

Questions by Members of the Council under Procedure Rule 10.0

Council – 19 July 2021

Question from Councillor Ezeifedi Received on 13 July 2021

Question:

Early this year, the "*Responding to the impacts of COVID 19 on Watford's BAME communities' task group*" made key recommendations which were accepted by Council. .Can the Mayor provide feedback with regards to implementation of the following recommendations?

1. The council should establish an equalities forum to include representatives of protected characteristics, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.
2. The council should develop a corporate equalities policy.
3. The template for undertaking Equalities Impact Assessments for new council policies should be reviewed to reflect best practice.

Answer:

1. As part of developing a refreshed approach to equalities and diversity, the Council will work with the community to establish a One Watford Equality and Diversity Forum, which will reflect our diverse community and the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010 so we hear, and listen to, voices from across the town. We will work with the Forum to develop clear terms of reference so that members can work effectively together to provide advice and feedback to the council and make a real difference in the town.

The plan is for the first Forum to be held in autumn, with the draft equalities policy a key item for consideration.

2. Officers have started work on developing the policy, which currently includes researching best practise across local government and other public sector organisations and ensuring that the new policy is based on an up to date profile of our Watford community. As the policy is developed, we will be reaching out to our diverse community, including those from our BAME community and those

who share other protected characteristics, for input and comment as we want the policy to be shaped by our community so it fully reflects the town. We expect this to be in the autumn.

Officers will make sure that all members have the opportunity to be part of developing the policy, particularly those who were part of the BAME Scrutiny Task Group, and the draft policy will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee group for discussion and consideration in the autumn.

As part of refreshing our approach to how staff consider equalities and diversity, we will be rolling out unconscious bias training across all our services and, where other training needs are identified, within the policy, these will be highlighted as priorities within our overall training programme for staff.

3. This is included as part of the development of the equalities policy and so we are reaching out to other organisations to see how they are completing their Equalities Impact Assessments as well as seeking guidance from Equality and Human Rights Commission. Officers will support the review of the template with updated guidance for staff so they are equipped to complete them effectively. Dedicated training sessions will be held to support staff understand the importance of Equalities Impact Assessments and how they underpin policy and strategy development as well as recommendations to members for decisions. Similar training will be made available to members.

**Question from Councillor Trebar
Received on 14 July 2021**

Question:

Following the Euro 2020 final between England and Italy I would like to know what the arrangements were for Sunday 11th July between the police and council staff in the build up to the match and on the streets of Watford.

Were enough resources and people deployed throughout the day to be able to pick up the racism, anti-social behaviour and violence towards peaceful residents and businesses in our town and what further steps will our Mayor Peter Taylor implement to make Watford a safer space for true football fans and people of all races to be able to celebrate together safely?

I'm sure we like to consider Watford to be a success story of multiculturalism however like many I am upset and angry but sadly not shocked by the scenes we saw here in our town following the UEFA European Cup final.

I am married to an Italian and while I supported the English football team the rest of my family supported Italy. They did not feel that they could go out on the streets of Watford and celebrate their win because they were scared about the abuse they would receive. This turned out sadly to have been a wise decision as we saw the scenes of violence, disruption and disorder on the streets of Watford reported in the Watford Observer following the match.

This was then compounded by heart breaking stories from black friends and residents about the racism they received not just after those brave boys missed those penalties for England but also the ongoing racism they sadly face every day here in our town. We need to say to all black and ethnic minorities, all foreigners who live, work or visit our town that enough is enough. Racism and hooliganism in any form will not be tolerated by this Council, its community leaders and senior officers.

As a council we should examine our own legacy - what have we done or not done in the past and we should put right those wrongs. We must continue to make sure the policy making process and our citizen engagement does all that it can to protect EVERYONE. We need to look at the bigger social issue and come together to make a change.

It is simply not enough to make a statement about how upset we all are following the events after the match. The measure of response should be the action that is implemented as a Council working together to stamp it out. It can't be lip service. There needs to be practical action on how we will combat racism and any future possible incidents of hooliganism in Watford.

Answer

Hertfordshire Police were asked for their comments to the points raised by the question. Watford's Chief Inspector, Ian Grout has provided this response:

“There was a Hertfordshire policing response to the Euro's under Op Advantage. A suitable staffing profile was identified for every England match following an intelligence and information review. This had proved successful throughout the tournament. Sufficient resources were deployed throughout the match. There were no issues pre match within Watford and I am surprised by the comments that there was racism, anti-social behaviour and violence towards peaceful members of the community. There were no reports to substantiate that.

The issue that was reported in the Watford Observer was police intervention to protect 3 Italian fans waving an Italian flag in the town centre following the end of the match. Officers removed them for their own safety. There were sporadic instances of minor disorder in other parts of Watford as well as the wider county post-match but sufficient police response to deal with them.

We do not receive reports of racism within Watford every day and I would be happy to explore that comment further if the Councillor can provide details for me to investigate.”

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On an on-going basis the Watford Community Safety Partnership (CSP) monitors race hate crimes and there have been no trends in relation to race hate and community safety in the last year.

Every day at 08:30 there is a Police and WBC briefing from the Inspector to the Community Safety Manager covering all crimes recorded in Watford within the previous 24 hours. These are reviewed to observe any trend or repeat offences or emerging issues, with race hate reporting being a part of this.

Once a week a review is made with the wider Safer Neighbourhoods Team, and once a month the Community Protection Group convene with race hate as a standing item on the agenda.

The CSP submit a community tension form to Police Head Quarters if we have any threat /or heightened risk to any section of the community. Watford appears rarely in these briefings due to there being no overt or repeat racism themes.

Historically, where we have had hate incidents, mental health/complex needs plays a very notable part in these reports. Race hate against hospital staff, police and security guards are a repeat theme within this.

Also, Watford Museum has an ongoing commitment of researching, sharing and celebrating Watford’s incredible diverse heritage that began over 15 years ago.

Watford Museum’s work includes:

- Active collecting of Watford’s 300+ years of diversity, from photographs to saris to Black Lives Matter placards (including one placard donated by Cllr Trebar).
- Recent acquisitions include a family album of a Watford Italian family, and their contribution to the community and the recent purchase of an album of

the Buxton family with the support of the Friends of Watford Museum, the first black family based in Watford from 1919

- Providing online access to Watford's diverse history and current work on new learning resources better representing this wonderful history, important figures, war and civic service, which includes our very significant Italian heritage
- Black History Month activities and supporting the Mayor and council with information on Watford's black history with a commitment to sharing stories all year round
- Assisting with projects celebrating diverse heritage, from black hairdressing in Watford to the Black Digital Archive, working with local community groups and national projects
- Refresh of the Cassiobury Gallery now includes the black history and story of former slaves employed at Cassiobury. The gravestone of former slave George Doney in St Mary's Churchyard is now listed and has signage after work in partnership with WBC's Planning Service
- Working with Watford FC, Watford FC Trust, Kick It Out, Football's Black Pioneers and Asians in Football to celebrate the Cother Brothers, the first players of Asian origin to play professional football in this country, including working with Watford FC Academy on their Premier League funded Trailblazers project and exhibition about players of colour
- Social media posts on Watford's diverse heritage, on Monday we posted about the incredibly well loved Italian ice cream family the Grillos which was viewed over 9,000 times on Facebook
- Delivering training for Sporting Heritage Network on working with the community with 'Ignored Heritage'