single Equalities Scheme to be included on the November agenda.
- IV. To continue to use Lion House for meetings rather than committee rooms in the Guildhall for accessibility reasons.

11/30/EP HR Workforce Report

The Committee received a report from the Head of Human Resources regarding the Annual Workforce Report. Future editions of this report would not be confidential. Due to recent restructures, some direct comparisons would not be possible. Staff numbers were reducing by around

50 per year. Some community groups are not represented in the workforce and the reasons behind this are currently being explored.

Councillor Al Bander was concerned about the high number of staff who had chosen not to disclose sexual orientation or faith information. He suggested this showed a lack of confidence in the organisation and presented a negative view of the Council to the general public. Other panel members felt there could be a number of reasons for this and that it did not indicate a lack of trust.

The Head of Human Resources suggested that there was a perceived view that women were more vulnerable to redundancy than men. The Leader asked if the figures could be broken down to show if there is a greater redundancy risk for part time staff.

Panel members suggested it would be helpful if the statistics on new appointments could be separated into internal and external candidates. This would allow gender analysis of promotions.

The meeting ended at 6.05 pm

CHAIR

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