

**Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
Wednesday, 15th January, 2020 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor C Barnett (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors H Bills, R Burston, J Cooper, T Crumpton, J Foster, L Jones, A Millward, J Roberts, M Rogers, P Sahota, D Tyler and S Waltho.

Dudley MBC Officers

M Rodgers (Director of Housing), P Davies (Interim Director of Housing), S Haywood (Head of Community Safety), K Lafferty (Community Safety Officer), S Griffiths – Democratic Services Manager/Statutory Scrutiny Officer and M Johal – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also in Attendance

S Middleton – Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium)

25 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor A Finch.

26 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was noted that Councillor H Bills had been appointed to serve as a substitute Member for Councillor A Finch for this meeting of the Board only.

27 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November, 2019, be approved as a correct record and signed.

28 **Public Forum**

West Midlands Transport

A member of the public made a statement about the history and situation of West Midlands Transport, in particular the following comments:-

- Referred to the total destruction of the tram network in the Black Country and Birmingham;
- The destruction of about 100kms of the railway train network and it had been considered that homes, shops, offices and roads should run down them instead of trains, or simply 'mothballed';
- Failure to build 15 tram lines of 200kms by the year 2000;
- One tramline on a mainline railway was built that led to the loss of a mainline railway station (low level Wolverhampton), resulting in 3 or 4 kms of train lines destroyed on either side of the station and a quarter of the platforms of a second station, Snow Hill;
- Even after 25 years of railway passenger numbers rising, the railway network continued to be wasted, destroyed and struggling to cope with increasing passengers;
- Costs associated with HS2 and the Metro extension were mentioned and it was opposed that only a prestigious, extravagant tram network would attract car commuters.

A Member concurred with some comments made and referred to the lack of an adequate public transport infrastructure. Mention was made of employees currently working at the Merry Hill Centre who were being asked to travel to Birmingham as the Civil Service Offices in Brierley Hill were due to close. The journey to Birmingham would take approximately one and a half hours which was extremely difficult for employees with children or caring responsibilities. Another alternative was to work in Telford but employees would have to rely on the use of their cars as there was no public transport serving the area which would add to congestion problems.



Other Members concurred and conveyed their experiences of using public transport and comments were made about the West Midlands Combined Authority in that assurances had been given that there would be sub-regional offices in Wolverhampton and Coventry alongside the regional office in Birmingham. The agreement of the Devolution Deal was intended to ensure links to transport were connected by collaborative working. Reference was made to the transport infrastructure in Manchester which had positively resulted in the reduction of people using their cars.

A Member agreed that Dudley Rail had closed but commented that if the line was opened between Walsall and Stourbridge it would still not serve Dudley or Merry Hill. It was considered that the Metro extension would serve these destinations and would attract passengers due to its frequency.

29 **Presentation – Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership**

The Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) gave a presentation on the work of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership. The presentation slides had been circulated to Members of the Board and were available on the Committee Management Information System for viewing.

Arising from the presentation the following comments and queries were made by Members and responses were provided, where appropriate, as follows:-

- There was a vast amount of energy wasted in factory premises due to high ceilings and the need to encourage businesses to install heat capturing systems such as solar panels;
- The role of the Black Country Consortium (BCC) and how they were funded was queried.

The BCC were a Limited Company by guarantee. Four Local Authorities made annual subscriptions of £100,000 and it was pointed out that 30% of firms were located in Dudley. The role of the BCC was to work in partnership to steer and support the delivery of the Black Country Strategy on Growth and Competitiveness.

- Reference was made on the need to educate, advise and encourage pupils from a young age to set up their own businesses and it was queried what role was played by the LEP to achieve this.

The Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) explained about the range of initiatives schools could access but undertook to provide a written response specific to Business Entrepreneurship.

- Thanks were placed on record for the advice and support received from the BCC to employees working at the Brierley Hill Civil Service offices.



- In referring to the Dudley Economy and that resident wages were increasing averaging £29,122 in 2019, it was queried where this information had derived from and further statistical information was requested on how many people earning that wage lived within the Borough. It was commented that although there may be some high quality jobs in the Borough there were a large number of retail and contact centres which did not pay high wages. Further statistical information providing details of the higher paid jobs, the locations and whether employees lived in the Borough and travelled to other locations to earn a higher wage was requested.

The Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) undertook to provide a written response on the information requested.

- It was queried whether there were any funding opportunities through LEP to improve businesses in the Borough.

The Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) reported that the Capital Programme was due to cease and to be replaced with the UK Share Prosperity Fund. In the interim there was growth help and further information could be provided.

- The need to have a balance on the number of houses and businesses in the Borough and how the BCC assisted in ensuring this happened.

The LEP worked closely with the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) to ensure a flourishing business environment and also that there was a balance in housing developments. The biggest challenge faced was where land within the Black Country was contaminated and support was needed from the Government to invest in this land.

- It was queried whether there was any scope to invest in research and development in the future to achieve increased growth.

The Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) stated that it was important to invest in research and development and the need to work collaboratively.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation be noted.
- (2) That the Chief Executive (Black Country Consortium) be requested to submit responses to queries raised above relating to educating young people in Business Entrepreneurship and statistical information relating to the higher paid jobs, the locations and whether employees lived and worked in the Dudley Borough or travelled to other locations to earn a higher wage.



A report of the Director of Housing was submitted providing an overview of Hate Crime work within Dudley and the partnership approach that Safe and Sound, Dudley's Community Safety Partnership were taking.

The Director of Housing stated that he would be leaving the Council on 31st January, 2020 and introduced P Davies who would be taking on the role following his departure.

Arising from the presentation of the report the following comments and queries were made by Members and responses were provided, where appropriate, as follows:-

- Whether there was a budget for Safe and Sound and Hate Crime Initiatives.

There was no specific budget allocated to Hate Crime and work was undertaken through existing resources. Partners in Dudley were committed to offering a variety of reporting mechanisms, these include reporting to the Police, online or via the Borough's Third Party Reporting Centres. £4000 was allocated from Community Safety Partnership which was used on all partnership communications.

- Reference was made to public and partnership consultation on the refresh of the Community Cohesion and Hate Crime Strategy and on the low level of respondents which was not a true reflection and representative of Dudley. There was also no detailed information on the consultation exercise or the respondents and delegates, for example the type of questions asked and what locations had been visited to base their responses. It was suggested that the matter be considered by the Corporate Scrutiny as consultation problems were recurring across the Council. It was considered that the item should have been included as an agenda item at Community Forums and information given to residents to take away and complete.

Whilst there were only twenty seven respondents and eighty delegates the strategy would not just be based on these responses and work would be undertaken in conjunction with other work streams and the regional Police Hate Crime Control Plan. The consultation exercise had been extensive through internal and external communications, online and through various community groups with a request to share the information. The information including hard copies of the strategy and questions had also been shared through Community Forums although it was accepted that it may not have been considered as a specific agenda item but this could be reviewed in the future.

- Of the 342 hate crimes recorded in Dudley during 2018/19 it was queried how many of these had led to prosecutions.

The Head of Community Safety undertook to provide a response in writing on the number of successful prosecutions. However, it was reported that discussions were ongoing with the Crown Prosecution Service with a view to promoting and publicising successful prosecutions.

- It was queried how the Local Authority was working with schools to identify and tackle issues in respect of hate crime and bullying.

The Community Safety Officer (Reducing Vulnerability) commented that work was ongoing in relation to anti bullying and stereotyping/prejudice in conjunction with the Diana Awards, in addition to the Prevent Ambassador Project. Continued efforts were made to work with schools and to make people aware by ensuring a range of educational resources were made available online.

- Clarity was sought with regard to the information in the Community Cohesion and Hate Crime Strategy under the section 'The Picture in Dudley' in relation to the third paragraph relating to 'name-calling'. The quality and sufficiency of the data was questioned and further background information was requested on who the victims were, whether there was a connection to certain roles or whether specific types of groups were more prone to suffering this type of abuse and the locality of the issues.

Information provided had been based on police data, however, some further information was available to provide a breakdown of age and ethnic origin of victims. If possible, any information on whether these were racially motivated would also be provided.

- Reference was also made to insufficient details relating to the 24% increase of hate crimes in 2017/18 to identify why there had been an increase, the locality of the incidents and whether these occurred in the community or had been targeted at people in certain professions. It was stated that the increase, in part, was likely to be due to work taking place to increase reporting. Details to include how the community are affected by incidents of hate crime and how the Local Authority engaged with these people were also not included.

The Director of Housing accepted that there was the need to obtain background details for information provided by other organisations and further acknowledged the need to provide robust and sufficient information in future reports.



- It was queried whether a child reporting a hate crime to a teacher in school was treated as a recorded incident or whether were they dealt with internally. A Member also referred to her experience in reporting bullying at a school and on the hate crime and racism incidents that subsequently followed online and queried what protection there was for Councillors.

There was no longer the requirement for schools to report incidents of hate crime to the Local Authority. There was Online Safety Training which includes a section on hate crime and there was an Online Safety Group whose remit was currently being reviewed to look at the risks and harms online.

Members requested that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State making representations and seeking consideration of a statutory requirement to compel schools to provide statistical information on hate crimes to the Local Authority to enable the Council to identify patterns and trends so that support could be provided, where needed.

- Further comments were made by Members in relation to the scrutiny process and it was considered that the Chair and Vice-Chair should inform Officers on the content required in reports, that Working Groups be used to scrutinise single big issue items and that partners such as the Police, Health and Fire Service should be requested to attend meetings.

It was agreed that Hate Crime should be included on the Work Programme of the Board for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year and potentially considered by a Working Group as a single agenda item and relevant partners be invited.

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer referred to comments made about the scrutiny process and stated that a report on the Future Designation of Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report providing an overview of Hate Crime work within Dudley, be noted.
- (2) That representations be made to the Secretary of State seeking consideration of a statutory requirement to make it mandatory for schools to provide statistical information on hate crimes to the Local Authority to enable the Council to identify patterns and trends so that support could be provided, where needed.
- (3) That the Head of Community Safety be requested to provide a written response to Members providing details on the number of successful hate crime prosecutions.



- (4) That the Head of Community Safety be requested to provide a written response to Members detailing further statistical information relating to the Community Cohesion and Hate Crime Strategy under the section 'The Picture in Dudley' as referred to above.
- (5) That Hate Crime be included as an item on the Work Programme of the Board for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.

31 **Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse Overview**

A report of the Director of Housing was submitted providing an overview of Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse work within Dudley and the partnership approach that Safe and Sound, Dudley's Community Safety Partnership were taking.

Arising from the presentation of the report the following comments and queries were made by Members and responses were provided, where appropriate, as follows:-

- It was commented that there were a small number of victims coming forward to report these type of incidents, however, they are sometimes disclosed within the context of domestic abuse incidents.

Attempts were made to engage with communities and ongoing projects were referred to such as referrals from General Practitioners (GP's).

- Concerns were expressed that people were not aware of reporting mechanisms and the need to offer appropriate training to Councillors.
- To ensure an in-depth explicit scrutiny session could take place, and to protect the identity of any individuals, the need to consider the item at a Working Group.
- It was suggested that the issue should also include the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) group as there could potentially be links to forced marriages and honour based abuse, particularly with young people from specific family backgrounds.

Acknowledging the issue it was reported that there was a new group based at the WHAT Centre to support LGBT individuals and other support groups were also referred to.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report providing an overview of Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse work within Dudley, be noted.
- (2) That Forced Marriage and Honour Based Abuse be included as an item on the Work Programme of the Board for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year.



32 **Feedback from Scrutiny Committees**

The Board received an update on the work being undertaken by Scrutiny Committees and Working Groups.

The Board noted comments made on the need to review Scrutiny and it was suggested that consideration be given to dedicated Scrutiny support.

The meeting ended at 8.25 pm

CHAIR



OSMB/24