

Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Friday 25 September 2020 at 5.45pm

Present: Councillor L Giles (Chair);
Councillors E M Giles and Rollins.

In Attendance: Councillors Piper and Preece.

Officers: David Stevens (Chief Executive), Sue Stanhope (Interim Director – Human Resources), Neil Cox (Director – Prevention and Protection) and Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service Improvement).

33/20 **Matter of Urgency**

There were no additional items of business to consider as matters of urgency, however the Chair requested a briefing in relation to Sandwell Leisure Trust.

34/20 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 20 August 2020 were agreed as correct records.

35/20 **Reset and Recovery – Phase 1 Findings**

Further to Minute No. 8/20 (18 June 2020) the Board received an update on the activity undertaken during, and the findings from, Phase 1 of the Council's Reset and Recovery Framework.

The Reset and Recovery Board had established three impact working groups:-

- Staff Impact
- Community Impact
- Economic Impact



Each of these working groups was led by a member of the Council's management team and was made up of Council officers and representatives from strategic partner organisations.

Each of these working groups had the following remit:-

- to share impact intelligence (including service user/community intelligence) from directorate areas and external contacts, discuss findings, themes and future implications;
- to agree the key messages from analysis of the intelligence to feed into the overall impact report, with particular focus on the following points:-
 - the impact of COVID-19 on existing issues (negative/positive impact);
 - whether COVID-19 resulted in new issues for the borough/council;
 - suggest areas for the next stage (thematic working groups).

These working groups had now concluded their work as part of Phase 1 and the findings of each were shared with the Board.

From the Communities working group it had been identified that COVID-19 had exacerbated existing weaknesses in Sandwell's community relating to underlying poverty and deprivation. It was recognised that the Council needed to do something different to address these underlying vulnerabilities and to do this effectively it was important to ensure:-

- engagement was done in the right way and was culturally sensitive;
- changes in the Council's organisation to do things more corporately;
- resources were more focused in areas of most need;
- clear measures of success.

The Economy working group had identified a number of challenges facing the borough:-

- disproportionate impact on young people – lack of apprenticeship vacancies, university options, unstable employment;
- low skills base – Sandwell’s starting point was lower, residents who became unemployed and were less skilled were usually less resilient financially and in finding new employment;
- impact on those 50 plus – as with other economic crises it was forecast that people aged 50 plus would be disproportionately impacted;
- skills and employment support demand would be different – higher skilled cohort meaning that the more disadvantaged moved further away from the labour market;
- digital exclusion/poverty – still a major barrier for residents to complete training and develop their skills;
- mental health – anxiety for those returning to work or accessing the labour market;
- economic impact on Sandwell’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities – a stronger understanding was required in order to tackle the issues as an organisation.

Finally, the Staff working group had identified that staff had coped well with adapting quickly to a new working style and maintaining service delivery in adverse circumstances, but it was recognised that this style of working had not suited everybody equally for a variety of reasons.

The working group had highlighted that the Council needed to:-

- define the new operating model and embed this within the organisation;
- balance the needs of staff with the needs of the organisation;
- continue to listen to the voice of staff through regular pulse surveys;
- augment communication mechanisms in light of remote working, particularly with the frontline and those without remote access.

From the comments and questions by councillors, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Communication with staff had improved with the utilisation of Microsoft Teams, however it was acknowledged that other methods were required to reach those employees without access to computers.
- A range of methods had been used throughout the COVID-19 situation to communicate important information and guidance to the public. This had included social media, websites, partners in the third sector and use of channels such as community radio stations.
- The Council had in place a range of measures to support the health and wellbeing of its staff, including access to counselling and a toolkit for managers. The counselling could be accessed without specific referral and was also available to councillors.
- The future operating models of the Council were being considered following a move towards staff working from home during the COVID-19 situation. It was acknowledged that some members of the public would want to continue to access some services in person however.
- Members expressed gratitude to the Council's Revenues and Benefits service for the speed of the response to issues around the introduction Government's financial help schemes for business.

The Chair of the Economy, Skills, Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board reported that her Board had agreed to 'drill down' into specific aspects of the reset and recovery from COVID-19. Members of the Scrutiny Management Board concurred with utilising that approach across the scrutiny function.

36/20

Senior Management Restructure

The Chief Executive and Interim Director – Human Resources presented proposals for a restructure of the Council's Senior Management (Director-level appointments). The Board welcomed the opportunity to be consulted on the proposals and the Chief Executive confirmed his intention to work with the overview and scrutiny function on future service transformation work.

The proposals were designed to introduce a flatter management structure with clearer lines of accountability. The proposals included a Deputy Chief Executive post and nine director-level posts. It was reported that this would achieve a saving of approximately £120k.

From the comments and questions by councillors, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- Consultation with all individuals impacted upon by the proposals had been carried out.
- The proposals had been designed to increase clarity of areas of responsibility.
- It was planned to communicate the changes, and who was responsible for what area, through both the Council's intranet and internet. It was suggested that the all member briefing arrangements that had been introduced during the COVID-19 situation were an effective way of ensuring that all councillors were briefed on changes. Town meetings were also a method to communicate changes.

Resolved that the proposals for the senior management restructure be endorsed.

37/20

Executive Forward Plan

The Board received the Executive Forward Plan for October 2020.

Meeting ended at 6.51pm