

Embracing Diversity

EMPLOYER FORUM ON DIVERSITY

Minutes of the Employer Forum Meeting Held on 7 July 2004
at Church Inn, Birtle, Bury

Present

Fred	Bowen	Bury EST	Steven	Walters	Serco Metrolink
Jane	Buck	B&Q Warehouse	Tim	Hall	Bury EST
Joe	Campbell	Bury EST	Peter	Rabbitts	ACAS
Sue	Chambers	Job Centre Plus	Stuart	Reich	BCR Chemicals
Gerrard	Curran	Business Link North M/cr	Hemal	Rajani	PACE
Huw	Davies	Bury EST	Bill	Robinson	Royal Air Forces Careers
Karen	Davies	Worsley Lodge	Kirsty	Roberts	NHS Pennine Care
Sue	Dickinson	EYDCP	Steve	Mason	Bury Metropolitan Police
Sarah	Draycott	Village Hotel & Leisure	Marlene	Simpson	Inland Revenue
Phil	Emmott	NHS Primary Care Trust	Catherine	Slater	The Extra Mile
Barbara	Forber	Inland Revenue	Lynda	Smethurst	Bury EST
Paul	Foster	N. Mcr. Chamber	Tracey	Pennant	Bury EST
Rod	Goodwin	Bury EST	Tracy	Webb	Bury MBC
Mel	Hirst	CIS	Tracey	Johnson	Bury MBC
Ingrid	Hitchon	Molygran Ltd	Catherine	Wall	Bury EST
Carol	Kelly	NHS Acute Trust	Dr. Peter	Thomas	Red Bank Health Centre
Diana	Kyle	Mayflower Hospitals	Andy	Walkden	Bury MBC
Graham	Parry	Cormar Carpets	Karen	Holness	Royal Air Force Careers
Alicja	Kinsey	Senior Hargreaves	Lee	Salad	Bury EST

Apologies

Joanne	Alcock	De Vere Whites Hotel	Beverley	Unsworth	Cameron House
Diane	Atkins	Asda Stores Ltd	Nicola	Littler	NHS Pennine Care (MH) Trust
Vicky	Attenborough	NHS Acute Trust	Mike	Mooney	First Buses
Sarah	Beaney	CIS	Michelle	Lomax	PACE
Julie	Bramley	Mayflower Hospitals	Alison	Todd	Bury College
Peter	Bury	TUC	Peter	Weidenbaum	Trumeter Ltd
Johnathan	Butterworth	Bolholt Hotel	Anthony	Wharton	Archline Bending
Gerrard	Curran	N. Mcr. Business Link	Victoria	Proudlock	Manchester United
Boyd	Farrar	Heathlands Village	Wendy	Holt	Ambers Attic
Kay	Gregson	N. Mcr. Chamber	Holly	Wallace	Ambers Attic
Simon	Hardy	McDonald's	Caroline	Schofield	Bury MBC
			Carol	Woodhams	MMU

Embracing Diversity

MINUTES

1. WELCOME TO MEMBERS

Fred Bowen welcomed members, new members and invited guests to the meeting. Due to a lack of response for a request for a member of the forum to chair the proceedings, Fred chaired this meeting.

2. MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING

Fred asked for approval for the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 April 2004. These minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4. PROJECT PROGRESS TO DATE

Transnational working

Fred reported that the transnational Equal seminar for employers had taken place in Zamora, Spain. Employers from Spain, Italy and the UK had been invited to participate along with managers and staff from the three projects. The seminar had been a huge success and had given the opportunity for the employers and practitioners to share their experiences and exchange best practice.

Three employers from Bury and three employers from Stockport had attended the seminar and Fred went on to invite the Bury employers to give a brief summary of their thoughts on the visit. The three employers from Bury were GM Police, Village Hotels and Molygran Ltd.

Stephen Mason (GM Police) 'Very useful and interesting seminar. I always had the perception that we were behind our European partners, in fact we are ahead. I was very surprised to find that they are still working on quota systems. I found this quite disconcerting. We have nothing to fear about Directives coming from Europe. We spoke quite frankly, other partners were somewhat twitchy'

Sarah Draycott (Village Hotels) 'Highlighted to me the importance and benefits of working with placement officers and having someone work alongside the employee. This doesn't appear to happen in Spain and Italy.

Ingrid Hitchon (Molygran Ltd) I would confirm everything Steve and Sarah have said, just to add we are definitely ahead. In particular the Italians appeared quite blinkered.

Huw Davies (Bury EST) 'I think our employers are being quite modest! During the evaluation session they were asked to lead a debate on their experiences and this led to all six employers being up on stage talking individually and answering delegates' questions. I do not think we should

Embracing Diversity

underestimate the impact that these employers had on the other employers and service staff. People were amazed at the commitment of the employers. The seminar gave an opportunity for employers and staff to talk at length amongst ourselves.'

Future EQUAL Funding

Huw went on to talk about the next round of Equal funding and that Bury EST would be submitting a bid with employers being invited to be development partners. GM Police, Molygran Ltd., Business Link and the Chamber of Commerce had already committed to the bid with the possibility of future partners being Village Hotels, Highfield Care, Compass Catering, Asda stores and Holts Brewery.

This bid would also give the opportunity for the development of a set of competences for supported employment workers. At the moment there are no such competences and therefore it is not possible for people to achieve an NVQ in this area of work. A code of practice for supported employment services is another area of work that Huw is involved in with the support and consultation of local and national employers. Huw recognised the value provided by the Employer Forum and invited forum members to be partners in the new bid.

5. WORK LIFE BALANCE Tracey Johnson (Head of Personnel, Bury MBC)

Fred introduced Tracey Johnson, Head of Personnel for Bury MBC. He went on to thank Tracey for stepping in at the last minute to cover for the absence of her colleague Caroline Schofield who was unable to attend this meeting. Tracey gave a presentation that outlined the current strategies and drivers for and against change within the authority on the development of flexible working arrangements for the staff. The presentation gave a wide variety of examples ranging from flexi working hours, job share initiatives, purchasing annual leave, career breaks, homeworking etc.

The main drivers for the Council had been high sickness absence and high staff turnover. Recruitment and retention may improve by presenting an improved image as an employer. There could also be benefits to the availability of office accommodation.

Other drivers for change were in response to National and European initiatives, legislation and directives. As a result of the success of the strategy, Bury MBC will be continuing to develop policies and looking to achieve an IIP Work/Life Balance Award.

Since the introduction of a number of flexible working arrangements, there had been a positive staff response despite some expected suspicions and concerns. There were considerations for the cost implication for the organisation and certain areas of the service delivery where it would be impractical to introduce all of the work life balance initiatives.

A copy of this presentation is included in this pack.

6. JOB RETENTION PILOT PROJECT Rod Goodwin Bury EST

Since the commencement of the Embracing Diversity project in May 2002, Bury EST, in partnership with Bury Primary Care Trust and the Red Bank Health Centre in Radcliffe, has been piloting a job retention initiative. Rod Goodwin, Employment Officer with Bury EST, is leading this initiative and

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receives client referrals from the GP's at the Health Centre. Some of these clients are already off sick due to the effects of stress, mental ill-health or other disability. Others are still in work but are considered to be at risk by their GP.

Rod gave an interesting talk on the introduction and progress of the retention pilot and presented some case studies and statistics on the numbers of clients supported in returning to work or alternative arrangements where a return to work would have been unsuitable. The main outcomes show the majority being supported to return to work and a number being signposted for other specialist services. It is hoped to continue the retention initiative at the end of this pilot and widen the service to other health centres throughout the Borough. This will depend upon future funding being available from the Primary Care Trust and the support and cooperation of GP's.

The initial process is to identify the cause of the illness followed by consultation with the clients GP and eventually their employer. It is sometimes necessary to involve other services such as occupational health departments or union representatives in order to ensure the client and the employer are equally represented and supported.

Rod then supports the client where appropriate to plan a return to work with the agreement of their GP. The success of the intervention can mainly rely on an agreement to introduce flexible working arrangements to allow for a return to work for the client – it could be on reduced hours allowing for a staged return to work. Where possible, changes in the clients duties may be suggested to avoid further stress and illness. The support of the personnel department and colleagues in the workplace is vital for the client to feel valued and helped in their efforts to return to work or stay in work. A short question and answer session followed.

A copy of Rod's presentation is included in this pack.

7. A GP's PERSPECTIVE ON JOB RETENTION Dr. P. Thomas (Red Bank Health Centre)

Dr. Thomas graduated in 1980, worked in Dubai for two years and has been a partner at the Red Bank Health Centre in Radcliffe since 1990. He has a specific interest in occupational health and achieved a diploma from the Society of Occupational Medicine in 2004. Dr. Thomas has worked with Bury EST since the launch of the job retention pilot and refers suitable clients to Rod Goodwin, the retention officer.

Dr. Thomas gave a detailed and comprehensive presentation from a GP's perspective on subjects that included the issue of sick notes, the GP's responsibilities and confidentiality to his patients. He outlined the expected outcomes and impact of the introduction of new GP contracts and the proposed changes in the responsibilities for the issuing of sickness certificates.

He went on to consider some future solutions to sickness absence and potential benefits. There were issues for Occupational Health Services with a lack of trained physicians and a UK workforce of 12 million. This presentation raised some interesting questions and answers and was very well received by all the delegates.

A copy of this presentation will be available on the Embracing Diversity website following the approval of Dr.Thomas. (www.embracingdiversity.org)

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8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Fred thanked all the speakers for their valued contributions and thanked members for their attendance and support of the forum.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 12.15pm

9. THE DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 13th October 2004. This will be a breakfast meeting with an 8.30am tea, coffee and breakfast snack service and a meeting start of 9.00am. The venue will be confirmed in the near future.

The subject for the next meeting would be drug and alcohol issues and the workplace.