

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held
at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 13 October 2021

Present:

Members: Councillor R Singh (Chair)
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor B Gittins
Councillor A Hopkins
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor K Maton
Councillor T Sawdon

Other Members: Councillor Brown, Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources

Employees:

V Castree, Law and Governance
G Haynes, Human Resources
S Newing, Director of Human Resources
C Sinclair, Law and Governance

Apologies: Councillor B Mosterman

Public Business

13. Apologies and Substitutions

14. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

15. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2021 were agreed as a true record.

Matter Arising – Minute 9 (Reserves Balances)

The Chair reported that he had had a positive discussion with Councillor Brown following the meeting in respect of the Reserve Balances position.

16. Workforce Diversity & Inclusion

The Board considered a briefing note which provided information on progress made in the area of Workforce Diversity & Inclusion across the Council over the past two years.

The Briefing note stated that Diversity & Inclusion had been identified as a key workforce driver for the West Midlands region before the launch of the West Midlands Employers (WMEs) report 'Spotlight on Inclusion – Creating Belonging in Local Government' and prior to the global events which shone an intense spotlight on the issues surrounding the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

The region's focus on equality, diversity and inclusion was rooted in a desire to ensure wide and authentic representation across the Local Government Sector and across all forms of diversity, to support the strengthening of inclusive services to the wider community. It was vital that the workforce was reflective of the people we serve. By creating a culture that values diversity and actively promotes inclusion we hope to build an atmosphere where differences of opinion and outlook are not only respected but sought out and appreciated.

The Board noted the progress in the area of workforce diversity and inclusion across the organisation, the re-establishment of its three existing employee networks, the Ignite Talent Development Programme, the Employ Autism Programme and new policy development.

The Board questioned Officers and received responses on a number of matters raised in the briefing note and Officer's presentation including:

- Anonymised recruitment practices and the process following the consideration of redacted applications through to appointment
- No provision for childcare/carers for Councillors, recognising that women were disproportionately represented amongst those who had caring responsibilities
- The recently commissioned Unconscious Bias Training and the need to roll it out to widely to all members and officers.
- The impact of returning to work following the pandemic on protected groups
- The need for the Employee Network Groups to be consulted on Equality Impact Assessments.
- Feedback on training
- The importance of accurate data set out in a standard format with timescales given

Following discussion, the Board asked for:

- A breakdown of the data on the workforce composition so it is reported for each job grade 1-7 (rather than grouped together)
- Future reports to include numbers as well as percentages
- Meetings with participants of the Ignite Talent Development Programme and Chairs of the Employment Networks to hear their experiences.
- Equality Day, 14 April, to be recognised in the City Council Calendar.

RESOLVED congratulated Officers on the excellent work being undertaken and requested that Officers:

- (a) Review Childcare/Carer provision for Councillors.**
- (b) Roll out the Unconscious Bias Training to all Members and Officer**
- (c) Arrange meetings with the Ignite Talent Development Programme and the Chairs of the three Employment Networks.**

17. **Agile and Flexible Working Update**

The Board received a presentation and considered a briefing note which provided an update on progress made in respect of agile and flexible working.

The briefing note indicated that prior to the pandemic, the City Council operated a flexible working policy which enabled in line with legislation for employees to be able to apply to work on a flexible basis. Over the last 18 months over half the Council had worked from home due to the pandemic and subsequent restrictions. This change occurred overnight and was underpinned by the technology available through Teams and Sharepoint. It was accepted this was a steep learning curve for all but despite this productivity did not decrease.

It had been crucial to ensure everyone worked as safely as possible regardless of the environment or location they were in. For those who remained in the workplace had appropriate PPE, risk assessments and followed the latest public health advice. For those staff working from home, risk assessments to determine equipment needs were undertaken, display screen and workstation set up advice provided and a system for the supply of necessary kit was established. Regular updates were also provided as reminders, plus the creation of the Flexible Toolkit to provide advice to manager and employees on the options and potential solutions.

Over the last 18 months, three 'pulse' surveys had been undertaken to help establish how employees were feeling and what support was needed either to help keep them safe and well or to be effective at work and the responses were detailed in the briefing note.

The Board questioned Officers and received responses on a number of matters relating to the presentation including:

- The reduction in sick days since the pandemic which statistically showed how working from home could reduce the number of sick days.
- The need to ensure that new members of staff and apprentices had the help and support in returning to office buildings

RESOLVED to note the report.

18. **Work Programme and Outstanding Issues**

The Board noted the Work Programme.

There were no outstanding issues.

19. **Any other items of Public Business**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.30 pm)