

Lichfield District Council – finding the **perfect match**

Executive Recruitment Case Study





Recruiting a dynamic individual capable of handling the unique challenges involved in running a district council is a tough ask in a competitive market. But Lichfield District Council had support from WME every step of the way...



"It's critically important to get it right – your political legacy hinges on getting the right chief executive. As a political leader, you're hoping you only do it once!"

Councillor Doug Pullen, Leader of Lichfield District Council, wants his local authority to transform itself for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

From post-pandemic recovery to major regeneration plans and a drive to re-engage with local communities, there's plenty on the agenda in the coming years.

So when he set out to recruit a new chief executive, he was well aware it needed to be a particular kind of person – someone capable of taking on the breadth of responsibilities now involved in running a modern district council.

"It's incredibly wide and you need somebody who has that understanding and breadth," he says. "We've had to make cuts but that doesn't mean we don't have ambitions.

"They need to help us build true partnerships with a variety of people. It's that ability to engage with and understand how a voluntary or community sector organisation can assist with our ambitions but also meet with a minister in Whitehall and lobby for funding. Two totally different meetings, both equally important because we will never truly deliver otherwise."

Given the critical importance of the role, the council brought in West Midlands Employers to assist with the recruitment process.

Christie Tims, Head of Governance and Performance, takes up the story.

"The market for senior level candidates is very competitive and it's especially hard when you're a small district – and have a small HR team with limited capacity. We've used WME an awful lot for a range of support, especially around Covid over the last year, so they were our go-to organisation.

"They bring that understanding of the local context, they're well-connected, they understand the unique challenges we face and that you need a particular type of person to be a chief executive in that environment."

WME worked with the Leader and Christie to design a strategy and job spec – providing expert guidance on the kind of candidates they should target.



Cllr Pullen says a number of elected members favoured recruiting from the private sector but 'healthy challenge' from WME made them realise the net should be cast wider.

"We needed someone that could hit the ground running and WME were great at brokering what could be difficult conversations," explains Christie.

"They did a lot of job research for us, benchmarked salaries, helped set the tone of the executive search and the recruitment, took part in the interviews and helped us score candidates. They were with us every step of the way."

That included keeping the process on track when the initial choice for CEO decided not to take up the position.

"WME said 'ok, here's the next plan' – they didn't miss a beat," says Christie. "We went back to some candidates that couldn't make the original selection dates and had dropped out of the process. They made sure we didn't lose the momentum of the recruitment campaign."

"We're really pleased with the person we got for the role and are eager for him to start."

Cllr Pullen believes WME's in-depth knowledge was key.

"They did a cracking job and were tremendously responsive to our ambitions and what we wanted to do. They were challenging when they needed to be and were helpful when they needed to be."

"They put a fence around what we were trying to do. It wasn't about them running it at arm's length, they were helping us through the process, so we felt we had made the decision ourselves. We couldn't be happier with the selection we made."



"WME have been really supportive. They kept me informed every step of the way"

Find out more from Lichfield District Council's Chief Executive, Simon Fletcher.

Understanding local government context and understanding our region

WME are proud to be part of the 116,000 West Midlands public sector workforce, which enables our understanding of the needs and challenges from both an inside and outside perspective. We work closely with national government bodies and use our networked position to our advantage when sourcing the best candidates for our region. We network with authorities and improvement bodies right across the country which we fold into our understanding of the sector. We also call upon our talent bank of expert associates, both independent consultants working in the private and public sector and public servants who are experts in their field and what to provide support back into the sector to work with us further strengthening the advice and support we offer.

How WME helped

- Advised on a recruitment strategy and job description (including benchmarking salaries)
- Conducted an executive search, longlisted and then technically assessed candidates
- Designed and delivered an assessment centre, shortlisted and then took part in the interview panel to offer an external, objective viewpoint
- Supported candidates throughout the process

The verdict

"This was a challenging recruitment and WME threw everything they had at it. They really opened doors for us in terms of the quality of candidates. I'd recommend them without hesitation.

On this occasion, they went out to bat for us and smashed it out of the park."

Christie Tims, Head of Governance and Performance, Lichfield District 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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