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# ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

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## MEMORANDUM

Ms. Sarah Andrews,  
Equality policy Officer,  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
The Town Hall, TUNBRIDGE WELLS,  
TN1 1RS

15th. February 2007

### THE 'EQUALITY' SUITE OF DOCUMENTS.

#### **The Context.**

We, being the sub-committee of the RTW Town Forum set up to examine the four documents together entitled "Equality – Comprehensive Equality Scheme" ("The Documents"), last updated on 8th. January 2007, have now examined those documents, and wish to report as follows, and as invited so to do, to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

In general, we are full of admiration for the thoroughness and foresight demonstrated by the authors of the Equality suite of documents. As a statement of policy and intent covering all salient aspects of TWBC's aspirations for Equality policy in the foreseeable future, it is necessarily lacking in detail and in part verbose, but its main thrust is clear and concise.

#### **A Matter of Procedure.**

As members of the public, we were granted a consultation period of four weeks during which to compile our response. For individual members of the public who may wish to communicate their concerns to you, this period may be sufficiently long. For an organisation such as the RTW Town Forum, which had intended to carry out independent and complicated research into several aspects of The Documents, however, it is simply not enough, and the majority of our investigative work has not so far been completed. It will be completed, however, and the results of our enquiries will be communicated to you in due course.

#### **Our Remit.**

We have been at pains to confine our observations on The Documents, and our related observations, to matters of considerable significance, and to omit any criticism of matters of detail arising from the document. We have, furthermore, confined our concerns to two matters which we regard as being particularly important:

1. The definition and identification of ethnic minorities.
2. The provision of improved transport and access facilities for the elderly and disabled.

#### **The Definition and Identification of Ethnic Minorities.**

In the Draft "Race Equality" document, the author states that "the Borough has a relatively small minority ethnic population when compared with Kent and national averages". This may well be the case, but the author of the document has equated minority ethnicity with skin colour, in a way which

we see as demeaning to our non-white compatriots. We see this attitude to minority ethnicity as tantamount to a continuance of racial discrimination, and not as conducive to ending it.

We would like to mention that, in addition to the 2.5% of the population who are non-white, there is a very considerable number of immigrants from the new member states of Europe, Poland in particular. We have it on good authority that Turner's meat processing factory alone employs several hundred Polish nationals, and we believe there to be at least another 500 resident and working in the Borough. This equates to up to an additional 1% of the population. In addition, the Polish community now has a shop of its own, so to speak, in Camden Road, and private initiatives are afoot to ensure that these new arrivals in our community are cared for as well as possible.

On 16th February 2007, a meeting, to which all Eastern and Central European residents are invited, will be held at the St. John's Social Centre, organised by one of the co-signatories of this Response. Such meetings as these are what we see as the most practical way to commence the integration of foreign people into our society. Practice, not more and more words!

Hot-bedding.

It has also come to our attention, however, that the practice of hot-bedding is rife among immigrant communities in the Dudley Road area of central Tunbridge Wells. We had intended to carry out an investigation of this rumour of our own accord, but have not had adequate time to do so. We do not like the thought of hot-bedding, or the thought of three or four immigrants sharing a single room: it is not conduct appropriate to the society in which we live. This matter deserves your enquiry.

### **The Provision of Improved Transport and Access for the Disabled.**

We are concerned to determine the extent to which hotels, cafes, restaurants, shops, Post Offices, and other buildings in the Borough which are open to the public, have been adapted for the use of disabled and elderly people. With an ever-increasing population proportion of elderly people, we need to know the extent to which the Borough is prepared for those who are less mobile. During the next few weeks, we will carry out a review of these matters, and report our findings to the Borough Council in due course. In the interim, however, we are advised that the Police Station does not provide disabled access, nor does the reference section of the Public Library, and nor does the The New Wellington Hotel, despite its recent change of ownership.

We are concerned, furthermore, to ensure that, where circumstances permit, busses are adapted for use by elderly people and wheel-chair users. It is with a great sense of approval that we have recently witnessed a number of fully converted busses in use in the Borough. It is disheartening to note, on the other hand, that in this respect, we lag far behind London whose busses are fully converted without exception. We are particularly keen to ensure that wheel-chair users who live in the Villages outside Tunbridge Wells, are able to move freely within the Borough.

### **Conclusion.**

These are our main areas of concern. We will carry out our own enquiries in due course, where we have expressed our intention to do so, and will report to the RTW Borough Council in due course.

Lt. Cdr. MVP Doyle RNR  
Professor MJdeK Holman  
Dr. MDH Larsen, Secretary  
Altan Omer

RTW TOWN FORUM 15.02.07