

The bottom line



Fiona Martin, director of employment law at Martin Searle Solicitors, says equality and diversity can benefit all businesses

Equality and diversity laws pay their way

IF YOU think "equality and diversity" is just an excuse for expensive consultants to charge millions for worthy, but largely irrelevant papers, you are not alone. However, equality and diversity is about more than just empty rhetoric. Hidden beneath the posturing are tangible benefits for your business – whatever its size.

Leader – an acronym for Local Employers Acting on Diversity, Equality and Race – is a new initiative set up in Brighton and Hove to help employers achieve best practice. So why should you sign up?

The bottom line is that a business employing people that reflect its market and the community as a whole is more likely to deliver better and more profitable results year on year. If you want immediate benefits, think about how much absenteeism and/or recruitment cost you. A workplace where every individual can fulfil their potential leads to a happy environment with the right people in the right jobs. That means your staff are less likely to go sick and more likely to stick around.

Furthermore, there are the penalties for falling foul of the law. The cost of defending discrimination claims is higher than other claims both financially and in terms of managers' time. Employment tribunal awards are not capped by the maximum £63,000. Then there is the bad publicity – is that the image you want for your business?

Got your attention? Time for a quick refresher of the basics.

Equality means creating a fair workplace where every individual can participate and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. It is a concept backed by anti-discrimination legislation. Diversity, on the other hand, means recognising and valuing difference in your workforce. There is no equality of opportunity if difference is not recognised and valued.

It is unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sex, marital status, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or age. There are also regulations preventing the less favourable treatment of part-time workers and fixed-term employees. This is a lot of legislation to take on board. Are you sure all your managers can spot intentional and unintentional discrimination when it happens and prevent it happening again?

An up-to-date equal opportunities and diversity policy is a good start in getting your business on track. But do not leave it on the shelf. Check out the Commission for Equality and Human Rights for a useful introduction (www.equalityhumanrights.com). Training is also essential. Even if you have policies to tackle discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying, if they are not implemented it is impossible to show you have taken all reasonable steps to avoid discrimination.

events

PROUD TO TAKE PART: A meeting is being held at the Friends Meeting House in Brighton on April 1 for anyone interested in becoming involved in this summer's Pride event



BUSINESS Link Sussex, Chichester Chamber of Commerce and Chichester City Centre Partnership are offering retailers in Chichester and the surrounding area the opportunity to attend one or more of four training workshops.

The workshops are taking place every Tuesday this month and will cover eBay and selling online, ecommerce and IT, web site development and search engine optimisation, how to produce a marketing plan for £500 and financial management made fun and easy.

Each business will leave the workshop with a personalised action plan and the opportunity to access a free one-to-one business review by one of Business Links business advisers.

The workshops will take place at the Vicarage Hall, Chichester Cathedral. They begin at 6pm and are expected to finish by 9pm. Cost per delegate is £15, including buffet.

Places are limited and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. For more information or to book a place please contact Julie Harrison on 01243 531765 or email office@chichestercci.org.uk.

FREE places to an exclusive energy efficiency seminar are being offered to private landlords.

Held at Crawley Civic Hall this evening from 6.30pm to 8.30pm, it will offer expert speakers about financial assistance for insulation and some heating measures, as well as the landlord's energy saving allowance tax relief.

Information will also be available on

requirements for landlords as a result of the home information packs.

Places are limited so booking is essential. For more information please contact Horsham District Council on **01403 215281**.

The seminar will be repeated at Chichester District Council tomorrow evening from 6pm to 8pm.

MASTER classes on how small businesses can take advantage of flexible working have been organised by Sussex e-Partnership.

The workshops are ideal for employers who want to learn more about flexible working and how to implement it, reduce costs and improve flexibility and successfully manage a distributed team

The sessions are free and will take place from 9am to 1.30pm (including a buffet lunch) at The Lighthouse, Brighton, today and at the Hawth Theatre, Crawley, on March 27.

To register your place and download your flexible working toolkit go to www.broadbandeastSussex.co.uk/flexibleworking or call 01243 382255.

THE Effective Marketing Company is holding a series of events to help businesses make the most of marketing.

Seminars called Effective Marketing On A Shoestring, taking place tomorrow and on May 1, will include networking and sharing marketing ideas and experiences with other business owners and help with the foundations of an effective marketing plan.

An Introduction To Effective Web Marketing, running on April 3, will

give people the opportunity to develop their own effective web marketing strategy, identifying what web marketing could be achieving, developing dynamic and engaging content, generating traffic, converting traffic into leads and sales, selling online and measuring the effectiveness of your web marketing.

On April 17, there is a seminar called An Introduction To Effective Telemarketing, which will give those attending an insight into what can be achieved through effective telemarketing, how to target prospective customers, how to manage the information that you gather and ensure businesses achieve something on every call.

Each seminar is at the Adur Business Centre, Little High Street, Shoreham, from 6pm to 8pm and costs £35 excluding VAT. To book a place, call **01273 467611**.

PRIDE in Brighton and Hove is holding an open meeting for anyone who is interested in getting involved with their events this summer.

The event, on Tuesday, April 1, takes place at the Friends Meeting House from 6pm and will feature community groups, businesses and supporters giving information on all the different ways people can take part in the annual gay festival.

It will be the first opportunity to join the parade, apply for a grant, think about having a stall, and pick up all the necessary application forms.

Anyone wishing to attend should let the Pride team know in advance by next Tuesday by calling 01273 775939. Alternatively, email office@brightonpride.org.

A BUILDING society is holding an open day for people to find out ways to make more of their savings.

Experts from Adams & Remers, a Yorkshire Building Society agency in Lewes, will be on hand to give advice about savings products and cash Isa accounts on Thursday, March 27.

The branch, on School Hill in Lewes, will be open from 10am to 3pm. Refreshments will be provided.

THE Sussex branch of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) is staging a seminar, asking: Can Businesses Be Socially Responsible And Profitable?

The seminar will take place at Stanmer House in Brighton on March 27.

It will feature speakers on the subject of corporate social responsibility.

There will also be presentations from businesses which have successfully integrated social responsibility into their marketing and operations.

The seminar is limited to 70 participants and begins with a one-hour networking session at 6pm.

This will be followed by presentations at 7pm.

The seminar is open to CIM students (£15), CIM members (£20) and guests (£25).

To apply for tickets, visit www.cim.co.uk/cimevents. Alternatively, you can email cimevents@cim.co.uk, or call 01628 427120.

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