



Our Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 17 November 2021

Attendance

Members of the Our Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Jonathan Crofts
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur
Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Zee Russell (Chair)
Cllr Tersaim Singh

Members of the Our Council Scrutiny Panel in attendance via Teams

Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
David Pattison
Sharonrose Manhrir
Jin Takhar
Martin Stevens DL

Scrutiny Officer
Chief Operating Officer
Equality Diversity and Inclusion Advisor
Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion
Scrutiny Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Welcome and Introductions**
Cllr Zee Russell, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website.

- 2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**
Cllr Zee Russell explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off, unless have been invited to speak by the Chair.

3 **Apologies**

No apologies were received.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **EDI report on consultation findings and update on actions**

Jin Takhar, Head of EDI, presented the update report on progress to the panel.

The Head of EDI advised the panel that the presentation will cover the findings and outcomes from Phase 2 of the public consultation on the draft Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy. The Head of EDI added that the panel would be asked at the end of the presentation to comment on the consultation work done during the summer and the supporting action detailed in the report. The comments of the panel would be included within the final report that will be presented to Cabinet on 8 December 2021 for approval.

The Head of EDI advised that it was agreed at a previous meeting on 30 June 2021, where an earlier draft was presented to the panel for comments, that a further update would be shared following the second phase of consultation with members of the community and voluntary sector for their comments.

The Head of EDI outlined the background to the development of the strategy and the advised the panel that the presentation would focus on the methodology used and the findings which have informed the strategy, which are supported by ten directorate equality plans.

The Head of EDI invited Sharonrose Manhiri, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisor, to give the detailed presentation to the panel on the findings from the consultation and a summary of the action plan.

The EDI Adviser outlined the four priorities of the EDI strategy and gave a summary of the aims behind the Phase 2 consultation process. The EDI adviser commented on the three different approaches used to consult with members of the local community and voluntary sectors groups about the draft strategy. The EDI Adviser added that 219 responses were received to the online survey.

The EDI Adviser informed the panel that based on an analysis of survey responses most people consulted agreed with the priorities and the proposed actions. The EDI Adviser welcomed the fact that the comments from the consultation exercise had already been identified within the ten directorate equality plans, as issues.

The EDI Adviser commented on the key themes that emerged from the consultation work and gave an update on the action being taken or planned in response to these issues.

The EDI Adviser detailed the changes made to the strategy document in response to the feedback, specific examples of work planned to address them. The next of the process will be to incorporate the actions into the Directorate Equality Plans and where appropriate discussions with the relevant leadership teams in November 2021. The EDI adviser commented that the findings of the consultation will inform the final

EDI strategy which will be presented to Cabinet in December 2021 for approval. The final draft will be published in January 2022.

The panel were invited to comment and ask questions about the report and presentation.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report and presentation and the work done to consult with community and voluntary groups.

The panel discussed the implications of the end of the uplift to Universal Credit referred to in the paper and queried if the proposed review of plans would also consider the impact of the change and specifically the effect of tapering with the potential to further widen the poverty gap between specific groups because of the change.

The panel welcomed the progress by the EDI team to continue building on the previous success and good work done in this area.

The Head of EDI reassured the panel that work is being done in response to issue of the poverty gap highlighted in the presentation. The Head EDI advised the panel that work is being done to develop a financial inclusion strategy and this will include a review of the data to identify trends beyond people with protected characteristics. The Head of EDI offered to attend a future meeting of the panel to present a report on the issue of financial inclusion and an assessment of the impact of debt on different sections of the community.

The panel commented on the finding in consultation from community groups which identified the need for support to secure funding and help in submitting funding bids and difference in outcomes which has led to more wealthier areas securing more funding because of the quality of their applications. The panel commented that supporting community groups to writing bids is very practical way of increasing the likelihood success in the future.

The panel discussed the issue of the under representation of diverse community groups on strategy boards and within the Council structure and expressed concern about the progress in better reflecting the community of Wolverhampton. The panel suggested that a target should be set to measure progress, which would have the benefit of managing the expectations of the public about the time it would take to achieve a more diverse representation. The panel suggested the achieving community representation in schools should also be an objective and supported this idea as a way forward.

The panel discussed the need for a co-ordinated campaign at either regional or national level about issues such as the impact of reduction in Universal Credit, while accepting the Council also has a role in trying to mitigate the effects of national policy changes. The Head of EDI agreed to discuss the issue with colleagues about how the Council can support community groups when preparing funding bids and report progress to a future meeting.

The Head of EDI commented that community representation in the workforce has been a priority for the previous 18 months and in response, 24 actions have been introduced covering recruitment policies and procedures and the review has also

identified areas for improvement. The Head of EDI confirmed that a progress report could be presented to a future meeting of the panel for consideration.

The Head of EDI commented on the issue of setting targets for improving representation through the recruitment process and reassured the panel of further measures being developed to improve practice.

The Head of EDI added that a target of achieving progress by 2030 as part of a long-term plan in recognition of the challenge.

The Head of EDI commented on the performance indicators that will be used to assess progress towards the vision for 2030 of the Council being representative of the communities it serves and in terms of people across all the protected characteristics. A proposed set of key performance measures will be presented to SEB and other groups for discussion and approval. The draft will also be shared with members of the Equality Advisory Group in the new year for approval.

The performance measures will be monitored to see if the range of initiatives are making a difference to achieving the vision. The Head of EDI gave examples of the areas that monitoring work will cover, for example, the number of residents who were shortlisted for vacancies, details of appointments, a comparison of the workforce profile compared with the previous year. The Head of EDI offered the panel reassurance that work will also be done to give opportunities for colleagues across the workforce to progress, particularly where there is a concentration of black and minority ethnic group among salary grades three to five.

The Head of EDI commented that with reference to the comments about the school workforce that a report will be presented on 29 November 2021 which will provide school census data. The information will cover both teaching and the non-teaching professions and profile based on protected characteristics and will support the aim of wanting schools to be more representative of the children that they are teaching.

The Head of EDI commented that the issue of women's safety is a real concern, and that the EDI Adviser is leading on project to respond this issue. A Gender Action Plan is being developed in the next few months which can be shared with the panel a future meeting. The Head of EDI advised the panel of further work being done with WMCA and other regional bodies to tackle issues around gender equality and the safety of women.

The Head of EDI commented on the work being done to develop a financial inclusion strategy, which is supported by colleagues in finance and adult social care. A report on the findings can be presented to a future meeting of the panel.

The panel welcomed the plan to support community groups with their funding bids in recognition of the need to see local community and volunteer groups prosper by getting the professional support needed and which will also benefit the City.

The panel expressed concerns about the limited impact of previous plans and strategies in the 1970s and 80s which had similar intentions of addressing the issues highlighted in the report, but many of which continue to be present today; particularly the aim of getting more community representatives in decision making positions. The panel supported the aims but there was concern about the challenges to making progress in this area.

The panel queried the reference in the report to the legal duty on public bodies to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share it.

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, commented on the legal responsibility on public bodies and highlighted examples of court cases where decisions made by public bodies have either been set aside or quashed because they have not been able to show compliance with the public sector equality duty.

The Chief Operating Officer outlined the requirements detailed in the related Act and referred to removing barriers to advancing the equality of opportunity between persons and gave an example of challenging the requirement in job descriptions for a specific qualification. The Chief Operating Officer commented on the work being done to make job descriptions much clearer about the need to have specific qualifications or experience to be meet the job selection criteria.

The Chief Operating Officer commented on the range of work, for example, mentoring opportunities which are intended to give people the right skills and support to succeed. The Chief Operating Officer offered to attend future panel meetings to report on progress of the EDI strategy and the outcomes in response to concerns about the impact of previous strategies on improving outcomes for employees and local communities. The Chief Operating Officer also offered to provide any specific information requested by panel to a future meeting. The panel welcomed the offer to present information on progress at future panel meetings.

The panel discussed the progress in implementing the Council's succession policy and suggested that it should be reviewed and updated as part work being done to develop the EDI strategy. The panel discussed the ideas for empowering individuals and communities and the need to make them less dependent on public authorities. The panel highlighted the challenge in tackling issues within communities which in some situations are intergenerational in nature.

The panel discussed the issue poverty among white working-class families and queried if this group would be included within the aims of the EDI strategy and specifically how information on their experiences is being collected and monitored, due to concerns expressed about their situation.

The Head of EDI commented that the Council has a responsibility to ensure all communities are treated fairly and to investigate whether disparities exist across all the protected characteristics and this would include people within the white British working-class community.

The Head of EDI offered the panel reassurance and outlined work being done across the Council to assess the impact of services on white British working class and other groups and specifically concerns about the educational outcomes when compared to other community groups.

The Head of EDI commented on the disparities that disproportionately affect certain sections of community, such as white working class and each directorate will as part of developing their equality action plans will be asked to look at the data to help inform future decisions and plans. Each of the directorate equality plans will have a

clear indication of the outputs, targets that are required to determine the progress made and the impact these services are having on local communities.

The panel discussed the impact that reduced funding available has had on efforts to change the lifestyles of local communities and highlighted the need to look at alternative funding sources to help break the cycle of deprivation and poverty.

The Head of EDI acknowledged the issue and advised the panel that a Financial Inclusion working group has now been established and the members will be looking at the cycle of poverty and deprivation that affect certain sections of the local community, while accepting that the issue has a disproportionate effect on specific groups.

The panel discussed the impact of the strategy and suggested that the progress should be reviewed more frequently to check that local intelligence from planned work detailed in the strategy can be used to influence wider regional and national government policies in a timelier way.

The panel commented that while accepting the funding issues challenges discussed previously the Council was still in a position make a positive impact on the lives of local people.

The panel requested an update the work done to develop measurables for the strategy referred to in the presentation as being at the work in progress stage. The Head of EDI advised the panel that the ten directorate equality plans will help to translate the commitments made into action. The Head of EDI added that the individual plans will each have measurable outputs and outcomes and a range of indicators to help track performance against agreed targets. The work is timetabled to be completed in the January 2022.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report. The Chair thanked the panel for their contributions.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the findings from the EDI consultation.
2. Cabinet to consider the panel comments on the findings from the EDI consultation.
3. The panel comments on the EDI strategy to be considered and incorporated into the final report to Cabinet, as appropriate.
4. The panel agreed to add the progress of the EDI strategy as a standing item to the panel work programme.