

## **Agenda Item 3**

# **Sandwell Equalities Commission**

### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Sandwell Council is committed to celebrating and promoting the rich and diverse backgrounds and cultures of its employees and residents across all six towns in the Borough, and imbedding equality in all that it does.

In line with many public bodies in Britain, including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), the national government and our neighbouring councils, Sandwell Council recognises it is time to have a fundamental look at what equalities and diversity means for Sandwell, how inequalities and discrimination are addressed and where it can make improvements for the benefit of all Sandwell residents, particularly in light of recent events such as the Me Too initiative and Black Lives Matter movement.

The Sandwell Equalities Commission has been established to drive and support this endeavour, and its focus is intended to be as wide-reaching as possible to ensure its contribution and impact is as significant as it can be.

The Commission's work shall form the cornerstone of equalities and diversity standards and best practice to which Sandwell Council's services, policies, procedures and work will strive to adhere to.

### **VISION**

An open, fair and inclusive Borough that embraces and celebrates Sandwell's rich and diverse communities, cultures, and traditions; and where everyone is treated fairly and given opportunities to make the most of their talents and realise their aspirations.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

To promote equality and challenge discrimination and intolerances in all its forms. To break down barriers prohibiting an inclusive society by confidently tackling unfairness caused by inequality and encouraging community cohesion through increased understanding and awareness.

## **VALUES**

A Commission that is:

- open and honest;
- acts with integrity;
- inclusive;
- listens; and
- is brave, bold and confident.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The Commission has 8 strategic objectives: -

1. To promote, embed and protect the rights of Sandwell residents to fairness, dignity and respect along with encouraging community cohesion across the Borough.
2. To challenge ignorance and intolerances in relation to all the protected characteristics by being a leading voice that promotes and celebrates the multi-cultural heritage of the Borough and the diverse nature of the local population.
3. To understand, involve and enable our diverse communities to play an active role in civic society and put the citizens' voice at the heart of decision-making.
4. To review and recommend changes (as necessary) to Council policies, procedures, and practices to ensure the authority complies with its legal obligations, fosters best practice and its workforce reflects the diversity of the people and communities it serves.
5. To champion and further embed equality in education (including career development) and employment for all residents of Sandwell regardless of race, disability, gender, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity.

6. To work with partners, the business community, voluntary/faith sectors, and other stakeholders to challenge harmful prejudices, stereotypes and biases that undermine equal opportunity.
7. To engage and work regionally with councils and other stakeholders, and national bodies and Government, to help ensure inequality concerns and issues in Sandwell are heard, understood, and addressed (including the encouragement and fostering of excellent relations with policy and decision-makers).
8. To monitor, analyse and evaluate relevant data and benchmark information to inform and drive new initiatives to meet the Commission's strategic objectives.

## **GOVERNANCE OF THE COMMISSION**

The Commission shall remain in place for a maximum period of 2½ years – concluding its work by no later than March 2023

The Commission shall report formally to the Leader of the Council (or Deputy Leader in the Leader's absence/unavailability) and to the Chief Executive (or Deputy Chief Executive).

The Commission shall provide regular progress reports/briefings (as required) to the Leader of the Council (and/or Deputy Leader) and to the Chief Executive (or Deputy Chief Executive).

The Executive and Directors Leadership Team shall receive regular progress reports and briefings from the Chairperson of the Commission to keep them updated with its work, progress and developments (on a quarterly basis unless otherwise required more frequently).

The Commission shall provide a progress/update report to Full Council on a bi-annual basis concerning its work, impact and outcomes.

The Chairperson of the Commission (or the Chairperson's nominee) shall attend meetings with the Executive, Directors and Full Council to present the Commission's updates and/or briefings.

The Commission may request and receive documentation/data held within the Council, request documentation/data from external bodies and invite persons internal and/or external to the Council to assist with its work, subject to any legislative

restrictions, obligations or other limitations arising (e.g. Data Protection Act 2018, GDPR, Freedom of Information Act 2000, contractual obligations).

The work of the Commission shall be open (so far as possible having regard to any legal or other applicable limitations/restrictions arising) to public accountability.

### **Equalities Commission Board**

The Board is responsible for all functions of the Commission.

Its high-level responsibilities include:

- Leadership and direction – Provide strategic and operational direction to achieve the Commission’s Vision, Mission Statement and Objectives.
- Determine the focus and priorities of the Equalities Commission having regard to the Commission’s Objectives.
- Delivering the Council’s Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan.
- Listen to individuals, departments, and organisations, whether internal and/or external, to understand the Council's equalities and diversity progress and compliance, and future improvements.
- Work with the Council’s Trade Unions to promote the equalities agenda and address issues and concerns.
- Consider and propose amendments to the Council’s Equality Policy and make recommendations to the Executive for consideration and onward recommendation to Full Council for approval.
- Approve the Commission’s engagement and communications strategies and plans.
- Determine outcomes/outputs to be achieved.
- Monitor progress of Council equalities action plans.
- Approve new initiatives and ideas to further the objectives of the Commission.

- To make recommendations to key decision makers in relation to the equalities agenda.
- To act as a consultee on equalities matters and issues in Sandwell.

### Operational functions and powers of the Equalities Commission Board

The Board of the Commission shall: -

- Progress/action identified priorities.
- Gather insight and undertake research.
- Review the Council's compliance with the Public-Sector Equality Duty and its Equalities Policy and make recommendations to the Council's Executive.
- Assess the Council's compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and any other relevant legislation, applicable Statutory Instruments, and other such regulations.
- Consider and recommend proposals on how the Council can better utilise its role, position, functions, and powers to address inequality in the Borough.
- Develop equality strategies and policies to be recommended to the Council's Executive.
- Assess the effectiveness and ability of people with protected characteristics to access Council services.
- Promote and review civic participation and the involvement of diverse communities in the decision-making processes of the Council.
- Review relevant Council policies and procedures to help address inequality issues/concerns within the Council.
- Develop new ideas, initiatives, approaches to celebrate the varied diversity and heritage of Council employees.
- Assist in the implementation of the Council's Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (and other relevant agreed action plans).

- Implement the Commission's engagement and communications plan.
- Prepare equalities related consultation responses.
- Consider national and regional policy development and initiatives in respect of our locality in Sandwell, determine its inclusion in the Sandwell Equality Commission's recommendations.
- Consider and recommend proposals on how the rich cultures, traditions and values within the borough can be promoted and celebrated.
- Identify good practice in addressing inequality issues and raising awareness of good practice across the borough.
- Support the fostering of good relations between Sandwell Council and our various partners, including but not limited to: the community at large, community groups, BAME groups, other equality stakeholder groups, Councillors/decision-makers, and other sectors such as the business and voluntary sectors.
- Help facilitate networks and coalitions between equality groups, decision-makers in the Council and other sectors such as the business and voluntary sectors.
- Provide advice and assistance to Council departments and external bodies in receipt of Council support within the borough to help understand inequalities issues and how they can be effectively addressed.
- Consider and support initiatives that tackle inequality within schools and in wider education forums/settings where the Council has jurisdiction.

The Commission may choose to establish Task Groups to conduct further work in respect of equalities imperatives such as Black Lives Matters, tackling disability discrimination, tackling homophobia and transphobia, celebrating Sandwell's diversity and other such groups as it deems necessary in pursuit of its objectives.

The Board may establish any other task groups, inquiry days, and undertake other forms/models of engagement as deemed necessary to progress its work.

### **Membership:**

The Commission's membership shall consist of five Sandwell Elected Members from a diverse range of backgrounds (who shall not be members of the Executive).

The Commission's membership shall be determined by the Leader of the Council (or Deputy Leader in the Leader's absence/unavailability) and appointees shall remain on the Board whilst the Commission remains in place (or unless the Board member resigns or is removed by the Leader of the Council (or Deputy Leader of the Council)). Where a member of the Commission resigns, the Commission shall appoint their replacement who must be an Elected Member of Sandwell Council and must not be a member of the Council's Executive.

### Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson

The Leader of the Council (or Deputy in the Leader's absence/unavailability) shall appoint the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson from amongst the membership of the Board.

The Board may appointment up to three non-voting persons to sit on the Board as Board Advisors for such periods as it requires to help progress its work. The Board shall determine the role and responsibilities of the Board Advisors.

The Commission shall have the authority to invite any individual or organisation from inside or outside the Council to attend meetings of the Board as it deems necessary to best inform and progress its work.

### **Frequency of Board Meetings and Quorum**

The Board shall meet every two months unless otherwise agreed by the Board.

The Chairperson of the Board shall be entitled to call a meeting of the Board as deemed necessary by giving 5 clear days' notice to Board members of the meeting (unless the matter requiring consideration by the Commission is deemed urgent by the Chairperson (or Vice Chairperson) in which case the meeting shall be convened as soon as practicably possible.

The Board shall be quorate providing three or more voting -members are in attendance at the meeting.

Meetings of the Commission Board can be held remotely using suitable ICT that enables each Board member who is able to attend the Board meeting to at least (i) hear the proceedings and other Board members, and (ii) engage in the proceedings and be heard by the other Board members.

## **Decision-making**

The Commission and its Board shall make recommendations to the Leader of the Council (or Deputy Leader in his/her absence) and Chief Executive (or Deputy Chief Executive) for their consideration.

## **Support Arrangements**

The Commission shall be supported by the Director of Law and Governance, the Executive Director- Neighbourhoods, and other officers as required.

The Commission shall receive administrative support from within the Council's Law & Governance Directorate and HR Team.

Such other Council teams/services shall support the work of the Commission as is considered appropriate and necessary by the Council's senior management team.