
Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 18th March 2021

Report of the Chief Executive

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Arrangements within the Council

Purpose

1. To provide Corporate Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the current arrangements in place for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion across the Council. With a specific focus on the outcomes of the independent equality review and the progress made in addressing the areas identified for further action, together with examples of how our service areas are working to ensure we close the gap in inequalities within the communities we serve.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee reviews the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the independent equality review, identifies any areas requiring additional pace or challenge and identifies any further action required.

Background

3. An independent assessment by Inclusivity Global commenced 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. The review, which was completed in July also assessed our progress in developing and embedding equality and inclusion practice across the Council.
4. The outcome of the review was presented to the Council's Strategic Executive Board in October 2020 and identified 4 key priorities for focus with a number of key



actions for progress within each of the 4 areas. Full details of the actions can be found at Appendix 1 together with an update on progress against these.

- **Priority 1** - Strengthen senior officer/political leadership and organisational commitment and capacity
 - **Priority 2** - Develop and strengthen the Council's approach and commitment to equality and Inclusion through the drawing up of a new equality and inclusion strategy
 - **Priority 3** - Review data collected and published to meet the requirements of the specific public sector equality duties.
 - **Priority 4** - Workforce
5. During June 2020 public health evidence emerged confirming a higher risk related to COVID-19 for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. As the timing of this coincided with the ongoing review of the Council's equalities arrangements, the organisation undertaking the review was asked to facilitate engagement with employees via a range of workshops over a two-week period in June. An action plan was agreed to address the concerns and issues raised from this engagement exercise.
- (See Appendix 2 – Key issues and actions from the BAME employee engagement)
6. Specific actions have been implemented to identify those more at risk and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 within Dudley borough. This being in response to national evidence of the disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on specific communities from a social, economic and health perspective. This includes the BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities, deprived communities, those already financially struggling on benefits or low incomes and those with existing long-term health issues that make them at higher risk of serious illness or death due to COVID-19.
7. The approach taken through the work of the Public Health and Wellbeing team in partnership with other teams across the council and partner agencies to support specific communities, has been an inclusive approach embedded into the whole COVID-19 response. Specific sub-groups have been established to ensure that specific higher-risk communities and groups are considered and included in all planning and response.

A detailed report on this work was reported to Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 4th November 2020 (see Appendix 3)

8. In September 2020 the Council agreed to work in partnership with our trade unions to tackle racial inequality in the workplace through an independent review into our systems, policies, processes and to understand the lived experiences of our employees. To this end, an independent organisation has been commissioned to carry out this work to undertake a whole systems review including;
 - Analysis of statistical data in relation to HR procedures including:
 - Recruitment
 - Leavers
 - Redundancy
 - Discipline
 - Absence Management
 - Learning and Development
 - Consideration of how the Council's Policy framework impacts upon the employment experience of BAME employees, both that relating directly to Equality and Diversity and wider e.g. HR Policies and particularly where BAME employees report that they may be disadvantaged or adversely impacted.
 - Engagement with BAME staff and other stakeholder interviews and exploring people's experiences of working for the Council.

The work which commenced in January 2021 is expected to be completed by the end of April 2021.

9. The recent report on Dudley Council's gender pay gap confirms that the makeup of the workforce is currently 65% female and 35% male, However, with the majority of female employees being employed in the lower graded roles on a part-time basis, our overall pay gap is at 10%. Whilst this is lower than the national average and it reflects the workforce composition rather than any pay inequalities, there is much more that can be done, and an action plan is in place to this end. Particular focus will be on exploiting the opportunities provided by apprenticeships and the apprenticeship Levy, to enable employees in lower paid jobs to develop skills and gain experience to progress in their careers. As well as ensuring we have good flexible working opportunities in more senior roles, to both harness skills and enable career progression for women.

10. Work underway to develop the Council's economic strategy and its activities focused on placemaking (buildings, physical and social infrastructure, and spaced/linkages in between them – how people live in and use places), is seeking to join up and integrate with other council services, for example, public health and driving forward improvements in the wider determinants of health delivered by the build environment; access to quality homes, jobs and opportunities for outdoor activity etc. The intention is to ensure that as far as is feasible this strategy and planning is informed by data intelligence and community driven, so it meets the needs and aspirations of our residents. This in turn will enable us to begin to tackle inequalities in Dudley as a result of:
- High youth unemployment which is increasing
 - An increasing number of benefit claimants
 - Below national average in terms of skills and percentage of working age population with qualifications
 - Low paid jobs and lower median full-time wage meaning many residents experience in work poverty,
 - Benefits of economic growth that are not felt by all communities.
11. The Access and Prevention Team within the Adult Social Care Directorate have a track record of growing the range of preventative services both in house as well as with key partners to tackle the challenges faced by people with disabilities, older people, carers and BAME communities. Examples of the work undertaken and initiatives in place are detailed in Appendix 4 of the report

Finance

12. Funding for new posts to support the corporate equalities was included in the Council budget agreed by full Council on 1st March 2021. This will enable additional capacity for Project Management, Policy, Performance, Equality and Diversity.

Law

13. The Equality Act 2010 provides a comprehensive framework of anti-discrimination legislation.

The general public sector equality duty under the Act requires public authorities to pay due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations covering the

protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 require public authorities to publish equality information and equality objectives.

Equality Impact

- 14 The outcomes of the review and developing strategies will support a workplace culture fairness, transparency and respectfulness for every member of our workforce and communities, owned by all Council Directorates. The three-year Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy should support the Council's vision and reflects our values and should go beyond legal compliance as we aspire to achieve excellence in equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do – an equality impact assessment will be required.

Human Resources/Organisational Development

- 15 Equality and inclusion are integral to a successful modern workplace. The Council will need to review, develop and implement policies and systems that challenge discrimination and stereotypes across all aspects of our work. The work will require a dedicated cultural change programme that will benefit everyone in the Council and will be embedded within the development of a Council People Strategy – attracting, supporting and developing a diverse range of high quality staff will support the Council as a progressive and innovative workplace where equality and inclusion is promoted and integrated in all that we do.

Critical to this will be clarity of the Council's aspirations for this agenda.

Commercial/Procurement

- 16 All procurements for the externally supported reviews complied with Dudley MBC's Contract Standing Orders (which are fully compliant with Public Sector and OJEU procurement rules and guidelines) and all funders requirements. There are no direct commercial implications associated with this report.

Health, Wellbeing and Safety

17. Good or bad health and wellbeing is not simply the result of individual behaviours, genetics and medical care, but is also related to the wider determinants of health. These are a diverse range of social, economic and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The link between social inequalities and differences in health outcomes is strong and persistent. Addressing the wider determinants of health, through promoting equality and inclusion, will help improve health equity as well as overall health.



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Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Key issues/actions arising from Equality Review and Progress made
- Appendix 2 – Key issues/actions arising from BAME Engagement Sessions in June 2020 and progress made
- Appendix 3 – Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (4th November 2020) report on the impact of Covid 19 on specific communities
- Appendix 4 – examples of Adult Social Care initiatives