

EMPLOYMENT MATTERS COMMITTEE

27 APRIL 2016

EQUALITIES WORKING GROUP UPDATE

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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.

2.2 The Equalities Working Group met on 30 March 2016. The Working Group drew from it a number of issues to bring to the Committee's attention including a summary of progress from each of the Forums present at the meeting.

3.0 Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2016

3.1 The Council started working with Stonewall in 2010 and became a member of the Stonewall Champions Programme. Part of being a 'Stonewall Champion' requires the Council to take part in a cross-sector benchmarking exercise. This seeks to assess every year how, as an organisation, the Council is performing in terms of meeting the needs of the LGBT community both in the workplace and also the community. This is called the Workplace Equality Index (WEI) and those who find themselves in the Top 100 of the index are promoted as being within the UK's top 100 gay-friendly employers.

This can only be good news for the Council as it sends a clear message to the local community and prospective new employees that we are an inclusive organisation who celebrate diversity and the benefits of having a diverse workforce.

3.2 In taking part in the exercise the Council needed to demonstrate expertise in the following 10 distinct areas of employment policy and practice:

- Employee policy
- Training
- Employee network group
- All-staff engagement
- Career development
- Line managers
- Monitoring
- Procurement
- Community engagement
- Additional work

3.3 The submission was then analysed by Stonewall and in turn the Council was benchmarked with other organisations from both the public and private sector and given a ranking.

3.4 More than 400 organisations took part in the 2016 WEI, the highest number in its 12 year history.

3.5 The Council has consistently improved its position on the WEI since its first submission in 2010 as it shown in Table 1 below, narrowly missing the much sought-after Top 100 by one point in 2015. However, this year the Equalities Working Group were pleased to learn that the Council reached 93rd place and finally joined the prestigious Top 100 group.

Table 1

Year	Position
2010/11	268
2011/12	197
2012/13	161
2013/14	108
2014/15	107
2015/16	93

3.6 As a result of entering the Top 100, Medway Council's success has featured in a Sunday Times supplement, on BCC Radio Kent, 5-Live, on the Stonewall website, Medway Matters online and on Twitter.

3.7 For the 2015/16 submission the Council, together with LGBTQ forum members, worked together to implement new and build upon existing interventions to support the submission including:

- the introduction of Declaration Week, encouraging staff to complete their equality data on SelfServe4you;
- the display of LGBTQ role models on the intranet and in short films shown in the Gun Wharf café area during Declaration Week;

- the implementation of a Transgender Policy and accompanying guidance providing guidance for managers and colleagues on how to support a colleague who is undergoing the transgender process;
- specialist training for HR staff on supporting transgender employees.

3.8 Since the announcement of the Top 100 position, a representative from Stonewall has visited the Council to discuss what went well and advise on further work that is needed in order for us to maintain our place in the Top 100 and possibly improve our position next year. A brief summary of the main points are below:

- **All staff engagement** – this seen as good but to score higher we need to include Board involvement more and engage more senior management LGBTQ role models
- **Staff network group** – very good
- **Monitoring** – was very good and above average for the Top 100 – most public sector organisations struggle in this area
- **Procurement** – assessments are above average for the Top 100
- **From the staff survey** – Stonewall said that it was unusual but very positive to see that from those who completed the survey within Medway Council gay employees score higher than straight employees on the following factors:
 - workplace culture is inclusive of LGB people (except trans);
 - able to be myself at work/ no barriers to recruitment;
 - confident to report LGBT Bullying and Harrassment to my employer.

3.9 Areas that needs further attention are:

- **Training provision** – Stonewall advise that to score higher in this area the council needs to extend equality training to more staff: needs to offer more training that refers to gender identity and sexual orientation, and for those who undertake recruitment – provide a more comprehensive training programme that specifically relates LGBT applicants. The current E-learning provision will not suffice for future years.
- **Career development** – there is no evidence that we provide specific career development opportunities for our LGBTQ staff
- **Employment Policy** – on the whole the policies are good but tweaks need to be made to the terminology on the gender reassignment policy.

3.10 The Equalities Working Group accepted that this is a work-in-progress and some of the above points would be seen as aspirational for the Council at this time. Discussions have taken place with the LGBTQ form and HR Services to agree an action plan to address some of the areas that need further attention. These include:

- an event for the LGBTQ forum members to promote the group and celebrate the Top 100 success.
- recruit a new forum Chair and Stonewall Senior Champion
- a review of the new equalities training programme that is currently being arranged by the Workforce Development Team
- mark each of the commemorative days on the LGBT calendar, e.g. IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia and Trans), LGBT History Month. This will be done by flying the Rainbow Flag at Gun Wharf and promoting on the intranet and in *The Headlines* newsletter.

- update employment policies where necessary
- Share best practice, and possibly hold joint events, with our neighbouring public sector colleagues through the Kent LGBT Forum Network.

3.11 Stonewall have published highlights from the 2016 benchmarking exercise, some of which are:

- Employers of the Year 2016 – MI5 Security Service
- Top Local Government – Leicestershire County Council
- 9 organisations have Star Performer Status including Accenture, Barclays, EY, Gentoo, Goldman Sachs, the Home Office, IBM and Simmons & Simmons.
- 15 industries are represented from across the public, private and third sectors.
- 415 employers participated in 2016
- 60,506 employees took part in the all staff survey.

4.0 Re-accreditation of Two Ticks Positive about Disability Symbol

4.1 The 'two ticks' positive about disability symbol is awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff.

4.2 Employers who use the disability symbol make five commitments regarding recruitment, training, retention, consultation and disability awareness. The five commitments are:

- To interview all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities.
- To discuss with disabled employees, at any time but at least once a year, what both parties can do to make sure disabled employees can develop and use their abilities.
- To make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure they stay in employment.
- To take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work.
- To review these commitments each year and assess what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and Jobcentre Plus know about progress and future plans.

4.3 The Council has been awarded the 'Two Ticks' accreditation since August 2001 and is due to be reviewed in May 2016. Part of the accreditation process is for Jobcentre Plus to be provided with evidence to show how the Council is both maintaining and improving upon its work year on year. In response to a question about the involvement of the Disabled Worker's Forum in the accreditation process an assurance was given that the Forum would be involved.

4.4 To give a flavour of how the Council meets the commitments, listed below are some key achievements, those introduced in the past year are in italics:

- All disabled applicants are offered an interview if they meet the minimum requirements for the role.

- The Disabled Workers Forum continually provide a high level of support for employees with disabilities and also advice to services relating to policy development and access issues.
- One of the Council's equality objectives is to increase the number of disabled people in the council's workforce. The percentage of those non-school based staff declaring a disability has remained for the past few years at around 3.5%, however in 2016 this dropped to 3.2% (February 2016). This figure is considerably low when compared to that of the local community which, when last recorded in the 2011 census stood at 16.4%.
- All officers undertaking recruitment activity must undertake equalities training before undertaking any recruitment.
- The Medpay scheme ensures, through the Performance Development Review process that all disabled employees have an opportunity to discuss the development of their abilities at least once a year;
- The redeployment process affords employees with disabilities the same priority access to vacancies as those facing redundancy.
- The Council has an extensive range of equality based e-learning programmes available to all staff. This compliments the provision available on the corporate programme which is currently being reviewed and developed.
- The Council has signed up to the Mindful Employer Charter to increase awareness of mental health in the workplace. This is due for review later in 2016
- *Declaration Week encourages all staff to complete their personal details on Selfserve4you; by gaining an understanding of the make-up of the workforce the Council is able to put the necessary support mechanisms in place*
- *As part of the workplace health wellbeing program a series of mental health wellbeing activities were launched during Mental Health Awareness Week: 11th-15th May 2015. This included a mental health awareness stand in Gun Wharf; a lunchtime learning session relating to mindfulness; presentations to staff from Care-first, and booklets supplied by the charity MIND were distributed to staff receiving free health MOTs*
- *Workforce data is now produced on a monthly basis by the HR systems team enabling improved monitoring.*
- *Working with Jobcentre Plus to find work experience placements for disabled individuals. Jobcentre Plus assist with the application for Access to Work funding for anyone successfully placed.*

5.0 Disabled Workers Forum

- 5.1 The Forum reported on issues raised at a recent meeting of the Council's Equality and Access Group regarding Riverside country park, the Strood Community Hub and issues facing disabled people when attending public events such as the Dickens Christmas event. The issues raised at the Group had been followed up and are being actioned and a representative from the Disabled Forum has met with the relevant officers to discuss them further.
- 5.2 The Forum held its annual awareness event in December and promoted back care.

6.0 Black Workers Forum

- 6.1 The Forum did not report any issues on this occasion.

7.0 LGBTQ Forum

- 7.1 The Forum has been without a Chair since August 2015. The February issue of Headlines featured an article on Stonewall success. This included an invitation for new members and chair.
- 7.2 Networking with other LGBTQ groups continues and this enables sharing of best practice amongst groups which in turn is shared with members of the forum. A meeting will take place with other forum chairs to share best practice and agree ways that forums can support each other.
- 7.3 The Forum is working with HR to prepare for this year's Stonewall Workplace Equality Index submission.

8.0 Risk Management

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

9.0 Consultation

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

10.0 Financial and Legal Implications

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

11.0. Recommendation

- 11.1 That the report be noted.

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Background papers

None

Appendices

None