

EQUALITIES PANEL

7 July 2020
4.00 - 5.30 pm

Chair: Antoinette Jackson

Public members:

Graham Lewis
Judith Margolis
Orsola Spivak
Raheela Rehman
Dr Susan Wan

Elected members:

Councillor Alex Collis
Councillor Baiju Thittala
Councillor Katie Porrer

Staff members:

Alistair Wilson
Ariadne Henry
Lesley-Ann George
Naomi Armstrong

Officers:

Suzanne Hemingway, Strategic Director
Deborah Simpson, Head of Human Resources
Allison Conder, Strategic Project Manager, Community Services
David Kidston, Strategy and Partnerships Manager, Corporate Strategy
Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, Corporate Strategy

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

20/8/EP Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Elected members: Councillors Jennifer Page-Croft and Martin Smart
Staff members: Joe Obe

20/9/EP Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

20/10/EP Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting of the 21st January were approved and signed as an accurate record. A document was circulated to Panel members including updates on items from the previous meeting.

Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, reported that the pronouns protocol as an action from last meeting has been drafted and is to be approved by HR, GMB and Unison before being disseminated to staff.

20/11/EP Cambridge City Council's support for people identified as vulnerable by the Covid-19 Social Exclusion Oversight and Co-ordination Group

The Panel received a presentation from Allison Conder, Strategic Project Manager, Community Services on this item and key points raised were:

- The County Council's Covid-19 Coordination and Oversight Group has identified 10 groups who already experience social exclusion, which makes them especially vulnerable during the pandemic due to being unable to comply with government advice and/ or are likely to have increased morbidity and mortality from Covid because these groups generally have poorer health indices and higher prevalence of pre-existing health conditions.
- The 10 thematic vulnerable groups are: Gypsies and Travellers, migrant workers, rough sleepers, people experiencing domestic abuse, those experiencing child criminal exploitation, ex-offenders, people with existing mental health issues, those with drug and alcohol issues, those experiencing economic hardship or with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), and sex workers.
- Targeting supporting these groups during the lockdown has required a different corporate approach for the council, bringing services together to enable a coordinated response for individuals who sometimes have contact with up to 9 individual teams or services. Key challenges for this joint working have been collating available data; implementing information sharing agreements; and a lack of data for some individuals and groups who lead more chaotic lives.
- A risk assessment has been developed through engagement with different services within the council.

Key risks from the requirement to lockdown have been identified for each of the 10 thematic high risk vulnerable groups, and actions undertaken or

planned to mitigate risks. Allison Conder presented on this unless otherwise stated below:

- **Rough sleepers** – Suzanne Hemingway, Strategic Director, is the project manager for this area. There had been 88 people temporarily rehoused and safeguarding procedures were put in place for adults at risk. Food, security and cleaning have been provided. 29 people have also been housed longer term. Following lockdown, the Council wants to continue reducing the number of rough sleepers and adapt the support provided by the voluntary and community sector.
- **Gypsies and Travellers** – Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, explained that in the UK access to water, rubbish disposal and toilets has been identified as an issue for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The council already had arrangements in place to dispose of waste and provide portable toilets. The County Council has improved access to water during lockdown by developing an agreement with a local water company, and the Council is exploring whether the agreement can continue as we move into the local outbreak management stage. District Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have also tried to identify land to be used as transit sites for unauthorised encampments, and some land has been identified for Gypsies or Travellers who need to self-isolate.
- **People experiencing domestic abuse** – Lynda Kilkelly, Community Safety Manager, is the project manager for this area. A risk was identified that abusers would use lockdown as an opportunity for coercive and controlling behaviour. Those identified as being most at risk of abuse are disabled people, women, and women in pregnancy or recently after giving birth. The City Council has developed an action plan to join up communication, and co-ordinate local services.
- **Those experiencing child criminal exploitation** – Lynda Kilkelly, Community Safety Manager, is the project manager for this area. The risks for children subject to criminal exploitation have increased under Covid-19, as much drug dealing takes place inside houses and children are increasingly vulnerable due to school closures during the lockdown period. The City Council is in regular contact with the police to share intelligence.
- **People with existing mental health issues** - Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, reported that people with mental health issues may be at risk of not complying with government safety advice (national research suggests this is especially true for people with depression) and lack access to professional and personal support networks. Many face to face professional services have not been able to be continued during lockdown. During Covid-19 the City Council has supported the County

council to contact vulnerable people and has made referrals for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust. The City Council has also raised awareness of the 'Now We're Talking' campaign and local support available to people. Moving forwards, the council plans to work with CPFT to identify how to improve access to face-to-face mental health services for homeless people without access to IT or a permanent address.

- **Those experiencing economic hardship or with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)** – People with NRPF are required to be housed but cannot receive any other state support (or if they were to, this would impact on their immigration status). Those with NRPF who lose employment altogether have been in financial hardship (if they are in employment but on furlough they can receive financial support). Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum has been supporting people with NRPF, and Cambridge Sustainable Food has been resourced to provide food support to individuals and families.
- **Migrant workers** – Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Manager, reported that migrant workers are disproportionately likely to be found in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's. This means they may be at greater risk of covid-19 if overcrowded. The main action the council has undertaken is to develop and issue a leaflet to all HMO's and landlords with advice for people in shared accommodation, which has been made available in 5 different languages as well as English online.
- **Those with drug and alcohol issues** – Lynda Kilkelly, Community Safety stated that a key issue during Covid-19 is that the cost of illegal drugs has increased as supplies are low, and drugs are being mixed, making them increasingly unsafe. The County Lines model has also changed during lockdown and moved indoors. The City Council has been sharing data it has with the County Council to target support.
- **Sex workers** – Lynda Kilkelly, Community Safety Manager, stated that the key risk identified for sex-workers is non-compliance with the governments requirements during lockdown and continuing sex work during the pandemic or face financial hardship. The Cambridge Women's Resource Centre has been providing support for sex workers during the pandemic, and the City Council has referred sex workers to them for support.
- **Ex-offenders** – Suzanne Hemingway, Strategic Director, is the lead for this thematic cohort. During the pandemic there were concerns that there may have been a coronavirus outbreak in prisons prompting the government to look at early release for some prisoners. This may have led to a large number of additional homeless people to rehouse. However, this has not happened.

The Panel Members asked the following questions and made the comments on the information presented:

- What support is available to students in the city who are financially struggling during coronavirus, especially those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)?
- How is the council staying up to date on impacts for people with NRPF during the pandemic? It can be difficult to identify the number of people with NRPF, because people who may have NRPF are wary about contacting the public sector for support because they fear that such contact will impact on their immigration status.
- Cheshire Homes has a fund available to help people with disabilities who are digitally excluded to access IT.
- Do the 88 rough sleepers identified in the presentation as having been temporarily rehoused, represent most, all or some of the rough sleepers in Cambridge?
- If homeless people are arrested and then released, can they return to their accommodation? If people are arrested and released on bail, what support does the Council provide?
- Has no one with mental health issues been able to receive professional face-to-face support during the pandemic?

Responses to the Panel's comments and questions:

- Allison Conder, Strategic Project Manager, said that support has been put in place by the Universities for students struggling financially, including people with NRPF.
- Ariadne Henry, Community Development Officer and staff member of the Panel, said that she is in regular contact with the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum, which has been providing a lot of local support to people with NRPF, including those in food poverty. If people with NRPF are homeless, the council can provide some direct support. A key issue is that where UK citizens are married to people with NRPF if they claim benefits on their own behalf, this can impact negatively on their partner's immigration status.
- Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, thanked the Panel Member who shared support available from Cheshire Homes and said this information would be shared with the Council's Digital Inclusion Officer after the Panel meeting.
- Suzanne Hemingway, Strategic Director, reported that there have been 120 rough sleepers temporarily rehoused by the council in the Covid-19 lockdown period. This is more people than the number of rough sleepers

previously in the city. Some of these people have moved to more settled accommodation. There are some people who have breached conditions of living in temporary housing and have not been able to be temporarily rehoused again.

- Suzanne explained that if anyone is arrested by the police and then released, they can usually return their accommodation. If people are charged and released on bail, there is a bail hostel, but this is not provided by the City Council. If ex-offenders are released from prison after serving sentences, they may not be able to return to their previous accommodation if family members will not accept them, or if the property has been let to other tenants. In this situation they may be able to access homelessness support services.
- Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, said that professional support for people with mental health issues is the responsibility of CPFT and the council cannot share information on circumstances where the service may have been providing face to face support during Covid-19.
- The council itself has provided face-to-face appointments in the Customer Service Centre from 15th June in circumstances where people's queries cannot be addressed online or via the phone. This is likely to include people with mental health issues who are more likely to have complex queries. The Tenancy Sustainment Service supports many people with mental health issues to sustain their council tenancy and has been providing face-to-face support to address complex issues throughout the pandemic making sure that social distancing is kept to.

20/12/EP Cambridge City Council Single Equality Scheme 2018 - 2021 Year Two Review

Helen Crowther, Equality and Anti-Poverty Officer, presented key information from the Year Two Review of the Single Equality Scheme. She shared:

- The report went to the Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee on 2nd July and the actions identified for the third year if the Scheme were approved. The report also marked key achievements in relation to the council's Public Sector Equality Duty for 2019/20.
- Some key achievements/ activities within the report were shared with Panel Members related to developing an equality and diversity terminology guide for staff, raising awareness of the council tax discount for those national policy defines as "severely mentally impaired", developing links between a school and a sheltered housing scheme to combat loneliness, and raising awareness of the council's role as a hate crime reporting centre and its racial harassment service.

- Representation of disabled people has increased from 6.37% as at the end of March 2019 to 7.2% as at the end of March 2020. However, representation of BAME people has decreased from 7.59% to 6.3% over the same period. This is largely because in 2020 we had a TUPE transfer of staff from Ditchburn Place, with 13 out of the 17 staff being transferred declaring themselves as from a BAME background.
- Some actions planned for 2020/21 were shared including an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, procuring a British Sign Language interpretation service for customers contacting the customer service contact centre, the launch of 'Make a Difference Days' to engage young people in local decision making, engagement in the Community Safety Partnership, and promoting and delivering a 'Wellbeing at Work' programme for our staff members.
- Examples of actions for 2020/21 related to Covid-19 in the Single Equality Scheme include maintaining regular telephone contact with sheltered housing tenants, providing advice and referrals to support voluntary and community sector organisations that are helping to tackle digital exclusion, and running a virtual community centre for children, young people, older people and families.
- Cambridge City Council lit up its main council building, the Guildhall, on 2nd June in remembrance of George Floyd. Antoinette Jackson (Chief Executive) chaired a Black Lives Matter meeting with staff, particularly BAME people, who have felt affected by the issues raised by events in America and in the UK. A variety of ideas were shared by staff on what more the council may do to further support BAME staff members and residents. These will be explored in 2020/21 and will be an area of focus in the next Single Equality Scheme for 2021 to 2024.
- Actions in support of BAME people taking place in 2020/21 that are part of the current Single Equality Scheme include developing unconscious bias/ inclusivity training for staff, providing Community Grants funding to 14 groups supporting BAME people tackle social and economic disadvantage, communicating public health messages to BAME communities during Covid-19, and the council's role in coordinating local South Asian History Month and Black History Month through virtual activities.
- At the next Panel meeting in January 2021, two items will include the Equality in Employment report and consultation on the Single Equality Scheme 2021 to 2024.

Panel Members shared the following comments and questions:

- As a result of Covid-19, will staff have capacity to undertake all activities identified for the third year of the Single Equality Scheme? Are there

likely to be additional costs to equality and diversity related work linked to the impact of Covid-19 that cannot be met through existing service budgets?

- Is the council involving schools directly in organising the ‘Make a Difference Days’?
- What support does the Council provide to help with financial management, recognising that some equality groups are more likely to struggle with money than others?

In answer to these questions, officers said:

- There has been some money from the government to help the council respond to the pandemic, but this has not met costs of responding to it. For instance, the government provided £24,000 to help temporarily rehouse rough sleepers but this has cost the council £1 million. The council has raised this matter with the government and there may be further funds provided in recompense.
- Staff are responding to issues affecting equality groups as a result of Covid-19. This may impact on their ability to carry out activities planned in the Scheme.
- It is unknown when the national lockdown restrictions will be fully lifted. This means that planned face-to-face activities may not be able to take place in 2020/21.
- Further information on Make a Difference days will be sent to the Panel after following up with the Children and Young People’s Participation Team delivering this project, including around involvement of schools.
- The council has two financial inclusion officers (one in customer services and the other in the housing service) to help people in financial difficulty. The council also funds Citizens Advice to support people – their advisers are partially based at the Jobcentre. Citizens Advice has been providing online and telephone support to people during the pandemic.

20/13/EP Any Other Business

The Panel thanked Antoinette Jackson for championing equalities and chairing the Equalities Panel in her role as Chief Executive in acknowledgement that this was her last Panel meeting before she leaves the council.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

CHAIR