

## Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

16 July 2019

<b>Subject:</b>	Development of a Diversity Commission
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director - Neighbourhoods Alison Knight
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Manny Sehmbi – Business Manager – Community Partnerships

### **DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That:**

1. Council agrees to the development of a Diversity Commission.
2. The Commission be made up of a number of five elected members and relevant external partners, including RES (Rights and Equality Sandwell) and SCVO. The Council is requested to appoint the Cabinet member for Community Engagement and Equality as Chair of the Commission and four additional elected members.
3. Recommend that the Diversity Commission reflect and consider:
  - Equalities Act and Key aspects of Public Sector Duty;
  - Government's Integrated Communities Strategy;
  - Capture the richness of Sandwell's communities including the role of the BAME business sector and how they contribute to the local economy and wealth creation;
  - Consider areas for improvement;
  - Develop a campaign to celebrate diversity and BAME groups' contribution to community life.
4. A further report will be presented to Cabinet to approve recommendations from the Diversity Commission to further support and embed cohesion and equalities in Sandwell.

# 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper and Action Plan provide the opportunity to further reflect and consider how we may continue to develop the cohesion and equalities agenda in Sandwell, whilst also recognising we are not starting with a blank sheet as several strands of work are already established and complement the equality and diversity agenda.

To further support equality and diversity in Sandwell it would be timely to create a Diversity Commission by providing advice, ideas and scrutiny. To capture the rich stories and positive work as above, provide recommendations to the Council's Cabinet on how we could further build understanding of equality and diversity and the impact on inclusion and community cohesion. The Commission would need to be made up of council members, a range of partners such as RES, SCVO, Police, Education/Schools, Faith and community sector and would be supported by relevant council officers.

- 1.2 The work of the commission would be to consider the local context and current activity but also areas that could be further strengthened and to present these recommendations to the Cabinet for further discussion/actions. The recommendations would be framed in agreed themes such as:

- Vision, Leadership and Communications
- Housing
- Education
- Economic Opportunity
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion

- 1.3 The commission would be able to reflect on the Public Sector Equality Duty:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- Foster good relations between people from different groups

The commission would be able to reflect on the published information and compliance and include any further recommendations to Cabinet.

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030**

### **2.1 The Diversity Commission contributes to the following Ambitions:**

- Ambition 1 – The commission will create increased opportunity and greater equality across all communities in Sandwell, it will work towards ensuring young people are prepared for modern life.
- Ambition 2 – The Commission will focus on social well-being working to create resilient communities that care for and support its most vulnerable members.
- Ambition 5 – The Commission will work towards improving integration across Sandwell, helping communities to adapt to migration and changes in community demographics.
- Ambition 8 – Part of the Commissions work will be understanding how diversity impacts on communities working towards creating Neighbourhoods that are good and safe places to live.
- Ambition 10 – The Commission will recognise and build upon the excellent work that is already taking place in Sandwell and be fully committed to working with partners across all sectors of the community this will include RES, SCVO, Police, Education/Schools and would be supported by relevant council officers and faith groups.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 In March 2018, the Government published the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper for consultation. The Green Paper set out the Government's vision for building integrated communities 'where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities.'

3.2 The paper set out a range of actions proposed to be taken across Government to:

- strengthen leadership to drive integration in policy development and service delivery
- support newly arrived migrants to integrate and improve communities' ability to adapt to migration
- make sure all children and young people are prepared for life in modern Britain and have the opportunity for meaningful social mixing with those from different backgrounds

- boost English language skills to enable people to take advantage of the opportunities of living in modern Britain such as getting a job, mixing with people and playing a full part in community life
- mitigate residential segregation and support people to build strong and integrated communities
- increase economic opportunity
- challenge the practices that can hinder integration and equal rights
- learn what works in building integrated communities and to share that learning

3.3 Responses to the Green Paper highlighted the need for both national and local integration plans to be delivered in a way which inspires, engages and involves local communities. Encouraging community voices to be heard, valued and produce change so that no community is left behind. Hence, an Integrated Communities Action Plan was developed to move this agenda forward across Government to 'create socially and economically stronger, more confident and integrated communities.' The strategy/action plan supports a place-based approach and compliments the Hate Crime and Near Neighbours agenda.

3.4 To support equality and diversity within Sandwell there is a need to understand the local context. Understanding the local community, levels of deprivation, ethnic and religious composition as well as quality of life.

3.4.1 **Population** - Sandwell's population of 325,500 is 49.6% (161,422) male and 50.4% (164,078) female.

3.4.2 **Life expectancy** for men is 77.1 years and women is 81.3 years.

3.4.3 **Deprivation Indices** - Sandwell is ranked 13th most deprived out of 326 local authorities.

3.4.4 **Ethnicity** - Ethnicity in Sandwell, as at the 2011 Census, the proportion of people stating their ethnicity is 'White' is 69.9%, the proportion stating their ethnicity as 'Asian/Asian British' is 19.2% and 3.3% state their ethnicity is 'Black/African Caribbean/Black British'.

3.4.5 **Religion** - In terms of religious affiliation (based on the 2011 census), the three largest groups in Sandwell are 55.21% Christian, 18.74% No Religion and 8.74% Sikh.

- 3.5 In addition to understanding the above data, there is a need to understand the stories and activities that happen at a local level, that reflect not only the richness of our diverse communities but also the resilience and community spirit that is prevalent in many neighbourhoods; such as a range of Places of Welcome, Women Empowerment groups, Men's Sheds project, community events bringing communities and different generations together. There are also several different stories linked to ethnic/cultural groups which have created economic wealth in the borough – job creation and local spend and these need to be explored further.
- 3.6 There has always been a great desire to build stronger, cohesive communities within Sandwell. However, there is a recognition that austerity, Brexit and factors such as English Language proficiency, Economic Inactivity, Residential Segregation and Migration Levels have impacted on communities, adding to inequalities and relationships between communities. It is important that in the work we are doing around “community wealth building” and inclusive economy that nobody or no communities are ‘left behind’. It is also equally important that all communities benefit from the Commonwealth Games and the legacy opportunities that will arise. Through the work of this Commission we can ensure that these areas are covered appropriately.

## 4 THE CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The council have always been very proactive in understanding Sandwell's communities and have developed various strategic work strands to support communities in relation to the context they are living in. Below are some areas of work that support cohesion, equalities and diversity within Sandwell:
- **Sandwell New Arrivals Partnership (SNAP)** – group that supports new communities in terms of understanding needs, accessing services and building resilience. As well, supporting two successful CMF (Communities Migration Fund) Bids, one relating to coordinating ESOL (English Speaking Other Language) and the other relating to support new communities to settle well in Sandwell through the support of advice.
  - **Prevent** – Through the Prevent strategy and work with schools and partners to raise awareness, support and prevent risks to Sandwell's communities. In addition, the council grant fund REWIND to educate and deliver awareness in schools.

- **Modern Slavery** – Raising awareness of signs of modern slavery, encouraging communities to report such activities, as well as working with partners to interrupt incidents of Modern Slavery and support vulnerable communities affected. We have appointed a lead for Modern Slavery in recognition of the need to have a coordinated approach to this agenda.
- **Voluntary Sector** – the Council have always been committed to supporting and growing the voluntary sector, through a range of resources such as grants, use of assets and support to develop services at a local level and supporting local communities and particularly vulnerable and diverse communities. This also includes the faith sector.
- **Rights Equality Sandwell (RES)** – The Council provide a grant to RES which enables them to improve equal opportunities, promote good relations and challenge unlawful discrimination.
- **STEP Centre** – Providing support to newly arrived families, particularly children prior to being allocated a school place.

4.2 The above are just a few areas of work but there are many other strands that are taking place amongst the faith, community and voluntary sectors. However, there are some gaps such as a strategic overview of community cohesion, understanding how diversity impacts on communities and the social and economic well-being of people in Sandwell. Addressing social exclusion challenges, which include low incomes and worklessness, creating neighbourhoods that are good places to live and areas where community spirit exists and founded on mutual respect and appreciation of similarities.

## 5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There has been consultation with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Equality, Executive Director for Neighbourhoods and Director for Housing and Communities.
- 5.2 In addition, it is proposed that a Working Group is pulled together to support the commissioning group and wider consultation with stakeholders.

- 5.3 The Working Group would consist of relevant SMBC officers, and external partners such as:
- SMBC – Community Partnerships
    - Community Safety
    - Business Development
    - Education
  - Multistory
  - Faith leaders
  - REWIND
  - RES
  - SCVO
  - Community groups representation, such as Changing Our Lives
- 5.4 The Working Group would be formed to support the development of the commissioning group, enabling different strands of work, knowledge and information to be collated, whilst creating wider ownership.
- 5.5 In addition, the Working Group would support the bringing together of a range of conversations, stories and ideas helping to develop a Sandwell wide approach highlighting positive stories of community life and the whole community benefits.

## 6 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 SMBC could continue as we are as discussed in 4.1; however, this would not be effective as it lacks ownership from the faith, community and voluntary sector and would not a joined-up approach.
- 6.2 No other alternative approach or structure has been considered

## 7 **STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no financial implications in supporting and administering a Diversity Commissioning, however dependent on the recommendations there may be a need for additional resources.

## 8 **LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The council continue to work closely with RES as a key infrastructure organisation.
- 8.2 The Commission would support the Public-Sector Equality Duty:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010

- Advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- Foster good relations between people from different groups

The commission would be able to consider the published information and compliance and include any further recommendations to Cabinet.

8.3 The Diversity Commission would be chaired by the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Equality, and any recommendations would be presented to Cabinet.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

9.1 The Diversity Commission would not have any adverse impact but would further support and strengthen cohesion in Sandwell.

9.2 No Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

10.1 No personal data will be shared

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

11.1 No implications at the present time

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

12.1 No implications at the present time

## **13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 No implications at the present time, however the focus of the work and any recommendations would inevitably support the health and wellbeing within communities and build community spirit and resilience.

## **14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

14.1 No implications at the present time

## **15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

15.1 The Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper and Action Plan provide the opportunity to further reflect and consider how we may continue to develop the cohesion and equalities agenda in Sandwell.

- 15.2 Recognising that we are not starting with a blank sheet as several strands of work are already established and compliment the equality and diversity agenda.
- 15.3 Considering the above it would be timely to create a Diversity Commission support Sandwell's work on equality and diversity by providing advice, ideas and scrutiny. But to also capture the rich stories and positive work along with recommendations to the Council's Cabinet on how we could further build understanding of equality and diversity and the impact on inclusion and community cohesion.
- 15.4 The Commission would need to be made up of internal and external colleagues/partners to create a joined up boroughwide approach and wider ownership.
- 15.5 The work of the Commission would consider the local context and current activity but also areas that could be further strengthened and to present these recommendations to the Cabinet for further discussion/actions.
- 15.6 In addition, the Commission would be able to reflect on the Public-Sector Equality Duty and reflect on the published information and compliance and include any further recommendations to Cabinet.

## 16 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 16.1 Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper March 2018
- 16.2 Integrated Communities Action Plan February 2019
- 16.3 LGA Research: Cohesion and Integration in Sandwell

## 17 **APPENDICES:**

None

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