
EQUALITIES SUB-COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Of a Virtual/remote meeting held on Tuesday 28 September 2021 at 7pm until 8.57pm.

Councillors present:

Stephen Giles-Medhurst
Margaret Hofman
Raj Khiroya
Sarah Nelmes

Keith Martin
Shanti Maru
Ciarán Reed

Also in attendance:

Councillor Joanna Clemens
Sophie Lawrence, Prevent Programme Manager, HCC
Michelle Hamilton, Fundraising Manager, Watford and District Mencap Society

Officers in attendance:

Rebecca Young, Head of Community Partnerships
Shivani Dave, Partnerships Manager
Gordon Glenn, Performance and Projects Manager
Debbie O'Neill, Community Liaison Officer
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager
Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

ESC 01/21 ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst was nominated as Chair of the Sub-Committee, seconded by Cllr Raj Khiroya.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst be Chair of the Equalities sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2021/22

ESC 02/21 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst nominated Councillor Sarah Nelmes as Vice-Chair, seconded by Cllr Keith Martin.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Sarah Nelmes be Vice-Chair of the Equalities sub-committee for the Local Government Year 2021/22

ESC 03/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Cox and Roger Seabourne.

ESC 04/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Equalities sub-committee held on 15 March 2021 were agreed to be an accurate account and would be signed by the Chair at the first opportunity.

ESC 05/21 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business

ESC 06/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There was none.

ESC 07/21 EQUALITY POLICY AND EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

The Performance and Projects Manager presented the current Equality Policy and Equality Objectives, which Members were invited to review and comment on.



EQ Policy and Objectives_v2.pptx

The current policy was based on the best data available, which in some cases was drawn from the census of 2011. The data gathered from the 2021 census would take a little more time to become available and would be included in the Equality Policy review in 2023. Three Rivers is a very diverse District in terms of languages spoken, ethnicity and religion. The Performance and Projects Manager highlighted to the sub-committee the successes of previous Equalities objectives that had been completed since 2016.

The Performance and Projects Manager concluded the presentation with examples of suggested Equality Objectives that comprised clearer wording, and said the aim was to agree new, community based Equality Objectives in early 2022.

A Member asked whether it was possible for the sub-committee to see what was proposed for the mandatory Equality training as it was integral to the remit of the Members, to which the Performance and Projects Manager said it was, but it may have to be done electronically due to timings.

A Member said the Council was supporting the Three Rivers Museum with its focus on Black History month in October and encouraged those present to look out for it.

The Chair said it would be useful to have a list of Council supported events that demonstrated its commitment to Equality and Diversity issues. The Performance and Projects Manager said the Council supported Pride every year and would be supporting Black History Month, and was supportive of the Chair's suggestion and would provide details to Members.

The Head of Community Partnerships said online training for Members via iLearn would be available in the near future, and the modules would include Safeguarding and Prevent, with Equalities training to be added. More Equality-related projects and activities would be included in the review along with a review of the objectives. The Equalities policy was due for a full review in July 2023.

RESOLVED:

Noted the review of the Equality Objectives would be taking place before returning to the sub-committee to consider before recommendation to the Policy and Resources Committee.

ESC 08/21 PREVENT

There followed a presentation by Sophie Lawrence, Prevent Programme Manager, on extremism and emerging issues. The aim of Prevent is to monitor risk and determine the actions required to raise awareness of and prevent radicalisation. The presentation focused on extreme Right Wing groups and the Involuntarily Celibate group (INCEL).

Extremism is a form of terrorism, and Prevent is a safeguarding mechanism. Social media provided an opportunity for people to express and share untruths, hatred, fake news and conspiracy theories, of which extremists took advantage to peddle their nefarious ideologies. The 2018 Prevent strategy had three specific objectives:

- Tackle the cause of radicalisation and respond to ideological challenges
- Safeguard and support those at risk by early intervention
- Enable those engaged to disengage and rehabilitate.

Right wing extremism was broken down into three categories – Cultural Nationalism, White Nationalism and White Supremacy, each with slightly different aims, with primarily White Nationalism countering the Black Lives Matter movement.

Instances of young people expressing extremist views were provided along with examples of graffiti and stickers within the county. There was evidence of groups taking advantage of anger and hardship caused by Covid e.g. combining anti-Afghan sentiments with anti-vaccine slogans.

The Involuntary Celibate group (INCEL) was an online sub-culture comprising angry young men whose sexual and social inadequacies were channelled in a hatred of women which often advocated violent attacks on females. The aim of Prevent was to gather intelligence and interject before harm was done, and as part of a response Hertfordshire County Council staged the Synergy event to which numerous key partners, such as the Police, NHS, Fire Service and Schools were invited to raise awareness and exchange ideas and provide access to information.

The Chair asked how one could identify signs of involvement in such groups. It was advised that it was rarely obvious, but the appearance of stickers and

obscure graffiti were indications. A Signs and Symbols document had been compiled as a point of reference. Members were encouraged to report cases, as individuals may be on the Police's radar and to undertake the online Prevent training via iLearn.

Members were advised that all designated Safeguarding Leads at the Council were Prevent trained and could be approached at any time if they were unsure.

A Member spoke of the attempts to help resettle Afghan refugees in the District, and was horrified by the consequent levels of racist abuse on social media.

A Member asked whether Prevent training by HCC would be the same as that provided by the Department of Education to School Teachers and Assistants, to which it was replied it would be a bespoke programme for Hertfordshire. Social isolation was evident in almost every case, and recruitment often occurred via Gaming (PlayStation, Xbox etc.) in which individuals shared their beliefs with like-minded people. The Prevent team was working with Youth Groups to address social isolation, and a Member suggested an approach might be to consider ways in which people were similar versus what makes individuals different. The Member referenced the sexualisation of terrorism and asked if that is addressed. It was advised that this was a major factor and that a piece on misogyny and extremism was currently in progress, while other examples of misogyny and sexualisation were evident within Islamist Extremism and the procurement of ISIS brides, and White Supremacist groups who advocated the rape of women.

The Chair said although it was up to central government to deal with abusive social media comments, could anything be done at a local level to address anonymous online posts? Some outreach work was required with local media, and HCC would look further at social media posts and regulation, and encourage responsibility and accountability for websites and social media platforms.

The Chair asked whether the anti-vaccine campaign was a form of radicalisation, to which it was replied that people were entitled to their opinion about issues, but it would only become of interest to Prevent if violence against people or property was implied.

A Member asked with what age group did Prevent begin to raise awareness of radicalisation, and were schools part of the educational remit. The 12-19 year old age group had been identified as the most vulnerable. Prevent was working with schools and teachers in Hertfordshire but there was much more to be done in the youth space. The Chair asked for the sub-committee to be updated on the progress of Prevent in future.

RESOLVED:

That the Prevent presentation be noted.

ESC 09/21 WATFORD MENCAP

Michelle Hamilton, Fundraising Manager of Watford and District Mencap presented to the sub-committee. It was explained that each Mencap

organisation operated independently, and that its focus was on helping individuals with learning disabilities.



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A learning disability was a lifelong condition which usually was the result of several health issues such as coordination and motor skills, and those affected were particularly susceptible to Covid, with fatalities 3-4 times higher than the general population. The virus also had a disproportionate impact on those from BAME backgrounds. Those with learning disabilities were subjected to greater prejudice and social isolation than others, and the aim of Mencap was to tackle such inequalities and discrimination.

The Chair asked how the organisation kept going during the Covid crisis in terms of funding. It was advised that it was very difficult as costs had increased and revenue-generating events stopped, but fortunately the community and some businesses had provided support, with Costa providing coffee for staff, and assistance was forthcoming from religious and community groups, individual fundraising efforts and Herts County Council, which sourced PPE. The organisation now had to redouble its efforts and encourage the public to re-engage, and it was heartening that so many people helped.

Prevent is aware of extremists targeting vulnerable people and those experiencing isolation, and suggested the two organisations work together.

A Member asked if more hardship was anticipated with furlough payments ending shortly, to which it was advised that the impact of such payments stopping would be clearer later. An individual who was furloughed and subsequently became unemployed, had received assistance and support from Mencap which no other organisation could.

A Member asked if Mencap worked with the Community Café in Chorleywood, to which the response was that it did not, but had worked the café in Watford. The Chair said it was good to see the café open again as it was an important support facility for many people.

A Member asked if Mencap was fully open yet, to which it was advised that a hybrid service was to be provided as some people remained nervous of being out in public.

RESOLVED:

That the Mencap presentation be noted.

The Chair asked that the presentations be made available for sharing with all Councillors.

ESC 10/21 WORKPLAN OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Head of Community Partnerships introduced the updated workplan, which comprised future agenda items, standing items and completed tasks. The aim was to invite representatives and partners to speak at future meetings of the

sub-committee on a relevant topic, the next being the Armed Forces Covenant which was due for re-signing.

There would be a joint Housing and Community Partnerships presentation on the Afghan and Syrian refugee scheme, and Prevent would be added for a future update.

The Chair said that as new terror groups would undoubtedly emerge it would be worth including the subject annually to raise awareness of such groups.

Next year a briefing with the Police was to be held relating to the Prevent Action Plan which all Councillors would be invited to attend.

On being put to the Sub-Committee, the Workplan with the additional references to Training and Development including Prevent was declared CARRIED by the Chair, the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Workplan be noted.

ESC 11/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair thanked the Head of Community Partnerships for compiling a very interesting agenda and programme, and the presenters for their thought-provoking contributions.

CHAIR