

Council – February 2022
Report of Councillor M Statham – Portfolio Holder, Internal Services

1. Introduction

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

2. Report Detail

The services covered by the Portfolio are listed below:

Human Resources
Organisation Development
Learning and Development
Equalities
Procurement
Corporate Landlord including facilities and general asset management
Catering, cleaning and caretaking
Administration and business support
Workforce

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

3. Human Resources

To support the Employment Appeals Sub Committee, we have delivered a successful training programme to Committee Members to aid their understanding of employment law.

We have recruited to a new Connected Working team, including a Lead Coach and a number of Coaches.

During a particularly challenging time, dealing with the pandemic, we have successfully gone “live” with the new integrated HR, Finance and Payroll system.

A number of the team have undertaken and qualified as accredited Mediators.

It has been a busy year for recruitment despite the pandemic the table shows the adverts which have been processed in the past year.

Adverts processed from 1st February 2021 to 11th February 2022			
Corporate Adverts	School Adverts	External Adverts	Current Adverts (awaiting processing)
462	840	97	20

plays in this to embed our values. We will 'maximise our leadership capability' through understanding and facilitating our talent and development opportunities. By 'maximising our organisational capability' we will be able to see and build the capabilities that are important for a future-fit workforce, supported by an enhanced set of OD tools, interventions and approaches. Finally our focus on 'creating positive customer experiences' our internal workforce will be more engaged, utilising simplified processes as part of the employee life cycle.

Specific activity as part of this includes re-focussing our change champions network to ensure they are enabled and developed in a way that maximises the impact that they have.

We have recruited to a new Connected Working team, including a Lead Coach and a number of Coaches who will facilitate driving the OD agenda and supporting teams to work more effectively.

We have reviewed and re-aligned our partnership with Odyssey to support building a future focused work programme for our leadership teams to support the next phase of Proud and BAU change activity.

5. Learning and Development

Our Apprenticeship programme has continued to go from strength to strength, offering young people the ability to access employment opportunities with quality training attached and our internal workforce the ability to gain the skills needed for future roles. During 2021/22 there were 175 apprentices on programme corporately and 193 on programme from our maintained schools. The types of apprenticeships being undertaken are directly linked to our strategic workforce priorities, offering us the ability to 'grow our own', this is really important in this 'tight' recruitment market. The Programme was awarded "highly commended" in the 2021 PPMA (Excellence in People Management awards). In addition, one of our Apprentices was runner up in the Municipal Journal, Rising Start category.

Our cohort of Mental Health First Aiders have continued to offer support to the workforce experiencing a mental health crisis or just struggling with balancing the needs of work and home life and this has been particularly important during the pandemic. The Programme and associated training in both Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Prevention has also been awarded "highly commended" in the 2021 PPMA (Excellence in People Management awards).

The HR Team have been instrumental in developing an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion action plan for the Council with the aim of building a truly representative and inclusive workforce. This has included running Career Development Workshops for under-represented groups with the aim of supporting them to elevate their careers as well as sponsoring individuals on regional development programmes such as the West Midlands Employers Breaking Through and Allyship Programmes. Other work has included reviewing key policies and procedures for fairness, bias and best practice.

The L&D Team have facilitated monthly meetings of senior leaders across the organisation (known as SMG), providing an opportunity to develop key skills, knowledge and behaviours in order to better lead the organisation to achieve its corporate strategic priorities. In 2022, this forum will be developed further as the vehicle for 'bringing to life' our organisational development ambitions.

In 2021, our second cohort of Proud Managers (our in-house management development programme) successfully completed their studies. The programme is ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management) endorsed at level 5. Cohort 3 also commenced on programme.

Throughout 2020/21, the L&D Team have implemented the Council's new ERP system, One Source to systemise aspects of Learning and Development (training) and Performance Management (appraisals). Alongside this, the pandemic has required the Team to demonstrate agility and flexibility, converting its learning offer to one of a blended/digital one. This has required them to acquire new skills/competencies, demonstrate tenacity and professionalism.

Our Recruitment Team similarly have implemented the Council's new ERP system, One Source (Taleo) to systemise aspects of Recruitment. They have continued to train managers in best practice recruitment virtually using MS Teams. They have built a candidate experience survey to inform future recruitment and selection policy and procedures and have invested further in their own learning and development including acquiring NLP and Certificate in Recruitment Practice qualifications.

The L&D Team has continued to ensure there is a credible learning offer for the workforce including:

- management development,
- core skills qualifications,
- coaching,
- profiling
- learning to keep the workforce and customers safe
- de-escalation training,
- key health and safety training
- training to meet the needs and expectations of external bodies such as CQC and the Social Work KSB framework and continuing professional development.
- Information Governance

6. Equalities

Corporate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The Council's EDI team continues to provide corporate advice and guidance as part of the Resilient Communities function. In 2021, the team has focused on the following priorities:

- re-defining the aims of the Corporate Equality Group
- review of compliance reporting (Equality Act)
- accessible communication
- corporate training
- raising awareness and staff communication

Corporate Equality Group – new terms of reference

In 2021, The EDI service supported the *Corporate Equality Group (CEG)* in adopting the new terms of reference and reviewing the roles/membership. The focus is on developing CEG as a forum where 'lived experiences are shared' and 'protected' discussions take place with a view to identify gaps and reduce inequalities experienced by workforce and customers. The traditional compliance role of CEG has moved to CMT, with EDI preparing quarterly compliance reports jointly with HR and Equality Champions. This means that improvements required are sponsored by senior leadership and are resolved promptly in different parts of the organisation.

Several other changes were adopted, including the terminology – CEG adopted the term 'under-represented groups' in references to broad inequalities agenda, ceased the use of the term BAME and advises to use the term 'Black and minority ethnic groups' in full. The council also adopted the term Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – (EDI) and this will replace the Equalities or E&D terminology in all our communication.

Workforce Equalities

We have developed a workforce equality action plan, which aims to attract, retain and develop our workforce all across under-represented groups. The goal is to be representative of our communities throughout the organisation. We are pleased that we have staff who are delegates on the 1st Breakthrough Programme (a career development programme) and the Allyship Programme (for senior managers to support ED&I), these programmes are run by West Midlands Employers in partnership with Bristol University.

Statutory duties (Equality Act 2010)

The Council has met its statutory obligation and published the *Equality Information and Objectives report 2022* on 31 January 2022. This is a self-assessment report required by law and audited by Equality and Human Rights Commission. This years' report highlighted incredible achievements in supporting EDI for Walsall residents and communities, showcasing how each directorate adopted to new circumstances, providing support face to face or online, keeping services for our families, children and communities accessible, and often providing the vital emergency support. This would not be possible without the strength of the diverse community and voluntary sector networks the council had built and well as the representative workforce. Our efforts in the area of EDI were recognised on the national level receiving recognition from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), MJ Awards and BAME apprenticeship network.

EDI service continues to provide advice, guidance and assurance on *Equality Impact Assessments* linked to key decisions affecting local people and staff. They carried out the cumulative impact assessment analysis of 2022/23 budget proposals, measuring impact on our staff and communities. This has resulted in a mitigation plan overseen by EDI team, Equality Champions and CMT. The report is publically available as part of the Budget 2022/23 communications.

Accessible communication

Work is also well advanced on embedding our Interpretation, Translation, Transcription and Easy Read (ITTE) contract ensuring it has adapted to new circumstances, e.g. remote communication. The Council has a legal obligation under the Equality Act to provide accessible communication and make reasonable adjustments so people can access its services. During the pandemic, the provider triggered the remote interpretation services very promptly with no disruption to council staff or customers. The annual 2021 monitoring report shows a slight reduction in the use of the service by 2.5%. In terms of utilisation, 47 languages were requested through 3,681 bookings and 45% of those were fulfilled through remote (video or phone) interpretation. The most frequently requested languages were Urdu, Polish, Czech, Punjabi and Romanian. The full analysis of the impact, including the use of British Sign Language and other alternative formats was shared with the directorates.

Corporate Training

The EDI service supported the Council's Learning and Development Team in providing training online in 3 different methods: self-guided EDI learning for front-line staff and managers, EDI induction for all starters and more in-depth *Equally Yours* training tailored to groups (from the same team or across several disciplines). During the pandemic, *Equally Yours* learning tool was modified to allow for virtual interaction. We currently have a small number of internal staff trained to deliver this innovative format and due to its success, we were asked to showcase it to Walsall College and Manor Hospital training their workforces and receiving positive feedback.

EDI Communication

The Equality and Diversity team currently chairs the West Midlands Local Authority Equality Network (WMLAEN). This is a sector led group, sharing EDI best practice and resources. Through WMLAEN we are currently taking part in the West Midlands Race Equality Taskforce and providing feedback to WMCA on their Equality Scheme 2022-24.

The Council continues to be a member of *Walsall for All* partnership engaging our diverse workforce in key community led events. In 2021, our staff took part in celebrating the International Women's Day, South Asian Heritage Month, Walsall Pride, Mental Health Awareness, Covid-19 Community Champions, Black History Month, Inter-faith week and St Nicholas Day.

7. Procurement

The Procurement team continue to provide effective and efficient specialist procurement support to ensure that the council's underpinning contracts are procured in a compliant manner and that value for money is achieved across the council's business.

During the last 12 months the team have focussed on a more strategic approach through the continuation of the work of the Third Party Spend Board. The key objectives of the board are to:

- Ensure a 'One Council' view of external spend.
- Develop opportunities for cross council initiatives which avoid duplication, ensure improved outcomes, and deliver value for money and savings
- Ensure that Social Value is at the forefront of everything we do and that the Walsall Pound, wherever possible, is kept in Walsall.

This work will continue with a forthcoming review of the council's procurement processes in order to ensure that an appropriate emphasis on social value is present in every tender opportunity.

The team has commenced the process of developing stronger links with local businesses by:

Target Pre-procurement Market Engagement

Targeted pre-market engagement events have taken place to encourage applications from the local marketplace which has improved opportunity for local suppliers to compete for Council's contracts on more of a level playing field.

Engagement with Walsall SME Businesses

Provision of procurement advice, guidance and support through engagement events with the Federation of Small Business, 'Walsall Works' and One Walsall. This has resulted in a **12.5% increase** in local suppliers registering on the Council's e-procurement portal 'In-Tend'. Increased awareness of the Council's contracting opportunities through an automated alert function whenever the Council publishes a contract opportunity.

Greater focus on meeting 'Local' need by encouraging 'Localism' to be embedded within contract specifications from the design stage of the project.

Support for Local SME's by increasing emphasis on 'social innovation' across the commissioning landscape wherever possible and appropriate to do so.

Promote 'Purchase Local' by the Promotion of opportunities to 'Purchase Local' for 'Minor' contracts (up to £25k), in accordance with statutory and regulatory requirements.

Workforce and Market development by educating and upskilling our workforce to better understand and fulfil the Council's Social Value objectives. Educate and develop our local marketplace and key suppliers to better understand and fulfil the Council's Social Value objectives.

8. Corporate Landlord including Facilities Management and General Asset Management

Hard FM (Repairs and Compliance)

Over the past 12 months the team have been working closely with procurement colleagues preparing and tendering for a new batch of maintenance contracts, the result of which will be a long term solution with up to 5 years contract period to enable relationship and continuity in the services provided. The number of contracts have been reduced to seventeen from the twenty four previous ones. Of these contracts 8 have been successfully procured, two are being presented to cabinet and three are currently out to tender, the remaining contracts are being finalised to go out to tender. The procurements have been through Open Tender to enable the local supplier chains in Walsall and across the West Midlands the opportunity to tender for the contracts with a specific focus within the criteria on social value.

The existing energy contract is coming to an end, and the option to extend the existing arrangement with the current supplier has been agreed, this will allow adequate time to review and develop what is required of the ongoing utility requirement within Walsall.

The building condition surveys for the Council portfolio are currently being undertaken and on completion this information will be used to assist in developing the long term asset strategy for the corporate estate.

The remote working of council staff has enabled the council house and town hall to undergo a complete rewire, including the replacement of the distribution systems and installation of energy efficient equipment.

Other areas of improvements within the corporate buildings include long standing maintenance issues and energy efficient improvements, replacement lighting, resolving long standing water leaks and general décor improvements.

Finally the FM team have continued to monitor and implement any requirements from Public Health and central government in regards to the Covid outbreak and the specific direction. This has enabled the Civic and Council house to remain a safe place of work for staff needing to work from the offices.

The long term vision is to utilise the information from the building stock condition surveys and new maintenance contracts to identify where and how the available budgets are spent to maximise the results and value for money. This will ensure

that the staff and visitors to the council owned or occupied properties remain safe and compliant.

This will also feed into the implementation of the Strategic Asset Plan and the changes to our corporate estate moving forward in our continued and new ways of working and the Corporate Landlord team will evolve with this changing landscape to ensure a fit for purpose service offer as this is implemented throughout 2022/23.

Energy

Corporate Landlord in conjunction with colleagues in Clean and Green are progressing the Net Zero Carbon agenda and arranging to incorporate the requirements into all undertakings across the corporate estate. Arrangements have been made for cross directorate meetings and engagement to further progress this important agenda.

Security / Curatorial (Re-naming to Corporate Landlord property services team)

The team are constantly working to meet the needs of the changing office requirements / blended working plans and assist with moves, security, health and safety changes within the corporate buildings, they are merging into couriers / post room and also caretakers assisting to deliver services impacted by Covid .

School Crossing Patrol Wardens

We are currently awaiting a survey of all crossing facilities and their categorisation from Road Safety which, due to Covid, has been delayed.

Further discussions will take place following the outcome of the survey as to how Soft FM and Road Safety can work closely together to improve the current arrangement of this service from a recruitment, training, HR, deployment perspective and from a managing the crossing facilities, categorisation, incidents and monitoring perspective as stipulated by Road Safety Great Britain.

9. Catering, Cleaning and Caretaking

Catering

Catering has delivered a sterling service throughout the pandemic that has seen external catering companies fail to deliver services and has at times fulfilled catering requirements for schools not in contract with us. Catering have worked with education risk assessments to continue to deliver hot meals where possible throughout.

Crisis families in some schools receive any food remaining after lunchtime service as a 'takeaway' for their evening meal.

We continue to seek ICT improvements and developments and have requested funding to purchase technologies to assist with supplier communication, ordering and the safe management of allergens.

All employees have been offered 1-2-1 training on One Source and the majority are now using the system.

75% of the frontline team have attended annual training in November and December and plans are in place for the remaining 25% to complete training as planned.

Adverts for 2 x Contract managers have gone externally and an internal advert for the Health and Safety Manager are all out as part of the Corporate Landlord Phase 2 restructure.

Cleaning and Caretaking

Cleaning and caretaking are continually improving. Throughout the pandemic both teams have provided additional cover and a variety of additional duties for schools and corporate teams, despite the sickness and Covid issues faced by the service.

At present we have caretakers seconded into providing a frontline lead for Public Health on lateral flow testing and also vaccinations. Caretakers and drivers continue to deliver food parcels where required due to Covid.

We are using our success and continuation of service delivery throughout the pandemic as a focal selling point to seek / gain further contracts within Walsall.

Duty cleaners are in the majority of premises providing additional cleanliness and hygiene to our employees and pupils within Walsall Schools.

10. Administration and Business Support

The Walsall Proud Programme outlined a range of opportunities for improvements in service provision, quality and financial benefits across the Council. A key component of this was the opportunities associated with the Council's Enabling and Support Services. These are critical back office functions that enable the Council to complete its statutory duties and provide adequate support to customer facing services.

A key success feature of this was the launch of a new Administration and Business Support (A&BS) service in April 2021, which forms part of HR, OD & Admin within the Resources & Transformation directorate. By centralising admin activity from across the Council, the service has removed duplication, introduced consistent processes and new and improved ways of working which will be underpinned by technology to improve how A&BS activities are undertaken.

The benefits resulting from the new A&BS service are:

- **Improved resilience** – due to the introduction of consistent role profiles resources can be deployed to meet demand creating a resilient team that can handle increased activity. This has removed single points of failure as the team share knowledge so are able to cover priority support activities in times of high demand or absences.
- **Professionalisation of service** – the introduction of clear management structures and service level agreements encourage an improved level of performance. This is enhanced by a clear service menu outlining what A&BS activity is with agreed key performance indicators.
- **Release of capacity** – by centralising dispersed admin activity this releases non-admin staff to focus on their core role and function which will support services to achieve their cashable and non-cashable benefits. Achieving benefits is not just about cashable savings but about achieving the benefit which can be cashable or non-cashable, the latter allowing the service to be more productive to achieve benefits by allowing the service to focus on their core activities which will in turn improve the services to enable future cashable savings to be achieved.

Financial benefit targets for A&BS was £550k which has been achieved as a result of creating an A&BS service with further benefit savings planned from centralising dispersed admin activity during 22/23 enabling services to focus on their core function.

The service continues to explore opportunities for use of technology to improve and streamline the service offer. A Power App is being developed to support Adult Social Care, Infection Protection Control within care homes which will be implemented over the coming months; integration of Clean & Green Fleet Services system with One Source; E-Forms to request raising of invoices/orders.

During 2022/23 the service will work with directorates to support their achievement of their Service Transformation Plans.

11. **Print & Design**

Print and Design continues to operate in an agile way often responding to urgent requirements connected to the pandemic. Covid advice and guidance materials have been produced throughout the year to ensure that Walsall residents and the Council's workforce have access to up to date information and to support the Borough's vaccination programme.

Print & Design has adapted well to new ways of working, combining a presence of the print shop floor with a remote working approach to the design phase. A virtual reception/front door has been successfully established for internal service requests.

Service improvements have been implemented through the use of new printer technology and additional opportunities for income generation are being actively explored.

The team continues to support services across the Council, for example, producing documentation for the upcoming Elections.