

Wiltshire Improvement Partnership Equality and Diversity Capacity Building Project

Minutes of a meeting of the officer project team held on 11th April
2007 at PACT centre, PEWSEY

Present

Mary Cullen (WCC, Project Manager), Di Parkin (IDeA, Project Consultant), Graham Partridge (IDeA Project Consultant), Amber Skyring (Salisbury District Council), Lisa Hayes (West Wiltshire District Council), Brad Fleet (Kennet District Council), Pam Brookes (WCC)

Apologies

D Lardner (North Wiltshire District Council)

North Wiltshire were unable to send a representative on this occasion, however DP has already visited NWDC and liaised with relevant officers there who were happy for this meeting to go ahead.

Welcome and introductions

MC welcomed everyone to the meeting and led introductions.

AS representing Salisbury DC indicated that she was not as yet clear concerning who the Salisbury representative on the project would ultimately be, as there had been recent changes in personnel.

MC queried whether AS could alternatively represent the South Wiltshire Diversity Alliance. AS will seek further clarity around this and feedback to MC.

Thanks

MC Cullen thanked members who had maintained project momentum and focus during her recent sickness absence.

WIP Project background

MC provided an overview of the work of the Wiltshire Improvement Partnership and current areas of work including the overall objectives of the equality and diversity project.

DP and GP introduced the programme of work which starts with a diagnostic phase at each authority looking at performance against levels of the equality standard for local government, identifying gaps and weaknesses and producing individual authority action plans.

Further to this a county wide assessment and action plan will be produced, in order to help identify areas of potential joint working, development of more consistent approaches and more effective use of resources.

A third consultant would be brought in to take this delivery aspect of the commission forward towards the end of May.

Another element of the project is the mapping of equality and diversity initiatives across the county. This will be undertaken by consultant Caroline White. DP indicated that it was vital that members identified initiatives, organisations and consultation activity they were aware of and feed this back to her/Caroline at the earliest opportunity.

Equality Standard for Local Government

DP introduced a background paper on the Equality Standard for Local Government, which she indicated should be viewed as a tool to help local authorities move forward in terms of their equality and diversity work.

She indicated that whilst authorities often felt that their progress was slow, the national picture showed that Wiltshire authorities were comparable with most others, with only very few authorities nationally achieving level 3 or above in the year 2005/6.

Whilst the standard is a self-assessment tool, she highlighted that authorities needed to robustly demonstrate achievement at each level before being able to claim reaching the next one. External assessment kicked in at level 3 and beyond.

AS and PB made points that authorities performed at different levels on different tasks or pieces of work, however DP confirmed that the assessment was an whole authority assessment and therefore all elements needed to be fulfilled for each level.

There was general discussion concerning the review of the standard which has taken place and revision which will mean that all six equalities strands will be included by next year.

DP went through the levels of the equalities standard and what needed to be demonstrated at each stage.

It was acknowledged that authorities sometimes found it difficult to ascertain what evidence to use or how to compile this. MC queried whether there was any guidance around this for authorities. DP confirmed that LIFT SW was looking at this area of work.

In terms of the WIP work, AS queried how the whole authority assessments would be carried out, bearing in mind that different people within authorities had different knowledge of initiatives and progress etc. DP confirmed that she would be liaising with several people at each authority and also reading relevant strategies, policies and service plans.

Members confirmed that it would be useful to have sight of interim findings in order to be able to check these against their own knowledge and understanding for each authority.

LIFT SW, Current strengths and weaknesses

DP provided members with background information regarding the LIFT SW programme which aims to raise the performance of local authorities in the South West in several key areas, including equality and diversity to level 2.

This work links well with the WIP work and DP indicated that this portion of the meeting on strengths and weaknesses around current equalities work, would be funded by LIFT SW. Further initiatives generated from the WIP project could also benefit from future LIFT SW funding.

DP sought members' views on how the LIFT SW funding could best be used and their thoughts on strengths and weaknesses of current equality and diversity practice across the county, members generated ideas which will be collated and circulated by DP.

Joined up working

DP asked members for ideas for areas around which they considered joint working and more effective use of resources between councils in Wiltshire was possible.

Members highlighted the areas of Consultation, Data collection and Monitoring, Training, Policy Development and Procurement as possible starting points.

It was noted that the Customer Focus partnership are also looking into provision of Translation services across authorities.

It was agreed that it was better to address a few areas well within the WIP project, rather than attempting too much.

Concluding remarks

MC thanked members for their attendance and positive contributions to the meeting. It was agreed that a further meeting was required once most of the individual authority work had been completed and preferably before the next WIP project board meeting.

Date next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 14th May at 10.30 am at the PACT Centre, 16 High Street, Pewsey.