

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

28 SEPTEMBER 2011

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 Black Workers Forum, 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 12 July 2011 met with the Black Workers Forum, Disabled Workers Forum and LGBT Forum. The notes from this meeting are set out in Appendix 1 to this 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 including a summary of progress from each of the Forums.

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

- 8.1 That the report be noted.

Lead officer contact

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Background papers

None

Equalities Working Group

Notes of discussion 12 July 2011, 7pm – 8.15pm, Meeting Room 9, Gun Wharf

In attendance:

Councillor Avey
Councillor Carr
Councillor Christine Godwin
Councillor Iles

Black Workers Forum (BWF)

Margaret Eniola
Trish Gayle
Marsha Wrye

Disabled Workers Forum (DWF)

Abi Jessop
Ian Townsend

LGBT Forum

Chris Codling

Officers:

Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer
Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services
Sandra Steel, Corporate Employee Relations Officer

1. Apologies for absence

None

2. Notes of last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 19 January 2011 were agreed.

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, updated the Working Group on a number of issues from the last meeting:

- Workforce Monitoring – HR had started to monitor the informal discussions held by the Forums and Trade Unions (see paragraph 4 of Notes of 19 January)
- Equality Act 2010 and Diversity Impact Assessments – Members' training on the Equality Act 2010 had taken place. Diversity Impact Assessments (DIAs) were included with relevant committee reports and salient information from the DIAs were included within the committee reports for Members' consideration
- Priorities for 2011 – that the Working Group would continue to meet on a six-monthly basis. That managers were being trained on equalities issues and that the Disabled Workers Forum (Ian Townsend) would support this training as appropriate.

3. Introductions

All those present at the meeting introduced themselves.

4. Draft Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011

This report provided details of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011. The specific duties required public bodies, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The regulations required public bodies to publish information by 31 January 2012 on how they were complying with the public sector equality duty requirements including information relating to its employees and others affected by its policies and practices. Equality objectives, setting out action required to meet the public sector equality duty, would be required by 6 April 2012. The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, confirmed that the use of Selfserve4you would assist in the process of obtaining relevant data towards the requirements.

The Working Group discussed a number of issues including that the duty should be considered as a “floor” rather than a “ceiling” in terms of the Council’s position as an employer of choice, and the quality of Diversity Impact Assessments.

5. Changes to Age Discrimination Law

This report provided details of the decision made by the Employment Matters Committee on 29 June 2011 to agree a revised Age Discrimination Policy Statement including the removal of the Council’s default retirement age.

The Working Group discussed the Policy including reference to section 7.1 (Advertising) where it was considered that the Council went further than the provisions of this section, as it had removed references to factors such as years of service and experience in addition to the removal of age from advertisements.

6. Positive about Disability Symbol

This report provided details about the Council’s retention of the two ticks positive about disability symbol. Representatives from the Council, including the Chair of the Disabled Workers Forum, met with Job Centre Plus on 18 May 2011 to discuss the annual re-accreditation of the symbol and the report provided details of the five commitments and the Council’s work towards them.

The Working Group discussed a range of issues including the need for greater disability awareness training, the issue of staff not declaring disabilities and the particular reasons why staff may choose not to declare a disability.

7. Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index 2012

This report provided details of the Council’s proposed submission to Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index for 2012. Stonewall published the index on an annual basis which provided external recognition of being a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual friendly employer, together with positive publicity for those organisations. It was

noted that it was becoming increasingly competitive to achieve a “top 100” placing in the index.

The Working Group discussed a range of issues including whether Kent County Council was seeking accreditation this year, employees’ propensity to declare whether they were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual, and how the use of anonymous surveys may assist in that process, in terms of building up confidence of the Council as an employer of choice, and whether individuals considered to be any benefits of declaring their sexuality.

8. Summary of Progress

Disabled Workers Forum

The Chair of the Disabled Workers Forum (DWF), Ian Townsend, tabled an update of progress made by the Forum since the last Working Group meeting in January 2011, and circulated copies of the DWF leaflet to the Working Group. The DWF were considering ways to enable the Forum to develop including the use of outside speakers at future meetings. The DWF was also keen on increasing its membership on a similar basis to the LGBT Forum, i.e. by extending membership to families. He reported that the next meeting would be held on 20 September and that annual meeting would be held on 2 December. He continued to represent colleagues as necessary, across the Council. He also was able to report issues to Robin Cooper as necessary.

Black Workers Forum

The Chair of the Black Workers Forum (BWF), Trish Gayle, provided an update on the work of the Black Workers Forum and circulated copies of the draft BWF leaflet. The Chair highlighted recent staffing issues which were resolved without conflict with assistance from HR. She also highlighted areas of good practice, overall, with regards to race issues and other activities such as the Black Achievers event, Black History Month and support for staff.

LGBT Forum

The Chair of the LGBT Forum, Chris Codling, tabled an update of progress made by the Forum since the last Working Group meeting in January 2011, and circulated copies of the LGBT Forum leaflet to the Working Group. It was noted that the Assistant Director, Organisational Services, was the LGBT champion on the senior management team and was also a straight ally to the Forum. The Chair set out the issues facing employees and whether they would come “out” at work. The Working Group discussed this issue and the reasons why employees may choose in whether to come “out” at work.

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