

**Minutes of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee  
Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 at 6.00 pm  
Microsoft Teams**

**Present:**

Councillor T Crumpton (Chair)  
Councillor E Lawrence (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors C Barnett, I Bevan, B Cotterill, J Cooper, S Craigie, P Drake, B Gentle, S Greenaway and P Lee.

**Officers:**

K O'Keefe – Chief Executive, M Williams – Acting Deputy Chief Executive, C Blunn - Portfolio Partner, J Branch - Head Of Human Resources and Organisational Development, R Jones – Strategic Business Partner and A Paul - Corporate Operations Manager (Chief Executive's Directorate); C Driscoll – Director of Children's Services (Directorate of Children's Services); K Wright – Director of Public Health and Wellbeing, K Jackson – Head of Healthy Communities and Place, B Kaur – Head of Children and Young Peoples Public Health and S Manson - Health and Wellbeing Policy Officer (Directorate of Health and Wellbeing), I Newman – Director of Finance and Legal, S Griffiths – Democratic Services Manager and K Taylor – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal); N Kletz – Commercial and Procurement Consultant (Directorate of Commercial and Customer Services)

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillor S Clark – observing in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Finance and Legal;  
Councillor S Phipps – observing in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Commercial and Customer Services;  
Councillor G Partridge – for Agenda Item No. 6 – Public Forum.

---

26 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

---

27 **Minutes**

## Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2021, be approved as a correct record and signed.

---

### 28 Public Forum

The Committee heard representations from Councillor G Partridge, as a member of the public, in relation to the powers awarded to the Council, Police and Government agencies to protect people including anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping and hate crime, which appeared to be enforced less frequently. A significant increase of local residents seeking support and queries as to why action had not been taken despite incidents being reported was evident. Assurance was needed that the Local Authority could be relied upon to protect the interests of Dudley residents going forward and responded to crimes reported and forwarded to relevant organisations if needed.

Members acknowledged the comments raised and concerns of local residents and shared their experiences both positively and negatively and suggested that collaborative working with partner agencies and communities was essential and effective enforcement undertaken, including additional Park Wardens, to address the issue going forward. It was further acknowledged that a number of these areas including car thefts was a national problem.

Councillor Partridge, although welcoming the comments made, assured the Committee that her attendance tonight was not to criticise and that positive discussions had been held with local Police Teams and Local Authority officers, however there remained a significant problem for local residents in understanding processes and reported incidents being actioned.

The Chief Executive thanked Councillor Partridge for her representations and referred to the defined powers in Law awarded to Local Authorities and the extension to the Localism Act to allow Elected Members to raise issues relating to their respective ward. The Committee was advised on the available options should they wish to consider the matter further however, it was considered by the Chair that a specific agenda item would not be recommended by the Scrutiny Committee at this stage.

The Chair on behalf of the Committee thanked Councillor Partridge for her attendance and the comments raised.

---

### 29 Corporate Quarterly Performance Report – Quarter 3 (1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020)

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on the Quarter 3 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020.



In presenting key information through presentation slides, the Portfolio Partner made particular reference to the thirteen performance indicators that were below target, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted, and it was evident that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on services regardless of short-term trend. An annual comparison had identified that a number of performance indicators had significantly improved despite being categorised as underperforming. A detailed account of the performance indicators was provided at the meeting.

Reference was made to the two Directorate Service Summary Documents that had been appended to the report submitted, providing an overview of service delivery and achievements during the given quarter focusing on Finance and Legal Services and Digital, Customer and Commercial Services.

The Chair expressed thanks for the work undertaken in developing the performance report which he considered had dramatically improved and formatted to highlight pertinent areas for Members consideration.

Following a request by the Chair, the Director of Children's Services was in attendance at the meeting to provide a corporate overview of the performance indicators relating to Children's Services, and the proposed measures in addressing those that were underperforming.

The Director of Children's Services commented positively on her introduction to Dudley Council confirming that data derived from Key Performance Indicators assisted in improving performance. The positivity and motivation displayed by staff despite challenges faced during COVID-19, staffing instability and recent Ofsted Focus Visits that reported a deterioration of social work practice were welcomed.

It was acknowledged that Dudley's arrangements in child protection systems and protecting younger children was good, however further work was needed in supporting teenagers with complex needs and risk of exploitation and addressing the significant vacancies within Children's Services. It was noted that the permanent rate of social work staff was 73%, and as a result of increased pressures and demand, the impact to the performance indicators was inevitable. Agency social workers were essential in ensuring that responsive support and help to Dudley children and young people continued to be provided.

Members were advised of the challenges faced in recruiting permanent social work staff and good agency workers, and although the work was achievable, there was not an immediate solution for the extensive area. Dudley's objective in increasing the number of permanent social work staff to 85% by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 was referred to.



Reference was made to a comprehensive Improvement Plan that had been developed following the Ofsted Focused Assurance Visit in October, 2020, which had identified nine priority areas for improvement that responded to critical areas of concern, including leadership, quality of Assessment and Plans, Permanency and Case Transition. A detailed overview of each priority and progress made to date was outlined in the meeting.

The Director of Children's Services referred to the number of performance indicators for Dudley and local measures, and that Elected Members, Department for Education and Ofsted required assurance of improvements made. The importance of measuring against statistical neighbours was mentioned and it was noted that work had been undertaken with the Management Information Team to produce a single dashboard to collate statutory key indicators.

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

- A Member commented on the importance of the quality and continuity of permanent Social Workers and placing children in permanency or adopted families. He also acknowledged the issues surrounding the significant case load of social workers.
- Reference was made to the implementation of phase one of the Liquidlogic Children's Social Care System that enabled case management and the rapid retrieval of data. The challenges in operating a new live system during a Pandemic was mentioned, however feedback had been positive. A performance dashboard had also been downloaded to employees laptops for information.
- It was recognised that the challenges faced by Children's Services had existed for a number of years, and the importance of maintaining a permanent Senior Leadership Team was mentioned. It was also requested that a further update be provided to the relevant Scrutiny Committee on progress made by Children's Services on a corporate level.

The Chair thanked the Director of Children's Services for the update provided and expressed his thanks and appreciation for the work undertaken by employees during this challenging and unprecedented time.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the Quarter 3 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020, be noted.
- (2) That a further update be provided to the relevant Scrutiny Committee on progress made by Children's Services on a corporate level.

A report of the Chief Executive was submitted on an overview of the current arrangements in place for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the Council, together with the outcomes of the independent equality review and progress made in addressing the areas identified for further action. Examples of how the service areas were working to address the gap in inequalities within Dudley Communities was outlined within the report submitted.

In presenting the report submitted, the Chief Executive referred to the importance of equality and diversity within the workplace, and acknowledged that although the Council provided good services, there was further work that needed to be undertaken. It was noted that the Equality Act 2010 provided a comprehensive framework of anti-discrimination legislation for protected characteristics, and that it was the Local Authorities duty to ensure compliancy and proactively promote the equality acts attributes throughout communities.

An independent assessment was undertaken in May 2020 to ascertain Dudley Council's current position in relation to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector duty placed on the Council, and progress in developing and embedding good equality and inclusion practice across the Council.

The review highlighted four key priorities for focus together with a number of key actions for process including strengthening senior officer / political leadership and organisational commitment and capacity, developing and strengthening the Council's approach and commitment to equality and inclusion through a new equality and inclusion strategy, reviewing data collected and published to meet the requirements of the specific public sector equality duties and the workforce. The action plan together with updates on progress made was outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted and summarised at the meeting.

A recent report on Dudley Council's gender pay gap identified that 65% of the workforce were female with a similar representation on the Strategic Executive Board embedding Equality and Diversity for all protected characteristics.

Reference was made to the work undertaken with an equalities and human rights charity, namely, Birmingham Race Action Partnership, who had been requested to undertake a series of open conversations with staff about their personal journeys of working in the organisation and feedback anonymously to the Strategic Executive Board.

The Head of Healthy Communities and Place commented on developing a strategy ensuring clear links with the work undertaken to reduce health inequalities and mitigate poverty, and the Council successfully embedded an inclusive approach in targeting responses to communities that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.



Following emerging public health evidence of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, targeted work had been undertaken around the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, deprived communities and those already financially struggling on benefits and low income and residents with existing long-term health issues.

In responding to the emerging gap, a number of sub-groups were established to ensure that specific higher-risk communities and groups were considered and included in all planning and responses. Assistance had been provided from internal and external partners in developing systems, processes, communication and outreach approaches to ensure engagement with targeted groups.

Extensive work had been undertaken in ensuring engagement with local communities, including nominating community champions to enable residents to take leadership and assist the Local Authority in identifying gaps, ensuring that key messages were disseminated accordingly, and highlighting areas that worked well or were unsuccessful.

It was noted that the Health and Wellbeing Board was undertaking a review of the impact of COVID-19 on the local population's health and wellbeing. The Outbreak Control Plan highlighted the need to build confident and resilient communities with an understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on inequalities, in alignment with the Future Council and Forging Future approach. Upon reflection, it was evident that a local approach was required in order to address the inequalities amongst communities.

The impact on employees had been recognised and measures implemented to ensure appropriate support was provided to deliver front line services. Key issues and actions arising from the BAME employee engagement was outlined in Appendix 2 of the report submitted.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, expressed thanks for the level of commitment shown by officers in undertaking the work outlined during this challenging and unprecedented time.

The Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development commented on the extensive work undertaken and committed plans as demonstrated in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

The Council's commitment in creating an inclusive workforce by implementing Human Resources policies and strategies to help deliver and develop leaders was referred to. The learning and development of both workforce and elected members and the need to develop a culture to allow employees to flourish to promote Dudley as an employer of choice was a priority.





Following comments made, the Chair welcomed the opportunity for Equality and Diversity to be considered by a Scrutiny Committee and suggested that the new Future Council Scrutiny Committee consider including six monthly updates on progress made on the future Work Programme for the next Municipal Year. It was also suggested that Diversity and Inclusion training be provided to Elected Members.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted be noted.
- (2) That the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the independent equality review be noted.
- (3) That the Future Council Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider including six monthly progress updates on Equality and Diversity on the future Work Programmes for 2021/22.
- (4) That consideration be given to providing Diversity and Inclusion training to all Elected Members.

---

31

### **Social Value Policy for Dudley MBC – Consultation**

A report of the Acting Deputy Chief Executive was submitted on the Council's development of a Social Value Policy and to seek input on priority themes and measures. A copy of the draft Social Value Policy was attached as Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

In presenting the report submitted, the Commercial and Procurement Consultant referred to the review undertaken in Autumn 2020 that resulted in an Procurement Improvement Programme. This would enable a fundamental modernisation of procurement across the Council, including the development of a Social Value Policy incorporating themes, key priorities and measures.

A comprehensive consultation process on the Policy was undertaken between 3<sup>rd</sup> March and 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021, with approximately seventy responses received, in conjunction with extensive research, benchmarking and incorporating work undertaken by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee over a two year period.

It was noted that the three key themes of the Policy were supporting stronger and safer communities, creating a cleaner and greener place and growing the economy and creating jobs. Each theme contained six key priorities and consideration was required to identify the priorities for each theme and how they could be targeted. A tailored approach would be undertaken in implementing the Policy according to individual contracts.



The Cabinet Member for Commercial and Customer Services commented on the importance of developing a Policy and processes to ensure longevity and maximise Social Value within Dudley. It was also confirmed that the Committee were being asked to consider whether the priorities identified were correct, the implementation of the Policy within the defining local areas and gather views on the project going forward.

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

- In responding to a question raised in relation to achieving social value through contracts in Dudley in areas including employment for care leavers and people with disabilities, the Commercial and Procurement Consultant referred to the growing the economy and creating jobs theme within the report focusing on providing support for young people to access apprenticeships, training opportunities and work experience, prioritising care leavers, long-term unemployed and people with disabilities.
- The importance of engaging with local businesses on the opportunities available and procurement processes with a focus on those in close proximity of Dudley was mentioned. Ensuring that good procurement processes had been applied and evaluating outcomes was also considered vital.

The Commercial and Procurement Consultant confirmed that Local Authorities had been awarded the freedom to reserve procurement opportunities for specific geographies or voluntary and community sector groups, however these predominately related to lower value contracts, and guidance had been prepared accordingly. The application of local areas had been defined within the Policy under two levels as follows:

- Local Level One – Boundary of 4 Black Country Councils
- Local Level Two – Wider West Midlands Regions (Mets, Unitary and Counties)

Due to the population of the area, Dudley had been defined within Local Level One.

- A Member commented on the difficulties faced by businesses in procuring Dudley contracts and suggested that consideration should also be given to cottage industries. The Commercial and Procurement Consultant confirmed that opportunities were promoted on the Councils website and tender portals.





- A Member commented positively on the draft Social Value Plan on a Page as outlined in Appendix 3 of the report submitted and agreed with comments made with regard to improving living standards in Dudley. Consideration was also needed as to how the themes would be measured and reported through a corporate analysis perspective together with the impact of the implementation of the Policy. It was noted that National measures were available and that the Local Authority was currently adopting these locally where targets could be set against measures, and a scorecard was being developed to feedback to the responsible Cabinet Member.
- The Commercial and Procurement Consultant also confirmed that two implementation documents were being developed: one for internal staff and one as guidance for suppliers, and that an extensive consultation programme included the top 100 suppliers, Chamber of Commerce businesses and all Elected Members.
- A Member recommended that an interactive infographic could be uploaded to the Councils website in order to be more accessible and informative.

The Commercial and Procurement Consultant thanked Members for their comments and contributions and the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, expressed thanks for the work undertaken.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the work to date in developing a draft Social Value Policy, in alignment with the Council Plan, Borough Vision and the Dudley Deal, be noted.
- (2) That the comments made on the priority Themes and Measures included within the Policy, be noted.
- (3) That the findings of the Scrutiny Working Group on Procurement and the timescales and process for finalising the policy, be noted.

### **Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2020/21**

A report of the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was submitted on the annual overview and scrutiny report for 2020/21.

Following presentation of the report, the Chair on behalf of the Committee expressed his thanks for the work and support provided by the Democratic Services Officer during the municipal year and the contributions made by the Committee.

In view of Councillor Cotterill not seeking re-election in May, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee conveyed his thanks for all the hard work and support and wished him all the best in his retirement.



## Resolved

- (1) That the annual overview and scrutiny report for 2020/21 be noted.
- (2) That the Lead for Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer), following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make any necessary amendments to update the annual report prior to its submission to the Council.

The meeting ended at 8.11pm

CHAIR

