

**Action Notes of the Equalities and Communities Theme Group held on  
Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

**Present:**

Sue Bent, Charley Gibbons, June Jeffrey, Barbara Hay, Margaret Edwards, Bill Hall, Jody Gordon, Joy Warren, Alison Quigley, Janita Wesson, John Payne, Teresa Staniewicz, Laura Slegg and Debbie Briggs

**In Attendance:** Rececca Young, Steve Stewart

**Apologies:**

Cllr Kevin Foster, Balbir Sohal, Sally Giles, Supt Jim Titley, Richard Tomlins, June Morley, Alison Porter, Chaman Verma, CEMAP, Jenni Venn, Vicky Millard, Dave Reilly and Surindar Nagra

Debbie Briggs opened the meeting and welcomed Barbara Hay, the new Equality and Diversity Manager for UHCW, and Margaret Edwards, the Interim Older People's Partnership Manager to the group. Debbie also welcomed Rebecca Young who had come to talk to the group about embedding Equality and Cohesion into the Economy, Learning, Skills and Employment theme of the Local Area Agreement (Agenda item 5). Round the table introductions then took place.

**1. Notes of the previous meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record. June Jeffrey asked whether future meetings would commence at the earlier start time at 1.30pm. Debbie asked whether people preferred the earlier start time and the general consensus was that this is better for people, although June said that she would sometimes have difficulty getting to meetings for 1.30pm if she had another meeting immediately prior to this. Sue explained that at the last few meetings, literally half the group had left the meeting at 3.30pm and we had not been able to give the last agenda item a fair hearing. We had agreed to change the time of the meeting on a trial basis to accommodate those people who had to leave earlier. It was agreed that the next meeting, which will take place on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2009, will start at 1.30pm and that we would continue to monitor this.

**2. Monitoring Equalities in the Local Area Agreement (LAA)**

Debbie Briggs took the group through the paper she had circulated in advance of the meeting, looking at monitoring equalities in the Local Area Agreement.

Debbie explained that a draft basket of indicators has been pulled together which will enable us to monitor the extent to which equality of opportunity is being delivered through the Local Area Agreement. This was developed through initial discussions between the Council's performance management team and the LAA Indicator owners. The basket will be developed over time and informed by the discussions that we will be having with the LAA lead officers over our next few meetings.

A half year progress report had also been circulated against the basket and Debbie asked the group if there were any questions in relation to this. Charley Gibbons asked how the data was collected and the intervals at which data would be available against these indicators. Debbie explained that this will vary from indicator to indicator, for example, some are measured annually such as indicators relating to educational attainment or measured by survey data, whereas others can be monitored quarterly. Debbie said that progress would be reported to the Theme Group on a half-yearly basis.

**3. Embedding Equalities and Cohesion into the LAA – Presentation and Discussion about the Economy, Learning, Skills and Employment Theme**

Sue welcomed Rebecca Young and Steve Stewart to the meeting, and particularly thanked them for agreeing to be the first theme for us to look at.

Rebecca took the group through some slides (attached) outlining the background to the Economy, Learning, Skills and Employment (ELSE) Theme Group and the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) theme it contributes to. There are 6 indicators that fall within this theme – 3 relating to improving skill levels; 2 relating to employment in relation to disadvantaged groups and 1 relating to young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). In addition, there is also an indicator around new business registrations although there is not currently a target for this indicator.

Each of these indicators is inherently about equalities, and Rebecca took the group through the indicators in more detail. Rebecca highlighted the fact that the targets were agreed with the Government in May/June 2008 and that we are now in a completely different world due to the economic downturn and we are faced with different client groups. It is important to make better use of our resources to help a wider client base.

Steve said that all the evidence shows that the more highly skilled and educated you are, the greater your earnings, security of employment and health is likely to be and the less chance you have of going into prison. The indicators around this are therefore clearly very important. GCSE attainment in the city is at the highest level it has ever been. However, other countries are overtaking us and we are now living in a very global world. It is therefore important to up-skill our people and attract jobs into the city.

Figures relating to attainment at levels 2, 3, and 4 (GCSE, A Level and degree level or equivalent) are measured through the household survey. The challenge for us is to identify which groups are not reaching the attainment levels.

In terms of NEETs, the analysis undertaken is very intense. There are 700 young people in the NEETs category and we know that there is an over-representation of dual heritage young people and white boys in this category. This is a very different scenario to 20 years ago. Joy Warren identified that this is the same group of working class white boys identified by Trevor Phillips.

Barbara Hay said that we should be concerned about what these statistics will look like in 5-10 years time. How many of these white boys will be in jobs in 5-10 years and how many BME young people will not? Bill Hall said that we can see this happening now as Black African; African Caribbean and Dual Heritage people are far more likely to be unemployed. Steve confirmed that this is an issue and whilst the numbers may be small, the issues are not.

Steve said that a key indication of economic growth is attainment at Level 4, which is degree level or equivalent. This is the level of skills that will attract business into the city. The number of people 'signing on' that are very highly qualified is increasing, and these people will be at the front of the queue for jobs. The ELSE group need to focus on getting all groups into work. Bill said that there is an issue in that people tend to have a value of what they are worth and may not want to work for £5 per hour. Joy Warren also said that there is an issue in that the Job Centres do not get 'high flying' jobs and therefore some people do not get the support they need to get back into work. Steve said that a further issue is that the graduate job market is drying up and the national graduate recruitment advice is to get into any job to demonstrate that you have got a positive attitude.

Barbara Hay said that people with learning difficulties are also a growing group and it is important not to leave this group behind. It is important to further break this group down. There are a number of BME young people classed as having a learning disability or autistic spectrum and it is important to unpick this further. There are also large numbers of African Caribbean boys classed as Asperger's or autistic spectrum. Rebecca said that there are crossovers for the ELSE group with the education sector and the challenge is about making greater links with the education sector, health, housing, etc.

Within Regeneration Services there is a team working with people with learning disabilities and looking at different ways to support people including work placements, and enabling people to get closer to the labour market.

Charley Gibbons asked whether volunteering is measured. Steve said that there are a great number of positive benefits to volunteering. In the past, if somebody did 16 hours of volunteering it could take them out of the NEETs category, however, the Government has changed this and volunteering is no longer classed as positive activity in the same way. This is very frustrating as it is still a wonderful route for some young people. It is a challenge for us to offer more volunteering opportunities for adults. If there are no suitable jobs out there for people then volunteering will help people to gain skills, confidence and will ultimately help them to find employment when the economic situation improves. Sue said that the time feels right to embrace this and to do something different. We could also look at providing volunteering opportunities for graduates which will really use their skills.

Steve said that funding is needed to put the infrastructure in place and then we would need to get partners together to explore the value in this. Charley said that the last 2 volunteers the Citizen's Advice Bureau have appointed have been long term unemployed and they are both now in jobs. It is important to formalise the training we give to volunteers so that it is recognised by prospective employers. Steve said that this may also enable organisations to obtain funding as a training provider, and we could explore the possibility of running, for example, an apprenticeship in Advice Services or Community Apprenticeships. This would be very effective and would provide good value for money. Steve also said that as of last week, there is a new National Apprenticeship Service. This will come into formal operation from April and there will be no age restrictions. The payment structure for apprenticeships has also changed and there is now a minimum payment of £80 per week, with no maximum limit. Margaret Edwards said that it is very positive that there is no longer an age limit as many people will now work much later in order to support themselves economically.

Sue said that we need to think about the plans the ELSE group has and ensure that they are fully embracing equality and cohesion. There is a lot of activity which targets specific groups and we need to ensure that the needs of priority groups are being met. Sue asked whether the data is being broken down and considered as part of the strategic planning. Rebecca said that the ELSE group are beginning to do this although there are ongoing issues relating to data sharing and data protection. The ELSE group are looking at ways of getting round those restrictions in order to track the distance travelled by the most disadvantaged client groups and what difference we are making. Sue said that it would be interesting for the group to see how the information can be broken down and what the issues really are. Steve assured the group that the information is broken down in the right places and knows what the challenges are. Judgements have been made about targeting particular groups and it is important to measure the impact as a result of this.

Steve agreed to take back the need to be transparent about where the break down information is available and to be clear about where there are gaps in information and what is going to be done about this.

Barbara said that during this time where people are losing their jobs it is important to help people to access information relating to the benefits they are entitled to, perhaps using community radio, local newspapers etc. It is important to take a more holistic approach to this and to put out positive messages as many people are not aware what they are entitled to. Rebecca said that a new Redundancy Park is being produced and she agreed to explore the possibility of including some information relating to benefits in this pack.

Sue thanked Steve and Rebecca for a very interesting discussion and said that it was very positive that there are some actions we can take away from this.

Action	Timescale	Who
It was agreed that data relating to NI 152 looking at working age people on out of work benefits is broken down further and reported back to the group.	As part of year end reporting (May/June 09)	Debbie Briggs/ Rebecca Young
<p>It was agreed that further work would be done to explore the possibility of establishing a volunteering summit.</p> <p>Steve and Rebecca agreed to talk this up within the ELSE Group and the wider Partnership and also to ask Dawn Ford to raise this as part of the planned discussion on the economic downturn with a view to putting a proposition on the table regarding the establishment of a Volunteering Summit facilitated by the Partnership.</p>	March 2009	Steve Stewart/ Rebecca Young/ Dawn Ford
Rebecca agreed to explore the possibility of including information relating to accessing benefits in the new Redundancy pack.	February 2009	Rebecca Young

#### 4. Refugee Week

John Payne said that he would like to engage the group in Refugee Week 2009. A report feeding back on Refugee Week 2008 had been circulated prior to the meeting and John said that the programme for 2009 needs more strategic support. In 2008, the programme was put together by enthusiastic individuals but was not owned by the City or the Partnership. Planning for 2009 has started and people like the links to the Positive Images Festival.

There has also been a pack of engagement with new communities in the past. This has been discussed with the New Communities Forum and there is a willingness to get involved but resources are needed to put events on and to make this effective.

In 2008, the Banner Theatre Company was involved in Refugee Week and the Trade Unions have made a financial contribution to include this in the programme again for 2009. Additional funding is needed to make this work.

John asked the group how we can better embed this as a city and also if anyone had any suggestions to access funding to enable us to get new communities involved.

Bill Hall suggested that this could link to other events such as Peace Month, Black History Month, Positive Images, International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, etc, as this would make it more strategic and would be a more efficient use of resources. Alison Quigley also suggested that the focal point could be the Events Team within Culture and Leisure, although it was recognised that the Culture and Leisure budget has also been cut.

Sue said that there appeared to be 3 gaps: there is no strategic overview across the city; there is no agreed delivery mechanism to pull together the existing good will and add to it and there is no agreed way to fund it. One option would be to think about accessing Trust Funds and bid for money to help with this. Sue said that there is a danger in the Council embracing this too much as this cut result in cutting off other potential funding sources.

Laura Slegg suggested that resources could be pooled and we could have one larger scale event annually. Concern was expressed that this could result in losing focus and also some of these events are tied to national dates.

Sue said that we could think about asking people to volunteer to support the steering group and this group could think about making a formal request for this to be looked at as part of the Community Cohesion Strategy.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Who</b>
Funding for Refugee Week currently comes from within Neighbourhood Management and Sue agreed to speak to Jenni Venn to identify whether any other money may be available to support Refugee Week.	January 2009	Sue Bent
<b>5. "Making Coventry a More Equal and Cohesive City" - Update</b>		
<p>A sub group of this group met to go through the draft guidance and final feedback has now been passed to Andrew Harrison. The final version of the guidance will be brought to the next meeting of this group.</p> <p>Sue and Debbie have also talked to Theme Group Leaders and Advisors in relation to this and they have asked us to take this to each of the other Theme Groups. The final guidance will also be taken back to Theme Group Leaders and Advisors.</p> <p>Debbie thanked everyone who contributed to the sub group to look at the guidance.</p>		
<b>6. Sharing Good Practice</b>		
Alison Quigley has been on a visit to Auschwitz and would like to feed back about this.		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Who</b>
It was agreed that Alison would feed back to the Partnership Board about her visit and look at organising a Showcase event. This could perhaps be fed back at the wider reference group.	February 2009	Alison Quigley
<b>7. Any Other Business</b>		
There was no further business to be discussed.		
<b>Future Meetings</b>		
The next meeting will take place on 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2009, from 1.30 – 3.30pm at St Peter's Community Centre.		