



South Staffordshire Council

MJ 2020 Awards: Senior Leadership Team

Changing the culture of the Organisation

Summary

Together South Staffordshire Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) have transformed the way the Council works. Gone are traditional departments replaced by Teams that interact, communicate and work differently.

CLT's drive, passion and ambition to change the culture of the Council has made the transition possible. When the new CLT was formed three years ago our mantra from day one was '**one team one Council**' and this approach has successfully been cascaded throughout the organisation.

As a team we have overcome challenges and turned them into opportunities by having a strong, structured and innovative team who are in touch with what really matters - **our communities**. Outcomes have been impressive, including securing a five-year balanced budget against a backdrop of financial uncertainty, whilst still maintaining the 4th lowest Council tax for District Councils and importantly 92% of our residents would recommend South Staffordshire as a place to live and over 80% think the Council provides value for money.

Welcome to South Staffordshire, a rural district of 40,400 hectares, of which 80% is greenbelt; a population of 111,900 with significant growth in people aged over 65. Overall, we have an affluent district, with pockets of deprivation. Made up of 27 villages and no central town, we are sandwiched between several conurbations, most notably the Black Country so relationships, although complex, are critical to the wellbeing of the district.

The Council has 49 Elected Members, Conservative controlled and a workforce of 306 employees, (159 are full-time). Our current net budget is £12.4m.



The Senior Leaderships Journey so far.....

Three years ago, a new Chief Executive (CEO) was appointed. Critical to the approach was the introduction of a new CLT whose focus was to collectively drive cultural change, bringing energy and a new-found pace across the organisation. All four posts have distinct corporate roles.

Dave Heywood, Chief Executive - **‘creating the environment’**



Dave Heywood
Chief Executive

Dave concentrated on building what was already good about the Council, but gave greater focus, clarity and direction to enable the organisation to work together as one team, hence the mantra ‘one team one Council’ was born.

Three Corporate Director roles were introduced - **‘to make things happen’**:



David Pattison
Corporate Director
Governance
(Monitoring Officer)



Jackie Smith
Corporate Director
Commercial



James Howse
Corporate Director
Resource
(151 Officer)

- David Pattison, Governance – **to keep the Council safe**
- Jackie Smith, Commercial – **to make the Council money**
- James Howse, Resource – **to save the Council money**

Clear communication from day one was important through the introduction of a weekly Chief Executive note to all staff, which was a first for the organisation. Emphasis was on corporate messaging and personal snippets of the CEO’s life outside the work environment to help breakdown perceptions. Also introduced were weekly ‘walk arounds’ and locality visits ensuring visibility and informal engagement with staff.



Focused daily CLT catch ups were introduced to instil trust and understanding ensuring decisions could be made quickly. ***“I was sceptical when the CEO introduced the daily meetings however the arrangement has worked really well making sure we remain sharp and on top of priorities as well as giving me the opportunity from day one to be part of the corporate decision making.”*** David Pattison, Corporate Director Governance.

CLT targeted and refreshed key strategic plans - Workforce Development Strategy; Performance Management Framework and a new Efficiency and Income Plan (E&I Plan) which focused on three key strands:

- **Financial stability**
Income generation through strengthening our commercial offer, acquisitions and property development.
- **Managing growth**
Economic growth and protecting our communities against unwanted development.
- **Doing things differently**
Enabling staff to be innovative, agile and efficient through system transformation.

A new organisational structure beneath CLT was introduced, creating five Assistant Directors who moved from singular offices to a shared office environment to stimulate joint conversation and innovation, the first restructure for the Council for 12 years.

A key priority was establishing a senior organisation with headroom to innovate and deliver change, importantly move away from silo working, supported by internal ‘freelance’ roles ensuring the right people were in the right positions to drive our E&I Priorities.

Communication and messaging across the organisation were critical. A new weekly news round-up for staff, members and parishes was introduced where Teams put forward snippets on sharing progress. We are now on edition 155!



CLT meet weekly with Assistant Directors. No reports are circulated beforehand, focusing on roundtable discussions on pre agreed topics, encouraging open conversations. Interactive Extended Leadership Forums, which include, Team Managers are held every two months. CLT takes the lead role, for example, following a change in political groupings, a recent session was dedicated to political awareness led by the Corporate Director Governance.

CLT hold bi-annual 'Today and Tomorrow' Staff Forums where messages are shared with staff and importantly a service team project is showcased giving Teams the experience to present in front of colleagues.

At Christmas, CLT host and personally pay for a 'Big Thank You' where outstanding service is celebrated linking the awards to the Councils five Values which were introduced as part of the new ways of working:

Trust; Positive Relationships; Listening to people; Transparency; Pride

What difference has it made?

- 79% of staff recognise and understood the phrase 'one team one council'.
- 69% of staff feel encouraged to and are given the opportunity to get involved in new ways of doing things.

The Elections Team Manager quoted ***"For the first time when we ran the Elections it felt like the whole council were behind us, not just our team working in isolation"***

In 2018 the LGA Peer Review recognised strong leadership of place, quoting:

"The leadership of the Council, political and managerial is very impressive".

"This is an effective and well-functioning council that cares for its people."



“The Chief Executive has brought a new approach and innovation and the evolutionary style of change has been impressive.”

“There is strong evidence of ambition and innovation”.

The close working relationships between CLT and our staff, members and partners has been integral in helping us deliver the Council’s E&I priorities and led to a step change in service provision.

Stronger Relationships

Working closer with Members we have seen a real shift in thinking. Over £40m has been set a-side which to date has seen an investment of £8m in acquisitions and a further £34m allocated for a mixture of developments covering retail, housing and offices. Our assets have a market value of £34.8m and generate £2.4m gross income per annum also supporting economic growth across the district.

It is an excellent example where CLT work together – Commercial Director identifies the acquisitions; Resource Director allocates the best way to resource and Governance Director ensures the approach meets constitutional requirements. Leading to sign off by the Leader and CEO.

Our strong leadership has strengthened our external economic growth programme where in partnership with the City of Wolverhampton and Staffordshire County Council have attracted major global occupiers onto our award winning i54 South Staffordshire Industrial Park, creating to date over 2,700 jobs. Through innovative working the partnership has secured a £40m expansion to the site with the expectation that a further 2,000 will be created.

The LGA Peer Review commented:

‘The Council is open to developing partnerships if it benefits South Staffordshire and the Chief Executive has been instrumental in taking partnership working to its next level to build positive outcomes by working with agencies’.



Smarter Working

CLT have continued to provide focus and clarity to ensure smarter working. Together we have developed a comprehensive Capital and Commercial Asset Strategy that identifies all assets and importantly plots potential developments, performance and optimum times to dispose of assets to yield greater financial returns.

CLT have re-framed the Councils performance management integrated approach to finance; risk and performance in one over-arching monitoring report that's discussed with Members. Councillor R Lees, Deputy Leader states:

“Members really support and engage with the new approach, enabling the opportunity to debate, discuss and review performance alongside the Council’s budgetary challenges.”

Bringing the Assistant Directors together in one working environment has proved beneficial and aided a far richer and mature conversation leading to new ways of working and savings of £1.5m over the MTFS. ***This has been possible because of the way CLT are championing new ways of thinking and doing things differently.***

Supporting our Workforce

We regard ourselves as a learning organisation, CLT champion a number of programmes across the Council. The CEO acts as the sponsor for the ***Aspire*** programme, a year-long development for up and coming managers. Corporate Directors mentor participants and lead on group discussions that are a priority for the Council such as entrepreneurialism and political awareness. Participants have the opportunity to work with CLT on a corporate wide priority, the latest focusing on agile working where participants became ‘agile champions’ developing their role and experience. The programme has been very successful with individuals being promoted to more senior positions.



“Being part of the Aspire programme gave me the insight in how the Council worked outside my service area and gave me the confidence to achieve and progress my career.” Elaine Harper Cohort 1 – since promoted to Assistant Director Welfare.

Supporting our Elected Members

Relationships between Members and Officers have always been a strong point for the Council.

The CEO meets with the Leader weekly and invites CLT to join them, which has strengthened relationships and understanding, and given directors exposure to talk in greater depth with the Leader.

The CEO and Leader have introduced bi-annual Member Locality Forums in an informal setting to stimulate discussion and debate on localised issues, providing an excellent tool to commence difficult conversations on sensitive subjects, such as the new Local Plan.

CLT are working with non-Cabinet Members to strengthen involvement at an earlier point in the planning process for new initiatives. Following Cabinet Planning Days, a wider Member Forum is always held to ensure an open debate takes place before detailed plans are worked up at the Council’s three Challenge Panels. This complements the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny ensuring all Members are engaged.

To further strengthen engagement, the Leader was keen that Members with a commercial background provided a check and challenge of potential acquisitions and introduced a Member Asset and Scrutiny Panel. Facilitated by the Commercial and Resource Directors, the approach has meant decisions are made quickly.

The Corporate Director Governance leads a Member Engagement Group and the Chairman was quoted saying **“engagement with members has never been as strong”**. In 2018 a Member satisfaction survey backed this statement up:



- 94% of Members are happy with the support they are getting from officers.
- 86% of Members feel well informed about what is happening across the Council.

Conclusion

CLT's dynamic and passionate approach has rubbed off across the Council and outcomes against the E&I priorities of *financial stability; managing growth; and doing things differently*; are consistently being met. We have more to do but we are proud of the outcomes to date:

- Over the last three years we have improved the Council's financial position by £5.7m and looking forward have balanced the MTFS over a five-year (rather than three-year) period.
- Secured significant economic growth in partnership with neighbouring authorities, so far creating over 3,500 jobs at several manufacturing sites across South Staffordshire and a £2bn investment into the local economy.
- Generated an annual return of £2.4m from our own commercial investments which by 2024/25 is estimated to grow by £750,000 per annum.
- Increased our operational income for service teams by £316,000 (22%) over previous two years.
- Worked with Members providing strong leadership challenging their stance as a green belt authority to secure an additional 9,000 homes (up to 4,000 as part of the Black Country overspill).
- Our Workforce Development Strategy has become intelligence led resulting in 100% success in recruitment, 97% retention and achieving an agile workforce leading to freeing up office space generating a revenue return.



- Our digital transformation programme has changed the way we work across the organisation, for example the Council has invested £8m in the council offices to create an integrated Community Hub for 23 partners across the public, private, NHS and voluntary sector, funding a new GP surgery for the community - increasing income from £300,000 to £570,000 per annum.

There is no better way to conclude the submission by demonstrating the impact CLT is having on ***changing the culture of the organisation***.

The Leader circulated the following email to the CEO and copied all Members following recent Personal Reviews of CLT.

'I just want to pass on to you the comments of the review panel who have carried out the PDR's of yourself, David, James and Jackie.

We were very impressed with all the team's performance and their commitment and contribution to the very successful management of the District Council. Over the last two to three years since you have been our Chief Executive we have seen a significant change in the performance of the Council and especially in the communication of information to such an extent that the individual reports for the directors were mostly telling us what we already knew. It was a pleasure to be able to discuss with you all the future progress of the Council and to see that it is in the very safe hands of your Corporate Leadership Team.

Please pass this message on and congratulate the team on the excellent outcomes of the last year, also keep up the good work in the exciting future for the next twelve months working as "ONE COUNCIL".'

Councillor Brian Edwards MBE Leader of Council

