

## Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

### Wednesday, 22 July 2020, Online only - 10.00 am

**Present:****Minutes**

Mr R M Udall (Chairman), Mrs E A Eyre (Vice Chairman),  
Mr A A J Adams, Mr A D Kent, Mrs F M Oborski,  
Mrs J A Potter, Mr P A Tuthill and Mrs R Vale

**Also attended:**

Tim Rice (Senior Public Health Practitioner, People  
Directorate),  
Sheena Jones (Democratic Governance and Scrutiny  
Manager, Commercial & Change) and  
Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator)

**Available Papers**

The members had before them:

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

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

**1148 Apologies and  
Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting in  
particular Councillor Jane Potter, who had been  
appointed to the Board and as Chairman of the Adult  
Care and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Panel by  
Council on 16 July 2020 in place of Cllr Juliet Brunner.

No apologies had been received.

**1149 Declaration of  
Interest and of  
any Party Whip**

None.

**1150 Public  
Participation**

None.

**1151 Confirmation of  
the Minutes of  
the Previous  
Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 June were agreed  
as a correct record and would be signed by the  
Chairman.

**1152 Interim COVID-**

The Board received an update about the impact of the  
COVID-19 pandemic upon the community safety work

## 19 Worcestershire County Council Community Safety Update Report

supported by Worcestershire County Council (the Council) and its key partners and how it had been managed to date.

The Lead Member for Crime and Disorder introduced the Report and highlighted that the Board was the designated statutory Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee responsible for the consideration of Crime and Disorder matters and usually met on an annual basis with Crime and Disorder partners, to discuss issues of mutual interest. Due to COVID-19, this had been deferred until later in the year and the Board was being provided with an interim update by the Senior Public Health Practitioner (Public Health Directorate). In addition, all Councillors had been asked to provide the Lead Member with examples (if applicable) of how crime had changed in their areas.

The Senior Public Health Practitioner highlighted the following from the Agenda Report:

- Managing the consequences of COVID-19 had significantly impacted on Public Health and staff had been redeployed to lead and manage the emergency response. Staff who ordinarily worked on community safety had and were still required to support the emergency planning response. Whilst some work was returning to “business as usual”, there was still a requirement to support the wider COVID-19 work and some areas of community work had been delayed or were in abeyance, although, the system supporting community safety had adapted well to the challenging circumstances.
- During the early response, the usual working arrangements were impacted, with the instant move to remote working by the majority of staff and the suspension of much of the partnership governance arrangements, although front line operational services such as the Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Family Front Door and adult social care had remained active.
- More recently, there had been a move back to shorter virtual partnership meetings, primarily focusing on the impact and response to COVID-19 across the partnership and was detailed in the Report.
- Strategic Action Plans for the Safer Communities Board (SCB) and its key subgroups had been streamlined with a “plan on a page” approach.
- Domestic Abuse which had received much

publicity during COVID was an area of concern. The Domestic Abuse Forum had met twice and would meet again during the summer before resuming its normal meetings cycle. The broad trend highlighted that reported incidents of domestic abuse and collated crime data was lower than usual in March and April, but the Police, Women's Aid, WCF and the DAWN project had all reported that this had begun to change recently, and cases and referrals to services had begun to rise. This reduction was anticipated and coincided with the closure of schools and the full lockdown requirements being imposed in March. This appeared slightly different to some of the national reporting on the increased numbers of domestic abuse cases, but the local position was being monitored closely by all agencies as suppression of reporting was likely.

- In South Worcestershire, police records had indicated in the year to date (as at 22 July 2020), there had been 1516 recorded domestic incidents which was a 12.5% increase on the same period last year, where 1347 incidents were recorded. In the same period in North Worcestershire there had been 1547 recorded domestic incidents which, was a 6.6% increase from the same period last year where 1451 incidents were recorded.
- The Police had good capacity to respond quickly to cases and Women's Aid were able to manage to support victims through remote working which they would blend with face to face services when they finally resumed.
- Throughout lockdown, there had been publicity via social media that domestic abuse could and should be reported and was one of the few exemptions allowing people to leave their accommodation with children if affected.
- Refuges and safe accommodation having at one point not been full were now back at full capacity but were managing and Women's Aid were exploring how to expand their access to additional emergency accommodation with local Housing Associations in particular. District Councils were currently advising that there was no significant increase in reporting of homelessness due to domestic abuse, but that this would be closely monitored post lockdown.
- The Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through the House of Commons would place new duties on the Council to assess the need for emergency and safe accommodation for victims of domestic

abuse and for the Authority to commission such arrangements. It would also require a local Partnership Board to formulate strategic plans and report back to the Home Office on this work. It was expected that the Bill would be enacted this year.

- Probation services had maintained distanced contact with offenders through the use of IT.
- The West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) was due to publish a comprehensive Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and new Strategy which, would focus on how services could best be jointly commissioned and on extending the work with perpetrators (DRIVE Programme).
- £75,000 additional grant funding had been secured by Public Health via the Home Office, to assist victims and their families manage better in temporary accommodation. The PCC had received £434,000 funding through the Ministry of Justice to support domestic abuse and sexual violence services to manage additional pressures arising from COVID-19, with a significant proportion of the funding being utilised in Worcestershire.
- Anti-social behaviour was one area that has been challenging in some places and had received a local response through the police local neighbourhood teams and Community Safety Partnerships.

In conclusion, the Council had continued to meet its duties relating to community safety as far as it reasonably could during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding interim changes in some staffing responsibilities and the move to home and distanced working, officers across the Authority and in commissioned services, had endeavoured to maintain front line, strategic and support services to assist and support those who were most at risk and vulnerable.

During the opportunity for questions the following main points were discussed:

- It was confirmed that Get Safe (keeping children and young people safe from criminal exploitation) had continued to be robust with many statutory and voluntary agencies working together to tackle the concerns. There was also a diversionary project supporting Get Safe.
- In response to the concern about child labour

during COVID, it was agreed that the Board would be provided detailed statistics.

- The increase in the number of nitrous oxide cannisters around the community was an area of concern for a number of Councillors and was an increasing problem. The Senior Public Health Practitioner advised that he was aware that the PCC was discussing this matter with the Chief Constable but this was an area requiring a multi-faceted approach both at a national and local level. The Senior Public Health Practitioner would report Members concerns to the Safer Communities Board and the Get Safe Strategic Group.
- In response to a Member's question about the availability of refuges and safe accommodation, the Board was advised that there was pressure on emergency accommodation even though there were cross border arrangements in place and it was often full. As mentioned earlier in the discussion, the Domestic Abuse Bill currently going through the House of Commons would place new duties on the Council to assess the need for emergency and safe accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and for the Authority to commission such arrangements. It would also require a local Partnership Board to formulate strategic plans and report back to the Home Office on this work.
- The Board discussed how support was accessed in cases of sexual abuse and it was agreed that in order to help Members signpost to the relevant service(s), a guidance note detailing how to report concerns about domestic abuse and sexual violence would be circulated to the Board.
- Following a case of modern slavery in a Leicester garment factory and the outbreak of COVID-19, it was questioned whether modern slavery was a problem in Worcestershire. The Senior Public Health Practitioner explained he wasn't aware of any similar industry in Worcestershire although, work was being done to identify the possible large risk areas for COVID.
- A Member explained a scam that she was aware of through personal experience which the Senior Public Health Practitioner agreed to report to Trading Standards.
- The Board went on to discuss the Trading Standards website and it was suggested that it wasn't easy to navigate and report through. It was agreed that an update on Trading Standards

(including reporting mechanisms) would be added to the Work Programme.

- Given the large number of agencies and partners involved in community safety, it was suggested that it would be helpful to explore residents' views of the new ways of working arising from COVID in order to continuously improve services. The Senior Public Health Practitioner suggested that this would be a legitimate discussion for Community Safety Partnerships.

In summary, it was agreed that:

- the Board would be provided with statistics relating to child labour during COVID
- the Senior Public Health Practitioner would report to the Safer Communities Board and the Get Safe Strategic Group Members' concern about the increased use of nitrous oxide in communities
- a guidance note detailing how to report concerns about domestic abuse and sexual violence would be provided to all Councillors
- the Senior Public Health Practitioner would advise Trading Standards about the scam highlighted by a Member during the meeting
- an update on Trading Standards (including reporting mechanisms) would be added to Work Programme
- the Council's preparedness for the Domestic Abuse Bill would be added to the Work Programme.
- the Annual Crime and Disorder meeting would be arranged for later in the year.

**1153 Scrutiny  
Proposal: The  
County  
Council's  
Energy  
Purchasing  
Arrangements**

On 21 November 2019, the Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel was advised of a cost pressure relating to street lighting and it was agreed that the Corporate & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel would look into the Council's energy purchasing arrangements. Accordingly, a small group of Panel Members were asked to gather some further detailed information and report back to the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Building on this work, the Board had before it a scrutiny proposal to set up a Task Group to review the Council's energy purchasing arrangements from West Mercia Energy to ensure best value for Worcestershire County Council.

**1154 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Board considered the scrutiny proposal and it was agreed that a Task Group would be set up led by Councillor Adam Kent, Chairman of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Board to review the Council's energy purchasing arrangements from West Mercia Energy to ensure best value for Worcestershire County Council.

The Board was asked to consider the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2020/21. The current 2019/20 Scrutiny Work Programme agreed at Council in September 2019 was due to be refreshed for the coming year. The refreshed work programme, including any necessary revisions in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, would be considered by full Council on 10 September 2020.

Appendix 1 (draft Scrutiny Work Programme for 2020/21) was tabled at the meeting and had been uploaded to the Council's website.

Panel Chairmen had consulted with their Panels on any amendments they would like to make to their work programme except for Economy & Environment and Adult Care and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Panels which, were due to meet later in the month and would confirm the Work Programmes then.

The respective Chairmen talked through the work programmes as per Appendix 1. The OSPB, Children and Families, Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panels and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee programmes were approved and it was agreed that the Work Programmes for Economy & Environment and Adult Care and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Panels would be agreed at the Panel meetings and forwarded to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Board for approval and onward transmission to Council for its meeting on 10 September 2020.

**1155 Performance and 2019/20 Year-End Budget Monitoring**

The Board was asked to consider the feedback provided by Scrutiny Panel Chairmen following the discussion of Quarter 4 (January – March 2020) performance monitoring and financial information for 2019/20 financial outturn. The main point made were as follows:

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Kent)

- There was an overall forecasted underspend for Corporate of £1m (13%) and for Communities an overall forecasted underspend of £260k (2.7%)
- Supplementary information had been requested in respect of complaints data which was showing as red and a deteriorating trend.

#### Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Oborski)

- The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) year-end position was showing an overspend of £7.2m, the key pressures were specifically out of County provision and Post-16 in the High Needs Block. The overspend was carried forward essentially increasing the deficit balance on the DSG reserve which at some point needed to be paid back. The deficit balance at the start of the year was £0.633m and at the end of 2019/20 £7.9m. Worcestershire's total deficit was £6.2m and would be carried forward.
- Some of the former Children, Families and Communities' (CFC) budgets had been transferred to the People Directorate and Finance.
- Adult Learning was overspent by £151,000 and the Service continued to review costs and income which, had resulted in reducing course activity in some areas whilst adding some new income generating evening courses.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Service closed in September 2019 and there was a £23k overspend relating to exit costs.
- The remaining CFC budgets in the Council were £549k overspent (0.6%) (Note this was a 'whole year' position that was effectively 6 months for the Council and 6 months WCF).
- The outturn position for WCF was an underspend after Corporation Tax of £522k.
- There was concern regarding Home to School Transport which was overspent by £803k due to known issues at budget setting. £246k of the spend was in WCF.

#### Crime and Disorder (Cllr Vale)

It was agreed that in future Cllr Vale would look at budget monitoring related to crime and disorder within the relevant Scrutiny Panels.

## **1156 Member Update**

#### Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Kent)

**and Cabinet  
Forward Plan**

Two points to highlight from the July meeting were:

- Performance and Year End Budget Monitoring - following services adapting to different ways of working through COVID-19 things were starting to return to normal with birth registrations being back on track and the gradual re-opening of libraries
- Worcestershire Councillors' Divisional Fund - the Panel had picked up that councillors often received mailshots requesting funding and as a result the Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager had agreed write to all Councillors to provide guidance on handling the general mail shots.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- Keeping in touch (KIT) calls had proved to be very successful during the COVID-19 pandemic for WCF and would be considered as an adaptation to future ways of working.

The Chairman thanked the Scrutiny Team for their work in supporting public meetings via Zoom.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Chairman .....