

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

29 NOVEMBER 2012

EQUALITIES WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Report from: Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

Author: Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

This report informs the Committee of a recent meeting of the Equalities Working Group with the Disabled Workers Forum and the LGBT Forum.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The Equalities Working Group was set up by the Employment Matters Committee and any recommendations will be a matter for the Employment Matters Committee to decide.

2. Background

2.1 The Committee established a Race Equality Review Working Group in July 2008 to review the actions taken in response to the Race Equality Review and comment on further actions needed. The Working Group's terms of reference was subsequently amended to enable it to meet with the Black Workers Forum, the Disabled Workers Forum and other equalities groups as appropriate on a regular basis and the name of the Working Group was changed to the Equalities Working Group. The Working Group's membership currently consists of Councillors Avey, Carr, Christine Godwin and Iles.

2.2 The Equalities Working Group met on 22 October 2012 with the Disabled Workers Forum and LGBT Forum. The notes from this meeting are set out in Appendix 1 to this report for Members' information.

3. Advice and Analysis

3.1 The Working Group drew from it a number of issues to bring to the Committee's attention including a summary of progress from each of the Forums.

3.2 In particular, the Working Group discussed the recent LGBT Forum sponsored Be Yourself at Work conference which was held on 6 September 2012. Over 50 people had attended the conference, including some Members and that the presentations given during the conference had been well

received, including a presentation from Charlotte Wheeler-Quinnell of Stonewall.

- 3.3 The Equalities Working Group also discussed the Council's 2013 workplace equality submission to Stonewall which aimed to build on previous submissions.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 The Council is keen to ensure that its workforce represents the community, which supports our aim to provide high quality and responsive services.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Equalities Working Group acts as a consultation mechanism to enable Members to discuss issues with various bodies across the Council.

6. Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 The meetings of the Working Group will enable the Council to comply with its equalities duties under the Equality Act 2010.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That the report be noted.

Lead officer contact

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Background papers

None

Equalities Working Group

Notes of discussion 22 October 2012, 6pm – 7.10pm, Meeting Room 13, Gun Wharf

In attendance:

Councillor Avey
Councillor Carr
Councillor Iles
Councillor Maple (for Councillor Christine Godwin)

Disabled Workers Forum (DWF)

Elaine Mansfield
Ian Townsend

LGBT Forum

Chris Codling

Officers:

Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer
Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services
Sandra Steel, Organisational Change Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Trish Gayle (Black Workers Forum), Councillor Christine Godwin and Rajinder Singh (Senior Research and Review Officer).

2. Notes of last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 1 February 2012 were agreed.

3. Introductions

All those present were introduced at the meeting.

4. Be Yourself at Work Conference

This report provided details of the recent Be Yourself at Work Conference held on 6 September 2012, sponsored by the LGBT Forum, the aim of which was to: raise awareness and increase the profile of LGBT matters within the workforce and to external visitors; raise awareness of the Council's commitment to being a Stonewall LGB Diversity Champion and; introduce and promote the Be Yourself at Work branding as the new equalities branding (based on the philosophy that people who are themselves perform better at work).

Tricia Palmer reported that over 50 people attended the conference, including some present at this meeting and that the presentations given during the conference had been well received, including Charlotte Wheeler-Quinnell from Stonewall.

She referred to the questionnaire results set out in Appendix 1 of the report and expressed concern regarding the response rate, with particular reference to declaring sexual orientation. She confirmed that whilst she had not dealt with any formal LGBT issues she accepted that employees were reluctant to declare LGBT orientation. The Council would continue to support employees from these groups and noted the importance of this conference.

Sandra Steel informed the meeting that a question on declaring sexuality would be included in the next Staff Survey although she noted that some employees were reluctant to declare their sexual orientation.

The Group discussed a number of issues including:

- Attendance and start times at the LGBT Forum
- Use of Social Media (including I-Share)
- That most attendees at the Conference were based at Gun Wharf and concern regarding staff outside of Gun Wharf (e.g. schools) and whether those staff had the ability to attend the Conference and/or raise issues as necessary.
- Whether young people considered the need to be involved in formal groups such as the LGBT Forum.
- The arrangements for the next Conference including publicity to ensure a wider attendance from both employees at Gun Wharf and other sites including schools.

Action:

That the Be Yourself Conference be publicised earlier next year and be widened to include all Council “outposts” including schools.

5. Stonewall Workplace Equality Index Submission 2013

This report provided details of the Council’s 2013 workplace equality submission to Stonewall. The Council had started working with Stonewall in 2010 and became a member of the Stonewall Champions Programme. This required the Council to check every year how, as an organisation, it was doing in terms of meeting the needs of the LGB community both in the workplace and in the community. The report detailed the Workplace Equality Index and the developments which had taken place which would hopefully improve the Council’s position.

Sandra Steel provided further information on the Council’s strengths and weaknesses regarding the Council’s submission and noted that further work was required on community engagement, supplier side policy, career development and the need for Senior LGBT Champions.

The Group discussed a number of issues including:

- The need to encourage any potential senior managers and/or Elected Members to be a Senior LGBT Champion
- The benefits from inviting other Local Authorities which had a high ranking on the Stonewall Equality Index to a future meeting of this Group.

Action:

That a Local Authority (Brighton and Hove Council or East Sussex County Council) be invited to the next meeting of the Equalities Working Group to discuss their approach to Stonewall including the Workplace Equality Index submission.

6. Summary of Progress

LGBT Forum

The Forum's report included details of the Be Yourself at Work Conference (6 September 2012).

Disabled Workers Forum

The Forum tabled a report which set out the following issues:

- Better for Less
- Low Attendance at DWF meetings. It was discussed that a message should be sent out to actively encourage employees to attend forum meetings
- Support to Individuals
- Lift on the Riverside at Gun Wharf had been out of action since last Christmas. It was noted that Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture was looking into this issue.
- Audit on access across the Council
- DWF Conference later in 2012 likely to take the form of an "open house" approach. It was suggested that a drop in session be arranged to undertake health checks (eg blood pressure).
- Details of access to Medway's libraries was being developed on the Council's website, starting with Chatham Community Hub.
- Whether Medway could apply to join the Employers Forum on Disability.

Action:

1. That a message be sent out to all staff from senior management to actively encourage involvement and attendance at the Forums.

2. That the Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Services be contacted regarding the access audit to find out further information on its aims and objectives etc.
3. That officers investigate the possibility of the Council joining the Employers Forum on Disability.

7. Any other business

Councillor Maple informed the Group that Full Council had agreed a motion on 18 October 2012 to instruct officers to work with local residents and organisations to explore the formation of the Medway Disabled Residents' Forum which is supported by the Council and has the status afforded to formal consultees when changes are proposed which impact on the quality of life, access and welfare of the disabled community.

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