

**COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Thursday, 26th November, 2020

Present:-

Councillor L Collins (Chair)

Councillors Bagshaw
Borrell
Blakemore

Councillors Dyke
Kellman

Councillor Caulfield +++++

Councillor J Innes, Cabinet Member for Business Transformation +

Councillor Serjeant, Deputy Leader ++

Liz Cook, Assistant Director – Housing +++

Kate Harley, Human Resources Manager +

Donna Reddish Assistant Director – Policy and Communications ++

Brian Offiler, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

+ Attended for Minute No. 4

++ Attended for Minute No. 5

+++ Attended for Minute No. 6

++++ Attended for Minute Nos. 6 and 7

**1 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA.**

No declarations of interest were received.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Flood.

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September, 22 September and 24 September, 2020 were presented.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of each meeting be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND CUSTOMERS - INVESTING IN OUR STAFF - APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME

The Human Resources Manager presented a report on the progress of the Council's apprenticeship programme.

The report set out the background to the current apprenticeship programme since the introduction of the Apprentice Levy and Public Sector Targets in 2017. The Council had achieved the target number of apprentices each year and had recently been awarded Top 100 Employer status in the National Apprenticeship Awards by national government.

To date 26 new recruits had been employed as apprentices on condition that they would secure a permanent role with the Council on completion of the apprenticeship. New apprentices were paid the relevant age-related national minimum wage in the first year and the rate for the job in the second year. A further 73 existing employees had undertaken apprenticeships as development opportunities, with good rates of retention and career progression.

It was noted that there had been challenges as the national programme had evolved, including:

- The change from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards, requiring alternative qualifications to be found in some cases;
- The requirement for all apprentices to achieve Level 2 Maths and English, requiring additional support in some cases;
- The requirement for 20% of working time to be off the job;
- The support required by apprentices with special needs being provided by the Council, rather than by education providers as previously;
- The interruption to some apprenticeships during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Relationships had been built with providers to address these challenges as far as possible, and it was planned to continue to identify apprenticeship opportunities in the future both when recruiting and for existing staff.

Arising from Members questions the following points were clarified:

- Apprenticeships were available in areas such as enforcement and horticulture;
- Meeting the 20% off the job requirement was particularly challenging for those in more senior roles undertaking apprenticeships;
- There had been a 50/50 gender balance in the number of apprentices in 2019/20. Data in respect of disability was not readily available as this relied on self-declaration by individuals, although applicants declaring a disability were guaranteed an interview.

Members expressed their appreciation of the work undertaken by the Human Resources team and managers to enable the apprenticeship programme to be successful.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Business Transformation and Customers and the Human Resources Manager for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the work undertaken to date and the planned work on the Council's apprenticeship programme be supported.

5 DEPUTY LEADER - EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Assistant Director - Policy and Communications presented a report on the effectiveness of the Council's external communications, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report outlined the communications activities undertaken during the pandemic, working effectively with partner agencies and the community and voluntary sector through the Derbyshire Local Resilience Forum, in order to deliver consistent messages to warn and inform using national and local campaigns. Methods had included press releases on service changes and key messages, social media messages and a Covid-19 hub

on the website, all of which had been seen as reliable and timely sources of information.

The report also referred to how internal communications had been adapted to support and inform staff and Members, including the weekly Members' e-bulletin.

Whilst noting the increasing proportion of the general population regularly using the internet, the report outlined the alternative means used to engage with those at risk of digital exclusion, including the 'Your Chesterfield' publication delivered to all homes, local print and broadcast media, printed information distributed with Council Tax and Business Rates bills, posters and banners in Council and community buildings and outdoor spaces and signage on Council vehicles.

A range of social media platforms were used to reach less traditional audiences, including the development of augmented reality experiences. These were monitored to assess their effectiveness at reaching the intended audiences and time and resource implications; this would then feed in to a review of the Council's social media policy in the New Year.

It was recognised that fake news and misinformation could be spread through social media channels and that comments on Council social media channels were assessed in the context of the national Covid-19 policy / legal framework and challenged or deleted where necessary.

It was noted that continuing to manage communications in the current emergency over a long period and the complexity of the messages and changes to guidance at short notice was proving challenging.

Arising from Member's questions and discussion, the following points were raised:

- It was hoped that a new customer relationship management system would enable more detailed analysis of the profile of users of the Council's digital communications;
- The town's businesses were promoted online through Destination Chesterfield supporting the 'Shop Local' message, such as details of changing opening times and click and collect and delivery options;
- The majority of the Communications budget (approximately 70 % of non-staff costs) was allocated for the production and distribution of

the 'Your Chesterfield' publication, with evidence that an increasing proportion of residents accessed information about Council services through this means and that there were high satisfaction levels with it;

- The majority of the community notice boards, which had been installed by the former Community Forums, but without funding for ongoing maintenance or sufficient arrangements to keep information up to date, had now been transferred to community ownership.

Members expressed their appreciation of the outstanding achievement of the small team of staff in maintaining rapid and reliable communications throughout the pandemic.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader and the Assistant Director – Policy and Communications for their contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the report be noted and the work undertaken on external communications during the pandemic be endorsed.
- (2) That suitable means be agreed with the Chair for members of the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee to be consulted as part of the review of the Council's social media policy.

6 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Assistant Director – Housing presented a report on the implementation of the recommendations from the scrutiny review of community rooms which had been approved by Cabinet in October, 2019.

A schedule detailing how each of the recommendations had been implemented was attached as an appendix to the report, although it had not been possible to fully undertake some of the promotional activities or assess the impact of actions as the community rooms had been closed since the Covid-19 lockdown in March, 2020. Reopening of the rooms would be considered in accordance with government guidance, but only once full risk assessments demonstrated that they could operate in a Covid-secure way.

Members emphasised the importance of the community rooms as a community support resource, particularly to assist recovery from the

pandemic, whilst acknowledging the need for this to be done safely. It was recognised that consideration would be given to potentially combine the administration of these Housing community rooms and the Venues community rooms in the future.

Members concluded that implementation of the recommendations had been completed and that the item could be removed from the monitoring schedule.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Assistant Director – Housing and the Scrutiny Project Group Lead Member for their work on the project and in implementing the recommendations.

The Committee also considered the Scrutiny recommendations implementation monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the report be noted and that the monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations on community rooms be removed from the Scrutiny monitoring schedule.
- (2) That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

7 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS PROGRESS REPORTS

Councillor Caulfield, Lead Member of the Scrutiny Project Group (SPG) on the Visitor Economy Strategy, outlined the proposed aim of the project to contribute to the preparation of the Visitor Economy Strategy and action plan. The draft Project Start Report would be considered by the SPG at its first meeting which was arranged to take place on 8 December, 2020.

The Group comprised Councillors Caulfield, Borrell, Brittain, Callan, Dyke, Fordham, S Niblock and Simmons, and it was planned for the project to be completed in March, 2021.

RESOLVED –

That the report by the Lead Member of the Scrutiny Project Group on the Visitor Economy Strategy be noted and that further progress be reported

to the Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee in January, 2021.

8 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December, 2020 – 31 March, 2021.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

9 WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE COMMUNITY, CUSTOMER AND ORGANISATIONAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered the items on its work programme for 2020/21, noting that there would be a progress report from the Scrutiny Project Group on the Visitor Economy Strategy at the meeting in January, 2021.

RESOLVED -

That the work programme be approved and updated to include the decisions of the current meeting.