

Our Ref: DPPLET2008/Equality Forum
Your Ref:

30 May 2008

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

CHORLEY EQUALITY FORUM

The Council is currently consulting on plans to develop an equality forum for the Borough. The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on how best the needs of the community can be addressed through effective consultation.

We would welcome responses from the community and will use the information provided to ensure that we make the equality forum the best possible platform for addressing the needs and concerns of equality target groups and for improving quality of life across the Borough.

We would ask that all responses are submitted by Monday, 23 June 2008 and we will publish a full response on the Council's website and to those responding to the consultation by 13 July 2008.

We would also take this opportunity to ask that those who are interested in representing any equality group through the equality forum, or would like to nominate a representative, to highlight this in their response or by contacting sarah.dobson@chorley.gov.uk, 01257 515325.

Rationale

The forthcoming Equalities Bill and the recent creation of the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights (which replaces the Racial Equalities Council, Disability Rights Commission and Equal Opportunities Commission) signals a change in thinking nationally about the most effective way of approaching equalities.

The current consultation mechanisms used by the Council are evolving into task and finish groups, much of the more detailed work around redesigning services is done outside of meetings and involves site visits or detailed half day consultation events. Examples of such work include accessibility of the website, markets design and the committee's response to 'Our Shared Future'.

The Council has recognised seven strands of diversity (Age, Gender, Disability, Ethnicity, Faith, Rurality, and Sexuality). The creation of a single equality forum will allow the Council and its partners to place all strands of equality on an equal platform and would allow us to tackle the issues which impact most on these groups.

This approach would allow us to focus limited resources on delivering real action which will change service outcomes for equality target groups.

The details below set out the Council's vision for equality consultation going forward. We are mindful of the need to ensure that we continue to move forward and build on the excellent work undertaken to date by those who have engaged with the Council and its partners to tackle equality issues. The Council's resources are limited, and we believe that an overarching forum is the only viable means of ensuring that everybody in the Borough with specific needs is able to make their voices heard and play an active part in shaping service design and delivery.

THE PROPOSAL

How will it operate?

We will ensure that everybody with an interest in equalities issues continues to be given the opportunity to have their voices heard and to shape the Borough's services and policies.

We are keen to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to feed into the equalities forum. A mailing list including members of existing consultation bodies will be retained. Agendas, minutes and key information will be sent to all of those who subscribe to this mailing list.

In 2008/09 Cllr Hasina Khan will chair the forum and the Vice Chair will be Cllr Dickinson.

The forum will meet every three months.

Task and Finish Groups

We will establish a number of task and finish groups tackling specific issues. Each task and finish group would have a lead service officer from the Council. The groups would be established with specific briefs, with the resources to investigate and address specific issues. Task and finish groups would report back to the equalities forum. Membership of task and finish groups would be broader than the membership of the equalities forum and would draw on interest and expertise from across the Borough and wider a field.

Task and finish groups this year have successfully addressed issues such as the accessibility of the Council's website for those with disabilities and Chorley's response to the Community Cohesion debate around the publication of 'our shared future'.

Agenda

We will consult with equality groups when setting the agendas for meetings and will endeavour to ensure that meetings focus on similarities between different communities, not differences. Issues specific only to particular equality strands will be tackled through a number of other mechanisms and platforms.

Forum members will meet annually to agree a forward plan for the forum (both agenda items at meetings and task and finish groups).

Examples of possible agenda items include:

- Employment
- Community cohesion
- Policing
- Deprivation
- Challenging myths
- Employment
- Health Inequalities
- Housing
- Access to services

Ad hoc items will be added to the agenda and task and finish groups will be formed to tackle any unforeseen issues (with the agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair).

Agenda papers will be published on the Internet (and large print copies sent to those with specific requirements). These will include papers to be discussed at the meeting to enable all interested parties to feed into the meeting and raise questions in advance.

Communication

Full minutes of every meeting will be produced and distributed to a mailing list (including current members of existing committees).

Updates on equality issues, the progress of task and finish groups etc will be posted on the Council's website (and alternative formats mailed to those with specific needs on request).

Other consultation mechanisms

We will continue to use a variety of other mechanisms to engage with equality target groups. Where other consultation and representative forums already exist (Disability Liaison Group, Racial Equality Council, Interfaith forum etc) the Council will continue to engage with these groups and to attend meetings as required.

Where there are specific concerns from groups or individuals we will look to work with the community to address these issues. We will continue to consult with specific groups on the issues that will impact on them and will take all available opportunities to strengthen our services in order to provide ever-greater equality and improved outcomes.

Contact details for those officers responsible for the most frequently raised issues by the existing forms will be provided and published on the Council's website and members of the community will be able to approach officers to request that issues are tackled on a day-to-day basis.

The Council's Assistant Chief Executive (Policy & Performance, Lesley-Ann Fenton) will act as the Council's equality champion and will address any concerns expressed by groups or individuals about consultation or service design or delivery on an ongoing basis.

Equality representatives

Membership

We are looking to consultees for suggestions regarding membership. Numbers of representatives for each of the equality strands and the agencies represented at the forum will have to be limited to ensure that meetings remain manageable. There will remain the opportunity for all members of the community to input into the agenda, ask questions and raise issues at meetings.

We would ask for nominations from equality groups, with those receiving the highest number of nominations from the community becoming standing members of the equality forum.

This approach will ensure that all equality strands are given equal weighting and an equal opportunity to influence and shape the borough's equality and diversity agenda.

The current proposal is that the membership of the equality forum will comprise of:

a) Up to three Community representative for each of the equality strands listed below:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Faith

- Sexuality
- Rurality
- Ethnicity

b) Six elected members from the Borough Council

- Cllr Hasina Khan
- Cllr David Dickinson
- Cllr Terry Brown
- Cllr Pat Case
- Cllr Rosemary Russell
- Cllr Iris Smith

c) Five statutory agency representatives:

Police
Primary Care Trust
Council for Voluntary Services
Citizens' Advice Bureau
Lancashire County Council

The membership of the forum is to be agreed by early August and the first full meeting to be held on 22 October 2008.

I have appended a diagram which illustrates the vision of how the equality forum may operate for clarity.

Conclusion

I hope that you find the detail of the Council's proposals useful we are keen to seek your views on what you think will and wont work, and how you feel that any concerns you may hold about the proposed equality forum could be tackled.

If you wish to discuss these proposals in details please do not hesitate to contact me or sarah.dobson@chorley.gov.uk (01257 515325).

Kind Regards.

Yours sincerely



Lesley-Ann Fenton
Assistant Chief Executive (Policy & Performance)
Email: lesley-ann.fenton@chorley.gov.uk
Tel: 01257 515323
Fax: 01257 5155156