

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY FORUM HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, THE COUNCIL HOUSE BROMSGROVE ON THURSDAY, 15TH MARCH 2007 FROM 6.30 P.M. TO 7.55 P.M.

PRESENT

Trevor Rigg (Chairman)	Bromsgrove Black History Group
Kevin Dicks	Acting Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Phil Street	Corporate Director (Services) Bromsgrove District Council
Claire Felton	Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Bromsgrove District Council)
Fiona Scott	Equalities Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Cllr. Stephen Peters	Bromsgrove District Council
Patricia Hackett	Mencap
Tony Lowry	Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Julie Summers	Bromsgrove District Council Equality Champion
Jeff Edwards	Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People and Redditch and Bromsgrove NHS Retirement Fellowship
John Tempest	Worcestershire Mental Health Network
Mary Collett	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N
Andy Hall	Hall Solutions
Mr B.K. Chaudhari	
Rauf Shah	Oakley Road Residents Association
Sarah Kelsey	Worcester REC
Ann Sowton	Bromsgrove and Redditch Network
Jim Smith	North Worcestershire DIAL
Alexandra Wharton	West Mercia Police
Joe Scott	
Huw Moseley	Arts Development Officer, Bromsgrove District Council

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from

Mr and Mrs Crossland	Bromsgrove Disabled Action Group
Rukhsaner Koser	Corporate Diversity Director, Worcestershire County Council
Sofia Jabeen	BME Engagement Officer, Worcestershire County Council
Elaine Mortimore	Youth Homelessness Forum
Mike Brown	Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Keith Sherman	Age Concern
Councillor Mrs C. Spencer	Bromsgrove District Council
Nina Mumtaz	
Ann Sloan	

2. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 1st February 2007 were approved as a correct record subject to a minor amendment in the list of attendees.

3. Matters Arising Not on the Agenda

There were no matters arising from the Minutes which were not included on the Agenda.

4. Items from the Chair

Trevor Rigg, stated that as it was important for the Forum to remain a keen, vibrant and evolutionary body, this would mean hopefully that new Members would be joining and participating on a regular basis in the work of the Forum. To assist with the introduction of new members to the Forum he had been working with Fiona Scott to develop a protocol, "A Welcome Pack", to guide the working of the Forum which had been previously discussed. It was intended to circulate this to new Members as they joined.

Following on from the above, Trevor Rigg also encouraged other members to put forward items for Agendas for future Meetings as this would ensure the discussion at the Forum was driven by Members. As an example of a good recent debate the discussion on Council Car Parking Charges was cited as this had enabled the Forum to submit a clear viewpoint to the Council.

5. Key Council Issues – Update From The Acting Chief Executive

Kevin Dicks, the Acting Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Council gave a brief update to the more detailed presentation on the key issues which the Council needed to face over the short and medium term which he had given at the previous meeting. The following issues in particular were highlighted:-

Medium Term Financial Plan (Budget – Revenue and Capital)

Mr. Dicks confirmed that the budget had now been agreed by Council as outlined at the previous meeting, but that in view of representations received from a number of areas including the views of the Forum, a sum of £50,000 had been included in relation to facilitating the use of car parks by disabled people and all sections of the community. Officers were now looking at options for the utilisation of this sum to best achieve that aim. In addition the Car Parking Scrutiny Task Group would shortly be reporting to Cabinet.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

Mr. Dicks reported that the CPA inspection had taken place as scheduled at the end of February. The Inspectors were still in the process of gathering and analysing information and forming their judgements. There had however been some preliminary feedback received and Mr Dicks reported this, which was still confidential at this stage, as far as he was able.

The Council was already fully aware of the areas where further improvement was required. It was anticipated that because the inspection was largely "backward looking" it was likely that the rating received would be unfavourable, however it was hoped the report would acknowledge that the Council was moving in the right direction and that the pace of change was satisfactory.

Visit to the Minister

Mr. Dicks referred to the visit to London to see Angela Smith a Minister in the Department of Communities and Local Government, which senior Officers and Members had undertaken on 7th February 2007 to talk about progress at Bromsgrove.

The whole tone of the Meeting had been much more positive than previously and the Minister had acknowledged the improvements Bromsgrove had made. She had been keen to stress however, the need to embed the improvements within the Council's way of working so that the improvements could be sustained. Other issues covered had been the need for better working partnerships, encouragement for two and three tier working (as covered in the White Paper) and the possible need to strengthen Senior Management Team by the addition of one post.

Chief Executive Officer Post

Mr. Dicks updated the Forum on the latest position regarding a permanent appointment to this post. There was to be a meeting of the Council's Appointments Committee on 21st March 2007 at which he would be the only candidate interviewed. Any recommendations made by the Committee would be subject to ratification at Council on 27th March 2007. It was intended that the process would be transparent and rigorous.

Other Issues

Mr. Dicks covered a number of other issues which were important to the future of Bromsgrove. Mr. Street briefly explained the work which was going on in relation to the Town Centre redevelopment. Whilst it was appreciated that there was an eagerness to get things moving, the planning process meant that much of the work was long term. It was hoped however that some short term responses could also be made such as help with improvements to shop fronts.

Other major issues included the development of the Longbridge site, an increased supply of Affordable Housing and the decommissioning of Council owned Hostels.

The Chairman and other Members thanked Mr. Dicks for his willingness to share information in an open manner with the Forum which meant that discussion could be more meaningful. The progress made on a number of issues was welcomed.

6. Progress Report from the Equality Officer

Fiona Scott gave a verbal update on the progress made on the Inclusive Equalities Scheme. It was noted that at some stage in the future it would be useful to have a detailed report on what was required in order for the Authority to reach Level 3 on the Equalities scale.

(i) Disability Equality – The Disabled Users Group

Fiona Scott reminded the Forum that there was a legal requirement for the Authority to have a Disabled Users Group and that it was the intention that this Group would undertake a review of the Disability Section of the Inclusive Equalities Scheme. A draft list of members of the Disabled Users Group was circulated and it was explained that this still needed to be firmed up. There were some vacancies to be filled i.e. a young disabled person and a person with single or multiple sensory impairment. It was also noted that Jim Smith had put his name forward for this Group. The Terms of Reference would be based on the County Council's model.

There would also be a need to look at practical issues such as times, length and frequency of Meetings. It was suggested that Phil Street would be an excellent person to Chair the Group. There would also be a need to ensure that the Group could work well with the Forum itself on a "side by side" basis and that duplication should be avoided where possible.

There would be training provided for the Group particularly in relation to the "Social Model" of Disability.

It was hoped that the Group would be in a position to report back to the June Meeting of the Forum.

Fiona Scott also reported that as from 21st May 2007, the Council would be employing a Disability Equality Project Worker, Rhyan Berrigan for a six month period. It was intended that Rhyan would be working to collect information about the needs of disabled people in the District and a range of other projects including looking for ways of ensuring that the objectives of the Disability Equality Scheme are met.

(ii) Gender Equality – The Gender Equality Working Group

Fiona Scott reported that a group of volunteers had been put together to sit on this Group and that Terms of Reference had been circulated. The Group would be re-drafting the Gender Equality strand of the Disability Equality Scheme which was also a legal requirement and which was the least developed/researched section of the Scheme at present.

It was hoped the Group would be in a position to report back to the June Meeting of the Forum.

(iii) Hate Crimes Incidents Procedure

Fiona Scott together with Sarah Kelsey referred to the background to the procedure which had been developed and it was noted that some incidents had already been reported through the procedure. It was noted that significant progress had been made on the background work including the establishment of a Multi Agency Panel and the development of a reporting form, a copy of which was circulated, together with the establishment of a Customer Care Protocol. It was intended to launch the Procedure formally in June 2007.

There was still work to be done in the meantime on finalising the List of Reporting Centres and the provision of training to relevant staff who would be initially receiving the reports. Sarah Kelsey confirmed that a publicity package was being put together for the launch and this would include information leaflets etc.

The Forum welcomed the progress made and requested a further report at the next Meeting.

6. Diversity and Cultural Activities for 2007

Huw Moseley the Council's Arts Development Officer was welcomed to the Meeting. Reference was made to the growth of the Black History Month activities and it was hoped that progress would continue in 2007. It was felt to be particularly important to involve school children in the events and it was hoped that further links could be created via the Youth Service. Huw Moseley suggested that Andy Wood who was manager at the Artrix would also be able to assist.

At some stage it was suggested that a Dinner Dance could be organised with speakers around the theme of the Forums interests. This may be some time in the future however and consideration was required as to how this could best be achieved.

It was reported that the first week in June was volunteer week and a "funding fair" event was to be held in Redditch at which information and one to one support could be offered to groups who were looking to apply for funding.

On 6th June a Volunteer "speed dating" event was being held in the Spadesbourne Suite at which approximately 15 organisations would be attempting to attract new volunteers. The organisations would have the opportunity to talk for two minutes to potential volunteers and persuade them that the organisation was worth becoming involved with.

Patricia Hackett referred to Learning Disability week which was 18th to 25th June 2007. An event would be taking place in the Spadesbourne Suite on 19th June based around issues of Hate Crimes and bullying. At the end of that week Mencap would also be celebrating their 60th Anniversary.

It was acknowledged that there was a need to promote the issues with which the Forum was involved in a positive way and that assistance with publicising events would be given wherever possible.

7. Agenda Items for 26th April Meeting

The Chairman reminded members of the Forum that it was important the issues should be generated from members as well as by himself and Fiona Scott. It was requested that any items for the next meeting be forwarded to Fiona prior to 12th April 2007.

Sarah Kelsey reported that it was hoped that in future meetings of the Redditch and Bromsgrove Race Equality Council could be held in Bromsgrove as well as Redditch. Any member of the Forum was welcome to attend the Meetings.

Patricia Hackett referred to information she had on two current issues one relating to a recent report on access to Health Care "Death by Indifference" and one to the availability of accessible public toilet facilities.

Julie Summers, one of the Council's Equality Champions who had been attending the Meeting for the first time expressed her pleasure at the content of the meeting and the very positive attitude of members.

The Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and participation.

Trevor Rigg

Chairman