

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held
at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 15 January 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor R Singh (Chair)
 Councillor F Abbott
 Councillor J Blundell
 Councillor R Brown
 Councillor B Gittins
 Councillor R Lakha
 Councillor T Sawdon

Employees:

People: G Haynes, S Newing
Place: V Castree, C Sinclair

Apologies: Councillor R Auluck

Public Business

19. Declarations of Interest

Councillor F Abbott declared an “Other Interest” in the matters referred to in minutes 22 and 23 below entitled “HR Score Card” and “People Plan” respectively and left the meeting when they were being considered.

20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2019 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

21. Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Levy

The Board considered a briefing note which provided an overview of Coventry City Council’s Apprenticeship Programme and informed the Board of the progress being made to ensure that the Council spends its £1m contribution to the Apprenticeship Levy fund.

Public sector apprenticeship targets had been introduced by the Government in April 2017. The government had set a target for any public sector employer in England with at least 250 employees to employ an average of 2.3% of their headcount as new apprentices. Coventry City Council as an employer had its own long-established apprenticeship programme and had won the Top Employer for School & College Leavers Award for 2016 – 2017.

In respect of the apprenticeship programme, the briefing note indicated that:

- Between April 2018 – December 2019 the Council employed 141 apprentices which equated to on average 1.7% of the Council's overall headcount and less than 1% of the corporate headcount.
- The Council currently had 115 apprentices on programme, 28 were located within service areas across the Council and 87 were in maintained schools across the City.
- The Council currently supported, through direct funding, 20 strategy apprenticeship posts with all other apprenticeship posts being funded directly by service areas or schools.
- Council currently had 11 apprentices who are Looked After Children/Care Leavers (LAC).
- 3.94% of the Council's workforce were aged between 16-24, whereas 46.37% of the workforce were aged over 50, which suggested a risk in terms of our skills and knowledge deficit over the next 10 years if not addressed.
- In April 2018 - Dec 2019, there were 407 Grade 2/3 posts recruited to, which presented an opportunity to develop a talent pipeline for future talent, improve the diversity of our workforce and lead the way across the public sector.

The briefing note included data on the number of apprentices in post and a breakdown of apprentices by directorate, level and ward.

In respect of the Apprenticeship Levy, the Board noted that it was introduced by the Government in 2017 to fund apprenticeships in England. The Levy was a Council resource and was paid at 0.5% of the pay bill minus a Levy allowance of £15K for each tax year. The Levy was collected monthly by HMRC via the PAYE system and converted into digital vouchers accessed through a new Digital Apprenticeship Service account (DAS). Levy funding could only be spent on Apprenticeship training and not used to support the recruitment of employees.

The yearly cost of the Levy to Coventry City Council was in the region of £1m, with approximately £600K allocated from the corporate wage bill and a further £400 allocated from our maintained schools wage bill. The government also topped this up by a further 10%, making the total amount of funds available circa £1.1m. Levy funding lasts 24 months and if it is not spent in this period, the Council's money is reabsorbed by the Employment and Skills Funding Agency.

The Board questioned officers on a number of aspects of the presentation including how the apprenticeship levy worked, how it can be used and asked what plans were in place to ensure that the allocated funding is spent within the timeframe. The Board sought and received assurances that the Council maximised training opportunities for apprentices.

RESOLVED that the Board note the Council's approach to delivering its Apprenticeship programme and the use of the Apprenticeship Levy spend.

22. HR Score Card

The Board considered a briefing note which detailed the development of an 'HR scorecard' which was being created to report on key performance indicators (KPI's) relating to the workforce.

The new HR scorecard was being developed to provide a Council wide workforce overview, with the information being provided on a quarterly basis. Reporting would be the 'people' metrics to indicate how the City Council was performing. The report would highlight where KPI's were being met and would identify any areas of concern which would then enable early intervention.

The areas of information covered had been expanded to include not just turnover, but the number of new starters to the Council and the spend on agency workers. 'Time to hire' metrics would also be included once the new electronic recruitment system was introduced in April 2020. The data looked at overall sickness on a divisional basis, by days lost, by reason and by numbers of long-term cases. Additional information detailed casework, which provided a 'health check' of the organisation in terms of the employee relations climate, along with the statutory and mandatory training figures. Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data would also be included. Other metrics could be added as development of the scorecard progressed.

The Board questioned officers on a number of matters raised in the presentation and, in respect of the data on sickness absence, asked that officers investigate whether or not there was any correlation between the age profile of the workforce and sickness absence. In addition, the Board suggested that the scope of the analysis of sickness absence be widened to show any impact of long-term absence.

RESOLVED that the Board endorse the development of the HR Scorecard and recommended that:

- **Future reports include comparative data from similar sized councils**
- **Officers investigate and report back on any correlation between the age profile of the workforce and sickness absence**
- **A wider scope analysis of sickness absence be undertaken to show any impact of long-term absences on sickness absence data**

23. People Plan

The Board considered a briefing note which set out details of the development of the People Plan for the City Council. The Plan, which had been developed by the HR service in conjunction with key stakeholders, determined the Human Resource priorities for the next two years.

Development of the plan involved contribution from of all parts of Human Resources through three half-day workshops, a similar session with the trades unions, feedback from the senior leadership team and other key stakeholders. This method, called the 'alignment model', included reference to the wider council strategy as well as regulatory needs.

One of the key areas of work over the next 12 months would be the introduction of the One Coventry Values which were in the process of being developed and would be chosen by staff through an extensive staff engagement exercise. Areas of priority work were identified in the briefing note.

The Board questioned officers on the presentation including the high number of absence due to stress/anxiety and raised the importance of constructive engagement with trades unions and partners and suggested that their available development education programmes be used. In addition, the Board asked that recruitment process be more open and transparent to provide feedback to all partners, that comparative data be included in future reports and cultural accountability be included in the Plan.

RESOLVED that the Board endorse the Plan and recommend:

- **That officers work collaboratively with trade unions in respect of development education programmes**
- **That ‘Cultural Accountability’ be added to the Plan**
- **That the recruitment process be open and transparent and provide comprehensive feedback both to the Council and recruitment candidates**

24. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

The Board noted the work programme.

There were no outstanding issues.

25. Any other items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.50 am)