

# MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 22 October 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Pauline Morrison (Chair), Jim Mallory (Vice-Chair), Olufunke Abidoye, Anne Affiku, Paul Bell, Duwayne Brooks, Patsy Foreman and Dan Whittle and

APOLOGIES: Councillors Jackie Addison

ALSO PRESENT: Helen Glass (Principal Lawyer), Salena Mulhere (Overview and Scrutiny Manager), Aileen Buckton (Executive Director for Community Services), Liz Dart (Head of Culture and Community Development), Barrie Neal (Head of Corporate Policy and Governance), Rosario Mincher (Director) (Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network), Joanne Bish (Treasurer, Equaliteam Lewisham), Mike Lewis (Procurement Programme Manager) (Chair, Equaliteam Lewisham) and Anthony Reid (Director) (Equaliteam Lewisham)

## 1. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2013

RESOLVED: That the minute of the meeting held on 3 September 2013 be agreed as a true record.

## 2. Declarations of interest

There were none.

## 3. Supporting the integration of refugees

Rosario Mincher gave a presentation to the Committee. The key points to note were:

- The organisation was formed in 1991 and became a registered charity in 1996.
- It currently has 10 paid staff and 7 trustees and is funded in part by Lewisham Council, as well as NHS Lewisham and Comic Relief
- It provides a range of support and information advice services for refugees and immigrants, including practical support such as clothes and hot lunches for those in need
- Last year nearly 500 people used the advice services, some of them numerous times. Of those people, 80% were Lewisham residents and they came from a wide range of countries of origin
- Information and advice services offered include, immigration support, welfare benefit support, health and housing support
- The barriers to integration were felt to be; language barriers, lack of employment opportunities, discrimination and a negative public/media perception of immigration, health issues and lack of ICT skills
- LRMN help tackle the barriers to integration with practical support and close working with statutory agencies across the borough and beyond
- A brief survey of clients recently found that the majority were positive about their experience of being an immigrant living in Lewisham and felt supported and engaged locally

- Of the 274,900 residents in Lewisham, 91,000 were non- UK born. The largest numbers of those come from Jamaica and Nigeria
- There are currently 8221 Eastern European immigrants in Lewisham, approximately 4000 of which are Polish

In response to questions, Rosario Mincher advised:

- The focus of the organisation is helping people to settle and get the support they need to find some sort of “stability”; to find a job, somewhere to live, money to buy food etc, rather than helping them feel British
- There is currently no specific project in place at LRMN but such a project could be developed if there was a need and funding was provided
- All refugees are migrants, but not all migrants are refugees – the name was changed from refugee to refugee and migrant network to include all migrants wanting support
- Most migrants currently coming to Lewisham at the moment are from Eastern Europe and Latin America. Most refugees are coming from Somalia, Vietnam, Eritrea and Afghanistan
- The negative media around immigration is a big challenge, lots of people the organisation work with report being scared to go out as they fear being targeted

RESOLVED: To thank Rosario for the very informative update, and to receive a further update next year.

#### **4. Lewisham race equality organisation update**

Mike Lewis and Anthony Reid gave a brief introduction to the work of EqualiTeam to date. The key points to note were:

- Mike Lewis advised that he is director of a local social enterprise that works locally with young offenders and local tradespeople his organisation recently renovated local library buildings, works with youth organisations in the borough such as TNG and Urban Youth.
- Mike Lewis took part in the Operation Black Vote programme, which encouraged and supported him to take a greater role in local civic life, which has led to him taking the role as Chair of EqualiTeam. Anthony Reid has been appointed a director and Joanna Bish is the Treasurer.
- The organisation has been in the process of setting itself up, doing practical things such as appointing Anthony, setting up bank accounts, agreeing a logo and key policies. Capacity and governance are both being developed
- The aim is to ensure that the organisation is a fit-for-purpose, community driven organisation by the time of its Annual General Meeting in 2014, with the support of funding from Lewisham Council and seed funding.
- The organisation is a new organisation but it has inherited the legacy of Lord Ousleys work, there is an away day planned for November which will help produce a ‘road map’ to focus the work of the organisation
- A key focus of the organisation will be to provide Equalities and Diversity support to organisations to help them develop their practices, such as recruitment, to ensure that policies and practices are reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose; EqualiTeam will act as a critical friend to help organisations improve

- The organisation will also scrutinise the services delivered locally and develop community engagement to build understanding of what the issues are locally, and campaign and lobby for change where it is identified, through engagement and research, as needed
- The organisation is very small and the borough and population of Lewisham is very large, EqualiTeam will do the best it can to support equality across the borough.
- The organisation has funding for three years, that will be an appropriate point to take stock and measure the outcomes of the organisation

In response to questions, Mike Lewis, Anthony Reid and Joanna Bish advised:

- The remit of the organisation is different to that of predecessors. The 2010 Act brings together a range of separate areas under one Act, and the principle of fairness for all people with the protected characteristics underpins the approach of the organisation
- If EqualiTeam achieves its vision, in 5 years time Lewisham will be a better place to live, with a sense of ownership and empowerment for all communities, with all people feeling included, represented and empowered
- Anthony Reid's personal opinion is that positive discrimination creates an environment where those who have worked hard can feel short changed and can create disincentives for people to feel engaged
- When using the term "Homogenised Equality" , Anthony Reid is referring to the bringing together of all of the 9 characteristics under one Act, following on from previous Race Relations Act, Disability Discrimination Act etc. The term reflects the equality for all focus
- Race equality is one strand of work that EqualiTeam will focus on, along with all other protected characteristics and it is equally as important as the other strands; it is important to keep pace locally with national policy, which since 2010 has focused on bringing together all of the equalities issues rather than focusing solely on one protected characteristic in isolation – if the organisation was to do that it would lose credibility.
- EqualiTeam can't be held accountable for the history of events before its introduction, or compared with Race Equality Action Lewisham, as it is a different organisation with a different purpose and will lack impact unless
- The Black Staff Forum in Lewisham Council still exists and is still funded but is now called the Black and Minority Ethnic Forum. Redundancies in recent years have directly impacted on staff who were active members of the Black Staff Forum.

RESOLVED: Members noted that they had previously been advised that redundancies had not disproportionately impacted on BME staff, so members wish to have circulated to them data on redundancies in recent years, broken down in relation to race. Members also wish to invite EqualiTeam to provide a further update in a year's time.

## **5. Councillor Call for Action**

Councillor Morrison advised the Committee that Councillor Owolabi-Oluyole's call for action had been allocated to the Committee by Overview and Scrutiny Business Panel. Councillor Morrison further advised that Councillor Owolabi-Oluyole had been invited to attend the meeting to introduce his report, but had not responded and was not present at the meeting.

Helen Glass outlined the legal and constitutional framework for dealing with a Councillor Call for Action.

Liz Dart outlined the recent history of Parker House, the poor state of repair of the building and the estimated cost of addressing the building issues.

The Committee discussed what action it could take.

RESOLVED: Though he was invited to make representations to Safer either in writing or in person, Councillor Owalabi -Oluyole did neither. In view of this, having considered the report before it, the committee resolved to report the matter to the Mayor and Cabinet for consideration.

## **6. Select Committee work programme**

Salena Mulhere introduced the report.

RESOLVED: The Chair to liaise with the Scrutiny Manager and make any necessary amendments to the work programme to ensure the workload at the next meeting is manageable if the budget item is forthcoming.

## **7. Items to be referred to Mayor and Cabinet**

RESOLVED: Though he was invited to make representations to Safer either in writing or in person, Councillor Owalabi -Oluyole did neither. In view of this, having considered the report before it, the committee resolved to report the matter to the Mayor and Cabinet for consideration.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

Chair:

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Date:

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