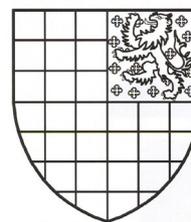


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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Working Party** formed to consider the matter of a Diversity policy, held on **Thursday 29th November 2018** in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **7:00pm**.

PRESENT Cllrs A Barker; S Catlin; H Jones; I Makepeace; S Murray; R O’Keeffe; A Rowell and E Watts

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*).

DvyWP2018/01 ELECTION of CHAIRMAN: Cllr Catlin was elected to Chair the Working Party for the 2018/19 year

DvyWP2018/02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Apologies had been received from Cllr Ashby, who had a family commitment, and Cllr Baah who was delayed in London. No message had been received from Cllr Elliott.

DvyWP2018/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were none

DvyWP2018/04 QUESTIONS: There were none. One member of the public was present.

DvyWP2018/05 REMIT of the WORKING PARTY:

Members considered the remit of the Working Party as set by Council:

Minute extract FC2017/65 refers:

EQUALITIES/DIVERSITY:

Members considered a proposal (*NOM 010/2017 copy in minute book*) to set up a Working Party to look at templates for a Diversity Policy used by other Councils, and to include members of the Community to assist the process. There was an accompanying report (*FC010/2017 copy in minute book*) which appraised Members of the background position.

The motion made reference to the Equality Act 2010 definitions of “protected characteristics” and noted that the Act allowed for positive action in general for the advancement of equality.

In addition the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) also required the Council to have ‘due regard’ to three aims, as part of its decision-making process. The three aims are:

- ⊕ Eliminating unlawful discrimination harassment and victimisation;
- ⊕ Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- ⊕ Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. Fostering good relations is about tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups.

Council had acknowledged its responsibilities in this regard in 2011, and had in place appropriate policies related to employment, and engagement with the community. It was nonetheless proposed that a working party be set up to look at policies used by other Councils, and to include members of the Community to assist this process. There followed a short debate, and Members were generally supportive of the principle of a working party to consider an additional policy, but sought training in diversity matters before work was undertaken.

After some debate **it was resolved that:**

FC2017/65.1 Equality/Diversity training will be provided for all Council Members as soon as possible

FC2017/65.2 Following training, a Working Party consisting of Cllrs Ashby,

Baah, Barker, Catlin, Elliott, Jones, Makepeace, S Murray, O’Keeffe, Rowell, and Watts be set up to further consider the matter of a Diversity Policy.

DvyWP2018/06 BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:

1 Members attention was drawn to report FC010/2017 (*copy in minute book*) which outlined the Council’s duties regarding Equality. They were reminded that Council had addressed its responsibilities under the Equalities Act and observed relevant principles in all that it does. The report (appended to the agenda) had been received by Council in November 2011; formally accepted, and was a matter of public record. Unlike principal authorities, a Parish Council was not required to publish a formal diversity policy. It was bound by the general Public Sector Equality Duty (*s149 Equality Act 2010*) and that was believed to be accommodated by a clear decision-making process and the formal recording of such. No ‘statement’ was required, but Members should remain mindful of responsibilities when addressing matters put before Council. Extant policies included a published Statement of Community Engagement, and an Equal Opportunities Statement used in employment matters, which was consistent with all legal requirements in that regard. It was acknowledged that the Statement of Community Engagement, which defined the ‘Community’ as everyone (*ie* wholly inclusive), was in need of updating and could be amended to refer to the nine ‘protected characteristics’ defined in the Act.

2 Training had been provided by a local government specialist from the South East Employers organization, although some members considered that as this was largely in the context of employment it had not fully addressed their needs. It was understood that training was available in other aspects of Equality & Diversity, and Members undertook to provide TC examples of any with which they were familiar.

3 It was stated that Lewes had a “large and diverse community” and that some were “unhappy that [the Council] does not have a policy”. This was not clarified, but another suggested the community should be surveyed and results monitored. This was considered vague, and specific ideas were promoted such as encouraging grant applications from groups with ‘protected characteristics’. This, it was contended, could result in conflict and complaints and was inadvisable.

4 The discussion moved into the area of policies for room-hire, and the recent issue of perceived racism at a Bonfire Council costume competition held in the Town Hall. The question was posed whether ‘best practice’ room rental models could be separated from policy related to users/attendees. It was recognized that such matters could spark a community-wide debate and that dealing with issues around Bonfire was nuanced and difficult. A member of the public attending, Scott Durairaj, was invited to contribute and warned that “the offence should not be minimized”. This was, he said, “not just about Bonfire – but about the 21st Century. Other Bonfire Societies do not colour their skin”. It had been anticipated that members would have researched examples of policies from elsewhere, but none were presented. TC had consulted the national e-group for Clerks of larger parishes, but the few examples resulting had all been similar to LTC’s own existing employment-related and community engagement statements.

5 Some suggestions promoted community workshops or outreach activity, and all were reminded that the function of an elected Councillor was to engage with their community at first-hand and to bring forward hopes/fears/aspirations/needs *etc* in a form that could be considered and decided by Council. One suggested that all members and staff should undergo anti-racism training. Mr Durairaj cautioned that “engagement with minority politics is problematic as minorities are intrinsically silent”, and that policies should cover all prejudice, not simply racism. Suggestions were advanced for training, and TC advised that all should be detailed to allow proper consideration following procurement rules.

DvyWP2018/07 CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

Council will be asked to note this meeting, and the principles and matters discussed. It is recommended that Council opens a dialogue with the community, addressing the need to eliminate prejudice & discrimination and to promote understanding between the people of Lewes, especially those having protected characteristics*.
*(*as defined in the Equality Act 2010 pt2 Ch1 s4)*

DvyWP2018/08 There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed, and thanked everyone for their contribution.

The meeting closed at 8:25pm

Signed date

**as defined in the Equality Act 2010 pt2 Ch1 s4 these are:*

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- sex (gender)
- pregnancy and maternity (a protected characteristic separate to sex)
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation.

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