

MINUTES OF THE SAFER STRONGER COMMUNITIES SELECT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 14 September 2023 at 7.00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Liam Shrivastava (Chair), Hau-Yu Tam (Vice-Chair), Coral Howard, Mark Jackson and Ayesha Lahai-Taylor

ALSO JOINING THE MEETING VIRTUALLY: Councillors Rudi Schmidt (ex officio) and Oana Olaru.

APOLOGIES: None.

ALSO PRESENT: Jennifer Daothong (Chief Executive), Pinaki Ghoshal (Executive Director for Children and Young People), Helen Clarke (Director of Communications and Engagement), Sherene Russel-Alexander (Director of People and Organisation Development), Alex Glanz (Head of the Chief Executive's Office), Benjamin Awkal (Scrutiny Manager), and David Weaver (DWC Consulting).

ALSO PRESENT VIRTUALLY: None.

NB: Those Councillors listed as joining virtually were not in attendance for the purposes of the meeting being quorate, any decisions taken or to satisfy the requirements of s85 Local Government Act 1972

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 be agreed as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Single Equality Framework

Witnesses

Jennifer Daothong, Chief Executive

Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director for Children and Young People

Sherene Russel-Alexander, Director of People and Organisational Development

Helen Clarke, Director of Communications and Engagement

Alex Glanz, Head of the Chief Executive's Office

David Weaver, DWC Consulting

Key points from discussion

- 3.1. The Chief Executive and the Head of the Chief Executive's Office introduced the reports. It was noted that the Council was not waiting for the

appointment of officers to the new Equalities Advisor and Disability Policy Officer posts before beginning to implement the longer-term, strategic recommendations of the Lewisham Disabled People's Commission (LDPC) and that new equalities objectives were to be published in early 2024.

Committee members asked preliminary questions. Key points raised included:

- 3.2. The Director of Communications and Engagement was responsible for the Council's relationship with the Lewisham Strategic Partnership, which included the Race and Equality Working Group chaired by Cllr Campbell. The Equalities Advisor would manage the Disability Policy Officer and report to the Director of Communications and Engagement directly to ensure internal communications and communications and engagement with partners were joined up with a strong line of accountability to the Chief Executive.
- 3.3. The whole Council was responsible for delivering against the organisation's equalities commitments; particular responsibility sat with the Mayor and Cabinet and the Chief Executive.
- 3.4. It was difficult for Members to locate guidance on the Fairer Lewisham Duty.
- 3.5. The Council's equalities objectives had driven a lot of its strategic work, such as the Birmingham and Lewisham African and Caribbean Health Inequalities Review. The Council's work increasingly related to the furtherance of the objectives.
- 3.6. A preliminary review of the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee's 2020 report *How Lewisham Embeds Equalities Across its Service Provision* had been undertaken in November 2021. Promoting and embedding the Single Equalities Framework (SEF) within the Council had been significantly hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic, on which organisational attention and capacity became focused shortly after the adoption of the SEF.
- 3.7. Over the last ten years, the representativeness of the Council's workforce in terms of ethnicity had improved significantly at all levels. The proportion of employees who were,
 - Asian had risen from 2.9% to 4.6%,
 - Black had risen from 30.7% to 37.2,
 - from Mixed and other ethnic backgrounds had risen from 3.4% to 4.8%,
 - White had fallen from 56% to 47%.
- 3.8. The proportion of the workforce who did not disclose whether they have a disability had decreased from 50% to 7.5% over approximately five years, while the proportion of staff declaring a disability had risen from 3 or 4% to 7.5%.
- 3.9. Women comprised 68% of the Council's workforce – although this would fall to 59% following the transfer of Lewisham Homes staff into the organisation.
- 3.10. Since 2018, the proportion of Senior Leaders who were,
 - women had increased from 45% to 70%,
 - Asian had increased from 4.5% to 10%,
 - Black had increased from 4.5% to 20%,

- disabled had increased from 0% to 10%.
- 3.11. The Council's gender pay-gap favoured women, in contrast to other London boroughs where it favoured men despite women constituting the majority of staff.
 - 3.12. Of the first cohort to participate in the leadership development programme for Black staff, four participants had achieved internal promotion which they attributed to the programme, particularly its module on 'realising your potential'.
 - 3.13. The standard of external equalities monitoring was still developing, and the Council recognised disproportionality in outcomes for certain groups in the community. Responsibility for external equalities was shared across the Directorates and all Executive Directors were ensuring engagement with the community, particularly with more-marginalised groups. The Mayor and Cabinet and Lewisham Strategic Partnership's Race and Equality Working Group also had a role to play.

David Weaver, DWC Consulting, introduced his report. Key points noted included:

- 3.14. DWC's work was informed by the Council's desire to make transformational change in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). David's brief was to assess the Council's current state and existing approach to equalities as both an employer and service provider; to determine the developments or actions required as part of the Council's overall policy approach by means of qualitative engagement with representative samples of the workforce; and to identify key conclusions and recommendations and highlight key issues that required ongoing consideration/lessons to be learnt.
- 3.15. No organisation was perfect but, overall, while there were areas for improvement or greater focus, the Council was doing well.
- 3.16. David's view was that, even if the Council did what it said it would, unless 'positive action thinking' – identifying where there was disproportionality and taking a targeted, leadership approach to identifying and delivering approaches to redress it – was engaged, it would not make the desired transformational difference.

Key recommendations highlighted by David included:

- 3.17. That EDI be recognised openly by the Council's corporate leadership as high priority and business critical.
- 3.18. That a holistic EDI strategy that was fully aligned with the corporate business plan be developed and reviewed annually.
- 3.19. That data capture and analysis be continually improved.
- 3.20. That the Council focus its attention and efforts on the groups experiencing the greatest inequality.
- 3.21. That departmental-level targets and plans be developed and directorate management teams set aside regular time for purposeful exploration of issues.
- 3.22. That EDI be a critical component of performance management and appraisal.
- 3.23. That frameworks be implemented to enable EDI issues to be 'zoned-in on' and highlighted.

- 3.24. That job descriptions be reviewed to ensure they relate to the ability to undertake roles in a diverse context.
- 3.25. That corporate and departmental targets for recruitment of under-represented staff to key/senior positions be set.
- 3.26. That the default position in recruitment processes be diverse candidate shortlists.
- 3.27. That urgent attention be given to protected characteristic disproportionality in internal human resources and management processes.
- 3.28. That urgent attention be given the Equality Analysis Assessment process.

Members then put questions to all witnesses. Key points raised included:

- 3.29. The issues identified could be addressed through both cultural change and formal structures and processes. Open conversations which included those who did not usually engage with EDI discussions were important. There were EDI considerations at the point of decision which managers and staff had to engage with.
- 3.30. There was evidence of important discussions at the Corporate Equalities Board (CEB) which had caused senior managers and Members to give consideration to serious issues. However, the Council and David recognised that the Board's benefits had been sporadic. With staff fora linking into the Board, it should be aligned with business-critical decision-making and conversations, which the review of its terms of reference should address.
- 3.31. The terms of reference were recognised by the Council as outdated and insufficiently purposeful. When they were introduced in 2021, the Council's data were poor and a focus had been improving internal monitoring; and the Council had been conscious that the results of the 2021 Census were forthcoming and would improve its understanding of the borough. The terms of reference had been improved since then by adding staff fora representatives, enabling them to escalate concerns for consideration.
- 3.32. More work was required to consolidate staff fora to ensure they were functioning effectively and their members' views fully represented at the CEB. It was important too to understand why some people who might be members of staff fora decided not to join them.
- 3.33. Recognised trade unions should be involved in EDI discussions. The Council operated a Joint Consultative Committee for engaging recognised trade unions at corporate and directorate levels. The appropriateness of including recognised trade unions in the CEB's membership would depend on a local authority's circumstances: for some it would not be productive due to local dynamics.
- 3.34. The CEB was internally focused and involved significant power dynamics. Elsewhere, Members were involved in such boards in a limited capacity on cyclical occasions in respect of certain specified matters.
- 3.35. Equality analysis assessments had not been completed as robustly as they should have been. Intersectionality had not been considered in as sophisticated a manner as it should have been. Directorate management teams were to be better held to account for the quality of assessments.

- 3.36. The Council conducted in-house recruitment for appointments below director level. For senior appointments, the Council was very clear with external agencies regarding its desire for a diverse workforce.
- 3.37. Difficult conversations about EDI were required, including regarding how people navigated prejudice and discrimination and how it related to their jobs. Staff needed to be supported and challenged in equal measure in a way that did not adversely affect service delivery.
- 3.38. It was important for the Council to evaluate the equalities impacts of services, including how resources were directed, otherwise its EDI conversations would be occurring in a vacuum.
- 3.39. David described poor equality analysis assessments as an organisational risk. Where a good assessment is undertaken, action should not be taken without real consideration of it and potential remedies to identified risks of disproportionality. There were local examples of good assessments being undertaken, but in some cases resulting action not taken; as well as poor ones being undertaken. Equality analysis assessments and potential equality impacts should be borne in mind throughout policy development.
- 3.40. The Council recognised the inconsistency of equality analysis assessment quality; training was being delivered ahead of the appointment of an Equalities Advisor.
- 3.41. For the Equalities Advisor and Disability Policy Officer to be successful, they needed to be resilient, be supported and have interpersonal and structural influence, including strategic links into directorates, human resources and organisational development, policy, and governance processes. The relationship with Members also required consideration.
- 3.42. The large workload for the Disability Policy Officer was recognised. It was important that the appointee was able to build capability in the organisation as well as deliver objectives independently. The implementation of the LDPC recommendations was to be independently reviewed while the Officer was still in post; this would provide opportunity to consider whether dedicated resource was still required.
- 3.43. The Disability Policy Officer role was novel for the Council. It was hoped that the accessibility of the role – e.g. a British Sign Language job description and the acceptance of non-professional experiences as evidence of required professional competencies – would help attract and retain the right person.
- 3.44. Whether the shorter than recommended duration of the role would add an extra layer of pressure was questioned by the Committee. The role was to be co-funded with strategic partners, presenting potential opportunity for extension. A range of potential reasonable adjustments were being considered.
- 3.45. Since DWC's review was commissioned, the Council's appraisal process had been refreshed, and now incorporated consideration of employees' soft skills and any reasonable adjustments they may require.
- 3.46. The development of the Council's new Corporate Values and Behaviours had involved staff from across the organisation. The Values and Behaviours were being embedded.
- 3.47. Staff reported a high level of trust in middle management.

3.48. There were already two Changing Places in the borough. Two further ones were being delivered – in Lewisham Shopping Centre and Downham Leisure Centre – using Department of Housing Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The Council would continue to seek further funding opportunities.

RESOLVED

To recommend to the officers in attendance:

1. The involvement and representation of more-junior staff in strategic discussions regarding equality, diversity and inclusion, including at the Corporate Equalities Board, be increased.
2. The next Single Equalities Framework and new Corporate Equalities Board Terms of Reference contain more-purposeful and more-measurable objectives.
3. The duration of the Disability Policy Officer role be reconsidered before the draft Lewisham Disabled People’s Commission response is submitted to Mayor and Cabinet.
4. That equalities be measured and considered when evaluating service performance and the distribution of Council resources in the community.
5. Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations be built into staff appraisal and one-to-one processes.
6. In the next Single Equalities Framework, the equalities prisms be more clearly defined.

4. Workforce Equalities

4.1. The Director of People and Organisational Development informed the Committee that the new workforce profile would be completed in November.

5. Select Committee work programme

RESOLVED

To remove unneeded PSPO, warm hub evaluation, and budget reduction items; move the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy and Local Assemblies item to the November 2023 meeting; add Workforce Equalities to the January 2023 meeting; and to add for information briefings on the development of next single equalities framework.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____