

Co-operative Council Commissions' Council Report



3 May 2012

As a Co-operative Council, we are committed to involving our employees, residents, partners and local organisations in shaping the future of the Council and the borough. That is why we set up the Co-operative Commission and the Council’s Employee Commission – to bring a fresh perspective to how we do things and to develop new ways of working together.

We are delighted that so many people have got involved with the Commissions, in many cases giving up their own time to take part. The recommendations are a testament to the wealth of skills and experience amongst our workforce and partners from across the borough.

On behalf of the Council, we would like to thank all those involved for their contributions and we look forward to taking forward the Commissions’ recommendations.



Leader of Telford & Wrekin Council



**Cabinet Member for Environment,
Co-operative Council and Partnerships**

Introduction

Telford & Wrekin Council is committed to becoming a Co-operative Council. This is about:

- Bringing more public services together;
- Involving employees and local people more in planning and running services and;
- Encouraging people to do more for themselves and their own communities.

The Council wants to build a relationship with the community where power and responsibility are more balanced. By establishing the Co-operative Commission for community and business leaders, and the Council Employee Commission, the Council has sought to involve a wide range of people and organisations in this partnership from the outset.

This has been a new way of working. Both of the Commissions, not the Council, have determined the priorities and set the agenda. As a result, this is not a traditional Council report – it is their own words and recommendations.

Co-operative Commission

The Co-operative Commission was established in September 2011 to involve partners in shaping and moving forward the delivery of a Co-operative Council. This opportunity was well received with 51 individuals joining the Commission.

The Commission prioritised five main themes to focus on:

- Employment, Skills and the Economy
- Commissioning Services and Procurement
- Volunteering
- Image of Telford & Wrekin
- Co-operative Values and Communication

Sub-groups, made up of volunteers from the Co-operative Commission were established to review each of the themes, discuss ideas and develop proposals to move them forward.

In December 2011, Rights & Fairness Telford ran a community forum to provide residents with the opportunity to identify and comment on the issues associated with each theme. In addition, in January 2012, the Employee Commission sent out a survey to all employees, this provided the opportunity for them to comment on the draft Co-operative values. The feedback from each of these activities has been used to inform the recommendations of the Co-operative Commission sub-groups.



The Commission met on Friday 2 March 2012 to discuss the recommendations and agree the future of the Commission. It was agreed that the Commission should meet again in six months time to learn about progress made in implementing their recommendations.

Employment, Skills and the Economy

There is a shared recognition that ‘employment, skills and the economy’ make a major contribution to life in the local community and are essential in underpinning the success and sustainability of the borough.

The Employment Skills and the Economy sub-group focussed on two main areas:

- **Attracting Businesses into the borough** – helping to boost the local economy through greater inward investment and more effective support for existing businesses.
- **Improving Employability** – by supporting employers through the provision of a highly skilled, adaptable workforce equipped for the modern economy and employment practices.

Recommendations

1. The Council and its partners need to develop a more effective focus on attracting inward investment and support for existing businesses to boost the local economy by:
 - Adopting a commercial approach to economic development through the development of an ‘Economic Development Board’ to aid information sharing, monitoring, transparency and accountability.
 - Telford and Wrekin Council promoting itself as a ‘Business Winning Council’.
2. Help support employers through the creation of a highly skilled, adaptable workforce equipped for the modern economy. As learning and skills are the key drivers of this, the emphasis should be to identify skills gaps, improve skills and boost employment in the private and third sectors, especially within Telford & Wrekin’s emerging industries.



Commissioning Services and Procurement

There is a recognition that commissioning and procurement carried out by the Council and other public sector organisations is important to local companies and the voluntary sector. Decisions and how they are made, can have a significant direct impact on the community and the local economy.

The Commissioning Services and Procurement sub-group focussed on two main areas:

- **Voluntary Sector Engagement** – That the Council increase engagement with and understanding of the voluntary sector’s role and to work co-operatively with them to exploit all commissioning/procurement opportunities through the voluntary sector to improve outcomes for the community.
- **Co-operative Procurement** – by simplifying the Council’s procurement process, ensuring that it is transparent to widen the pool of potential providers, thereby maximising opportunities for local businesses and increasing local choice.

Recommendations

1. To increase engagement and understanding of the voluntary sector’s role and to work co-operatively to better exploit commissioning/procurement opportunities through the voluntary sector, by:
 - Establishing a Voluntary Sector Engagement Group.
 - The Council undertaking a review of how and what it procures and commissions with the voluntary and community sector.
2. To simplify the procurement process and ensure that it is transparent to widen the pool of potential providers, thereby maximising opportunities and increasing local choice, by:
 - Using the freedoms and flexibilities within European and Best Value statutory guidance to maximise the **local** opportunities in terms of awarding contracts to local organisations and businesses and maximising the benefit to the local economy and community, including employment and training opportunities.
 - The Council considers looking at alternative service delivery models as appropriate.
 - The Council consider using the Co-operative Commission to hold the Council to account to ensure that the Co-operative values, once approved are embedded in all that it does – including procurement.

Volunteering

There is an agreed recognition that volunteering makes a major contribution to all aspects of life in the local community and supports the delivery of services in both the voluntary and public sector. Volunteering brings benefits to both the individuals that volunteer in relation to building confidence, developing skills and building social networks, and to the organisations that are supported by volunteers, many of which wouldn't be able to operate without the input of volunteers.

The agreed overarching vision for volunteering in Telford and Wrekin as agreed by the group is to ***develop and retain a diverse range of enthusiastic and motivated volunteers within Telford and Wrekin, who feel valued and are able to use and develop their skills through volunteering.***



The Volunteering sub-group focussed on:

- Promoting volunteering.
- Recognising and valuing volunteers.
- Promoting and sharing good practice.
- Reducing barriers to volunteering for individuals and organisations.

Recommendations

1. A more joined up strategic approach is taken in relation to developing and delivering volunteering activity within the borough and that a Strategic Volunteering Group with representatives from voluntary public and private sector organisations is established.
2. That the Strategic Volunteering Group has an initial focus on developing a coordinated approach to developing volunteering around four key areas;
 - Promoting volunteering
 - Recognising and valuing volunteers
 - Promoting and sharing good practice
 - Reducing barriers to volunteering
3. That the Strategic Volunteering Group considers ways in which the impact of the proposed actions and the work of the group is monitored and evaluated.
4. That Telford and Wrekin Council develops a Strategic Volunteering Policy across the organisation to ensure consistency for volunteers that support the delivery of Council services.
5. That the Council carry out CRB checks on behalf of small voluntary organisations at a reduced cost (£5). The Council currently carries out CRB checks on behalf of a range of organisations for a cost of £30, this current charge applies to both businesses and voluntary organisations.

Image of Telford and Wrekin

‘Every action which supports the image and visitor economy per se, adds value to Telford and Wrekin’s quality of life for residents and businesses and to inward investment prospects. An attractive and compelling offer, high quality public realm, transport which works and places which are authentic, individual and distinctive will create success for all’ (A Draft Plan for Growth for Tourism and the Visitor Economy in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford)

To improve the image of Telford and Wrekin, the sub-group felt that we need to develop a joined up offer that celebrates the borough as a place that people and businesses want to live, work, visit and invest in as an internationally important tourism destination.

The sub-group agreed the overarching vision for Image of Telford and Wrekin:

Improving the image of Telford and Wrekin, to enable the borough to be ‘a good place to visit and therefore a good place to live’.



The key areas of focus for the sub-group were:

- Increasing visitors to Telford and Wrekin (Business and Leisure Tourism).
- Increasing business investment in Telford and Wrekin.
- Improving Civic Pride for residents of Telford and Wrekin.

Recommendations

1. That the Council, partners and community work together in new (co-operative) ways to enable **‘Telford to become a Conference Town’**.
2. That Telford & Wrekin Council promotes itself as a ‘Business winning Council’ (link to the Employment, Skills and Economy Commission sub-group recommendations).
3. That the ‘joined up’ Tourism Offer in Telford and Wrekin should be improved together with the co-ordination of marketing, PR and visitor information across Telford and Wrekin.
4. That the Council, partners and the community build on existing events and festivals to exploit and promote the assets of Telford and Wrekin, leading to a culturally vibrant place to live, work and visit.
5. That the Council, partners and the community work together to promote Civic Pride for residents of Telford and Wrekin.

Co-operative Values and Communication

The Co-operative Values and Communication sub-group focussed on developing proposals for a set of co-operative values for both the Council, the wider community and partners.

Using the information they were provided with and their own direct knowledge and experience, the group worked together to agree six draft co-operative values. The group felt that having a clear set of co-operative values was fundamental to the Council becoming a Co-operative Council and in the longer term moving towards being a co-operative Borough. They recognised that people would need to be informed about the values and that embedding them would be a journey that would take time and effort.

The other major focus for the group was to consider how the Council communicates and consults with people and how this could be improved as it is important that people are involved in the decisions that affect their lives. This also empowers people with the skills they need to help themselves and their communities and are aware of the opportunities they available to get involved.

Recommendations

1. Adopt the following set of Co-operative values:

- **Ownership**

We will – be accountable for our own actions and empower people with the skills to help themselves.

We would like everyone to – take action and responsibility for themselves and their community to the best of their abilities.

- **Openness & Honesty**

We will – be open and honest in the way we work and make decisions and communicate in a clear, simple and timely way.

We would like everyone to – be open and honest about what they want to improve in their community.

- **Involvement**

We will – work together with the community, involve people in decisions that affect their lives and be prepared to listen and take on new ideas.

We would like everyone to – work with and support others, get involved and share their views to help us develop the way we do things.

- **Fairness & Respect**

We will – respond to people's needs in a fair and consistent way.

We will and would like everyone to – respect and care for themselves and others, value the different ideas and skills that people bring and treat each other as equals.

The group also considered how the Council communicates and consults with people and how this could be improved.

2. Recommendations for communication includes investigating the use of phone applications to report issues and also circulating information to existing contacts (e.g. flex card users) to raise awareness of new initiatives and projects.

3. Recommendations for consultation are:

- face to face interaction wherever possible
- publish and promote a forward plan of all upcoming consultations
- develop online progress tracking tool for consultations
- feedback to participants the progress of items they were consulted on.
- incentives for those who take part in consultations
- consolidated consultation – use one event to consult on various areas
- Councillors attend consultations alongside Council officers

4. A recommendation was also developed under the theme of ‘Co-operative Borough’ to recognise and develop recommendations whereby people are empowered with the skills they need to help themselves and their communities and are aware of the opportunities they available to get involved. These recommendations included:

- continuation of the Community Forum
- build on success of existing community groups

Council Employee Commission

As part of the Council's commitment to becoming a Co-operative Council, the Employee Commission was set up. This commission is employee-led, open to all and gives employees a new way to get involved in shaping the organisation.

The opportunity to get involved was well received with 87 employees joining the Employee Commission.

At the first meeting in October 2012, the Commission identified and prioritised five main themes to focus on:

- Financial Management
- Skills Planning and Development
- Employee Engagement and Communication
- Employee Volunteering
- Social Responsibility

Sub-groups made up of volunteers from the Employee Commission were established to review each of the themes and develop proposals and recommendations to move them forward.

Consultation with employees.

In January 2012, an Employee Commission survey was sent out to all employees to seek views on each of the themes and the sub-groups have used the results to help to develop their proposals.



Financial Management

The Financial Management sub-group has focussed on how employees could be more involved in financial management and business planning.

The group focussed on three main areas:

- **Raising employee awareness of Council spend** –

The group identified that there was a lack of employee knowledge about the Government's requirement for Councils to publicise its monthly list of spend above £500. The group felt that by publicising this list, employees would have a better understanding of Council costs.



- **Engaging employees in the development and delivery of financially and community focussed services** –

The group recognised that employees could be more involved in the development and delivery of services by engaging them in a simple yet effective business planning framework, which focuses areas including: financial management, team engagement and social responsibility.

- **Developing employee skills to effectively manage contracts and procurement** – The group requested that the Skills Planning and Development sub-group focus on procurement and contract management skills as part of a mentoring pilot.

Recommendations

1. Note that the sub-group's recommendation to raise the profile of the Council spend above £500 with council employees has been implemented.
2. Develop a business planning framework which includes a mechanism to engage employees in the development and delivery of financially and community focussed services.
3. That the Skills Planning and Development sub-group focus on procurement and contract management skills as part of their recommended mentor scheme.

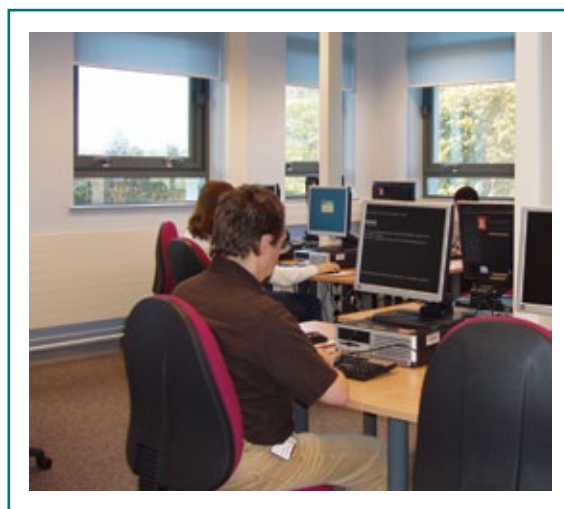
Skills Planning and Development

The Skills Planning and Development sub-group has focussed on how the Council can utilise the untapped potential and skills of its employees.

The group focussed on two main areas:

- **Ways of sharing knowledge and developing employees in changing or newly appointed roles** – The group identified that a mentor scheme would help to share knowledge between employees who have experience of different work areas. They also felt that it is important to develop employees who are changing roles or are newly appointed to the organisation, to support them through the change.

The Financial Management sub-group requested that the Skills Planning and Development sub-group focus on procurement and contract management skills as part of a mentoring pilot.



- **Introducing e-learning at the Council** – There was shared recognition that e-learning is becoming a widely used way for adults to learn, inside and outside of the workplace. A cost/benefit report for an e-learning system is already being developed and will be taken to Senior Management Team for approval. The group gave their views about the infrastructure and support needed to enable employees to use and benefit from e-learning and have suggested possible learning modules that could be included in a roll out of e-learning.

Recommendations

1. Seek council approval in principle to develop a mentoring scheme based on the sub-group's proposals, which can be costed and subject to available resources implemented.
2. Seek council agreement in principle to implement an e-learning system based the sub-group's priorities, which can be costed and implemented subject to available resources.

Employee Engagement & Communication

The Employee Engagement and Communication sub-group has focussed on how the Council currently communicates with its employees and how this can be improved.

The group focussed on four main areas:

- **How employees access information and mechanisms for communicating effectively**
 - The group identified three different groups of employees: those who have access to a work-based PC; those with occasional access and those who do not have access to a work-based PC.

The group identified that approximately 40% of employees do not have access to a work-based PC. They focussed on finding different ways to communicate and engage effectively with this group of employees.

- **Team briefings to communicate information with employees** – The group recognised that team briefings can be an effective way to communicate information. This was confirmed by the results of the Employee Commission survey, where, 84% of respondents indicated that they receive the majority of their information in this way.

The group acknowledged that briefings are handled in very different ways. They agreed that information should be relevant to the target audience and that there should be a range of communication mechanisms available for all employees regardless of where they are based.

- **Improving employee morale** – There was shared recognition that there is a need to improve employee morale in this difficult financial climate. The group identified that this could be achieved in a number of ways, including, celebrating success and achievement within teams and across the organisation.
- **The use of social media** – The group recognised the need to explore new avenues of communication. Whilst social media may not be accessible to all and it could be open to potential misuse, the group felt that this should not be discounted as a method of communicating with employees.

Recommendations

1. Develop, cost and seek approval to implement mechanisms to improve communication with employees who do not have access to a work-based PC.
2. Develop a guidance framework for team briefings for all employees.
3. Develop and implement ways of celebrating and recognising success and achievement.
4. Develop policies for the future use of social media (e.g. Online Communications System and e-me).

Employee Volunteering

The Employee Volunteering sub-group has focussed on developing outline proposals and options for an employer supported volunteering scheme at the Council.

The group focussed on four main areas:

- **Definition and benefits of volunteering** – There is no common national definition for ‘volunteering’; however, the sub-group has defined it as: ‘an activity where someone gives their time to help an organisation or group at no extra cost to the beneficiary’.

The group identified that employee volunteering can bring many benefits for:

- Organisations that provide volunteers – being more flexible and responsive to community needs, raising the Council’s profile and improving partnership working.
 - Employees who volunteers – learning new skills and knowledge, achieving work/life balance and building new relationships.
 - The community – gaining additional support, learning new skills, improving quality of life, building new relationships and community spirit.
- **Objectives for a volunteering scheme at the Council** – There was shared recognition that clear objectives are needed to help to develop proposals for a volunteering scheme that delivers outcomes for the Council, its employees and the community.
 - **Ways to deliver a volunteer scheme at the Council** – The group identified two elements to the scheme: special projects co-ordinated by the Council, providing opportunities for employees to take part in community projects and events and; signposting to other volunteering opportunities.

Following research into other organisations’ volunteering schemes and following feedback from employees, the group have recommended arrangements to support employees to volunteer. The group also discussed ways to raise awareness and promote volunteering opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Develop, cost and seek approval for a volunteering scheme based upon the sub-group’s proposals.
2. Develop a council volunteering policy across the organisation to ensure consistency for employees who volunteer.
3. The volunteering policy should include time to volunteer based on the following:
 - A limited amount of paid time e.g. two days for employees to take part in special projects that are co-ordinated by the council.
 - Unpaid time for employees to take part in other volunteering activities that link to the signposting element of the volunteering scheme.

Social Responsibility

The Social Responsibility sub-group has focussed on what social responsibility means and how it can be embedded at the Council.

The group focussed on three main areas:

- **What is social responsibility** – The group acknowledged that the concept of social responsibility is difficult to define. They agreed that it is easier to explain it by the results of acting socially responsible. For example, social responsibility can manifest itself in the helpful and responsible attitude and actions of individuals.
- **The importance of social responsibility** – There was shared recognition that being socially responsible holds significant value and the group felt that employees, the Council and the community have a social responsibility, each helping to benefit the other. This was confirmed by the results of the Employee Commission survey, where, 80% of respondents believed that social responsibility was an issue for the Council and 64% that it was also an issue for individual employees.

In addition 74% of respondents believed that social responsibility should be a core value of the council. Therefore the group discussed ways to help embed the principles of social responsibility through the proposed Co-operative values of 'fairness and respect, openness and honesty, involvement and ownership'.

- **The benefits of social responsibility** – The group identified that being socially responsible can have many benefits including, economic, environmental and social benefits. For example, currently 30% of households don't recycle their waste, if they did; this would save in the region of £1 million in landfill costs and taxes.

Recommendations

1. Raise member and employee awareness and understanding to embed social responsibility through the values of – 'Ownership, Involvement, Openness and Honesty and Fairness and Respect'.
2. Six months after social responsibility employee awareness campaigns, evaluate their success.
3. Incorporate the principles of the social responsibility model within a business planning framework (see financial management sub-group proposals).

Next steps

The Council's Cabinet will be considering the recommendations of the two Commissions on the 29 March 2012. They will decide which recommendations they wish to implement.

The Council and its partners will develop a programme to investigate the delivery of the approved recommendations. As part of this the Council will explore and address the financial and legal challenges that this may present.

Progress reports will be presented to Cabinet and participants of both Commissions.

Both the Co-operative and Employee Commissions will meet again in September 2012 to review progress against the approved recommendations.

For more information visit

www.telford.gov.uk/cooperativecommission

or contact the Co-operative Council Delivery Team on 01952 380131



