



To:
Cllr Louise Gibbard
Cabinet Member for Supporting
Communities

Please ask for:
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Date
Dyddiad:

11th January 2021

CC:
Cllr Alyson Pugh
Cabinet Member for Supporting
Communities

BY EMAIL

Summary: This is a letter from the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel to the Cabinet Member for Supporting Communities. The letter concerns the meeting held on 14th December 2020 and the annual Equality Review Report 2019/20.

Dear Councillor Gibbard,

On the 14th December the Panel met to discuss the annual Equality Review Report 2019/20. The Panel are grateful to yourself and to Joanne Portwood, Policy and Strategy Officer, for attending to discuss the report. We also thank Adam Hill, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Resources for attendance and input at this meeting.

We thanked all those involved in the collation and publication of this informative and comprehensive report. The report was a crosscutting review, highlighting the breadth and depth of positive work across the Council. This is the ninth review under the Public Sector Equality Duty and reflects the reporting regulations for Wales, which were introduced in 2011. The Review held particular significance this year in light of the pandemic, which seemed to expose far-reaching inequalities across the country.

You told us that the Review reports on some excellent case studies underlining a range of events and the ongoing work of Equality Representatives in each department. You highlighted the valued work undertaken liaising with Equality forums, and work with older people through Local Area Coordinators, drawing attention to the continued corporate commitment to tackling poverty.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY / TROSOLWG A CHRAFFU

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You expressed the opinion that improvements would be valued in terms of gaps in data held on Council staff and those interacting with us. You acknowledged that this is a difficult topic as this data is given voluntarily and people are often suspicious and wary in disclosing such data. It was explained that without such data it is difficult to present patterns and develop awareness of trends. You also explained that the Council is developing a more co-productive approach to gathering data and that more engagement across the Council would be beneficial. We understand that the Swansea coproduction network have been co-opted onto a number of Policy Development Committees and we look forward to hearing about the outcomes of this engagement in the future.

You explained that a new data management system is outlined in the Review. It was heard that data is anonymised and thus looked across the organisation rather than at individuals. You emphasised that if we do not have this data to analyse, we will not be able to ascertain whether or not discrimination is inadvertently or indirectly taking place.

Officers reported to the Panel that there is a new Strategic Equalities Board being established to drive forward objectives. It was pleasing to hear that the new system ('Oracle Cloud') will build on the current Human Resources (HR) and finance system, making it more resilient and easier to access and record information.

The Panel also acknowledge that steps are being taken to improve data collection, but would like to know more about what these steps involve exactly. We would also appreciate further information about how assurances can be given to people that their information will be used efficiently and appropriately.

We agree that accurate and relevant data will help the Council respond and react more quickly to situations, such as the effect of the pandemic on the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community. The Panel heard that the Council is working closely with HR and Unions to understand how better to ask questions, phrase questions and generally reassure data subjects that any information collected has no negative purpose, but rather to be able to respond and react, supporting the workforce.

Officers explained that voluntary data collection currently takes place at the point of recruitment, and not again thereafter during the course of employment. Officers acknowledged it would be useful for them to question how to improve and build on current process.

The Panel was interested to hear about the *School Swap* case study, a community cohesion initiative for young people aged 11-18 across Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend. We requested more information on the case histories section of the Review and in particular the names of the schools that took part in the swap. We would be interested to learn more about the cross section of schools used and the partner authorities involved in this swap.

We discussed the title on Page 9 of '*Equitable Provision of Services For All*'. The Panel felt that as some projects, such as Families First, are not facilitated universally the title could be misleading. Panel Members raised concerns over this title being fit for

purpose in this context. You acknowledged our concerns here and noted this point for future reporting.

Officers explained that Families First and associated programmes have been subject to Welsh Government funding based on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. Officers accepted there were gaps in provision and this should be taken on board in future reporting. Officers undertook to provide a more comprehensive answer on this point and how best to address pockets of deprivation in every ward.

The Panel queried general understanding of the legal requirements of the Review. Officers explained that the obligation arises under the Equality Act 2010 and there are specific duties to report annually and develop a new Strategic Equality Plan. Officers acknowledged that the report is quite legalistic and that future reports could develop language to ensure better clarity and understanding.

We heard that the Public Sector Equality Duty places an obligation on the Council to demonstrate and report on steps taken each year. The Panel felt that in future reporting it would be useful to separate legal duty from Council actions taken above and beyond legal requirements.

Panel members suggested that a cost-benefit analysis be included in future and would see this as a valuable addition to the Review.

In relation to Paragraph 5.3 (*Equality Impact Assessments, EIA*); Members queried whether there is any follow up on EIAs and questioned whether the Council gathers information and follows through on results. You acknowledged that this should be done and it could be appropriate for the new Strategic Equalities Board to oversee.

Officers explained to the Panel that it is envisaged individual departments will take ownership of EIAs, with support from the Equalities Team. The Panel also heard that work is underway to review EIA procedures and develop a new process surrounding Integrated Impact Assessments; taking into account the new socio economic duty that will be a requirement from April 2021, ensuring council decisions take into account those from disadvantaged socio economic backgrounds.

The Panel expressed a view on Paragraph 5.7 relating to *Community Cohesion*. Members felt this should be the top priority and therefore the first item of reporting. We discussed how community leaders take responsibility for community cohesion and this principle should be used as a guiding light for equality, becoming a primary feature of future reporting.

We are interested in any thoughts you may have on the contents of this letter. We would be grateful if you could please provide a written response to the following points by 1st February 2021:

1. Names of and information about the schools that took part in the schools swap case study.
2. Outline information about what new steps are being planned, and what assurances can be given to people, for gathering data.

3. Officers undertook to provide more information about funding gaps and how they plan to address pockets of deprivation in every ward.
4. Clarification of what role the Policy Development Committee will have in terms of equality performance and reporting.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Chris Holley

Convener, Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel

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