

Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 12 October 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
Cllr Celia Hibbert

In Attendance

Councillor Louise Miles (Cabinet Member for Resources)

Employees

David Pattison (Chief Operating Officer)
Jin Takhar (Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion)
Becky Wilkinson (Director of Adult Social Care)
Alison Hinds (Director of Children's Services)
Laura Phillips (Deputy Director of People & Change)
Sukhvinder Mattu (Head of People Services)
Alison Shannon (Chief Accountant)
Solomon Scott (Senior Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer)
Jameel Mullan (Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager)
Lee Booker (Scrutiny Officer)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**
The Chair welcomed the Panel to the meeting.

2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**

The meeting procedures were explained to the Panel.

3 **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

6 **EDI strategy Progress against Objectives**

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion explained to meet the requirements of the law, they were present to inform the Panel on the status of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Key Performance Indicators (KPI).

The Director of Adult Social Care began her presentation (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) to give an overview of Adult Social Care EDI KPIs. She said that they had made progress on where they were previously at, but she recognised they still had a long way to go. She said they had made progress with the protected characteristics of Age, Sex and Disability. Some of the data captured was newly captured data and therefore, not all could be displayed with a relative comparison to capture progress. Bespoke training was commissioned to allow the workforce to have sensitive conversations relating to the protected characteristics with patients, however, this had not achieved the desired outcomes. This is something that would need to be focused on and worked out as next steps.

The Director of Adult Social Care said “Direct Payments” were seen as a good thing in Adult Social Care, as it showed the independence of the person. However, there was a significantly higher portion of Black and Asian people who utilised direct payments, rather than commissioned services. Research was to be carried out to discover if this was down to any cultural insensitivities by those services and to allow alterations to service provision to be more inclusive of Black and Asian groups. Work would need to be done to ensure Black and Asian people were aware of the mental health services available in the community.

The Vice-Chair sought clarification on a quote within the presentation document which stated: “14.3% of adults were of Black, Black British, Caribbean or African ethnicity, with 15.2% detained being of the same ethnic origin.”

The Director of Adult Social Care said it meant 15.2% of the whole 14.3% were of a specific and same ethnic origin. The Chair said it needed to be noted that quotes written in this way were not clear enough and needed to be written with better clarity.

The Chair referred to page 18 of the presentation which explained that the bespoke training had not achieved the desired outcomes. He was concerned experts were hired to train staff on this specific issue and it did not work. He wanted to understand why this was the case and have further information.

The Director of Adult Social Care explained that although the training was for all protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, they found they were unable to get people to declare their sexuality and therefore saw this as a failure which would need to be addressed in a different way. This meant that they were not getting data still on sexuality and would need to do a lesson's learned approach as to why the training did not achieve the aims.

The Chair agreed it would be an on-going process to attempt to obtain the results needed. He stated that his constituents had struggled with the communications around Direct Payments and that it was not easy to find, understand or do them for many. He felt this was the reason many did not independently do Direct Payments and instead went through the Council to sort payments.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that they were undertaking an Adult Social Care re-design and sought to address these issues. She thanked the Chair for his insights.

The Chair said the presentation stated that Black people in Britain were detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 at a much higher level nationally than the rest of the population. The Chair wanted to know if Wolverhampton was in line with the national trend or not. The Director of Adult Social Care stated that she did not know the specific statistics and would need to check and come back to the Chair on this.

The Chair agreed he wanted this and stated it would be used to look at whether Wolverhampton was higher or lower than the average statistics. He wanted to then find out the reasoning behind the data results.

A Panel member asked why there were sections of information which stated "not recorded". The Director of Social Care stated this was because the participant declined to answer the question.

A Councillor discussed a case wherein a constituent was detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. She felt people were left too long without intervention. She wanted to know what the services were doing to intervene sooner to prevent people going into care.

The Director of Social Care agreed with the Panel member that they would meet outside of the meeting to go through the case and discuss the issue further in private.

A Member of the Panel said she felt it was great the information had been captured but due to the size of the presentation provided, numbering at 50 pages, she wanted to know how the data was going to be used to tackle the issues uncovered in the data.

The Director of Social Care stated in the future she would try make reports and presentations more succinct for the Panel. She said they had commissioned work to be done in response to the data, to target those areas in need of improvement.

A Councillor wanted to know the actions and timeline planned to tackle these issues. The Chair stated that he felt the Councillors question was more relevant to the Adults Scrutiny Panel. He then addressed Officers and stated the formats presented to the Panel were too long and thick with data. He wanted a more simplified and concise

format in the future.

The Director of Children's Services opened the presentation on Children & Young People (CYP) to give a recap on previous CYP priorities and explained the data informed the actions they took as priorities. They had used the opportunities available to work with young people to work on aims they had set. The priorities for the next year were informed by a larger data sample and they were ensuring they would be representing the diverse needs of the diverse CYP with diverse staff. This would include the setting up of some targeted groups, such as a girl's group to work with youth offenders. A full motion was to be taken to Council to try and get full time care leavers as a protected characteristic.

A Councillor stated that the report showed people between the age of 15 and 18 were an over-represented group and she wanted to know what they were going to do to target them.

The Director of Children's Services said it was a good opportunity to show how data was used to target groups and inform their thinking. This would be displayed through family support and peer support groups which they would now try to shape the services so that young families could access services. The over-representation meant they could reflect on how to work with young parents caring for people in those age groups.

The Councillor replied enquiring about the lack of disability data on page 45. She said in the future this data could be gathered but she wanted to know if it could be broken down into further categorisation of the types of disability present within the children to allow for more targeted responses.

The Director of Children's Services said that they could try to do that but it would depend on the way the data was collected. She said she would take it away as feedback to look into future reports.

The Councillor wanted to know how they were ensuring short breaks for parents were indeed breaks. The Director of Children's Services said it was a key priority for the future to ensure that breaks away from children were an option, alongside family activities.

A Panel member focused on areas of underperformance in the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic groups. She said the outcomes always ended up being the same and wanted to know if the interventions being done were not working. She also wanted to know if qualitative data was gathered to inform policies, as opposed to just quantitative data.

The Director of Children's Services replied that the data gathering did include both qualitative and quantitative research methods. She said they were seeing changes to outcomes by services.

A Councillor wanted to know the progress of the priority to take to cabinet the motion that care leavers would be a protected characteristic.

The Director Children's Services confirmed this has been to cabinet and approved. Care leavers were now categorised under the protected characteristics within the City of Wolverhampton.

The Vice-Chair stated that the KPI data on pages 35, 37 and 39 showed that Asians were disproportionately represented. He wanted to know how the administration categorised "Asian", as it could cover a very broad group of people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As the usage of this data and the understanding of the groups it covered would influence how strategies were informed and planned. He stated for example that Asia as a term could be used to cover people from Chinese heritage, through to Indian heritage and felt the Council needed to be clear what they were looking at when discussing EDI.

The Director of Children's Services agreed it was a broad category used to capture data. She said the Vice-Chairs challenge was reasonable and they would listen to his feedback to look at how the data was broken down and used; similar to the previously discussed point about disability data.

A Councillor wanted to know why the data showed Asians were under-represented in adoption compared to other groups. The Director of Children's Services said this was not specific to Wolverhampton and was relative to a national trend that Asians were under-represented in adoption.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager said that key themes for exclusions were a decrease in exclusions overall since 2017, but they had a long way to go to ensure all young people got the best possible outcomes. The data showed the highest over-representation was key stage 3 to key stage 4, which was in line with national data. Children with additional needs had increased and was higher than the national data; more needed to be done in Wolverhampton to address this. Males were higher than females in exclusions which was in line with trends in the national data.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager New stated new guidance had been developed by the Government setting out the responsibilities Local Authorities had to address low attendance by pupils in schools. The largest proportion of exclusions were from the White ethnic background. Mixed race and Black males were over-represented in exclusions, which was in line with national data. The highest exclusions by religious background were Christian, with atheists also being represented as high. An improved website with better pathways had been launched which provided parents with access to see what support was available in an inclusive system provided by the Local Authority. They had had 76 exclusion prevention meetings, which was done when a pupil was at risk of exclusion to try turn things around. 70 of the 76 people remained in their provision post-prevention meetings and this displayed the Local Authority was providing support to schools, families, and students. The Council team were currently looking to do research looking at those who were excluded to gather qualitative information on their experiences to try develop an intervention program. They were to launch an attendance pathway and risk of exclusion pathway. They had recruited additional staff to meet requirements for attendance, this would mean supportive clinics for parents and carers. They had developed inclusion workshops which identified gaps in the provision.

A Panel member sought clarity over a graduated pathway. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager replied that they had launched the Wolverhampton Inclusive Schools for Everyone site, which offered the pathway in a condensed manner.

A Councillor stated that whilst there was work and support to reduce exclusions, she was concerned by highly disruptive behaviour in class rooms impacting on all children's quality of education. She wanted to know if data could be compiled on this and what could be done.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager said they could not assume what the quality of learning was. They would need to do research to find out what the Wolverhampton specific situation was, to inform the responses. 80 to 85 of Schools were rated good in Wolverhampton by Ofsted. They had a school improvement and education excellence service which could provide support to leaders in school to deal improving education quality.

The Chair wanted to know if there was a difference between support provided to Local Authority Schools and Academy Schools.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager said the same statutory responsibility applied in terms of services. Attendance was changing in legislation which required to have a clear offer to all schools.

The Chair wanted to know if there was a difference between exclusion levels at Academies compared to Local Authority Maintained Schools. The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager said that Academies had a higher rate of exclusions. The Chair felt this was down to the Academy school format, which was more competitive and results based. He stated this needed flagging as an equalities issue.

The Inclusion and Attendance Service Manager said they were round the table with the heads of Academies and were maintaining a relationship where concerns could be raised.

There was agreement between the Panel and the Head of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion that going forwards future presentations would be more concise, with additional information added as appendices.

7 **Race at Work Charter & Pay Gap Reporting**

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion opened the presentation (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) with the purpose of updating the Panel on the progress made against the Race at Work Charter requirements. The Business in the Community (BITC) Race at Worker Charter was launched in partnership with the Government in 2018. There were 7 "calls for action" as a part of this, and The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion spoke about progress on these.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion stated that the Council had appointed an Executive Sponsor for Race, Religion and Belief; they chose the Chief Operating Officer for the role. Since then, Executive Sponsors had been appointed from each equality forum. She said it had made a difference and that employees felt more empowered to speak up about concerns or issues. She said there were over 60 members of senior staff who were mentors for 75 mentees, with 25 mentees being promoted. This was down to engagement with Senior Executive Board Sponsors. For the action, "Capturing Ethnicity Data and Progress", the Council had achieved this by capturing the data and presenting it to the Panel. The Head of Equality, Diversity and

Inclusion reported increases in Ethnic Minority Background representation in the workforce. Black and Asian members of the workforce at paygrades 9 to 17 had doubled in numbers, totally at 56 members from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds. 42.1% of apprentices were from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds across 2021-2022. Progress on committing at board level to zero-tolerance of harassment and bullying was the creation of clear policy on this matter, as well as the creation of safe spaces and ways to speak up, including through independent third-party organisation to get advice and support. Figures for 2021 to 2022 grievances totalled less than 10 cases.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion remarked that to work towards the call for action - "Supporting Equality in the workplace is the responsibility of all leaders and managers"; actions taken included EDI being a standing item on all team meetings, each directorate had an equality plan to show the steps the Council was taking to tackle service inequality, as well as proactive messaging from Senior Executive staff members. To take actions that support ethnic minority career progression the Council offered Aspire to management training, which all colleagues could apply for, wrap around support for individuals who have been unsuccessful in an interview, opportunity to get mentorship from senior colleagues, as well as broader skills improvement opportunities.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion commented that to support race allies in the workplace the Council had a One City Allyship Approach in which the Council encouraged uptake to the role with colleagues. To support ethnically diverse-led enterprise owners in supply chains, the Council had worked with procurement teams to offer options where these businesses could be considered. They had also worked with groups such as the Black Business Network and Asian Business Network to help develop training and support for businesses to put themselves forwards for procurement opportunities. The creation of the EIA Assurance Board would ensure there was fair and robust discussions around the requirements of future contracts.

The Head of People Services began the combined pay gap report (a copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes) to summarise the findings on ethnicity, sexuality and disability. She confirmed they used the median to analyse the data. Ethnicity data was summarised, the Council paid apprentices 10% higher wages than other companies did on average. The diversity of the workforce had increased year on year, ethnic minority success rate hiring increased from 3.7% (2020 -2021) to 6.7% (2021-2022).

The Head of People Services stated that for disability pay gap, disabled people earned on average a higher wage within the Council than their peers who hadn't declared a disability. The median pay gap for a LGB+ employee was 9.4% more than a heterosexual employee on average, but the mean was 1.4% less. The different results for LGB+ employees was explained by the small percentage of workforce who identified as LGB+, making percentages volatile to change should staff leave or join. The transgender pay gap was not calculated due to the extremely small levels of trans employees within the Council making it not possible to present a coherent analysis. The Council was committed to further reducing pay gaps, to promoting inclusivity and encouraging data disclosure by employees to allow the Council to make more accurate policy and strategy choices.

The Vice-Chair wanted further information on the Race Allies policy, he wanted to know what it defined and the progress on it. He said he had never heard of it before.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion stated they had 12 staff allies at a senior level who supported the staff equality forums and advocated on behalf of staff. It was promoted within the Council and staff were encouraged to participate. Specific to Race Allies, there had been little take up by staff.

A Panel member stated they thought the Race at Work Charter was fantastic. She said she would love to see it done for all protected characteristics and asked if it was possible.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion replied that it was right to want to spread more inclusive policies in the workplace for all the protected characteristics. She said they were due to embark on self-assessments in each equality group and were also going to be doing an LGBT+ assessment through the Stonewall Charity.

A Panel member stated he was pleased with the report and said the City of Wolverhampton Council always went above and beyond what was required by the Government in Equalities matters. He wanted to know if colleagues all had forums to speak on these matters to inform the Council. He stated he expected pay gaps to be larger when new employees started at the bottom of the pay ladder, such as through apprenticeships. He wanted reassurances this would close as they progressed through the system.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion said support forums went on tour. They also went to Hickman to reach the workforce on that site. They had a monthly operators' performance management network. They were conscious a section of the workforce were not digitally included, such as front line colleagues. They were working on ways to ensure those colleagues got the communications needed, as well as information on pay.

The Chief Operating Officer stated that Equality representatives attended Senior Management meetings to present anything EDI related that is required. He confirmed that the Council was replicating the Race at Work Charter across all protected characteristics. He also said in the past those representatives had been to scrutiny to give their views.

A Councillor urged the Panel to consider having representatives visit and speak to the Panel again in the future.

A Councillor referred to the reported increase in the workforce of employees from Black and other ethnic groups. He wanted to know if this data was able to be broken down to show the subgroups within that category.

The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion stated that they did have that data and that it was possible to do that.

A Councillor referred the Hamas attacks in Israel which occurred on October 7th 2023 and the subsequent continuation of the Israel/Palestine war. He felt that not enough had been displayed on internal Council material for Jewish staff. He wanted to know if Jewish colleagues were represented and included within the Equality forums. He wanted assurances they had the support they needed.

The Chief Operating Officer said that those issues were covered under the Race, Religion and Belief forum; the Council was inclusive of all staff. Employee support was covered by the Employee Assistance program which offered counselling. The Council was ensuring there was a joint-faith based response to these issues.

The Vice-Chair wanted to know what was meant in the presentation by “wrap around support for employees unsuccessful in interviews”. The Head of People Services responded that for colleagues and non-colleagues who were unsuccessful in a job interview, the Council offered them feedback on how they could improve their interview techniques.

A Councillor wanted to know why the take up to the Race Allies program was low. The Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion replied that they would note the request and look into it.

The Chair asked about the statistics covering the White ethnicity group, as an additional categorisation had been created with White Other, Gypsy, Roma & Traveller groups as ethnic minority groups. He wanted to know how this impacted on data changes.

The Head of People Services stated that this was following changes by the government to the National Guidelines and that these new changes did impact on the overall data, but adjustments had been made so that it worked correctly.

8

Treasury Management

The Chief Accountant opened the presentation (a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes) on treasury management. The Council set and reported on prudential and treasury management indicators, with quarterly updates for monitoring purposes. Examples were provided in the appendices. The Council had not taken on any new borrowing since March 2019. The Council could only borrow for capital purposes and funding was done through the General Fund and the Housing & Revenues Account. Current forecasting confirmed no new borrowing would be required for the financial year 2023 – 2024.

A Panel Member was pleased with the report but stated he was concerned about the debt the Council still had, whilst recognising efforts had been made to pay off some of the debt. He stated residents paid a lot for their Council tax and wanted them to have quality services.

The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that the Council monitored its spending cautiously and had made efforts to pay off the borrowing. She said the reasons for the borrowing were the administrations ambitious plans for the City and to contribute to the City’s economic development. She stated this was done due to a lack of financial strategy and support from the National Government since 2010. She stated that the definitions were different, that “borrowing” was not the same as “debt”. She said that borrowing was to fund capital projects and done in accordance with programs.

A Panel Member asked how the Council protected itself from the volatility of the markets, such as rises in interest rates.

The Chief Accountant said all borrowing was based upon fixed term agreements and was informed by external advisors. She said they had benefitted from interest rates going up. Investments were short term and on double A rated money markets. Treasury Management always set informed budget plans which considered possible future projections.

The Cabinet Member for Resources stated that the Reserves were earmarked for any issues to cover.