

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FORUM

Minutes of meeting held via Confero and in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 27 February 2024

Chair:

Councillor Mo Razzaq

Councillors Present:

Councillor Ross Clark, Councillor Margaret Cowie, Councillor Grant Ferguson, Councillor Richard Lockhart (*substitute for Councillor Poppy Corbett*), Councillor Mark McGeever (Depute), Councillor Bert Thomson

Councillors' Apologies:

Councillor Janine Calikes, Councillor Poppy Corbett, Councillor Monique McAdams, Councillor Kirsten Robb

Attending:

Finance and Corporate Resources

A Bell, Team Leader, Consultation, Organisational Development and Equality; N Docherty, Administration Assistant; E-A McGonigle, Administration Officer; E Maxwell, HR Business Manager

Social Work Resources

M Kane, Service Manager (Performance and Support); C Stewart, Planning and Performance Manager

Also Attending:

Autism Resources Coordination Hub (ARCH)

R Hutchingson, ARCH Coordinator, A McGregor, Mentor, Social Inclusion Project (SIP)

Trades Unions' Representatives Present:

T Slaven, Chair of the Joint Consultative Forum; K Wallace, Unite the Union

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Equal Opportunities Forum held on 22 November 2023 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Forum decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 Autism – Let's All Understand

A presentation was given on autism and the work of the Autism Resources Coordination Hub (ARCH) by R Hutchingson, ARCH Coordinator.

The presentation aimed to:-

- ◆ provide a better understanding and awareness of autism and its unique expression in autistic individuals
- ◆ raise awareness of some of the strengths as well as challenges associated with autism
- ◆ demonstrate why neurodivergent people needed informed level supports and services

- ◆ provide information which would allow for more confident interactions with autistic children, young people and adults

Autistic people had significant, observable differences in all 3 areas of what was known as the Triad (or Dyad) of Impairment. Diagnosticians looked for certain recurring patterns/clusters of cognitive processing and behaviours in the following overlapping areas, which were fully detailed in the presentation:-

- ◆ social interaction
- ◆ social communication
- ◆ social imagination and flexible thinking

The following statistics were provided in relation to autism:-

- ◆ data from the Cambridge Autism Research Centre 2021 indicated 1 in 57, which equated to 11,500 people in Lanarkshire
- ◆ the ratio of males to females, which was estimated to be 4:1
- ◆ 1% of autistic people had an Extreme Demand Avoidance (EDA) profile (not a separate diagnosis)
- ◆ 70% of autistic people had mental health problems
- ◆ on average, more than two thirds autistic people did not have an intellectual disability
- ◆ between 2020 and 2022, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) data showed an increase in adult autism diagnostic referrals

Information was also provided on intersectional barriers facing autistic/neurodivergent children, young people and adults.

There followed a verbal update from A McGregor, who was diagnosed with autism when he was 3 years old. Detailed information was provided on his journey through the education system right through to securing employment. Information was provided on the challenges faced and the support systems that were available.

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the presentation.

Following a discussion on the recruitment process in the Council, the HR Business Manager:-

- ◆ clarified that the Council's application form permitted applicants to indicate any supports required should they be shortlisted for an interview
- ◆ undertook to liaise with the ARCH Coordinator to establish if there were any further adaptations that the Council needed to consider in the application process for autistic and neurodivergent applicants

R Hutchingson and A McGregor were thanked for the informative presentation and update.

The Forum decided: that the presentation be noted.

In terms of Standing Order No 14, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 3.14pm for a 5 minute period. The meeting reconvened at 3.19pm

4 Annual Report on Mainstreaming Equalities and Diversity – Social Work Resources

A report dated 19 December 2023 by the Director, Health and Social Care was submitted on work being undertaken by Social Work Resources to meet the commitments of the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and related statutory duties.

The Council Plan 2022 to 2027, Connect, set out the Council's objective to deliver a range of outcomes for the benefit of everyone in South Lanarkshire. There were 6 outcomes, with Social Work Resources focusing mainly on the following 3:-

- ◆ Health and Wellbeing – people live the healthiest lives possible
- ◆ Children and Young People – our children and young people thrive
- ◆ Communities and Environment – caring, connected, sustainable communities

The statutory framework for social work services was contained in a raft of legislation. Principal among those, was the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 which placed a duty on all local authorities to “promote social welfare”. Social workers had a distinctive set of knowledge, skills and values when supporting the most vulnerable people and ensuring that their needs were met without discrimination.

Many of the services that were delivered to the public were set out in statute and, therefore, the majority of direct service delivery had to comply with the respective legislative framework. It was this framework that provided the basis of the Social Work Service, working alongside the South Lanarkshire University Health and Social Care Partnership (South Lanarkshire University HSCP) to reduce inequality and provide effective care to meet the needs of vulnerable people in South Lanarkshire. The areas of work the targeted service focused on were detailed in paragraph 3.3 of the report.

The Council and the South Lanarkshire Integration Joint Board (IJB) also recognised the immense pressure faced by households across South Lanarkshire as they were experiencing the worst cost-of-living crisis in 40 years. Additional demands continued to be placed upon services as supports were offered to help households manage scarce resources and maintain support that in the year ahead.

Social Work Resources participated in the Council's Equality and Diversity Working Group and, along with other Resources, had developed equality outcomes that met the general duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 as follows:-

- ◆ to eliminate discrimination
- ◆ to advance equality of opportunity
- ◆ to foster good relations in all the work we do

During 2022/2023, there were no complaints recorded by Social Work Resources under the equalities category.

The Resource reported progress against 4 of the Council's outcomes within the 'Mainstreaming equalities progress report 2019 to 2021 and Mainstreaming equalities report 2021 to 2025 were fully detailed at section 5 of the report under the following headings:-

- ◆ increase the number of people from ethnic backgrounds employed in the Council workforce to reflect the diversity of the South Lanarkshire population
- ◆ older people, those from vulnerable groups and individuals who live alone are protected from scams and nuisance calls and their wellbeing is improved through increased awareness and preventative action
- ◆ counselling through schools' service is accessible for all children/young people aged 10 and over

- ♦ improve health, care and wellbeing for the most vulnerable in our communities

Over the course of 2022/2023, the Resource carried out Equality Impact Assessments, which included Lanarkshire Advocacy Plan 2020 to 2025 and Community Alert Alarm Service (CAAS).

Officers responded to members' questions on various aspects of the report.

The Forum decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 30 November 2022 (Paragraph 3)]

5 British Sign Language (BSL) Position in Schools - Update

A verbal update by A Bell, Team Leader, Consultation, Organisational Development and Equality (Finance and Corporate Resources) was given on British Sign Language (BSL) in schools.

Calderside Academy currently had 2 pupils in the secondary Deaf Education Department. The school was predicting that numbers would remain low and a Service review was planned to establish the best and most cost effective means of supporting young people with BSL.

Details were provided on a Scottish Government survey that had been carried out in March 2023 in relation to the 1+2 Approach, the ambitious policy which aimed to offer all pupils in Scottish schools the opportunity to learn a first additional language from Primary 1, and a second additional language from Primary 5. This was expected to continue until the third year of secondary education. The results from that survey highlighted that in South Lanarkshire:-

- ♦ 72 out of 125 primary schools had responded and, of those 72, none were offering BSL as language number 2. 7 were offering BSL as language 3 and 2 primary schools were offering Makaton as language 3
- ♦ 5 out of 17 secondary schools had responded and, of those 5, none were offering BSL as either language 2 or 3
- ♦ one of 7 Additional Support Needs (ASN) schools had responded. In this school, BSL was not being taught, however, Makaton and Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) were

It was noted that this position could change, particularly given the focus last year in relation to Highland Council's BSL 1+2 digital programme. There could be more schools teaching BSL as a result of this resource and further information was required on the current position. Crosshouse Primary School, East Kilbride had been using the Highland Council BSL resource and had rated it highly. The Forum would be kept informed of any developments.

Details were also provided on work that was ongoing to prepare the second edition of the BSL Lanarkshire Plan. Further details would be brought to the Forum as this work progressed.

The Team Leader, Consultation, Organisational Development and Equality responded to members' questions in relation to the following:-

- ♦ raising the BSL profile in schools, as well as the Council in general, and what more could be done to promote BSL as a career path
- ♦ the possibility of members of the Forum visiting the Deaf Education Department of Calderside Academy

A Bell was thanked for her informative update.

The Forum decided: that the verbal update be noted.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair advised that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Wednesday 8 May 2024.

7 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

Chair's Closing Remarks

The Chair requested that the following items be considered at the next meeting of the Forum:-

- ◆ an update in relation to the communication around religious and cultural school meal requirements
- ◆ a presentation on Hinduphobia in Scotland