

## **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Wednesday, 13 March 2019, County Hall Worcester - 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

#### **Minutes**

Mr C B Taylor (Chairman), Mrs M A Rayner (Vice Chairman), Mr A D Kent, Mr R J Morris, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Prof J W Raine, Mr A Stafford, Mr R P Tomlinson and Mr R M Udall

### **Also attended:**

Mrs L C Hodgson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities

Ms K J May, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning

Mr G R Brookes

Dr C Hotham

Andrew Spice (Director of Commercial & Commissioning), Taylor (Head of HR & OD), Hannah Needham (Assistant Director for Families, Communities and Partnerships), Steph Simcox (Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery), Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Alison Spall (Overview and Scrutiny)

### **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2019 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

**246 Apologies and Welcome**

None.

**247 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None.

**248 Public Participation**

None.

**249 Confirmation of**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2019

**the Minutes of  
the Previous  
Meeting**

**250 Workforce**

were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Panel received a report from the Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development (H of HR&OD) which provided an update on the County Council's recent Workforce initiatives. He provided an overview of the key issues as follows:

- A new operating model for the HR&OD Team was being embedded, which had seen a move away from Directorate based resources to a centralised Team with the introduction of new standardised, streamlined and simplified processes and policies.
- In the last 12 months there had been an emphasis on the performance and productivity of the workforce, in addition to workforce initiatives that could directly achieve in year savings. The key areas of focus were: performance review compliance, attendance management at work, the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme, agency spend reduction, Christmas Annual Leave Purchase Scheme, social work recruitment, apprenticeships and the Social Work Academy.
- The Panel was informed that the performance data from previous years had shown low levels of compliance (on average 60%), combined with higher than average performance rating distribution, which had raised concerns regarding their accuracy and consistency. Added to that, the sickness absence rate had been rising against the national trend, resulting in lost productivity. The H of HR&OD advised that this situation had improved significantly in the last year, with compliance rates currently on average at 90% and expected to be 100% by the year end. The absence management figures were also now showing a downward trend.
- Between 2017 and 2020, the County Council was required to register an average of 2.3% of its total workforce on new apprenticeships, which was approximately 74 per year. An Apprenticeship Levy was required to be paid by the Council calculated on 0.5% of the total pay bill. The Levy was paid into a digital account and could be drawn down to pay for apprenticeship training for a limited period. The H of HR&OD advised that the Council had recently obtained Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) Employer Provider

status, which meant that it could deliver a range of apprenticeships and retain the full amount of levy for each apprenticeship programme.

- Future workforce priorities for 2019 included the establishment of a wholly owned company, Worcestershire Children First and the associated work around the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE). The Panel was assured that there was also a focus on staff who were not transferring to the new company.
- The County Council's Organisational Redesign Project involved a significant input from Human Resources. This Project was focused on the function and form required to deliver Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) services effectively and the skills and capabilities required to support this delivery. The Panel was informed that over 120 staff volunteers were working in groups to contribute and support the development of this Project.
- The key statistics for the full time equivalent (FTE) profile, sickness, turnover rate and agency spend were provided for the end of Quarter 3 2018/19.
- A new Managing Performance Policy was launched in September 2018, with an emphasis on ensuring that employee performance was measured accurately and evidenced correctly. Mandatory mid-year ratings were expected from all managers for each of their staff.
- Social worker recruitment had been a key goal for the year and significant time and resources had been employed in reducing the Council's dependency on agency workers and stabilising the workforce. During the last 12 months permanent staffing levels for social workers had increased to 79%, against a minimum target of 85% and turnover had reduced from 25% to 13% in the same period. The retention figures had been aided by the successful launch of the Social Work Academy this year, which had proved to be a valuable support for social workers, particularly newly qualified social workers joining WCC at the start of their careers. The next few years would prove critical for the Academy.
- The implementation of the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme introduced in November 2018 had resulted in 40 applications being agreed with a resultant overall saving of £1.2m.

The following main points were raised:

- A Member questioned why the number of staff taking voluntary redundancy was so low, when there was a target figure of 240. The H of HR&OD explained that the Council was required to legally notify the Government of the maximum number of redundancies likely to be made. Given the budget figures at that time, it was established that 240 was the maximum number of redundancies that could be facilitated, although the final number was always expected to be much lower. Of the applications received for voluntary redundancy, over half were not agreed, due to factors such as the post not being able to be deleted or the cost of the potential redundancy being prohibitive. Some employees were advised at an early stage that their application would not be able to be approved.
- In response to a further question, the H of HR&OD advised that it was not anticipated that the formal Voluntary Redundancy Scheme would be repeated in the near future, however, the Council was not opposed to individual employees expressing an interest in voluntary redundancy and such requests would be explored. He stressed that this did not apply to employees who had recently applied and been declined voluntary redundancy.
- A Member raised some concerns about the value and cost of the performance review process, in particular what the information was used for and the expected benefit. The H of HR&OD advised that the process was vital as an ongoing Council wide process to ensure that key information about the productivity and performance of employees was being obtained. The importance of the moderation role was also crucial to understand the performance and ability of a team and Managers were receiving training to ensure that they were doing this effectively. The Director of Commercial and Commissioning stressed that employees were entitled to expect a review of their work, which identified their effort and achievement. Where employees were exceeding their performance targets, it was appropriate that they should receive some recognition for that, which in turn encouraged further improvements. It wasn't intended that the process should be complex, rather to ensure that there was quality objective setting and meaningful, productive review sessions taking place as part of the expected pattern of everyday working practices.

- A query was raised as to how the impact of the Performance Review process on employees had been assessed and whether there was any specific feedback obtained to gauge this. The Panel was informed that the process had been kept simple with clear objectives linked to the Strategic Plan. The H of HR& OD advised that a specific question seeking feedback on the process had not been included in the recent Pulse Staff Survey.
- A Member suggested that enabling staff to participate in meaningful activities beyond the workplace was beneficial to staff engagement, improving productivity, self-esteem and morale. He referred to a previous Scrutiny about increasing physical activity in Worcestershire. One of the recommendations from this Scrutiny was for WCC as a large employer to encourage staff to be more physically active. At the time, there were a number of initiatives to engage staff and improve motivation. Unfortunately, these initiatives didn't appear to have been continued. The H of HR&OD advised that whilst these types of initiative had not been focused on recently, this was something that could be considered in the year ahead. The Director suggested that one of the Volunteer Groups could be asked to explore this idea.
- The possibility of staff being entitled to have 'volunteer days' could also be given some consideration. The Panel asked for feedback on this at the appropriate stage.
- It was confirmed that WCC would have used most of its £410k Apprenticeship Levy by the year end.
- The Panel was informed that the definition of 'apprentice' was used to refer to new employees of any age or existing employees who wished to upskill or complete a qualification. Members felt that this wider definition needed to be made known as there was the assumption that apprenticeships referred to young people at the start of their careers.
- In response to a Members question about the number of current apprentices, the HR&OD explained that there were 16 apprenticeships currently being provided under the WCC Employer Provider Service, but that other apprenticeships were being run through other schemes. The Panel was advised that the 16 apprentices were either in social care or business administration. Most of these apprentices were new employees, but the H of HR&OD agreed to provide specific details on

**251 Libraries Transformation Programme**

the breakdown.

- The H of HR&OD guided the Panel through Appendix 1 (HR & OD Development Business Plan 2018/19) and provided details of the numbers of staff currently in each section and additionally the Pensions Team, which also came under his remit. He advised that the culture and environment of an organisation was crucial for its future development. There needed to be clear capabilities in place or potential to develop skills to ensure future needs were met. The H of HR&OD was keen to do a skills audit, which would help with this process.
- In response to a question about succession planning, the H of HR&OD advised that WCC had a Workforce Strategy rather than a Succession Strategy.
- There was some confusion between the Performance Indicators included in this Report and those included in the Performance Monitoring Report that followed. The H of HR&OD confirmed that future reports would include clear narrative to aid Members' understanding.
- A Member asked what protection there was for staff from workplace bullying and harassment. The Panel was informed that this was one of the new Council Policies launched in September 2018. A recent staff survey had also included a question about whether staff felt confident to report harassment. Additionally, the HR Team had encouraged the Trade Union to carry out their own survey, the details of which would be shared with them. It was agreed that the Panel would receive a further Report on this issue at the September Panel meeting, to include the results of the two surveys.

The Assistant Director of Families, Communities and Partnerships provided an update on the Libraries Transformation Programme. She advised that the Consultation launched in October 2018 had closed on 28 February 2019 and 1,947 responses had been received, which were currently being analysed in detail. Drop-in sessions had been held at all 23 libraries, facilitated by Libraries Officers and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities had attended every event. Some of the key themes were as follows:

- A staff presence was felt to be important and was valued
- The fully volunteered model was not supported

- Concern was expressed about the Open Plus model, especially around safeguarding
- General concern was expressed about the reduction of a service which was really valued.

The Panel was reminded that one of the aspects of the Consultation was to seek views on the methodology used to define need. The Needs Assessment would therefore be refreshed as a result of the findings, which might have an impact on the rankings compared to those originally given. In terms of social isolation, for instance, the Assistant Director confirmed that there would be a review of the isolation ranking to ensure that access to public transport was considered.

Members were informed that Place Partnership Limited had been instructed to carry out a strategic asset review of library premises to identify what options there were for savings to be made. Stakeholder meetings were also being held to ensure everyone was kept informed of developments.

In terms of going forward, full proposals would be presented to the Cabinet in June. In drafting those proposals, the Assistant Director advised she would be mindful of some clear messages that had come to the fore during the Consultation ie:

- Whenever possible, frontline service should be protected
- Use of current library properties should be prioritised, whilst looking at ways in which the buildings might be able to be used differently to increase income
- Wherever possible, management efficiencies be obtained from back office services
- There could be implications for the front-line service, such as Open Plus.

The CMR thanked all the staff who had been involved in the drop-in sessions. She was pleased to report that the £200k of savings for 2018/19 were on track, with a further £600k of savings to be achieved over the next two years. She confirmed that liaison work would continue with District Councils regarding the importance of library locations.

The Assistant Director advised that the Department had been invited to take part in a Local Government Authority (LGA) Peer Review of the Library Service. She welcomed this opportunity, which would test out proposals ahead of

the Cabinet meeting in June. The Chairman commented that the Panel would be happy to be involved as appropriate. The Assistant Director advised that when she had further information she would liaise with the Chairman.

Councillors Morris and Raine had carried out a site visit to Yate Library the previous week, to look at their Open Access Library Scheme. They advised that it had proved to be a very useful visit, with detailed information obtained and their understanding enhanced as to how the open libraries worked in practice. Some of the key learning points were:

- South Gloucestershire Council was part of the *Libraries West Consortium* incorporating large areas of the West of England including Gloucestershire, Dorset, Bristol and Somerset. The Consortium was used to gain efficiencies in purchasing, joint tender bids, IT, licensing etc.
- A budgetary situation whereby significant savings needed to be identified across libraries services led to a consultation on open access being expanded to all libraries. There was a one-off capital cost of introducing Open Access, with Biblioteca being the company used to supply and set up the system.
- By April 2019, all South Gloucestershire Council's libraries would have the Open Access system in place.
- Overall opening hours had increased by 93% with the Open Access scheme, whilst staff hours had been reduced by 27%. The savings were achieved without any compulsory redundancies.
- Staff were very positive and felt it could be developed further in due course, for instance with longer opening hours for open Access.
- Using Open Access, generally allowed for opening hours from 8.00am to 7.30pm, including weekends.
- Results of the Consultation exercise with users of Open Access had shown 73% to be positive about their experience.
- There had been 37,000 visits to libraries during Open Access hours. (7% of total visits)
- In terms of overall users, 30% had been over 65's and 62% have been female.
- A range of community users made use of the library hub. Access could be given to a Group Leader as a private booking, via their Open

Access card, and they were then responsible for the members of their group.

- Police Officers and Social Workers were encouraged to use the library as a base whenever they wished.
- Public concerns regarding public safety had not proved to be an issue.
- Under 16's were not allowed to enter the library building during Open Access on their own due to safeguarding, however, they could do so, if accompanied by an adult.

Members asked some additional questions:

- The CMR was asked whether there would need to be any library closures to achieve the £600k of savings. In response, she advised that they were currently looking at ways to change the delivery of services and was confident at the moment but added that there could be consequences if other occupiers decided to cease their use of library buildings. She highlighted that If such action was required there would need to be a separate consultation exercise. The Assistant Director added that she was confident that there would be a minimal effect on library services.
- A Member who was observing the Meeting, drew the Panel's attention to the special circumstances impacting on Alvechurch Library, in that it was built as part of a school complex about 10 years ago and was included in a commercial Private Finance Initiative (PFI) arrangement. The premises were relatively small but the rent was around £46,000 pa. As well as the rent, the PFI controlled the opening hours of the building, hence taking value for money (VFM) considerations out of the Council's influence. In light of the above, the Member suggested that Alvechurch Library should be seen as a special case. The CMR confirmed that she was fully aware of the set-up of Alvechurch Library and that residents had been very vocal in putting forward their Library's case. The Assistant Director advised that VFM had not been included in the Needs Assessment but was only being used to assess overall costs. She stressed that every library was different and that this would be reflected in the Cabinet report.

## and In-Year Budget Monitoring

Communities, specifically:

- Performance Information for Quarter 3 (October to December 2018)
- Financial Information on Revenue and Capital Budget monitoring for period 10 month ending 31 January 2019.

Members were informed that they would receive information of this nature on a quarterly basis. The Director of Commercial and Commissioning advised that this was a first attempt at producing performance information for Scrutiny Panels and that it demonstrated the Corporate and Communities indicators were generally moving in the right direction. The Panel was invited to comment on the scope of the PI's and how they might wish to use them to support their scrutiny work in future.

A number of points were raised:

- A Member queried how these Performance indicators (PI's) connected to those contained within the Balanced Scorecard and why the four parameters of the Scorecard were not reflected in this information. The Director advised that the PI's presented to the Panel were in the main different to those in the Balanced Scorecard and had a different purpose, which related purely to the remit of this Panel. He added that it was hoped to make the data increasingly useful and interactive in the future.
- The Chairman suggested that a guide on how to use the Balanced Scorecard would be helpful for Members. The Director agreed to arrange this.
- A Member commented on the pleasing performance of the Media Team reflected in the PI's. He added that he would appreciate some further detailed information on these PI's as it would be helpful to see progress going forward. Further detailed information would be provided.
- In terms of the PI's on contract monitoring, a Member commented that it was difficult to identify individual contract performance, to ensure accountability for public money. The Director explained that they were trying to aggregate contracts together, whilst also getting an insight into spend. He agreed that transparency was important and that the management of contracts was key, with spend data already in a good place.
- In response to a question, the Director advised

## 253 Commissioning and Commercial Update

that not all activity had a target, for instance 'Agency Spend' and hence this was shown blank in the table.

The Panel received an update on the development of Commissioning and Procurement activities within the last 6 months and proposals in the pipeline:

- The establishment of a strategic Corporate and Commissioning Board with its overarching policies. A review of complex exemptions to the procurement code had been carried out.
- The introduction of a category management approach, providing a holistic view as to how the market would best respond. Trained commercial staff were crucial to the effectiveness of this process with 5 CIPS qualified procurement staff currently in post and a further 9 being trained.
- A Central Buying Team would be developed to ensure control, competition and compliance were applied and obtained. A catalogue was being introduced for the purchasing of low value items with single options generally offered. This system was IT based and would improve efficiency for users.
- A new Procurement Strategy was being developed, the timeframe of which was provided for the Panel. The Director advised that the Procurement Team weren't currently able to discriminate, for instance to secure social value or support local small businesses. This was an area which the Panel's views would be sought in late Spring.
- A challenging target for savings was in place for next year to measure the success of all the new initiatives and measurable outcomes were currently being worked on.

The following main points were raised:

- The Director was asked whether there was any scope for offering a centralised procurement approach to include District Councils. The Panel was advised that this was something that could be offered and that areas of overlap were currently being considered. Members supported this approach and felt that this was long overdue.
- A Member queried whether suppliers would be asked to make a financial contribution to be

**254 Work Programme 2018/19**

included in the catalogue if they wished to be a preferred supplier and perhaps be assured of quick payment in return. The Director commented that the County Council currently paid suppliers very early, but a decision for the future might be whether there was any differentiation in payment dates.

- The issue of partnership working was raised, in particular, whether there was scope to increase social value through the Council's commissioning process. The Director referred to civic crowd funding initiatives in other areas, involving businesses and local communities which had proved very successful. This was something he would be keen to explore in the future.
- The potential for much more effective community provision through s106 monies at District Council level was highlighted.
- Concern was expressed regarding the lack of coherent procurement spending at Parish level, given the budgets involved.
- It was confirmed that work was ongoing in respect of reducing the number of cost centres which had halved and would reduce further.

The Panel received details of their current work programme for review.

After discussion, the following actions were agreed:

Workforce - Harassment

- This item to be added to the Work Programme with a report being brought to the September 2019 Panel.
- Details of the outcomes of the Staff survey and Trade Union survey should be included with this report.

Place Partnership

The Panel agreed that it would wish to look at the current direction of travel of Place Partnership, savings being made, asset utilisation etc.

Worcester Woods Countryside Centre

It was suggested that a possible Task Group should be considered to investigate long-term revenue generation for the Worcester Wood Countryside Centre. The

Chairman suggested that the Traded Income session which followed the Panel meeting may be able to consider this issue but if not, the item would be added to the Work Programme.

Commissioning and Commercial update

An update was requested for the September 2019 meeting.

Liberata and Councillor IT

It was confirmed these items would be brought to the May 2019 Panel meeting, as shown on the Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

Chairman .....