

Position Paper on Partnership Structure in Equalities and Diversity

1. Background

In 2007 MK Council initiated a 3 year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the REC (now the Equalities Council, EC). This finishes in 2010 and we are using this opportunity to review the needs of Milton Keynes in the equality field.

2 Needs

2a Umbrella Consultation Mechanisms

Nine (9) consultation strands can be identified linked to various equality areas and the groups and individuals that are associated with them. These require different consultation arrangements and because they often bring together other groups and individuals can be called umbrella consultation mechanisms.

Within all mechanisms there is a need to (some strands have developed these):

- build up expertise in the issues faced by their strand and the range of solutions available
- develop appropriate models for consultation
- identify the hidden voices and ensure these are linked into the mainstream process
- provide a focus for consultation that brings differential voices together to consider hot topics for our communities on a regular basis
- provide support to the community within the strand in discussing and resolving issues, including facilitation and advocacy within the community and between the community and suppliers or other communities, access to information and research, and signposting to agencies
- appropriately bridge the gap between the needs for mainstream engagement and specialised consultancy

Obviously such mechanisms might also provide extra services that might or might not be commercially viable, such as specialist training, consultancy, counselling, etc.

The identified strands and their current support organisations are:

- Race (Race Equality Partnership supported by MK Equality Council)
- Disability (Disability Action Group supported by Centre for Integrated Living)
- Religion (Council of Faiths supported by MK Council)
- Young Age (Various through the youth participation team)
- Older Age (Work support by Age Concern)
- Sexual Orientation (communities supported by Q: Alliance)
- Gender (Events and strategic discussion supported by Women & Work)
- New Arrivals (Groups supported by the British Red Cross)
- Gypsy/Travellers (Gypsy & Travellers Forum supported by MK Council)

A look at the list reveals

- that the range and complexity of different strands differs
- that the requirements for support are not the same, for example the cost of practical support (such as signing) for disability consultation is larger than the costs for faith group support
- that the issues faced by each group are very varied, with different service changes having widely different impacts across the strands
- that therefore different streams require different approaches

- that some groups have secured funding from other sources for other work and some have not
- that some groups receive funded support for this function and others do not

2b Strategic Equality Partnership

There is a need for far more clarity around the role of a Strategic Equality Partnership. This fulfilled by the Milton Equality Partnership. We need:

- Informed input from the strands above who come together with the statutory agencies to consider the equality map of Milton Keynes.
- The capacity to consider strategic issues arising from differential equality legislation, policies and situations, develop equality goals for Milton Keynes, commission the intelligence needed and review performance
- Clear reporting from the partnership to the LSP via one or more of the thematic partnerships.

3 Risks

Various risks have been identified:

- Organisational risks as organisations change to meet the new requirements and the need to safeguard experience gained over many years.
- The use of multiple organisations brings the risk that the available resources will be fragmented too far to be effective.
- The needs of particular organisations may be lost in the focus on wider needs in the community and of mechanisms
- Methods for consultation maybe too geared to the convenience of particular sub-sets of a community, and that they may not be supporting the whole of their sector equally, or identifying or reaching hard-to-reach groups.
- Organisation may not have the secretarial support and leadership, whether voluntary or funded. There may perhaps be other services that can be more efficiently carried out centrally without detracting from the expertise of the sector strands, or all strands might be supported from one combined organisation.

4. Questions for Discussion

Comments on the issues and options are invited, to be returned to the Council by 7th October (jeremy.beake@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

1. Is the list of the umbrella organisations correct correct?
2. What other areas need to be covered is needed?
3. What sort of support is needed?
4. How will Local agencies and Authorities be updated with consultation outcomes?
5. What methods of consultation are working and why?
6. Any other issues and comments you wish to raise

This will inform the options developed and future funding routes. This is a position paper and is not a reaction to any one group but recognises that the council, local agencies and its partners in the third sector will need to change to meet the challenges of our changing, growing and more diverse population.

Diagram
Showing the
Interactions
Outlined
(with existing
support groups)

MK Equality Partnership
(the Strategic Equality
Partnership for Milton Keynes)

Local Agencies

Updates and information
from consultation groups
to local agencies requires
strengthening

