

Minutes

Meeting name	Scrutiny Committee
Date	Monday, 25 July 2022
Start time	6.30 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor R. Child (Chair)

Councillors J. Wilkinson (Vice-Chair) S. Atherton
P. Chandler J. Douglas
M. Glancy

Officers Chief Executive
Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
Director for Growth and Regeneration
Corporate Services Manager
HR & Communications Manager
Senior Democratic Services and Scrutiny Officer

Minute No.	Minute
17	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Holmes, Posnett and Webster.</p>
18	<p>MINUTES The Minutes of the special meeting held on 25 May 2022; the meeting held on 6 June 2022; the special meeting on 14 June 2022 and the special meeting held on 27 June 2022 were approved.</p>
19	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST No declarations of interest were received.</p>
20	<p>REVIEW OF THE FORWARD PLAN The Chairman introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan and invited Members to comment upon the document.</p>
21	<p>REVIEW OF THE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 The Chairman introduced the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23 and invited Members to comment upon the document.</p> <p>In response to the query on whether the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had been invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on Crime and Disorder, Members were informed that the PCC had been invited.</p>
22	<p>CONSULTANCY AND AGENCY USE In introducing the Consultancy and Agency Use report, the Chief Executive gave a presentation to the Committee. During the presentation, Members were provided with an overview on the Council's approach to resource management, including recruitment, retention, vacancy management and the use of consultancy and agency spend in support of the Council's corporate objectives.</p> <p>During the presentation the following key points were highlighted to Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 2016-18 the Council lost 15% of the organisation which left the organisation vulnerable as there were significant capacity and capability gaps. • With new teams and structures and a big increase in recruitment, the turnover reduced from 18% to 11%. • Despite this turnover increased in last year. This matches the national post-covid trend but also there were exception circumstances, where Officers in particular departments were subject to targeted head hunting from a neighbouring authority. • In the vast majority of cases, advertised vacancies are filled with permanent recruitment 72% which includes 20% internal progression. There are 9% of vacancies that remain unfilled.

- Once the recruitment process has been undertaken there are times that the Council may want to appoint an interim. This would be done to fill the gap between the previous postholder and the arrival of the permanent post holder.
- Officers then outlined the following examples of when the Council hired consultants or additional expertise:
 - Work to support the development of the Stockyard proposal.
 - Work to meet grant funding conditions for Asset Development Programme.
 - The development of a business case for a Health and Leisure Park.
 - Implement the technically complex Northgate Housing system project and upskilling existing staff.
 - Work for the development of a new website and implementation of a new Finance System.

A question was asked about whether there was an occasion where the Council had hired a consultant or expertise to produce a report and/or recommendations but the Council had not acted on the information it had received. In response Members were informed that the information and advice that the Council receives from a consultant or expert is used in one capacity or another and that the case studies within the report seek to demonstrated this.

Following this point, a Member questioned what happens to information that isn't used, a specific example was given in relation to consultancy support to the previous leisure procurement undertaken in 2016/17. Officers informed Members that the previous leisure procurement had not been realistic in its expectations, a position formally confirmed and accepted by the Council in 2018. The current corporate strategy recognises that consolidation of leisure centres would be necessary to establish a sustainable future and that significant focus is being given to establishing whether an affordable way forward exists.

Officers were questioned on whether the Council continued to receive consultancy services from the consultant who delivered the Health and Leisure Park presentation in January 2022, as there was concern that the consultant does not understand the needs or market of Melton. In response Officers have previously acknowledged and reiterated recognition that the January 2022 briefing did not hit the mark and that this feedback had been taken on board. The consultants involved were part of a wider multi-disciplinary team and the firm engaged were properly procured and remain industry experts, recognised across the sector, and who have helped many other councils deliver their leisure centres. It was also mentioned that currently the key focus for their engagement is answering the fundamental question regarding affordability of future provision.

A query was raised as to how much the Council had spent on consultants, as it was noted that the figures provided did not include monies spent on consultants to create the baseline energy study. Subsequent clarification was provided that the document provided represented a comprehensive overview of the last 3 years and the reason the baseline energy study was not included was because expenditure

was being incurred in this financial year.

A query was raised as to how much the Council had spent on consultants, as it was noted that the figures provided did not include monies spent on consultants to create the baseline energy study. In response, Officers stated that the figures could show on 2022/23 balance and therefore would not be covered by the period of the report.

Furthermore Members were informed that the Council does apply for funding which contributes towards consultancy fees, however it was noted that a significant amount of core funding had been used to purchase consultancy services.

A comment was made on whether the Council needed additional in-house capacity as opposed to consultants. In response it was highlighted that the Council is committed to building the strongest possible in-house team, but there are occasions, as set out in the report, where it represents greater value for money to commission external expertise. It was also noted that the Council's spending power is 42% smaller now than in 2010 and therefore the Council has to be extremely innovative at utilising resources and leveraging external funding, something Officers have been extremely successful in doing over recent years.

The question was raised as to whether the Council are receiving value for money in relation to consultancy fees spent on tourism. It was clarified that funding provided to the external provider had been reduced over recent years, and that an in-house resource had been appointed over the last 18 months to strengthen the local provision. It was recognised that the Scrutiny Committee had identified this as an area of interest for their work programme and that the Committee would consider the issue in more detail at a future workshop.

Following a question on whether consultancy spend is audited, the Committee were assured that they are audited and that the Council has received good assurance.

Regarding a query raise in relation to fees spent in the Growth and Regeneration area on valuations, Members were informed that this would continue until a qualified valuer is appointed.

A discussion ensued regarding recruitment and how to attract the best talent and whether the offer of home working could be a way to attract the right staff. In response, the Committee was informed that the Council does offer home working but it must be recognised that there are some departments where home working is inappropriate and that occasionally staff need to collaborate in an office setting.

Following a question regarding whether the requested qualifications on a job advert are required, Members were informed that the focus is on people's behaviours not qualifications although it was recognised that there are some roles that require the right qualification. Furthermore, it was noted that an element wouldn't be added to a personal specification if it wasn't required for the role.

In response to a question regarding the kickstart apprentices, Members were informed that the roles were created by the Department for Work and Pensions but that the Council has supported them in applying for jobs. It was confirmed that apprentices haven't been dismissed as each have benefited from a natural progression.

A discussion ensued about the employment of graduates at the Council. It was recognised that the Council or Local Government as a sector do not do enough to attract graduates. There was a recognised need for the Council and the sector to go out and sell themselves to graduates, although it was noted that the most efficient way for the Council to do this would be through collaboration with other districts.

The Committee expressed interest in viewing the benchmarking figures and were assured that they would be sent out to Members.

It was clarified that the legal fees mentioned would have been for the cost of legal advice in relation to the Melton Mowbray Distributer Road agreement with Leicestershire County Council, however Members were informed that this would have been part funded by Homes England. It was noted that the Council holds a reserve for legal fees in relation to the Local Plan, as it is expected that the Council would get changed on the process.

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URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at: 7.53 pm

Chair