

COMMUNITY RELATIONS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS FORUM HELD ON THURSDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2000, IN CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, AMERSHAM, COMMENCING AT 10.00AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.50PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Buckinghamshire County Council

Mrs A R Bainbridge (Chairman)

Mr M Appleyard, Mr W J W Chapple, Mrs C Martens, Mrs F D Roberts and Mr M Taylor.

Other Members present

Mr T Fowler

Race Equality Councils

Mr R Dheer, Dr S Ghose, Mr R Priest, Mr H Wadhwa and Mr P Ward

Officers

Miss J A Bierton, Ms L Galloway, Mr J Gaskell, Ms N Kausar, Mr A McLaughlin, Ms D Munday, Ms G Thomas and Ms R Vahey.

PARTNERSHIP CHARTER

Preceding the formal Agenda, Mrs Bainbridge welcomed the Chairman of Chiltern District Council, Mr D W Phillips who was in attendance to witness the signing of the Partnership Charter between Buckinghamshire County Council and Buckinghamshire Racial Equality Councils. The aim of the charter was to ensure that each organisation was "committed to working together, as partners to promote race equality". Mr Phillips wished the Forum well for their continuing work in helping to influence changes within Buckinghamshire.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr J Beckerleg, Ms K Furness, Mr C Jones, Ms J Larche, Mr D McGahey, Mr S Nolan, Mr P Scott, Ms G White and Mr R Worrall.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on Wednesday 11 October 2000, were confirmed.

2 UPDATE ON CORPORATE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ACTION PLAN

The Forum received and noted a report from the Director of Corporate Services of the progress on the Equal Opportunities Action Plan 2000/2001.

It was reported that the feedback received on the Diversity Awareness training was positive and that managers had been issued with a Diversity Awareness training manual to support them in cascading the information to their teams.

The report confirmed that the Equal Opportunities Working Group had nominated senior officers to lead on the development and implementation of service/departmental policies. The senior officers would also be responsible for liaising with service users on the content of the action plans in order to gain commitment throughout the organisation. It was anticipated that individual service departments' action plans would be brought to the Forum on a quarterly basis, in addition to the updates on the progress of the Corporate Action Plan.

Progress had been made towards the implementation of an agreed process for auditing access to County Council services under the new Disability Discrimination Act, with the production of a questionnaire.

A number of issues within the Action Plan fall under the remit of the Head of Communications. It was confirmed that an appointment had been made and it was anticipated that the new post holder would begin in January.

A Racial Incident Recording Policy is currently being developed and is due to be implemented in January. This would be monitored on a similar basis to the County Council's Complaints Policy.

Members were encouraged by the feedback received on the training and emphasised the need for ongoing refresher training. It was confirmed by officers that there would be ongoing training and particularly in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act. It was suggested to maximise budgets that cross party training could perhaps be an option.

Concern was raised, in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act, as to which premises were being audited by the County Council and whether the audit included the buildings to be occupied, temporarily, by the Aylesbury Race Equality Council. The particular difficulties experienced with the

Aylesbury Vale Racial Equality Council building were highlighted. Officers confirmed that all County Council buildings would be audited and reported that several options were being considered to solve the problems associated with accommodation.

A member of the Forum welcomed the proposal by the Equal Opportunities Working Group for the strapline “positively welcoming applications from all parts of the community” to be included in recruitment advertisements.

3 ADMISSIONS INFORMATION TO PARENTS AND ETHNICITY MONITORING

The Forum received a report providing an update on the information and support provided for ethnic minority families seeking admission to Buckinghamshire Schools and progress on the setting up of the systems for monitoring the different ethnic groups in the grammar schools selection procedure.

The Forum had received a copy of the new “Admissions to Buckinghamshire Primary and Secondary Schools - Guide for Parents – September 2001 – August 2002 Entry” which had been amended to help improve parents’ understanding of the process.

The section detailing the requirements for the completion of application forms had been translated into two languages. The Guide was written in plain straightforward English and included case studies also to help understanding. The names of the children in the case studies had been chosen to show the diversity of Buckinghamshire.

It was reported that the Education Department, in partnership with Social Services had set up a Help Line in Asian and for approximately 28 other languages for parents making enquiries in relation to admissions to Buckinghamshire Schools.

Officers reported ongoing difficulties in reaching parents of pre-school children and confirmed that this was an area currently being focussed on. Again, in partnership with Social Services, the Education department are in the process of producing a list of nurseries where there are parents whose first language is not English. This still, however does not reach those parents whose children do not attend nursery, it was therefore suggested by members that perhaps using local radio stations or health visitors would be beneficial.

The report also highlighted that currently legal advice is being sought in relation to the Data Protection Act and the requirement to compel all parents to fill in ethnicity data. Currently under the Data Protection Act it is regarded as sensitive data and as such explicit consent is required prior to processing. Members suggested that the only way to overcome many of these barriers was to ensure that comprehensive training was undertaken by governors and head teachers to enable them to encourage parents to provide this information. Officers confirmed that there had been a presentation to Buckinghamshire head teachers.

One further difficulty highlighted by a member of the Forum was concerning “first preference”. Parents obtained information regarding schools from a variety of sources, e.g. the internet, neighbours and OfSTED reports and do not just look at the academic achievement of the school, but also at policies on anti-bullying etc. It was felt important that head teachers should consider this fact when looking at the perception of their school in the community.

4 MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS FORUM

The Forum received a report from the Director of Corporate Services outlining the implications of Buckinghamshire County Council’s Modernising Agenda on the Community Relations Forum. The Director of Corporate Services stated that the Local Government Act 2000 required Local Authorities to adopt an executive and scrutiny model of administration to replace the traditional committee system.

It was reported that at full Council on 23 November 2000, it had been agreed to adopt the elected Leader and Cabinet model. Under these arrangements a Cabinet of eight members had been established comprising the Leader, Deputy Leader and six Portfolio Holders. In addition five Select Committees had been established to undertake the overview and scrutiny function. The Forum noted that this was for a pilot period until May 2001. The Director of Corporate Services added that a review of the success of the pilot scheme would be undertaken in April. There were few implications for the Forum as the County Council very much valued the work that was undertaken. It was suggested that the most appropriate link/reporting line would be via a Cabinet member. It was felt that the most appropriate portfolio holder would be the Deputy Leader.

The Forum raised concerns regarding the way in which decisions would be made, the speed of these decisions and the manner in which the new system would be communicated to members of the public. Assurance was given that cabinet decisions would be recorded, with the reasons for the course of action taken and published within 48 hours. Select committees would meet on an ad hoc basis and therefore be able to be more flexible and look at items in more detail. The method of communication to the public is currently being addressed.

The Forum were asked to send any suggestions regarding success measures to either the Director of Corporate Services, the Committee Clerk or to Mr W Chapple.

5 EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ACTION PLAN

The Forum received and noted a report from the Director of Education updating progress on the objectives outlined in the Education Department’s Action Plan - Positive Response to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry - Macpherson Report.

Much of the work undertaken in the Action Plan had been strengthened by the introduction of the Commission for Racial Equality’s new standards for

schools entitled “Learning for All”. Some of the activities highlighted were improving the social inclusion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, the development of the ICT Database and the development of a strategy for dealing with racist incidents. It was confirmed that the Action Plan was being taken forward in parallel with “Learning for All”.

6 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The Forum received an oral report from Alan McLaughlin from Legal Services on the Human Rights Act that came into force on the 2 October 2000.

Mr McLaughlin confirmed that training on the Human Rights Act had been undertaken and continues with Social Services, Human Resources and Senior Management. He confirmed that schools had received a briefing. The new legislation means that individuals are able to ask UK Courts to take account of Human Rights. However only individuals, not companies’ etc can bring cases. This is because there must be proof that rights have been infringed. The time limit on cases to be brought is one year.

It was also reported that individuals would be able to bring cases against bodies such as Local Authorities and Health Authorities. The definition of a public body under the Act is so wide that it may include residential care homes, companies such as Railtrack and other such public bodies deemed to provide services to the public. Information was distributed on the Convention, which detailed some of the articles.

Members of the Forum queried whether there was a plan to distribute information on Human Rights to residents in Buckinghamshire and raised concerns that legal representation would not be available to all sectors of the community. Officers confirmed that the Government had indicated that an advertising campaign on television and via the Internet may be used similar to the campaign in relation to the Data Protection Act. With regard to legal representation it was noted that some lawyers do offer a “no win, no fee” alternative.

7 LEARNING FOR ALL - STANDARDS FOR RACIAL EQUALITY IN SCHOOLS

The Forum received a report from the Director of Education providing an update on the outcomes of the recommendations made in the report “Learning for All – Standards for Racial Equality in Schools” submitted to the Forum on the 14 June 2000.

It was reported that since June a small working group of officers had begun to look at specific education authority guidance for schools and on steps to be taken for reporting and recording racist incidents. This guidance would also include action to be taken by the Local Education Authority. Training sessions will be undertaken to raise educational achievement and increase awareness of the “Learning for All” standards for schools and governing bodies.

It is expected that the Department for Education and Employment will issue a Code of Practice for Local Education Authorities that will encourage schools to maintain the standards in "Learning for All". Currently Buckinghamshire is planning to launch the standards locally with all schools due to attend a conference during the Summer Term 2001.

Members of the Forum were pleased to note that progress had been made and requested feedback be provided from the group that had been set up to monitor bullying / racial incidents. It was also requested that officers consider an event to celebrate the cultural mix across the County. The Forum agreed to include this as an agenda item at the next meeting.

8 RACIAL INCIDENT RESPONSE GROUP

The Forum received an oral report advising them that the Racial Incident Response Group had launched a leaflet following the Stephen Lawrence - Macpherson Report. The official launch was held on Saturday 18 November 2000 with guest speaker Cherie Blair. The event was widely supported by the County Council and Tesco's at Broadfields, Aylesbury who provided a buffet. A new leaflet had been produced for the launch and work had now begun on distribution (copy attached).

9 HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

The Forum received information regarding the Home Offices directive for a Holocaust Memorial Day. The Government had set aside Saturday 27 January 2001 to hold the first annual Holocaust Memorial Day, the purpose of which is to provide a national mark of respect for all victims of Nazi persecution and all those affected by recent acts of a similar nature, in countries such as Yugoslavia and Africa.

It was reported that Local Authorities had received guidance from Central Government on how to commemorate the day and the types of events to be held for the whole community. It was confirmed that the Department for Education and Employment had sent educational packs directly to schools.

The Forum felt that it was important that the Holocaust Memorial Day was raised with the Cabinet, it was also agreed that the Committee Clerk would send the distributed information to Mr C Graves, Chairman of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) with a covering letter. Members also felt that it was important for school head teachers and governors to be reminded, therefore it would be included in the Briefing Bulletins sent to both these groups.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on 7 March 2001 at 10.00 am, County Hall, Aylesbury.

CHAIRMAN