

---

**EXTRAORDINARY POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE****MINUTES**

Of a virtual/remote meeting held on 24 August 2020 between 7.00pm and 7.42pm.

**Councillors present:**

Sarah Nelmes (Chair) (Local Plan)  
Matthew Bedford (Vice Chair) (Resources  
and Shared Services)  
Joan King (for Cllr Cox)  
Steve Drury (Infrastructure & Planning  
Policy)  
Alex Hayward  
Paula Hiscocks  
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Transport and  
Economic Development)

Stephanie Singer (for Cllr Lloyd)  
Andrew Scarth (Housing)  
Reena Ranger  
Roger Seabourne (Community Safety and  
Partnerships)  
Alison Wall  
Phil Williams (Lead Member for  
Environmental Services & Sustainability)

Others Councillors in attendance: Councillors Joanna Clemens, Joy Mann, Alex Michaels and  
Debbie Morris,

---

Officers Present: Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive  
Geof Muggerridge, Director of Community and Environmental Services  
Rebecca Young, Acting Head of Community Partnerships  
James Baldwin, Deputy Monitoring Officer  
Jayne LaGrua, Principal Solicitor  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

**PR25/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Cox and Chris Lloyd with the substitute Members being Councillors Joan King and Stephanie Singer.

**PR26/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

None received.

**PR27/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received.

**PR28/20 NEW SUB-COMMITTEE OF POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

A motion was passed at the Extraordinary Council meeting on 28 July 2020: which required the setting up of a sub-committee to discuss any changes needed to the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy to reflect definitions affecting community groups and the impact on others. The full motion can be seen at Appendix 1.

This report sets out the proposed Terms of Reference for the sub-committee and the proportional representation of the sub-committee.

It is suggested that the sub-committee be called the Equalities sub-committee and the proposed Terms of Reference can be seen in Section 2.3. The proposed representation on the Committee can be seen in Section 2.7.

The Acting Head of Community Partnerships advised that the terms of reference of the sub-committee included developing a timeframe and work plan for the committee to assist and develop equalities work for the council. There would be the opportunity to discuss the definition around Anti-Semitism, a definition around Islamophobia and following this the sub-committee would undertake a review of the Council's entire Comprehensive Equalities Policy and ensure that agreed definitions affecting community groups were reflected in the policy. The sub-committee would also be undertaking work with the Community Safety Partnership to find out about experiences within our communities and understand how people have been affected by prejudice and discrimination. This would help guide the Council's work around hate crime and tackling discrimination and prejudice. The final objective of the Equalities sub-committee terms of reference is to provide an opportunity for research and discussion with other organisations, community groups and charities through Task and Finish Groups should this be agreed by Council.

Members raised the following points:

A motion was passed by Council that we did not have small working party type groups as the meetings are held behind closed doors and not in the public domain with Part II information being leaked. The Member was unhappy about having these closed meetings.

Could participants not be invited to a sub-committee meeting? Why have a Task and Finish group meetings.

Concerns with the work being done by a small sub-committee as it should be discussed by P&R Committee Members. To break it down into small Task and Finish Groups which would mean the Committee Members were not privy to those discussions and reports would not provide the opportunity for Members to give due diligence.

It was down to the Chair of the meeting on how many times Members spoke.

There was a question at the Council meeting in July where it was asked what was lacking in our Equalities policy and the answer was not very much. Council had the chance to adopt the IHRA Anti-Semitism Definition but this had not been done.

Was this a task that was befitting of a District Council? We are all very lucky to live in a safe and harmonious area and our religious motivated hate crime statistically was down 50% from 4 to 2. Everything the Council do should be open and transparent. The report speaks about calling community leaders in but what credentials would they need? What happens when you have two factions of the same religion or in the same community who are at fundamental odds with each other and what would be the dispute resolution?

The Committee was being asked to set up a new sub-committee which was going to have focus groups below that. There would be financial implications for our country, our residents, our businesses and local authorities going forward. Was this reasonable and responsible? If things are happening in Three Rivers where was our Equalities policy falling short? Do we not have Government legislation we can consider? Generally Government consultations are wide and far and fully

consultative so surely we would have them to fall back on. When you have Government consultations they consult with community groups, independent experts, academics other Government departments, Attorney General's office and the Crown Prosecution Service. How are we going to do a similar job?

There was no timeframe to the equalities work. This would be an unnecessary diversion of time, money and resources when the Council had so many other demands.

Members reflected on how we had arrived at this situation and how some 19 Members had passed a motion at Council which quoted that there were widely accepted and recognised definitions of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia but had asked what those wide range of definitions were. There was only one definition to be discussed by the sub-committee which is the IHRA one. There had been a lot of hurt caused to the local Jewish community by the Council motion. All this work was a waste of money to the tax payers and Council resources which had been expended by trying to get the Council to adopt the IHRA definition of Anti-Semitism

A motion had gone to Council and been lost to open up the membership of the Policy and Resources Committee to allow the Independent Councillors Group a place on the Committee.

There was a need to understand the financial implications and how we choose the voices for Task and Finish Groups.

The Chair had inherited this situation but we need to move on and get the IHRA definition adopted by Council. There was a motion in June that all Groups be represented on this Committee but it had been lost.

The Chair clarified that it was not for the Task and Finish Group meetings to be closed but for them to be very open so that invitations could be made to people from outside the Council. For example, if we were having discussion on problems suffered by a particular element of the community we could have the community leaders attend. If we are looking at an issue on Black Lives Matter we could involve members of our communities that are affected by it. Having the Task and Finish groups seemed a better way to have open discussions rather than the more formal committee meeting. It was not the idea to have just one group but several groups looking at different elements of the work. It would enable people who had an interest in a particular element of the work to be involved.

The whole point of the Task and Finish Groups was to get away from the formalised Committee structure where each person was only able to speak once to address the Committee but provide the opportunity for an open table discussion. The request made that the meetings would not be held in Part II could be accommodated.

The Chair said the idea was to look at our Comprehensive Equalities Policy. Our current policy was extremely comprehensive but it was good for any policy to be reviewed and updated. The Council are making sure that all parts of our communities have a chance to talk to us about their experiences and let us know if they feel they have suffered anything that might suggest that we should take action. A Hate Crime initiative on ways of tackling hate crime would be coming forward. The Chair had apologised to some of our communities and had written to the Leaders of the Jewish faiths in the community and to the Jewish Chronicle. The Council do want to do what is best for all of our communities and what we are doing now is the best we can do. 1 September was the next Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

A Member said there had been criticism made that sub-committees could only have membership from the Policy and Resources Committee but that was due to the Councils Constitution. The Task and Finish Groups would allow any Members with any interest in these subjects to be part of this work and to be able to call for evidence in public and was common practise in a lot of Authorities. There is a detailed timeline for the work in the reports to the Equalities sub-committee. The terms of reference were specifically related to the Councils Comprehensive Equalities policy and our Community Safety Partnership and not to Central Government, the County Council or any other bodies.

In accordance with the Council's Committee virtual meeting protocol which sits alongside the Council Procedure Rules a member of the public spoke on the proposed terms of reference of the sub-committee.

The Chair advised that this was only the start of the process and adopting the IHRA Anti-Semitism definition was a first step to action hate crime. The process being put in place was not just to give definitions but to take action in our community and make it a fairer community for all. Staff time and costs would be less for the Task and Finish groups.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved the recommendations as set out in the report at 11.1 and 11.2, seconded by Councillor Andrew Scarth. If Council agree the setting up of the Task and Finish Groups this would come back to the sub-committee to agree which groups are set up.

On being put to the Committee the motion on setting up the new Equalities sub-committee under the Policy and Resources Committee, its membership to consist of 9 Members with the political proportionality being 6, 2 and 1, the terms of reference, that no decision making powers be delegated to the sub-committee; and that substitute Members be allowed was declared CARRIED the voting being unanimous.

On being put to the Committee the motion to agree to allow the Equalities sub-committee to form small Task and Finish Groups as it felt necessary to assist in its review as detailed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 of the report was declared CARRIED the voting being 8 For, 4 Against and 1 Abstention.

**RESOLVED:**

That a new sub-committee called Equalities sub-committee be established under the Policy and Resources Committee as set out below:

- The Committee to consist of 9 Members with the political proportionality being 6, 2, 1.

(the Membership of the sub-committee to be: Councillors Stephen Giles-Medhurst, Sarah Nelmes, Matthew Bedford, Roger Seabourne, Steve Drury, Phil Williams, Alex Hayward, Reena Ranger and Stephen Cox)

- The Terms of Reference as set out in Section 2.3 of the report are agreed.
  - That no decision making powers be delegated to the sub-committees; and
  - That substitute Members be allowed.

**RECOMMEND:**

To Council:

To agree to allow the Equalities sub-committee to form small task and finish groups as it felt necessary to assist in its review as detailed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 of the report.

**CHAIR**