

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

1 APRIL 2010

EQUALITIES WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Report from/Author: Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

Summary

This report informs the Committee of a recent meeting between the Equalities Working Group and the Black Workers Forum, Disabled Workers Forum and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans staff (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 references were 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 that the name of the Working Group was changed to the Equalities Working Group. The Working Group's membership currently consists of Councillor Ken Bamber, Carr, Maple and Ruparel.
- 2.2 The Equalities Working Group met with the Black Workers Forum, Disabled Workers Forum and the LGBT Forum on 21 January 2010.
- 2.3 The following are the key points from the discussion between the Working Group and the Forums:
- 2.3.1 **Black Workers Forum**
- Chairs of all three staff forums to meet on a regular basis with the Equalities & Diversity Adviser.
 - Workforce monitoring – it was recognised that undertaking an annual pay assessment by ethnicity has been challenging but this continues to be a target for the Council.
 - It was noted that issues relating to BME staff may also apply to other staff from the other Forums

- The need to raise the profile of the BWF, through improvements to the pages on the Council's Intranet site (Connections), leaflets etc.

2.3.2 Disabled Workers Forum

- The profile of the DWF had been widened over the past year
- Staff not declaring disabilities
- Facilities issues – for example, heavy doors throughout Gun Wharf
- The difficulties faced by staff in being able to attend DWF meetings
- To provide training for Members. DWF to link in with officers to move this forward.
- Recruitment and Selection Framework/Updated Redeployment Policy – the DWF had a number of concerns on the proposed policy and it was agreed that HR follow this up with the DWF.
- The DWF's Annual Conference was held in December 2009 and had been attended by Jonathan Shaw MP, who gave a keynote speech on disabilities issues.
- The use of the Access to Work scheme, a government initiative which provided advice and financial support with extra costs which may arise because of employees' needs.
- The retention of the "Two Ticks" scheme
- Providing individual support to colleagues at informal meetings with HR
- Presence at the "Welcome to Medway" induction meetings for new employees.
- The need for more signage at Gun Wharf, for example, better signage for disabled parking bays.
- A proposal to install the "Soundfield" system in meeting rooms at Gun Wharf to improve hearing for all.

2.3.3 LGBT Forum

- The LGBT Forum had formed in mid 2009 following an informal network which had existed in Medway for a number of years
- An interim Committee was currently in place with a view to holding formal elections for the Committee shortly.
- The Forum would be supporting the LGBT History Month in February
- Meetings of the Forum would be held on and off the Council's premises on an alternate basis
- Further proposals included supporting World Aids Day, linking in with the wider LGBT community in Medway, the Youth Service and schools.
- The Forum would undertake a publicity drive through the use of leaflets, barracudas etc.
- The advent of the LGBT Forum provides an opportunity to review the effectiveness, outcomes and support arrangements for the Forums. The Equalities & Diversity Adviser is commissioning an external consultant to advise on best practice regarding staff equality groups and to recommend improvements.

2.4 The Working Group also discussed workforce monitoring and it was noted that Members had concern with the use of the 2001 census data which it was considered was out of date and as such did not provide accurate information. Members also discussed disability information and also reasons why staff may choose not to declare a disability.

2.5 In terms of the way forward, it was agreed that the Working Group meet approximately six monthly with all of the Forums, subject to any other relevant forums/parties also being invited to attend.

3. Advice and analysis

3.1 The meeting was a very useful exercise and the Working Group drew from it a number of issues to bring to the Committee's attention. In addition, it is welcomed that the Working Group plan to meet with Forums on a six monthly basis.

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 Any financial implications resulting from changes to processes will be met within existing budgets. The Council will make best use of external funding to support people with disabilities to remain in work.

6.2 The report enables the council to comply with its equalities duties. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 employers are obliged to make reasonable adjustments enable people with disabilities to work. The Council clearly supports this and will make strong efforts to make adjustments where appropriate.

7. Recommendation

7.1 The Committee is asked to note the report and that meetings of the Equalities Working Group and the Forums will be held on a six-monthly basis.

Lead officer contact

Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

T: 01634 332343

E: tricia.palmer@medway.gov.uk

Background papers

None