

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

29 FEBRUARY 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 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 2 February 2012 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 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 considered a report on Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index 2012. It stated that Medway Council had risen from 268th place on the 2011 index to 197th place on the 2012 index. This can be

seen as a very positive achievement, showing major improvement over a period of one year.

- 3.3 In addition, the Equalities Working Group also discussed equality information as required under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 which had come into force in September 2011. These regulations required the Council to provide varied information including, on the basis of the analysis of the equality information, to identify equality objectives, by April 2012. This information would be included in the Council Plan, due for consideration and approval, at Full Council on 23 February 2012.

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 2 February 2012, 6pm – 7.15pm, Meeting Room 9, Gun Wharf

In attendance:

Councillor Avey
Councillor Carr
Councillor Christine Godwin
Councillor Iles

Black Workers Forum (BWF)

Trish Gayle

Disabled Workers Forum (DWF)

Elaine Mansfield
Ian Townsend

LGBT Forum

Chris Codling

Officers:

Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer
Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services
Rajinder Singh, Senior Research and Review Officer

1. Apologies for absence

Margaret Eniola, Ajit Kaur and Marsha Wrye (Black Workers Forum).

2. Notes of last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 12 July 2011 were agreed.

3. Introductions

All those present were introduced at the meeting.

4. Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index 2012

This report provided details of the Council's submission to Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index (WEI) for 2012. This was the second occasion that the Council had taken part in the initiative and had risen from 268th place in 2011 to 197th place for 2012. The results of the benchmarking exercise were set out at in Appendix 1 to the report. The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, explained the scoring system used in the benchmarking exercise stating that Medway Council was ranked 31st out of 47 Local Authorities. She also informed the Working Group that the Council had met with a representative from Stonewall on 31 January 2012 to review the current position as well as looking at areas for improvement and setting priorities for the Workplace Equality Index 2013.

The Working Group discussed a wide range of issues including a detailed discussion on the results of the benchmarking exercise in respect of staff attitude feedback, the Diversity Team and the Diversity Policy, staff engagement. Both the Assistant Director, Organisational Services and the Senior Research Review Officer responded to the discussion points stating that it would be necessary for the Council to provide more evidence of the work it carried out as well as developing an Action Plan, the aim of which was to improve the Council's rating for the Workplace Equality Index 2013.

The Working Group also discussed that a number of issues were cross cutting and could equally apply to the other Employee Forums. This included the breakdown of disciplinary cases and the response rate exit interviews/questionnaires.

Action:

- 1. The Working Group asked for the reasons given by staff when leaving the Council's employment.**
- 2. The Employee Forums asked for a copy of the exit questionnaire so that they could provide it to staff when they leave the Council's employment, the aim of which, would be to improve the response rate.**

5. Equality Information and Objectives

This report provided details of recent changes to the equality legislation. The Equality Act 2010 required the Council to take specific actions from January 2012 to ensure its legal obligations were met. This included the Public Sector Equality Duty which sought to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people. Specific regulations also required the Council to - publicise equality information and set equality objectives in line with the Equality Act 2010. The Cabinet had agreed on 20 December 2011, "Delivering Fair and Responsive Services" (Appendix 1) and the "Fair Access and Inclusion Policy" (Appendix 2).

The Senior Research and Review Officer provided a detailed overview of the report including the objectives and details of gender and ethnicity data with regard to disciplinary cases, the changes in the make up of Medway's population and the diversity breakdown of the Council's workforce. The Working Group discussed a number of issues including disciplinary cases.

6. Summary of Progress

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 new BWF leaflet as well as displaying the Forum's new barracuda. The Chair highlighted recent highlights including the Black Achievers Awards, recent work with the Young Offenders Institute, Christmas lunch with senior citizens and active casework around the issue of bullying.

Disabled Workers Forum

The Chair of the Disabled Workers Forum (DWF), Ian Townsend, along with Elaine Mansfield, provided an update on the work of the Disabled Workers Forum. The Chair informed the Working Group that Carrie McKenzie, Head of Organisational Change, had agreed to be a Champion for the Forum and he was hopeful that she would help raise the profile of the DWF across the Council. The Chair queried whether the Council should be a member of the Employer's Forum on Disability. The issue of the Access to Work Scheme was discussed as it was perceived to be difficult for employees to obtain funding from the scheme.

LGBT Forum

The Chair of the LGBT Forum, Chris Codling, provided an update of the work of the LGBT Forum. The Chair stated that the LGBT Forum had had a successful year with increased membership. The Forum had contributed to the Council's application for inclusion within the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. The Forum had also held a successful buffet lunch to mark World Aids Day.

7. Role of the Forum

The Working Group discussed the role of the Forum and it was considered that the Forum meetings provided a useful opportunity to discuss various issues.

The Working Group also discussed the future delivery of the Council's Corporate Induction Programme and it was noted that this was likely to include more e-learning modules.

The issue of the Forums being consulted on draft HR policies was discussed and the Assistant Director, Organisational Services confirmed she would check that the Forums were included as consultees.

The Working Group was informed that LGBT History Month was being held in February with further information being found via the Council's Intranet site.

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