
Equalities Sub-Committee MINUTES

Of a virtual meeting held on Monday, 3 March 2025 from 7.11 pm – 8.22 pm.

Present: Councillors

Anne Winter, (Chair) Kevin Raeburn, Raj Khiroya, Christopher Alley, Lisa Hudson and Cheryl Stungo

Officers in Attendance:

Alison Scott, Director of Finance
Rebecca Young, Head of Strategy and Partnerships
Jay Williams, Community Liaison Officer
Shivani Dave, Partnerships Manager
Anita Hibbs, Committee Officer

ESC10/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Cox.

ESC11/25 MINUTES

The minutes of the Equalities Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chair at the earliest opportunity.

ESC12/25 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of other business.

ESC13/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

ESC14/25 IMPACTFUL LIVES

The presentation could not be delivered due to technical issues. It will be postponed to the next Equalities Sub-Committee meeting.

ESC15/25 WORKFORCE MONITORING

The Director of Finance presented the update on the workforce data, emphasising the Council's commitment to eliminating discrimination in employment and service delivery, and efforts being made to improve disclosure rates include anonymous surveys and outreach initiatives.

Members discussed the workforce data and questioned the factors affecting completion rates of the disclosure surveys among employees and what actions could increase response rates.

Officers spoke about previous efforts, including a blog aimed at raising disability confidence, but noted that these efforts did not significantly impact disclosure rates. They also mentioned ongoing strategies, such as engaging with employees through the Inclusion Working Group, and utilising paper copies for those less inclined to use digital platforms.

Members raised concerns about the low percentage of minority employment and suggested collaboration with other local authorities to improve recruitment efforts.

ESC16/25 REFUGEE UPDATE

The Community Liaison Officer presented the update and spoke about the various services provided by the Refugee Council and local councils for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, particularly focusing on Afghan, Ukrainian and Syrian cohorts, detailing the comprehensive assistance offered, including legal support, mental health counselling, employment training, and practical help for families adjusting to life in the UK.

Members discussed the various challenges faced by refugees in the community, highlighting employment barriers, mental health issues, and the importance of language acquisition. Officers identified employment as a significant barrier, noting that many refugees find that their qualifications are not recognised, leading to demoralising job placements. The conversation also touched on the necessity of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for better assimilation and independence. Mental health is a critical concern, and officers emphasised the impact of past traumas and current challenges on refugees' well-being. Officers also spoke about the proactive nature of many refugees, and the need for ongoing mental health support as they settle into their new life. The discussion concluded with a focus on community support, safeguarding measures and the importance of showcasing the contributions of refugees to the local area.

ESC17/25 EQUALITY DUTY INFORMATION REPORT

The Partnerships Manager presented the report summarising the corporate work undertaken to meet 4 key equality objectives; promoting equality in employment and training, improving access to services, enhancing understanding of community diversity, and celebrating inclusion.

Members requested further information on the lunch and learn sessions being provided to employees. Officers explained that these sessions are bite sized, informal training sessions on diverse topics such as neurodiversity, menopause and men's health, designed to fit into employees' lunch breaks for better accessibility. Officers emphasised the importance of internal promotion to increase attendance at these sessions. Additionally, they mentioned the mandatory e-learning module for all staff on equalities, which will be reviewed in the coming months, and the collaboration with external providers for face to face training. The Inclusion Working Group is focused on reviewing feedback from staff surveys to develop action plans and enhance training materials. The group have been raising awareness about issues such as domestic abuse, and have also been promoting Race Equality Week and Holocaust Memorial Day with recent events.

ESC18/25 WORKPLAN

The Head of Strategy and Partnerships provided an update on the Equalities Sub-Committee's workplan, confirming that the Impactful Lives presentation will be postponed to the October meeting, and highlighting items such as the Watford African and Caribbean Association to discuss their community efforts, updates on the Prevent agenda, which is currently undergoing changes. Additionally, the Community Safety Team's collaboration with local groups will be reviewed. The workplan also includes a cancer project presentation by One Vision, and a discussion on mental health, prompted by a suggestion from the Chair. Other standard items include council motions related to equality and the Equality Duty Information report, which will be revisited in the future.

ESC19/25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

CHAIR