

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 19 July 2018

Present:

Members: Councillor J Mutton (Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

Place J Barlow, S Bennett, G Cowley, R Parkes,
A West

People D Ashmore, P Chen

Apologies Councillor K Taylor (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March, 2018 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Final Hospitality Statement and Charity Appeal for the Lord Mayoralty of Councillor Tony Skipper 2017/18

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that provided the end of year hospitality budget report for the Mayoral Year for Councillor Tony Skipper, 2017/18. The report update the Cabinet Member on how the budget was allocated during the Mayoral Year. The total spend was £65,153.03, which was £442.97 less than the allocated budget and this balance was returned to corporate reserves.

An Appendix to the report provided details of the individual civic engagements undertaken by Coventry's first citizen and ceremonial head to meet a range of priorities from community engagement to international events. The Lord Mayoralty also provided an opportunity to showcase the City and promote relationships with local businesses. The Cabinet Member noted that there were a number of events linked to the City of Culture Bid and the European City of Sport Bid, both of which had been successful.

The Cabinet Member also noted that a total of £15,492.88 had been raised for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal, the beneficiaries of which were Zoe's Place Baby Hospice and The Teenage Cancer Trust.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:-

- 1) Notes the contents of Appendix 1 to the report which sets out detailed expenditure of £65,153.03 against the hospitality budget and:-**
- 2) Notes the final sum of £15,492.88 raised for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal 2017/2018**

4. Housing Benefit Overpayment Resources

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place), which indicated that since April 2018, Local Authorities have had the opportunity to refer details of customers who have a Housing Benefit Overpayment to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in order for a matching exercise to take place with Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs data. This is called the Housing Benefit Debt Service (HBDS). The objective of the exercise is to identify if the individual is working, with a view to recovering any Housing Benefit overpayment directly from the customer's earnings (Direct Earnings Attachment).

The Council currently has 2,770 invoices outstanding that are not currently in recovery, with a value of c. £3million, because it has not been possible to trace the debtors. In order to maximise the opportunity to use the HBDS, it is requested that an officer is recruited on a temporary basis, for a period of six months, to work within the Housing Benefit Overpayments team. This resource will focus on the 2,770 invoices and refer the customer's details to the DWP. Data will be returned to this resource and will instigate a Direct Earnings Attachment Order to the debtor's employer. Where a match is identified via the Housing Benefit Debt Service, this will result in the Overpayment being placed in a recovery stream and income will be received by the Council as a consequence.

The Cabinet Member noted that Coventry had already taken part in a pilot scheme, which had been very successful and which had resulted in the DWP rolling this service out nationally.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources approves the funding of a temporary G3 officer resource for a period of six months.

5. 12 Month Cumulative Sickness Absence 2017/18

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) that enabled him to monitor levels of sickness absence for the 12 month period of 2017/2018 and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

The annual and bi-annual information provided was based on full time equivalent (FTE) average days lost per person against the FTE average days

per person available for work. This was the method previously required by the Audit Commission for annual Best Value Performance Indicator reporting and the City Council continued to use this method to ensure consistency with previously published data.

The report set out cumulative sickness absence figures for the Council and individual directorates. Appendices to the report provided detailed information on: targets against actual days lost per FTE 2013-18; Directorate summary out-turns; reasons for absence; days lost per FTE, by Directorate; a percentage breakdown of absence; and the spread of sickness absence, by length of days. A summary of Occupational Health and Counselling Services Activities Undertaken was provided in the report.

The Cabinet Member noted the need to revise the sickness and absence policies and procedures and invest in sickness absence management training as part of the ongoing workforce strategy programme. This is to support the delivery of the corporate target of reducing the absence to 8 days per FTE by 2019/20.

In addition, the Cabinet Member noted that in future years, improvement to systems and employee record keeping systems will enable more effective and consistent reporting, including:-

- A rolling 12 month period
- Focus on core council workforce data separate from schools workforce data
- A change from “days lost” to reporting sickness absence per FTE as the main measure
- Align the reporting of long term absence to the policy and procedure Framework

The Cabinet Member expressed his disappointment at the sickness absence figures and indicated that he would be monitoring this closely over the next few months.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources notes the report providing sickness absence data for the 12 month period 1 April 2017-31 March 2018 and endorses the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness absence.

6. Agency Workers and Interim Managers - Performance Management Report Quarter 4 (1 January, 2018 to 31 March, 2018)

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (People) which provided performance information on the use of agency workers procured for the Quarter 4 period, 1 January to 31 March 2018 and Interim Manager and other agency worker spends for the same period.

Further to Minute 72/17, the Cabinet Member had asked for further information to be provided this Quarter and in future on the number of agency staff engaged and the reasons for that engagement. Where the information was available, it had been provided within the report. Where the information was not available,

commentary was provided in the report on the feasibility and timescales to implement this change to information reporting.

Coventry City Council has a Master Vendor Contract with Pertemps for the supply of agency workers and they supply all suitable agency workers through their own agency or via a 2nd tier arrangement with other agencies on behalf of the Council. The information supplied by Pertemps gives detailed information on agency worker usage and expenditure. However, Pertemps was not always able to supply the required agency workers and where this is the case, service areas will use other suppliers. The report indicated that this contract has now been re-tendered and a new provider Reed, will be supplying agency workers from 25 June, 2018.

A table in the report show comparative expenditure in Q4 2017/18 and Q3 2017/18 and indicated an overall increase in total spend. A further table in the report provided the percentage of staffing requirement met by agency workers from Pertemps. The full-time equivalent of agency staff had been calculated for each service area and gives the percentage of staffing requirement met by agency workers from Pertemps for each Service Area.

The report provided detailed information on the following service areas:-

- Children's Services
- Adults Services
- StreetScene:- Waste Services
StreetPride
Planning and Regulation

The report also provided a comparison of expenditure outside of the Pertemps contacts Q4 2017/18 with Q3 2017/18 and highlighted the following areas:-

- Children's Services
- Education:- Coventry Music Services (formerly the Performing Arts Service)
Centrally employed teachers/teaching assistants
Educational Psychology
Quality Assurance Monitoring Officers
- Customer Services – Homelessness Officers
- Place – Professional Services Contract

The report highlighted work undertaken to find alternative solutions to agency staff, including the establishment of a bank of casual workers within Waste and specialist recruitment in Highways, Traffic and Transport.

In response to concerns raised by the Cabinet Member at a previous meeting regarding the need for managers to ensure that the process of filling vacancies was undertaken at the earliest opportunity, this had been communicated to senior management teams and had been reflected in the process to be used for the new contract.

The Cabinet Member requested that for future reports, a comparison of the figures from the same Quarter the previous year be provided.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Corporate Services:-

- 1) Notes the agency/interim spend for Q4 and the corresponding numbers of agency workers**
- 2) Notes the work done on providing in-house solutions as an alternative to agency and interim workers**
- 3) Notes the inclusion in the report of the level of corporate staffing requirements met by agency workers from Pertemps.**

7. Outstanding Issues

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources noted that the outstanding issue relating to Agency Workers and Interim Managers had been covered in the report submitted for consideration (Minute 8 above refers)

8. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 10.40 am)