



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY FORUM
HELD IN THE COMMITTEE ROOM, THE COUNCIL HOUSE, BROMSGROVE
ON THURSDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY 2008 FROM 6.30 P.M. TO 8.10 P.M.**

PRESENT

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| Trevor Rigg (Chair) | Bromsgrove Black History Group |
| B. K. Chaudhari | The Oakalls |
| Mary Collett | North Worcestershire S.P.I.N. |
| Kevin Dicks | Chief Executive Officer, Bromsgrove District Council |
| Patricia Hackett | Mencap |
| Sarah Harvey | West Mercia Police |
| Sarah Kelsey | Equalities Assistant, Bromsgrove District Council |
| Joan King | Gender Trust |
| Eileen Mulhall | North Worcestershire S.P.I.N. |
| Stephen Peters | Bromsgrove District Councillor |
| Fiona Scott | Equality Officer, Bromsgrove District Council |
| Joe Scott | Bromsgrove Resident |
| John Tempest | Worcestershire Mental Health Network |
| Doug Turland | West Mercia Police |
| Julie Wright | West Mercia Police |

1. Introduction and Apologies

At the start of the meeting, each member introduced themselves and the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from:

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|---------------------------|--|
| Hugh Bennett | Assistant Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council |
| Mr. and Mrs. R. Crossland | Bromsgrove Disabled Access Group |
| Jeff Edwards | Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People |
| Claire Felton | Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council |
| Sally Langle | Advocacy Group |
| Tony Lowry | Bromsgrove District Housing Trust |
| Elaine Mortimore | Bromsgrove Youth Homelessness Forum |
| Huw Moseley | Arts Development and Events Officer Bromsgrove DC |
| Rauf Shah | Oakley Road Residents Association |
| Keith Sherman | Age Concern Bromsgrove |
| Ann Sowton | Bromsgrove and Redditch Network |
| Phil Street | Executive Director – Projects and Partnerships, Bromsgrove District Council |

2. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 13th December 2007 were approved as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

(a) Electronic Reference Panel

Fiona Scott reported that following discussion at the previous meeting only one person had definitely come forward to become part of a group of Forum members to be consulted on forthcoming publications and there would need to be a significant number of participants to make the process meaningful.

In the circumstances further thought had been given to the best way of developing the original concept and discussions were now on going to develop "cyber space" area on the Council's Intranet system which could be used for consultation on documents such as sections of "Together Bromsgrove" posters or information leaflets produced by service departments. Those who signed up to the project would be assigned an ID and password and would receive an e.mail when a new item was available to be viewed and comments submitted. Inevitably there would often still need to be a fairly tight timescale for submission of comments in view of printing and publication deadlines. It was hoped to arrange for a live demonstration of the system at the meeting of the Forum in June.

The proposals were welcomed.

(b) Annual Consultation Event

Joe Scott updated the meeting on arrangements for the Annual Consultation event planned for 12th April 2008. Generally arrangements were going well but members of the Forum were encouraged to complete their invitation response forms and to add their names to the volunteer list if possible. It was reported that BARN would also be distributing invitations to their members.

There was also a request for any sponsorship or modest financial support to allow for the production of promotional material such as pens which could be used to promote the Forum at this and other events. At some stage there would need to be consideration of the adoption of a logo for the Forum either on an individual basis or as part of a larger umbrella organisation.

The Chairman thanked Joe Scott and the other members of the Planning Group for their contribution.

(c) Taxi Ranks

It was agreed that an update on this issue be circulated.

(d) Concessions Policy

Kevin Dicks referred to a meeting to discuss a proposed Concessions Policy which had taken place on 7th January 2008 between members of the Forum, relevant District Council officers and Roger Hollingworth, Leader of the Council. Notes from the meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

It was confirmed that as things stood at present there would be no free parking permits for the over 60's as from April 2008. All concessions offered by the Council had been looked at with a view to introducing a policy which would cover all service areas but this had proved to be impracticable and therefore each service area would continue to offer concessions in accordance with its own guidelines. It was felt that there was a need for further discussion on the area of possible parking concessions for those who have cars under the mobility scheme as a degree of assessment has already been carried out under this scheme. Kevin Dicks undertook to meet together with Claire Felton, Patricia Hackett and Mary Collett to try to move this issue forward.

4. Community Transport and Taxi Driver Training

Kevin Dicks presented these two items and referred to the Briefing Note produced by Hugh Bennett.

(a) Community Transport

There had been a recent visit to Redditch BC to find out more about that authority's Dial a Ride service. The service was recognised as being best practice but inevitably there was a significant financial input required from the Council. It would be feasible to establish a smaller service initially, possibly on a shared basis at a lower cost but this clearly would be a political decision.

In order to progress the issue it was hoped to set up a small project group lead by Hugh Bennett, to include Fiona Scott. The group would also review the operating hours of the Shopmobility scheme. It was intended that a bid be submitted as part of the 2008/09 budget round.

(b) Taxi Driver Training

Central government funding had been secured by the Council's Licensing Officer to provide training on a voluntary basis for up to 30 taxi drivers. The training would train drivers to NVQ Level 2 and would include training relating to "passengers who require assistance". It would be possible to extend this training so that it is mandatory when applying to become a taxi driver.

It was recognised that a key element was engendering the appropriate attitude by taxi drivers. The issue was also to be considered by the Disabled Users Group.

Progress on both of these issues was noted with pleasure.

5. Equality and Diversity Budget Bids

Kevin Dicks reminded the Forum of earlier presentations from Jayne Pickering and Hugh Bennett which had resulted in the bids put forward by the Forum following the discussions in October 2007. Since then progress through the Council's budget process had been followed and reported to Forum meetings and a number of the specific bids had now been approved such as support for Diwali celebrations and Black History Month. In addition the High Dependency Unit had been approved as part of the town centre project and other issues such as the MARC bid would hopefully be moving forward via partnership working.

The Chair acknowledged the value of the Forum participating in the budget process for the first time and it was felt it had been a very worthwhile exercise.

6. Issues From the Chair

Next Meeting of the Forum

In view of the Annual Event taking place in April, the Chair suggested that the next scheduled meeting of the Forum on 17th April 2008 be cancelled and that the next meeting take place on 12th June 2008. This was agreed.

7. Key Issues from the Chief Executive

Kevin Dicks briefly updated the Forum on key issues and the following points were highlighted:

(a) Town Centre

Work was progressing towards the production of an Area Action Plan to cover the town centre. This would be a key document to demonstrate how the town centre would develop over the next 20 years. Stakeholder workshops would be held to assist with the development of questions which would then lead to a set of options to be the subject of wider consultation. A retail study would also be carried out by CBRE the company engaged by the Council to determine what retail facilities were required. A Town Centre Steering Group had been set up including the County Council, Police, Health and Fire Authorities. The Market Hall site was likely to be the first to be developed.

Members of the Forum felt there was a need for some visible progress to be made in the town centre as soon as possible. It was noted that the event in April would include a workshop on the town centre.

(b) Housing Figures

The Regional Spatial Strategy which allocated housing figures for Bromsgrove was to be the subject of extended consultation. The government had indicated that the figures allocated for West Midlands Region were too low.

(c) Housing Inspection

The Audit Commission were carrying out a re-inspection of the Council's Strategic Housing service during the week commencing 26th February 2008.

(d) Voluntary Engagement

It was likely that the Council would request a Comprehensive Performance Assessment recategorisation from the Audit Commission to take place towards the end of 2008. It was hoped the Council would have moved from poor to fair and that the Authority could come out of Voluntary Engagement.

(e) Longbridge

This extremely important development was now at the preferred options stage. The area of the site which was in the Bromsgrove District was likely to be mainly residential although the overall use of the site would be for mixed purposes including employment, residential and retail.

8. Report of the Equality Officer

Fiona Scott reported on the following issues:

(a) Disabled Users Group

It was reported that this group was now getting established although terms of reference had yet to be agreed. Representation was still being sought from those with sensory impairment and from other areas of the district such as Rubery, Wythall, Hagley and Alvechurch. This group was required by legislation and was a means of involving people with disabilities in a very meaningful way in projects, developments and services at the outset of the planning phase and throughout the process.

It was recognised that at the next meeting there would be a need to consider how the operation of the DUG would relate to the operation of the Forum and how duplication of effort could be avoided.

(b) Bromsgrove Hate Incident Partnership (BHIP)

Following the piloting of this scheme a new easy read version of the reporting form had been produced. A number of new reporting centres had been established in locations such as TIC, Padstone and Greenscope.

(c) Royal Visit

The visit to the Greenscope project by the Earl of Wessex had been very successful and had generated positive publicity for the project. Thanks were expressed to all those involved.

(d) Tailoring Equality and Diversity Strategy for Worcestershire (TEDS)

This item relating to a County wide project was briefly introduced at this stage. It was noted there would be further discussion at future meetings of the Forum.

9. **Future Agenda Items**

The following were suggested as possible future agenda items:

- Progress on meeting the provisions and aspirations of the Inclusive Equalities Scheme
- Conference to consider additional more complicated issues
- Constitution for the Forum
- Taxi Ranks outside Asda

Trevor Rigg

Chair