

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY FORUM HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BROMSGROVE ON THURSDAY, 2ND AUGUST 2007 FROM 6.30 P.M. TO 8.20 P.M.

PRESENT

Trevor Rigg (Chair)	Bromsgrove Black History Group
Kevin Dicks	Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Rhyan Berrigan	Disability Equality Project Worker, Bromsgrove District
Louise Berry	Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Mr B. K. Chaudhari	
Mary Collett	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N.
Ann Crossland	Bromsgrove Disabled Group
Ray Crossland	Bromsgrove Disabled Group
Jeff Edwards	Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People and Redditch and Bromsgrove NHS Retirement Fellowship
Patricia Hackett	Mencap
Sarah Kelsey	Worcester REC
Sally Langley	Bromsgrove and Redditch Advocacy Group
Tony Love	Chief Inspector, West Mercia Police
Tony Lowry	Operations Director, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust
Eileen Mulhall	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N.
Stephen Peters	District Councillor and Equality Member Champion
Joe Scott	
Rauf Shah	Oakley Road Residents Association
Keith Sherman	Chief Officer, Age Concern Bromsgrove and District
Anne Sloan MBE	
Jim Smith	North Worcestershire D.I.A.L.
Phil Street	Corporate Director (Services), Bromsgrove District Council
John Tempest	Worcestershire Mental Health Network
Theresa Thomas- Morton	British Sign Language Interpreter
Iain Tretheway	North Worcestershire D.I.A.L.

1. Introduction and Apologies

At the start of the meeting, each member introduced themselves and the Chair welcomed everyone, particularly those attending the Forum for the first time.

Apologies for absence were received from:

Sandy Bannister	Disability Equality Adviser, Worcestershire County Council
Hugh Bennett	Assistant Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Claire Felton	Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council
Huw Moseley	Arts Development Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Sam Peterson	Police Constable, West Mercia Police
Fiona Scott	Equality Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Paul Whitehouse	

2. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 14th June 2007 were approved as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising not on the Agenda

The Chair informed members that an extra item would be added to the agenda and Sarah Kesley (Worcester REC) would provide an update on Hate Crime reporting processes as requested at the last meeting.

With regard to enforcement issues against illegal parking at taxi ranks, it was reported that the police had encountered some problems and the Police Chief Inspector and the District Council's Chief Executive planned to meet to discuss the matter.

4. Items from the Chair

Annual Event

The Chair of the Forum suggested that similar to last year's event which launched this Equality and Diversity Forum, an annual event should be arranged to celebrate the success of the Forum over the past 12 months and to make new plans in relation to the coming year. It was agreed that the event held in September 2006 was very positive and holding a similar event this year could help to raise awareness of the work of this Forum. However, it was believed that holding the event in September 2007 was unrealistic and that October 2007 might be more suitable. It was suggested that the event could link in with Black History Month which then led to the suggestion of holding a joint event with Worcestershire County Council. However, it was commented that an event celebrating the success of this Forum would be much more about the District and there was a concern that this message could be lost if it was a joint event with the County Council.

It was agreed that a working group be formed to arrange the event and that it be made up of the following volunteers: Patricia Hackett, Sarah Kelsey, Trevor Rigg, Joe Scott, Jim Smith, Iain Tretheway and a volunteer from West Mercia Police.

Democracy Week

Phil Street (Corporate Director at Bromsgrove District Council) informed members of the Local Democracy Week planned to try and encourage children to become more involved, for example, persuading young people to vote at elections. It was stated that Kevin Dicks (Chief Executive), Claire Felton (Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services) and the Leader of the Council, Roger Hollingworth were working on progressing plans such as setting up a mock Cabinet session to help raise awareness of the work of Councils and its elected members. It was explained that the aims of the event would be to: (a) increase the understanding of young people on what local authorities do; (b) encourage young people to use their vote; and (c) encourage young people to stand as a local Councillor.

Several comments were made such as ensuring young people with learning difficulties were not forgotten as they could vote from the age of 18 years too and the possibility of working with the Youth Service and local schools who elect representatives to avoid any duplication. Suggestions included:

- setting up a mock polling station to inform young people what they do when they come to vote for the first time; and
- approaching local high schools and colleges asking for one representative from each, possibly on a rota basis, and perhaps linking it to their academic work so that the students who volunteer to be a representative were given credit which would therefore encourage them to become involved.

Members were reassured that Kevin Dicks (Chief Executive) would be visiting schools within the District to talk about the Council's work and that this matter would be brought back to the Forum at a later date.

Inclusive Equalities Scheme – Impact Assessments

The Chair reminded members of Bromsgrove District Council's Inclusive Equalities Scheme and that officers needed to complete Impact Assessments to ensure no person or group were being directly or indirectly disadvantaged. It had been agreed that this Forum would act as critical friends to check that the Council had not missed anything and therefore members of the Forum needed to be trained to ensure they understood the Inclusive Equalities Scheme and Impact Assessments. It was agreed that rather than hold a separate training session, it would be incorporated into a future meeting.

Bromsgrove District Council's Promoting Equality Poster

The Chair brought members' attention to posters which were up in Bromsgrove District Council offices relating to promoting equality. There was a concern over two bullet points which stated "understanding their particular needs" and "involving them in shaping our services" and in particular the use of the words "their" and "them" as it was felt that it could be seen as making a division. However, another point of view was that the wording used was often used to include and perhaps the issue was the sentence on the poster stating "Who is affected by Equality?"

It was pointed out that although lessons could be learnt, it should be seen as a leap forward in a positive direction as there was at least a poster promoting equality rather than no poster at all.

It was commented that the Forum had not been consulted on this particular poster. It was suggested that similar to Age Concern, an electronic reference panel be set up to find out the views on any material which was to be printed relating to equality and diversity (with the understanding that a quick response would be necessary). It was reported that at Age Concern there was often a detailed discussion over publicity material which did not necessarily prevent material being printed but it at least enabled different views to be aired and listened to and encouraged a debate.

5. Black History Month

Phil Street (Corporate Director) informed members of Black History Month due to be held in October. It was explained that Black History Month predated the

Equality and Diversity Forum and had been successful. A booklet would be issued in September outlining the nature of Black History Month and the activities which would be held during October. Members were informed that there had been contributions from various individuals and organisations such as the Chair of this Forum, Bromsgrove District Council, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and West Mercia Police. Praise was given to Huw Moseley (Arts Development Officer at Bromsgrove District Council) who had managed many arts events very successfully taking an imaginative and innovative approach. The Chair commented that the challenge was to show that the Black History Month was relevant to Bromsgrove.

6. Sustainable Community Strategy

Louise Berry (Senior Policy and Performance Officer at Bromsgrove District Council) gave a presentation on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy which was an overarching strategic document for the future direction of the Council based on statistical information. It was explained that the Council now needed to find out the public's views and therefore the "Glad or Grumpy" campaign had been developed to check the content of the Strategy was correct and nothing had been missed. It was stated that the consultation period had commenced at the end of June 2007 and would continue until 31st August 2007.

It was reported that the Council had received a very good response so far with approximately 350 completed postcards received. Key facts were put to the Forum as well as some examples of what made residents of the District glad and grumpy which had been received so far. It was stated that following the consultation, it was expected that there would be some changes, such as adding Transport as a priority, ensuring childhood obesity was included, as well as covering mental health issues and learning disabilities. It was also explained that it was expected that the paragraph contained within the Strategy relating to Equality would be expanded on and Fiona Scott (Equalities Officer) would be consulted.

It was pointed out by a member of the Forum that vulnerable adults should not be missed out. Other members shared what made them glad and grumpy. Louise Berry urged anyone who wished to put their views forward after the meeting could do so by completing a postcard.

The Chair thanked Louise Berry for her presentation.

7. Hate Crime Update

Sarah Kelsey (Worcester REC) gave a brief presentation on the launch of the Hate Crimes Incidents Procedure on 25th July 2007 which was held at the Artrix. Despite the bad weather, members were informed that 53 people attended and the guest speakers were very informative, each using a different approach. It was reported that the feedback received had also been very positive.

The posters and leaflets were shown to the Forum which had been distributed to those who attended the launch on the 25th July 2007 as well as various other places such as doctors surgeries, schools, visitor day centres and churches. It was pointed out that the publicity material had been distributed to places across the District including the more rural areas such as Lickey and Blackwell.

Reference was made to the current and future Reporting Centres and that the Hate Incident Form was also available on Bromsgrove District Council's website. It was hoped that the numbers of Hate Crimes reported could be used as a baseline for next year.

The Forum expressed their appreciation of the work which had been undertaken and thanked Sarah Kelsey for her presentation.

8. Religious Hate Crime

Tony Love (Chief Inspector) introduced himself to members and thanked the Chair for giving him the opportunity to address the Forum on Religious Hate Crime.

Tony Love commented on the terrorist attack in London on 7th July 2005 and the more recent attack at Glasgow Airport and raised the question how these attacks impacted on Bromsgrove District. It was explained that the Home Office requested impact assessments to be carried out to show what the effect was on communities. Although Tony Love stated he did have some contacts, he became aware that he did not have all the relevant contact details he needed. He stated that he felt it important that better links in the community were forged to enable the Police to obtain an immediate assessment following a terrorist attack or any other major incident. Therefore, he asked if any members of the Forum would be prepared to be the key members of the community he could contact for a fast, balanced, community-wide assessment in the future.

It was agreed that Fiona Scott (Equalities Officer at Bromsgrove District Council) had a list of each member's contact details which could be passed on to Tony Love. If any member did not want their details passed on, they would need to contact Fiona Scott to inform her they would like to opt out.

9. Key Council Issues – Update from Kevin Dicks (Chief Executive)

Car Parking Charges for the Disabled

Kevin Dicks informed the Forum of a meeting which took place on 1st August 2007 regarding Disabled Car Parking Charges and gave a summary on what had been discussed. Members were informed that four members of this Forum were in attendance, including the Chair, as well as the Leader of the Council, Roger Hollingworth. Notes from the meeting were handed out to members for their perusal. The outcome of the meeting was that Kevin Dicks be requested to look at the concessions policy and the Forum would be consulted to ensure Bromsgrove District Council had a concessions policy which was fair and fit for purpose.

Audit Commission's Recommendations and Council's Responses

A handout listing the Audit Commission's recommendations and the relevant part of the 2007/08 Improvement Plan for the Council were distributed to members.

Budget Consultation

Kevin Dicks stated that Budget Consultation 2008/09 would be an item on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum as the Council wanted to give the Equalities and Diversity Forum an opportunity to put forward three budget bids. It was explained that the process started in September each year and concluded the following March when Full Council agreed the Council's budget. Kevin urged members to begin thinking about what ideas they would like to put forward and how they would benefit residents of the District.

10. Agenda Items for 13th September 2007

Suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting on 13th September 2007 or future meetings of this Forum were:

- Town Centre
- Bromsgrove District Council's Budget Consultation 2008/09
- Dial-a-Ride Scheme for Bromsgrove
- Issues surrounding Wendron Day Centre
- Bromsgrove District Housing Trust's Equalities Strategy (future meeting)
- Travellers and Gypsies (future meeting)

Kevin Dicks informed members that recently a scrutiny task group had been set up to look at public transport and specifically bus services which could incorporate dial-a-ride schemes.

(Members were informed that a Garden Party was going to be held at Crabtree Court with donations raised going to flood victims. Members of the Forum were welcome to attend.)

Before the meeting closed, the Chair thanked those present for their attendance and participation.

Trevor Rigg

Chair