

**Minutes of the Future Council Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2022 at 6.00 pm  
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

**Present:**

Councillor A Davies (Vice-Chair in the Chair)  
Councillors R Collins, J Cowell, T Creed, P Dobb, C Eccles, J Foster, M Howard, I Kettle,  
A Lees, T Russon and P Sahota.

**Officers:**

J Branch (Head of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Inclusion),  
D Brennan (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager), Ajaib Paul (Head of Chief Executive's  
Office), C Blunn (Corporate Performance Manager) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services  
Manager).

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1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S Ali, C Barnett,  
E Lawrence and K Shakespeare.

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2 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

Councillors R Collins, J Cowell and C Eccles had been appointed as substitute  
Members for Councillors K Shakespeare, C Barnett and S Ali respectively, for this  
meeting of the Committee only.

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3 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Council tenant.

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4 **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2022 be approved as  
correct records and signed.

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## 5 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

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## 6 **Annual Scrutiny Programme 2022/23**

The Committee considered items to be included in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2022/23.

Arising from Minute No. 61 of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2022, Councillor J Foster requested that Democratic Services provide feedback on the adoption of recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee Development Session with the Local Government Association held on 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2022.

In relation to briefing notes to be received by the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor J Cowell requested that these should be circulated more widely to Members. It was suggested that these should be included on the Council's website and that links should be made available alongside the agenda documents for future meetings.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the items to be scrutinised by this Committee, as contained in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2022/23, be noted.
  - (2) That the Chair and Vice-Chair be requested:
    - (i) To consider the inclusion of an additional item in the Scrutiny Programme concerning the Council's bid for City Status.
    - (ii) To review the timing of the proposed item on Digital and ICT transformation with a view to this being brought forward for early consideration during the municipal year.
  - (3) That, subject to resolution (2) above, the Committee confirm the programme of business as outlined in paragraph 6 of the report submitted, subject to the need for flexibility to reflect any changes that might arise during the municipal year.
  - (4) That the Lead for Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2022/23 municipal year.
  - (5) That the terms of reference for the Future Council Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.
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## 7 **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Delivery Plan 2022/23**

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive on the annual delivery plan for the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. The Head of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Inclusion presented the report and invited comments from the Committee to enable further consideration and development of the delivery plan over the longer term.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given as appropriate:-

- Councillor A Davies commented positively on reflecting the 'Dudley context' in the document and the performance of the Council as an employer in ensuring that the demographics of the Borough were strongly reflected in the make-up of the Council's workforce. This, therefore, reinforced that Dudley should not adopt measures or policies within the strategy that other authorities may adopt based on challenges or perceived challenges they had but Dudley did not.
- Councillor R Collins referred to the use of the term 'gender reassignment' in the list of protected characteristics and suggested that 'gender preference' or 'gender identity' would be more appropriate terminology. Officers would consider this, however, it was noted that the document reflected terminology currently provided for in the legislation. A suitable comment would be included in the document to clarify this point.
- Councillor R Collins also referred to the potential adoption of 14pt size font as the corporate standard for Council Committee reports. This was supported to promote inclusion.
- Councillor C Eccles referred to difficulties encountered by residents where the Council relied on the use of the internet or electronic systems to conduct community engagement. Specific reference was made to consultation on the Black Country Plan and the £150 energy bills rebate as examples. The Committee considered that access to support should be made easily available for all residents to ensure inclusivity. Councillor A Davies expressed the view that more traditional means of accessing all Council services and support should still be maintained as an option for those who were not able or comfortable with accessing them online, particularly the elderly.



- In response to a comment from Councillor J Foster, the Head of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Inclusion set out the historical context to the ongoing work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. This included the disproportionate effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on Black and Minority Ethnic communities, a collective grievance registered by trade unions in 2020 and the subsequent commissioning and publication of an independent report by the Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP). A central staff resource had been established and the Council's response was being shaped in consultation with the Corporate Equalities Board. It was important that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was fully reflected in the Council's People Strategy and in all Directorate service plans.
- Councillor J Foster referred to the role of elected Members and the need to improve training provision. She also referred to representation on the Council and Committees and the need to ensure that political groups affirmed their commitment to ensuring that diversity was reflected amongst their membership and in the appointments they made. Equality and diversity should be viewed as a 'golden thread' running through the work of all Committees and the Council generally. It was considered that this issue should be referred to Scrutiny Chairs to consider in the context of their work programmes.
- Councillor P Sahota welcomed the report and stressed the need for the strategy to be reflected in all policies and plans adopted by the Council. Key Performance Indicators would be necessary to ensure that progress could be monitored and reviewed. He also supported the point concerning the composition of Committees and the need for political groups to lead by example in this regard.
- Councillor P Sahota referred to statistics presented at borough level, particularly relating to the Council's workforce, and the need to view this in context with employees on senior grades compared to those on lower salary grades. He also stressed the importance of exit interviews to identify the reasons why employees left the Council. Managers should nurture talent and encourage employees to progress through effective one-to-one meetings and provide any necessary or associated support.
- Councillor P Sahota expressed the view that more details should be included under Theme 3 in the action plan (ensuring the integration of equality objectives into the commissioning, procuring and delivery of services). All residents were entitled to receive an equal level of service across all wards. The deprivation index could be used in connection with identifying service levels in deprived areas and more affluent areas of the Borough. Equality applied to the delivery of services and Key Performance Indicators could be used to monitor the situation and ensure accountability. Reference was also made to improving engagement with communities, including hard to reach groups.

- Councillor A Davies referred to the general workforce figures presented in the BRAP report and the terminology used in connection with Black and Minority Ethnic groups. He expressed the view that different groups faced different challenges and this needed to be recognised. This view was supported by Councillor I Kettle who referred to the differences within communities and the need for a more nuanced approach. This supported the recommendation for additional training for Council officers and increased awareness of different cultures within the Borough.
- Councillor J Cowell referred to the need for a simple and transparent process in reporting and dealing with cases where a potential issue of discrimination was identified. Specific reference was made to the need for a clear process and contact points for the general public and voluntary service/volunteers. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager reported that the strategy was supported by a range of other policies and legal provisions, such as Dignity at Work, Codes of Conduct, Whistleblowing Policy and Hate Crime reporting. The Council adopted a zero-tolerance approach and these points would be considered further by Officers.
- Councillor J Foster repeated the importance of reflecting diversity in the Council's governance arrangements and made particular reference to the current composition of the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees.
- Councillor T Russon expressed the view that inclusion should be reflected in the first bullet point action on page 14 of the agenda (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan 2022/23 (Theme 3)).
- In response to a query raised by Councillor J Foster, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager reported that the reference to 'good relations' in paragraph 3 of the report was intended to relate to listening, developing relationships and treating people equitably. Councillor J Foster was of the view that the promotion of good relations could be undermined in circumstances where communities were competing against each other for resources.
- Councillor A Davies expressed concern that insufficient emphasis was placed on those negatively impacted by social mobility and socio-economic impact factors. This should be given greater emphasis and prominence in the document and be identified as an immediate priority for year 1 of the strategy to assist all people negatively affected. It was recommended that addressing socio-economic inequality should be incorporated as a key aspect for attention in year 1 of the strategy alongside other actions to support people with protected characteristics.
- Councillor J Foster stated that socio-economic inequality had not been included in the enacted legislation and that it might be appropriate for the Council to make recommendations to the Government in this regard.

- Councillor A Davies expressed concerns regarding the reference to Stonewall in the action plan. Reference was specifically made to the document suggesting that Dudley MBC should join programmes from Stonewall; an organisation which other prominent organisations and Government departments had recently withdrawn from in the light of various issues and concerns. Following the comments made, Officers undertook not to proceed with joining these programmes and potential alternatives would be considered.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the comments and views of the Committee concerning the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion annual delivery plan 2022/23, as summarised above, be considered further and incorporated in the ongoing development of the delivery plan.
- (2) That the Scrutiny Working Group, comprising all Members of this Committee, provide further contributions to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion annual delivery plan and review progress.
- (3) That the Equality, Development and Inclusion Team, in conjunction with the Local Government Association, develop further training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, tailored to reflect the Dudley context, and that the training be provided to Members of this Committee and made available to all Members of the Council.

## **8 Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 4 (1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022)**

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022. The Corporate Performance Manager gave a presentation to the Committee and highlighted key issues. The Committee was requested to review the report and refer any identified issues to the relevant Officers or Cabinet Members.

Members asked questions, made comments and responses were given where appropriate as follows: -

- Councillor P Sahota expressed concern regarding the number of Key Performance Indicators for each Directorate and sought assurance that there were sufficient Indicators to enable critical challenge of the Council's ambitions in major service areas. It was noted that the Key Performance Indicators had been developed to encourage corporate working and to ensure delivery of key corporate outcomes.
- Councillor P Sahota referred to bids for external funding and the need for robust indicators to enable a comparative analysis with other local authorities.



- Councillor A Davies acknowledged that the Key Performance Indicator data did not always give the full context, however, the Committee sought assurances that ambitious targets were being set by Directorates. This could be covered by the inclusion of appropriate narrative in the report. It was also suggested that the Local Government Association could provide information on Key Performance Indicators used by other local authorities to assist with comparator data and the setting of challenging targets.
- Councillor A Lees acknowledged the difficulty in measuring the success of external funding bids in view of the multiple funding streams that the Council pursued. It was considered important to measure the progress of key regeneration projects to ensure their timely delivery.
- Councillor I Kettle also referred to information concerning funding bids including the number of bids submitted; the number of successful bids and the cost of submitting those bids. This information could be provided by the Directorate of Regeneration and Enterprise.
- In relation to quarterly reporting on Directorate Plans, it was a matter for the Scrutiny Committee Chair to consider the level of detail required and if the information was more appropriately provided as a briefing note/information item to Members.
- Councillor J Foster indicated that performance improvement updates were received in the capacity as the Deputy Leader of the opposition group. It was important that Members maintained a focus on key performance data and the effective interpretation of information provided. Further training for Members could potentially be sourced externally. The current process for setting Directorate performance targets was queried in the context of these being sufficiently robust and challenging. The existing remit of the Scrutiny Chairs/Vice-Chairs meetings and the potential for further development was also referred to.
- Councillor A Davies stated his view that this Committee was the appropriate forum for performance targets to be challenged and to hold the relevant Directorates and Cabinet Members accountable. It was confirmed that all performance indicators were developed by Heads of Service, Directorates and Cabinet Members and there was an opportunity for this Committee to review the list of indicators and challenge them accordingly.
- Councillor C Eccles referred to the Key Performance Indicators relating to a 'cleaner greener place to live' and questioned whether the targets were sufficiently challenging and ambitious. Councillor A Davies stressed the need for all performance indicators to be ambitious and it was particularly important that Members raised any specific concerns at this Committee during the year.



- Councillor J Cowell referred to corporate complaints and expressed a concern that informally resolved complaints were not appropriately recorded. It was reported that many informal issues were treated as service requests rather than formal complaints. The categorisation of formal corporate complaints would be considered further by the Strategic Executive Board.
- Councillor J Foster queried the training provided to Managers to deal with complaints and requested that more detail be provided at a future meeting of the Committee. A concern was expressed that training was not consistent across the Council and this would be communicated to appropriate senior Officers.
- Councillor C Eccles referred to a potential increase in complaints associated with backlogs that had occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. More details would be sought from the relevant service areas. It was acknowledged that some employees had been redeployed from their usual duties during the pandemic and it took time for services to return to normal operation. Reference was made to delays in Children's Services assessments as these were dealt with on a multi-agency basis.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Quarter 4 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2022, be noted.
- (2) The Corporate Performance Manager be requested to refer the specific issues raised by the Committee, as summarised above, to the relevant Officers or Cabinet Members for appropriate responses.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm

CHAIR



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