

Minute Extract – Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13 October 2020**OS.29 COUNCIL MOTION - SUPPORT FOR TECH TALENT CHARTER**

- 29.1 The Committee was reminded that at the meeting of the Council on 28 July the following Notice of Motion was referred to Overview and Scrutiny for consideration and recommendation back to Council.
- The Motion asked the Council to adopt the following
1. Ask the Council's Human Resources Section to look at the Tech Talent Charter, identify what the Council could do better, the benefits to the Council in signing up to the Charter and how the Council can influence other shared service providers that the Council works with (including, but not limited to, Ubico, One Legal, Publica, South West Audit Partnership).
 2. Receive a report back to a future meeting of the Council in 2020/21 with the findings and recommendations from the Human resources Section.
- 29.2 The Chair explained that he would firstly ask the proposer of the Motion to present it to the Committee, followed by the Head of Corporate Services presenting his report circulated with the Agenda at Pages No. 145-152. The item would then be opened up for questions and debate before determination of what response should be sent back to Council in respect of this Motion.
- 29.3 The proposer of the Motion indicated that she would like to give Members some background on the Tech Talent Charter which was essentially a commitment by organisations to a set of undertakings that aimed to deliver greater inclusion and diversity in the workforce. An organisation had to nominate a senior member of staff who would be the lead and work towards inclusive recruitment and retention policies together with a commitment that once a year data would be submitted anonymously to the Tech Talent Charter organisation. She explained that the Motion had really come about to ask Tewkesbury Borough Council to look beyond itself and play its part in encouraging diversity in the tech area. The proposer felt that this was particularly pertinent as the Council was supporting the Cyber Park and she felt it would be a good message to send to potential employers that, as a local authority, Tewkesbury Borough Council was committed to doing everything it could within its power to try and achieve the best workforce with the most talent. The Charter was supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport together with a number of major government departments who were signatories to the Charter. In addition, a large number of the Country's blue-chip companies and neighbouring authorities had signed the Charter, so it was very mainstream. There was no cost involved with the Charter, no membership fee to pay and each organisation's progress was at its own timetable, so the Council set the timetable which it wished to work to. The Charter compliance was not monitored by the responsible body so the Council would not be questioned for instance on the outcomes from an interview panel. She indicated that, from reading the report of the Head of Corporate Services, it looked like Tewkesbury was doing very well with women in the Tech Sector but it needed to be recognised that the Tech Talent Charter was expanding beyond just the Tech Sector and was looking at diversity in more general terms. She felt that the Charter offered the opportunity for prestige, to have good work recognised and would enable the

Council to scrutinise from within to see if there was anything more that could be learnt about diversity and inclusion. In conclusion, she urged Members to support the signing of the Charter which would be a good badge that demonstrated the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and she asked that Members approach this matter with an open mind.

29.4 The Head of Corporate Services presented his report which contained some background research he hoped would aid the Committee's consideration of the Motion. He drew attention to Paragraph 3.1 which stated that, as at 16 September, 544 organisations had signed the Charter, predominantly from the private sector but a few neighbouring Councils, including Cheltenham, Cotswold, Forest of Dean and West Oxford. A Board of Directors was in place to oversee the Charter but, again, the representation was dominated by the private sector. Paragraph 4.1 of the report set out some points that Members may find pertinent in discussing the Motion and, as had been stated earlier by the proposer of the Motion, it was very positive that the percentage of females in the Council's IT and Business Transformation Teams were significantly above the national figure of 17%. However, the Motion went beyond just signing the Charter as it referred to influencing other shared service providers two of which, namely Publica and the South West Audit Partnership, the Council had no relationship with and therefore would be unable to exercise any influence over them. In terms of One Legal as the Council was the lead in this partnership the staff fell within the Council's human resources and equality policies. In respect of Ubico, the contract with the Council required adherence to equality and diversity practices and policies and the Committee received an annual performance report from that organisation which could include relevant data in this area if required. The Motion also referenced the fact that the influencing of other service providers should not be limited to these partnerships and the Head of Corporate Services indicated that, if Members were to accept this, Officers would need a steer on what other partnerships should be included. Again as indicated by the proposer of the Motion, the Charter was derived from the Tech Sector but as reference was made to other partnerships this broadened the scope beyond the ICT Sector as none of the partnerships referenced were from that sector. With regards to preparing a report for Council, the Head of Corporate Services suggested an alternative in that equality and diversity data relevant to the Tech Charter could be included in the Workforce Development Strategy which was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis and was due to be presented at the next meeting in November. In conclusion, initial feedback from the HR team had been that signing the Charter would not have a significant impact on resource and could be seen as a badge of the Council's commitment for continued positive work around equality and diversity based on the caveat that the Council simply signed the Charter and updates were provided through the Workforce Development Strategy.

29.5 During the debate that ensued, a Member indicated that diversity and inclusion was recognised throughout the Workforce Development Strategy and particular reference was made to Page No.10 of the Strategy which stated that the effectiveness of these issues were regularly tracked and reviewed. On this basis he asked the proposer of the Motion whether she had been aware of this when proposing the Motion. The proposer of the Motion indicated that she felt the Motion was about looking beyond Tewkesbury Borough Council with the authority playing its part and contributing to get more women involved in the Tech industry across the board and raising the profile; nationally women did not have a very high profile in the Tech industry yet they made up 50% of the talent in the Country and she felt it was important to make use of all the

talent available. Upon receiving confirmation that the proposer was aware of the content of the Workforce Development Strategy, the questioner asked why the proposer of the Motion appeared to be concentrating on specifically females. He was aware that this Motion was almost word for word the same as one put to Cheltenham Borough Council but with a paragraph missing which covered other under-represented Groups such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LBGT), Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), the disabled and those with mental illness. He also referred to the fact that the Chief Executive of the Board responsible for the Tech Talent Charter had stated that if only white middle class women were brought into the industry that was not diversity. Again, he asked the proposer of the Motion if she was aware of this and specifically why the Motion focused on females only. The proposer of the Motion indicated that she would be happy with more diverse policies across the board she was not saying that it was particularly only women, she indicated that she was only asking the Council to sign up to the Charter and the aspirations of the organisation responsible for it. Other Members spoke about their concerns that the Motion was focussed on women, despite the fact that the Council's statistics were very good with over 37% of the ICT team and over 50% of the Business Transformation team being female. The view was expressed that the Motion was not about diversity it was concentrating on females and by pushing one group forward other groups such as LBGT and BAME were automatically pushed back. Some Members agreed that the focus and wording of the Motion was not appropriate and were of the view that it should be withdrawn as it was just looking to promote one group to the detriment of other groups. One Member stated that he disagreed with this view as he believed that the Motion was about equality of the sexes and race, religion etc. did not factor into this. Further questions were asked about the time commitment involved with the Charter which covered just eight people at the Council. Whilst it was acknowledged that signing the Charter involved a negligible amount of time Members were advised that the Chief Executive of the Tech Talent Charter was on record saying that organisations had been required to leave as they had not complied with the requirements of the Charter. In response to a question about whether the proposer was aware of how much time would be involved with the Charter requirements, she indicated that she was not but the Motion requested further information on the work involved and the report now before Members indicated that signing the Charter would have little impact on resources. It was stressed that the question was about compliance with the requirements of the Charter in terms of attending meetings, preparing data, exchanging views etc. not simply signing a document. The Member was of the view that the resource implications could not be justified in respect of such a small area of the Council's business that already exceeded national expectations in terms of the gender split. He maintained that the Charter was aimed at the Tech Sector, companies like Hewlett Packard and the Royal Bank of Scotland that had hundreds of Tech Staff and, whilst he had nothing against the Charter, he was a consultant in the IT field and a member of the British Computer Society, which was a signatory of the Charter, he did not think that it was appropriate for Tewkesbury Borough Council which had a very small number of IT staff. In addition, he felt that the Motion was poorly written, was very woolly, and, in his opinion, its contents and scope had no worth. Some Members disagreed with the views expressed about the Tech Talent Charter not recognising all sectors of the community as opposed to just women and could see no problem with signing the Charter; the Council was not being asked to spend any money nor commit huge resources, other authorities locally had signed up to the Charter and their teams would be of a similar size if not smaller than Tewkesbury's

therefore they were in favour of supporting the signing of the Charter and could not understand the reluctance of other Members.

29.6 A Member stated that the key to this was for all Members to work together to bring forward a Motion that would be acceptable and provide benefit to the Council and its residents. Other Members stated that the Motion as presented was trying to address something that was not a problem at Tewkesbury Borough Council in terms of the gender split in IT, it sought to influence partners that the Council was not able to influence, it did not address the real problem of the limited number of females in school studying in the Tech field at A level, it did not reference a diverse workforce and it did not provide information on the requirements of the Council once the Charter had been signed in terms of resource and what benefits would be derived to the Borough. In essence it was felt that the Motion was trying to address a problem that for the most part did not exist at Tewkesbury Borough Council instead of focusing on the real problems in this area and putting forward a Motion that was suitably worded to make a real difference. The Chair agreed that it was important for Members to work together but the time for that was before a Motion was submitted to Council not after it had been considered and referred for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He indicated that the situation currently was that the Committee was considering a Motion as written and it needed to determine its view on that Motion in order to report back to Council. Some Members of the Committee urged the proposer of the Motion to withdraw it, take on board the comments made at today's meeting, work with all Members to prepare an alternative Motion that could at the appropriate time be submitted to Council. The Chair indicated his intention to make a proposal that the Council should not sign the Tech Talent Charter as there were no specific benefits to the Council; the gender split for females in the Tech roles at the Council was good and would not benefit from the Charter being signed; the Council's resources were already under pressure and it was for other organisations and partners to determine for themselves whether they wished to sign the Charter without influence from the Council particularly since the Council was unable to influence two of the partnerships mentioned. He referred Members to the discussion that had taken place earlier in the meeting in relation to the performance trackers and how many projects for the benefit of the Borough and its residents were being delayed or put on hold as resources were severely overstretched in trying to deal with response and recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic; he could not support the Motion when it did not deliver for the Council's residents and, however minor, would impact further on the Council's resource problems. Putting aside the problems with the wording of the Motion, in addition he did not think that this was the appropriate time to be considering this Motion as, with everything else that was going on, it did not seem to him a good use of Officer or Member time. After further discussion, the proposer of the Motion agreed to withdraw it with a view to presenting a re-worded Motion at the appropriate time that took on board the points made and had been discussed with the other Groups on the Council prior to submission.

29.7 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED That the Council be advised that the Motion on the Tech Talent Charter had been **WITHDRAWN** at the current time whilst the proposer worked with other political groups to find some wording which would be acceptable across the board to come back to the Council at a future date.