

Rugby Borough Council – understanding the context of local government

Executive Recruitment Case Study





Rugby Borough Council wanted to find an executive director capable of leading exciting plans to reshape the organisation. WME helped the local authority manage a highly successful recruitment campaign and identify the right person for the job

Mannie Ketley describes her first few weeks in post as executive director of Rugby Borough Council as “turbo-charged”.

The country entered lockdown as a result of Covid-19 just seven days after being recruited to the post. Leading the council’s response to the pandemic was “intense” but it also gave Mannie the opportunity to develop a breadth of experience that would normally take years to achieve.

Previously the council’s head of corporate resources, she secured the top job following a two-stage recruitment process that pitted her against both internal and external candidates.

The very fact that it was spread over two stages is a reflection of the strong response the council generated after bringing in West Midlands Employers (WME) to help manage the campaign and assess candidates.

Suzanne Turner, HR manager, picks up the story.

“Initially, we’d wanted to look at a restructure at the same time as filling the post. After talking things through with WME, we decided to separate the two pieces of work to make it simpler and allow the new executive director to shape their new strategic team.

“This isn’t something we do every day. The advice from WME was really helpful and reassuring – talking it through with someone who has supported other councils and knows the different options, the right level to make decisions, dovetailing our usual recruitment practices alongside compliance with our government rules amongst other considerations.”

The post was advertised on the council’s website and on WMJobs – a vacancies portal managed by WME that attracts more than two million unique visitors a year.

The level of response surprised the council, admits Suzanne, and led to the creation of a two-stage recruitment process that saw eight candidates whittled down to a final shortlist of four.

“It was a tricky situation because we were working to a tight timetable. That’s when we called up WME’s expert team to step in and advise us. It was also really useful and reassuring having WME at the interviews alongside myself and the leaders – an organisation which is seen as an expert and external to the organisation.

“WME’s expertise brought in experience of what you should be looking for, how you might measure that and identifying where people’s development needs might be. WME’s chief executive had some really great insights on the candidates which were objective and evidence-based.”

It was essential for the council to appoint someone capable not only of remodelling the organisation for the challenges ahead but also leading the future development of Rugby, one of the UK's fastest-growing towns.

Mannie believes WME's input into the process was invaluable – in particular, their participation in the interviews and assessments.

"Having WME there helped to broaden the questions I was asked. I know from Suzanne's perspective it's daunting when you have three group leaders there who are clear in their minds about the kind of candidates they are looking for. It helped having an impartial senior executive there who could speak from a position of authority.

"That level of understanding of the sector is very important and a huge advantage for WME. Councils need people who can deal with all those different scenarios – such as a crisis – that you are going to be faced with in this role.

It brings a lot of gravitas to the whole process. Internally, we're looking at the best fit for the organisation. But the world is a much bigger place than the geographical area the council is responsible for. In a fast-changing sector, it's important to have somebody external and unbiased who's able to bring that wider perspective."

WME then helped the council recruit a deputy executive director with the successful candidate being Dan Green, formerly the council's head of environment and public realm.

It analysed the psychometric profile of candidates and assisted with the interview process by having a senior member of the team join the panel as an independent observer.

"It was really useful to have someone who could help the interview panel make objective decisions," says Suzanne. "They also produced helpful interview and presentation feedback on the candidates and were available to talk one-to-one with them."

Mannie is now looking to the future, leading on the council's post-pandemic recovery strategy and getting the local economy back on track.

She believes WME will have an important role to play in helping the organisation achieve its goals.

"It's hugely helpful to have an organisation like WME working with you and helping with the development of staff from a position of understanding the skills that are needed."



Understanding local government context and understanding our region

We 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, with a future restructure in mind
- Advertised the post on WMJobs, which is managed by WME
- Devised a two-stage recruitment process and assisted with the shortlisting of candidates
- WME's chief executive, Rebecca Davis, joined the interview panel to provide an external, objective viewpoint

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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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