

Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Equality and Diversity Sub-Group

Tuesday, 6 February 2007

Present: Councillors Terry Brown and Mrs Iris Smith

Also in attendance: Sarah Dobson (Policy and Performance Officer), Paul Sudworth (GIS Officer), Helen Sutton (Customer Services Manager) and Tony Uren (Democratic Services Officer)

1. CHAIR OF MEETING

In the absence of other Members at the commencement of the meeting, Councillor Brown assumed the Chair of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by the Members in any of the agenda items.

3. VISIT TO STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Sarah Dobson reminded the Members that the Sub-Group had agreed to visit Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (based in Leek) on Thursday, 22 February 2007 to discuss with the Authority its approach and action plans in relation to equality and diversity issues.

The Staffordshire Moorlands District comprised a population of 94,000 within three distinctive market towns, urban fringe settlements and surrounding rural areas. The Council, which employed 309 full time staff, had a current 'good' CPA rating, but was aiming for excellence, and had achieved Level Three of the Equality Standard in March 2006.

Sarah informed the Members that Staffordshire Moorlands Council wished the Chorley party to examine the operation of one of its 'Rural Kiosks' as part of its visit.

The Sub-Group **AGREED** the following arrangements to be made in respect of the Staffordshire Moorlands visit on 22 February:

- The Sub-Group and Officers be transported to and from Leek by mini-coach, departing from the Town Hall, Chorley at 8.30am to arrive by approximately 10.30am, and departing from Leek at 2.30pm.
- In the event of any of the Sub-group Members (Councillors K Ball, T Brown, Mrs I Smith and C Snow) being unable to attend the visit, an invitation be extended to Councillor H Khan, Councillor P Malpas (Chair of Ethnic Minorities Consultative Committee) or Councillor D Dickinson (Chair of the Disability Liaison Group) to attend in their place.
- Confirmation of the visit arrangements, including an itinerary and suggested questions to be asked of Staffordshire Moorlands Members and Officers, be e-mailed to the respective Councillors able to attend on 22 February.

4. ONE-STOP SHOP AND CONTACT CENTRE - FACILITIES TO MEET DIFFERENTIAL NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

The Chair welcomed Helen Sutton (Customer Services Manager) who had been invited to attend the meeting to advise and discuss with the Sub-Group the services and facilities provided at the One-Stop Shop and Shared Services Contact Centre to aid and assist customers with differential needs.

Helen outlined the measures and services that had been introduced in the One Stop Shop and Contact Centre to meet the requirements of people with differential needs, referring, in particular, to the following:

- The physical adaptations that had been made to the premises (eg improved signage and signposting; a rise and fall desk to assist disabled customers; alterations to doors to assist entry, etc).
- An evening exchange session with the Lancashire County Council's Youth and Community Service to publicise the facilities at the One-Stop Shop and Contact Centre.
- A weekly surgery was held in the One-Stop Shop in conjunction with the Community Youth and Community Service. The surgery was conducted by Councillor Hasina Khan, for the benefit, in particular, of minority ethnic group members in the Borough.
- Two One-Stop Shop operatives were experienced in sign language.
- The introduction of Language Line, the effective telephone based system that connects customers and advisors with external interpreters.

Helen also drew attention to the plans to introduce the Customer Relations Management system, a software system that would be capable of recording all customer contacts (either face-to-face or by telephone), showing details of the gender and ethnicity of customers. The establishment of the sophisticated system would be dependent on the satisfactory completion of the Shared Services Contact Centre agreement with Lancashire County Council. In the interim, however, there was a facility on the Council's web-site for customers to log in complaints, with the entry seeking details of the ethnicity of respondents, in addition to the nature of the complaints. This facility could prove useful in compiling statistical information for CPA purposes.

The Officers will be meeting shortly to discuss effective means of recording and monitoring complaints whilst taking account of the number and nature of complaints; the age, gender and ethnicity of complainants; and the differing nature of urban and rural complaints etc.

During the course of the discussions with Helen, the Sub-Group identified the following issues that would need to be addressed during the inquiry:

- The Council will need to have documented proof of all of its endeavours and actions to achieve equality of service for its citizens, including its partnership working.
- The Sub-Group requested a report detailing the specific services provided at the One-Stop Shop, with an indication of the nature of complaints received.
- The Council needs to devise and implement an effective complaints monitoring process that would be capable of recording the age, gender and ethnicity of complainants; the services which are the subject of the complaints; and the nature of the complaints.
- Consequently, as a result of the analysis of the complaints data, the Council would be able to identify the barriers to groups' access to services and consider how best to remove the barriers and improve services to meet the needs of all sections of the community.
- Customers from minority ethnic groups could be signposted to and encouraged to take up English language courses at local colleges.

- The personal specification for the new Customer Access Officer post with special responsibility for hard to reach groups could include a desirability for applicants to be able to speak one or more languages other than English.
- The Council's Licensing Section could be encouraged to use the 'Language Line' facility in its dealings with customers. Use of the facility should be monitored to ascertain the most frequently requested interpretation service, which could be examined in a review of the Council's 'strap-line' on its communications.
- A survey of customers attending the Youth and Community Service's surgeries at the One-Stop Shop, together with the nature of the enquiries, would be useful to the inquiry.

5. GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

The Chair welcomed Paul Sudworth (Geographical Information System (GIS) Officer) who had been invited to the meeting to explain the nature and potential uses of the GIS facility.

Paul explained that the GIS software enabled information fed into the system to be represented graphically on digital mapping sources.

The system could be developed to provide demographic and deprivation information and identify the localities of particular community groups within the Borough. This information could be useful in determining the specific parts of the Borough to which resources and action should be targeted.

By way of an example of GIS's capabilities, Paul produced a plan which illustrated the differing levels of dissatisfaction with the Council's services in each Borough Ward from information gleaned from the results of a recent residents' survey.

The Sub-Group was impressed with the capabilities of the GIS facility and **AGREED:**

- (1) That copies of the dissatisfaction survey questionnaire and GIS map, together with a note of the number of replies received, be supplied to all Councillors.
- (2) That the Officers be requested to arrange for the GIS mapping of information in relation to the local population's age groups; the number and location of disabled people' and the ethnicity of the local population, for distribution to all Councillors.

Chair