

Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 8 June 2023

Attendance

Members of the Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

Cllr John Reynolds (Chair)
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Ellis Turrell
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Ciaran Brackenridge
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lamina Lloyd
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE

Employees

Lee Booker (Scrutiny Officer)
David Pattison (Chief Operating Officer)
Jin Takhar (Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion)
Ruth Taylor (Service Lead – Placemaking)
Julia Nock (Deputy Director of Assets)
Alison Shannon (Chief Accountant)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>Title</i>
1	Welcome and Introductions The Chair welcomed the Panel
2	Meeting procedures to be followed The Chair informed the Panel of meeting procedures
3	Apologies and notifications of substitutions Apologies received: Councillor Linda Leach due to other Council business
4	Declarations of interest There were no declarations of interest.
5	Minutes of previous meeting Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

6 **EDI strategy - Equalities Impact Assessments**

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion stated that the purpose of the report was to give assurance to the Panel that the Council was meeting legal requirements in adhering to the Equality Act 2010 and its public sector duties, specifically in carrying out Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA). It was also to display the Council had robust EIA policies and procedures and an example was to be shown to the Panel. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion gave background to EIAs which were designed to enable and ensure that the Council could assess projects so that they would not discriminate against anyone, where possible. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion brought up the Public Realm Phase 1 and 3 developments, which covered Victoria Street and the Civic Halls redevelopments. She explained to the Panel that EIA policies had been reviewed 18 months previously and that guidance and templates were available via internal Council web systems for colleagues to refer to and use. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion informed the Panel that the Council was looking to adopt an EIA Oversight Board to better improve future EIAs.

The Service Lead – Placemaking explained to the Panel that as part of the broader scheme of the redevelopment of Victoria Street, they sought to improve EDI and had carried out an EIA to achieve this. Some benefits listed included better access for wheelchair users, improved street safety for women via increased footfall and cleaner air, via cycle lanes, leading to lower pollution levels for street users. The Service Lead – Placemaking referred to the presentation slides (A copy of the presentation is attached to the minutes) which showed an 18 month consultation process with the public and stakeholders. She then told the Panel they were moving onto Phase 2, Queens Square and Lichfield Street developments. Consultations had occurred for this, and a mitigation process had been pursued which were designed to eliminate or minimise potential adverse effects on Equality Groups. Further consultation and workshops with relevant groups were planned for September 2023.

The Vice Chair highlighted that the EIA report showed recommendations for the Phase 1 and 3 developments which were set to be completed in November 2021, he said that the report did not show that these were completed and asked if they had documents which showed the successful implementation of recommendations. The Vice Chair also queried assessment content for visually impaired people on the Victoria Street re-development, seeking further information.

The Service Lead – Placemaking replied that the information in the report was specific to the time it was done and that they aimed to work with stakeholder groups in the future to assess the works now they were completed to see how the work had been received and gather feedback. The information would then be matched by an outcomes report.

The Vice Chair replied asking when this report would be done, referring back to Phases 1 and 3 being completed.

The Service Lead – Placemaking answered that the work would be done over the summer and be used to also inform Phase 2 designs in the autumn.

A Panel member highlighted that there were difficulties for some with visual impairments seeing the grey step half kerb in the Victoria Street cycle lane.

The Service Lead – Placemaking explained that the cycle lane was done with blind people and visually impaired people in mind, having worked with blind colleagues and other disability partnership groups. The slight kerb section was added as a result of consultation with blind colleagues that advised they would need raised delineation to use their sticks to tap to understand the space. However, since the launch, issues had been raised regarding it as a potential trip hazard so further consultation would take place between members of the public, including people with visual impairments to find a working resolution.

It was agreed across the Panel and Officers that a lessons learned approach would be taken and this design not used in future redevelopments.

A Councillor enquired if the team benchmarked their work results next to other local authorities.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion stated that The City of Wolverhampton Council was leading the way on Equalities policies and works with other Local Authorities so that they could improve their equalities and EIAs. She stated that she had previously worked for Wolverhampton Homes and sought to incorporate elements of their Equalities policy into the Council's.

A Panel member raised Hackney Carriage and Taxi driver consultations in reference to Victoria Street, stating that they had a taxi rank there, he wanted to know if the drivers were happy with the consultation outcomes.

The Service Lead – Placemaking answered that there were no major issues raised regarding the loss of Victoria Street by the Taxi Drivers Federation. Hackney Carriage and Taxi Drivers were consulted with and newer rank additions in various streets had contributed to a net gain in Taxi spaces.

A Councillor enquired if many disabled parking spaces were available.

The Service Lead – Placemaking said they had increased disabled parking spaces in School Street, Salop Street and Skinner Street.

A Councillor asked if the West Midlands Fire Service were consulted with, along side other partners.

The Service Lead – Placemaking stated that they had consulted with all blue light services and continued to do so.

A Councillor sought clarification with the legal requirements of EIAs, he asked if it was legally necessary to do an EIA for every single decision the Council took or was it only for projects over a certain budget level. He also enquired about bus stops.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion replied that in line with the Equality Act 2010, the Council had a duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination where possible.

The Service Lead – Placemaking said that a net increase in bus stops would be achieved, in particular in Lichfield Street and Princess Square.

A Councillor raised that Wolverhampton Homes had been mentioned and sought to

clarify the Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion's reference to them for transparency.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion explained that she had introduced the assurances board in Wolverhampton Homes and that other Local Authorities had taken up a similar policy structure, She was keen to ensure The City of Wolverhampton Council adopted a progressive policy which had become standard practice elsewhere.

The Vice Chair asked if the Equality Diversity & Inclusion team had reviews within the progress of a project rather than just before and after. He also referred to earlier questions about Taxi ranks and asked how they had prepared for those taxis which only drop off and pick up, formerly in Victoria Street.

The Service Lead – Placemaking stated that they did not currently have mid project reviews occurring as part of their current EIA templates and that this would be future work for the EDI team. She stressed that they currently had an outcomes-based report structure. She also replied agreeing there were less taxi tanks in Victoria Street now but that the increased taxi ranks elsewhere contributed to a net gain and this was done in agreement with the Taxi Drivers Federation.

A Councillor debated the reply, highlighting that whilst there may be ranks, there were a lack of legal drop off areas for taxi drivers which are policed by traffic wardens. The Councillor felt this made it harder for those with disabilities to get near to some areas and increased their travelling time outside of the vehicle.

The Service Lead – Placemaking replied that they were currently consulting and looking to add more pick up and a drop off points at Queen's Square. The Police had advised this would be a good spot and would enable safety for those who used the Safe Haven.

The Chair raised a concern that other organisations of whom the Council consulted when doing EIAs were not communicating effectively enough through their own organisations to ensure full, broad consultation had taken place. He felt this needed to be considered in the future.

The Panel agreed the report.

7 **Land and Property Disposal Policy**

The Deputy Director of Assets stated that the purpose of the report was to bring to Scrutiny information on how Council owned land and properties were disposed of, which included those capital receipts over £10,000, across the 2022 – 2023 financial year. This was to show they were compliant with the Council's constitution and the Local Government Act 1972 when disposing of assets. The plan was to deal with properties that were no longer required by the Council for service delivery, the plan would be reviewed in 2024 as the current plan was to end in 2023. Once a site had been recognised as surplus to requirements, an internal service consultation was done, followed by a ward Councillor consultation. If it was decided an item was to be

sold off, this would be taken to Cabinet Resources Panel if it was over £250,000. If the item was under the amount it would be taken through an Individual Executive Decision Notice (IEDN) process. Everything was documented and brought to Cabinet so that the team were transparent in how they planned to dispose of an item. 2022 – 2023, 8 properties were sold, generating £500,000 and Housing Revenue Account profit of £278,000. All assets were sold in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972. Further information on the assets were displayed in the appendices (a copy is attached to the signed minutes). Scrutiny was asked to observe and agree on the documentation and useage of the assets. The Deputy Director of Assets also stated that Scrutiny would get to see the planned changes for the 2024 – 2029 policy plan in the future.

A Panel member stated that they felt the £250,000 threshold was too high and that assets under the price should still be looked at to the same level as those over £250,000. The Councillor requested future strategy reports to show what wards the items sold were in. He also stated that he believed it should be shown if the Council initiated a sale or if it was because a private investor made an offer. He also asked if income made from asset sales was to be used specifically on the area from which the asset was sold, or was the money absorbed into the general Council budget. He felt the money made from the sale of an asset should be put back into the area from which it was sold.

The Director of Assets said she would take the threshold comment back to her team to discuss. She said she would reissue appendices to include the ward information, as well as whether the Council decided to sell it as an initiative or if it was in response to a private offer. She stated that the money from sales was absorbed into the central Council finance system.

The Vice Chair stated that the reports showed the price of the sale of the assets, but not what they were valued at. He felt it would improve transparency and Scrutiny if the value of the assets was also shown along side sale price.

The Director of Assets said they could provide this information in future reports.

- 8 **Treasury Management Activity Monitoring Quarter Three 2022-2023**
The Chief Accountant stated that the Treasury Management Activity Monitoring Quarter Three 2022-2023 report had been took to Cabinet in March and that as part of the constitution, it was a requirement for her to bring it to Scrutiny. She summarised the definition of Treasury Management, she explained to the Panel that they had budget indicators with which they worked to. She stated that the final quarter of 2022 – 2023 had an underspend on the Council budget and an overspend on the Housing Revenue Account. A cash limit was set to protect funds, whereby cash was not kept in the Council holdings for long, it was invested into money markets to generate more money via interest. The limit was exceeded during Christmas, due to staff holidays, once the holiday was over, the money was moved into money markets.

There was a brief discussion about the limit being exceeded during the Christmas holidays. There was agreement between Officers and the Chair that the team would look to try avoid this occurring again.

9 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as the 12 October 2023.