

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 13 October 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor J Mutton (Cabinet Member)
Councillor T Sawdon (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Other Members: Councillor J McNicholas (petition sponsor)

Employees:

Resources: R Greenslade, H Joyce, P Johnson, G Paddan,
S McGinty, A White

People: P Barnett, M McGinty

Public Business

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016 were signed as a true record.

Matters Arising – Minute number 5 refers: The Chair advised that he has spoken to Councillor Khan, Deputy Leader in respect of time taken in carrying out Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and it was agreed that a letter be sent. A letter has been drafted by Legal and will be signed by Councillor Khan. It was further agreed that this item be included in the Outstanding Issues report.

13. Petitions - Improve broadband speeds in New Stoke Village

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of Resources concerning two petitions which had been submitted to the City Council regarding the provision of superfast broadband in New Stoke Village. The first petition sponsored by Councillor McNicholas, bearing 26 signatures and the second petition was an e-petition with 80 signatures. Both petitions requested that the Council helps to improve the broadband speeds in New Stoke Village. Councillor McNicholas, a Lower Stoke Ward Councillor attended the meeting along with the petition organiser Mr Priestman and spoke on behalf of the petitioners.

The report noted that New Stoke Village is a new housing estate with ongoing building works on the site of the old Peugeot Plant. The initial build was started within the last 5 years. Despite the recent build, the ability to provide superfast broadband within the development was limited and average broadband speeds within the area were typically between 1 and 3.5MB/Sec.

Consultation with both BT/Openreach and Virginmedia have revealed that they currently have no plans to upgrade their services within the area to provide

superfast broadband. It was noted that the Council had very limited powers to influence broadband providers to upgrade their existing infrastructure to allow for the provision of superfast Broadband within areas such as New Stoke Village. Further work was underway with Coventry Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband partnership to submit two applications for external funding to improve broadband infrastructure in the City.

The report referred to the options considered and the discussion that have been undertaken with the main providers of superfast Broadband to residential premises in the UK. The Council is working towards publishing a Digital Strategy for Coventry, which has the vision to 'Make Coventry a Digital Place'.

Councillor McNicholas and the petition organiser drew attention to the need for improved broadband speed on new estates, as more people work from home and it was agreed that it would ultimately help to attract further investment in the City.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources:

- 1. Responds to the petition organisers encouraging residents of New Stoke Village to register their requirements for access to superfast broadband with local broadband providers (BT and Virginmedia).**
- 2. Reviews the Council's involvement in regional initiatives such as the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Broadband Partnership with a view to improving the coverage of Superfast Broadband in Coventry.**
- 3. Works with the Task and Finish groups of Scrutiny Boards 1 and 3, to meet with local Broadband suppliers (BT, Virginmedia, City fibre etc.) to explore further opportunities for the improvement of the Superfast Broadband infrastructure within Coventry.**

14. Q1 Cumulative Sickness Absence Report 2016-2017

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of Resources which provided information on the three month period of April – June 2016 cumulative sickness absence levels. The report enabled the Cabinet Member to monitor the levels of sickness absence for that period and the actions being taken to manage absence and promote health at work across the City Council.

The annual and quarterly information 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 that was previously required by the Audit Commission for annual Best Value Performance Indicator reporting. The City Council continues to use this method to ensure consistency with previously published data.

The report noted that on most occasions of sickness absence across the City Council in April – June 2016 the cause was Stomach, Liver and Gastroenteritis accounting for 716 occasions. The amount of time lost through Stomach, Liver and Gastroenteritis was 1,617.60 days. The amount of time lost through Stress, depression and Anxiety was 3,878.63 days, making it the highest cause of time

lost. However, it is not possible to differentiate between personal stress and work related stress. The second and third most prevalent reasons for time lost due to sickness absence were Other Musculo-Skeletal problems (3,450.61 days).

The data provided within Appendices 2 and 4 reflected each Directorates' performance and establishments. Appendix 5 showed the breakdown between frequent and long-term absence levels during 2015/2016. Training was being provided to managers to support dealing with both practical and procedural issues. This is an on-going programme of training which was taking place across the Council as a whole. It was confirmed that there were no outstanding casework from absence triggers generated from Quarter 1.

The report noted that the Mandatory Workplace Mental Wellbeing Audit Programme continued to be rolled out across the Council and schools. Further work was being undertaken to provide additional emotional support for Social Workers. Monthly 'mental Wellbeing Support Groups' continue currently for social workers in the Children's Social Care Team, enabling the social workers to address issues which had arisen for them from their case load in a facilitated meeting, to help avoid burn out. The application of the sickness absence management processes were continually reviewed to ensure compliance with the Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources notes the report providing sickness absence data for the 3 month period of April – June 2016 and endorse the actions taken to monitor and manage sickness.

15. **Agency Workers and Interim Managers – Performance Management Report Q1 (1 April to 30 June 2016)**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of Resources which provided performance information on the use of agency workers procured through the Master Vendor Contract for the Q1 period 1 April to 30 June 2016; to compare Q1 2016/17 with Q4 2015/16 expenditure. To also consider Interim manager and other agency worker spends for the same period.

The Master Vendor contract required all agency workers to be ordered through the Master Vendor, Pertemps and came into force on 2 December 2013 for a period of three years with the option of a one year extension. The Master Vendor would supply all suitable agency workers through their own agency or through 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 the Master Vendor on the agency spends provided detailed information on agency worker usage and spends.

The information provided showed a small increase in spend this quarter of £30,511 (1.8%) due to ongoing vacancies however, this should show some reduction during the next quarter as the service continues to recruit permanent, experienced social workers. The ongoing recruitment campaign was attracting social workers to Coventry with some agency workers opting to take on permanent roles with the service.

The report set out the steps that the Council was taking to reduce expenditure on agency workers, particularly in those areas where they were used most intensively.

The quarterly monitoring of expenditure on agency workers will continue throughout the contract. The cost of agency workers for the current reporting period from the Pertemps system was £1,934,213 which equated to 4.8% of the overall wage bill for this quarter (excluding schools).

Members present gave consideration to an option of establishing a Coventry City staff pool to reduce the number of agency social workers; to provide appropriate levels of service at a reasonable cost.

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

- 1. Approves monitoring processes to continue for both Agency workers and Interim Managers**
- 2. Endorses compliance with the corporate policy on the recruitment of Temporary Agency Workers through the Master Vendor, Pertemps.**
- 3. Instruct officers to continue to work towards reducing expenditure on the use of agency workers.**
- 4. Instructs officers to use the Pertemps Master Vendor contract except when Pertemps have not been able to supply appropriate staff.**

16. Transition Fund Awards

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Executive Director of Resources on the Transition Fund Award. As part of the 2015/16 budget setting process the Council agreed to establish a one-off £500k Transition Fund to support work with residents and communities in developing new approaches to delivering Council services. Following a merger of this fund with the Community Grant Fund, the Transition Fund was increased to £525k.

The Transition Fund was a key enabler for delivery of the Connecting Communities approach. Connecting Communities was an ambitious and wide reaching approach to radically redesign services through co-production and collaboration with local communities. The approach focuses on how services might be delivered differently in the future in the communities and neighbourhoods where there was most need and within the resources available.

The criteria for final award of Transition Funding included the need for a clear plan for the proposal to deliver long-term cost savings to the Council as well as being required to fit with the principles of the Connecting Communities programme approach. Initial expressions of interest in the Transition Fund were sought during the consultation process on Phase One of Connecting Communities.

One Transition Fund award was approved in June 2016 (Cabinet Member decision of 21 July 2016 refers). Following expression of interest and business case evaluation processes, officers sought approval for a further award from the Transition Fund, again to the total value of a maximum of £20,000. This award would enable the delivery of one proposal that formed a part of Phase One of Connecting Communities, as agreed by Cabinet on 23 February 2016.

The award would support Holbrooks Community Care Association to accommodate alternative library provision, following Cabinet's decision to end delivery of library services at Arena Park Library. The Cabinet decision of 26 November 2015 gave delegated authority to the Executive Director of Resources in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources to take decisions on Transition Fund awards where the matter was urgent or where lower risk/value opportunities were identified. The Council will monitor delivery progress against a project plan, developed with the organisation and the project will be subject to a review after an agreed period to ensure appropriate outcomes are achieved.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources; notes the decision that the Executive Director for Resources has already made in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources, under delegated authority, to make an award from the Transition Fund to Holbrooks Community Care Association up to the value of £20,000.

17. **Outstanding Issues Report**

The Cabinet Member noted a report of the Executive Director of Resources that identified those issues on which further reports had been requested and were outstanding, so that progress could be monitored.

18. **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 urgent items of business.

(Meeting closed at 11.10am)