

Minutes of the WIP Equality and Diversity Project Team Meeting held on 14th May 2007 at PACT Centre, Pewsey

Present

Mary Cullen (WCC Project Manager)
Brad Fleet (KDC)
Pam Brookes (WCC)
Di Parkin (Consultant Idea)
Graham Partridge (Consultant Idea)
Amber Skyring (SDC)
John Pearce (SDC)
Debbie Lardner (NWDC)
Lisa Hayes (WWDC)

Apologies – None

Mary Cullen welcomed everyone to the meeting and led introductions.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved

Matters arising

- Amber Skyring confirmed that she would continue to attend the group as a representative of Salisbury District Council
- Di Parkin will re-circulate notes of strengths and weaknesses from last meeting

Diagnostic reports and gap analyses

Mary Cullen expressed thanks to district colleagues for assisting with the diagnostic work, arranging interviews, focus groups and collating relevant information. The consultants also offered thanks for help with this.

Diagnostic reports and gap analyses for four authorities have been completed. The report for Salisbury will be finalised later this week.

Di Parkin and Graham Partridge provided feedback on the diagnostic work done to date in four authorities. Di commented that overall most authorities were performing at around level 2, with

differing strengths and weaknesses and areas requiring consolidation.

Di commended all authorities on areas of good practice and the commitment and enthusiasm shown by people around the table and others in individual authorities. It was acknowledged that this is an under resourced area of work and that this needed to be fed back to the WIP board.

She indicated that members should be proud of their contributions to this agenda and not be discouraged by any weaknesses highlighted during this process.

Mary Cullen echoed this and acknowledged that whilst there were bound to be sensitivities around areas of weakness, members should continue to maintain the positive and constructive attitude evidenced so far.

West Wiltshire District Council

Di Parkin highlighted areas of good practice by West Wiltshire District Council in terms of provision of a crèche corner, clarity of information around availability of translated material, equality impact assessment built into service planning etc.

Regarding areas for improvement, she highlighted a need to take equality impact assessment work to the next level and to look further at the training needs of service managers.

Lisa Hayes reported that she found the diagnostic report accurate and reflective of the key issues she saw them.

Wiltshire County Council

Di Parkin acknowledged that Equality and Diversity was more difficult in a County Council environment given the scale of operations and the broader remit.

However she highlighted good practice in terms of the Gender and Disability Equality Schemes.

In terms of weaknesses she highlighted a need for greater quality control around equality impact assessment work and better co-ordination of information across the council.

She noted the impact of changes and absences of staff on this agenda but was pleased to now see strong leadership at Director level at WCC.

Pam Brookes felt that overall this was an accurate assessment.

Amber Skyring raised a question on how commitment to the equalities agenda was assessed by the consultants. She gave an example related to provision of excellent waste collection services to Disabled residents which was just viewed as part of normal service and was not highlighted as an equalities initiative.

Di Parkin indicated that if officers were not able to identify this as an equalities issue/initiative then there are likely to be bigger gaps in their general awareness around this.

Kennet District Council

Di highlighted a range of good practice by Kennet District Council including availability of translation and interpretation services, staff knowledge and awareness of how these work, translated information on council leaflets and good policies on monitoring.

Key areas of weakness included updating of recruitment policies etc, which meant that Kennet was in her opinion not fully able to claim level 3 of the Equality standard.

Brad Fleet acknowledged that these areas had been picked up and would be worked on to secure level 3.

North Wilts District Council

Di praised North Wilts for a well organised and structured approach to equality and diversity, provision of good staff training and robust service planning.

North Wilts from her assessment has securely achieved level 2 of the Equality Standard and showed a good corporate framework for this work.

In terms of weaknesses and areas for improvement, more could be done in terms of signposting translation and interpreting services and more could be done to sell managers the benefits of equality impact assessments.

Salisbury District Council

The diagnostic report is not yet available for Salisbury DC, however Graham Partridge noted some areas of good practice including embedding equalities into performance management, something which needs further development, but which could be of benefit to all councils.

In terms of weaknesses he reported that from discussions he had had, one of the key issues was getting equality and diversity onto the core agenda.

Amber Skyring queried the process in Salisbury in terms of ensuring that a comprehensive picture of equality and diversity initiatives across the council was obtained.

It was noted that Salisbury DC arranged interviews and a good cross-section of people was involved.

Following some further discussion around this, members felt as the same process had been followed in other authorities and that the report would in any case be made available for feedback and amendments, that no further action was required at this time.

Salisbury officers will feedback once the report is received.

Proposals for Phase 2

Di Parkin presented proposals for phase 2 of this consultancy work.

The common areas identified for improvements were

- Equality impact assessment work
- Leadership
- Best practice showcase
- Equality and Diversity network

Consultation
Procurement
Translation and Interpretation

In terms of translation services, Mary Cullen undertook to meet with John Rogers to get an update on the objectives and progress of the Customer First Partnership's work in this area.

Following discussion of the proposals, members felt that there was perhaps too much to action in the timescales involved.

Members also wondered about the impact of One Council for Wiltshire on partnership working generally, and whether some aspects of this phase 2 work were best left until after the decision on this.

It was agreed that the work around consultation, in terms of getting key stakeholders together, might best wait until this decision was made.

Mary Cullen asked members to maintain focus on this work for the present adding that the equality and diversity agenda would continue whatever the outcome of the one council decision.

Brad Fleet felt that if the decision is given to proceed with a unitary council, members of this group would be likely to be refocused on complex transition planning and that this work would become a function of the unitary council.

However acknowledging the issues at present, all agreed to maintain project focus for now.

Mary and Di will therefore re-draft the phase 2 paper taking these issues into account. Members noted necessity of including timescales in the re-draft.

Mapping Exercise

Di Parkin outlined progress to date with the mapping exercise and highlighted issues around accessing information and contacts.

Caroline White had produced a list of organisations and some key contacts however this had proved difficult.

It was noted that West Wiltshire contacts were not included.

There was some further discussion around the brief and the fact that it specified a need to document examples of equalities projects and initiatives rather than a list of organisations.

It was agreed that this work needed urgent re-focusing.

Di Parkin suggested that a template be developed to be used, within Councils initially, to map initiatives and to circulate to the voluntary and community sector for additions.

Amber Skyring noted, and others concurred, that this would place a lot of work on this sector who should perhaps receive some form of remuneration.

This will be taken to WIP board at a later point for further steer.

Connections with LIFT SW

Di Parkin outlined areas where this work overlapped with LIFT SW work and therefore where there were opportunities for cross funding.

These included getting all authorities securely at Level 2 and the equality network idea.

She will discuss funding issues further with Mary as some elements of her time have not been fully apportioned as yet.

Date next meeting

The next meeting was arranged for 11th June 2007 at 10.30 am at the PACT Centre, Pewsey.