

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

ECONOMY, SKILLS AND CULTURE O&S COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 27 November 2024 at 1000 hours in Committee Room 6, Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham

Present:

Councillor Katherine Iroh (Chair)

Councillors Jon Hunt, Meirion Jenkins, Simon Morrall, Esther Rai and Shafique Shah

Also Present:

James Fuggle, Assistant Director, People Services

David Harris, Assistant Director, Corporate Landlord

Sadie Thomas, Head of Resourcing, People Services

Louise Ward, Head of Talent, Learning and Early Careers

Spencer Wilson, Head of Post-16, Employability and Skills (online)

Amelia Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Baseema Begum, Scrutiny Officer

NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

46. The Chair advised those present that the meeting would be webcast for live and subsequent broadcast and that Members of the press/public may record and take photographs except where there are confidential or exempt items.

APOLOGIES

47. Apologies were received from Councillors Gurdial Singh Atwal and Lisa Trickett. An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Hunt.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

48. There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

49. **RESOLVED:** -

- i) That the public Minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- ii) That the private Minutes of the meeting held on 16th October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ECONOMY, SKILLS & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ACTION TRACKER

50. RESOLVED:-

- i) That the action tracker be noted.

ECONOMY, SKILLS & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25 AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

51. The Chair outlined the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Young People working at the Council Inquiry and explained that these had been agreed by members of the Task & Finish Group set up to take this piece of work forward. The Chair added that the Task & Finish Group would be meeting on 11 December to discuss next steps.

Items for future meetings were also highlighted as part of the work programme discussion.

RESOLVED: -

- i) The report be noted.
- ii) The Committee agreed the TOR of the Young People working at the Council Inquiry.
- iii) The Task & Finish Group to discuss next steps for the Young People working at the Council Inquiry on 11 December at 11.30am.

EVIDENCE GATHERING - COUNCIL AS EMPLOYER OF YOUNG PEOPLE

52. The Chair welcomed James Fuggle, Interim Assistant Director, Louise Ward, Head of Talent and Early Careers, Sadie Thomas, Head of Resourcing and Spencer Wilson, Head of Post-16, Employability and Skills (online) to the meeting.

The Chair explained that officers had put together a report based on the questions posed in the Terms of Reference and requested that officers give an overview of the responses with the opportunity for Members to ask further questions.

Louise Ward, Head of Talent and Early Careers took Members through the responses and during the discussion the following were among the points made: -

Recruitment and Workforce Planning

Members raised concerns about the use of WMJobs as the main way to advertise jobs. It was felt that it was old fashioned and likely that young people would not be aware

of it and therefore less likely to consider it to look for jobs. Equally identifying who the Council was working with to recruit was highlighted. It was felt imperative that the Council widens its reach to tackle those young people who have little or no qualifications such as school leavers.

Officers confirmed that the Council was currently using Hays as the service provider for recruitment to temporary roles. It was acknowledged that WMJobs was not the best platform for attracting young people however this service is due to be brought back in-house. There was no timescale on when the use of other platforms for advertising jobs would take place. The Council did not use social media channels for recruitment.

The proportion of young people under the age of 25 in Birmingham is approximately 40% and it was noted that the number of young people employed by the Council was highly disproportionate to this with 1.74% of those up to the age of 24 making up the workforce. There was a need to make this more representative and a reflection of the city.

There was also concern on the high number of young people leaving the Council within a year of being employed. Out of 138 leavers over the past 2 years 109 had left within a year and 66 of these young people had resigned. Officers were clear that young people needed support, so they do not leave in the first year and Members were keen to identify the issues as to why this was the case.

In some service areas the Council struggles to recruit young people as the right offer is not there. The emphasis has historically been starting in manual jobs in areas such as Adults and Waste services and building from there.

Members acknowledged the fiercely competitive environment that young people face in applying for jobs and enquired on the recruitment process that the Council undertook in comparison to the private sector.

Officers confirmed that the recruitment process for jobs was dependent on the role and the recruiting manager and so was different for each case. Applicants were required to provide a statement as well as filling in a form online. Members felt that this was antiquated and would discourage young people to apply as the standard approach was to provide a CV. Reaching all young people through one easy and accessible platform was emphasised. Additionally, Members felt that the Council could do more to highlight what it has to offer in terms of stability and reliability that were key factors in attracting staff. This coupled with working with schools to engage young people with more information on careers and breaking down what jobs entail and the impact of certain roles was equally important. Officers highlighted that social impact was a key factor for young people in taking up opportunities and this was something that the Council could emphasise in its recruitment process.

Due to the competitive nature of jobs, there was concern that graduates may be applying for and getting jobs that did not require a degree and the impact that this had on those job opportunities that would be better suited to young people without or with fewer qualifications. Equally the opportunity for the Council to offer young people apprenticeships could attract a lot of untapped talent where the cost of a university degree is prohibitive to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The opportunity to 'learn and earn' could be seen as very attractive.

Officers emphasised that senior council officers and Commissioners were supportive of a centralised programme to employ graduates, apprentices and offer traineeships as currently the offer differentiated between directorates. However, work was required to identify the positions available and there was a high risk that these opportunities were being identified as savings by service areas and this was a concern.

Officers explained that there was a high percentage of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in the city and the Council was collaborating with partners including DWP and St Basils amongst others on this agenda.

Although there may be people who were older, may have the right skills and qualifications and who may not necessarily be local to Birmingham and be able to fill vacancies; employing local people was seen as key in improving poverty and youth employment in the city. A local person with family and friends in the city was seen to have a vested interest as a resident and therefore more likely to provide a better quality of service.

Members were of the opinion that employing young people with enthusiasm to learn and take on new skills and knowledge was imperative as there was a serious risk to the organisation where 50% of the workforce were due to retire in the next 10 years. It was also felt that due to its size the Council should be investing in and training its workforce. An Early Careers Strategy along with workforce planning is required for the next 12 months to 3 years to ensure that capability is built internally, and investment is made in 'growing our own' talent.

A new system known as 'RoleMapper' is being used to evaluate jobs. This software flags if a qualification is actually needed for a role. 'Educationalism' was seen as a barrier. Making job specifications applicable for a broader group of people was also noted (men applying with only 60% of skills vs women applying with 80% or more of skills in a job advert).

Apprenticeships

Over the last 2 years 30 apprentices have been recruited. 14 apprentices were hired in 2023/24. Work is taking place with schools to increase this number; albeit limited due to current resources.

There was concern that apprenticeships were targeted at graduate level young people and there did not seem to be an offer for those who did not meet this criteria.

Members highlighted their concern in ensuring that the process was changed so that pathways for apprenticeships and graduates were clear and that applicants could see a distinct progression route to a full-time role. There was acknowledgement that the Council was in difficult financial circumstances however any work to increase the number of young people being taken on by the Council through an apprenticeship or other route was welcomed. Using the apprenticeship levy to create more opportunities was highlighted and to use this to help solve capacity issues due to staff leaving.

It was emphasised that any placements offered to young people should be available to all and not based on 'who you know' and that opportunities for work shadowing for example had been ad-hoc.

Officers acknowledged the points raised and explained that due to the current financial situation the Council's focus has been on reducing costs primarily through reducing staffing. It was noted that emphasis on the recruitment of young people had not been driven as a key agenda priority, therefore any change to this would need both senior officer support and a clear business need. Safeguards were also being put in place to ensure cronyism and nepotism does not happen in the future. Widening the advertising so that anyone can or is able to apply was also being done.

People Services were working with individual directorates on workforce planning. The intention was for each directorate to have a plan once the Council is in a position to afford to do so.

29,000 employers have been impacted by the Apprenticeship Levy with employers using on average of 55% of their apprenticeship levy. As a business Birmingham City Council are using 24.4%. It was explained that taking on an apprentice was time consuming, and it took a significant amount of investment for businesses before an individual becomes fully qualified. Due to the financial issues and state of the Council to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, skilled individuals were needed to get a grip. The Council has made significant progression for using the maximum capacity of its Apprenticeship Levy transfer allocation by supporting SMEs to take on more young people within the city. Officers stated that this was being co-ordinated by Council colleagues and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

RESOLVED: -

- i) The report be noted.
- ii) Clarity was sought on whether the 8 employees in the 16-18 age group were training positions.
- iii) Data to be provided on the number of applicants per job specifically where recruitment is for young people.
- iv) A breakdown to be provided on jobs filled by graduates where a degree was not required.
- v) That research is undertaken looking at the age profiles of employees at similar sized organisations to the Council (those with 9-10k employees). This should also include other councils including those in the West Midlands as a comparison.
- vi) It was agreed that the impact of a high number of employees due to leave the organisation within the next 5-10 years be added to the Corporate Risk Register.

53. PROGRESS REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS SCRUTINY INQUIRY COUNCIL OWNED ASSETS

The Chair welcomed David Harris, Assistant Director, Corporate Landlord who explained the background and the changing landscape impact on the outstanding recommendations.

The update in relation to the outstanding recommendations was as follows: -

Recommendations R01 and R02: it was outlined that these were no longer achievable as originally set out in the report and should be discharged. The section 114 notice had a significant impact on the Council's asset base. The main drivers of both R01 and R02 were largely now captured under the activity being undertaken by the Corporate Landlord as part of its Improvement and Recovery (IRP) programme and functional and strategic redesign.

Recommendation R04 had been achieved with the website having gone live in December 2023.

During a discussion with Members the following points were made: -

- Councillors are being made aware of community assets being sold in their wards unless the asset has already been categorised as surplus. If it is surplus, then further contact is not required.
- Members were keen to ensure that social value was being achieved through the sale of community assets.
- The Assistant Director, Corporate Landlord confirmed that issues raised would be covered as part of a report back on the Corporate Landlord programme.

RESOLVED: -

- i) The report be noted.
- ii) A breakdown of statistics on Community Asset Transfers to be provided alongside the Quarterly Update Report on Asset Disposals to the January meeting. This should include how many assets have been allocated to those doing community work and how often this has happened.
- iii) Members agreed to sign off the report and for the issues raised to be covered under the Corporate Landlord programme item to be scheduled onto the work programme.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

54. The next meeting will be held on 8 January 2025.

REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS RECEIVED (IF ANY)

55. None were received.

OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

56. There were no items of urgent business to consider.

The meeting ended at 12:07 hours.

Chair's signature: