

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

SHROPSHIRE PARTNERSHIP EQUALITIES FORUM

1 Purpose of Report

To request that the Fire Authority agree to funding for the Equalities Forum and give background information around this request for funding.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is requested to agree to provide £5,000 funding to the Equalities Forum for 2006/07, to be funded from the general reserve, in line with the request that this be used specifically towards the work of the Forum.

3 Background

Following the closure of the Race Equality Council, which covered the whole of Shropshire, on request of Shropshire County Council and Borough of Telford & Wrekin, an independent review was undertaken by Sushel Ohri Associates Ltd. of race and diversity infrastructures to establish what was now required. This review recommended two different types of structure, which are:

- Shropshire County Council creates an Equalities Forum; and
- Borough of Telford & Wrekin sets up a Race Equality and Diversity Group.

A full copy of the report '**Review of Race Infrastructure in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire – Building Capacity to make a Difference**' is available on request.

In May 2003 Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority committed £5,000 per year to the Race Equality Council for a post dedicated to dealing with racial harassment, provided that a satisfactory service level agreement was provided. This payment was never made as a service level agreement was not forthcoming and the Council was eventually dissolved.



4 Current Status

The Shropshire Partnership has requested funding for the Equalities Forum from partner organisations in order to run this group. We have received a letter requesting £5,000 (2006/07) this letter is attached at Appendix A.

To summarise, the letter states that the group's work programmes includes:

- Cross partner awareness training;
- Establishment of a Hate Crime Task Group;
- Opportunity fund, awards programme;
- Equalities festivals and events;
- Equality and Diversity post – already established; and
- Improving communications.

Other organisations that are providing funding to this group are:

- County and District Councils £10,000 each; and
- West Mercia Constabulary £5,000.

Further information on the Equalities Forum can be found in the document '**Work Programme for Diversity and Equality**' (at Appendix B), which was agreed at the public service board meeting.

5 Benefits to Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

- It will show the Fire Authority's commitment to race and diversity issues.
- It will ensure involvement of the Fire Authority in partnership projects.
- It will help to achieve the Fire Authority's strategic aims and objectives through partnership/community working.
- The Equalities Forum and its members will be able to advise us on race and equalities issues.
- It will help to improve relations throughout the County.
- It aligns with the Government's agenda to promote community cohesion, social inclusion and partnership working.
- It will help the Fire Authority to develop and respond to the needs of its communities.
- It will assist access to the hard to reach groups.
- It will allow us to access a wider range of people for consultation.

6 Situation with the Borough of Telford & Wrekin

We have already received a request from the Borough of Telford & Wrekin for their Race Equality and Diversity Group, which was agreed at the last Fire Authority meeting, held on 14 December 2005.

7 Legal Comment

Under the Race Relations Act 2000, all public authorities have a duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. They are also required to publish a race equality scheme, whereby they state how they will meet the general duty of the Act.



The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which brought in changes in October 2004, now includes employees in operational roles. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 will be introducing a new requirement on public authorities in 2006 to eliminate discrimination against, and harassment of, disabled people; promote equality of opportunity for disabled people; promote positive attitudes to disabled people; and encourage disabled people to take part in public life. The Service will also be required to produce a disability equality scheme, detailing how it will meet these requirements.

The Employment Equality Regulations (Religion or Belief) 2003 protect people from; discrimination on grounds of religion or belief both direct and indirect, discrimination by way of victimisation and harassment on grounds of religion or belief. It also protects applicants and employees in employment

8 Financial Implications

A single payment of £5,000 for 2006/07 has been requested. If agreed, this can be found from the general reserve without having future budgetary commitments. Efforts are being made to find this money from existing budgets in 2005/06.

This may be an annual request, which would then be subject to consideration as part of the 2007/08 process.

9 Equality and Diversity Implications

Funding the Equalities Forum will show the Fire Authority's commitment to Equality and Diversity, and that it values the views of the community and to work in partnership. It will also help the Fire Authority to achieve its Best Value Performance Indicators and the targets set in the National Framework Document.

10 Appendices

Appendix A Letter of 18 January 2006 from Shropshire Partnership requesting funding for the Equalities Forum

Appendix B Shropshire Partnership Public Service Board Meeting 18 July 2005 Item 7 - Work Programme for Diversity and Equality

11 Background Papers

Report commissioned by Borough of Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire County Council – Review of Race Infrastructure in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire – Building Capacity to Make a Difference. (Sushel Ohri Associated Ltd.)

For further information about this report please contact Natalie Hill, Equality and Diversity Officer, on 01743 260236.



Alan Taylor
Chief Fire Officer
Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
Brigade Head Quarters
St Michael Street
Shrewsbury
SY1 2HJ

18 January 2006

Dear Mr Taylor

Request Funding of £5,000 – Shropshire Partnership Equalities Forum

Following discussion between David Bell of the Shropshire Partnership with Paul Raymond and Natalie Hill I write to request sum of £5,000 (2006-2007) to support the work of the Shropshire Partnership Equalities Forum. We are very grateful for your support so far,

As you will be aware the need to address Shropshire's small but growing black and minority ethnic and other diversity and equality communities has been identified in the research carried out by Sushel Ohri "Review of Race Infrastructure in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire" (October 2004), and more recently in research carried out for the Community Council by Aston University "Study into the needs of BME people living and working in Shropshire" (August 2005).

As a result of this the Partnership established the Equalities Forum to give wide representation to local BME and D&E communities and to provide a voice on local needs. The Forum has established a work programme agreed by the Local Strategic Partnership to be taken forward by the forum which includes:

- Development of a cross partner awareness training programme (Being developed).
- Establishment of a Hate Crime Task Group and delivery of a multi-agency protocol for the wider reporting of hate crime, incidents and provision for case work with victims and action to address hate crime (To be in place by September 2006).
- An "opportunity fund" small awards programme (two awards made and further applications to be appraised)
- Funding for annual "equalities" festivals and events (An events programme being developed)
- Operation and development of the Equalities Forum and Diversity & Equality post. (Established but needing development)
- Improving communications to BME & D&E communities (including web, publicity and translation).

Equality targets have also been included in the new Local Area Agreement and performance on the work programme and targets will be part of the performance management arrangements to be quarterly reported to the Public Service Board and Management Group.

The county and district councils have agreed to contribute £10,000 each from second homes council tax and West Mercia Constabulary has also earmarked £5,000 specifically towards the work of the forum and I would ask the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to do the same.

I hope that this information (and the enclosed workplan) will support this application. My colleague David Bell would be happy to provide any further information required.

Yours sincerely

Celia Bahrami
Director



PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD

DATE OF MEETING: 18 JULY 2005

ITEM

7

Item name: Work Programme for Diversity and Equality

Author: David Bell

Contact details: david.bell@shropshire-cc.gov.uk, 01743 252248

Recommendation:

1. That the PSB agrees the work programme for 2005 –2006 with funding as agreed
2. That the PSB agrees in principle to the allocation of similar funding for future years subject to:
3. Agreement of an annual report on progress and expenditure of resources
4. Annual agreement to the workplan for each following year

1. Introduction

1. The Public Service Board agreed on the 25th May to an allocation of £10,000 from each District and Borough allocation of the Second Homes Tax to provide a budget for a work programme for Diversity and Equality for the year 2005/06. Also the PSB agreed to consider an on-going allocation subject to agreement of a satisfactory work programme 2005/6 and for future work arrangements.
2. This follows previous LSP Management Group agreement to the recommendations of the Review of Race Infrastructure (20.8.04), the establishment of the 35 member, Equalities Forum (31.3.05), a common Equalities Statement and the agreement of Corporate Equalities statements by all Shropshire councils.
3. "Promoting Diversity & Social Inclusion" was identified as a top priority in Shropshire's Integrated Community Strategy (2002/05) and in the Shropshire Partnership Strategy (2005/10) and the Countywide Strategy (2005/10).
4. The decision of the Public Service Board was reported to the Equalities Forum (14.6.05) and a Sub Group has been formed to develop the enclosed work programme. The Forum supports this request for future funding arrangements.

2. Summary of the 2005/6 Work Programme

1. The work programme has been developed as a result of work with the Equalities Forum, IDeA, the Community Council, the CAB, SCC, organisation "champions" and focus groups and through discussions 2004/5.
2. The work programme seeks to support the relevant recommendations of the Review of Race Infrastructure.
3. The work programme:
 - 3.1. A cross partner awareness training programme
 - 3.2. An incident reporting line and evidence databank
 - 3.3. An "opportunity fund" small grants programme
 - 3.4. Funding for an annual "equalities" festival/conference
 - 3.5. Operating budget for the Equalities Forum and Diversity Officer
 - 3.6. Improving communications including: web, leaflets and newsletter

4. Details of each aspect of the work programme, evidence of need and costing are set out below:

5. Detailed Work Programme and Costings

4.1. A cross partner awareness training programme

Shropshire's Rural Community Council have established a voluntary sector equalities group, established a Forum sub committee on training and set out to audit existing training provision together with commissioning a survey of BME contact with voluntary sector groups. A number of existing partners currently have staff induction and awareness programmes e.g. SCC and the Police. WMP have established a 3-stage process and sought to include Diversity and Equality community representatives in Police training. However, study shows the quality of training to be variable and many partners have yet to establish or resource equalities awareness training. The Equalities Forum seeks resources to:

- Map existing equalities awareness training, evaluate quality and establish baseline standards through sharing good practice.
- Provide resources to ensure that all partners and sectors have access to high quality equality awareness training at induction and later stages.
- Ensure that such training is provided to front line staff to ensure that BME & D&E clients receive high quality customer focused services on an equal basis.
- To promote good practice and innovation including enabling BME & Diversity Equality access to training to increase shared awareness.
- Ensure that trainers share good practice and gain skills in line with on going changes in legislation and practice.

4.2. An incident reporting line and evidence database

Hate crime is commonly associated with prejudice against particular individuals such as those from minority ethnic groups or hate based on homophobia. The 2004 Crime, Disorder and Substance Misuse Audit recorded 622 hate crime incidents between January 2001 and December 2003 (offences include assault, harassment, and criminal damage). 64% of hate crimes were racially aggravated.

Shrewsbury and Atcham experienced the majority of hate crimes. South Shropshire has seen a substantial rise in hate crime from 2001 –2004. While in some areas rates have fallen the number and nature of reported incidents causes concern. 50% of all racially aggravated crimes were recorded in Shrewsbury and Atcham, 17.7% in North Shropshire, 14.6% in Oswestry, 11.5% in South Shropshire and 6.2% in Bridgnorth. Concern is highlighted by the Bengali community and bullying and intimidation and hate graffiti have also been identified as an important issues including by young people. Few organisations exist to support victims of hate crime.

In addition to serious reported incidents, the Police and other agencies are aware that much hate crime goes unreported to the Police and an alternative reporting line and recording system is required to record the incidence and type of hate and associated incidents affecting all Diversity & Equality communities. The CAB and partner advice agencies are working to develop alternative provision but need resources to undertake a feasibility study, develop an action plan and implement the service.

4.3 An “Opportunity Fund” and small grants programme

A majority of Boroughs & Districts have Opportunity Funds and the Regeneration Action Plans have funded “community chests” to support local initiatives. These have been very successful, encouraged innovation and are oversubscribed.

Work through the Equalities and Voluntary Sector Forums have shown that a large number of Diversity & Equality groups have very limited resources, yet supply a high level of support, information and assistance to their communities. This is very cost effective and is likely to provide a considerable saving to other local and county services. A number of such small services have accommodation difficulties, problems with costs of communications, providing services and supporting volunteers.

It is proposed that a small Diversity & Equality opportunities fund be established with the operating and application principles of the local opportunity funds/community chests with applications considered by a sub group of the Equalities Forum, agreed by the whole Forum and reported to the Management Group.

4.4. Funding for an annual Equalities Festival, conferences and events

The Safer Shropshire Partnership Strategy 2004/2008 sets the following outcomes to be achieved:

- A more tolerant society in which diversity is celebrated rather than the cause of victimisation
- A reduction in the fear of hate crime

Events like the Runga – Rung Festival (Craven Arms) attended by over 3,500 local residents, celebrate the culture of the local Asian community and bring together all ages and cultures in the market town and its hinterland. This spreads understanding and encourages confidence. Such events build bridges, reduce fear, grow community cohesion and undermine the grounds for prejudice and discrimination and so reduce hate and crime.

The success of Runga – Rung (and similar festivals and events in Shropshire and neighbouring counties) demonstrate good practice and what works. A successful festival or event spreads information and enjoyment and undoubtedly accelerates acceptance of diversity and equality. The principles the Forum would seek to follow are:

- To build on the experience and good practice of other Shropshire and regional festivals and events e.g. working closely with the police and councils.
- To grow an annual “Equalities event” in Shropshire based around a relevant cultural date or celebration.
- To highlight different cultural and equalities issues each year and hold events in district locations e.g. disability, older people, the Bangladeshi community etc.

4.5. Operating Budget for the Equalities Forum and Diversity Officer

The Partnership Management Group and Public Sector Board plus staff, administrative and main LSP communications costs take up the main budget. The Equalities Forum has over 35 voluntary members, meets 4 times a year, has sub groups and is the main work forum for Diversity and Equality, meeting the

expectations of legislation, the Regional Assembly, partners and the local diversity and equality communities. A small operating budget is required to be used at the discretion of the Vice Chair to:

- Support access and other costs of members of the Forum who are disabled and have other needs in attending Forum meetings and supporting its activities
- To support the LSP side of costs for Kal Parknash the SCC/LSP Diversity Officer and her work programme for the Forum and LSP
- To support the administrative costs of the Forum.

4.6 Improving Communication

The need to continually improve communication through the Partnership has been recognised and this is particularly important in the field of Diversity and Equality and to meet the need to communicate in relevant languages. While news on equalities is summarised in general Partnership newsletters a number of special publications may be required.

- A Shropshire Partnership/Equalities form leaflet with information and contacts
- Periodic newsletters on equality themes with translation
- A web site or section on the SP or Partners websites dedicated to Equality news and information.
- Publicity for events and festivals

5. **Budget 2005/6**

A cross partner training/awareness programme	£10,000
Incident reporting line and evidence database	£15,000
Opportunity fund and small grants programme	£15,000
Funding for an annual equalities festival and events	£10,000
Operating budget for the Equalities Forum and Diversity Officer	£10,000
Improving communications	£ 5,000
Total	£65,000