

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Tuesday, 5 November 2019, County Hall Worcester - 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Mr A D Kent (Chairman), Mrs M A Rayner (Vice Chairman), Mr G R Brookes, Mrs A T Hingley, Mr R J Morris, Prof J W Raine 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), Steph Simcox (Head of Strategic Infrastructure Finance and Financial Recovery), Sharon Caldwell (Registration and Coroner's Services Manager), 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 3 September 2019 (previously circulated).

(Copies of documents A and B will be attached to the signed Minutes).

243 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Councillor R M Udall.

244 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None

245 Public Participation

None.

246 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

247 In-Year Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2

The Panel received a finance update relating to Commercial and Commissioning and Community Services for Quarter 2 2019/20 (July -September 2019).

The Director of Commercial and Commissioning (COaCH) advised that it was anticipated that there would be an underspend for COaCH of £556k at year end, which was a £417k improvement since Quarter 1. This positive performance was largely as a result of a clear focus on contract spend and management of vacancies, along with some elements of additional income being obtained. In terms of the Communities budget, the Panel was informed that it was well managed and forecasted to meet budget, as predicted, with no significant issues.

Members raised a number of issues as follows:

- Concern was expressed in respect of the reduction in funding for the Talent Programme, which was an area that some Members felt was of great value in providing skills training for young people. The Director explained that as part of the need to find budget savings last year, a decision was made to scale back this Programme, and that a scaled back position was being continued in the current year. The Head of Finance highlighted, that the level of savings had been halved for this current year. She also advised that the budget for the Talent Programme (£400K) was not held solely within the COaCH Directorate and that it topped up a range of other activities in other Directorates, for instance relating to apprenticeships and graduate training.
- In terms of the future position of the Talent Programme the Panel was informed that there were no plans to reduce the budget for next year, although this would depend on the Council's performance at that stage. In response to a question about succession planning, the Director advised that there wasn't a specific programme being actively promoted at the moment, but a key aspect of the Organisational Redesign Programme, would be to ensure that the right people were in place according to required skill sets for each post.
- A Member queried what the additional £60k registration fees income related to and was advised that the income had largely arisen as a result of an increase in the fees for statutory certificates from £4 to £11. Whilst the overall numbers of certificates requested had declined,

the increase in fee levels had resulted in an overall net gain in income. The Panel were further advised that the 'Tell us Once' initiative, which residents can choose to make use of and enabled the Council to inform a number of other statutory agencies of a death on behalf of relatives, also had an impact on reducing the number of copies of a death certificate required by relatives.

- It was clarified that the Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU) dealt with issues such as data protection, record storage and the governance aspects of data sharing. The budget for this Unit was currently showing at a £30k underspend.
- Further details about the £250k reduction in Property Services contract costs were requested. The Director advised that the contracts relating to every Directorate had been closely looked at, to establish whether there was scope for savings, for instance, by way of combining services and contracts at the procurement stage. He highlighted that a lot of early thinking work on the 0-19 Prevention and Early Intervention Service for Children and Young People contract meant that changes would be initiated to ensure that new contracts were best suited to the current needs of the Council. He also referred to one large contract identified in the COaCH Directorate, due to become liquid this month, of which it had been decided the service would no longer be required. A Member queried whether all contracts were being looked at, to which the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Transformation and Commissioning advised that the current focus was on the first £277m of contract value due to become liquid, as this was the point at which the savings could be made.
- A Member asked about the savings in Legal Services. The Director advised that the increase in income from Legal Services was very marginal, but that the savings had arisen from the timings of staff vacancies being filled. The question was raised as to whether there was scope for greater income generation opportunities for Legal Services. The Director advised that the Legal Services Officers were focussed internally on the Council's needs and didn't have sufficient capacity to focus on income generation
- In terms of the Communities budget, a Member asked for an explanation on the 7.8% variance on the Countryside Greenspace and Gypsies. The

248 Working with District Councils and other Partners to share information

Head of Finance advised that this was a one-off issue relating to water services, which had arisen during the Quarter 2, and which was currently being investigated. The Panel would be provided with a report back when clarification was obtained.

- It was confirmed that the County Council had a statutory responsibility for the provision of gypsy sites and the welfare of the residents. There were currently 100 berths available, with the possibility of more, if funding was made available.

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of how the Council currently shared information with District Councils and others to meet residents' needs. The Director explained that all Partners across Worcestershire had signed a Worcestershire Office of Data Analytics (WODA) Data Sharing Charter which set out principles for person related data sharing. The other Partners included all District Councils, Worcestershire Children First, the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust, Worcestershire CCG's, West Mercia Police and the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire Service. It was highlighted that Worcestershire was one of the first local authorities to put such a system in place. It was noted that the list of partners was not static and could be added to as needs changed. The Panel was informed that protocols and arrangements had been put in place and the WODA Information Governance Group had met regularly over the past two years to improve information sharing via the 'Information Sharing Gateway' and to ensure compliance with the law.

The Director highlighted the scope and benefits of the use of shared datasets, to aid collaborative working and provided some examples of this. For instance, it was helpful for predictive purposes when planning for services post-hospital care, as this then enabled better personalised care for residents. In terms of emergency situations, front line teams were able to share data at an incident, such as the identification of vulnerable residents, and hence be able to respond more effectively. The Geographical Information System (GIS) was currently being used to co-ordinate maintenance programmes on public rights of way and highways.

The potential of the Worcestershire 5G Testbed was highlighted as a key asset and one which provided significant opportunities for the future. Members discussed the potential for the 5G technology to assist the County with transport assessments and traffic

management, for instance via 5G enabled lampposts. The potential for 5G to be brought into procurement solutions when purchasing highways equipment in the future was also highlighted. The Director commented that the key factor was going to be how such technical initiatives were able to be developed and executed. He advised that there was currently not the capability in-house, but there was expertise within the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Director reported that the Council had signed up to the Government Digital Service standards and was able to tap into training opportunities and bid for funding. The Council had been successful in securing funding through a Discovery Project for Registration Services data and had recently been successful in obtaining a further £73k for a project linking Registration Services and housing.

The Panel considered areas in which the Council could work with the District Councils. Members suggestions included:

- Council tax collection system
- Information Technology systems e.g. Office 365
- Customer Relationship Management systems for Councillors
- Opportunities for business development
- A system of sharing Best Practice
- Income generation initiatives.

The Panel were supportive of the desire to work more effectively together with District Councils and other partners and felt that the data sharing was a positive start to that process, showing the benefits that could be achieved. They highlighted some of the issues which would need to be considered in taking this forward:

- Ensuring that there was co-operation from all the local authorities – which needed to come from the leadership in each case
- What would be the obstacles or resistance to working together? – e.g. fear of sharing information with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Identifiable benefits in productivity or cost savings needed to drive the process.
- Were the necessary Management systems and processes in place and compatible?
- Do the successes of data sharing inspire authorities to see the future potential of joint

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working?

- How does the idea of joint working sit with each authority's organisational priorities, for instance for WCC 'Digital First' and 'One Worcestershire'?

The Chairman agreed to discuss this issue with the Vice-Chairman and consider ways in which it could be taken forward. They would report back to the Panel with a suggested way ahead.

At the last meeting, the Panel had requested a 'deep dive' into the performance of death and still birth registration appointments, following the decline in performance identified in the Quarter 1 performance indicators. The Director presented a report detailing the findings of the 'deep dive', along with an overview of the Registration service, including performance, recent changes and future developments.

The Registration and Coroner's Services Manager (RCSM) provided an overview of the report including details of:

- The current staffing arrangements, including reliance on peripatetic staff to cover for leave and peak times of demand.
- The locations of Registration Offices in the County and that some were co-located with other services for the convenience of users and to ensure cost-effectiveness.
- The data on availability of appointments was provided to the Council and also the General Register Office, the latter which oversees performance in terms of agreed Performance Indicators. This information was then analysed in different ways. Referring to Appendix 1, it was highlighted that whilst there was always an available appointment in the County, such appointments were not always taken up due to, for instance, an inability to travel to a particular office.
- Stillbirths – the Panel was advised that most stillbirths occurred at one of the main hospitals. Due to this being such a distressing time for families, the Service took its lead from the bereavement midwife as to where and when a family was able to deal with the registration process. In light of this, the statutory timescales were not always met as the needs of the family took priority.

- Death Registration – whilst the Council’s performance was still above national and regional levels, it was still below the target of 90% within 5 calendar days. The RCSM referred to various actions being implemented to address this issue, including the introduction of a Performance Champion who was reviewing best practice and working with GP’s and hospitals to seek to improve reporting times.

Members raised a number of questions and related issues as follows:

- The Chairman asked why registration needed to be completed in person at an office rather than on line. The RCSM advised that the law stated that it needed to be carried out in this way. She highlighted that there were some changes happening with regard to some aspects of the Registration Service, for instance, the electronic record system was soon to become the legal record of marriages, following which marriage registers would no longer be required. Following discussion on the detailed monitoring sheet in Appendix 2, the RCSM confirmed that relatives who lived outside of Worcestershire could attend a register office local to them and that office would then transfer the details to the Worcestershire service. The CMR for Communities highlighted that many residents valued the personal reassurance and guidance that was provided when registering a death in person.
- A Member asked for the procedure for registering a death to be explained and the RCSM gave a brief overview of the key stages.
- The issue of sharing of data with other agencies was raised. The RCSM advised that there was a statutory requirement to share information with agencies such as Public Health and Council Tax Offices. In addition, legislation which came into force last year, allowed permission to be sought to share data, provided there was a legal reason to do so. The optional ‘Tell us Once’ Service, also allowed the Service to share data with a range of other agencies, provided permission was obtained from the family.
- In cases when people found it difficult to travel to a Register Office, the question was asked whether there was a mobile registration service available. The RCSM explained that domiciliary visits were available in certain limited circumstances, such as

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for those who were housebound.

- A Member asked what happened when a deceased person had no known family. The Panel was informed that in such cases, other persons could register the death, such as a person who was present at the death, a Care Home Manager or a Bereavement Officer. Where a deceased person had no family, the District Council had regulatory responsibility for public burials and dealing with a deceased persons estate.
- In response to a question about the flexibility of the Service to religious or cultural needs, the RCSM advised that arrangements could be made for a Registrar to attend a mortuary at the start of the next working day. If a family wished to take a body out of the country for burial, the Coroner was required to undertake an investigation and issue a death certificate. Once the death was registered, funeral directors were then able to arrange for transportation out of the country.

The Chairman thanked the RCSM for a thorough response to the request for a 'deep dive', which had outlined the actions which had been taken to address the issue and additional actions being considered. The Panel would look forward to a resultant improved performance in their performance data. The Chairman also commented that Members had benefitted from the general overview of the service which had proved to be very informative.

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

The Chairman highlighted the issues that were due to be presented at the December and January meetings.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm

Chairman