

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee - Equalities review - Initial Response from METRO

1. Background

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Safer Stronger Select Committee have asked METRO Charity to comment on a number of areas to support the committee with their review on Equalities Provision. This is our response to the questions posed.

2. METRO's Equalities Role In Lewisham

METRO has been engaged to undertake a range of work around equalities from August 1 2019 up to end March 22:-

- Attendance at relevant equalities events and forums.
- Hosting Lewisham Equalities Forum meetings.
- Developing an equalities audit tool for the council and undertaking an independent audit.
- Providing case work support around LGBT hate crime.
- Improved understanding and awareness of LGBT hate crime matters via events, training and workshops.

3. Any knowledge METRO has would help the Committee understand if there are gaps/barriers

Currently our main experience is around the LGBTQ experience in Lewisham particularly around hate crime and safety. The council does fund specific provision e.g. youth clubs, hate crime work and mental health which should be applauded and is more diverse than many other councils. The main issue for LGBTQ people is that mainstream services either stigmatise, discriminate or do not consider the specific needs of LGBTQ people. Currently there is only one day a week of METRO's time to work around equality for LGBTQ people.

Our initial view is that as with other councils, data sources can be poor or lacking.

Again as with other councils, equalities monitoring is not as at its best as individuals are suspicious of disclosing their identity (as they fear it may lead to discrimination meaning that are stopped from accessing services)

We also know that in the borough the voluntary and community sector is very vibrant and passionate. The sector often speaks for and provides services that the council has never, or now is unable, to provide for people with protected characteristics

We are also concerned that there is now no disabled people's organisation in the borough that can provide a voice for this protected characteristic. It will take some time for any new organisation to develop to provide this input.

4. Are residents' equalities needs known and understood

Our initial view is that:-

- There is some understanding of some experience e.g. men's access to mental health and some BAME experiences and needs.
- Understanding needs is complicated and yet as with many other organisations, council processes can be fairly blunt instruments e.g. the African community is incredibly diverse yet monitoring normally just asks if someone is Black African
- The council needs to spend time engaging with the specialist knowledge within voluntary organisations to help to understand need.

5. METRO's engagement in the review of the Council's CES

METRO has recently had a positive meeting with officers leading the Council's review of the CES. Our main concerns are

- The previous process means that people in the community are reluctant to participate with this new review.
- That the timing is tight which may mean it is difficult to effectively engage with the community and the local voluntary sector to ensure the new CES is owned by all.

6. Examples of, Equalities good practice by local authorities that you could share?

We asked our national and regional networks for some initial ideas. The following areas have been cited: so far-

- Sutton – in the development of their fairness commission
- Redbridge- have focussed on unconscious bias training. Alongside a focus on accessibility including Makaton training.

7. How does METRO embed Equalities

METRO is an equality and diversity charity committed to promoting equality, combating discrimination and respecting the dignity and independence of our staff, volunteers and services users. We believe that everyone is entitled to be treated with respect, and to be protected from discrimination and harassment. We take care to undertake our work with due regard to individual needs and understand the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We recognise that discrimination can and does occur on grounds of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status, religion, poverty, age, class, as well as other differences in experience, belief, legal status and culture. Discrimination can be direct, indirect, or institutional. Equal treatment is often insufficient to secure equality of opportunity in employment or service provision and positive action can be required to achieve equality of opportunity.

Our policies and practice cover reasonable adjustments, governance, policy and staff recruitment

Some of our services are targeted at particular communities in need. We target specific very high risk or vulnerable communities e.g. Latino men who have sex with men, our mental health drop in for the LGBTQ community, our over 50s LGBT group, our prostate cancer group, our trans youth group

Alongside this we promote research and engage front line staff to develop our strategy and policies. We also view ongoing professional development around equalities issues as important for our staff e.g. training around sexuality and gender orientation, disability awareness and traveller awareness

As with any organisation striving to improve around equalities we know that we still need to improve particularly around physical access, engagement with BAME communities, support to trans communities, work with the lesbian community and support so that all staff in METRO whatever their characteristics can thrive and develop.

8. Best practice around EAA

At this point in time we don't have any views in this area

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METRO

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