

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

16 MARCH 2011

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 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 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 (Councillors Ken Bamber, Carr, Maple and Ruparel) met with the LGBT Forum and Black Workers Forum on 19 January 2011 (apologies for absence were received from the Disabled Workers Forum).
- 2.3 The notes from this meeting are attached to appendix 1 to the report.

3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The meeting was very useful and the Working Group drew from it a number of issues to bring to the Committee's attention.

- 3.2 In particular, the Working Group raised the issue that Members receive training on the Equality Act 2010 following the local elections in May 2011. This proposal has been taken on board by the Member Development Advisory Group and a session has been provisionally arranged for Members on 14 June 2011.
- 3.3 The Working Group will be held on a six-monthly basis and the next meeting will be scheduled for July 2011.
- 3.4 It was noted that the some of the support to the Employees Forums previously provided by the post of Equality and Diversity Adviser within HR, that has been removed as a part of the in-years budget saving is to be absorbed into the Employee Relations Team. The Senior Research and Review Officer (Diversity and Cohesion) within the Research and Review Team will undertake the strategic HR Equalities work.
- 3.5 The Assistant Director, Organisational Services has asked colleagues in the Employee Relations Team and the Senior Research and Review Officer (Diversity and Cohesion) to develop an action plan to work with the Employees Forums to follow up the actions, as appropriate, arising from the meeting of the Equalities Working Group.

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.
- 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 The Committee is asked to note the report.

Lead officer contact

Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

T: 01634 332343

E: tricia.palmer@medway.gov.uk

Background papers

None

Equalities Working Group

Notes of discussion 19 January 2011, 7pm – 8.50pm, Meeting Room 9, Gun Wharf

In attendance:

Councillor Ken Bamber
Councillor David Carr
Councillor Vince Maple
Councillor Maureen Ruparel

Black Workers Forum (BWF)

Margaret Eniola
Trish Gayle

LGBT Forum

Mick Oliver

Officers:

Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services
Caroline Salisbury, Overview & Scrutiny Coordinator
Rajinder Singh, Senior Research and Review Officer, Diversity and Cohesion

Apologies for absence:

Ian Townsend, Disabled Workers Forum (DWF)

LGBT Forum

The Working Group discussed the issues arising for the LGBT Forum during the past year:

- A forum champion had been secured on the senior management team – Tricia Palmer
- The forum had been given the opportunity to comment on changes to employment policies at Medway as part of the formal consultation process
- Attendance at communication and consultative meetings – such as Internal Communications Group and Equalities and Access Group
- Given the opportunity to network with new staff at Welcome to Medway sessions
- Worked with the former Equality and Diversity Advisor on initiatives including the Stonewall LGBT Recruitment Guide (circulated to secondary schools, universities, Connexions, youth groups) and the Council's submission to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index of top 100 employers
- Provided informal advice to LGBT staff, relatives and managers on personal, or service issues
- The branch Chair was a member of the organizing committee for the World Aids Day event at Rochester Cathedral
- One of the Vice-Chairs, with a colleague, assisted a group of youth service users to form their own LGBT youth group. The group has met on a regular basis and is looking to become more formalised. Other Members of the forum have expressed willingness to attend the youth group's meetings to share life experiences.

The Working Group discussed the priorities and aims for the LGBT Forum for the forthcoming year:

- Celebrating LGBT History month – an open event at Gun Wharf with a guest speaker
- Raising the profile of the Forum through additional publicity, particularly in satellite offices
- Adopt a formal business plan for the year ahead
- Join the crew on the Medway SOS bus at events and some evenings
- Continue to be a resource for outreach and youth workers working with LGBT youth
- Produce a leaflet of useful contact numbers and addresses for LGBT staff.

Black Workers Forum (BWF)

The Working Group discussed the issues arising for the BWF during the past year:

- The BWF was represented at meetings of Medway's Internal Communications Group and the Equalities and Access Group
- Black history month was celebrated
- Black achievers awards
- Assisting social services to pinpoint the needs of black fostered children
- Invitations to speak at other schools outside Medway
- Assisting staff with challenges at work and helped to avert two cases from becoming grievance procedures
- An approach had been made to work with young men at the prison, as positive role models (this has still to be actioned)
- The formal structure of the Forum is published on the website with a "who's who" guide and action plans.

The Working Group asked for details of this to be sent to them for information.

Action: Forums

Members asked whether there was ever any collaborative working between the Forums on overlapping issues and if not, would they consider this for the future? The Forum representatives responded that they had tried to arrange several meetings, which had unfortunately been cancelled, but they usually managed to meet at the end of other meetings they all attended and regularly e-mailed each other.

Workforce Monitoring

The Working Group discussed the workforce monitoring report and it was noted that 75% of council staff lived in Medway and that staff over the age of 40 were over-represented with a third of the workforce aged over 50. However, this might not be as problematic as originally thought due to the extension to working age in law. There had also been an increase in applicants aged 24 and under and the apprenticeship schemes had helped this.

The Working Group asked for an assurance where unsuccessful young job applicants were from BME groups, that extra care was given to them and when possible feedback was also given to them.

The Working Group discussed the figures shown in Table 27 - Employee Relations Cases by ethnicity of complainant (page 37 of the agenda) highlighting that the figures did not include staff who approached the Forums for help but the statistics shown were purely for complaints that had been formally lodged. The group asked whether there was any way to show the number of staff who had approached the Forums for advice, even though they may not have proceeded with their complaint?

The Working Group agreed to ask HR to approach the Forums and Trade Unions to obtain details of the number of informal discussions, to highlight how informal dialogue with them is preventing formal complaints from coming forward and that HR kept a record of the number of approaches made to each Forum and Trade Union. This may also highlight any trend in complaints, ie. a high number all from one location, showing an underlying issue at that work place. This information would also support the employee survey statistics.

Action: HR

Equality Act 2010 and Diversity Impact Assessments

The Senior Research and Review Officer (Diversity and Cohesion) gave a presentation highlighting the provisions of the new Act.

The Working Group suggested the following action to assist in showing how genuine the council was about equality matters:

- The council should lead by example and introduce equality monitoring of all councillors after the local election in May 2011. This would show how representative the councillors are of the local workforce and of the residents of the Medway Towns, etc. **Action: HR**
- The same presentation is shown as induction training for all Councillors, following the local elections in May 2011 **Action: Members' Services**
- that Members are encouraged to discuss the details of a Diversity Impact Assessment form when attached to a committee report and that the record of the meeting should reflect the discussion to protect against any potential for future challenge.

Priorities for 2011

The Working Group discussed the forthcoming year and agreed that:

- the Working Group should meet every six months and that the next meeting of the group is held in July 2011. **Action: Democratic Services**
- representatives of the Forums should aim to meet with each other to discuss joint training for overlapping issues eg. the issue of discrimination. **Action: Forums**
- the Forums would like council managers to be better trained on dealing with equalities issues. **Action: HR**

- the Forum's leaflets and websites are updated and include relevant, helpful information. **Action: HR**
- Medway Councillors receive Equalities Act 2010 as induction training after May 2011. **Action: Forums**
- The LGBT Forum requested that HR and the Senior Research and Review Officer (Diversity and Cohesion) work with the Forum to highlight the Equality Act changes. **Action: HR and Research and Review**
- Other Forum members should be made aware of the Act and how it impacts on their activities **Action: Forums**
- Any leaflets/literature produced by the Forum is circulated to the Councillors on the Equalities Working Group so they could see the work and progress of the Forums. The LGBT Forum offered to circulate the minutes of its meetings to the Councillors **Action: Forums**
- The Chairman asked for further information of a short film screening for the Disabled Workers Forum that was taking place on Tuesday, 25 January **Action: Forums**
- The Working Group asked for a copy of any photographs from the black achievers awards. **Action: Forums**

Caroline Salisbury, Overview & Scrutiny Co-ordinator

T: 01634 332013 Email: caroline.salisbury@medway.gov.uk