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MINUTES OF THE EQUALITIES COMMITTEE Tuesday 12 September 2017 at 6.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors McLennan (Chair), Harrison, Maurice and Thomas

Absent: Councillor Mashari

1. **Apologies for absence and clarification of alternate members**

The Governance Officer informed the Committee that the Chair had been delayed and it was **RESOLVED** that Councillor Thomas would chair the meeting until the arrival of Councillor McLennan.

Councillor Thomas took the chair.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Davidson, with Councillor Maurice being present as substitute.

2. **Declarations of interests**

There were no declarations of Interests made by Members.

3. **Deputations (if any)**

None.

4. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on 2 May 2017, be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. **Matters arising (if any)**

Members of the Committee enquired about the Harlesden Hub and the Eastern European Fair which had taken place on 17 June 2017. Peter Gadsdon (the Council's Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships) informed the Committee that the Harlesden Hub was providing support to residents to access services delivered by the Council and its partners. In relation to the Eastern European Fair, Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) explained that a comprehensive update would be provided under item eight to the agenda.

Ms Ivanova invited Members to an event to celebrate Black History Month on 26 October 2017.

6. **Progress update on Brent's Digital Strategy (presentation delivered on the day)**

Peter Gadsdon (the Council's Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships) introduced Ms Abigail Malley (Digital Strategy Officer as part of the Civil Service

Fast Stream scheme) and delivered a presentation on Brent's Digital Strategy. The Committee heard that the Strategy had been agreed by the Cabinet in June and six million pounds over the course of two and half years had been allocated to transform the way services were delivered. Mr Gadsdon said that the digital revolution had left the most vulnerable residents excluded so the Strategy covered issues such as technical and digital offers to access services, the rollout of assistive technology (AT) at residents' homes and making Brent a digital place where infrastructure would provide connectivity for residents and businesses.

Councillor McLennan entered the meeting at 6:08 pm and took the chair.

Mr Gadsdon pointed out that age was the main indicator of digital exclusion and spoke about the negative correlation between people's age and their desire and ability to use digital technology, but acknowledged that this would be less of a barrier over time. In addition, Mr Gadsdon said that one in seven residents had a disability limiting their activities, which combined with the fact that 11% of Brent's population was aged 65 and over, meant that focus had to be placed on this group of people to help them access services. He said that an important part of making Brent a digital place was helping residents feel more confident and supported which could be achieved by working with the Community and Voluntary Sector (CVS), via community hubs, and through the increased provision of self-service. However, Mr Gadsdon stressed that face-to-face contact would never be removed as the Council acknowledged the need to provide support people directly in some circumstances.

As far as connectivity was concerned, he informed the Committee that the Council was looking into ways to provide WiFi to housing estates, which led to a question about the technology used to ensure this. In response, Mr Gadsdon said that Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras could be used as broadband routers and said that the Strategy looked into alternatives that private providers could not or would not provide. In addition, Ms Malley noted a special team had been set up to address the lack of connectivity in certain areas of Brent and they would bid for funding to address this issue.

Mr Gadsdon gave examples of projects delivered as part of the Strategy – the introduction of homelessness reduction customer relationship management (CRM); the digital offer to foster carers; telehealth; the improvement of the digital offer for school admissions; borough-wide digital skills development, etc. The Committee heard that the Digital Strategy was due for renewal in 2020 by when the majority of the projects would have been delivered.

Members of the Committee commented on the experience of using the Council's automated switchboard system and expressed their concerns related to the voice recognition system and the need to add an 'operator' option which would connect the caller to a member of staff. In response, Councillor McLennan said that Cabinet had approved the award of the contract for the provision of telephony services, including the automated call distribution system (ACD). Carolyn Downs (the Council's Chief Executive) said that using webchat might be better than calling the switchboard as enquires would be resolved quicker and residents would know the outcome immediately. Mr Gadsdon commented that people had to be pointed to the channel that would provide them with the best service, which meant that the Council's webpage had to be easy to navigate. This led to a discussion about the need for an application for residents of the former Brent Housing Partnership

(BHP), who would like to use technology to report maintenance issues. Members heard that a big investment in CRM software would be made to deliver a new offer to BHP residents. As far as the engagement of young people in designing digital services was concerned, Ms Malley said that there had been conversations with the Children and Young People Department how to engage with schools and involve them in application development and design.

In relation to a suggestion for the creation of a technology park in Brent, Ms Downs explained that the Council explored different options in this direction. However, this depended on who owned the land and informed the Committee that despite the broadband in Brent being better than other areas of London, some companies preferred certain postcodes.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The Progress update on Brent's Digital Strategy be noted; and
- (ii) An update on the implementation of the Strategy be provided at a future meeting of the Committee.

7. European Union Referendum Implications for Brent

Mark Cairns (the Council's Policy and Scrutiny Manager) introduced the report which provided an update on developments since the 'European Union Referendum and the Impact of Uncertainty on European Union Nationals Living in Brent' report had been presented to the Committee in February 2017. Mr Cairns said that the outcome of the negotiations was going to have a huge impact on European Union (EU) nationals living and working in Brent as well as on the economic health of the United Kingdom (UK) and Brent. Although the official position of the UK was that EU residents already living in the country would be offered a settlement status, no cut-off date had been set after which anyone arriving in the UK would need to apply for a work permit or return to the EU. Moreover, despite the fact that free movement of people was expected to end in 2019, it had not been clear what immigration arrangements would replace it. In relation to EU-derived law, Mr Cairns said that The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill would enshrine all existing law into UK law at the point of Brexit, following which this would be reviewed and amended by Parliament. The Council would be able to lobby and influence the review and there might be opportunities for further devolution.

The Committee heard that structural funds would cease in December 2018 – Brent was part of two projects receiving EU funding, through the European Social Fund, so alternative funding had to be secured to continue beyond this point. In addition, any economic downturn would have a negative impact on the income generated through business rates.

Members of the Committee enquired whether the Council could write to government officials and Members of Parliament to emphasise that as a result of Brexit, the quality of life for the people living in Brent had deteriorated. In response, Carolyn Downs (the Council's Chief Executive) advised Councillors that there was nothing stopping the Council to raise the issue and added that the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Mayor had been considering a similar approach. She noted that if Brexit was not carried out in a way that would allow skills transition, the economy of Brent would suffer – approximately half of the 40, 000 EU nationals living the area

worked in the Borough, filling roles in various sectors, ranging from construction to healthcare. A Member of the Committee noted that the negative effect could have an impact on Brent prior to the official leaving of the EU and gave an example with the Polish community and the number of people moving back to Poland as a result of the improved economy of their native country.

The Committee agreed that the situation would be monitored and action would be taken in line with the Borough's interests if necessary.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the European Union Referendum Implications for Brent report, be noted;
- (ii) A briefing session for all Elected Members be organised; and
- (iii) An update on the issue be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

8. Progress report on the Council's work with Eastern European communities

Pascoe Sawyers (the Council's Head of Strategy and Partnerships) introduced the paper which provided a progress update and outlined the next steps on the Council's outreach work with local Eastern European communities. The Committee heard that three out of the five recommendations endorsed by the Committee had been completed, with one ongoing and one due to be completed in the autumn of 2017 (page 16 to the Agenda pack).

Mr Sawyers highlighted the key outcomes of the project to date:

- The network of organisations working with Eastern Europeans had grown from 15 to 28 members
- The Eastern European Fair had been very successful with approximately 600 guests attending, among whom Mr Barry Gardiner Member of Parliament, the Mayor of Brent and the Leader of Brent as well as Councillors Davidson and McLennan who co-hosted the event.
- In partnership with Advice4Renters, a leaflet providing tailored information and advice had been translated into the main Eastern European languages

The Committee heard that work on the recommendation on providing training and capacity building was ongoing. What remained outstanding was to deliver drop-in sessions in various locations across the Borough in the autumn of 2017. In terms of next steps, the Committee heard that Brent would be submitting a bid for available funding through the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and would be exploring opportunities for joint working with other Local Authorities and third parties.

Members of the Committee enquired about the cohesion among various Eastern European communities. In response, Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) said that the Equalities Team interaction with Eastern European communities and feedback from Eastern European organisations supporting the team showed there was willingness of communities to mix and the Eastern European Fair and other engagement activities were a clear demonstration and celebration of community cohesion. She noted, however, that there was more work

to be done with groups such as the Gypsy and Roma communities who have distinct needs and challenges that could not be addressed via the mainstream approach. This work was due to commence shortly as part of the next phase of the project, in partnership with the Eastern European network.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The contents of the progress report on the Council's work with East European communities, be noted;
- (ii) The Committee's appreciation for the good work completed be noted; and
- (iii) An update on the next stage of the project be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

9. Progress update on actions taken to address employees' feedback from Your Voice survey (presentation delivered on the day)

Mildred Phillips (the Council's Head of Employee Services) delivered a presentation on the actions taken to address employees' feedback as per the Committee's request. She provided background information to the survey which had been conducted in the period March-April 2016. She said that, overall, 70% of respondents were satisfied with the job they did, but expressed concern that the percentage of people who believed action would be taken to address the outcomes of the survey was low (37%). She continued by focusing on the top and the bottom five responses. The issues identified were that employees did not feel that there had been a strong culture of performance management; change was managed effectively; and the Council Management Team (CMT) was open and honest in their communication with staff. Carolyn Downs (the Council's Chief Executive) said that her biggest concern was that employees did not consider managers to be open and transparent.

Ms Phillips highlighted the actions taken to increase the visibility of senior managers. Forward Together sessions with CMT were being held and were very well received by employees, with over 50% of the workforce attending the last round of sessions. Minutes of CMT meetings were published on the Intranet and employees were regularly shadowing these. The Chief Executive held bi-monthly breakfast/lunch meetings and attended team meetings. The staff and managers' newsletter had been re-launched and the usage of Yammer had increased significantly. In addition, the 'Love Where You Live' campaign had been launched. The Chair commented that politicians, especially the Cabinet, had to be active and visible and gave an example of the Question Time sessions with the Leader and herself where in-depth discussions on important matters were taking place.

In terms of performance management, the appraisal scheme had been simplified and guidance for managers had been issued, along with support how to handle complex situations. The Council had reviewed the corporate training offer which led to the introduction of the My Development portal. A Member of the Committee asked if Brent had mental health champions and Ms Phillips explained that this had been considered and it would be introduced, with the Occupational Health Adviser being available to provide support until the changes were introduced.

The Committee discussed when the next staff survey would be taking place and it was suggested that this could be in April 2018. In response to a question about the gender pay gap (GPG), Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) said that the 2015-16 GPG was 6.8% which was relatively low compared to the average public sector GPG of 11%. She reminded the Committee that GPG reporting was now mandatory and noted that it would receive a report on the 2016-2017 GPG at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the progress update on actions taken to address employees' feedback from Your Voice survey, be noted.

10. Update on Management Development 2016/17

Mildred Phillips (the Council's Head of Employee Services) introduced the report which gave an overview of management development during 2016 and 2017. She said that two key programmes had been implemented during this period- 'Aspire' and 'Inspire', with the former one being linked to two levels of Chartered Management Institute (CMI) qualifications – Level 3 for employees at grades PO1 to PO4 and Level 5 for staff at grades PO5 to PO8. Ms Phillips drew the Committee's attention to paragraph 5.5 of the report (page 32 to the Agenda pack), which provided details about the career progression of participants. She noted that 70% of those promoted following the completion of the Level 3 Certificate (10) were from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. In relation to the 'Inspire' programme, Ms Phillips said that Module 1 had been completed, feedback so far had been positive and more details would be provided at a future meeting of the Committee.

The Committee discussed the outcomes of the 'Aspire' programme and Althea Loderick (the Council's Strategic Director for Resources) noted that the proportion of BAME staff at senior levels within the organisation was continuously increasing from 11% in 2015 to 28% in 2017, which was a significant achievement in such short period of time.

RESOLVED that the Update on Management Development 2016/2017, be noted.

11. Progress update on Brent's 2017/18 Equality and Diversity action plan

Andreyana Ivanova (the Council's Head of Equality) drew the Committee's attention to Brent's 2017/2018 Equality and Diversity Action Plan (pages 39-41 to the Agenda Pack) and highlighted that the only action with an amber status was the streamlining and re-launching of the Council's Equality Analysis (EA) process. She explained that there had been a slight delay and the action was expected to be completed in Autumn 2017. A new more user-friendly template was being drafted and it would be piloted with staff members in due course, with the Equalities Team arranging drop-in and team sessions to promote it.

Ms Ivanova informed the Committee that she had managed to submit an application for the Best 100 Employers for Race 2017. Feedback received had been positive and the final result would be known in November 2017. As far as the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (WEI) annual application was concerned, Ms Ivanova confirmed its submission and expressed her confidence that Brent had chances to

improve its position in the overall ranking (ranked 200th in 2017), although this also depended on the number of employers participating in 2018 Stonewall WEI.

Members of the Committee enquired about future actions. Ms Ivanova said that the Equalities Team had been working with services and forums to identify key equality and diversity matters to taken forward but reminded the Committee that there were a few actions in green (i.e. on track) that were still due to be completed. She invited Members to share their ideas about relevant areas to be included in the 2018/19 Action Plan. In response, a Member suggested that leaving the European Union and the impact on Brent residents had to be added.

RESOLVED that the progress update on Brent's 2017/2018 Equality and Diversity Action Plan, be noted.

12. **Any other urgent business**

There was no other urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.51 pm

COUNCILLOR MARGARET MCLENNAN
Chair

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