

Swindon Equality Group – 2016 Newsletter

Our group contact list now stands at 47 and this includes some TET members in other parts of the country. It is invaluable to send and receive comments and suggestions from other equality groups.

The Baptist Church in Gorse Hill continues to host our regular meetings and we are very grateful for this facility. However in spite of the large mailing list it has proved difficult this year getting people to attend the eight gatherings that we have held. This is one of the reasons why we produced our

Member Survey

Responses have been trickling in from the survey so please do try to commit the few minutes that will be needed to complete and return this. If you would like me to send you another copy then please let me know. Results will be shared early in the New Year.

Swindon Borough Council

Councils of all stripes have been under attack for several years now and our ambition of persuading SBC to pay the Living Wage (LW Foundation version of course) seems to be receding with every additional £1 million of savings that they have to find. However we have to believe that there is some wriggle room and still some decisions that are politically influenced so it is important that we sustain a dialogue.

To this end we continued to chase the responses to our 'Make my Council Fair' questions (produced by TET and submitted in Nov '15) and the answers arrived in January. The responses were often negative, generalised and/or referred to other staff so did not seem to offer much traction e.g. we found out that SBC do not keep a record of which contractors pay the living wage.

If you would like to see the full set of questions and answers then please let me know and I will mail them to you.

We have also asked one question at a council cabinet meeting, an aspect that we intend to pursue further.

Perhaps the most successful contact with councillors was in May when we sent

Letters to local candidates

With 13 SEG members involved, 91 letters were sent out and 19 replies received. The responses are still available to view on our website and they do make interesting reading.

Holding the successful candidates to account for their responses will be a task for us and for constituents.

Web Site

Visits to our web site had remained steady at around 100 each month up to Spring 2016. This rate more than doubled around the time of the local elections and since then the average has been closer to 200 hits per month. Is this significant?

We still have our views posted on the Brexit issue and these seem to take on greater significance with each week that passes.

Presentations Part 1

After a string of invitations throughout 2014/5 we were only approached by one group for a presentation in 2016. This was delivered in April to a group representing Catholic parishes in and around Swindon (see part 2 below).

Local Groups' Day

Once again we were able to send a representative to the day held at 'TET Central' for local groups and this proved to be as stimulating and informative as always. We hope to see one of the main speakers from that event in Swindon soon (see 2017 plans below).

Links with other organisations

We have made a point of keeping in touch with other Swindon groups and where our objectives overlap we have shared information and encouraged involvement. I am conscious that many of you appreciate this process – thank you for your responses.

Our links with equality trust groups in other parts of the country remain very valuable – special mention this year goes to the groups in Sheffield and in Oswestry, along with the continuing involvement and support from TET.

One of the more productive developments in 2016 was the invaluable support from Bishop Lee Rayfield and the involvement with the group of influential Swindon people that he has been able to convene. This has had a profound influence on the

Swindon Fact File

One of our main objectives for 2016 was to produce a set of inequality related Swindon statistics.

This proved to be quite a challenge initially although once the links to relevant documents/sites have been made it becomes much easier to sustain an information flow. The more contentious issue has been how best to present this information for maximum impact.

Initially we had support funding from the Bishop and were able to employ David Wildish who produced a highly visual booklet to our specification. The draft booklet titled 'Warning Signs' was well received by the reps at the TET local groups' day and by other interested parties.

However comments from other quarters pointed out the potential for damage to the reputation of Swindon, local businesses and people considering a move to the South West.

On reflection we were offered what we consider to be a useful platform in The Link magazine and decided to convert our material into a series of articles, starting with the December edition and under the heading 'Spirit of Swindon'. Throughout the series we aim to make use of the key data from the 'Warning Signs' draft, placing this in context and encouraging action and responses.

It is possible to feel that we might have been 'nobbled' a little through this process but we have much more scope to explain and qualify each point to a much wider (potential) audience. It will also be interesting to see the responses we achieve over time.

It would be really useful if SEG members could read the Link article(s) and send in comments to the magazine – hopefully supportive!

Presentations Part 2 (and plans for 2017)

After a relatively quiet 2016 in terms of presentations we should be able to take out and use our SEG banner twice in January. I have been asked to present at the Swindon Community conference and also alongside Stewart Lansley at the re-launch of the Weston-Super-Mare group.

Stewart, of course, is booked to appear at our own presentation in Swindon on Thursday March 30th.

We will be guided by responses to our survey before committing to our other objectives for next year.

Thank you for all your support and very best wishes for a less unequal 2017

Tom