

Informal Meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee

28 January 2021

Notes from discussion of the Equalities Strategy

Committee Attendees: Sean Fitzsimons, Leila Ben Hassel, Robert Ward, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Oni Oviri and Joy Prince.

Other Councillor Attendees: David Wood – Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Resilience.

Officers: Yvonne Okiyo, Gavin Handford & Simon Trevaskis

The Scrutiny & Overview Committee met informally to feed into the development of the Equalities Strategy. It was agreed that any conclusions or recommendation would be reported at the Committee meeting scheduled for 9 February.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Resilience, Councillor David Wood, introduced the strategy, outlining how the comments from Committee, taken in July 2020, at an earlier stage in the development of the Strategy, had been incorporated into the draft strategy being presented. From the introduction the following was noted:

- The approach to the Strategy had been closely aligned to the Equalities Framework for Local Government.
- One of the key drivers for the Strategy was for the Council to use its role as both an employer and community leader to address social inequalities.
- The previous comments of the Committee about having realistic and timed milestones had been incorporated in the Strategy.
- The Strategy also aimed to make the collection and use of data as effective as possible.
- The Strategy recognised that the Council had extensive stakeholder links in the community and should continue to work with these groups to help achieve the aims of the Strategy.
- In conjunction with the Equalities Strategy, a bespoke Autism Strategy was due to be finalised in the next few weeks
- Work had been undertaken to ensure that the Equalities Strategy aligned with other Council Strategies.
- Progress on delivering the Strategy would be reported to the Senior Management Team, Cabinet, Scrutiny and themed partnership boards as required.
- Despite the current difficulties facing the Council, it was recognised that there was a need to continue addressing work in this area, with the Strategy striving for achievable ambition.

Following the introduction by the Cabinet Member, the Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions about the Strategy and make comment on the content. The Chair, highlighted that a commitment had been given to embedding an equalities work stream within the Scrutiny Work Programme. It was also noted that the review of Scrutiny by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny was due to be delivered in the near future, and it would be important to ensure that equality was reflected in the report.

Regarding the targeted outcomes for the Strategy, it was recommended that SMART targets should be used wherever possible, as this would mean the impact of the Equalities Strategy could be measurably demonstrated. It would be preferable if there were a small number of SMART targets for improving the lives of the people of Croydon that the Council had significant influence over.

It was recommended that any previous Equalities Strategy or any other equalities targeted programmes (and in particular the Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Plan 2016-2020) should be reviewed and evaluated, so that the learning from this can be used to inform the new strategy being developed.

There was disappointment about the relatively low level of response to the consultation on the Strategy, with it questioned whether there had been sufficient promotion of the consultation. It was acknowledged that due to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic the options for promoting consultations had been restricted to primarily social media, which may have had an impact. It was also confirmed that the number of responses was not unusually low in comparison with other Council consultations. It was recommended that the Strategy should set out an analysis of the responses from stakeholders, and the Strategy should reflect how these responses had informed the final strategy.

As it was advised that at present equalities indicators were monitored within individual services across the Council, it was recommended that this information should be compiled into a corporate equalities dashboard to allow for a more complete assessment of the progress being made in implementing the strategy.

It was recommended that a draft of the Equalities Strategy should be shared with the officer preparing the Autism Strategy, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that the two strategies were closely aligned. It was also suggested that there might be a benefit for the oversight of the implementation of the Autism Strategy to sit with that of the broader Equalities Strategy.

A number of inconsistencies in the wording within the Strategy were highlighted, which it was agreed would be addressed when it was proof read before publication.

In response to a question about whether there was an over-concentration within the Strategy on ethnicity over other inequalities such as age and disability, it was advised that it was important to respond to the needs of the residents of Croydon in embedding a culture of equality for all residents. At the same time, the Council had limited resources and it was important to have a Strategy that was focused and did not try to be overambitious. It was agreed that further consideration would be given to how this concern could be addressed within the Strategy.

Given that the next census was due to take place this year, it was recommended that the Strategy should be reviewed in light of any new data arising from the census. It was acknowledged that it could often be a number of years before census data became available.

It was noted that the Children & Young People Sub-Committee had discussed a potential target of increasing the number of children in the borough with access to a computer or the internet, and would like to have this considered for incorporation into the Strategy.

In response to a question about how the Strategy would be able to adapt should there be changes within services, it was advised that it had been designed to work with what was already in existence within the Council. If services changed a strategy, then the Equalities Strategy would need to be updated.

From the discussion of the Equalities Strategy, the Committee made a number of conclusions and recommendations for consideration by Cabinet Member and officers preparing the Strategy. These were as follows:-

	Conclusion	Recommendation
1.	It was recognised that SMART targets should be used wherever possible, as this would mean the impact of the Equalities Strategy could be measurably demonstrated. It would be preferable if	That targets used to measure the success of the Equalities Strategy are SMART and focussed on improving the lives

	there were a small number of SMART targets for improving the lives of the people of Croydon that the Council had significant influence over.	of the people of Croydon, in areas which the Council had significant influence over.
2.	The Committee felt that past experience should be used to inform the development of the new Equalities Strategy.	That any previous Equalities Strategies or any other equalities targeted programmes should be reviewed and evaluated as part of the development of the new Strategy.
3.	The Committee concluded that the views of the stakeholders, who responded to the consultation, should be acknowledged in the Strategy.	That there should be analysis of the responses from stakeholders, and the Strategy should reflect how these responses have informed the final strategy.
4.	The Committee agreed that the use of data would be important in demonstrating the impact of the Equalities Strategy. As such it was essential that there was a central, corporate data source that allowed progress in implementing the Strategy to be monitored.	That information from across the Council should be compiled into a corporate equalities dashboard.
5.	The Committee concluded that there was a synergy with the Autism Strategy, which was currently being developed, and as such the two strategies should be reviewed to ensure that they were mutually compatible.	The Equalities Strategy should be shared with the officer preparing the Autism Strategy.
6.	The Committee noted that the next census was due to start this year and as such agreed that it would be an important source of data for the Strategy.	That a process for reviewing the Equalities Strategy in light of any new data sources, such as census data, becoming available, should be built into the Strategy.