

Minutes of Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Tuesday, 6 December 2022 at 6.00 pm
In Council Chamber at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors Fenton, Hinchliff, Taylor, Trumpeter and Simms.

In attendance: Neil Cox (Director of Business Strategy and Change), Kate Ashley (Strategic Lead – Service Improvement), Elaine Newsome (Service Manager - Democratic Services), Kim Bromley-Derry (Managing Director Commissioner), Kerrie Carmichael (Leader of the Council), Victoria Lee (Head of Human Resources), Debbie Sant (Assistant HR Business Partner), Surjit Tour (Monitoring Officer and Director of Legal Services), Suky Suthi-Nagra (Democratic Services Manager) and Anthony Lloyd (Democratic Services Officer).

60/22 Election of a Vice Chair to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board

Councillor Ellen Fenton was elected as the Vice Chair to the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board.

60/22 Apology for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anandou and Elaine Giles.



61/22

Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest made.

62/22

Additional Items of Business

There were no additional items of business to consider.

63/22

Employee Engagement and Organisational Culture

The Board was informed that positive improvements had been made and many external reviewers such as Grant Thornton and the LGA had praised the progress made by the Council thus far in achieving milestones including the preparation of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and work around Council Culture. Ensuring that members and officers knew the importance of the improvement plan as well as promoting good working relationships between officers and the public were key factors in progressing further.

The difficulties faced by Sandwell Council over the past several years and over the pandemic provided important lessons on maintaining a cultural grip on organisation and staff. Additional issues such as managerial behaviour and the relationship between members and officers were also affected during this time. As a result, staff morale was low, and many officers did not feel empowered in their roles. These problems had cascaded down throughout the Council to frontline officers which, in turn, created further issues with the recruitment and retention of staff.

The Employee Engagement Survey (EES) was conducted between February and March 2022 with a response rate of 61% of employees (2,374 responses from a staff population of 3,913). The survey remained broadly consistent with 2018 and previous years. The survey was accessible via an email invitation as well as paper surveys.

The results of the EES showed that employee engagement had fallen from 69% in 2018 to 63% in 2022. Whilst scores across all five factors were lower in 2022 than in the previous survey, Sandwell scored above the local authority benchmark in pride amongst staff (7 percentage points above benchmark) and

recommending the council as a good place to work (8 percentage points above).

Corporate level results were presented to Leadership Team on 12 May 2022 and with staff via an All Staff Briefing on 26 May 2022. The results were also published on the intranet.

Directorates compiled the key actions to address the top three issues in their specific areas and the top three high performing areas to ensure good practice continued. These action plans were reviewed by Leadership Team on 18 October 2022, with the agreement that the action plans would be monitored corporately on a quarterly basis.

Organisational Culture:

The organisational culture workstream consisted of two main phases. Phase 1 included conversation exercises with staff and members. The second phase would be to then utilise the information obtained from these conversations to better inform what the desired values, behaviour and culture should actually be.

A “Culture Working Group” was established, this included representatives from across the council that contributed to and provided constructive challenge to the approach, including leads on EDI and Member Development; Culture Champion volunteers were also appointed. Culture Champions were offered training sessions that enabled them to carry out listening group sessions. The sessions were to seek qualitative feedback from employees regarding the current culture and their aspirations for the future. Staff who could not attend these sessions were invited to fill out surveys.

The next phase was to agree the values and behaviours that would then inform the activities to embed the culture. This would include the following actions:

- Leadership Team sign off the agreed desired values and behaviours.
- Develop a plan to promote and communicate values and behaviours.
- Embedding values and behaviours into HR practices, appraisals, and performance management, employee induction and the alignment to a management development programme.

- Embed values and behaviours as a foundation of the council's workforce strategy and aligned with and to our work on Customer Journey and equalities, diversity and inclusion
- Consider the approach for frontline workers due to difficulties around access to work devices
- Staff briefings and Leadership communications

Members identified that implementing changes would be more difficult with the introduction of hybrid working. It was highlighted that although more difficult, hybrid working was a part of the recruitment retention policy and many staff would look elsewhere if the arrangements were changed to working full-time within the office. The main goal was to ensure that staff were present in the building, alongside their teams, at core times. Team attendance within Council buildings would be clustered to ensure that enough desk space was available; this would also ensure that the aforementioned core service terms were covered every day.

Members welcomed the idea of regular updates to the Scrutiny Boards to help shape and monitor any actions taken.

Councillor Fenton left the meeting at 6.49pm

Intermittent surveys would take place that would cover a variety of topics to keep employee engagement and feelings relevant and up-to-date. Concerns were raised around Employees of the Council not believing that leaders or managers communicated efficiently or that their feedback would be listened to.

Councillor Trumpeter left the meeting at 7.00pm

Members were assured that there was an appraising system in place however, compliance with the system had been an issue at Sandwell Council. A planned "re-launch" and emphasis on appraisal would take place and performance would be measured to ensure that those that work hard are recognised and rewarded.

Members thanked officers for their time and encouraged open dialogues with staff to ensure that views were listened to and noted.

Meeting ended at 7.15pm.

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