

# Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 13 October 2022

### Attendance

#### Members of the Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Udey Singh (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Jonathan Crofts  
Cllr John Reynolds  
Cllr Zee Russell (Chair)  
Cllr Tersaim Singh  
Cllr Lovinyer Daley  
Cllr Louise Miles  
Cllr Ellis Turrell  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge

#### Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith  
Alison Shannon  
David Pattison  
Kieran Simpson

Scrutiny Officer  
Chief Accountant  
Chief Operating Officer  
Senior Equality Diversity and Inclusion  
Advisor  
Head of Equality Diversity and Inclusion  
Head of Procurement  
Head of Commercial  
Head of Customer Engagement and  
Registrars

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1     **Welcome and Introductions**  
The 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**  
The Chair 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 Jaspreet Jaspal

Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal

Charlotte Johns - Director of Strategy

Claire Nye - Director of Finance

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting (29 June 2022)**

The panel approved the minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2022 as being a correct record.

6 **Treasury Management**

The Chair invited Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, to present the report.

The Chief Accountant advised the panel of the background to the reports which were being presented for information and assurance.

The panel were invited to comment on the report.

There were no questions or comments about the report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the contents of the Treasury Management report.

7 **Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy Update**

The Chair invited Jin Takhar, Head of Equality Diversity, and Inclusion, to present the report to the panel.

The Head of Equality advised the panel that the report gives an update on progress made to deliver against the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and supporting action plans. The Head of Equality outlined the four key priorities of the EDI Strategy and advised that the presentation would focus on priority one - To demonstrate Visible Leadership and Strong Organisational Culture.

The Head of Equality commented on specific sections of the report to provide the panel with reassurance that EDI is key priority for the Council.

The Head of Equality highlighted the progress of the staff equality forums and the support given by SEB leads and other initiatives.

The Council has recently adopted the Governance Forums' The Race Equality Code. The performance of the Council will be independently peer reviewed against the four principles in the Code. The Head of Equality advised the panel that the Council will receive a report detailing the strengths and recommendations for any improvements are needed. The peer review full report will be published by December 2022. The Head of Equality suggested that the report could be presented to a future meeting of the panel.

The Head of Equality commented on the work being done to tackle equalities disparities at a service level with the aim of making the Council an equitable provider

of service. The Head of Equality highlighted plans to support career progression and suggested that a report could be presented to a future meeting of the panel.

The panel were invited to comment on the report.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report. The panel queried the amount of time employees spend on equality and diversity issues and wanted reassurance that this activity was not impacting on the quality and delivery of Council services to the public. The panel asked for an estimate of employee time spent on attending and supporting the different equality forums and future for holding a Wolverhampton Pride.

The Head of Equality advised the panel that the members of the staff equality forums meet monthly, and the length of meetings vary from one to two hours depending on the agenda. The Head of Equality commented on work done by the equality forum members and the value of their contributions to the development of Council policies. The Head of Equality added that line managers of forum members support employees and commented the issues of equality is the responsibility of everyone in their daily work to make sure that people are respected and valued whether they are an employee or a resident. The agenda of forums are focused on the business that matters to the public.

The Head of Equality advised the panel that the Council supports a future Wolverhampton Pride event in 2023.

The panel suggested that future reports should include key performance indicators to help Councillors better understand the work being done and that can also be shared with the public in meetings.

The panel welcomed the introduction of the menopause policy. The panel commented that the menopause policy does not refer to a specific period policy and the issue of period poverty. The panel commented that some Councils are offering free period products

The Head of Equality advised the panel that the issue of period poverty is a priority and that a survey of employees led by Public Health will be starting shortly as evidence of the work being done to respond to the concerns highlighted.

The Head of Equality advised the panel that future reports will include performance information and the report presented today was aimed at giving an overview of the change in leadership and organisational culture. The Head of Equality added there have been meetings to discuss the equality outcomes that services could focus on and that a set of performance indicators for EDI have been developed for each business area. The Head of Equality commented that systems have been introduced to monitor progress against the indicators and this information will be included in the future reports to the panel.

The panel queried the numbers of people who have taken part in the employee mentoring programme. The Head of Equality advised that three people have taken part and future reports will give further details about the performance of the initiative.

David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer, added that a performance report was recently presented to Scrutiny Board which included data on equalities and

suggested that following a more detailed analysis that the findings could also be shared with the panel at the same time as Scrutiny Board in March 2023.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report and supported the plans to present the panel with further information.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the report to be on the progress being made in delivering the EDI Strategy 2022 – 2024 to be noted.
2. The panel agreed to receive updates on actions agreed to be presented to a future meeting on progress in implementing the EDI Strategy 2022 – 2024.

## 8 **Reserves Working Group**

The Chair invited Alison Shannon, Chief Accountant, to present her report. The Chief Accountant advised panel that this was an annual report to invite nominations to review the Council's earmarked reserves as part of the budget setting process.

The Chief Accountant advised that the working group will be asked to scrutinise the allocation of reserves. The panel comments will be included in the report to Cabinet. The proposed date for the meeting is 8 November 2022.

The following members indicated their wish to be a member of Reserves Working Group

Cllr Zee Russell  
Cllr Udey Singh  
Cllr Johnathan Crofts  
Cllr Louise Miles  
Cllr Tersaim Singh  
Cllr Ellis Turrell

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and supported the report recommendations.

Resolved:

1. The panel approved the terms of reference for the Reserves Working Group.
2. The panel accepted the nominations for the membership of the Reserves Working Group.

## 9 **Contract Management and Procurement Update**

The Chair invited John Thompson, Head of Procurement, to present the report.

The Head of Procurement gave an overview of the background to the Procurement Bill. The Head of Procurement advised the panel that the proposed changes to public procurement regime is expected to be introduced in early 2023, following a six-month transition period.

The Head of Procurement commented on the key changes the procurement arrangements and welcomed the proposal to give the Council new discretionary powers in the Bill to exclude suppliers for poor performance but is awaiting further national guidance on how this change will work.

The Head of Procurement commented on the work done to prepare for the implementation of the Bill and highlighted a recent peer review exercise to assess the level of readiness for the changes. The Head of Procurement advised the panel that Wolverhampton scored the highest among the cohort for the Pipeline work being undertaken.

The Head of Procurement commented on the significant resource implications of the changes in the Procurement Bill and advised the panel that when they have been approved by Parliament then meetings will be held with colleagues in audit and legal to review the Councils Constitution, policies, and procedures to ensure that they are compliant with the requirements of the Act.

The Head of Procurement briefed the panel about the progress of implementing recommendations from the Wolverhampton Pound review which relate to work of procurement service.

The Head of Procurement introduced Parvinder Uppal, Head of Commercial, to comment on progress against the contract management project objectives previously presented to the panel.

The Head of Commercial commented on the link between this work and the new Procurement Bill, the strategic priorities of the Council and the work being done to improve capabilities of employees with contract management responsibilities. The Head of Commercial briefed the panel on training of employees and the development of templates as part of a complete overview of the contract management process.

The Head of Commercial advised the panel that 176 employees had completed the mandatory foundation training and currently 74 per cent of employees have successfully completed the training. The Council has accepted the offer of 10 places for Practitioner level training, the next level of training, which has been funded through DLUC and CCS. A request has been made for extra places in response to requests from colleagues.

The Head of Commercial briefed the panel on the initial findings from the contract lifecycle management review from a sample of 346 contracts in the database as part of efforts to improve performance.

The Head of Commercial updated the panel on joint work with colleagues in legal and HR to consider changes as part of efforts to develop a streamlined contract process.

The Head of Commercial added that work had been done to procure a contract management system that would provide a strategic overview of contracts and performance monitoring but unfortunately, the submissions received did not meet this aim. A business analyst has been recruited to help develop other options for an online tendering and contract management system and to support work being done to meet the requirements of the Procurement Bill, for example, reviewing the roles of employees with contract management responsibilities.

The Head of Commercial invited the Head of Procurement to continue with the presentation.

The Head of Procurement briefed the panel on the background to Council's involvement and other public sector bodies in the development of the Commercial Standards and Continuous Improvement Framework as part of the peer review exercise. The Head of Procurement commented on the assessment rating overall for Wolverhampton against the nine framework themes was either 'good' or 'better'.

The Head of Procurement commented on further action planned against the themes to further improve performance as part of an ongoing continuous improvement programme.

The panel were invited to comment on the report and presentation.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report and congratulated them on the performance of the service. The panel commented on the reference in the presentation to working with Wolverhampton University to encourage students to study for a career in procurement and to provide professional training for the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply.

The panel were concerned that the University is looking to reduce the number of courses offered and suggested that an update on progress of this idea be reported to a future meeting.

The Head of Procurement agreed to update the panel on progress of discussions with the University.

The panel queried the creation of the post Head of Wolverhampton Pound and the grade for the role and added this was not a recommendation from the review. The Head of Procurement confirmed that this is a new post, and that the salary grade has not yet been agreed. The Head of Procurement agreed to provide the information requested when available.

The panel commented on the findings from the Wolverhampton Pound review which highlighted the challenges facing local businesses when bidding for Council contracts and queried the support offered to support them.

The Head of Procurement accepted the challenges facing local suppliers and outlined the action being taken to support them. The Head of Procurement commented on changes made to the procurement process in response to comments at a recent meet the supplier event at the Molineux. The Head of Procurement highlighted that a recent change has been the reduction in level of employer liability insurance for business wanting to bid for contracts from £10 million to £5 million, which is the industry standard level of cover.

The panel thanked the presenters again for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the report and presentation to be noted.
2. The panel agreed to receive updates on actions agreed to be presented to a future meeting.

**10 Customer Services – 2021/22 performance and future strategy**

The Chair invited Lamour Gayle, Head of Customer Engagement and Registrars, to give the presentation to the panel.

The Head of Customer Engagement outlined the areas that would be covered during the presentation.

The Head of Customer Engagement highlighted the key improvements and achievements of the service to date in the way it is working to meet the needs of both internal and external customers.

The Head of Customer Engagement gave an overview of the performance of the Customer Services contacts during 2021 – 2022 and a detailed analysis of enquiries by telephone, email, and face-to face, services delivered, and the call abandoned rate. The service handled 592,922 customer contacts in 2021-2022.

The Head of Customer Engagement advised the panel that face-to- face customer enquiries re-started in March 2022 and the service dealt with 1125 customer enquiries and an average of 60 – 70 customers visiting the Civic Centre daily. Most of these customers queries received related to Wolverhampton Homes.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the findings from the data analysis and highlighted issues facing the service in improving performance and the need to have a joined up digital transformation approach to address them. The Head of Customer Services commented on reduction in abandoned calls rate from 21 per cent in 2019 to 10.2 percent 2022-2023 and further work was planned to reduce this further to better understand the issue.

The Head of Customer Services commented that in response to customer feedback a new Customer Services Strategy is being developed to address issues highlighted in the data analysis.

The Head of Customer Services commented on service specific reviews covering the following areas taxi licensing, council tax and housing benefit and blue badge scheme. The findings from the reviews will inform the development of the strategy. The Head of Customer Services outlined the timeline for the development of the customer services strategy, and the aims and principles aimed at achieving specific objectives and outcomes.

The Head of Customer Services commented on the plans for replacing the current telephone systems and detailed the advantages of introducing such a system in improving the service to customers. The main objective of the strategy is to deliver a consistent positive customer experience. The Head of Customer Services advised the panel that companies have been invited to demonstrate different telephony solutions to the Council next week.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and the progress made to improve the performance of the service.

The panel queried the arrangements for dealing with enquiries from the public who contact the Council on services which are the responsibility of Wolverhampton Homes and suggested if having a representative from Wolverhampton Homes at the

Civic Centre rather having to refer them on to resolve the issue would give a better experience.

The Head of Customer Services commented that the service meet regularly with colleagues from Wolverhampton Homes since the building was re-opened to the public to discuss issues. The public footfall in the Civic Centre about Wolverhampton Homes enquiries is monitored and there have been discussions about the co-location of services and the idea of having a Wolverhampton Homes Customer Service Officer.

The Head of Customer Services added that the service currently does not offer a dedicated service to customers about Wolverhampton Homes and agreed to update the panel on progress at a future meeting.

The panel discussed the presentation of the call abandonment rate figures, the calculation of average call rate times, calculation of the number of customer service contacts and what further action was being proposed to reduce it further.

The panel queried the reference in the presentation which showed staffing levels at a lower level than the industry standard and the reliance of customer self-service. The panel welcomed the recognition of the issue in the presentation and that would be included in the strategy review. The panel expressed concern about the number of residents without digital access and how they would manage and the importance of making provision for people in this situation wanting help with Council services.

The Head of Customer Services reassured the panel that the issue of digital poverty across the City is being addressed and outlined a range of initiatives aimed at supporting residents.

The Chief Operating Officer advised the panel that a report on Digital Wolves will be presented to Cabinet next week which will focus on the issue of addressing digital exclusion and suggested the report be presented to the panel at a future meeting.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made.
2. The panel agreed to add a report on Digital Wolves to the panel work programme.
3. The panel comments on the presentation to be noted and information requested provided as appropriate.

## 11 **Resources and Equalities Scrutiny Panel - Draft Work Programme 2022 - 2023**

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

The Scrutiny Officer commented on the agenda for future panel meetings and advised that date for the Reserves Working Group will be added when details have been agreed. The draft work programme will be updated to include any specific actions arising from this meeting.

The panel were invited to comment on the draft work programme and suggest topics for future meetings.



The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

The panel suggested adding an extra meeting date to the work programme in February 2023 to better manage the agenda items.

The panel suggested that a report on the findings of the LGA Resident Satisfaction Polling should be added to the panel work programme.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The panel agreed to add an extra meeting to the panel work programme in February 2023.
3. The panel agreed to receive a report on the LGA Resident Satisfaction Polling to a future meeting of the panel.