

Council – 13th April 2015

Portfolio holder report - Personnel and business support

People

The Council has had to make some difficult choices as part of the budget reductions and more difficult choices lie ahead. These choices will impact on our staff and the portfolio will do all it can to minimise the human cost of these decisions and we will provide advice and support to Managers and staff going forward.

From the 1st April 2015 the Council introduced the Living Wage into the Council and all staff will earn the Living Wage or above. Ensuring we treat our staff fairly is a top priority for the portfolio and the creation of a Personnel Committee to formalise and regularise dealing with those staffing matters has been established. The Personnel committee has overseen the introduction of a range of policies ensuring they are fit for purpose, legally compliant and easily understood by staff and managers.

Recent updating of policies include:

- Redundancy Procedure
- Relocation Procedure
- Redeployment Procedure
- Grievance procedure
- Right to Request Flexible working Procedure
- Family Friendly Working Procedures (Maternity, Paternity etc)
- Agile Working (more flexible working)
- Holiday Pay

In addition Safety Management Standards have been updated for Fire, Noise, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Radiation and Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment (LOLER).

The Recruit-Ability programme offers 12 month paid work experience placements within the Council to people with disabilities. This scheme is always well received and remains a priority. Our commitment to the Living Wage includes the Recruit- Ability scheme.

As from 2015 we now offer all ex-forces candidate's a guaranteed interview if they meet the essential requirements for a job.

Audit Legal and Governance

Professor Steve Leach of De Montfort University, is currently undertaking a review of the councils scrutiny process. He has been observing Panels and meeting Members since 10 March. He will be based in Walsall on the 13, 14 and 15 April conducting in depth interviews with Senior Councillors, Members and Partners. Once completed Professor Leach will produce a report on his findings and make recommendations on the future of scrutiny in Walsall. Professor Leach is a recognised expert in local government politics and decision making structures.

The Audit service has been redesigned, saving 17% of its overall budget; and is going into 2015/16 equipped with a flatter and leaner structure of qualified / experienced staff ready to meet the assurance needs of the organisation going forward. The team have to date, issued 129 audit reports in 2014/15, including recommendations for improving systems to drive operational change and add significant value to the business.

As well as planned audits, the service has successfully responded to 10 whistleblower's complaints, demonstrating the effectiveness of the whistleblowing policy and the organisation's commitment to seriously addressing concerns when they are raised.

The Council's external auditor's, Grant Thornton, concluded in 2014/15 that 'the Internal Audit service continues to provide an independent and satisfactory service to the Council and that internal audit work contributes to an effective internal control environment at the Council'.

Internal Audit undertook a comprehensive review of the Council's corporate governance in 2014/15, concluding that the council operated a generally sound system of internal control in this area. This was supported by an independent piece of work commissioned from Grant Thornton.

The Audit Committee also had a productive year. In 2014/15, it successfully appointed 2 new independent members, bringing the independent membership on Audit Committee to a total of 3, in line with good practice. It further went on to appoint one of the independents as Chair in September 2015. The Audit Committee has undertaken a successful programme of work, demonstrating to the residents of the borough, the Council's stakeholders and partners as well as other elected members, the importance of its role and the positive contribution it makes to the Council's overall governance arrangements and the delivery of the council's objectives.

Electoral Services have just completed a refresh of Personal identifiers for absent voters whose signatures are over five years old. Each January the council is required to write to all absent voters (proxy and postal voters) to request that they renew their personal identifiers. The council sends an initial form, a reminder and then a cancellation notice if absent voters do not respond. Along with the cancellation notice the council includes a fresh application.

There has been an increase in **Freedom of Information Requests** from 946 in 2011 to 1608 in 2014 with an expectation of further increases. We have responded to this increase by doing things differently and we are currently running a successful pilot within Money Home Job which has devolved responsibility for simpler requests to the service with the central team offering advice and support on more complex cases.

The legal team are focusing on delivering a value for money professional service. The development of our legal staff is key and a continued priority as we are developing our relationship with external organisations. We are exploring sharing opportunities with our neighbours, and already belong to the largest public sector legal services purchasing Consortium in the country which achieves significant savings for the authority and we are providing professional support to other authorities around governance arrangements. Notable recent successes include creating one of the first Joint Executive Committees on behalf of the four Black Country councils bringing in over £100million worth of government grant funding to the Black Country supporting the delivery of the Darlaston Strategic Development Area Access Project which represents a major component of the council's regeneration strategy for Walsall and the new M6 Junction 10 which will deliver significant benefits for the borough for many years to come. We are also heavily involved in supporting the continuing regeneration of the town centre through the Primark and Co-Op development.

Corporate Plan and Budget.

Business Change has supported the production of the corporate plan 2015-2019 "Shaping a Fairer Future". It outlines our priorities in difficult financial circumstances and is now aligned to the budget cycle.

As members are already aware we have carried out the largest public consultation the Council has seen. Council staff supported events and activities across the borough aimed at ensuring we deliver our commitment that we will be a Council that listens. We received 7045 comments on the budget proposals.

Budget proposals required Equality Impact Assessments to ensure the Council met its equality duty and also to understand the impact of budget proposals on the vulnerable groups and identified mitigating actions.

We have challenges but we also have opportunities and the Portfolio will support the organisation to deliver efficient and effective services to our residents. We will build a change programme to help deliver our corporate priorities.

Procurement

In the period 2014/15 the Procurement service has enabled delivery of 95 procurement projects with an annual value of around £112m across all Directorates of the Council. We have enabled £2.3M of savings through procurement activity with capability for further savings over the next few years. We have looked to improve benefits for local communities through active promotion of Social Value when procuring or renegotiating contracts. We design service specifications and tender evaluation to actively promote

meeting the needs and engagement in the local community. This maximises opportunity and enables local businesses to compete on a level playing field. We actively provide procurement support to the market place to better equip suppliers to bid for Council contracts. We will provide proportionate, user friendly, accessible procurement processes and documentation as necessary.

Technology

We are designing our services and systems to be both efficient and effective. The services provided through the portfolio need to adapt to the challenges of service delivery where there is less funding available. The Business Change team will continue to support the development of our new website to ensure it is easy to use. We will also deliver efficient and effective services for those residents who choose to contact us in person or by phone.

ICT received 40,227 requests for help in the last 12 months with 29,919 (74%) of those requests being at the first point of contact. The remaining 26% required more technical assistance to resolve and were passed to our technical teams.

Employee and manager self service for HR is being rolled out across the Council. This allows for immediate access to people information, contributing to our corporate plan of helping to empower staff. Self service also helps to reduce the cost of back office services as managers and staff will be able to complete appropriate tasks themselves.

The Mosaic system will help the transformation within Children's and Adult Social Care. This work is being led by the front line services and is being supported by resources from the centre and this support is a priority for the portfolio.

Councillor Keith Chambers

Portfolio holder for Personnel and Business Support

1st April 2015