

RACE ADVISORY FORUM

9th August, 2004 at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Mr. A.R. Malik – Pakistan Muslim Association (Chair)
Dr. N. Khanum – Luton Multi-Cultural Women's Coalition (Vice-Chair)
Mr. S. Sereaton – African Caribbean Community Development Forum (representing Mr. P. Markland)
Mr. S. Roy – Bengali Hindu Cultural Association
Mr. R. Deb – Bengali Hindu Cultural Association
Mrs. L. Rees – Luton Community Housing
Mrs. V. Ible – St. Kitts Nevis and Friends Association
Mr. A.R. Khan (co-opted member)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. R. Fletcher, Chairman, Bedfordshire Probation Board

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Mr. M. Suleman (Pakistan Kashmir Welfare Association), Mr. M.K. Anwar (co-opted member) and Mr. B.A. Chaudhri (United Pakistan Welfare Association).

18 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That, subject to the following correction:

Minute 15 – The addition of a fourth bullet point to read: "Member organisations of the Race Advisory Forum receiving grant funding from the Council should be obliged to attend meetings of the Forum",

the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 5th April, 2004 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

19 PRESENTATION BY MR. R. FLETCHER, CHAIRMAN, BEDFORDSHIRE PROBATION BOARD (REF: 5)

The Forum received a presentation by Mr. Robin Fletcher, Chairman of the Bedfordshire Probation Board with regard to the service the Board provided to the people of Luton and Bedfordshire and its compliance with the Race Relations Act 2000.

In 2001 the Government created 42 Probation Boards in England and Wales based on a regional structure. At that time Mr. Fletcher was involved in the selection of the initial Board.

The 5 aims of the Probation Board are:

- duty to protect the public

- meeting stringent targets in relation to the reduction of re-offenders
- responsibility for proper punishment
- awareness of crime on public
- rehabilitation of offenders

About 220 people were employed in the service and approximately 50 to 60 of those were professional probation officers.

The Bedfordshire Probation Board consisted of 12 people, a chief officer and a Chair. There were 5 ethnic minority representatives on the Board who had played a tremendous part and Mr. Fletcher commented that he was quite proud of that ethnic representation.

Performance targets were in place with regard to drug testing orders, enforcement, the provision of basic skills to offenders and victim contact. Mr. Fletcher provided information as to how the Board was currently measuring up to those targets.

A progress report had been made to the Home Secretary with regard to Race Equality Schemes, in particular the career progression of staff and the recruitment of ethnic minorities. In addition, the Board was required to develop policies in relation to recruitment and retention.

The Board was also required to review the impact of the Race Relations Act 2000 and a second report was currently in progress. The Board had met with the Bedford Race Equality Council but Mr. Fletcher commented that he wished to have the Race Advisory Forum's assistance with the development of diversity policies.

Luton had a very substantial Probation Board office and a hostel. Mr. Fletcher commented that hostels played a vital role in respect of the introduction of prisoners back into the community.

Mr. Fletcher was the Chair of the Eastern Region Consortium which is a training board for eastern England. He reported that the training for Probation Officers was very good which meant that they came out well qualified to carry out the job.

In relation to the training of staff, the Chair enquired what the training curriculum consisted of and whether staff were trained to deal with different cultural/religious backgrounds.

Mr. Fletcher responded that the training consisted of the study for a degree over 2 years and an NVQ4. There was also practical training involved. He added that there were trainees from ethnic backgrounds although he didn't think there were enough. He commented that he would be interested in the Forum's views of how people could be attracted to the service.

The Vice-Chair commented that when it came to the delivery of services, experience was far more important and further commented that any gaps in their understanding/training should be identified.

She suggested that if an event was held, e.g. a job fair, then invitations could be extended to the Race Advisory Forum, high schools, etc. who could bring people to that event.

The Chair commented that there was a misconception with regard to the salary in the probation service. Mr. Fletcher reported that salaries had improved tremendously over the last few years.

A member commented that it was very important to train officers, particularly on cultural grounds.

A member enquired which basic skills were provided to offenders, how those skills were selected and to what extent were they successful.

Mr. Fletcher responded that he understood the analysis of needs was undertaken very carefully and tailored for each individual. It was difficult to comment with regard to the effectiveness of those basic skills.

The Vice-Chair commented that basic reading and writing skills should be provided to all.

Mr. Fletcher reported that staff had received training with regard to race equality impact assessments. In addition, 5 events had been held with regard to value and diversity training for staff.

A member commented that many youth workers had left their posts to work within the Drug Testing Order service. Mr. Fletcher responded that he was not aware of that and requested further information on the issue.

Mr. Fletcher reported that an event was currently being organised to explain the work the Probation Board was undertaking. He extended an invitation to members of the Race Advisory Forum to attend although a date had not yet been determined.

The Vice-Chair suggested that representatives of voluntary sector organisations who dealt with youth issues should be invited.

Resolved: That Mr. Fletcher be thanked for his presentation.

20 ROLE OF DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES (REF: 6.1)

Jo Cleary, Director of Housing and Social Services, informed members that she had been in post for approximately 9 months. She had previously held a post within the Social Services Inspectorate.

She commented that in coming to Luton she felt there was a lot of vibrancy, creativity and highly committed staff.

One issue for the department was the employment of ethnic minorities. Although the department had the highest percentage in that area she didn't think it was brilliant given the nature of the communities served.

Jo Cleary reported that over the last 5 years she had been part of a national programme for the development of black managers in social services. She had been a mentor to about 5 black managers. It was about giving people opportunities to start planning their careers and was not just mentoring but supporting people as well. She added that she was very committed to it.

Members were informed that with effect from April, 2005 2 new departments would be created - Children and Learning and Housing and Community Living.

The vision for Housing and Community Living was that everyone lived in communities and the concept was that access meant access for all. Jo Cleary reported that she wished to make it easier for services to be accessed. She added that there was a real opportunity to develop the new department to see how opportunities for people to access services in different ways could best be maximised.

Jo Cleary read out to members some of the comments made by the Social Services Inspectorate following the joint review of social services.

In terms of race it was integral to how people's needs were assessed.

Members were advised that the Black Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy would be resurrected and focus groups were planned to assess what current and future needs were.

Currently the Council operated African Caribbean Elders and Asian Elders Working Groups which were forums established to identify gaps in service provision.

The Chair commented that there was a lack of a meals on wheels service for the Asian community but that he understood it was intended to restart the service again with better provision.

The Vice-Chair requested a simple list of strengths and weaknesses on the basis of inspection reports.

The Vice-Chair reported that when consultation was undertaken it was very important to reach out and approach women in Asian communities.

She suggested that Jo Cleary should look at the sections contained in the Council's Community Plan with regard to housing/services.

A member enquired if any significant deficiencies with regard to the delivery of services had been identified and how it was intended to improve them.

Jo Cleary responded that she had found people were really concentrating their efforts on service delivery and that the biggest difficulties were around there not enough capacity in the department to strategically plan forward or manage performance. She added that not enough funding was available to meet the demands of the service.

A member referred to the percentages of ethnicity in the department and enquired whether she felt they were too low.

Jo Cleary responded that she did feel they were too low but the department had been undertaking a lot of work with local job fairs and had recently recruited a number of Asian social workers.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

**21 WORKFORCE SURVEY RESULTS 2003 ALL DEPARTMENTS
(EXCLUDING SCHOOLS) (REF: 7.1)**

Kath Huth, on behalf of the Head of Human Resources, reported on workforce data for 2003/4 and comparisons with the results of the previous years' data.

The information provided would be used to assist in the monitoring of human resource strategies, review the Council's equal opportunities strategy and employment targets and provide the framework for the development of any action plan for addressing under-representation.

Members were informed that the monitoring of sexual orientation and religion/faitb/belief had been included in this year's workforce survey.

Kath Huth reported that the trend was positive and ethnicity figures were gradually increasing.

A member enquired how part-time employees were treated in the data collected. Kath Huth responded although part-time employees were included in the data the proportions were not.

A member enquired what period the return covered. Kath Huth responded that it covered the period April to March each year which matched the timing of the report submitted to central government with regard to Audit Commission Performance Indicators.

A member raised concern that when the results were compiled no independent verification took place which could lead to the results not being fairly dealt with/scrutinised correctly.

Val Grant, the Head of Equalities, reported that the information on employees was already held by the Council and that verification forms were sent out for employees to confirm.

Kath Huth responded that she hadn't ever received a request with regard to verification but that she was happy for any external organisation

undertake this. She added that she was confident that the figures produced were correct.

Willy White, Department of Lifelong Learning, commented that systems were checked by auditors to ensure that they were valid, accurate and robust.

The Chair enquired what measures were in place to prevent manipulation of the figures.

Kath Huth responded that access to the data was strictly limited and those who did have access to it were made aware of its confidentiality.

A member referred to the data with regard to employees' length of service and commented that the percentages were high for those under 5 years. She enquired whether the costs of recruitment and training for those employees were recovered.

Kath Huth acknowledged that they were high and reported that some of the reasons for this were end of apprenticeship, end of temporary employment, internal move, normal age retirement and dismissal, pay and benefits and lack of training/career opportunities. She said that the Council had recognised this and it was attempting to address the issue.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Head of Human Resources be requested to ensure that the statistical information presented to the Forum in tabular form all be expressed as percentage figures in the future and include proportions of part-time employees.

(iii) That the Head of Human Resources be requested to submit to the Forum information on (a) the number of people who collect the data and the ethnicity breakdown of them and (b) figures relating to dismissal from posts.

22 RECRUITMENT STATISTICS – JULY 2002 TO DECEMBER 2003 ALL DEPARTMENTS (EXCLUDING SCHOOLS) (REF: 7.2)

Kath Huth reported on recruitment statistics for the period 1st July, 2002 to 31st December, 2003.

The purpose of the statistics was to assist the Council in monitoring its human resource strategies, particularly those related to equal opportunities in employment.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

23 WORKFORCE COMPOSITION IN SCHOOLS 2003 (REF: 8.1)

The Director of Lifelong Learning reported with regard to the current composition of the workforce in schools and the comparison of outcomes with previous years.

The Chair enquired whether recruitment abroad was still taking place and whether there were plans for Asia. Willy White responded that it was in Canada, Australia and Greece but there had been no suggestion of Asia. He added that they already had many Asian people who worked in Luton schools.

A member enquired whether existing teaching assistants could be upgraded to teachers through teaching qualifications. Willy White responded that a significant number of teaching assistants did not wish to become teachers. Those who did however were encouraged and had the benefit of a career progression scheme, various courses and in some instances financial support.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Director of Lifelong Learning be requested to present future data broken down between schools.

24 FEASIBILITY STUDY ON EQUALITY AGENCY FOR LUTON (REF: 9.1)

The Head of Equalities reported with regard to the progress made to date in further exploring the possibility of the establishment of a race equality agency in Luton.

Members were advised that the Council had secured funding in the sum of £15,000 from the Commission for Racial Equality for a feasibility study to be undertaken. The study would gather data in order to prepare a report which was intended to be completed by March, 2005.

It was the intention to survey 550 organisations, held on a database of the Luton Assembly, by questionnaire which would be followed up with detailed interviews.

Val Grant reported that an Equality Agency Pilot Steering Group had been established which met approximately every four weeks. She added that the Steering Group comprised of a good cross-section of groups.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Head of Equalities be requested to invite the consultants undertaking the feasibility study to a future meeting of the Forum.

25 TERMS OF REFERENCE PROGRESS REPORT (REF: 10.1)

The Chair reported that the Terms of Reference Working Group had not yet met and he sought a date from members of the Group.

Resolved: That a meeting of the Terms of Reference Working Group be held on Thursday, 26th August, 2004 commencing at 3pm in the Town Hall.

26 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION AT FUTURE MEETINGS (REF: 11)

- Equality Agency progress report
- further information requested regarding recruitment statistics
- presentation by a key speaker

27 RACE ADVISORY FORUM AGENDAS (REF: 12.1)

A member raised concerned that there was not enough time at meetings of the Forum to consider all agenda items.

The Democratic Services Officer reported that the Disability Advisory and Access Forum's agendas were timed and suggested that the Race Advisory Forum might wish to try the same approach.

Resolved: That the Democratic Services Section be requested to trial a timed agenda for the next meeting of the Race Advisory Forum.

(The meeting ended at 9.45 p.m.)