

DIVERSITY FORUMS LAUNCH EVENT – Follow-up

Background

Following general dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the advisory committees as consultation mechanisms for the Council, we reviewed and approved a new structure at Council in November 2006.

The aim of relaunching the committees as forums is to reinvigorate the effective engagement of organisations representing BME, disabled people's, women and men's and LGBT communities. We have introduced new working arrangements to improve engagement and communication as well as getting wider involvement from new and emerging communities.

In parallel, the Community Safety Partnership has been drafting a Community Cohesion Strategy for the city. This also has the objective of strengthening the engagement of public sector agencies with the needs of all communities in the city, including minority communities. The ultimate aim of the work on community cohesion is to develop respect at a neighbourhood level and engender a positive sense of belonging for all people in Derby, regardless of their community.

Issues

The launch event on 28 June highlighted strong feeling, in particular from the members of the Minority Communities Diversity Forum (formerly MECAC), that MECAC had achieved very little in the last five years and that the political leadership are still not showing appropriate commitment to the new forums and, by extension, to the needs of the communities represented.

The Disabled People's Diversity Forum members do feel that DEPAC has achieved in the past and are positive about the new forum and working arrangements. However, there are still concerns around political commitment – particularly in relation to recent public realm-related projects.

The Gender Diversity Forum is a new group and, given the diversity of the agendas it is trying to address, will need strong leadership if it is to drive a positive agenda going forwards.

Councillor Berry made the suggestion that the forums should be able to raise questions at full Council as a way of making their voice heard.

Actions

1. The forums will agree achievable draft work programmes for the next 12 months, based on the prioritisation agreed at the launch event.
2. The Deputy Leader of the Council, Dave Roberts, will continue to chair MCDF as recognition of the complexity of the agenda facing the black and minority ethnic communities and in particular the emergent communities.

3. The Chief Executive, Ray Cowlshaw, or another chief officer will regularly attend MCDF.
4. Prem Chera, chair of the Disabled People's Diversity Forum (DPDF), will act as champion for disabled people in Council and try to address concerns about public realm projects.
5. Lisa Higginbottom, chair of the Gender Diversity Forum (GDF) will work with Rachel Dickinson, senior officer on this forum, to establish a clear and focused work programme for this new group.
6. Pam Thompson and Dawn Robinson-Ruane will agree links between forums and Community Cohesion Unit and make sure there are regular updates on the Community Cohesion strategy to the forums. Discussions at the forums will also feed in to the work on community cohesion.
7. Andrew Auld will explore the possibility of the forums raising questions in full Council or will identify an alternative approach for effectively influencing policy.