

Agenda Item No: 6
Report To: Cabinet
Date of Meeting: 26 November 2020



Report Title: Notice of Motion on the council's approach to equalities, inclusion and diversity

Report Author & Job Title: Charlotte Hammersley, Data Protection and Compliance Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Clarkson
Portfolio Holder for:

Summary:	A Notice of Motion was put to Full Council at its meeting on 15 October relating to Ashford's approach to equalities. The Council referred the motion to the Cabinet for a more detailed report on how the proposals set out in the Motion could be taken forward.
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Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All.

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Note the council's current approach to the points raised in the Notice of Motion**
- II. Note that a draft Equalities, Diversity Inclusion (EDI) Policy is in development which will set out the council's approach for the future.**

Policy Overview: The Council's Recovery Plan was adopted by the Cabinet in July 2020 and ratified by Full Council in October 2020. The Recovery Plan sets out the council's equalities objectives which were formally reviewed as part of the development of the Plan. The council's Policy Statement on equalities, diversity and inclusion is due for review and a draft is in development.

Financial Implications: The recommendation within the Notice of Motion that the council should 'appoint a designated officer to actively and regularly engage with representatives of the BAME community, providing regular progress reports' would require additional resources to be found.

Legal Implications: The council is governed by the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty which will be reflected in the emerging policy.

Equalities Impact Assessment:	Not Required because an impact assessment will be carried on a draft equality, diversity and inclusion policy which will be brought to a future meeting of the Cabinet.
Data Protection Impact Assessment:	Not required.
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	Having recently set its equalities objectives, the council is compliant with its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. The adoption of a policy in due course will assist the council in ensuring it maintains a low tolerance to the risks associated with this important compliance matter.
Sustainability Implications:	NA
Other Material Implications:	N/A
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	<u>Ashford Borough Council's Recovery Plan, July 2020</u>
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Introduction and Background

1. A notice of motion was put to the Full Council at its meeting on 15 October 2020 as follows:

"That this Council notes that October marks Black History Month, the annual recognition and celebration of the history, achievements and contribution of African Caribbean people to this country. We welcome the links forged with the Ashford BAME community evidenced by the recent and upcoming Mayoral engagements celebrating Black History Month.

That this Council also notes that there is no room for complacency in the face of inequality and social injustice – the Government's pioneering Ethnicity Facts and Figures website sets out in clear detail enduring ethnic and racial inequalities in housing, employment and the justice system.

That this Council recognises that it is not enough to be, 'not racist'. That is too low a bar to set. Ashford is a caring, innovative Borough and we should aim high, striving to be actively anti-racist and anti-discriminatory and do all we can to champion and celebrate diversity and inclusiveness in our Borough.

That this Council acknowledges and recognises the valuable contribution that the BAME community has made to the NHS and the disproportionately high impact of Covid-19, both in the community and among healthcare staff in our community, as evidenced in the Public Health England review of June 2020.

The stated aims of the Recovery Plan are to improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do: to reach out to further develop ways of engaging individuals and communities to ensure their voice is heard and to develop a community action plan. I thank our officers for their contribution and urge the Council to:

Appoint a designated officer to actively and regularly engage with representatives of the BAME community, providing regular progress reports

To build on the excellent equalities and diversity training already delivered to officers and Councillors and to consider the inclusion of unconscious bias training

To support the work of community groups including the Ashford BME group and to actively support BAME businesses

To work towards the establishment of a cultural centre or centres to celebrate the contribution of our diverse Ashford communities

To consider BAME history and culture as a source for street names on future developments.’

2. Within the Notice of Motion are specific points which the council’s Management Team have considered. In order to aid debate at this meeting, some information is provided on each of the points to explain Ashford’s current approach and future plans within the overall context of a developing Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy.

Proposal

3. The council has a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to review its equalities objectives at least every four years. In accordance with this duty, the council has recently set new objectives which are set out in its Recovery Plan which was adopted by the Full Council at its meeting on 15 October 2020. These objectives are:

Objective 1: Improve our understanding of our diverse communities in all that we do

Objective 2: Encourage all residents to have a say in the decisions that affect them and get involved in their local communities

Objective 3: Deliver services and customer care to meet the needs of all our residents

Objective 4: Deliver organisational change to enable a more inclusive and diverse workforce

4. The Recovery Plan also sets out how the council plans to broadly deliver these objectives.
5. Following the adoption of the objectives, officers have started to develop an EDI Policy which will set out the council’s responsibilities under the Equalities Act 2010 and Public Sector Equalities Duty and the practical steps it will take to meet these responsibilities along with the specific objectives. As part of development of the policy, relevant groups (I.e. those that promote and represent protected characteristics as defined by the Act) and council employees will be consulted to help shape the steps that the council sets out.
6. It is proposed that rather than consider the potential to implement each specific point raised in the Notice of Motion now that the Policy is shaped by the views garnered through the consultation process.
7. In the meantime, the table below also sets out some information in response to each of the proposals made in the Notice of Motion:

No.	Notice of Motion proposal	Current position
1	Appoint a designated officer to actively and regularly engage with representatives of the BAME community, providing regular progress reports	The developing EDI Policy will set out a proposal for a Senior Officer Equalities Champion. Whilst we do not have a dedicated post, there are two officers who have recently been supported to achieve a high level qualification relating to the leadership and management of equalities, inclusion and diversity with the intention that they will oversee the development and monitoring of the policy.
2	To build on the excellent equalities and diversity training already delivered to officers and Councillors and to consider the inclusion of unconscious bias training	Equalities and diversity training is provided to councillors and is mandatory for all council employees. As well as online training, all staff are required to complete face-to-face training which has recently taken place. The delivered training covered unconscious bias and we can ensure that it is also included in the course content of future training. All management and leadership training ensures equalities are at the heart of the process and, as such, addresses unconscious bias e.g. training on managing sickness and recruitment and selection
3	To support the work of community groups including the Ashford BME group and to actively support BAME businesses	Services across the council support the work of community groups and businesses including BAME groups and businesses. The emerging EDI Policy will set out the support we will continue to provide and ways for community groups to access this support. Some examples of how we support groups and communities is provided at Appendix 1.
4	To work towards the establishment of a cultural centre or centres to celebrate the contribution of our diverse Ashford communities	<p>Whilst a dedicated centre may not be the most effective approach, the EDI policy will seek to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that current and future facilities are inclusive and reflective of our communities with a broad programme of events. • Promote existing facilities to BAME groups and communities.
5	To consider BAME history and culture as a source for street names on future developments	<p>The council is responsible for street names but it is for the developers to suggest names via an application process for new developments. The naming of streets is decided by officers under delegated powers other than decisions taken by the Cabinet when the proposed street name is after someone.</p> <p>Any suggestion will be considered and there are no specific criteria for inclusion or exclusion. However, technical guidance is provided in the street name and numbering policy for example, streets names should be easy to read and not similar to others' located nearby.</p>

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

8. A draft EDI policy is currently in development. The views of groups that represent people with protected characteristics will be sought as part of the consultation process on the policy before it is submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

9. Work to develop an equality, diversity and inclusion policy is already underway and points raised in the notice of motion will be considered as part of its development.

Next Steps in Process

10. A draft EDI policy will be developed and brought to the Cabinet for approval over the coming months. The policy is in the drafting stage and a consultation period will follow. It is anticipated that the draft policy will be brought to the Cabinet by April 2021.

Conclusion

11. The council has recently adopted its equalities objectives which will last for the duration of its Recovery Plan. The next step in the process is to introduce a new policy which will articulate these objectives. The detail of the policy is currently being developed and will be consulted upon to help ensure it reflects the needs of our local residents and communities.

Portfolio Holder's Views

12. I oppose discrimination of any kind and believe in supporting all of our communities in the borough. This report accurately reflects what we have done, what we are doing, and what our plans are for the future. It is good that a review of the policy is already underway and I intend for Ashford to continue to lead the way in supporting our diverse communities as we have been recognised for doing so with our Syrian Refugee Programme. Our recent award demonstrates that Ashford is indeed an extremely caring borough.

Contact and Email

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Support for BAME Groups: case studies

Case Study 1: Grants and support to BAME Groups

Cultural Services have worked closely with a number of groups often to help them become established by supporting grant applications. For example, support was provided to the Chair of the Ashford BME Association from its inception assisting with a successful grant application for £7,000 towards start-up costs and grant support has continued since then with further awards in 2018 and 2019.

These grants were to help support a number of projects the Association were delivering including volunteer training, a health, social and cultural inclusion project and workshops to build confidence in women.

Other groups that have received direct assistance have included the Ashford Asian Society, Ashford international Chinese Society (now disbanded) and the Ashford Muslim Society.

Case Study 2: Ashford's Syrian Resettlement Programme

On 28 October 2020, the council won the Diversity and Inclusion award from the Local Government Chronicle for its contribution to the Syrian Resettlement Programme.

Since December 2015 we have welcomed 34 families to Ashford totalling 145 people. A further 14 babies have been born to families since arrival in the UK. We have had no arrivals since November 2019. Those families due to arrive in February/March 2020 were put on hold due to Covid-19 and nationally there have been no resettlement arrivals since.

Families are helped to integrate into their new communities. We work with a host of providers and community groups to help them to do this including Ashford Volunteer Centre, Concept Training, Adult Education, Ashford College, Ashford Vinyard, schools and community groups. Most of the families are now living independently quite successfully and may have at least one member in full time employment. Approximately ten families still require much more intensive support and this has been exacerbated by Covid-19.

Children have done well in school with some excellent results and this good evidence of effective integration along with the employment rates.