

Safer Spaces Motion to Full Council July 18 2019: Comments from Councillor Gavin Clayton

The figures I cite in this motion are staggering and recent media reports seem to suggest that we may have reached a peak in tolerance for diversity and difference in our communities and we are heading backwards! This suggests it is something that is 'just happening' and that we as citizens have no power to effect it. Society on the slide...throw your hands in the air and shrug!

I don't accept that position...when prejudice bigotry and hatred are on the rise (within UK, Europe, USA and across the globe) it is important to double our efforts once again and that all people challenge it, but especially those lucky enough to hold a position as we do. That is why I am confident that the whole Council will support this motion and that we counter this rise in hate crime and lead policy development and implementation here in South Cambridgeshire ...proactively...and in partnership with expert agencies locally, Crime Commissioner etc.

I know that the Cabinet may have some amendments that they would like to bring to the motion as written... I would therefore seek three 3 assurances from them if these amendments are to be acceptable to me as the proposer.

1. The motion challenged the lack of an expert Equalities and Diversity Officer post being recruited (this would still be my preference)...and as I understand it the responsibility for policy development, monitoring, performance for Equalities currently sits with Phil Bird/Kevin Ledger. The Council has recently appointed Kevin into the senior Policy role and we have also just appointed a new policy officer. Phil Bird has been speaking to other councils particularly Bedford and Cambridge (who are developing a Single Equality Strategy which we could perhaps learn from and adapt?), ready for us to update our policy so this work is ready to progress now. The Council will also shortly be recruiting two graduate policy and performance posts.

I seek assurances that Equality & Diversity will of course continue be everyone's responsibility across SCDC as per the existing Equality Pledge, (but specifically a KPI monitored role within a senior post holder's roles & responsibilities/Job Specification/performance targets in the newly establishing Policy Team).

In this way we will still be able to monitor, compile data and respond at community & policy level to incidents across SCDC (the national report I cite mentions that many incidents go unreported to police and others as individuals see no point ("it happens all the time")...we need to make sure SCDC residents feel it is worth reporting...but hopefully by being proactive we will have less incidents too.

2. An important place to start and given the largest % increases for hate crimes are towards LGBT and Trans people is by a commitment for SCDC to purchase the Gold Subscription to Safer Spaces where businesses, public and voluntary sector organisations can sign up to the charter and mark their organisation as a Safe Space by displaying the poster and putting the campaign logo in the window of all council properties and vehicles.

3. As part of the review we work with City Council, Encompass and The Kite Trust to encourage Parish and Town Councils, partner organisations and groups seeking licences and community grants to adopt membership of the Safe Space mark for their business or community facility.

The drivers for this were many and varied for me including family members' experiences of discrimination, but also in getting my Councillor column accepted by the local Camboume community paper. As long as the end result is that ALL Residents in South Cambridgeshire of whatever race, religion, gender, disability or sexual orientation feel safe, supported, welcome and backed up by policy that doesn't allow for bigotry and hatred to go unchallenged then I accept the amendments and ask the Council to send a strong signal to our residents and unanimously support the motion.

Then we can really claim that South Cambs is a 'Modern and Caring Council'.

Details of contacts at the City Council and Encompass Network who are willing to support work of this kind with SCDC have been provided to officers.

