

Report

5

Report to:	Equal Opportunities Forum
Date of Meeting:	15 March 2011
Report by:	Executive Director (Corporate Resources)

Subject:	Employee Forums
----------	------------------------

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ update the Forum on the development of the employee forums

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the contents of the report be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The purpose of the Council's employee forums is to help employees balance work and home life. They allow employees to share experiences and find solutions to common problems. It is also a chance to raise awareness within the Council of individuals needs so as to improve our working practices and policies.
- 3.2. The forums are open to all employees who consider them relevant to their own individual circumstance. All can attend for personal reasons or because they are looking for support for a particular situation. The Council supports the forums by providing paid time off for employees to attend.
- 3.3. Since 1996, there has been a Disability Forum and a Black and Minority Ethnic Employee Forum. In 2000, a working parents and carers forum was also established and ran successfully until 2007.
- 3.4. The forums meet on a quarterly basis and have a strong regular attendance.

4. Forum Survey

- 4.1. In January 2010, we conducted a survey about the existing forums and also proposed that we would like to establish new ones where appropriate. The aim was to find out what employees felt was working well, what could be improved and what would make forums more accessible.
- 4.2. Over a period of four weeks, 1,677 responses were received which were overwhelmingly positive. Many felt the forums provided a safe environment to raise concerns and issues, obtain advice and reassurance from colleagues and to get a better understanding of the supports that were available to them.

- 4.3. Of those who had attended forums, 75% stated they would recommend them to others and of those who wouldn't, they wanted to see improved agenda's and a greater link to day-to-day life.
- 4.4. 55% of respondents found no barriers to attending; 22% felt they did not have enough information on the forums; 14% wouldn't want anyone to know that they were attending a forum; 10% said that they could not get time off to attend; and 5% said that they had transport difficulties.
- 4.5 Further issues relating to the forums, was a lack of awareness of their existence amongst some parts of the workforce. 36% of respondents were not aware of any of the forums. Comments provided also show that there was a general lack of understanding of what the forums were about and it is clear that some believe forums can only be attended by certain groups.

5. Forum Refresh

- 5.1 Further to the survey, a number of actions have been taken to address the concerns raised and to improve the range available to employees.
- 5.2 Firstly, the Working Parents and Carers Forum has been re-established and a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Forum has been set-up. Both are in response to the high interest in having such groups and in recognition of the benefit to the Council to have such interests represented when assessing and developing policy and practice.
- 5.3 Secondly, the Disability and Working Parents and Carers Forums are being held in the four geographical areas of South Lanarkshire. This is to improve general access to the forums both in transportation terms and time.
- 5.4 Finally, advertising for forums has been standardised so as to raise the profile of all.
- 5.5 Future developments are to introduce an intranet page for the forums where employees can obtain information such as minutes and presentations. As well as offering the opportunity to participate remotely.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. None

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. Support for forums will continue to be met from existing resources.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. There is no legal requirement to have forums however, they do assist the Council in meetings it equality duties under the Equality Act. Failure to meet the duties can carry an unlimited financial penalty.
- 8.2. There are no implications for sustainability in terms of the information contained within this report.

9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.

- 9.2. Consultation regarding the refresh of the forums was undertaken both via means of a Council-wide survey and discussion with existing forum members.

Robert McIlwain
Executive Director (Corporate Resources)

15 November 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives

- ◆ Fair and open
- ◆ People focused
- ◆ Working with and respecting others
- ◆ Excellent employer
- ◆ Tackling disadvantage and deprivation

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Simon Cameron, Diversity Advisor (Equalities)

Ext: 3886 (Tel: 01698 453886)

E-mail: simon.cameron@southlanarkshire.gov.uk