

Mr R Brookfield
Sec West Lancashire Pensioners Forum

Halsall
Ormskirk
L39

4th September 2011.

Dear Ms Webber

Petition: Public Equality and Human Rights Forum

Thank you for your response of 3rd August 2011 to our petition. I and my fellow members profoundly disagree with Council's view that at this point in time, nor indeed at any other point in time, have there been sufficient mechanisms in place for communities to raise issues of equality and human rights with the Council, and that there is no need for a Forum of the type requested. If there were such mechanisms, why have we not been invited to attend them and present our case for our equality and human rights to them?

Council's view might be better sustainable if proof had been provided of a single instance when the disabled and elderly community had, by invitation, publicly met and discussed with council members and council officers what our petition asks for... "to discuss issues of equality and human rights before decisions are made about us, our houses, our safety, our wellbeing, our community, and address all issues of age equality and discrimination". Having done our own research we know Council couldn't provide such proof because such an event has never occurred, but if council believes it has, please let me know the details of it?

Your response states... "In response to this request I would like to stress the importance the Council places on ensuring that equality issues are a consideration when making decisions which impact on local people". Really? In that case please supply proof that equality for disabled residents has ever been an issue? Council has failed to consult or involve residents with disabilities in the way that was set out in its disability equality scheme, which stated "the Council will continue to work towards achieving the targets set for 2009 and has confirmed its commitment to meeting its statutory duty within the resources it has available". What chance did we have to discuss in any forum what those "resources it has available" might have been, knowing as we do now there were NO discernable resources? Did council not understand its statutory duty under the Equality Act 2006 was to achieve the purpose of making discrimination unlawful in the exercise of public functions?

We've been unable to identify any response to our needs; nor any effective consultation with us; we have identified adverse effects on us; there is no better communication with us; equality isn't conspicuous in mainstream services; for "fairness and proportionality" just look at Dial-A-Ride, a victim of an illegal blanket policy that did not allow for 1,000+ different cases to be treated differently; and for member equality training we ask, what member training?

Dial-A-Ride affected our community in every ward but received no support from the elected members who voted against it. In March 2011 council wrote this, below, in its Draft Equality Scheme April 2011-March 2015; Our community leadership role. The Council enjoys a unique position in the community and will use that position to influence and promote equality in every aspect of community life. We will do this by: Talking to our residents in order to become better aware of the needs, interests and ideas of all sections of our community. We will actively encourage people to contribute to the development of our services and strategies. It also contains this gem "Supporting Elected Members on equality issues and issues that affect particular communities in their wards and areas of work".

By August 2011, with the Equality Scheme in place for just five months, council has refused to talk to one section of its community, our elderly and disabled community, that wants to contribute to the promotion of equality. "Active encouragement to contribute" has become, "no dialogue with elderly and disabled residents". It was stated in council minutes, February 2010, "...there is no longer a dedicated equality resource within the Council". Is it any wonder we consider the dignity of elderly and disabled residents is irrelevant to this council?

We are intrigued by council's claim to "accurately gauge" our views from whatever this range of mechanisms is. With this council "gauge" means "guess". Our opinion is there is only one way to let council know what our views are and that's to face them and tell them.

Returning to the fact of council now stating; "Whilst respecting the views of the Forum as expressed in the Petition, the Council takes the view that, at this point in time, there are sufficient mechanisms in place for communities to raise issues of equality and human rights with the Council, and that there is no need for a Forum of the type requested", on behalf of the West Lancashire Pensioners' Forum I disagree and therefore make a formal request that the Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the adequacy of the step that the Council has taken, or proposed to be taken, in response to the petition.

Yours sincerely

R Brookfield