

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

19 NOVEMBER 2014

EQUALITIES WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Report from: Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

Author: Wayne Hemingway, Democratic Services Officer

Summary

This report informs the Committee of the outcome of a recent meeting of the Equalities Working Group.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The Equalities Working Group was set up by the Employment Matters Committee and any recommendations will be a matter for the Employment Matters Committee to decide.

2. Background

2.1 The Committee established a Race Equality Review Working Group in July 2008 to review the actions taken in response to the Race Equality Review and comment on further actions needed. The Working Group's terms of reference was subsequently amended to enable it to meet with the Black Workers Forum, the Disabled Workers Forum and other equalities groups as appropriate on a regular basis and the name of the Working Group was changed to the Equalities Working Group. The Working Group's membership currently consists of Councillors Avey, Clarke, Christine Godwin and Wicks.

2.2 The Equalities Working Group met on 15 October 2014 with the Disabled Workers Forum and LGBT Forum.

3. Advice and Analysis

3.1 The Working Group discussed the following issues at this meeting:

- Equalities Objectives and Annual Equality Report
- Diversity Impact Assessments (DIAs)
- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Summary of Progress from the Forums – Disabled Workers Forum and LGBT Forum
- Stonewall Workplace Quality Index Submission 2015
- Re-accreditation of Two Ticks, Positive About Disability Symbol.

3.2 The notes are attached at appendix 1.

4. Risk Management

- 4.1 The Council is keen to ensure that its workforce represents the community, which supports our aim to provide high quality and responsive services.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Equalities Working Group acts as a consultation mechanism to enable Members to discuss issues with various bodies across the Council.

6. Financial and Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 The meetings of the Working Group will enable the Council to comply with its equalities duties under the Equality Act 2010.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That the report be noted.

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Background papers

None

Equalities Working Group

Notes of discussion 15 October 2014, 6.30pm – 7.32pm, Meeting Room 8, Gun Wharf

In attendance:

Councillor Avey
Councillor Clarke
Councillor Christine Godwin
Councillor Wicks

Black Workers Forum (BWF)

None

Disabled Workers Forum (DWF)

Elaine Mansfield
Ian Townsend

LGBT Forum (LGBT)

Lesley Jones

Officers:

Anthony Law, Democratic Services Officer
Lesley Jones, Corporate Improvement Officer
Tricia Palmer, Assistant Director, Organisational Services

(It is noted that Lesley Jones attended in her capacity as both the Vice Chair of the LGBT Forum and also as a presenting officer for several reports).

1. Apologies for absence

Sallyann Baxter (LGBT) and Marsha Wrye (BWF).

2. Notes of last meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 21 October 2013 were agreed subject to the list of those attended being amended to read "Councillor Clarke".

3. Introductions

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the Forums.

4. Equalities Objectives and Annual Equality Report

The Corporate Improvement Officer introduced a report setting out the Council's general duty, under The Equality Act 2010, to have due regard to: eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and, fostering good relations.

A copy of the council's Annual Equality and Diversity Report for 2013/2014 was circulated at the meeting. This report (published on the council's website)

used equality data to reflect upon Medway Council's work with diverse communities and outlined achievements around equality and diversity, together with details of how the council would improve services to ensure they were fair and responsive to everyone.

The Working Group was referred to section 5 of the annual report, which provided equality information on the Medway community and provided comparative information for the council's workforce. The following was highlighted, along with further reflections on the implications of other characteristics such as age and gender:

- 29% of Medway Council staff are male compared with 50% in the community
- 3.6% of Medway staff state they have a disability compared with 16% in the community
- 7% of Medway staff are Black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BAME) compared with 10% in the community.

The Working Group discussed the contents of the Equality and Diversity Report for 2013/2014, noting that the data excluded school based staff. The Group reflected upon the suspected underreporting of equality data by staff, in particular disability data. It was noted that the underreporting of disability data continued, despite a number of positive actions undertaken by the council. This included: committing to the Mindful Employer Charter; re-accreditation as a Two Ticks Positive About Disability employer; the Disabled Workers Forum; and, the support available through the Access to Work scheme. The Assistant Director, Organisational Services advised that underreporting would need to be considered further.

The Working Group congratulated staff on the production of the Equality and Diversity Report for 2013/2014.

5. Diversity Impact Assessments (DIAs)

The Corporate Improvement Officer advised the Work Group that Diversity Impact Assessments remained the Council's chosen method to demonstrate that it had complied with the general equality duty to put fairness and equality at the centre of any change to service provision, policy or strategy.

It was explained that the DIA process helped to assess the likely impact any such change may have on all sections of the community and/or council staff, including people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

The process and new template was circulated at the meeting.

The Working Group considered the new template and noted that individuals may fall into a number of protected characteristic groups. Responding to questions, it was explained that Diversity Impact Assessments should be proportionate to the change proposed to service provision, policy or strategy and the process enabled the likely impact on individuals to be considered

before any decisions were made; thereby helping to find ways that can prevent, or at the very least, reduce any potential adverse impact.

6. Holocaust Memorial Day

The Corporate Improvement Officer advised the Work Group that the Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January each year and was the day for everyone to remember the millions of people killed in the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur.

It was explained that the 2015 event was taking place at Chatham Memorial Synagogue and the theme was "Keep the memory alive". The event would be a collaborative venture and the planning committee included representatives of Medway Council, Chatham Memorial Synagogue, Rochester Cathedral, Medway Inter-Faith and Medway Youth Parliament, together with teachers from participating schools and representatives of Mid Kent College.

Invitations to participate in the day would be sent to all schools and Councillors.

7. Summary of Progress from the Forums

Disabled Workers Forum

Ian Townsend informed the Group that the Forum continued to campaign for disability issues across Medway, as reflected by the installation of hearing systems in main Meeting Rooms at Gun Wharf and improvements to the system at the Corn Exchange.

The Working Group was also advised that "Welcome one and all", a guide to accessibility planning, had been published on the council's intranet and distributed to all schools.

Ian Townsend advised the Work Group that the current staff moves had proved challenging, particularly for people with a range of disabilities. He cited a number of examples and stressed the need for consultation on individual access arrangements and whether reasonable adjustments were needed. The role of the Access to Work Scheme to provide additional resources was also stressed but it was acknowledged that the organisation was improving by learning from recent experiences.

In relation to a mental wellbeing event, arranged for 3 December 2014, it was noted that these arrangements would need to be reviewed as Meeting Room 9 was being decommissioned.

LGBT Forum

Lesley Jones advised the Working Group that Sallyann Baxter had replaced Simon Harrington as chair of the LGBT Forum and she was vice chair.

It was noted that the Forum was engaging with services from across Medway Council at monthly meetings, with the notes being published on the intranet. The Forum had also sponsored the Kent & Medway LGBT Community Action Group event *Picnic Under the Rainbow* in July, which had promoted engagement with staff from libraries, community wardens and the fostering team.

The Working Group was further informed that rebranding work had now been agreed and new literature would be published by the end of November. The LGBT Forum website was also being redesigned and the Forum had gained publicity via the intranet news pages and an article in Headlines. A number of new straight allies/role models had also been recruited.

It was noted that the Forum had raised awareness of Bi people at work on Bi Visibility Day in September. This event had been tweeted and received nearly 3,500 views. The Forum was now planning for LGBT History Month in February 2015, as well as sponsoring staff to attend the Metro/Relate workshop – *Language, Taboos, assumptions – LGBT issues and working with LGBT* in October 2014.

7. Stonewall Workplace Quality Index Submission 2015

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, submitted a report which provided details of the 2015 Workplace Equality Index submission to Stonewall. She stated that over the past four years the council had gradually improved its position on the 'top 100' and narrowly missed (by four points) entering the Top 100 in 2014. The fact that Medway had improved 160 places over four years was a great achievement

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, gave examples of good practice.

It was also noted that the submission criteria had changed fundamentally part way through this years gathering of evidence, which may have an impact on Medway's position for 2015. The result would be known in January 2015.

The Group noted the report and requested that the Assistant Director pass on their gratitude to Sandra Steel, Employee Engagement Manager, for her work in compiling the data and completing the submission.

8. Re-accreditation of Two Ticks, Positive About Disability Symbol

The Assistant Director, Organisational Services, introduced a report which updating the group on the result of the 2014 re-accreditation of the Positive About Disability 'Two Ticks' symbol.

It was noted that the 'Two Ticks' positive about disability symbol was awarded to employers who had made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff. The Work Group was advised that the council had originally been awarded the Two-Ticks accreditation in August 2001, with the latest accreditation being awarded in July 2014.

During the discussion, the Work Group also noted that the council had been awarded Gold Status in by Investors in People.

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