

Our Council Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 30 June 2021

Attendance

Members of the Our Council Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal
Cllr Tersaim Singh
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Jonathan Crofts

Members of the Our Council Scrutiny Panel in attendance via Teams

Cllr Clare Simm
Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal
Cllr Christopher Burden

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
David Pattison	Director of Governance
Jin Takhar	Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager
Paulette Chattwood	Co-Chair Race, Religion and Belief
Jane Ciftci	Chair Rainbow Forum
Solomon Scott	Co-Chair Race Religion and Belief Forum
Glenn Watts	Co-Chair Disability and Age Forum
Martin Stevens	Scrutiny Officer
Julia Cleary	Scrutiny and Systems Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome**

Cllr Zee Russell, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual 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**

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, 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**

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Paul Appleby
Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur

4 **Declarations of interest**

The were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting 17 March 2021**

The panel approved the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021 as being a correct record.

6 **Draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Approach**

Cllr Zee Russell invited David Pattison, Director of Governance, to present the report to the panel.

David Pattison, Director of Governance, made a few introductory comments outlining the progress made and key achievements during the year.³ The Director of Governance advised that Jin Takhar, Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion, would give a detailed presentation to the panel on the draft Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

The Director of Governance commented that the Staff Equality Forum Chairs would also be in attendance to share their experiences of working with senior managers in taking forward issues of concern.

The Director of Governance commented that the progress made in respect of equalities work was a proud personal achievement. The Director of Governance commented that the Council is making a difference on the issue of equalities which is becoming embedded across the Council and that it is comfortable with being uncomfortable on equalities issues and happy to be challenged.

The Director of Governance invited questions and challenge from the panel about what more the Council could do to help Wolverhampton become a fair and inclusive city and considered that it was on the right path. The Director of Governance commented that a key factor in the progress made has been because of the contributions from Staff Equality Forum Chairs and referred to the action taken by the Council in response to the issues raised. The Chairs of the equality forums attend meetings of senior management and Strategic Executive Board on a weekly basis and their contributions are valued and encouraged.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion gave a summary of the approach taken to develop the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. The Head of Equality and Diversity commented in detail about the Plan on a Page slide which gave a summary of the context, key objectives and priorities of the strategy. The panel were advised that a more detailed 15-page document has been produced linked to this document which sets out the vision, commitment, aspirations of the strategy, and how the priorities listed were developed.

The panel were given an assurance of the Council's commitment to inclusion, fairness, and inclusivity and the commitment across Corporate Services to make substantial progress in this area. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion invited the panel to comment and shape the draft strategy which will be included in the planned wider consultation on the document towards the end of July 2021.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented on the key achievements during the previous 12 – 18 months and the focus on building on this progress.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented that there had a major change in the way in the Council as a whole, considers issues of equalities. A key element was the development of partnership working between senior management and employees across the organisation, as well as community leaders in helping to develop and shape the priorities in the strategy.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented on the specific pledges made by some Council directorates linked to their respective equality action plans, for example City Environment Direct made a commitment that 100% of their workforce will be digitally connected to enable them to be more engaged in shaping policies.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented on the diversity of the population of the City and the Council's commitment to work towards being an inclusive employer reflecting the communities served. There is a desire to achieve change at a faster pace to ensure that employees can take up opportunities for career development and training.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion outlined details of plans to achieve the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Workforce Representation 2030 Vision, the overall aim being for the Council to be reflective of the communities served. An analysis of the profile of the Council workforce in respect of the protected characteristics, compared to Census data from 2011 was presented to the panel.

The panel were advised of the possible changes to the profile of the City's population when the new Census data is published which is likely to show an increase to about 45 percent in the ethnic minority population and compared this with profile of the Council's workforce, and specifically number of posts held at Grade 9. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion accepted that there was more work needed to improve representation at senior levels and highlighted the benefits of diversity at senior levels across the Council will bring in terms of improved decision making.

There is a commitment to create a culture whereby colleagues feel respected, valued and have opportunities to flourish and to be themselves. Examples were given of the range of specific initiatives which are focused on improving training and development opportunities and the recruitment offer.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion advised the panel that there are 10 equality and diversity action plans which will help drive the vision and commitment as indicated in the strategy. Examples of the specific initiatives to both support employees and to change the culture within the Council were outlined to the panel, such as assessments, wraparound support and support staff forums. The Head of

Equality Diversity and Inclusion agreed to share details of the leadership pledges with the panel at a future meeting.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion advised the panel of changes to the current recruitment process which is needed if the targets in the vision are to be met by 2030. The change will look offer alternatives to the traditional approaches to advertising vacancies to help the Council reach out a wider pool of potential candidates, for example using non-traditional professional journals and also being more creative in the messaging with a focus on wanting talented, skilled people, irrespective of their protected characteristics.

In addition, further action is proposed to create organisational career development opportunities, better flexible career pathways and the removal of hidden barriers in terms of qualifications length of experience, by challenging their relevance. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented on introduction of the 'extended offer' to employees at Grade 7 and 8.

This work will be supported by changes in the Council publicity and branding to make the Council more welcoming to potential candidates. This would include providing a site for Forum Chairs to share and talk about their experiences.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion briefed the panel on the next steps in taking forward the strategy and invited comments on corporate approach to developing the strategy and highlighted the need to continue working in a collaborative way with different communities.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion invited the Staff Equality Forum Chairs to share their experiences with the panel.

Jane Ciftci, Chair Rainbow Forum, outlined the progress made during the previous 12 – 18 months. The Chair commented that the impact of the pandemic has led to increased levels of engagement from people who may not have felt comfortable attending a meeting at the Civic Centre but who are happy to take part in meetings remotely in their own home.

The Chair commented on the increased levels of confidence arising from this change among group members, for example writing articles for City People and there are more visible role models from the LGBT community. The Chair commented on the range of activities and events to celebrate and raise awareness of LGBT issues and the higher levels of engagement from members of the LGBT community. A bid is being submitted to Stonewall for funding to further support this work and show a commitment to equalities.

The Chair commented on plans for a conference which will look at the issue of rainbow retirement issues and health and social care matters affecting the LGBT community. The Chair commented on the commitment to ensure that the group is inclusive and not exclusive, and the work done to address some of the inequalities about the issue of digital exclusion. The Chair commented on the confidence of the members to hold forum leaders to account to keep them updated on progress and to challenge where necessary where change is needed. The Chair commented on the feelings of pride in part of an organisation which is supportive of the LGBT community.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion invited Paulette Chattwood, Co-Chair Race Religion and Belief Forum, to brief the panel. The Chair commented on the progress made and added that members of the group feel part of the organisation, which has changed from the position 12 months earlier. The Chair welcomed the changes that have been introduced in the Council such as safe spaces and mentoring opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds. There is a commitment that the group is inclusive and not exclusive. The Chair commented on the work being done to address inequalities issues within the Council around the issue of digital exclusion. The Chair added that members of the group feel more confident to share their views and to challenge them on progress.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion invited Glen Watts, Co-Chair of the Disability and Age Forum, to brief the panel on the work of the group.

The Co-Chair advised the panel that he has been chair of the group for about 18 months and commented on the major changes that have taken place in the work of the forum over the last 12 months, particularly in terms of the level of engagement.

The Co-Chair commented that the impact of Covid 19 and the move to remote working has had a positive impact on the level of engagement and the number of people reported that they have felt more comfortable to talk about issues using Teams. The Co-Chair commented on increased levels of confidence among group members, who have felt able to share their personal stories.

The Co-Chair commented on the work done to raise awareness of the issue of people with hidden disabilities and the publicity material which has been produced. The symbol of the sunflower has been used to raise awareness about the issue. The group has been supported by Charlotte Johns, Director of Strategy, acting as a sponsor for the group. The Co-Chair commented on the positive contributions made to the progress made by the Director's willingness to take forward and respond to the concerns of the group.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion invited Solomon Scott, Co-Chair Race Religion and Belief Forum, to brief the panel.

The Co-Chair referred to the comment made by Director of Governance about the biggest achievement of the Council being comfortable with the uncomfortable. The Co-Chair commented on the progress made during the previous 12 months and highlighted the example of the number of people sharing positive experiences of the changes that have been seen. The forum has given members space to be honest and speak openly about issues of race and equality.

The Co-Chair advised the panel that he had recently been appointed as Equality and Diversity Inclusion Adviser, which has given further insight into priority that the Council gives to the issue of equalities. In the role the Co-Chair represents Wolverhampton on West Midlands, Local Authorities Equalities Network and considers that Wolverhampton is performing better than other local authorities in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion.

The panel thanked the presenters for their report to the panel.

The panel queried how the strategy intends to respond to concerns about the educational performance of white working-class children compared to other groups and asked for details of specific actions planned.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion acknowledged the historical issue of the disadvantages experienced by white working-class population. The panel were advised that this issue is being considered as part of the directorate equality action plan, specifically around the educational attainment for this group. A request has been made to get data on attainment levels.

In addition, data held by the Council is being reviewed to able to measure the impact our services are having on sections of the community and white working-class British families. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion advised the panel that there are plans to engage with a whole range of groups with protected characteristics. This will also include consulting with different groups and the needs of working-class communities in Wolverhampton during the second week of July 2021.

This work will be supported by the launch of City Allies initiative from the 23 July 2021 and the aim will be get representation across all communities to get involved. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion reassured the panel of the awareness of the disparities that exists for young white working-class boys and the plans to respond to the concerns expressed.

The Panel Chair thanked the speakers for their presentations.

The panel invited forum chairs to share their views about what is not working and what can be done better in achieving the aims detailed in the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

Paulette Chattwood, Co-Chair Race, Religion and Belief, responded that the forum has achieved a lot during the last 12 months, but accepted that there were still things to do and achieve, for example, improved training opportunities. There are monthly meetings of the forum which provide the opportunity for members to raise issues and to get feedback on progress. The forum is well supported by EDR team and the forum can respond quickly when issues are raised, which shows members are valued and listened to within the organisation.

Jane Ciftci, Chair Rainbow Forum, was not aware of any specific issues that suggest that action was needed to respond to any concerns of the group. The issue of lack of visibility of LGBT people at senior management levels was highlighted but there was acceptance that this is a process that will take time.

The Chair welcomed the work done to widen the pool of potential candidates and to promote the message to underrepresented groups that the Council is an attractive employer. The Chair also welcomed the planned consultation for the Rainbow City and the information that be provided by the community which will be used to take forward issues highlighted.

Glen Watts, Co-Chair Disability Forum, commented on the positive progress made to take forward issues and the pace of change was welcomed. The Chair highlighted the increased workload demands which on average requires an extra 20 hours a month to take forward issues of the group.

The Co-Chair commented on the extra support which is needed when people with a disability start working for the Council as they become used to the new environment. The Director of Governance commented that the work of done by all forum chairs should not be extra to their normal day job and supports them be given time to fulfil their role.

The Director of Governance advised the Chairs to raise any workload concerns with their manager and if where necessary with Directors directly given the importance of equalities issues. The issue of equalities should be seen as a fundamental part of the Council's business.

The panel requested that the findings of the consultation which is due to start of 11 July 2021 be reported to a future meeting for consideration. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion agreed to the request.

The panel discussed the issue of people with hidden disabilities, such bi-polar and queried if such groups were also included in the strategy and the definition of disability upon which it is based.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion commented the definition of disability used in the strategy is based on the social model, which would include people with a mental health condition. The Head of Equality Diversity reassured the panel about the support offered to employees with mental health conditions and that data is also being collected to help improve the support offered.

The panel queried the policy of offering guaranteed interviews and how such a policy would help to recruit the best talent. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion reassured the panel that focus of the strategy is about recruiting the best person with the right skills, irrespective of protective characteristic in terms of guaranteed interviews. An offer of a guaranteed interviews to candidates offered where a person has disclosed that they have a disability.

The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion outlined other measures, such as anonymising personal details and focusing on the skills and behaviours required for the role. The application process has also been simplified and streamlined.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to be included in the report to Cabinet.
2. The Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion to present the findings of the public consultation to a future meeting of the panel for comment and discussion.

7

Our Council Scrutiny Panel - Draft work programme 2021- 2022

The Chair invited Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

The Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel on selection criteria to be used when choosing items for the panel work programme and opportunity to take different approaches to

reviewing topics of interest, such as small group meetings with key employees. The panel were invited to suggest possible topics for the work programme.

The panel suggested a report on restructure of senior management scheduled for Cabinet should ideally have been sent to the panel for pre-decision scrutiny to assess the possible impact on achieving the objectives detailed in the Re-Lighting Our Council plan. The panel suggested that this would ensure that it met its responsibilities and given an opportunity to review how the new strategy was developed and the impact monitored.

The panel suggested the each of the key themes detailed in the strategy be considered in detail by the panel during the year. The reports to be presented to the panel in timely manner so that its contributions can help to inform and shape the strategy. The panel commented on proposed changes the governance arrangements and suggested this should be included in the work programme.

The Director of Governance reassured the panel that the Director of Strategy would be happy to attend a future meeting of the panel to update members about the strategy and respond to questions and comments.

The Director of Governance added that there are no changes planned to the current Leader Cabinet model in the Council.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The panel to receive an early report from the Director of Strategy on the changes to senior management restructuring and the implications for the delivery of the Re-Lighting Our City strategy.
3. The key themes in the Re-Lighting Our City strategy to be added to the panel work programme for review and discussion.