

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GROUP ON 3 JULY 2008

SUBJECT: MORAY EQUALITY FORUM

BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE THE MORAY COUNCIL

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1. The Community Engagement Committee is asked to review progress and feedback information on establishing an Equality Forum.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Community Engagement Group note the progress which has been made towards the establishment of a Moray Equality Forum.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Equalities legislation requires the Community Planning Partnership to carry out formal consultation with equalities groups. Consultation is required with regard to equalities schemes and action plans and also on impact assessments of policies and activities.
- 3.2 The Community Planning and Development Manager and the Equal Opportunities Officer are supporting the Moray Equalities Forum. A draft remit for the forum has been created and distributed to partners and the forum representatives for consideration (**Appendix 1**).
- 3.3 The forum will act as an advisory and consultative body to the Community Planning Partnership on issues relating to race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief and gender in Moray. It will also give equality groups the opportunity to raise issues of concern and will ensure that our services are meeting the needs of the community.
- 3.3 The aim of the forum is to empower those who do not have a voice, due to cultural and other barriers, to have their say on policy and procedures. The representatives of organisations will be asked to encourage the people themselves to take an active part in the forum.
- 3.4 An initial meeting took place in May and discussed the formation of the forum, the best model for engagement and who to involve. It was suggested that the majority of the work could be carried out on-line, with alternative methods to reach those that cannot or do not want to access e-mail. It was also highlighted that ideally we aim for a mix of people within the community and representatives of organisations.
- 3.5 The Community Planning and Development Manager and the Equal Opportunities Officer have been asked by the representatives of equalities groups to visit their local groups to encourage and support the forum. These meetings will take place over June and July with a meeting of the forum to be held late summer to formally establish the forum.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Community Plan / Theme Plans / Partners Plans

The Council has made a commitment to develop a culture, which encourages both equal opportunities and the observance of equal opportunities. It will also seek to improve access to services by all sectors of the community.

(a) Policy and Legal

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 states that local authorities and all other bodies participating in Community Planning should do so in a manner which encourages equal opportunities and, in particular, the observance of the equal opportunities requirements. The Community Planning Partnership has a legal duty to carry out these consultations and to gain comments on our policies and activities. The risk of not meeting our duties is prosecution for non-compliance.

(b) Resources (Financial, Risks, Staffing and Property)

There will be a requirement for additional resources arising from this report. Community Planning Partners will be asked to contribute to the running of the forum.

(d) Consultations

A wide range of equality organisations were made aware of the Forum and invited to participate in the equalities forum.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The Community Planning Partnership is required by equalities legislation to consult with equalities groups. This paper summarises progress to date in establishing an Equality Forum.

Author of Report: Fiona Simpson, Equal Opportunities Officer

Background Papers:

Ref:

Appendix 1

The Moray Equality Forum – Draft Remit

The Partnership is keen to ensure that services provided are meeting the needs of the community. Feedback from the majority is already received via the Citizens Panel, local community planning and other methods. However there is some concern that feedback is missed from those who may have other needs resulting from their age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief or sexuality. Therefore an Equalities forum is being formed so those more minority opinions and issues can be heard. It is hoped that the Forum will eventually include members from all equalities to ensure that the community is being involved. The Equalities Forum should be seen as a dynamic and innovative and be a proactive resource, positively reflecting the diversity of Moray.

The forum exists to enable equalities groups and communities to bring issues of concern to the Partnership in order that we can plan joint action. They are also a resource the Partnership can call upon to ensure an equalities perspective is included in the development of policies, strategies or services.

The purpose of the Equality Forum is to act as an advisory and consultative body to the Community Planning Partnership on issues relating to race, disability, age, sexuality, religion and gender in Moray.

Its role is to:

- co-ordinate, organise and communicate: to facilitate the inclusion of the views and voices of equality group's community's organisations, and individuals, across Moray.
- provide advice and feedback on the impact of all Community Planning Partners policies and functions
- Get involved in the writing and development of policy across the range of Community Planning responsibilities
- to make any recommendations to review or amend policies and functions as necessary
- assist in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies
- raise awareness within the Community Planning Partnership of the potential barriers placed on disadvantaged groups
- disseminate information between the partnership and equalities groups and community and to the Partnership
- bring equalities groups and service providers together to inform planning and service delivery. Develop innovative, best practice for engaging and involving equalities groups
- create various opportunities for involvement (with regard to influencing planning and service delivery)