

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Tuesday, 16 July 2019, County Hall Worcester - 10.00 am

Minutes

Present:

Mr A D Kent (Chairman), Mrs M A Rayner (Vice Chairman), Mr R J Morris and Mr A Stafford

Also attended:

Mrs L C Hodgson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities

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

Andrew Spice (Director of Commercial & Commissioning), Hannah Needham (Assistant Director for Families, Communities and Partnerships), Steph Simcox (Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery), John Gladman (Interim IT & Digital Manager), Kirsty Gilmour (Project Manager), Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager), Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Jo Weston (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Available Papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated)

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

228 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Mrs A T Hingley, Mr J A D O'Donnell and Prof J W Raine.

229 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

230 Public Participation

None.

231 Performance and 2018/19 Year-End Budget Monitoring

As part of its regular work programme, the Panel was updated on Quarter 4 (January to March 2019) performance and year-end financial information for services relating to Commercial and Commissioning and Community Services.

Budget Monitoring (Year-End 2018/19)

The Director of Commercial and Commissioning referred to the Agenda Papers and reminded the Panel that his area involved up to 10 separate services.

Although there had been a Council wide financial challenge in 2018/19, the Directorate had achieved a £1.127m underspend, due to factors including additional income, lower than anticipated spend relating to repair and maintenance, deleting vacant posts and reducing the number of placements on the Graduate/Apprenticeship Programme. In relation to Communities, there had been an overall underspend of £170,000, mainly due to one-off additional Public Health funding.

The following key points were made in the subsequent discussion:

- The Panel was disappointed to learn that the number of placements on both the Graduate and Apprenticeship Programme had been reduced, but was pleased to hear that the Cabinet Member acknowledged the value of utilising the Apprenticeship Levy
- A Member questioned when recruitment to the Apprenticeship Programme would open again, the Director confirmed the Council's commitment to the Programme, but it was unclear when exactly recruitment would commence, hopefully, within the next 12 months
- In response to the suggestion that it was important to consider care leavers for the Apprenticeship Programme, the Panel was advised that this did happen, but there was more work to do
- In relation to the Graduate Programme, although there had been several success stories, it was important that the financial situation was considered and the organisational re-design completed prior to further recruitment
- Although figures had not been verified, it was reported that Quarter 1 (April to June 2019) was broadly on budget
- The Panel commended the Director and Cabinet Members on their positive year-end position

Performance Monitoring (Quarter 4 January to March 2019)

Members referred to the Agenda Papers and during general discussion, the following key points were made:

- It was questioned why Agency Spend had

increased to £10,484,558 (from £8,290,459 in the previous quarter) when reliance on agency staff was generally decreasing. The Panel was advised that this was a very complex situation and it was not possible to reduce agency spend totally. The costs related to Adult and Children's Social care (although the situation was improving) and some specialist services, such as consultancy for example to assist with the organisational re-design

- Although the figure was high, the Director was satisfied that there was a good reason for every element of spend. There had been short term specialist need, such as the project to bring IT Services back into the Council and it was pleasing to report that most Children's Services staff were now permanent, with an 85% rate of retention in Social Workers, in comparison to 54% last year
- Members noted that Staff Turnover had increased in Quarter 4, to be informed that there had been some redundancies, some of which were voluntary. In addition, new Human Resources policies had been introduced, primarily around sickness and productivity, which may have contributed to the higher figure
- The Director agreed to check and report back to the Panel about why the Staff Turnover PI (page 17 of the Agenda) was 2.05% in 06/18 compared with 10.97% for 03/19
- The Panel noted that the Civica Contract for Customer Service was being re-commissioned. Recently, there had been a shift in residents contacting the Council, with telephone communication reducing by 50%
- It was suggested that some residents may give up trying to make contact via the central Customer Contact centre as specialist knowledge was sometimes required. The example was given of Worcester City Council, who had reverted to calls being passed directly to relevant departments, eg a Planning query being transferred to the Planning Department
- The Chairman asked whether Scrutiny could assist in respect of the re-commissioning of the Civica Contract. The Director suggested that it would be helpful if Scrutiny could look at how other Local Authorities provided Services and examples of best practice
- In relation to Libraries, Members agreed that there was a huge opportunity for growth and learned

**232 Worcestershire
Councillors'
Divisional Fund**

that partnership working had resulted in different organisations working out of libraries providing a wealth of different services to residents. The Panel noted that as a result of the recent Cabinet decision on Library re-design, resident communications were being developed

- It was confirmed that 'Museums Worcestershire' comprised The Commandery in Worcester, Worcester Art Gallery and Museum and the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle. The joint service with Worcester City Council also undertook outreach support to a number of other County museums
- The Panel noted the deterioration in targets relating to registration of deaths and still births. In response, it was reported that although regrettable, Bank Holidays had an impact on the targets and although appointments may be available within the target time, not always at the customer's choice of venue
- Members agreed that complaints were a source of intelligence about the Council's Services, which they would wish to learn more about. It was agreed that Compliments and Complaints handling would be added to the Panels work programme for future Scrutiny.

The Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager had been invited to present the Annual Report on the Worcestershire Councillors' Divisional Fund.

The Fund was not guaranteed but had been continually in operation since 1 August 2011. It had been received positively by Members and the Fund had benefited numerous organisations and activities across the County in each of the 57 Councillor Divisions.

During 2018/19, 742 submissions were authorised for payment, equating to £568,102 having been spent during the same time.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- It was suggested that some organisations thought that the Scheme was a grant and it would be helpful if the Council's website could reflect that the funding was allocated in accordance with Councillors Divisions
- Cross-divisional working was acceptable provided that Members could indicate how the Fund would

**233 Reduction in
printing costs
for
Worcestershire
County Council
Staff and
Members**

benefit residents in their own Division

- In response to a query about the administrative burden of the Scheme, especially towards the end of each financial year. It was suggested that Group Leaders could remind their Members to utilise the Fund throughout the year to avoid a rush approaching the year-end deadline
- Members asked whether the application process could be refined, including the possibility of electronic forms, a point which would be taken away for consideration
- The Panel believed that more marketing could be done to promote the good work of the Fund to the Public
- When asked whether the Panel would wish to continue considering the Annual Report at a meeting, the Panel agreed that for transparency purposes, it would wish the discussion to be held in public.

In summary, the Panel agreed to make the following comments:

- Update the website to emphasise the purpose of the Fund
- Ask Group Leaders to ensure Members utilise the Fund year-round and avoid a rush approaching the year-end deadline
- Increase the communication and marketing of the Fund to promote the County Council
- Investigate the use of IT in the application process
- Schedule the Annual Report to a Panel meeting in 2020.

The Panel was asked to consider a Report relating to a recent review of Worcestershire County Council's (the Council's) current print estate, seeking to identify areas for reduction in costs and print volumes for Council staff and Members.

The Panel heard that in 2018, the Council had spent £380,000 on printing which equated to around 12 million sheets of paper. The recommendations suggested that savings could be achieved by implementing a digital culture for Staff and Members, reducing access to colour printing and generally printing less.

It was reported that in order to implement the recommendations, a capital and revenue investment of £73,500 would be required, however, revenue savings over a 5 year period would be £707,000 overall.

234 Work Programme 2018-19

In the ensuing discussion, the following key points were made:

- Members asked for clarity on what was included in the £380,000 spend, to be informed it included all the consumables, such as paper and ink, but not the printers themselves. These were bought and maintained by the Council under a different budget
- In response to a question about why the printers were not on a lease agreement, Officers advised that it wasn't cost effective at the time of the decision
- An Audit of printers across the organisation was taking place at the moment. A Member made the point that newer printers used less energy and were more cost effective
- It was stated that the Modern.Gov software (for accessing Agendas and Minutes etc) could be utilised much further, perhaps resulting in paperless meetings. Some Members reported that other authorities had taken the stance not to print Agenda papers centrally, an approach which seemed to work
- When asked to what extent the central print room was utilised, it was reported that only bulk printing, such as Agendas and Directorate brochures, was completed there
- The Panel concluded that printing less would naturally contribute to environmental objectives
- The Panel supported the report and the recommendations within, however, Members also believed that the organisation needed to be bold with this initiative and that it be led from the top. It was suggested that going forward, Officer reports and presentations to Members could be more concise.

The current Work Programme was noted without additions.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chairman