

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 3 August 2017

Present:

Members: Councillor J Mutton (Cabinet Member)
Councillor Taylor (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

Place J Barlow, B Barrett, P Johnson, R Parkes, M Salmon, J Smith,
A West

Apologies: There were no apologies

Public Business

37. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared.

38. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March 2017 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

39. Final Hospitality Statement and Charity Appeal for the Lord Mayoralty of Councillor Lindsley Harvard 2016-2017

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that provided the end of year hospitality budget report for the Mayoral Year of Councillor Lindsley Harvard 2016/2017. The report updated the Cabinet Member on how the budget was allocated during the Mayoral Year. The total spend was £57,162.55; this was £8,433.45 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 Cabinet Member noted that the Mayor's Charity Ball raised the sum of £7,000 for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal and also provided an opportunity to showcase the City and promote relationships with local businesses.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:

(1) Notes the contents of the Appendix to the report which sets out detailed expenditure of £57,162.55 against the hospitality budget.

(2) Notes the final sum of £17,100.32 raised for the Lord Mayor's Charity Appeal 2016/2017.

40. **Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that proposed amendments to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for business rated properties in Coventry.

In April 2017 a national revaluation of business rates properties came into effect. Ratepayers who experienced increased bills as a result of the revaluation were supported by a national scheme of transitional relief which phased the increased liability over a period of five years.

For the 2017 revaluation, the Government had announced additional support, beyond the national transitional scheme, for pubs, local newspapers, small businesses and rural businesses.

In addition, the Government had provided additional funding for Councils to set up their own schemes of discretionary support for businesses impacted by the revaluation, to be known as 'local discretionary relief schemes' (LDRSs).

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had stipulated that all of the additional support would be administered through section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Section 47 governed the use, by Councils, of discretionary reductions in business rates liability. The DCLG did not intend to introduce new legislation to facilitate the additional revaluation support and therefore Local Authorities (LAs) wishing to implement the new schemes were required to amend their existing discretionary rate relief (DRR) policies.

The parameters governing the new support for rural businesses, local newspapers, pubs and small businesses were prescribed by DCLG and it was proposed that the Council administered these schemes in line with the criteria laid out. The DCLG had not provided any guidance on how LDRSs should operate and LAs were free to design their own schemes of support.

Coventry proposed a scheme of support based on the following principles:

- Support was provided to businesses occupying a property with a rateable value greater than £12,000 and not more than £100,000;
- The business should have an increased liability, after all other reliefs, including small business and pub relief, greater than 1 per cent as a result of the 2017 revaluation;
- The property was occupied;
- The following types of business were excluded from support:
 - Coventry City Council buildings
 - Buildings occupied by NHS bodies
 - GP surgeries and health centres
 - National and international companies
 - Banks
 - Betting shops
- Eligible businesses would receive a reduction in their bill in year 1 of the scheme totalling 100 per cent of their increased liability.

The proposed policy was set out in an appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member Strategic Finance and Resources:

- (1) Approves the amended Discretionary Relief Policy as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.**
- (2) Delegates authority to the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to approve the specific parameters and percentage thresholds of the final scheme.**
- (3) Delegates authority to the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to review and adjust the scheme, following consultation with the Cabinet Member Strategic Finance and Resources, in the first and subsequent years in response to fluctuations in forecast levels of spend against the funding.**
- (4) Delegates authority to officers to make decisions in respect of reliefs provided in accordance with section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.**

41. Cumulative Sickness Absence 2016/17

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that enabled him to monitor levels of sickness absence for the 12 month period of 2016/2017 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 2012-17; Directorate summary out-turns; reasons for absence; days lost per FTE, by Directorate; a percentage breakdown of absence; the spread of sickness absence, by length of days; and a summary of Occupational Health and Counselling Services Activities Undertaken.

The Cabinet Member expressed his concern at the rising sickness absence statistics and confirmed the need for robust monitoring, particularly where patterns of absence formed. He also outlined his support for the 'Dying to Work' Campaign that promoted employers supporting employees with a terminal illness, to continue to work if they so wished and were able to do so. The Cabinet Member requested that a breakdown of the costs of sickness absence to the City Council, separating salary details from all other costs, be included in future Sickness Absence Reports.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member:

- 1) Notes the report providing sickness absence data for the 12 month period of 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017 and endorses the actions being taken to monitor and manage sickness.**
- 2) Requests that future reports include a breakdown of the cost of sickness absence, separating salary details from all other costs.**

42. Agency Workers and Interim Managers - Performance Management Report Q4 (1 January to 31 March, 2017 with a final summary of 2016/17 compared with 2015/16

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that provided him with performance information on the City Council's use of agency workers procured for the Quarter 4 period, 1 January to 31 March 2017 and sought consideration of Interim Manager and other agency worker spends for the same period.

Coventry City Council had a Master Vendor Contract with Pertemps for the supply of agency workers which came into effect in December 2013 and had recently been extended. Through the contract, Pertemps supplied all suitable agency workers through their own agency or via a 2nd tier arrangement with other agencies on behalf of the Council, using rates of pay based on an agreed pay policy and a negotiated mark-up rate with the Master Vendor. The information supplied by Pertemps gave detailed information on agency worker usage and expenditure. However, Pertemps was not always able to supply the required agency workers and on occasion service areas would use other suppliers where this was the case.

Appendices to the report provided details of total Directorate spend on agency workers up to and including Quarter 4 2016/2017 for spends with Pertemps, including interims; justification of new orders placed by Directorates for agency workers; and equalities data for workers supplied through the Pertemps contract.

Alternative solutions to agency staff were being developed and work had commenced on developing in-house solutions to some of the Council's staff shortages. Within the People Directorate, Children's Services were developing some ideas on an alternative contract that pitched hourly rates similar to those that could be earned working through an agency. Other benefits and inducements are also being considered as part of a package to be offered to Social Workers to take roles with the Council.

The Place Directorate had two strategies to reduce the reliance on agency workers within Waste Services. A pool of employees, who were contracted full time but who may be placed within any team that required them. These employees typically filled in to cover leave and absence. Also, a small bank of casual workers, usually drawn from workers who had previously worked for the Council via an agency, who were offered work when shifts could not be covered by the substantive workforce or during times of peak activity. This bank of casual workers was being expanded in anticipation of increases in workload.

A Recruitment Plan had been developed with the objective of recruiting to 20 specialist roles within the Highways, Traffic and Transport Teams. This would reduce the cost of agency spend and promote Coventry City Council as the employer of choice.

Over 160 CVs were received through the creation of a Talent Pool that allowed applicants to register their interest. A microsite had also been developed which included a career video promoting the major programme of capital investment in highways and infrastructure within the City and the benefits of working for the City Council. One appointment had been made and managers were confident in recruiting to other vacancies. A marketing plan would be implemented for vacancies that remained and an apprentice/graduate programme would be introduced.

The Cabinet Member welcomed the in-house solutions that were being developed as alternatives to using agency staff and affirmed his view that where an increase in workload was on-going, permanent recruitment be pursued. He requested a detailed breakdown of costs associated agency workers separating Social Worker agency staff from all other agency workers. He also requested that Waste Services be represented at future meetings of Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources, when Agency Workers Performance Management Reports were on the agenda. He further sought clarification of the total Council spend on Agency Workers for 2016/2017.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:

- (1) Notes the agency/interim spend by the City Council for Quarter 4, 1 January to 31 March 2017.**
- (2) Notes the work done on providing in-house solutions to providing agency and interim workers.**

43. Outstanding issues Report

The Cabinet Member noted a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) that identified an issue on which a further report had been requested and was outstanding, so that progress could be monitored.

44. Any other items of public business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.15 am)