

MEETING OF THE ENGAGEMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THURSDAY, 25 MARCH 2010 2.00 PM



GROUP MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillor Michael Cook
Councillor Mike Exton (Chairman)
Councillor Reginald Howard
Councillor Jock Kerr

Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Tom Webster (Vice-Chairman)

PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright

GUESTS

David Millar
John Dickinson
Krystyna Waszkiewicz

OFFICERS

Corporate Head Sustainable Communities (Teena Twelves)
Corporate Head Partnerships and Improvements (Robert Moreland)
Service Manager Human Resources & Organisational Development (Joyce Slater)
Corporate Equalities Project Officer (Elaine Claridge)
Democratic Officer (Lucy Bonshor)

40. COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None received.

41. MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Howard was substituting for Councillor McBride for this meeting only.

42. APOLOGIES

An apology for lateness was given by Councillor Ian Selby.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

44. ACTION NOTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH JANUARY 2010

The notes from the meeting held on 14th January 2010 were agreed.

A question was asked about item 38 which referred to the consultation document on petitions as set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act. The Democratic Officer replied that the PDG's response to the consultation had been sent off within the deadline; as yet there had been no response to the consultation on the website.

45. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

The Corporate Head of Partnerships and Improvements (CHPI), Robert Moreland confirmed that objections to 43 kiosks being removed had been sent to BT, two Parishes at Harlaxton and Skillington wished to go ahead with adoption. The box at Dowsby had been removed following a robbery and the Boothby Pagnell kiosk should not have been on the list as it had been removed previously.

The wireless connection was now available in the Council Chamber if Members wished to use their laptops and a guidance document was being produced. The programme would be extended to include the committee rooms and the Members Lounge in due course.

46. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE EQUALITIES SCHEME

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting including the following guests:

David Millar - Kaleidoscope (LGBT support group)
John Dickinson - Grantham Mind
Krystyna Waszkiewicz - Grantham Polish Club

The Corporate Head Sustainable Communities (CHSC), Mrs Teena Twelve referred to the report and document which had been circulated with the agenda. The document was very much a work in progress with input and views of the PDG required it was also an opportunity for representatives of other groups to help devise and shape policies of the council.

The term equalities and diversity had a misconception about it and therefore within the organisation a re brand was being introduced to look at the issue as more of a community focus with the agenda being about people rather than a tick box exercise, something that added value and influenced the way we work by thinking differently about things but still meeting our legal requirements to report annually on equalities and diversity. The Single Equalities Bill was

currently on its way through Parliament and as it had cross party support a change of Government should not stop the bill being passed.

The scheme set out how the Council meets its statutory duties to promote race, disability and gender equality under the Race Relations (Amendment Act (2000), the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) and Equality Act (2006). The Council needed to ensure that the services that they provided reflected the needs of the local community. She then gave an example of where money which had been used for translation leaflets (which had just sat on a shelf) had been re directed to a front line service which had enabled mobile hearing loops to be purchased that had helped Officers speak to older householders who had hearing impairments without having to shout. This was a simple switch of how a resource was used which benefited people directly and improved customer satisfaction which was beneficial to the customer as well as the authority. Further examples of achievements like this had been made and were listed in the report and she asked that if anyone had any further helpful suggestions to let her know and this invitation was extended to those guests present.

A question was then asked about the corporate equalities group and implementation team who sat on these groups where they all internal or did they have external representatives. The CHSC introduced Elaine Claridge who was for part of the week the Corporate Equalities Project Officer. She spoke about the work being undertaken within the council to promote awareness of equality issues and membership of the various groups.

A Member asked about the Tenants Equalities Groups and whether any guidance and controls were in place. The CHSC replied that these were in place and group had input in to the impact equality assessments which were extremely useful. The CHSC recognised that the equalities agenda was a very wide ranging and complicated area that required a breadth of understanding that very few people had, therefore it was important to respect the views received and have support and training in place to enable people to carry out the work involved.

Examples of the quick wins that the internal groups had driven forward were:

- The text replay credit card which each member of staff had
- Language line credit cards which again each member of staff had which fitted behind their ID cards giving them information that was readily available.

The CHCS then referred to the mechanisms in place for involving community groups in shaping policies and the issues they face. The guests were then invited to speak.

Krystyna Waszkiewicz representing the Grantham Polish Club said that a lot of hate crime was in evidence where she lived on Thames Road with car vandalism and egg throwing. A lack of street lights near the canal area made

the public fearful to walk this area especially at night and with the anti social problems being encountered in the area. Also language was a problem as 95% of Polish people did not speak English but putting classes on late in the evening was not helpful when people had been working long shifts.

David Millar from Kaleidoscope (LGBT support group) said that as soon as you say who you are representing shutters come down. He welcomed the work that the authority was doing to try and involve as many groups as possible to get their views although there was still a stigma attached for the section of the community that he represented. For people to express their views and to be given the respect they deserved they needed to have additional support.

John Dickinson from Grantham Mind said that a stigma was still attached to mental health problems and not everyone felt comfortable giving their views in to an environment such as the meeting, it would be hard for people to attend without more guidance and support.

It was suggested that the community focus group needed to act as a conduit for conveying feedback to enable all groups to contribute to the corporate equalities scheme. A lot of work was still to be done to break down what people saw as bureaucratic barriers that stopped people talking face to face and involving them within the community.

The CHSC then referred to the Local Government Equality Standard and Equality Framework which the council was assessed at level 2 in 2006. During April 2009 the new Equality Framework was introduced to replace the old standard which measured authorities against three standards:

- Developing
- Achieving
- Excellent

A full understanding of equalities and diversity is essential across both staff and members to progress through the levels. Work to progress this had been undertaken during 2009 focussing on a programme of significant cultural change within the authority. The CHSC referred to the ED the elephant logo that had been adopted within the authority to promote equalities and diversity issues and “its all about you” as everyone was affected by equalities and diversity in some shape or form.

Within the last 18 months a big difference had taken place within the council following the hard work that had been undertaken on the equalities agenda with little changes being implemented that had made a huge difference to how services worked.

The PDG fully supported all the hard work that had been undertaken to progress the equalities and diversity agenda and the Chairman thanked everyone for attending and putting their comments forward.

47. EQUALITIES IN EMPLOYMENT MONITORING REPORT

The Service Manager for Human Resources and Organisational Development (SMHR&OD), Joyce Slater referred to report HR & OD 105 which had been circulated with the agenda. She referred to the legal duty which the Council had to collect the data contained within the report on staff, this issue having been raised in the last item. Rather than do this as a “tick box” exercise it was felt that the work undertaken should be useful to us as a Council to help inform policy and procedures to prevent discrimination in the workplace. This had resulted in a major piece of work being undertaken which had to be correct and accurate as well as adhering to the Council’s legal duty. Currently there were differing pieces of legislation relating to the different equality strands, it was hoped that in autumn 2010 the Equality Bill would be enacted to consolidate all the strands under the same piece of legislation and would include the following six strands:

- Race/ethnic origin
- Gender
- Disability
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Religion and belief

The SMHR&OD then put the results in context and why the validation showed only 96% rather than 100% (this was due to staff leavers from the cut off time of validation and also long term sick). Also how questions were phrased, by including the response “not stated” or “prefer not to say” it was found that people were more willing to answer the question which meant more meaningful data was collected.

She then referred to section 3.3 of the report and appendix 1 which was the requirement under the Race Relations (Amendment Act) 2000 and the statutory code of practice to monitor and publish, by reference to racial groups. The difficulty was in getting the categorisations correct and from the data received a number of applicants were not confident in putting down their ethnicity at the point of application approximately 60%. This was significant and further work on the why and trends will be looked at going forward.

Each category within appendix 2 was discussed with the following highlighted:

- Difficulty in defining local community profile
- Number of GP’s registrations show a significant increase in numbers which will change the local community
- Gender – local authorities bias to female employees
- Disability – the Council has a good track record in supporting people with a disability with 8.3% of employees declaring themselves to have a disability within the meaning of the DDA the council is one of the top

- performing councils in relation to the employment of disabled people.
- Age – the council’s age profile shows a lack of young employees (16-20) and the Council is looking at a collaborative project in Lincolnshire dealing with apprenticeships.
- Sexual orientation - it was the first time this question had been included in the validation exercise and although the response had been better than expected many staff chose “prefer not to say”.
- Religion and belief - the muslim community was not represented in the staff responses yet there was a muslim community locally and HR would be looking at how we present ourselves locally. A better position would be known after the next report when comparisons could be made.

A general discussion then followed with points raised about people’s reluctance to put down what religion they were, what were the reasons behind this, the turnover of asian employees, religion and belief; why Catholicism was not a category, why the need for people to put down what sexual orientation they were when more often than not the information was not disclosed, therefore accurate data could not be compiled. The SMHR&OD replied that all this information was relevant to build up a picture of the community as a whole and the council needed to be focussed and proactive in putting together policies and procedures so that no one was discriminated against for any reason. All the categories used were standardized and nationally valid.

A further short discussion then followed about disability and how people were now more willing to say they had a disability - this had not been the case a few years ago even with those disabilities that were invisible such as dyslexia. Members noted the report and recommended adoption by the Cabinet.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Slater for her report.

Recommendation:

That the Engagement PDG note the report and recommends that Cabinet adopt the report for publication.

48. DATE OF NEXT ENGAGEMENT PDG

The following item was dealt with as a matter of urgency as this was the last scheduled Engagement PDG before the next Annual Council meeting.

The Democratic Officer referred to the possible date of the Parliamentary Election (6th May) and the draft timetable of meetings which Members had been circulated with in January. The Engagement PDG had been scheduled for Tuesday 4th May and the Democratic Officer asked if Members were agreeable to the date being changed to Tuesday 11th May as she would be

involved with postal vote opening in the week running up to the election. Members agreed with the proposed date change and suggested that the meeting start at 10.00am.

Recommendation

That the Engagement PDG meeting scheduled for Tuesday 4th May on the draft timetable of meetings be changed to Tuesday 11th May with a start time of 10.00am.