

Rugby Borough Council – building a **stronger** **leadership** team

Case Study





West Midlands Employers was engaged by Rugby Borough Council to provide bespoke support to help its newly created senior leadership team bond and embrace new ways of working. The result is a confident group of leaders with a shared sense of purpose and direction

Successfully implementing an ambitious new corporate strategy that's designed to help your area bounce back after the pandemic is a big enough challenge for any local authority.

Doing so with a brand new leadership team following a restructure takes it to another level.

Having become Rugby Borough Council's executive director just a week before the first lockdown, Mannie Ketley is well versed in the need to adapt and change.

The area is a successful and resilient part of the West Midlands, but it soon became clear that the council would need to take a fresh approach to enable the borough to play a leading role in the region's post-Covid recovery.

Mannie and colleagues therefore restructured the senior management team to give it greater capacity and a more strategic focus in a move that saw a number of staff move from largely operational to leadership roles.

It was a major shift that required the new team to embrace new ways of working – both as a group and in terms of the council's shift to a hybrid model.

In order to make this transition as smooth as possible, West Midlands Employers (WME) was brought in to design and deliver a bespoke programme of support that would help to build a common culture and understanding across the team and embed new approaches.

After doing initial groundwork with team members, a facilitator ran three workshops that involved both individual and group coaching.

"We'd worked with WME in the past and were confident they would do a good job," explains Elaine McGladdery, who is the council's learning and development business partner.

"We wanted a way of getting the team together in a room to think about what they do and how they do it. What's the purpose of the team?"

Elaine says the benefits were immediately clear.

"Because of the pandemic, it was the first time a lot of them had got together for a quite a long time. There was a lot of energy and engagement in the room. One of the most valuable aspects of the sessions was the chance for team members to share their personal journeys because it really helped them get to know each other and understand where they're coming from."



One of key outcomes has been around a collective commitment to 'compassionate leadership' that will be central to the post-Covid recovery and will ultimately enable the team to model behaviours that cascade down the organisation.

Mannie believes the work has enabled the team to bond and nurture a distinct identity and ethos that will equip them well as they deliver the new corporate strategy.

"Bringing WME in at the outset of a newly formed leadership team helped us to achieve a level of 'team spirit' far more quickly than would otherwise have been possible.

"This level of connection with each other, an understanding of our shared goals and our own strengths and shadows has developed working relationships significantly and positively."

The workshops included a focus on the AID (Action, Impact, Desired Behaviour) model for giving effective feedback and a framework for structuring coaching, GROW (Goal, Reality, Options and Will) – tools that the council will continue to utilise.

"Using GROW and AID are key takeaways for us and will be a common feature in our ways of working," says Mannie. "Understanding each other's personalities better means we are able to communicate with each other more effectively and supportively, in the context of what drives both positive and negative behaviours."

The council is a member of the West Midlands Coaching and Mentoring Pool, run by WME. Having adopted a coaching style of leadership, the plan is to use coaching far more throughout the organisation.

Elaine believes the decision to bring in a trusted and impartial partner that has a deep understanding of the region and of local government will continue pay dividends.

"Councils like ours are traditionally a bit of a stepping stone for people in their careers. But the approaches we're using now should enable us to focus even more on developing people internally. When you do that you tend to hang on to people for longer.

"For the workshops it was important to have that external perspective and for it to be somebody who could challenge without an agenda and reflect back. I would definitely recommend WME to others. They have that ethos that works for us and they 'get' us – that's really helpful."

Feedback from the senior leadership team



"I'm not usually a fan of 'share your personal experience/story' sessions but having this discussion at the beginning of our workshops opened up lines of communication that simply would not have otherwise been there. We all immediately had an improved connection with our colleagues, which has already made business discussions a lot easier."



"I found the both the group sessions and the individual coaching really rewarding... I am continuing to think about what we discussed and have had some success in delivering some of the short-term targets. I am also using this to informally coach the team around me."



"We benefitted from having detailed discussions about what the team was there to do and also what the team was not there to do as well as how we should behave. The result of this has been that there is a real focus on strategic leadership and less of an onus on operational management."



"[It] opened up a whole new conversation about outcomes focussed strategy and agreeing appropriate measures. The timing of this has been perfect given that we have recently agreed a new corporate strategy and now need to deliver it."

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.

Visit www.wmemployers.org.uk

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