

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY FORUM HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, THE COUNCIL HOUSE BROMSGROVE ON THURSDAY, 1ST FEBRUARY 2007 FROM 6.30 P.M. TO 8.15 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)
Cllr. Caroline Spencer	Bromsgrove District Council
Fiona Scott	Equalities Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Cllr. Stephen Peters	Bromsgrove District Council
Elaine Mortimore	Bromsgrove Youth Homelessness Forum
Patricia Hackett	Mencap
Tony Lowry	Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Rachel Booton	Bromsgrove District Council Equality Champion
Jeff Edwards	Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People and Redditch and Bromsgrove Retirement Fellowship
John Tempest	Worcestershire Mental Health Network
Mary Collett	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N
Andy Hall	Hall Solutions
Mr and Mrs Crossland	Bromsgrove Disabled Action Group
Mr B.K. Chaudhari	
Rauf Shah	Oakley Road Residents Association
Rukhsana Koser	Worcestershire County Council
Sarah Kelsey	Worcester REC
Ann Sowton	Bromsgrove and Redditch Network

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from

Jim Smith	North Worcestershire D.I.A.L
Alex Wharton	West Mercia Police
Logan Mailvaganam	Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
Huw Moseley	Arts Development Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Iris Martins-Griffiths	Across Consultancy
Kam Ohri	

2. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 30th November 2006 were noted.

3. Terms of Reference of the Forum

It was felt that the draft Terms of Reference for the Forum as attached to the agenda required slight further amendment so that there was consistency in the wording.

Subject to this,

It was Agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Forum be formally adopted.

4. Key Council Issues

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

Medium Term Financial Plan (Budget – Revenue and Capital)

Mr. Dicks explained the background to the budget making process and outlined the spending pressures which the Officers had categorised as unavoidable or high. Only issues which were in line with Council Priorities would be categorised as such and would therefore be likely to be approved by the full Council on 27th February 2007.

These pressures included issues such as vehicle hire and maintenance at the depot, meeting a drop in Car Park income and income from Planning Application fees over the level projected, utility costs, introduction of Smoke free legislation, affordable housing initiatives and costs associated with the Museum, Woodrush and Haybridge Dual use facilities.

A certain level of savings had also been put forward by officers. The savings proposed included issues such as rationalisation of services provided, suspension of the green waste collection over the winter months, improved desktop printing and alternative methods of service delivery such as providing joint services with other Authorities.

Decisions had also been taken previously to end the system of making Concurrent functions payments to Parish Councils and to externalise the Pest Control service.

As part of discussions on the budget, members of the Forum expressed concern at the decision taken previously to make a charge for parking for disabled persons. It was felt that this was an unfortunate decision to have taken and that it had generated a great deal of disquiet and adverse publicity for the Council. Mr. Dicks accepted that the proposals had not been introduced in the most effective way and that mistakes had been made in lack of consultation with those most concerned. Trevor Rigg suggested that the ways in which representations could be made by the Forum perhaps needed to be considered. Mr. Dicks took on board the comments and criticisms made.

Members expressed some concern that some services provided may be reduced. Mr. Dicks re-iterated that the intention was to look of ways of delivering services by alternative methods which would be more efficient. Arrangements for collection and disposal of Green Waste were the subject of much discussion with the County Council at present.

Phil Street referred to the work which was being undertaken at present to plan the future development of the Town Centre. It was hoped at a later stage to have a full discussion with the Forum on this issue.

In terms of the Council's Capital Programme, Mr. Dicks made reference to allocations which had been made to a programme of vehicle replacements, to affordable housing schemes and to works to be undertaken to Council buildings in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

Mr. Dicks explained the background to the forthcoming CPA inspection and the reasons for the Council requesting the inspection at this time. It was likely that the outcome would be that the Council would be rated as "poor" in view of the nature of the inspection which was largely backward looking. It was important however that the inspection, which was to take place 27th February to 2nd March, revealed that the Council was moving in the right direction and was showing signs of improvement which he believed was the case. The Council had been working to an Improvement Plan which had now been substantially completed. It was recognised however that there was still much work to be done before the Council could achieve its goal of being an "excellent" Council.

It was noted that as part of the preparatory work around the inspection colleagues from the Forum, in this case Trevor Rigg and Ann Sowton, had agreed to contribute to the feedback from the Local Strategic Partnership.

Visit to the Minister

Mr. Dicks referred briefly to a visit to London to see Angela Smith from the Department of Communities and Local Government which senior Officers and Members would be undertaking on 7th February 2007 to talk about progress at Bromsgrove.

Chief Executive Officer Post

Reference was made to the need to resolve the issue of a permanent appointment to this post.

West Midlands Regional Leaders Summit

Mr. Dicks referred to a recent meeting he had attended of the West Midlands Regional Leaders Summit. One of the topics for discussion had been the decision to disband the Commission for Racial Equality and to replace it with an alternative body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Dicks for his frank and informative presentation.

5. The Inclusive Equalities Scheme – Progress Report

Fiona Scott gave a verbal update on the progress made on the Inclusive Equalities Scheme. It was reported that in future it was hoped to submit a written report on a regular basis to future meetings as this would be more meaningful.

Fiona referred to the “easy read” version of the Equalities Scheme which had been circulated and which all Councils were required to produce. Consideration was given to the draft version of the document relating to Disabled people. It was explained that the “easy read” version must be in a format which people with learning disabilities can understand. It was requested that any specific comments be sent to Fiona within the next few weeks.

It was reported that the first “strand” of the Scheme to come under detailed review would be Disability. It was intended that the group undertaking this review the “Disabled Users Group” would have 12-15 members. This group would be set up as a permanent group and terms of reference would need to be considered. It was hoped that the group would include people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, mobility issues, sensory disabilities and a progressive long term health condition, together with at least one young disabled person.

Following the establishment of the group dealing with disability issues, the next area to be reviewed would be Gender Equality. It was explained that the legislative framework required that this be the next strand for review. At present only one person had indicated that they would be interested in being part of this group. Any other member of the Forum who was interested in becoming part of this group was requested to contact Fiona. There was a duty on the Council to review the scheme and the timetable was fairly tight.

It was agreed that as a starting point Trevor Rigg, Fiona Scott and Ann Sowton meet to begin to look at the gender equality issue including terms of reference for the group.

There was a brief discussion on how younger people could be encouraged to become involved with groups such as the Forum. It was acknowledged that it was unlikely that they would wish to attend meetings such as this. Other vehicles to increase involvement could be more use of websites, theatre groups etc.

6. Procedure For Dealing With Racial Incidents And Hate Crimes

Sarah Kelsey gave a brief update on the progress made with regard to the establishment of the procedure for dealing with racial incidents and hate crimes. Once the procedure and supporting information was in place it was intended to include an article in Council Chat.

It was agreed it would be useful to have a full presentation at a future meeting.

7. Diversity and Cultural Activities for 2007

Reference was made to the need to consider events which could be included in a Cultural Events Programme for the forthcoming year. The Black History Month had been successful and had grown over the last few years but further suggestions for appropriate events should be forwarded to Huw Moseley in the Council’s Culture and Community Section. Contact had been made with local schools regarding a number of events. It was acknowledged that any proposals would need to be realistic in terms of budgets available.

It was noted that the week commencing 18th June 2007 would be Learning Disability week and a number of events would be taking place, in particular around

the chosen theme of bullying. Reference was also made to Volunteering Week and it was reported there may be some financial support available for events in relation to this. Ann Sowton undertook to speak to Huw Moseley on this.

It was agreed that Huw Moseley be invited to attend a future meeting of the Forum.

8. Future Agenda Items

Any member of the Forum who wished to suggest items for future agendas was requested to contact Fiona Scott.

Trevor Rigg

Chairman