

Notes of a Meeting of the Equality Working Group - 13 August 2020

Members Present:

Cllr Josephine Hawkins
(Chairman)
Cllr Dan Adams
Cllr Rodney Bates
Cllr Sharon Galliford
Cllr Robin Perry

Cllr Morgan Rise
Cllr Valerie White
Cllr Helen Whitcroft

Officers: Jayne Boitoult, Louise Livingston and Julie Simmonds

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received by Councillor Charlotte Morley.

2 Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on March 2020 were agreed by the Working Group. It was acknowledged, that the resource implications of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic meant many of the recorded actions had not been implemented.

However it was reported that the Hate Crime Policy had now been added as an addendum to the Council's safeguarding policy. In addition the receipt of a presentation from the Surrey Heath Faith Forum would be considered for inclusion in the Working Group's work Plan.

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4 Equality Strategy

The Working Group considered the creation of a two year work plan to sit alongside the Council's Equality Strategy. It was acknowledged that any work plan would include the organisation of a series of all-Councillor Equalities training sessions.

It was acknowledged that there was significant value in all Councillors attending equality training sessions, although Councillors' time commitments often made attending training sessions difficult. Whilst there was some merit in making Equalities training sessions mandatory for Councillors in order to ensure attendance, there was also an emphasised need to make training sessions attractive and engaging in order for Members to extract the most value. It was emphasised that in previous years this included personal-experience led training sessions; rather than 'tick-box' led sessions; and such sessions were better at tackling unconscious biases.

In addition, it was suggested that online and recorded training sessions and the potential integration of staff and Councillor training sessions, would make sessions more accessible to Councillors.

The Working Group agreed the inclusion of two different components of the proposed programme of all Member training sessions. The first component of the training sessions would focus on the obligations the Council had to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the second component of the programme would look to provide more engaging sessions including specific sessions on Gypsy and Traveller Training and LGBT+ awareness. It was acknowledged that the training sessions on the protected characteristics, as per the Equality Act, would be led by the relevant representing organisations. It was also acknowledged that Voluntary Support North Surrey worked with a wide range of minority groups from across the Borough, and that would be a useful source of information in respect of minority groups' access to services.

As well as the training of Councillors on a micro-level, it was agreed that the Council's communication channels were ideal to promote awareness of Equality issues within the Borough. It was agreed that a social media campaign on equalities issues, could act as a starting point to change the culture around the Gypsy and Traveller Community and other protected groups within the Borough. It was also acknowledged that there was a wider role for Members and Councillors in tackling Equality issues in the Community, including Councillors acting as Community-leaders. It was also agreed that Borough-wide initiatives and fostering a wider cultural change should take priority over local events surrounding individual memorials.

It was noted that Members should email the Executive Head of Transformation or the Council's Community Partnerships officer if they had comments on the draft Equality Strategy included in the agenda pack which would be further reviewed at a future meeting.

There was also discussion in respect of allowing room for any necessary dialogue around staff equalities issues. It was agreed that including equality based questions in future staff surveys would be a suitable way to pick up any notable equality-related themes.

AGREED that

- I. the following be included in the Equality Working Group's bi-annual work plan:**
 - a) The holding of 2 sets of all-Member equalities training sessions; to meet Equality Act 2010 obligations; and more specific experience led sessions.**
 - b) The addition of questions relating to inequality to the next staff survey encouraging the sharing of individual experiences.**
 - c) The receipt of presentations by the Working Group from Voluntary Support North Surrey and Surrey Heath Faith Forum.**

- I. Officers look into the potential for a Social Media Campaign tackling equalities issues.**
- II. The organisation of local events surrounding individual memorials not to be specifically supported, with the list to be circulated to members, should they wish to reconsider.**