



Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 18 September 2018

Attendance

Members of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Ian Angus
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Claire Darke
Cllr Barbara McGarrity
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman (Chair)
Cllr Jonathan Yardley (Vice-Chair)

In Attendance

Cllr Lynn Moran (Portfolio Holder)
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Sue Roberts MBE

Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Meredith Teasdale (Director of Education)
Angela McKeever (Head of Skills and Education)
Paula Warrilow (Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeships Lead)
Charlotte Johns (Head of Local Economy)
Heather Clarke (Service Development Manager)
Isobel Woods (Head of Enterprise)
Andrew Scragg (Participation Officer)

Witnesses

Richard Macvicar (City Wide Area Manager – Environmental Services)
Casey Gavin (Work Experience)
Jack Strickland (Clerical Assistant)
Anna Tabner (Chair of Youth Council)
Amanpreet Thamrat (Digital Apprentice)
Shay Malcolm (Chef Apprentice at Nutmeg)
Alisha Kainth (Revenue and Benefits Apprentice)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Payal Bedi-Chadha and Cllr Christopher Haynes.

The Chair had also invited Members of the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Cllr Paula Brookfield, Cllr Ian Brookfield and Cllr Jane Stevenson.

Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal the Chair of the initial Scrutiny Review on apprenticeships sent his apologies. Cllr Michael Hardacre sent his apologies as a member of the initial Scrutiny Review on apprenticeships.

Cllr John Reynolds sent his apologies as a Portfolio Holder, for which part of the Committee's remit fell within.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2018 be approved as a correct record.

4 Matters arising

The Chair referred to the resolution at the previous meeting regarding the action group approach to proactively respond to the repurposing of the City Centre. The action group had recently been renamed, the City Centre Commission. She asked for an update on the Commission and when it would begin work. In response, the Head of Enterprise stated that Bill Grimsey had conducted a review on the challenges City centres were facing. The Council in order to align themselves with the national trends coming from the Bill Grimsey review, had renamed the task force/action group a City Centre Commission. Bill Grimsey had visited the City on the previous Monday, where Officers had discussed the City and asked for his advice and guidance on the future. Work was still ongoing on the City Commission. The Chair asked for a briefing note on the City Commission when the details were more established. She asked Members of the Scrutiny Panel to contact her with any ideas for the City Commission, as she wanted the Panel to have an input into its terms of reference.

5 Annual Review of previous Scrutiny Municipal year

Resolved: That the report on the annual review of the previous municipal year of the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel be approved.

6 Scrutiny Review of Apprenticeships Update

The Chair gave a warm welcome to the apprentices and other witnesses in attendance at the meeting. She referred to the apprentices as the beginning of a blue print of excellence for the City. If the Council could ensure their own

apprenticeships were being managed correctly then this would lead the way for other organisations. The Chair stated she was keen to understand where the apprentices felt the system could be improved.

The Director for Education stated that a Scrutiny Review on apprenticeships had been undertaken in January 2017. The team led by the Head of Skills and Education had worked hard over the last year to put into action the recommendations arising from the review. She was pleased to report that a Strategic Organisational Development Lead and Apprenticeship Lead had been recently appointed to the authority to help support the work.

The Head of Skills and Education commented that the recommendations from the Scrutiny review had been turned into an action plan. One of the first priorities was for the Council to become an exemplar employer of apprentices. The credibility of the Council throughout the City would be boosted if the Council could lead the way. Work experience was also an important issue, including its accessibility, usefulness and access to the apprenticeship positions. The second priority was regarding marketing and information. They had known from speaking to young people that there was a lack of information available about apprenticeships, particularly as they were undergoing tremendous changes. As a consequence, there was a big campaign which undertook to improve information. The Council's website, WorkBox, was one of the main resources used to enhance the communications and information on apprenticeships.

The Head of Skills and Education stated there was now a School's Strategy in place to improve their access to apprenticeships. The Council were also looking to improve the availability of apprenticeships to vulnerable young people, particularly those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability). It was important to ensure the Council's processes were accessible, that there was additional support in place and that apprenticeship opportunities were available to vulnerable people. The Council's apprenticeship position was still a challenge, with Wolverhampton scoring the lowest in the Black Country. The Council had however started on a significant improvement journey, which was already having an impact.

The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeships Lead stated she had focused on certain areas at the commencement of her employment with the Council. She had been told the recruitment process was too lengthy and was not attracting people. The Council had developed a plan to introduce a new recruitment process. They had also increased the number of apprenticeship starts, which had increased to 89 from 45 in the previous year. She believed there would be a rapid improvement when the new recruitment process was in place. She had increased the number of apprenticeship standards which the Council could use. These had increased from four to 106.

The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeships Lead remarked that the ten week Summer Programme had been launched on WorkBox. The apprenticeship pages on WorkBox had undergone significant development. She had been working with Human Resources and the LGA on calculating an appropriate amount of pay for different apprenticeships. The new pay deal for apprenticeships was a step forward. The £150 a week had not been an attractive pay offer for care leavers or older people, as they could not live independently on that pay. The Council were looking at apprenticeships for all ages and not just younger people.

They also wanted to utilise apprenticeship standards to upskill current staff. There were 45 currently on different standards.

Casey Gavin who was a Wolverhampton care leaver and had been on work experience at the Council gave an account to the Panel of her experience. She had been based in the Council's Organisational Development Team for nearly two months. She obtained the work experience placement through the Council's Corporate Parenting Officer, Alice Vickers. Prior to the work experience placement, she delivered Total Respect Training to a range of social care professionals including foster carers, social workers, prison officers and the front line Police force. She was also a member of the Young People's Panel who assisted in the recruitment of professionals working in the looked after children's sector.

Casey stated she had been overwhelmed with the amount of support she had received from the Organisational Development Team. It had been a very valuable experience and had helped prepare her in her next step to study psychology at University. She had been given a diverse range of duties during her work experience placement. She had undertaken a complete data cleanse of the Council's Learning Hub and was now working on the redevelopment of the Hub, which included the creation of new learning modules. She had also assisted her colleagues in the running of the Corporate Induction Programme, the Future Leaders Programme and the transfer of the Waste Service back to the Council.

Casey commented that her biggest achievement during the placement had been to raise the profile of Corporate Parenting. With the support of the Director of Governance, she had been able to ensure that the whole of the Governance Directorate had a 100% completion rate on the Council's Corporate Parenting mandatory training module. She felt very lucky to have been given such a good placement. She thought that work experience placements should be promoted more within schools, so they were aware of the opportunities. Whilst at University she hoped to stay with the Organisational Development Team for one to two days per week.

Amanpreet Thamrat gave an account of his experience so far as a Digital Apprentice at the Council. He had decided in Year 10 not to go to University. He stayed on at Sixth Form and completed two years of A-Levels. He felt he was more of a hands on person and so an Apprenticeship was more suitable for him than University. In his last year of Sixth form a friend of his Mother's had told him about the apprenticeship opportunity at the Council. He had not been aware that the Council offered an apprenticeship in the area of digital design before his Mother had told him. He was currently on a level two apprenticeship but next year he would be on level 3, after his contract had been extended for a further twelve months.

Amanpreet commented that there had been a long wait after applying for the apprenticeship before he received confirmation that he had been successful. He understood part of the reason for this was the application deadline had been extended, due to the lack of applicants. He had in fact started working elsewhere believing he had been unsuccessful. Luckily he had only been there 8 weeks on a pre-apprenticeship course and they were understanding about his situation. He had initially thought that he had not been successful in his apprenticeship application due to the long wait. He highlighted this was an area which could be improved in the future. Another area which he had difficulty was the length of time his school had

taken to give him a reference, this was in spite of him and the Council's HR Department chasing them.

Amanpreet was very complimentary about the opportunities the apprenticeship had given him and the variety of work he undertook at the Council. The Panel watched a video which had been produced about his experiences. He had creative freedom over his work and spent sometime out of the Office working on projects, including at schools. Some of the work he undertook included designing websites and new branding.

Alisha Kainth (Revenue and Benefits Apprentice) gave an account of her experience as a Revenue and Benefits Apprentice. She worked in the area of recovery and had been working at the Council since January 2017. Her contract had been extended and she had now completed a Customer Services Level 2 NVQ. She had been involved in the Apprenticeship Workshops since March 2018. She was most grateful for the opportunity the apprenticeship had given her. She enjoyed the apprenticeship because she was able to learn on the job, gain experience and undertake training. Her next step was to complete a Level 3 apprenticeship. She was able to attend College one day a week to study. She commented that the process for application for the apprenticeship had been a lengthy one. She thought the help and support for the application process could be improved.

Shay Malcolm (Chef Apprentice at Nutmeg) gave an account of her experience as a Chef Apprentice at Nutmeg. She had been an apprentice since June 2017. As a care leaver she had been given a lot of support in applying for apprenticeships. She had decided not to attend College. She had been finding it difficult to gain employment due to her lack of work experience. She spoke positively about the apprenticeship, which had given her a chance to learn new skills and entry to the workplace. The Panel watched a video which had been produced about her experiences. The apprenticeship had led to a great sense of accomplishment and had improved her confidence. She attended College one day a week as part of her apprenticeship.

Shay stated an area where apprenticeships could be improved was the wages, as she got paid less than the minimum wage. She had just enough to live independently. The Cabinet Member stated that it was important for the Council to use spheres of influence to try and improve the wages of external apprenticeships. The Director for Education stated that the Council had raised the issue of wages at a meeting of the Inclusive Growth Board. The Business Skills Week the following week had a dinner which was focusing on apprenticeships and in particular small and medium enterprise apprenticeships. The aim was to try and encourage the employment of apprentices and in addition to have discussions about what was deemed a fair wage. Shay remarked another area where she felt there could be improvement in apprenticeships was the working hours. It had been a big step from not working at all to having to work long hours 5-7 days a week. The Director of Education responded that supporting people into work was another subject which the Council were hoping to have as part of Business week.

Jack Strickland (Clerical Assistant) gave an account of his time as an apprentice at the Council. He highlighted that his initial apprenticeship at the Council had led to him being taken on at the Council as a full-time Clerical Assistant in the Place Directorate on completion of his apprenticeship. He had started his apprenticeship at

the Council in 2016 after deciding he did not wish to finish his courses at Sixth Form College. He did not hear that he had been successful in his application for an apprenticeship at the Council until 2-3 months after he had applied. It had taken some time for him to have a permanent line manager when he started as an apprentice, as his initial Manager left the Council in his first week. His eventual manager though had been very supportive. He had successfully completed an internal Project Management qualification during his time as an apprentice. He had also completed a one-day residential course about minute taking at meetings.

Jack said that in March 2017 he finished his qualification and achieved a Level 2 NVQ. He was accepted for a full-time position as a Clerical Assistant. The apprenticeship had improved his confidence. He had not found College that supportive, it had been mainly self-learning. He now worked with senior officers on a variety of different projects which had included the successful City Parade and Celebration of Wolves Football Club following their promotion to the Premier League. The Apprenticeship had been a wonderful opportunity for him to start his career in the workplace and had fitted perfectly with what he needed at that point in his life. He would be giving a speech as part of Business Week about his time as an apprentice. He asked if the excellent work Wolverhampton was doing on apprenticeships could be showcased to make Wolverhampton more attractive as a City, following recent negative headlines in the media about the City.

A Councillor commented that a common trend having heard from the apprentices was the delays in the application process and schools being too slow to give references. Members agreed that communications were a key area for improvement. The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeship Lead agreed that there was a need to speed up the recruitment process and to streamlined the application process. They had created a more streamline process and were working with HR to expedite future applications. She did not want big delays in the future and to try and avoid this she wanted fixed dates for short-listing and the assessment centre, in advance of going out to advert.

A Councillor stated that one of the barriers to obtaining an apprenticeship position was the need for a qualification in English and Maths. He asked if the Council were taking steps to help overcome the problems people faced if they lacked the entry qualifications. The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeship Lead responded that there were various ways to help. One of these was to complete the qualifications as part of the apprenticeship or to support them to do the courses beforehand. They were also looking at individual development plans for people after conversations with the Adult Education Service. The Cabinet Member praised Officers for their work in this area and stressed the importance of contextualised learning.

Richard Macvicar (City Wide Area Manager – Environmental Services) spoke about his time as a Manager working with Apprentices. He spoke positively of the Apprenticeship scheme, which had led to a greater diversity of people working at the Council. He did believe the application process needed improving, he was aware of some candidates who had waited four months. He was aware of recent steps to help streamline the process. Obtaining approval for funding could also take several months before the recruitment process had even begun.

Richard commented that the Council over the last five years had put through dozens of people in NVQ Level 2 in Horticulture and NVQ Level 2 in Street Cleansing. There were 24 people starting the qualifications in the following week. The course involved attending college one day every two weeks. He managed an aging workforce which meant it was sometimes hard to encourage individuals to complete the course. The College did offer resources to help people with their English and Maths if required. The Council also offered a number of internal courses in areas such as first aid and manually handling.

The Head of Skills and Education stated that promotion was a key aspect to the apprenticeship programme. The pages on WorkBox had undergone significant improvement over the last three months. There were about 700 hits a day on the website. The Summer Programme had been a key part of the promotion activities. There had also been some videos made with Council Directors. The Council had organised the Big Skills and Apprenticeship Show in partnership with the Colleges. It was however not enough to just run events, there had to be ongoing communication activity.

The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeships Lead remarked that when the Council was looking at how to engage with schools, they focused on two different areas. The first was how the Council could support schools to be an employer of apprentices. The second was how they could support schools to give the right information and guidance to young people on apprenticeships and to promote them more effectively. She would be meeting schools individually to promote the apprenticeships schemes.

A Member of the Panel asked if there was any resistance from the Academy Schools to the apprenticeship schemes. The Director of Education responded that there was no specific problem with academies. It was more about leadership and governance in each individual school, whether it be an academy or state school. She added it was important for schools to understand the importance of the individual and how an apprenticeship might be the best direction for that person. A crucial element for the Council was how they could best support the schools in their leadership and governance responsibilities.

The Chair asked if the Council looked at examples of best practice in apprenticeship schemes at other local authorities. The Director of Education confirmed that they did investigate what other authorities were doing, but she was of the view that Wolverhampton did very well.

The Chair commented that she understood a car manufacturer had turned down apprentices from Wolverhampton, not because of their reading and writing skills, but because of their lack of team working abilities. It was important schools taught the importance of team working and team working skills. The Director of Education suggested that a visit to Highfields School would demonstrate some of the excellent work undertaken in this area.

A Member of the Panel commented that there was not enough career advice given to young people including those leaving University. The Director of Education responded that there was work ongoing in teams at Impact, Wolves at Work and WorkBox, which all offered career advice. The Member commented that career advice within the schools needed to be improved.

The Cabinet Member stated it was important to prepare young people for the workplace. This included social skills in the workplace and the use of appropriate communication. The Chair remarked that a key project in the future was to assess how the Council monitored the work that was taking place across the City and organisations to prepare young people for the workplace.

The Head of Education and Skills highlighted some examples of the work taking place in schools to improve employability. The Council was very effective at working in a joined-up way with businesses and the education sector. The Council's access to businesses had been a real help in improving employability.

The Head of Education and Skills highlighted that a key part of the Council's work was to ensure that Apprenticeships were inclusive for everybody including vulnerable people. The Strategic Organisational Development and Apprenticeships Lead commented that she did not want vulnerable people to feel segregated. She wanted to be able to showcase the extra support that could be available as part of an apprenticeship offer. The package included giving managers the information they needed to support an individual undertaking an apprenticeship. The new recruitment process would speed up the process and negate the need to fill in long forms, permitting the uploading of a Curriculum Vitae (CV). The majority of young people had already completed a CV as part of their development programme. The Council were also looking at pre-apprenticeship support which would be dependent on the needs of the individual and enhanced work experience. She added there would also be opportunity for job coaches where appropriate. The pay scales had been improved which meant apprenticeships were a more feasible option for some people.

The Chair and Members of the Panel complemented Officers on their commitment and tremendous work that was being undertaken in apprenticeships. The Chair stated said she would be writing to each of the witnesses to thank them on behalf of the Panel for their attendance and contribution at the meeting. She requested that the work on apprenticeships be effectively monitored and that the Panel receive an update review report in 12 months' time. She also asked for a Headteacher to attend the review meeting so the Panel could receive a different type of witness evidence.

Resolved:

- a) That the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel receive an update review report on apprenticeships in twelve months' time.
- b) That a Headteacher be invited to the meeting in twelve months' time, so that the Panel can receive witness evidence from a further perspective on the subject of apprenticeships.

The meeting closed at 8:20pm.

Scrutiny Work Programme

Resolved: That the workplan for the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel be accepted.