



## **MINUTES OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE**

**Held on Tuesday 6 December 2016 at 6.00 pm**

**PRESENT:** Councillor McLennan (Chair), Davidson, Harrison and Thomas

Apologies were received from: Councillors Tatler

### **1. Declarations of Interests**

There were no declarations of Interests made by Members.

### **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 September 2016 be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

### **3. Matters Arising (If Any)**

Councillor Harrison referred to Agenda Item 7 of the previous minutes (YourVoice 2016 Staff Survey: Equality Analysis) and questioned whether there were any updates from the workshops with the staff groups whose responses had shown variations from the Council's averages. Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) responded to say that this would be covered under item 11 to this agenda.

### **4. Deputations (If Any)**

The Chair noted that she had received one request to speak from a member of the public on the content of item eight to the agenda.

### **5. Election of Vice Chair of the Committee**

**RESOLVED** that Councillor Davidson be elected as the new Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the 2016-2017 Municipal Year.

### **6. Update on Outcome Based Reviews and the Harlesden Community Hub**

Peter Gadsdon (the Council's Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships) introduced the report, which provided the Committee with an overview of the Harlesden Community Hub prototype, recently trialled for two weeks in Harlesden from 31 October to 12 November 2016. It was primarily based in Tavistock Hall in Harlesden, with an accessible stationary London bus also being present on Tavistock Road to aid publicity of the hub's location. Mr Gadsdon explained that the community hub formed a key part of the Council's three ongoing Outcome Based Reviews (OBRs) which had been established to focus on:

- (i) Employment support and welfare reform;
- (ii) Housing for vulnerable people; and
- (iii) Regeneration

The Committee heard that it was felt that a community hub was the best way to bring together different communities and Council services to address the issues identified by the OBRs. Peter Gadsdon gave a summary of the advice and information zones available to residents on different issues such as: Housing Benefit; Council Tax Support; Children and Family Advice; and Drug and Alcohol Awareness. These were run alongside activities such as: an arts taster session run by Crisis; a Brent Youth debate on the USA elections; and Brent Mind Music Workshop. It was felt that, overall, the hub had been very successful as it had provided a relaxed, non-corporate environment, which had allowed residents to engage with a range of different organisations and service areas in one place to discuss their varying needs. Peter Gadsdon also emphasised the collective team spirit within the hub, with it being an excellent example of different groups working together and building partnerships to support the local community. In terms of evaluating areas for improvement, he stated that it would have been ideal to stay longer than the two weeks as the numbers of residents engaging with the hub picked up noticeably in the second week. It was noted that this was also linked to the need for using different publicity tools and clearer messaging to allow residents to understand what the hub was and therefore engage with it more effectively.

Peter Gadsdon concluded that the prototype had been successful and that it was important not to lose momentum generated from this project. He stated that the partnerships fostered by the numerous different groups involved had been very important and that moving forward, a working group would be drawn from people who have been involved in the hub. He noted a key aim would be to develop a more sustainable model and hoped a temporary hub could be in place in Harlesden as soon as possible.

The Chair thanked Peter Gadsdon for the report and commented that she had had a fantastic experience when she visited the hub herself. She asked whether there was any set of defined outcomes for the residents who engaged with the hub. Mr Gadsdon said that the aim had been to provide services which related to the issues identified by the OBRs. For example, on employment and welfare and services to support vulnerable people, CRISIS had run a session on the benefit cap which had been very successful. It was noted that the session had been directed at residents who were already known and identified as being likely to lose income due to the cap. The session provided a constructive space to talk through the related issues they were facing. He noted that otherwise, it had largely been a case of those at the hub dealing with the different issues and queries people had as and when they came in. The Committee heard that the main objective was to build trust with local residents by highlighting that the Council and community organisations were proactively working together to improve their lives.

In response to a Member's question as to when a temporary hub would likely be in place, and what factors were involved to achieve this, Peter Gadsdon stated that finding a venue was the main issue as suitable properties in the area were often busy with pre-booked events. He did however stress that there was a clear desire to embed the hub in the area and that everyone who worked on the prototype remained eager to make this happen.

In response to concerns raised by a Member that positive community initiatives of this kind had been proposed in Harlesden before but had never taken off, and there

were fears that this could happen again with the community hub, Peter Gadsdon noted these concerns and stated that local community groups had also voiced this. He told the Committee that building trust with both partnering groups and residents was an ongoing process but that this prototype had been a good start. He noted that the Council was committed to making the hub a sustainable model of success in Harlesden and then replicating it elsewhere in the Borough. The Chair added that there was evidently a real determination to take this forward, and this included talking to businesses in the area about how the presence of the hub could benefit them. Carolyn Downs (the Council's Chief Executive) also noted these concerns and stated that this initiative linked to the Council's plans for Town Centre Managers throughout the Borough. She stated that there needed to be co-ordination of these different elements going forward to allow for a significant positive impact to residents.

**RESOLVED that** the progress and next steps for the work on the OBRs and Harlesden Hub prototype be noted.

**7. Employment, Skills and Enterprise team: summary of available support for vulnerable residents**

Kaya Chatterji (the Council's Service Development Manager for Employment, Skills and Enterprise) introduced the report, which provided an overview of the employment and training support for vulnerable residents, including those with a disability, which were commissioned or delivered by the Employment, Skills and Enterprise Team. The Committee heard that there were barriers to vulnerable people which caused significant inequality, and that there was a growing body of evidence to suggest that paid employment could assist vulnerable people to live independently for longer, improve their mental health and wellbeing whilst reducing reliance on traditional support services. Ms Chatterji noted that there was a clear theme around holistic, integrated working for residents with complex needs across different services and organisations in all of the projects contained in the report.

The Committee heard about four specific project examples. The overview included their aims and the key outcomes which were hoped to be delivered. These examples were: the Brent Works Learning Disabilities Contract (Section 7.0-7.1 of the report); Brent Start courses for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (Section 7.2 of the report); Mental Health Trailblazer project (Section 5.0-5.1 of the report); and Job Brokerage Contract (Section 6.1 of the report). She specified the estimated job starts for people who were engaged with the projects over the length of the respective contracts.

A Committee member noted that it was clear that Brent residents were going to be badly affected by the Government's benefit changes, and questioned whether there was any grant funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) extended to these projects in assisting residents with disabilities or mental health problems find work. Kaya Chatterji responded by stating that DWP had provided a degree of funding to some of the projects in the report but not all. She noted that Section 6 of the report detailed the Council programmes which responded to the changes to the Welfare system. Matthew Dibben (the Council's Head of Employment, Skills and Enterprise) added that the Employment, Skills and Enterprise Team was aware that there were huge numbers of households in Brent affected by the welfare reforms and was working hard to identify those most vulnerable so they could be steered

towards the most appropriate support programme. Discussions continued on what the Council was doing more widely to ensure that the most vulnerable residents were supported, and Matthew Dibben suggested that services such as Troubled Families and Adult Social Care would be approached to obtain information on current practices and the Committee would be informed respectively.

The Chair welcomed the report, mentioning specifically that it was pleasing that the Team was commissioning projects to improve outcomes for residents on the autistic spectrum. She advised the Committee that she was part of the London Councils Grants Committee, which offered grants to community projects aimed at improving employment and skills, and asked whether this had been explored as a source of funding. Matthew Dibben stated that the Team's next steps were to look at how to make these projects more sustainable whether this was through grant funding or exploring different commissioning routes such as through the Brent Clinical Commissioning Group. He noted that it would be beneficial to discuss any potential to utilise the London Councils' Grants Committee with the Chair going forward.

Another Member of the Committee noted that the targeted approach was interesting and questioned whether there was any scope for this approach to be adopted by the Council on a wider scale in helping residents to find employment such as schemes with College Leaders focusing on youth employment. Matthew Dibben stated that there was potential to take these projects further than the pilots and if their impact was successful then that is what the Team would be aiming to do. He did note however that large scale projects would be dependent on the level of investment and how well these were managed.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (i) The contents of the report be noted; and
- (ii) A report specifying what input the Council's Adult Social Care and Troubled Families teams have in identifying vulnerable families due to be adversely affected by the welfare reforms be brought to the next meeting of the Equalities Committee.

**8. Eastern European Communities Living in Brent (Task & Finish Group Report)**

The Chair invited Mr Martin Francis, to address the Committee in relation to the Task and Finish Group Report. Mr Francis stated that he believed that the report's methodology and evidence base was inadequate and perpetuated stereotypes about Romanian nationals in particular. He also noted that it was focused too narrowly on two nationalities which excluded a variety of other Eastern European countries. The Committee heard that Mr Francis had spoken to the Romanian Cultural Centre about the report which had also felt that the Council had a limited understanding of the Romanian community and needed a more thoughtful data collection process. He concluded that the Council had missed the opportunity to highlight the cultural richness that the Eastern European Community brought to the Borough within this report.

Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) thanked Mr Francis for his representation. She addressed the points raised stating that the intention of the report was in no way meant to exclude specific Eastern European nationalities but

to update the Committee on the most recent data available to the Council that was heavily reliant on people's self-declaration. The focus on Polish and Romanian nationals was primarily because these were the two largest Eastern European groups in Brent and the two groups which the Council had the most substantial evidence base on socio-economic barriers to draw from.

The Committee heard that the task and finish group had held a recent roundtable with 15 different Eastern European Community Groups invited, including the Romanian Cultural Centre, the Bosnia and Herzegovina Community Advice Centre and the Eastern European Resource Centre, where the findings and recommendations of the task and finish group were presented. The work and recommendations of the group had been well received and no specific concerns had been raised. Members heard that all organisations expressed an interest to be involved in the implementation of the relevant recommendations. Andreyana Ivanova reminded the audience of the scope of the report and that this was the first phase of the task and finish group. The next phase, would be to work much more closely with these community groups and do outreach work to deliver sustainable outcomes to improve the lives and experiences of Eastern European residents.

Genevieve George (the Council's Partnerships and Engagement Manager) added to this by emphasising that all of the recommendations were a starting point and that the Council was looking to be inclusive and work alongside the Eastern European community. She went through the proposed recommendations aimed at improving outcomes for Eastern Europeans including: community groups applying for grants; expanding volunteering opportunities; holding drop-in information sessions and open door events in different community hubs on a range of themes; working with Advice4Renters to offer bespoke advice to the Eastern European residents; and carrying out ethnographic research to inform further outreach work, if required. She also acknowledged that community cohesion was extremely important to address after the rise in hate crimes after Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

Members welcomed the report and the planned initiatives within the recommendations. It was also acknowledged from the Officers' comments that this was deemed to be the starting point which the task and finish group could build upon. Members felt there needed to be a clear focus on translation and language services being available to Eastern European communities to aid integration and community cohesion. It was suggested that this could be done through schools, who had, in the past, offered lessons to parents to aid the process of settling into the area. There were also discussions on the need to educate the local population on the positive aspects that these communities could offer and break down any barriers which existed culturally or socio-economically.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (i) The findings and proposals outlined in the report be noted and the task and finish group's next steps under the recommendations section be endorsed;
- (ii) An update on the task and finish group's progress be brought to a future Committee meeting, provisionally in summer 2017;

- (iii) The report be amended (under section 4.3) to include **schools** as a venue for holding local drop-in information sessions; and
- (iv) The Committee place on record its great appreciation for the Eastern European Community in Brent and that all Eastern European nationals were very welcome in the Borough.

## 9. **Overcrowding and BAME Households (Task & Finish Group report)**

Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) introduced the report which provided the Committee with an initial background and summary of the scale and impact of overcrowding affecting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) households. She noted that the recent Runnymede Trust research in particular had found that Bangladeshi and Black African groups continue to be the two groups that are most disproportionately affected by overcrowding, closely followed by the White Other ethnic group that had seen the highest increase in overcrowding. She noted that the findings and recommendations of the task and finish group would inform the Council's review of its Housing Strategy.

Tony Hirsch (the Council's Strategy and Policy Manager for the Housing Partnerships Service) provided some more detail on the report. The Committee heard that overcrowding typically occurred through a lack of income, changes to welfare and/or lack of supply of larger accommodation. Mr Hirsch stated that overcrowding was quite difficult to measure as it was based on census data which could quickly become out of date and that local data was usually limited or anecdotal – especially so in the private sector. He outlined that the task and finish group had focused on the Council's social housing stock, leasehold data and the diversity and socio-economic profile of the Council's tenants and leaseholders to begin to build a picture of the situation in Brent (figures found in Section 3.10 of the report). Tony Hirsch noted that a significant finding was that leasehold properties which had been sold under right-to-buy legislation were often more crowded than Council-owned properties because they were now being let privately. The Committee heard an overview of the report's recommendations containing the steps the Council should be looking to take to guard against this problem.

In discussions surrounding the recent Autumn Statement, the Chair asked whether the instruction for Councils to sell high-value housing assets and pay a sum of the sale to central government had changed. Tony Hirsch responded saying that this provision had not gone but the understanding was that this would be piloted over a five-year period. It was also noted that the Council would definitely not have to pay anything from any high value sales in the next year.

It was noted that there were also wider discussions surrounding the role of the London Mayor and providing housing in the Borough, and also whether Brent had the resources it needed to address the potential problems specified in the report. The Chair noted that the Council had recently set up a Wholly Owned Investment Company which was specifically designed to build and assist the development of the Council's Housing Strategy. Tony Hirsch added that, as it stood, Brent Housing Partnership was a registered provider and could apply for grants for additional housing although this could change if the Council's Housing Management services were brought back in-house as was currently proposed. The Committee also heard details about the London Mayor's affordable housing program which was aiming to

build 90,000 new homes between now and 2021 and that his target of 50% affordable had now been dropped to 35%. It was felt that this could also assist in the helping to alleviate potential problems of overcrowding affecting BAME households.

**RESOLVED that** the findings and proposals outlined in the report be noted and the recommendations to help inform the review of the Council's Housing Strategy be endorsed.

#### 10. **2015-16 Gender Pay Gap Audit**

David Veale (the Council's Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development) introduced the report which considered the gender pay differences between men and women within Brent Council's non-schools workforce. The Committee heard more detail about the methodology involved which was based on the primary data taken from the HR database on 31 March 2016.

David Veale outlined that the Council's overall *general* pay gap was 6.8 percent which meant that on average women within the organisation earned this percentage less than men. This was below the UK-wide general pay gap for all employees which was 19.2 percent and the public sector specific pay gap of 11.4 per cent. He also outlined that the overall *proportional* gender pay gap was -0.42 percent which meant that the median pay for women was slightly higher than the median pay for men. David Veale explained that the differences between findings of general and proportional pay gaps were because of the higher proportion of women being on lower grades within Brent's workforce. However the belief was that the Council was doing relatively well in comparison to UK averages and the report contained proposals aimed at reducing the overall gender pay gap.

Members of the Committee welcomed the findings within the report and felt that the Council was generally heading in a very positive direction on equalising gender pay. There was a brief discussion on whether it would be feasible to compare Brent's findings with statistics from other London Boroughs. David Veale specified that a lot of London Borough's had not published the findings from their Gender Pay Gap Audits because currently it is not mandatory to do so. However, in preparation for the enactment of section 78 of the Equality Act on mandatory gender pay gap reporting London Councils have set up a group to come up with a common approach to pay gap audits so that Councils could benchmark more effectively.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (i) The findings and proposals outlined in the report be noted; and
- (ii) A report comparing Brent's Gender Pay Gap Audit data to other London Boroughs, where possible, be brought to one of the next meetings of the Equalities Committee.

#### 11. **2016/17 Equality Strategy Action Plan**

Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) provided an update to Members on the progress of the Equality Strategy Action Plan. She directed Committee Members to the 'Amber' status sections of the document and noted

Councillor Harrison's early request for feedback on the follow up workshops to the 'YourVoice' survey (see *matters arising*). She explained that the Amber status was due to the one month delay of the workshops that had been put back to November to factor in further feedback from the Forward Together and Question Time sessions held by the Council's Corporate Management Team in October. The workshops were held at the end of November and were facilitated by Business in the Community as an impartial partner. The findings and suggestions from these sessions would be assessed and taken forward as part of the relevant action plans to ensure that all staff felt that they were a valued part of the workforce and that they can fulfil their full potential. Ms Ivanova also mentioned the other amber section which was the review of the Council's MyMentor programme that was currently being undertaken. The Committee heard that any notable updates would be provided at a future meeting of the Equalities Committee.

A Member of the Committee questioned why the Committee had not been updated formally on the work to assess equalities implications for different departments facing budget cuts. David Veale responded that service-facing equalities impacts were published as part of the relevant reports and that all reports on budget proposals are supported by equality analysis of their impact. He continued that both the Equalities and Human Resources teams monitored internal restructures for equality impacts and that, to date, no restructures had had a disproportionate impact on any particular group. The Chair added that Cabinet key decisions were all also subject to equality assessments. Althea Loderick (the Council's Strategic Director of Resources) agreed that a report clarifying the process of how equality impact assessments were completed, would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED that:**

- (i) The progress of the 2016/17 Equality Strategy Action plan be noted; and
- (ii) A report clarifying the process of how equality impact assessments were completed and which specific bodies were involved be brought to the next meeting of the Equalities Committee.

**12. Date of the Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting of the Equalities Committee was scheduled to take place on 20 February 2017 at 6pm.

**13. Any Other Urgent Business**

There was no other urgent business.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.09 pm

COUNCILLOR MARGARET MCLENNAN  
Chair