

AUDIT, RISK & ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Date	12 April 2022
Report title	Equity and Inclusion Scheme 2022-24
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf
Accountable Employee	Ed Cox – Director of Inclusive Growth and Public Service Reform Email: ed.cox@wmca.org.uk

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Audit and Risk Committee is recommended to:

Consider and note the publication of the Equity and Inclusion Scheme 2022-24 and note the objectives and activities to help realise the WMCA Equality Vision.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with an update on the development and publication of the Equity and Inclusion Scheme 2022-24.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Equity and Inclusion Scheme 2022-24 is a statutory document setting out the WMCA's vision, ambitions and proposed objectives for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion over the next three years.
- 2.2 Regulation 5 of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, requires public bodies to publish one or more equality objectives at up to four-year intervals to support the key aims of the public sector equality duties, namely to a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; b) advance equality of opportunity between different groups, and c) foster good relations between different groups.
- 2.3 The Scheme draws out our key commitments, current activities and future plans in relation to equality and diversity. It recognises that our equality and diversity vision is fundamental to our overall vision of improving the quality of life of everyone who lives and works in the West Midlands and highlights the synergies between equality, diversity, inclusion and inclusive growth. It brings together all key WMCA of work and highlights all

different activities that are likely to have direct or indirect positive equality impact under one unified equalities action plan.

- 2.4 The Scheme takes a holistic approach, recognising that true commitment to equality and diversity goes beyond just the nine protected characteristics, with a strong focus on positive socio-economic outcomes. The scheme is fully aligned with the WMCA Corporate Strategy 2022-24

3. Scheme objectives

- 3.1 The Equity and Inclusion Scheme is structured around four key objectives – three external and one workforce/internal one. Developing equality objectives is a key legislative requirement for all public authorities. WMCA Equity Scheme objectives comprise a number of themes and deliverables and is accompanied by an action plan. The objectives are outlined below:

- 3.2 **Objective 1:** Provide accessible, affordable, safe and inclusive transport services to our wide range of customers

Key themes include: Transport safety and security; delivering an accessible and inclusive commonwealth games experience; ensuring services offer good value for money and people are able to access employment, education and leisure opportunities; narrowing the sustainable travel inclusion gap and ensuring sustainable travel modes are more easily accessible; improving customer experience and better understanding diverse customer needs; ensuring infrastructure, information and services are accessible to more people with a customer service that meets individual needs, and ensuring transport strategies are inclusive and promote an equitable network.

- 3.3 **Objective 2:** Deliver schemes, strategies and programmes across the WMCA that help deliver positive equality and inclusion outcomes, also reducing socio-economic disadvantage and poverty, for our region's diverse communities

Key themes include: Affordable and inclusive housing provision; delivering skills equity; delivering on the promise of more inclusive growth shaping investment, infrastructure and services around social and economic goals; supporting positive, proactive and preventative approaches to citizen wellbeing and engagement

- 3.4 **Objective 3:** Ensure equality is embedded within all key WMCA work areas, the WCMA has a strong regional influencing role around the equalities agenda and decision making is informed by the needs of our diverse communities

Key themes include: Embedding equality considerations in decision making; strengthening our approach to community engagement; supporting positive social value outcomes through procurement activities; working with partners to influence change and tackle diversity and inclusion challenges

- 3.5 **Objective 4** Provide an accessible, diverse and inclusive working environment by improving the recruitment, retention, progression, development and overall experience of people employed by the WMCA, enabling the organisation to become an inclusive employer of choice where equality informs our culture and behaviours.

Key themes include: Attracting and appointing a diverse range of candidates; Improving employee equality competencies; Supporting enhanced visibility of the equality agenda in the workplace; giving employees a voice; ensuring equalities is fully embedded within key employee lifecycle processes; supporting employee wellbeing ensuring positive mental health and wellbeing are championed; improving the quality of workforce data

- 3.6 The Equality Scheme includes a comprehensive action plan for each objective to support positive equality outcomes for employees, service users and West Midlands residents.

4. **Public Engagement**

- 4.1 While there is no statutory obligation for us to consult on the Equality Scheme, we finalised a 6-week engagement period where the public (including key regional and local community and equality groups) were given the opportunity to comment on the scheme principles. The scheme was communicated via social media, on our website and to our list of equality contacts. The scheme was available in a number of alternative formats, e.g., easy read, plain English, large print and audio.

- 4.2 Overall 173 responses were received. The majority of responses were from members of the public but there were also a number of organisational responses (e.g., Guide dogs, YCA, No Limits to Health). The feedback received was broadly positive and the majority of respondents supported the Scheme objectives. There were no specific recommendations to make changes to the Scheme content and structure. The Scheme has been published on the WMCA website and is available in a number of alternative formats.

5. **Financial Implications**

There is no financial impact in relation to this report. Activities/initiatives included in the scheme have been considered as part of individual budgets

6. **Legal Implications**

The WMCA has a statutory obligation (Regulation 5 of the Equality Act 2010-Specific Duties and Public Authorities Regulations 2017), to publish equality objectives at up to four-year intervals to support the key aims of the public sector equality duties.

7. **Equalities Implications**

The Scheme is likely to have positive impact on the Equality Act protected characteristics as outlined in the main body of the document and the accompanying action plan

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

Equality is one of the eight fundamentals of the Inclusive Growth Framework, and the Equality Scheme brings detail to how the WMCA can use its power and resources to create a more equal region. The Scheme itself does not create the activity, but it is a lens that is applied to ensure that equality is a consideration whenever plans are made and resources allocated. As such, it is important that when the plans cited in the Scheme are progressed that the detail on how inequality is being addressed is designed in from the outset. For certain investments – such as policies focused on addressing fuel poverty – resolving inequality of outcome is the point of the policy, and it is therefore straightforward to put that at the heart of its design. For others, such as job creation from investments into housing and land – a positive and necessary focus – will not explicitly address inequality unless that is consciously designed in.

9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

N/A

10. Other Implications

N/A

11. Schedule of Background Papers

N/A