

North Warwickshire Borough Council – the **importance** of impartial and trusted feedback

Executive Recruitment Case Study





Getting the right person for the top job in your organisation is absolutely essential for future success. North Warwickshire Borough Council found WME's expert support invaluable as the local authority appointed its first new chief executive in almost a quarter of a century

Situated close to Birmingham and Coventry, North Warwickshire is one of England's smallest local authority areas in terms of population but among the largest in area. Made up of market towns and rural communities, it sees some 30,000 people visit every day for work. But the borough council has big plans for growth that will enable more of those commuters to live and work in North Warwickshire.

To fulfil those ambitions, says leader Cllr David Wright, the council needs to be a very different kind of organisation. The retirement of the council's chief executive after 23 years in the role provided an opportunity to move in a fresh direction under a new CEO.

"It was a well-run local authority but we needed to be more dynamic, more business focused," Cllr Wright explains. "We wanted somebody that could instigate change. Fundamentally, it's to enable us to make North Warwickshire a better place to live and work."

Having initially looked at sharing a chief executive with a neighbouring authority, the council's administration instead opted for an internal recruitment process.

HR manager Kerry Drakeley brought in West Midlands Employers to provide advice on developing the best way forward and support to put it into practice.

"I have been here 14 years and while we have done some senior recruitment over that time it's the first time it has involved the chief executive position," she explains. "We had an idea of the way we'd like to go about it and the processes to follow because of those other recruitments. But there's so much to think of. West Midlands Employers were able to come in and advise at every stage of the process and make sure we got everything right."

WME's expert team, suggested setting up internal and external stakeholder panels to take part in the interviews and assessments. This would serve to strengthen the recruitment process and provide feedback on candidates from a wider range of people while helping to allay concerns raised by opposition councillors about the decision to recruit internally.

Staff across the organisation from all grades and service areas were asked to take part in internal panel while major businesses and a variety of partners were approached for the external panel.

"It was very beneficial," says Kerry. "The internal really enjoyed taking part and took it very seriously. The external panel included some of the key stakeholders that the CEO would be working with. It meant they felt they had some impact on helping the council to get the best candidate for the role."

It turned out to be an essential part of the process, admits Cllr Wright.



“We wanted to come up with a robust interview and selection process that would stand up to scrutiny and test all applicants fairly and WME helped us to achieve that,” he says. “If none of the internal candidates could be appointed we would have used the same process to go to the external market.”

WME worked with Kerry and her colleagues throughout to ensure everything ran smoothly within a tight timescale. She explains: “Most of the process was through WME because they have that specialist expertise and experience. One of the key things was the advice and support— with

members for the interviews, with the job criteria and design of the assessments, and in helping us to have a fair and transparent process.

“WME facilitated the panels on the day and collated feedback that we used to inform our decision. Having WME’s expert team there ensured it all ran smoothly and perfectly.”

The successful candidate was Steve Maxey, formerly corporate director for environment. “I felt the process was proportionate, focused and covered just about every angle,” he says. “Once politicians had decided to go with the internal option, the role of WME was absolutely vital. They brought that validation to show I met certain criteria. “I had a one to one with WME afterwards. In terms of feedback that was great. It makes you think about the ‘what next?’ and that this is just the start of the process, not the end.”

After the interviews and assessment, Cllr Wright never had any doubts that he’d found the right person and says the opposition is now “singing Steve’s praises” thanks to the leadership he’s shown during the Covid-19 crisis.

And finally, would the council use WME again? “We wouldn’t consider anyone else,” says Kerry. “There’s nothing that compares with the level of expertise and experience in local government and recruitment that they offer.”

Why quality feedback is important

Feedback after any form of assessment is important but even more so when working with internal candidates as this initiates the learning process in them.

An objective, transparent and respectful conversation needs to be conducted during feedback to drive home the points which are highlighted through the assessment process. For internal candidates a recruitment process is very much an internal 'development' process and delivered effectively can help achieve an opportunity for dialogue to discuss their career aspirations.

We feedback with the aim that the participant becomes aware of both the areas of strength and areas of development. It should encourage introspection, help participants draw inference and reach conclusions.

Having a trusted and confidential discussions as part of our executive process enables us to continue working with the organisation and participants far after an 'appointment' has been made, through a range of support including Executive Coaching, leadership and team developments initiatives. Our role is to provide advice, support pre, and post executive recruitment.

How WME helped

- Worked closely with the council from the outset to design a fair and transparent internal recruitment process – from the job specification to the written assessments.
- Provided expert advice on the benefits of stakeholder panels and how they work and helped the Council introduced these as an integral part of the process.
- Facilitated on the day of the interviews, collated feedback and presented the findings to the council. The successful candidate then took part in a one-to-one feedback briefing.

The verdict

"WME were outstanding, not just in terms of the advice we got but their level of professionalism all the way through. I'd recommend them to any other local authority. They bring a wealth of experience and have a unique place in the market." – Cllr David Wright, leader of North Warwickshire Borough Council

About WME

West Midlands Employers is a not for profit, public sector organisation collectively owned by 32 councils in the West Midlands. We're one of 9 Regional Employers' Organisations in England. Our vision is to advocate, build and champion a resilient and diverse public sector workforce for an ambitious West Midlands region. Our wide range of services supports this vision.

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