

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held
at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 21 March 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor E Ruane (Chair)
 Councillor J Blundell
 Councillor R Brown
 Councillor L Kelly
 Councillor R Lakha
 Councillor J Lepoidevin
 Councillor P Male
 Councillor K Maton
 Councillor J McNicholas

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

Employees (by Service Area):

Customer and Business
Services:

L Waller

Human Resources:

S Newing (Chief People Officer), Edwina Quansah

Legal and Procurement
Services:

O Aremu, R Amor

Waste and Fleet
Management:

S Elliot

Law and Governance:

E Jones, C Sinclair, A West

Apologies: Councillor J Innes

Public Business

30. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

31. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

32. **Staff Survey - Speak Up, Speak Out**

The Board considered a briefing note and presentation which detailed the background and context of the Staff Survey undertaken in September 2023, together with details of the results and next steps to address issues raised in the survey. The complete version of the survey was available to view online.

The City Council's People Plan had identified a comprehensive staff survey as a 'need' because of the wider aim to get better and greater engagement with the workforce. This provided a mechanism for receiving feedback on the lived experiences of working at the Council, as well as identifying the negative issues that may be impacting on retention. Equally important was to understand and learn of positive experiences so these could be highlighted and celebrated and promoted as part of recruitment campaigns/initiatives.

The briefing note indicated that the provider selected to support the process was DJS, who were successful in their tender submission because of their previous experience of working with a number of authorities and as a result had the advantage of being able to provide wider benchmark data both from the wider public sector and other local authorities and their experience of the process and quality of the survey.

The survey was undertaken from 11th September to the 13th of October 2023 and was made available to all employees through their corporate email address, sent to home addresses or available through QR codes. All surveys were anonymous.

The survey was live for five weeks and generated 2,178 responses out of approximately 5130 employees equating to 40% of the workforce.

The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member on several points arising from the presentation including the following:

- The newly established 'OneCovSquad' initiative and its anticipated benefits
- The use of interim staff in senior roles and associated pay grades
- Staff training in digital skills and ways of improving accessibility for staff of all abilities
- Apprenticeship programmes and the differences between them

Following consideration of the presentation and responses to questions, the Board requested the following:

- Details of the current number of management level interim posts and the associated pay grade
- Data on the 2 types of apprenticeships
- The average length of a secondment period

RESOLVED that the Board note details of the Staff Survey results and the proposed HR response to the findings and agreed to receive an update report on progress of the emerging HR plan at a future meeting.

33. **#CovConnects Update**

The Board received a briefing note and presentation on the #CovConnects initiative to connect with the people of Coventry to deliver the services they need and listen to them in order to keep improving.

The presentation set out information about:

- Principles of the programme
- Community connectivity
- Community skills initiatives
- #CovConnect Device Bank
- Case studies
- Digital reuse, repair and recycling
- Ongoing plans to scale up
- Older adults and digital inclusion
- Young people and families

The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member on several points arising from the presentation including the following:

- Funding streams from partners
- Exploring the extent of the current engagement with broadband partners
- Co-ordinating provision of equipment to schools
- Questions around any benefits realised from the City Council's arrangement with City Fibre

RESOLVED that the Board note the details in the presentation relating to the broader #CovConnects programme and agreed to receive a further report at a future meeting which would focus on partnerships and how they work in practice.

34. **Home to School Taxi Update**

The Board considered a briefing note which provided a background on the establishment and use of the home to school taxi service and an update on its review.

The current arrangement for home to school taxi provision was tendered under a Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) compliant, Open procedure, and commence on 01 July 2018 for a term not to exceed ten (10) years (up to 30 June 2028).

As a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), the arrangement allowed for providers to enter and leave the contractual arrangement during its term. There were currently 37 active providers on the DPS.

The briefing note set out how the arrangement worked, the role of the Passenger Transport Services (PTS) in reviewing applications, approving and amending routes and issuing new calls for competition, together with issues currently being faced by the PTS including short distance routes which were unattractive to providers and late or last-minute requests for transport.

There had been an increase of 26% in the number of children and young people being referred in the last five years, which had impacted on school taxi provision. Costs of the provision were set out in the briefing note, together with a list of the highest national daily transport costs for an individual pupil.

PTS were currently seeking to bring the more expensive routes back in house and details of those routes were set out in the briefing note.

The Board questioned officers and the Cabinet Member on several points arising from the presentation including the following:

- The use of taxi service fares rather than a flat fee
- Concerns that the current process did not provide best value for money
- The percentage of parents who transport their child to school, in response, Officers agreed to provide that information to Members

Following discussion, the Board agreed that, in order to further explore the issues raised, a Task and Finish Group be established to ensure that best value was being achieved.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- (a) Note the actions being undertaken in addressing the challenging costs of the home to school taxi service provision.**
- (b) Agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to review the current DPS arrangement in order to ensure best value for the home to school taxi service.**

35. Corporate Risk

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

36. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

It was agreed that the following items be added to the Work Programme:

- Update report on the Staff Survey – Speak Up, Speak Out (Minute 32 above)
- A further update report on #CovConnects (Minute 33 above)
- The establishment of a Task and Finish Group to look at best value in respect of the Home to School Taxi service (Minute 34 above).
- Corporate Risk (deferred from this meeting)

37. Any other items of Public Business

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 4.10 pm)