



## **Bromsgrove District Council**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Equality and Diversity Forum held in the Committee Room, the Council House, Bromsgrove on Thursday 12th June 2008 from 6.30 pm to 8.20 pm**

#### **Attendance**

Sat Aggarwal	Bromsgrove Resident
Hugh Bennett	Assistant Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Mr B K Chaudhari	Bromsgrove Resident
Mary Collett	Worcestershire Association of Service Users
Nuala Dalton	Bromsgrove Resident
Kevin Dicks	Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Jeff Edwards	Bromsgrove District Action Group for Older People
Claire Felton	Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council
Katie Sharp-Fisher	Private Sector Housing Team Leader, Bromsgrove District Council
Nigel Godwin	Bromsgrove Resident
Joan King	The Gender Trust
Wayne Knighton	Bromsgrove Resident
Tony Lowry	Executive Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Elaine Mortimore	Bromsgrove Youth Homelessness Forum
Eileen Mulhall	Worcestershire Association of Service Users
Cllr Stephen Peters	Diversity Champion for elected members, Bromsgrove District Council
Trevor Rigg	Chairman Bromsgrove District Council Equality and Diversity Forum
Cllr Roger Smith	Portfolio Holder for Human Resources and Organisation Development, Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services and Older People
Fiona Scott	Equality Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Joe Scott	Bromsgrove Resident
Phil Street	Corporate Director, Projects and Partnerships, Bromsgrove District Council
John Tempest	Worcestershire Mental Health Network
Ian Tretheway	North Worcestershire Disability Information Advice Line
Julie Wright	Community Support Officer, West Mercia Constabulary
Jo Wright	Bromsgrove Resident

## **Apologies**

Sandy Bannister	Worcestershire County Council
Adrian Fowler	Wythall Resident
Patricia Hackett	Mencap
Andy Hall	Hall Solutions
Sandra Hill	Padstone Day Centre, Bromsgrove
Mrs M Hill	Bromsgrove Resident
Sue Raisin-Jones	Multi-Agency Resource Centre, Charford
Tony Love	West Mercia Constabulary
Kathleen Roche-Nagi	Bromsgrove Resident
Peter O'Teng	Worcestershire Race Equality Council

### **1. Introductions and Apologies**

Claire Felton introduced the meeting and explained the need to elect a Chairman and a Vice Chairman for the Forum.

Trevor Rigg was the current Chairman and as a result of meetings with Trevor it had been agreed that the operation of the Forum should operate on the same basis as other Council Committees.

Therefore there is now a need to elect a Chairman whilst recognising that Trevor has been a very willing and able Chairman to date and has always sought to reflect the general feeling of the group in his Chairmanship.

Claire offered the formal opportunity to nominate someone for the position of Chair.

Trevor Rigg was nominated by Mary Collett and seconded by Mr Chaudhari and Mr Aggarwal.

Trevor's election was agreed unanimously.

Claire then explained that as there are occasions when the Chairman isn't available and that Trevor will need to be succeeded by someone, she asked for nominations for a Vice Chairman.

Joe Scott was nominated by Mr Chaudhari and seconded by Mr Aggarwal.

Agreed unanimously.

Trevor then formally opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their confidence in him. He welcomed everyone to the meeting particularly new members.

### **Apologies were noted.**

### **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th February 2008**

The minutes of the meeting on 14th February were noted and there were no points of accuracy.

The acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Joe Scott and seconded by Eileen Mulhall.

The minutes were agreed unanimously.

### **3. Matters arising**

#### **3 (a) Electronic Reference Panel**

Fiona explained that the project to set up an “electronic reference panel” had been based on the idea of a group emailing list which would be used to send out a document ( as an attachment ) for comments.

This idea had now evolved into something more sophisticated which is now known as the “Equalities e-consultation” website.

This is a web site which is only accessible by those who have been sent the link and the login details. When receiving the link, users need double click on the link and enter the User Name and Password. The Password only needs to be entered once, the system will remember it from thereon.

The system was live tested this week and all Forum members with an email address have been sent the link. There are two items for members to view and comment on :-

The photos from the Consultation Conference on 12th April 2008

Two documents from the Planning Department

Several people confirmed that they had received the link and had looked at the website but no comments had been made on the content so far.

It was agreed that there will be a “teach-in” at a future meeting for members who are not familiar with websites and accessing information on line.

#### **3(b) Annual Consultation Conference – 12th April 2008**

Fiona explained that the report on the Conference is still to be written and the photos on the website were for people to decide which ones they wanted on the front cover.

Trevor said that he would have liked to see more volunteers helping out on the day but he was very impressed with input from Forum members. Eileen said that on the day, the transport arranged for community members was late.

Trevor asked the group about the content of the Conference – was it right? Eileen said it went very well, she was very impressed.

Joe Wright asked what was it that went on at the Conference? Did members of the public come to the Conference?

Fiona explained that there was a mixture of officers from Bromsgrove District Council, elected members from the two main political groups, representatives from the County Council, and members of the Forum and the Disabled Users Group. The Conference was for the community to give them a chance to put their point of view.

It was advertised in Together Bromsgrove and there was an on-line enrolment form. All members of the Equality and Diversity Forum, the Disabled Users Group and Bromsgrove Black History Society were invited and there was some recruitment by word of mouth.

Joe Scott stated that the Events Working Group had tried to bring in more residents because statutory and voluntary organisations were already well represented in Equality and Diversity Forum activities. The Group feel that they achieved this objective.

Trevor agreed that we will take some time to discuss this and how we can improve when we organise the next Conference. Press advertising will be considered. Trevor recorded a big thank you to the Events Working Group and everyone who had attended the Conference.

### **3 (c) Taxi Ranks**

An update on this item was been circulated with the papers for this meeting. Regarding the taxi rank outside of the Golden Cross, the County Council is in the process of updating their Traffic Regulation Order.

Kevin Dicks reported that this will make a significant difference to the anti-social behaviour that is experienced at that end of the town as that is where most of the entertainment activity takes place and previously there had been no taxi ranks to take people out of the town.

### **3 (d) Concessions Policy**

Kevin Dicks provided an update under his Agenda item.

### **4(a) Community Transport**

Hugh Bennett provided an update under his Agenda item. The Council are about to go out to consultation on this issue and are having discussions with the WRVS, Redditch Borough Council and the Red Cross about future provision ( subject to political decisions on the 2009/ 2010 budget ).

### **4(b) Taxi driver training**

This was provided in the circulated papers with Taxi Ranks.

## **5. Equality and Diversity Budget Bids**

Hugh Bennett provided an update under his Agenda item.

## **7(c) Housing Inspection**

Kevin Dicks provided an update under his Agenda item.

## **8. “TEDS” ( Tailoring Equality and Diversity Strategy for Worcestershire ) now called “Being Different Together”**

Fiona confirmed that this project has now been formally launched and the first stage of the project is to establish a picture of community involvement and community perceptions of local government services across Worcestershire. Some members of the Equality and Diversity Forum and the Disabled Users Group took part on the focus groups and telephone interviews. The report will be available in July and the results will be fed back to this group.

## **4. Items from the Forum Chairman**

Trevor stated that he was happy that all the items he wanted to discuss were being covered elsewhere on the Agenda but that we should continue the drive for wider membership of the Forum

In relation to the Consultation process and Partnership working there is a need to get everyone on board. Health is a very important factor and we still need to get the Primary Care Trust ( PCT ) to get involved. They recently sent out a letter to residents with a questionnaire for a “tick box” exercise when they could have used our consultation process.

Trevor and Kevin will make efforts to contact someone at the top level of the PCT.

## **5. Items from the Chief Executive – Kevin Dicks**

### **(a) Car Parking Concessions**

The recent meeting on Car Parking concessions recognised that we haven't been able to get everything we want but the transfer of tickets between car parks has been achieved. Shopmobility is now able to open for longer hours including lunch hour. In future it is hoped that it will be open at weekends but this won't be until April next year and will be the subject of a budget bid.

There is a meeting in July with the Leader of the Council regarding the concessionary parking permit for residents who are 60 or over. If the over 60s permit is restored then members of this group want the Blue Badge free parking restored as well and KD confirmed that this will be fed back to the Cabinet.

Jeff Edwards reported that the Older People's Forum met today ( 12th June ) and were sending a letter to the Leader of the Council in advance of the meeting.

## **(b) Housing Inspection**

Members of the Forum will remember that 18 months ago Bromsgrove District Council had an inspection of Strategic Housing which rated the service as a “0” star with little or no prospect of improvement. The more recent inspection has rated the service as “1” star with promising prospects for improvement. The report had also recognised the significant improvements not only in the service but in the council as a whole.

## **(c) Corporate Performance Assessment ( CPA )**

The Council has requested another CPA inspection which is likely to take place in the Autumn of this year and Bromsgrove District Council will be one of the last Councils to have one. The last inspection rated Bromsgrove as “Poor”. We have asked to have another CPA now before the new regime of Corporate Area Assessment ( CAA ) comes into force and are hoping to get a “Good” rating.

## **(d) Questions from the floor**

Kevin reported that following discussions with the Chairmen and given that there is beginning to be lots more business for the meeting that it had been suggested that the Chief Execs item be changed to one where he could answer questions from the floor. There were none at this meeting so Kevin asked that anyone who would like to bring up questions to let either Trevor Rigg or Fiona Scott know before the next meeting on 14th August.

Trevor Rigg said that he would like to meet managers from other services and would like to see items on the agenda from departments within the Council.

## **6. Items from the Assistant Chief Executive – Hugh Bennett**

### **Customer Standards and Customer Access**

Hugh led a short discussion on the proposed Customer Standards and what community members expect in relation to access to services. See attached Annex for details of this discussion.

Hugh is managing a small working group to develop Community Transport – Mary Collett is one of the members of the group which is meeting every three weeks at the moment. They are currently looking at several options and in due course will be consulting with community groups and Parish Councils.

There is a need to be sure that there is sufficient demand to justify providing the service. The supply side is also under consideration. Hugh’s team will be meeting with the WRVS to explore ways of expanding the current service of Rural Rides. Rural Rides currently cannot cope with demand. Under consideration are options to buy wheelchair accessible vehicles for Rural Rides or to start paying the drivers.

Mini buses are also an option as they could take a group but the size of the minibuses and the size of the groups that might want to use them needs to be considered. They are also meeting the Redditch Community Transport provider to see if there’s any possibility of expanding their service into the Bromsgrove District.

Which groups are expected to provide the customer for the service? There is a Community Transport service in Droitwich but the criteria are very narrow. The criteria for a Bromsgrove based service needs to be looked at very carefully but the advice so far is to be flexible. It is aimed at those with mobility impairments and the drivers of the service are often the best placed to make these judgements.

Currently booking through Rural Rides means ringing two weeks beforehand but not hearing whether you can be accommodated until two days before the date you have requested. This makes things very difficult if you have a hospital appointment for example.

The application for funding will be based on the need to provide a service to rural areas with little or no bus services. Bromsgrove has a particular problem with the geographically spread out nature of the District.

Mr Chaudhari raised the matter of the lack of a bus service for the Oakalls Estate although there is a bus route which could make a stop on the estate.

This is not within the remit of the project being undertaken by Hugh Bennett's team but Kevin Dicks said he would take this matter up with the County Council who have responsibility for public transport.

Kevin Dicks re-iterated that it is already known that the public transport in Bromsgrove is not very good and following the recent Public Transport Scrutiny report the County are undertaking a review of public transport provision which will be published later in the year.

Hugh Bennett will come back to the next meeting of the Forum with more details on the Community Transport Review.

Trevor Rigg reported that he has met the Equality Champions of Bromsgrove District Council today. The Forum comments go to the Champions and tying this in with the involvement of Councillors helps to keep this process moving.

Jo Wright asked whether there was any information available in Bromsgrove or Worcestershire about gay pride as in other parts of the country e.g. Birmingham and Plymouth? There is an Age Concern leaflet available which addresses issues for this community as it is recognised that they are less likely to access health services because of fears of prejudice.

Elaine Mortimore for the Bromsgrove Youth Homelessness Forum explained that they provide a youth drop in service to offer advice on individual issues including support for issues around sexuality. They have some literature and will signpost people to services but these tend to be mainly in Birmingham.

Jo Wright suggested that Bromsgrove looks at ways of actively campaigning perhaps around LGBT History month. Kevin Dicks suggested that the Forum may want to consider this as a budget bid for 2008/9.

## **7. Aids and Adaptations Survey – Tony Lowry**

Tony explained that Bromsgrove District Housing Trust ( BDHT ) are classed as Registered Social Landlords and have 3,200 properties. A significant proportion of their residents are less well off and a quarter of the total are elderly.

BDHT likes to be accountable and Forum members will remember that there was a previous presentation of their Equality and Diversity Strategy.

The current survey focused on one priority – the way with which Aids and Adaptations are dealt. These are available to anyone of any age who is either disabled or becomes disabled and there is a need to adapt the property.

In order for the adaptations to take place an Occupational Therapist ( OT ) has to recommend what is required. At the moment the level of demand is such that the Occupational Therapists have not been able to keep pace.

If the OT makes a recommendation and the cost of the work is less than £700 BDHT do the work and it takes about 20 days. If the recommendation is for something more complex then the resident has to apply for a Disabled Facilities Grant. This can take up to six months for BDHT tenants. BDHT is aiming to get this waiting period down to 4 weeks.

Eileen Mulhall gave an example of repairs to her steps and path taking only six weeks because this was authorised by a hospital based OT.

In Wayne Knighton's case, because he is a private home owner, it took two years to get a stair lift installed.

Jeff Edwards said that thinking of people in their 70s or 80s, a six month wait is obviously not acceptable.

It was noted that there is a shortage of OTs and it would be useful to have some background information as to why this is the case from the PCT.

Tony suggested that PCT, BDC and BDHT report to a future meeting on the Indicators to monitor improvements and performance as a result of this initiative. The Equality and Diversity Forum to agree indicators.

## **8. Disabled Facilities Grants – Katie Sharp-Fisher**

Katie has two people in her team. The team who also provide the Care and Repair Service and energy efficiency grants. These are available to anyone but you're more likely to be eligible if you are in receipt of a means tested benefit or registered as disabled. The grants would apply to items such as replacement windows or loft insulation.

The performance information from the Disabled Facilities Grants team shows that over the last six months

- There has been a 58% increase in the number of grants completed
- There has been a 71% increase in spend
- This has benefited 137 families, people with children and other dependants and disabled people

Two years is an unreasonable length of time to wait for an adaptation although this length of wait wasn't unusual. It has been reduced since last September from 56 weeks to 26 weeks. The delay is at the Occupational Therapist stage. After that, getting the work completed is usually quite quick.

Renovation grants are available for up to £10,000 and Disabled Facilities Grants are available for up to £30,000.

There are some free promotion items – low energy light bulbs and power down socket adaptors.

Information about these services is available in Drs surgeries, The Citizens Advice Bureau, The Customer Service Centre, Age Concern just to quote a few.

## **9. Equality Officer Report – Fiona Scott**

### **(a) Equality Monitoring**

The Council currently collects information from service users regarding their

- Ethnic origin
- Gender
- Age
- Disability

Because of recommendations from the Housing Inspection by the Audit Commission this is to be extended to include

- Religion or Belief
- Sexual Orientation

The information is held as statistical data not personal data.

Fiona asked the Forum to give some consideration before the next meeting as to how they would prefer the question around religion and belief and sexual orientation to be posed. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next meeting with the Forum informing Fiona of any suggestions before the meeting.

**(b) Local Labour Market Assessment**

The Council has had an assessment done and this is now available on request. It is primarily a mass of statistical information which will be used by service departments to support their business plans and complete Equality Impact Assessments.

The Assessment shows that there is

- A growth in the ageing population
- A younger ethnic minority population profile
- An emerging migrant population (European Member States/rest of world) regionally
- Pay rates for someone living and working in Bromsgrove are lower
- Pay rates of female workers appear to be declining
- An apparent lack of reliable detailed data in a number of areas, for example, ethnic minority populations, sexual orientation, and faith communities
- An apparent lack of reliable data for ethnic minority and migrant labour

**(c) The Disabled Users Group**

The group is meeting every two months and although the Terms of Reference have not been agreed, the group is starting to find its feet. Last weeks meeting was mostly dedicated to the design of the "Personal Care Suite" with the help of various specialist advice from County Council service providers such as Padstone Day Centre, Chadsgrove School and Adult and Community Services.

The group is still trying to attract someone from the Deaf Community and would still like to improve representative of disabled people from Wythall, Hagley, Alvechurch and Rubery. The meetings only open to Disabled people who are residents of Bromsgrove.

There is still some need to discuss the relationship of the Disabled Users Group with the Equality and Diversity Forum. It has been suggested that the Council circulates all papers for both groups – would people find this too much?

It was also suggested that the Forum meetings take a report from a representative of the Disabled Users Group.

**(d) Bromsgrove Black History Society**

The funding is secure for 2008 and the Society is having monthly meetings to plan this years activities. This will be similar to previous years with puppet theatre shows for younger age school children. We are also looking at ideas for in house activities for Bromsgrove District Council as well as activities for the community.

**(e) Diwali**

A meeting is to be held with Mr Chaudhari and Sat Aggarwal.

**10. Future Agenda Items**

It was noted that there is an extra meeting of the Equality and Diversity Forum on 18th September to vote on Community bids. The invitations to make a bid will go out in July to the Equality and Diversity Forum and the Disabled Users Group.

Local Housing Allowance and Local Democracy events were agreed for the Agenda for the next meeting.

Trevor apologised for the over running of the meeting.

**Meeting closed at 8.20 pm**

**Trevor Rigg**

**Chair**

**Next meeting is on  
Thursday 14th August 2008**

**6.00 pm for light refreshments in the Conference Room**

**6.30 pm for meeting in the Committee Room**



## **Annex**

### **Feedback from Equality and Diversity Forum on Customer Standards and Customer Access - 12<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

#### Customer Standards

Customer Letters – members of the Forum thought the standard was OK (response within 10 days). It was suggested it should be linked to proper files and information.

The complaints standard (full response within 10 working days) should be a minimum standard.

Emails – members would prefer a response within a day (even if this was just an automated response to say the message had arrived). Could the system be set up to do this? A human response within 3 days (rather than 5) was then felt to be a reasonable expectation as any longer than this you might as well visit the CSC in person which defeats the object of having this channel of communication.

Phone call standard (answering within 6 rings) was felt to be reasonable, and members felt that staff were mostly responding to voicemail messages within 2 working days as per the standard

A suggestion was made that officers unable to attend PACT meetings should send an apology.

#### Customer Access

Community Transport - HB explained that consultation on the 5 options would begin soon to assess the level of demand. A tail-lift vehicle is needed for the Bromsgrove minibus for the elderly.

Shopmobility - a suggestion was made that disabled users who weren't able to park close to Shopmobility could have a scooter delivered to their car by a volunteer

CSC – Some sections of the community don't feel confident with using a computer. Are there options for assistive hardware or training? Members were reassured that online access was only one way of contacting the Council and that other avenues would remain open. HB will talk to Ann Sowton about this and try to involve the local libraries, the Multi Agency Resource Centre in Charford and Learn Direct who all provide public access to the internet.