



MINUTES OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

Thursday 7 April 2016 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Pavey (Chair), Councillor Kansagra (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Harrison and Thomas

Apologies were received from: Councillor Mashari (Lead Member for Employment and Skills)

1. **Declarations of interests**

None declared.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED:-

that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 January 2016 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. **Matters arising**

None.

4. **Deputations**

None.

5. **Digital Inclusion and Online Accessibility for Brent residents**

The Chair welcomed Margaret Read, Director of Brent Customer Services to present the above item.

Margaret Read reminded the Committee that, in October 2014, the Council's Cabinet had formally agreed a new Community Access Strategy which set out a vision for transforming the way in which residents were able to access information, advice and services.

The strategy sought to create modern and relevant access arrangements that were tailored to meet the needs of differing demographic groups, help the Council to respond positively to the difficult financial pressures it faced and to target the most personalised contact arrangements to those who were most vulnerable and had more complex needs.

It was pointed out that the overall aims of the strategy were to :

- Develop a consistent and excellent experience for residents whenever and however they made contact with the Council
- Develop community access arrangements that were designed to meet the differing needs of residents, and focused on the community not internal service boundaries
- Develop an improved digital offer, better confidence in digital access channels and significantly increase take up and use of digital access channels
- Improve the efficiency of resident's access arrangements so as to better manage demand, remove duplication and failure and prevent demand arising in the first place

Margaret Read informed the Committee that the strategy was being delivered through a portfolio of projects that commenced in early 2015. These projects had included significant work to improve Brent's on line offer to residents, making it easier to use and extending the range of services and information available through digital channels so that residents could access these when they wanted rather than having to rely on more traditional access channels such as phone or face to face contact.

The briefing presented by Margaret Read provided an overview of the arrangements that had been put in place to ensure that digital/on line services were accessible and responsive to the needs of all residents, particularly those who face barriers to self-serve due to their age, disability, language and/or socio-economic status. It was important to note that the development of the digital offer had not limited access to other contact channels and had in fact increased access options. Residents could still phone, write, email and visit face to face if they chose to do so and could obtain assistance to use self service facilities at the Civic Centre Customer Services Centre. The only exception to this was parking services where there was no longer an option to visit a face to face access point.

RESOLVED:-

that the contents of the report submitted and the range of online services available to customers to date be noted.

6. **Progress update of Councillor Pavey's review on HR and Equalities and action plan**

Councillor Pavey, Deputy Leader of the Council, introduced the report providing a progress update of the impact from his review of HR and Equalities based on the available qualitative and quantitative information.

Andreyana Ivanova, Head of Equality, reported that at the time of writing the report, the significant majority of actions in Councillor Pavey's action plan (60 out of the 64 representing 94%) were completed or on-going. She stated that the remaining four actions were on target for completion as per the indicated timescales.

The detailed progress update on the action plan was attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted.

Members noted the significant improvements from employees' perspective.

Members suggested that, at its next meeting, the Committee should consider the Council's 2016/17 equality action plan.

Members suggested that the Committee consider, at its next meeting, the results of the upcoming staff survey.

RESOLVED:-

that the contents of the progress update and the supporting appendices be noted.

7. Brent Council's policies, programmes and initiatives supporting employees and applicants with disabilities

Mildred Phillips, HR Director, introduced the report stating that Brent Council was committed to having a diverse workforce that was representative of the equalities profile of its communities, and had legal duties to advance equality of opportunity for disabled people and to make reasonable adjustments to its workplace practices and environment. She reminded Members that, in December 2015, Brent had been awarded the Department for Work and Pensions Disability Confident Employer status.

Mildred Phillips stated that Brent was a disability positive employer and a member of the Positive about Disabled People scheme awarded by the Job Centre Plus with the Two Ticks symbol. In March 2016, the Council successfully retained its Two Ticks accreditation showing its commitment to disability inclusion and good employment and recruitment practices. She went through the internal support package of arrangements available to potential/current employees with disabilities and their managers, including training and awareness raising initiatives.

Mildred Phillips stated that the Council recognised that there was still a lot to be done and worked hard to promote disability inclusion and minimise barriers facing disabled employees and applicants, in partnership with organisations such as Remploy, the Business Disability Forum (BDF) and enei.

Councillor Pavey, Deputy Leader of the Council, agreed to report back to the next meeting about the work of the Disability Forum.

RESOLVED:-

that the policies, programmes and new initiatives supporting employees and applicants with disabilities be noted.

8. Quarterly update on the Council's Let's Talk Collaborative Mentoring programme

Andreyana Ivanova, Head of Equality, introduced the report stating that the Let's Talk Collaborative Mentoring programme had been approved by officers in December 2015 and launched in January 2016.

She stated that the programme aimed to promote and facilitate regular dialogue between senior managers and staff as a means of empowering junior staff

members, fostering good cross-organisational working relationships, developing a greater understanding of diversity from differing perspectives and improving the sense of belonging to One Council.

Andreyana Ivanova provided a breakdown of participants by directorate, grade and diversity profile. Participants' feedback was also included as an Appendix to the report. The Committee noted that the profile of participants was representative of the wider profile of the workforce and that the feedback was very positive. An annual report would be presented to the Committee in due course.

RESOLVED:-

that the first quarterly progress update and staff feedback on the Let's Talk Collaborative Mentoring programme be noted.

9. Update on Council's Aspire Leadership and Development programme

Mildred Phillips, HR Director, provided the Committee with an update on the Council's Aspire Leadership and Development programme. She informed the Committee that there had been 103 applications in total, of which 38 applicants were successful. The diversity profile of applicants was representative of the wider workforce and was proportionate to the size of directorates.

Carolyn Downs, Chief Executive, agreed to discuss with her colleagues the time commitment the programme required from its participants.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the update on the Aspire Leadership and Development programme be noted;
- (ii) that a formal evaluation of the programme be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee, including the demographic breakdown of participants.

10. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.

11. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm

M PAVEY
Chair