

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 JUNE 2007 FROM 6.30 P.M. TO 8.10 P.M.

PRESENT

Trevor Rigg (Chairman)	Bromsgrove Black History Group
Kevin Dicks	Chief Executive, Bromsgrove District Council
Mr B.K. Chaudhari	
Mary Collett	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N
Jeff Edwards	Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People and Redditch and Bromsgrove NHS Retirement Fellowship
Claire Felton	Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council
Amanda Glennie	Strategic Housing Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Patricia Hackett	Mencap
Dawn Ibbitson	Equalities Champion, Bromsgrove District Council
Sarah Kelsey	Worcester REC
Elaine Mortimore	Bromsgrove Youth Homelessness Forum
Eileen Mulhall	North Worcestershire S.P.I.N.
Cllr. Stephen Peters	Bromsgrove District Council
Fiona Scott	Equalities Officer, Bromsgrove District Council
Joe Scott	
Rauf Shah	Oakley Road Residents Association
Ann Sowton	Bromsgrove and Redditch Network
Phil Street	Corporate Director (Services) Bromsgrove District Council
John Tempest	Worcestershire Mental Health Network
Jo Wright	

The Chair welcomed the following new members

Rhyan Berrigan	Disability Equality Project Worker, Bromsgrove District Council
Jim Harris	West Mercia Police
Lynne Roberts-Oliver	West Mercia Police
Ian Trethoway	North Worcestershire DIAL

Theresa Thomas-Morton British Sign Language Interpreter

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from

Rukhsana Koser	Corporate Diversity Director, Worcestershire County Council
Keith Sherman	Age Concern, Bromsgrove
Jim Smith	North Worcestershire DIAL

2. Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting held on 26th April 2007 were approved as a correct record.

(Joe Scott referred to an issue which he had raised at the previous meeting regarding cars parking illegally in taxi ranks. Mr. Dicks agreed to follow this up.)

3. Hate Crimes Incidents Procedure

Sarah Kelsey gave a presentation on the proposed launch of the Hate Crimes Incidents Procedure on 25th July 2007. A number of invitations had been issued in respect of the launch and details were available if members of the Forum wished to attend.

Reference was made to the various documentation which had been agreed in respect of the final procedure, including the Terms of Reference, Information Sharing and Customer Care protocols and an Action Plan. Work had also been undertaken in respect of promotional material to publicise the scheme such as leaflets and posters. These would include information on how to report hate crimes and membership of the Panel. The Hate Incident Form would be available on the Bromsgrove District Council web site. The Reporting Centres would also be publicised at present these were CAB, Worcestershire Hub, Bromsgrove DC, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, Age Concern, Basement Project and Victim Support.

It was reported that there was a programme of future work in place. This included more Reporting Centres, Workshops with local groups so that they could have greater understanding of the scheme and continued promotion of the project. In advance of the formal launch of the scheme a total of 7 incidents had been reported in April in Redditch. It was noted that following the launch the scheme would be promoted by way of posters and leaflets within libraries, Doctor's surgeries, clubs and pubs, supermarkets etc. A press release would also be issued to all forms of local media.

The forum expressed appreciation of the work which had been undertaken to bring the scheme to this point. It would be useful to receive feedback in the future.

4. Choice Based Lettings

The Chairman introduced Amanda Glennie Strategic Housing Officer at Bromsgrove District Council to the meeting.

It was explained that the Council was adopting a new method of allocating Social Housing to replace the "Points System." The new system was being developed at present but was based on a model used by Wychavon District Council.

The proposed system of "Choice Based Lettings" was a much simpler and more transparent process. Applicants would be able to see details of the properties available and the eligibility criteria would be clear. It was intended that applicants would be in a better position to make informed choices in relation to applying for specific properties and would be able to be realistic regarding their chances of

obtaining a particular property. The system would also enable up to date information to be provided on alternatives such as Shared Ownership Schemes, Mutual Exchanges and Private Sector Lettings. The system would be available on a continuous basis via the internet, text telephone and newsletters. The experience of Wychavon District Council was that applicants were more likely to remain in a property, that matches were found more easily and the number of relets required was reduced.

In order to gain in put from the Forum on Customer Support and Accessibility to the service, those present were split into two groups and a short workshop on each subject took place. Amanda Glennie intended to take the views and ideas of the Forum back to the Housing Group which was developing the Scheme for use in Bromsgrove and she thanked the Forum members for their participation.

The Chairman thanked Amanda for her presentation and the opportunity to participate in the workshop process which was a first for the Forum.

It was agreed that Housing issues generally were an area which merited further consideration by the Forum at some stage.

5. Items from The Chair

The Chairman of the Forum briefly reminded members of the need to be aware of each others viewpoints and to have respect for the sensitivities of all members. He also requested new members to fill in the short introductory form which gave them the opportunity to indicate their specific areas of interest in relation to the six strands of diversity. This would assist the Equalities Officer when looking at possible membership of Working Groups etc. The Chairman also expressed the view that in order to maintain the momentum and vibrancy of the Forum, it was important to follow up with members perhaps by letter if they did not attend for three consecutive meetings and to understand any reasons behind this.

6. Key Council Issues – Update From The Chief Executive

Kevin Dicks gave a brief update on the result of the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Mr. Dicks reported that as expected the outcome of the report was that the Council was “poor”. It was important however that within the Executive summary there was a clear recognition that whilst the Council still had a long way to go a number of significant improvements had been made. Within the report a number of key issues had been highlighted. Mr Dicks briefly referred to these:

- Need to place the customer at the heart of everything the Council does - this is key for all staff.
- Improve and develop member capacity – as well as training for members in specific subjects, there is a need to improve member behaviour, stop bickering at meetings and unhelpful letters to the local press etc.
- Requirement to include an additional senior management post in the establishment. - this is being considered at present.

- There needs to be a continued and sustained improvement in performance – this is wholly recognised.

Mr. Dicks stated that the positive nature of the Council's partnership working with the Forum had been recognised by the CPA Inspectors. The Council was at present working on a further Improvement Plan for 2007/08. This would contain detailed actions with target dates to ensure that the issues raised by the CPA report were addressed.

7. Car Parking

Mr. Dicks referred to discussion at the previous meeting where further information had been requested in relation to the car park charging policy particularly in relation to people with disabilities. Mr. Dicks circulated a report and extract from the minutes of the Executive Cabinet meeting of 12th May 2004 which related to the setting up of the Shopmobility facility. The report indicated that the funding of the Shopmobility scheme had been closely linked to the introduction of charging for disabled parking.

Members of the Forum were concerned that this link had been made and questioned whether adequate public consultation had been undertaken at the time. Schemes in other neighbouring Districts were not run on this basis and Bromsgrove was the only District in the County to charge disabled people for parking. In addition it was noted that at present the facility was available for 28 hours per week and this did not include Saturdays or the lunchtime period. As part of the discussion the condition of the toilets in the Town Centre was also criticised. Mr Street responded on this and acknowledged current difficulties with the facilities. In the medium and long term it was intended that the redevelopment of the Town Centre would encompass these issues.

It was clear that the Forum were not satisfied that the issue of car parking for the disabled was being addressed by the members of the District Council.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that a meeting with the relevant District Council members be requested in order that a small group of Forum members (comprising Trevor Rigg, Jeff Edwards, Patricia Hackett, Eileen Mulhall and Mary Collett) can put forward the views of the Forum. Mr Dicks undertook to set up such a meeting.

8. Scrutiny Task Group on Transport

Mr. Dicks and Mrs. Felton referred to the recent establishment of a Scrutiny task Group to look at Transport and in particular Bus Services in the District. Although detailed terms of reference had not yet been drawn up for the Task Group, it was anticipated they would include bus provision throughout the District, the types of vehicles operating, the bus routes and financial issues.

The Task Group would in due course be seeking information and input from a number of sources and it was likely that local bus transport would be a subject of interest to the Forum and that the Forum could be a useful source of information to the Task Group. It was suggested that it may be beneficial to invite the members of

the Task Group to attend part of a future meeting of the Forum to discuss the issue.

This was **AGREED**

9. **Disabled Users Group**

Fiona Scott reported that the meeting of the Disabled Users' Group was now to take place on 29th June 2007 at the Council House and a good range of attendees had come forward to take part in the event.

The Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and participation. He also requested that any suggestions for agenda items for the next meeting on 2nd August be forwarded to Fiona Scott.

Trevor Rigg

Chairman