

## **EQUALITY ADVISORY GROUP**

### **Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

Conference Room 1, Crown Office, 25 Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

#### **Present**

Marsha Scott (Chair)

Nikki Gibbons, Crown Office Trainee (Minutes)

#### **Members**

Bill Gray  
Diego Quiroz  
Jamie Spurway  
John Evans  
Michelle Macleod, HM Inspectorate  
Michele Burman  
Nathan Gale  
Sue Anderson  
Sally Witcher

#### **Delegates**

Ruth McQuaid  
Karen Kennedy  
Sandy Mackie  
Catherine Dyer

#### **Apologies:**

Bushra Iqbal  
Heather McVey  
Monica Lee-MacPherson  
Neelam Bakshi  
Nico Juetten

#### **Attending:**

Paul Lowe (by VC)  
David Casey

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

- 1.1 MS welcomed everyone to the meeting and all present introduced themselves to the group.
- 1.2 There were 5 apologies for today's meeting (see above).

### **2. Minutes of Previous meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held in the Procurator Fiscal's Office, Edinburgh, on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2014 were approved with no amendments.
- 2.2 Due to time constraints for this meeting, some of the outstanding action points will be covered at the May meeting. However, **Action Points** 20 and 21 were covered. These referred to a survey of both EAG members and also COPFS staff who work with the EAG. In addition, all present were asked for their views on the interaction between COPFS and the EAG since the sub group structure was introduced in early 2013.
  - 2.2.1 It was generally agreed that there was an element of role confusion in terms of member's roles within the EAG. BG advised that his main interest is disability and HR but that he was struggling to access information between meetings.
  - 2.2.2 MM advised that although the focus should be on priorities, outcomes are required in order that people can meet objectives set for agreed timescales.

- 2.2.3 SW agreed that there should be a focus on outcomes for the group. She is very encouraged by the existence of the group but clarity was needed on what the group is trying to achieve. What are the key equality questions for the group? What changes do the group want to see made? Where is there room for manoeuvre with decisions already made by COPFS?
- 2.2.4 KK liked the sub group structure as it focused EAG expertise on key priorities for COPFS but was disappointed that this plan hadn't worked as well as expected to. However, there was still merit in having sub groups.
- 2.2.5 JE also agreed that there should be more focus on outcomes for the group.
- 2.2.6 DQ also liked the sub group structure and agreed that work had not progressed as expected over the past year. He also asked about the conduit of information between COPFS and members.
- 2.2.7 SM felt that the EAG was an excellent group and enjoyed working with it.
- 2.2.8 RMcQ welcomed the advice and direction of the EAG with the Equality Act project work but felt that the introduction of the sub group structure had detracted from this work.
- 2.2.9 MB agreed with SW's comments and added that sometimes it is difficult for large groups to achieve their objectives.
- 2.2.10 NB added that there is a balance to be struck between sub group work and consultancy work with the organisation. She is often surprised at who is and isn't represented at meetings.
- 2.2.11 The Crown Agent agreed that outcomes should be the focus and that a clear structure was required to achieve those outcomes.

2.3 Once the feedback discussion had concluded, MS proposed the following steps to address the concerns raised:

- A return to advance notice set meetings, at roughly quarterly intervals but always after the Strategic Board meeting dates, to hopefully improve attendance but also to provide advance deadlines for work.
- The meetings should be held in each of the 4 Federations in turn, so for instance, every summer meeting is held in the North Federation whilst every autumn meeting is held in the West etc.
- Roles within the EAG should be reviewed every 2 years. Rather than set designated time limits for roles, it should be contingent upon effectiveness.
- Regarding group membership, a replacement is needed to represent children on the group.
- Regarding COPFS membership, Policy will continue to provide secretariat support. Additional staff attendance should be decided by what topics will be discussed at a given meeting.
- Before the next meeting (in June 2015) there should be an email discussion about outcomes for the group. Priorities for MS are a mainstreaming equality action plan and a revised equality impact assessment for the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan.

**ACTION POINT 1** – KK / DC to provide the EAG with Internet Headlines information. (Speak to Lindsay Hadden re info provided to Audit and Risk)

**ACTION POINT 2** – KK to ascertain whether the minutes of the Strategic Board could be given to EAG members

**ACTION POINT 3** – MS and NG to lead an email discussion about outcomes for the group.

**ACTION POINT 4** – KK to circulate proposed future meetings to the group. Meetings should be a few days after the COPFS Strategic Board has met.

**ACTION POINT 5** – DQ to discuss with RMcQ any human rights issues with her equality work. DC to arrange a meeting.

**ACTION POINT 6** - For the next meeting, EAG members to consider the priority issues for them, or the organisation they work for, in relation to COPFS.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **3. COPFS Structural Review - Paul Lowe, Project Manager (by VC, at 2.15)**

- 3.1 PL provided a high level overview of the new project, including its role and remit. He explained that when COPFS changed to a federational structure, it moved from a geographical management structure to functional management. Namely that instead of having a regional Procurator Fiscal with responsibilities for all work within their region, COPFS now has functional managers who manage, for example all high court business across Scotland or all deaths investigations across Scotland etc.
- 3.2 This change in management ethos would help deliver the Law Officer's commitment to create more specialised prosecutors. This would ensure a consistency of approach to prosecution policy which would avoid a "postcode" lottery perception amongst victims and witnesses and would also enable staff to become highly skilled in particular areas of prosecution rather than trying to be a "Jack of all Trades."
- 3.3 MS was delighted that PL and the new project were consulting with the EAG at such an early stage of the review and looks forward to working with the team to address any equality issues as they arise. The Crown Agent added that the new project was a consolidation of some existing federation projects as well as new work.
- 3.4 MB asked what the timescales were for the new project. PL replied that delivery was planned for April 2016.

### **4. Inspection of Complaints handling in COPFS – Michelle Macleod**

- 4.1 MM advised that HM Inspectorate of Prosecution was carrying out a review of complaint handling within COPFS. She asked the EAG for advice on how to gather feedback from service users other than by surveys. Her timescales for feedback is the end of April 2015. Her review is focusing on:
  - Has the Response and Information Unit (RIU) added value to the service?
  - Does COPFS have a complaints procedure fit for purpose?
  - Do responses address what has been requested or complained about?
  - Is COPFS learning from the complaints they receive?
- 4.2 MS asked if there were common themes amongst the people who are not happy with the responses they receive from RIU? MM replied that this issue would be explored in the review but that other organisations had suffered a low response rate for their reviews.

- 4.3 MB offered to help MM with methodology issues for gathering feedback.
- 4.4 The group asked if there were specific questions that the Inspectorate wanted groups to consider. Michelle subsequently circulated a list of questions.

**ACTION POINT 7** - MM to contact MB re offer of methodology help to gather feedback information for her Inspectorate review.

**5. COPFS forward work planner – Karen Kennedy**

The COPFS forward work planner and horizon scanning table was sent to members prior to the meeting but there was insufficient time to discuss this in any depth. This item will be on the June agenda.

**6. Identification of priorities for the EAG – Ruth McQuaid**

RMcQ explained how the 3 current priorities came about and that the feeling within COPFS was that these areas were still a priority for COPFS. Hence domestic abuse, victims and witnesses and workforce strategy would continue to be the focus of COPFS engagement with the EAG. DQ agreed that focusing EAG expertise on these 3 areas would be beneficial for both COPFS and the EAG in the meeting of challenges created by current legislation.

**7. HR Update – Sandy Mackie**

SM referred to the written report he had prepared for today's meeting, which contained a number of embedded Excel spreadsheets.

**ACTION POINT 8** - SM to provide staff data analysis to MS and NG.

**ACTION POINT 9** - SM to send out presentation on leadership and management development to members.

**8. AOCB**

- 8.1 KK advised that this was her last EAG meeting as secretary to the group. She would be remaining in Policy Division but that her role would be filled by David Casey, who was soon to join Policy Division. MS thanked KK for her contribution to the group over the past 5 years.
- 8.3 SW asked how the Justice Disability Group fitted in with the EAG. RMcQ advised that there was no direct connection between the two but that the group reported to the Justice Equality and Diversity Sub Group, which she was chair of.

**ACTION POINT 10** - KK and DC to organise an Induction half day for new members who had recently joined the group - MB, SW, and JS. The new member from the Scottish Transgender Alliance is also to be invited to attend.

**9. Date and venue of next meeting**

The next full meeting of the group is proposed for Wed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015, in Crown Office.