

CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Minutes of a meeting of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 24th March 2015 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room 3, Darby House, Lawn Central, Telford TF3 4JA.

PRESENT: Cllrs. A. McClements (Chair), N. England, J. Pinter, and co-opted member J. Ellis.

Also attending: Cllr. S. Davies; Cabinet Member, Neighbourhood Services Employment and Skills, R. Partington; Managing Director, Telford & Wrekin Council, Lois Stewart, Organisational Development Manager, Fiona Bottrill; Scrutiny Group Specialist.

APOLOGIES: None

CCSC-15 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 19th August 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CCSC-16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs. J. Thompson and K. Tomlinson

CCSC-17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CCSC-18 EMPLOYEE COMMISSION AND CO-OPERATIVE VALUES

The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Services, Employment and Skills and the Managing Director to the meeting. The Chair explained the Scrutiny Committee had carried out a review on 2011/12 on the Council's Co-operative Values and Employee Commission. Members of the Committee spoke to staff across the organisation making sure they covered different service areas and buildings. The Members asked staff:

Were they aware of the Co-operative values and did they affect their work?
Were there any other issues they wanted to raise?
Did they know about Scrutiny?

The Chair said that this had been a good piece of work which had found that staff were aware of the values and many of them said that they were already part of the way they worked. The Cabinet Member and Managing Director had been invited to attend the meeting to update the Committee on this work. The Chair said she was particularly interested to hear how the Managing Director and Senior Management Team are communicating with staff.

The Managing Director said that the work involved in communicating in such a large and complex organisation is never finished but progress is being made. He said that in the recent engagement sessions it has been recognised that this has to be carried out in such a way that it is meaningful to staff. Staff are aware of the financial challenges the organisation faces and need to be given the opportunity to understand how they can help.

The 'Bigger Picture' is a simple way of engaging staff. This was developed through 25 workshops held over 11 days. At these events all staff were free to speak and explain what is good and what are the values of the organisation.

The feedback from this event was that people feel proud to work for the Council. Staff thought that the management are trying to do the right thing. A poster has been produced that provides an image which sets out the Council's story so far. An interactive version of this will be available and a set of tools for managers to engage with staff. It is important for the organisation to have a narrative and be able to build on this.

The Managing Director said that the feedback from staff was very positive. He has carried out a second annual tour to talk about the Bigger Picture. In these presentations he explained where the Council is now, what it has achieved and where the Council is going. This has been presented in the context of the financial challenge. Over 400 employees attended these events and applauded at the end of the session. It is essential to be honest with people and say that not everyone will continue to be part of the team as the Council gets smaller. The Council's approach has been to generate income to mitigate the cuts and protect services. The budget strategy has included investment which has not been the case in other areas. Most Councils are not making investments. This approach has been commended by other organisations, e.g. free swimming for over 50s.

The Council has also been looking at policies to ensure these are efficient. This has not been a top down approach but working with employees, Trade Unions and managers. An example of this is the flexi deal which enabled employees to work more flexible hours, buy annual leave and achieve a better work life balance.

The Chair asked if there had been feedback from staff about restructures and that this can make them feel very vulnerable.

The Managing Director explained that over the last 6-9 months there had been a reduction in the number of re-structures. The whole council has been re-designed

about 3 times. However, this has not been done all at the same time and which has made it more manageable. To be able to carry out restructures in this way requires vision. The approach to the restructures has been 'how do we design a service and will still work and save money?' He gave the example of the in-house adult care provider. Through dialogue with the staff and the trade unions it was restructured so that it could become a competitive service that would be bought by individuals.

The Managing Director said that there is still too much silo working and that there would be more restructures. It has also been recognised that it is important to continue to invest in learning and development and much of this will take place through the online learning platform OLLIE.

L. Stewart explained that the approach to learning and development is a 'blended approach'. Some training is online and some is face to face. During 2014 there had been the biggest recorded number of training courses delivered through OLLIE. There have been 12,400 individual course participants.

The Chair asked how the training is evaluated?

The Managing Director said that doing a course is not always the best way to learn.

L. Stewart said that OLLIE is good at driving knowledge and that the blended approach to learning means that the online courses can be followed up by 1 hour briefing sessions or 1-1 training. Coaching or mentoring is a good way to understand the impact of learning. At the end of the training participants are asked for feedback and then later asked if they are using this knowledge. It is important that people take responsibility for their own learning and development but they also need support from managers. L. Stewart added that the Co-operative Values are embedded in the organisations and that these values are very strong. The 1-1 framework has been reviewed and now reflects the values and provides staff feedback on these. In the difficult financial climate there is a temptation to feel 'down' but in this organisation there is a level of optimism.

The Chair said that the ethos of an organisation is very important.

Cllr. S. Davies said that the optimism of the organisation is reflected in the number of apprentices, which is now 165. In every team there are people who are here to learn and this motivates other people to learn. He gave the example of the trainee solicitor who was sponsored by the Council and is now employed here. The Cabinet Members have continued their 'walk-about' and Cllr. S. Davies said that officers email him directly and that it is important that staff are given the recognition for the work that they carry out. He added that it is also important for senior officers to know the different communities in Telford and Wrekin, and this has been helped by councillors carrying out 'ward walks' with senior officers. This will help people to understand the impact of the decisions that are being made. It is also important that people in Telford and Wrekin understand that public servants at the Council work very hard for the benefit of the local community.

Mr. J. Ellis said that he had been surprised that the values had to be stated in such an obvious way since, when he worked for the Council, this was the way people had worked. He had noticed that when other people came to work for the Council they often commented that the culture was different at Telford & Wrekin. He said he felt it was sad that things at the Council had changed so much that a Co-operative Commission had to be set up to bring back these values. As an co-optee on the Committee he said that he supported the co-operative values.

Cllr. S. Davies responded that the decision to be a Co-operative Council means putting this into practice on a day to day basis. Parts of the Council had embraced this quickly but others were slower to take this up. As a new member in 2011 he had been keen to see the top of the organisation becoming flatter. This has been achieved, and managing Director is the first Head of Paid Service at the Council to be directly responsible for a service area. The Council's relationship with the Town and Parish Council's has improved. Previously regeneration has been 'done' to areas rather than with them. An example of this has been the solar farm – in other areas there have been protests, but because the Council here had worked with people to explain the reason and the benefits there had been no objections here. Another example of how the relationship with the Town and Parish Council's has improved is the Parish Environmental Teams (PETS) and the Community Support Officer Training.

The Managing Director said the Council has changed since he joined in 1991. He confirmed that the Cabinet and Senior Management Team had worked in partnership and had not taken the 'easy decision' to close services, but rather how to keep the service going for less money. The Cabinet has had high expectations and this is reflected in the aspirations for Telford and Wrekin – which is 'on the up'. It is important that people enjoy their work.

Cllr. N. England said that he had worked for the Council until 2004 and stood for election in 2011. He had joined the Co-operative and Communities Scrutiny Committee in 2013. He explained that he understood that the Co-operative Council meant there was a different way of working. He gave the example of an environment issues that needs to be resolved. Previously this may have been fully funded by the Council but now the way to address this is for the Council to work with other organisations to find additional sources of funding. He also said that it is important that all staff have access to the information they need, not just about how to do their job but also about the wider organisation.

Cllr. S. Davies responded that this can be a cultural issue within an organisation. There are some staff who do not have access to a Council computer – but they can opt to receive some emails to their personal email address.

Cllr. N. England added that it is important to retain staff as this reduces the cost of recruitment.

L. Stewart said that she had read about the Council's co-operative values before she

started working here. Once she joined the organisation it was clear that they are part of the organisation at every level and that what matters is making a difference of the local community.

The Chair said that this was reflected in the comments made by staff during the Scrutiny Review.

Cllr. N. England added that when asked about the Co-operative values many staff responded that this is what they already do.

The Managing Director said that accountability is important – people can hear what you say, but if they see that something has changes, that we do what we say, that is how they will judge the organisation.

J. Ellis said that this approach in empowering for staff.

Cllr. S. Davies said that there are some things that only the Council can do, e.g. leading the bid for the MOS Centre at Donnington, but there are other issues where the Community can be able to help itself. He gave the example of the Pride in the Community Programme.

The Managing Director said that it is important that people are clear about the purpose of the Council. The restructure process is not easy, but it is about being clear what we do and why. This is why there are planned briefings during the restructure process. The Council has minimised the number of compulsory redundancies to around 50 when about 1,200 jobs have gone. Some people find a new job in the Council others decide not to stay.

Cllr. S. Davies added that the Council gives a lot of support to people who are at risk of being made redundant.

The Managing Director said that the Council has worked with the Trade Unions. He has to sign off every voluntary and compulsory redundancy - the process has to be fair.

J. Ellis commented on the previous values stated by the Council: Quality, Caring, Fairness. He added that he is happy that the Council has recognised the importance of these.

Cllr. S. Davies said that the way the Council implements the Co-operative Values has evolved e.g. the Employee Commission now works through focus groups and forums. If, after the elections in May, he is part of the administration, the Council will not go back to the beginning of the process but will continue to develop the Cooperative values.

J. Ellis asked of all Councillors had 'bought into' the Co-operative Values?

Cllr. S. Davies said that the Co-operative Ward Fund had been £1,000 and had doubled to £2,000. Nearly all Councillors have taken part in this programme. As part of the Pride in the Community Fund process there was a cross party group evaluating the applications.

The Chair said that the Council is making progress and it has been very useful to have this update. She thanked the Cabinet Member and Managing Director for attending the meeting.

CCSC-19 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair said that this was the last meeting in the cycle for this year. She thanked everyone for their support and work. She said that the key pieces of work that she was proud of included the work on the implications of welfare reform, the Review of First Point for Business and the Review of Community Centres. This highlights the role of Scrutiny and the difference it can make.

J. Ellis asked about the work of other Scrutiny Committees. He said that the community aspect is very important and when looking at the Council's budget this should not just focus on finance. He also expressed an interest in being involved in the work that will take place next year on the Council's bus subsidy policy.

The meeting ended at 6.48pm

Chairman:.....

Date:.....