

Cabinet Member Briefing – The Internal Services portfolio

Introduction

The Resources and Transformation Directorate are the ‘engine room’ of the Council. We deliver the services which enable the Council to deliver on its plans, strategies and pledges safely, efficiently and effectively, as well as owning the management of the Council’s finances, physical and human resources, ensuring robust governance and supporting and enabling the democratic process.

There are 750.4 FTE staff within the Directorate, of which many are employed in our operational corporate landlord services and in our Council-wide business administration function.

We are at the heart of driving innovation and change throughout the Council, through the PROUD transformation programme and our Transformation and Digital Services, and in ensuring that we have a healthy organisational culture and a diverse and skilled workforce to deliver on the Council’s and partner’s ambitions for Walsall in 2040. We pride ourselves on being innovative and solution focussed and on playing our part in Walsall’s future.

Our Service Delivery

i) Human Resources, Organisational Development and Business Support

This service area underpins the delivery of our PROUD promises by ensuring that we have an effective and diverse workforce, as well as overseeing the delivery of the Council’s Business Administration function. During the current year we have finalised and published our Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development (OD) Strategies which will be the building blocks for our work on equality and diversity, culture, recruitment, skills and retention of the people we need to fulfil our ambitions as a Council.

Workforce equality is very important to us and we are working alongside the Policy and Strategy Team to develop the Council’s new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy. We are proud to report that our gender pay gap is nil (0%) although we recognise that more work needs to be done to improve the representation of BME and Disabled staff within our workforce. To this end, we offer targeted bespoke management development to BME staff, which we are looking to extend to other groups, and have recruited and trained 20 EDI champions to work within the services and alongside our recently appointed Senior EDI Advisor to progress our equalities work.

This year, we have continued our work to improve our Integrated HR, Finance and Payroll systems, and in November launched our new recruitment module which introduces anonymised selection and makes the application process simpler for potential candidates. To support our approach to hybrid working for many of our staff, we introduced a Ways of Working Policy which provides guidance and clarity of expectation to managers and employees.

A dedicated Organisational Development (OD) function was launched in July 2023, to support our development of the workforce for the future. A significant number of development resources are now available online, the corporate induction programme has been re-invigorated, leadership and management development has been re-focussed and improved and coaching and mentoring is now available to anyone within the Council. Our Connected Working team are delivering bespoke coaching and training to services to develop high performing teams.

A Walsall apprentice recently won a prestigious national apprenticeship award and this year we have introduced a supported internship programme to help some of our more disadvantaged young people in to work.

Admin and Business Support (ABS) is a key component of the Council's Enabling and Support Services, delivering critical back-office functions that enable the Council to complete its statutory duties and provide support to customer facing services. The service has centralised business support activity from across the Council, which has removed duplication, introduced consistent processes as well as new and improved ways of working which have made significant efficiencies and given back capacity to those delivering front line services to residents. ABS also deliver the Blue Badge Assessment service and HR Employment Services.

ii) Finance, Assurance and Corporate Landlord

Our finance function is responsible for our stewardship of the Council's capital and revenue finance, including grants, treasury management and outside bodies. Their functions include preparing our statutory accounts, overseeing the budget setting process, medium term financial planning, audit and assurance and technical accountancy including VAT and the collection fund. This service area is headed up by the Council's statutory Section 151 officer. As a Council we administer the legacy funds for the Black Country LEP, we also support the effective use of external grants such as the Towns and Levelling Up Funds.

We have once again received a positive report from our external auditors on our effective financial management and value for money arrangements, which were also commented upon during the recent Peer Challenge. Since 2010, the Finance function has supported the safe delivery of over £225m in savings, allowing us to maintain a sustainable financial position despite significant reductions in funding over that period. In doing so, we work closely alongside managers, who have delegated responsibility for managing their budgets, and have developed a suite of tools, training, principles and standards and have this year launched our 'Beyond' financial reporting portal.

This year, the finance team were finalists at the Public Finance 'Finance Team of the Year' awards.

Our corporate landlord function incorporates both strategic property and estates management and our 'Soft FM' services of catering, cleaning, caretaking, security, and the post room. Work in the 'Hard FM' area includes delivering the Council's Strategic Asset Plan, including rationalising the corporate estate, reducing carbon emissions, facilitating regeneration through strategic asset management, generating capital receipts and using our properties to generate income; we have recently let the third floor of the town hall to WMP at a market rent. On the 'Soft FM' side we have significantly increased our trading income from selling these services, have delivered considerable operational efficiencies and are currently looking at a number of further income generation opportunities through our in-house catering, venues and facilities.

iii) Legal and Governance

Our legal and governance services give and commission robust legal advice and guidance to support the safe and effective governance of the organisation and delivery of services. They also administer local and national elections and oversee the effective operation of local democracy in Walsall.

The team has led, with other local authorities, on obtaining a landmark ruling from the Supreme Court to allow us to continue to take out injunctions in relation to car cruising and

travellers. We are also working very closely with Adult Social Care to manage and reduce outstanding debt and put in procedures to prevent such debt occurring in the future.

This year the elections team have implemented a new elections system which will streamline processes and improve the experience for poll staff and candidates. They are also working through significant changes to the electoral process which will need to be in place for the local, and potentially national elections taking place this year.

Our legal team are taking a lead role in the steering group for the development and implementation of the proposed single framework for the procurement and call off of a full spectrum of care, support and accommodation services for adult and children's social care clients.

iv) Transformation and Digital

The DaTS Service consists of Digital Delivery and Digital Operations. The purpose of our service is to enable the Council to maximise the use of technology to modernise and streamline services.

This includes making sure that appropriate IT systems are chosen and implemented effectively and that applications are developed to support business needs. Our ICT business partners work with services to identify needs and develop solutions and our network of Digital Champions, within services, provide user advice and guidance.

We run a customer service desk (telephone, online and self-service) to help users with technical queries and maintain the Council's entire ICT infrastructure from end user devices (e.g. laptops) through to telephony, networks and the maintenance of key services, including in the event of an emergency. We also maintain robust arrangements to protect the Council's cyber security from what are an increasing number of external attacks.

Our information governance team ensures the council maintains and improves on our data protection compliance and reporting obligations while upholding the legal information rights of all data subjects. They provide information, advice and training to all of our staff to protect the privacy of our staff and service users and protect the Council from breaches which could lead to heavy fines and a loss of public confidence.

The Digital and Transformation service also includes the Corporate Programme Management Office, responsible for overseeing the governance and delivery of the PROUD transformation programme. They provide a change centre of excellence and a robust way of not only tracking and ensuring delivery but also providing challenge and innovation across a portfolio of transformational projects that will drive the future shape of the Council and its service delivery.

Ensuring that the data we capture, process and store is held safely and securely is another function within Transformation and Digital. The Information Governance Team provides advice and guidance on Data Protection Act legislation and ensures that any breaches are investigated and reported appropriately, with any lessons learnt fed back into the service. The team supports the introduction of new systems and processes by ensuring services apply privacy by design principles and provide a Data Protection Officer service to a range of Walsall Schools.

Our Strategies

- Organisational Development Strategy

- Workforce Strategy
- Employment Policies Framework
- Finance oversees finance delegation and rules, including a suite of documents which in total ensure the councils remains financially resilient including the Medium Term Financial Framework, the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy.
- Corporate Risk Management Strategy.
- Counter Fraud Policy and Response Plan.
- CIPFA financial management code.
- SAST – Stop, Automate, Standardise, Transform.
- Digital Strategy 2023-2025.
- Technology Framework 2024-2028 (Draft).
- Information Governance Policy and framework of procedures, standards, and guidance.

Our Projects

- This year, we were proud to be instrumental in progressing a number of the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge from January until the revisit in November. This included noted progress on culture, EDI and the 'Walsall Pound'.
- We are well into year one delivery of the Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development Strategy (2023-2026) that ensures we have an inclusive workplace culture and future fit diverse and talented workforce.
- We continue to support organisational culture change and will deliver project initiatives and associated action plans in response to and informed by the Employee Survey 2023.
- In order to effectively support the business and directorates with the delivery of the Proud promises, service transformation plans and long-term workforce strategies, we are reviewing and improving our use of HR data insights to better inform decision making and delivery, including workforce profiling data, leavers exit data and recruitment and selection data.
- As part of our EDI action plan, we are launching a number of new initiatives this year including; anonymised recruitment and selection, a new neurodiversity policy, a review of the EDI learning available, a new transgender and non-binary equality policy, the relaunch of our equalities champions and development of a framework for employee networks – all of which are pivotal in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, identifying and removing barriers for those with protected characteristics, and supporting an inclusive workplace culture that allows us to capitalise on the benefits of diversity.
- Further using technology to improve how A&BS activities are undertaken including Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- Continuing to ensure our 4 year medium term financial plan is in a balanced position.
- Ensuring our 2023/24 annual Statement of Accounts, are delivered within the statutory deadline required and following the completion of external audit, receives an unqualified opinion.
- Supporting implementation of statutory guidance for local authorities on the Best Value Duty.
- Supporting implementation of the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code.

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- Ensuring that we are ready to deliver multiple elections to the new legislative requirements.
- Reviewing our internal governance so that it is efficient and effective, in line with the recommendations of the CPC.
- Continuing to progress the R&T elements of the PROUD programme, including (but by no means exclusively) improving efficiency through automation, improving support to front line services through our business partnering programme, supporting innovation and channel shift in the Customer Experience Centre through the delivery of the Core Technology Platform, ChatBots and Walsall Connected and supporting commercialisation, income generation and a reduction in third party spend.

Future Works

2024 and beyond is an exciting time for Resources and Transformation. With a number of the key pillars now in place and a new Chief Executive in post, there are significant opportunities to work across the Council to deliver our ambitions for the future. This will include:

- Setting the Council's ambitions down in the form of a new Council Plan, building on what residents have already told us is important to them in the WAW2040 Strategy. This will sit alongside a new performance framework and the opportunity to set our own vision for the next stage of the Council's transformation, building on successes of recent years.
- Developing a new approach to our budget setting, focussing on business intelligence, delivering the Council plan and pledges, transformation, innovation and engagement throughout the year and with more involvement from elected members.
- Building on the soon to be launched EDI Strategy to improve our workforce representation, re-invigorate our staff networks, celebrate diversity and improve recruitment and retention.
- Develop a new employee benefits package and employee wellbeing offer to support recruitment and retention.
- Design bespoke talent strategies and career pathways to focus on attracting and retaining staff to hard to recruit areas.
- Support members, the Chief Executive and senior managers in a senior restructure and recruitment to add stability to the organisation.
- Having recently taken on the Procurement and Contract Management Function, begin to deliver an improvement plan which will positively impact on service delivery, cost efficiency and levels of social value delivery, including a sharper focus on the 'Walsall Pound'.
- Continue the implementation of new forecasting software for finance and budget holders, with the aim of supporting the effective delivery of budget management at all levels of the organisation and extending this dashboard to include HR and performance information.
- Continue to support on the improvement of demand-led forecasting, including the development of Power Bi graphs to improve the visualisation of the data, improved reporting and automation / improvements to processes.
- Continue to develop tools and information to ensure managers and members are equipped to deliver their responsibilities in line with the CIPFA Financial Management Code.
- Continue to support delivery of improvements to the OneSource system, supporting self-serve, identifying efficiencies and improving the employee experience.
- Support Children's Services with a Department for Education (DfE) new pilot scheme which will be running from January 2024 and March 2025 aimed at reducing delays in public law proceedings in the family court. This will be a new funding opportunity for the

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Local Authority and our partner authorities across the Black Country, Telford and Shropshire.

- Review and implement measures to improve safety within the building, including CCTV.
- Review the arrangements for the personal safety of our elected members, in conjunction with the police.
- Continue to develop opportunities for member development and training.

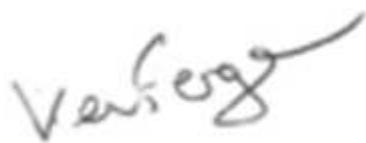
Thank You

This portfolio report provides me with the opportunity to thank all staff most sincerely for their commitment and efforts over the past 12 months.

- Human Resources
- Organisational Development
- Administration and Business Support
- Transformation and Change
- Digital and Technology Services
- Information Governance
- Finance, Corporate Performance and Corporate Landlord
- Legal and Democratic Services

These services are often invisible and go un-noticed, but they are increasingly important to us all.

Signed



Ken Ferguson
Portfolio Holder – Internal Services