

## **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

### **Wednesday, 18 November 2020, online - 2.00 pm**

#### **Present:**

#### **Minutes**

Mr A D Kent (Chairman), Mrs E B Tucker (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 (Strategic Director of Commercial and Change), Richard Taylor (Assistant Director for Human Resources, Organisational Development and Engagement), Hannah Needham (Assistant Director for Communities), Jonathan Fitzgerald-Guy (Assistant Director Transformation and Commercial, Commercial & Change), Steph Simcox (Head of Finance), Sharon Booth (HR Operations Delivery Manager), Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and Alison Spall (Overview and Scrutiny Officer,).

#### **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. Presentation handouts for Item 6 (circulated at the Meeting)
- C. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 September 2020 (previously circulated).

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

#### **289 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman reported on a change to the membership of the Panel. He welcomed Councillor Liz Tucker who was joining the Panel, having been appointed to the role of Vice-Chairman. Councillor Mary Rayner was no longer a member of the Panel. The Chairman thanked her for her support and the very positive and helpful contribution she made to the work of the Panel.

Apologies were received from Councillors Mr K D Daisley and Ms C M Stalker.

#### **290 Declarations of Interest and of**

None

|     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
|     | any Party Whip  |   |
| 291 | <b>Public Participation</b>   | None  |
| 292 | <b>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting</b>                | The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.  |
| 293 | <b>Performance, In-Year Budget Monitoring and 2021-22 Budget Scrutiny</b> | <p>The Panel received details on the performance and financial information for services relating to Corporate and Communities for Quarter 2 (July to Sept 2020). In addition, details of emerging pressures and challenges for services, as identified by the Directorates for the 2021/22 Budget, were set out for Members consideration. The Strategic Director advised that in a few limited cases the figures included in the report had been for Quarter 1 rather than Quarter 2, due to pressures on staff and timing issues.</p> <p><b><u>Performance Indicators</u></b></p> <p><u>Sickness rates and trends</u></p> <p>The Assistant Director of HR, OD and Engagement (Assistant Director) had been invited to provide an update on sickness figures and trends within the Council, and how these had had altered during the pandemic. The Assistant Director gave a brief presentation (attached to these minutes) of the key figures relating to attendance management at work for Quarter 2 which showed that the total sickness level predicted at year end, based on quarter 2 figures, would be an average of 6.44 days per employee. This compared favourably to last year's figure of 8.1 days.</p> <p>The impact of COVID-19 would have had some impact on the movement of these figures, but the improvement had been very much part of an improving trend over the past few years. Three years ago, a target of 7 days per year was set and was now an achievable goal. The measures that had been put in place to achieve this were based around a fundamental change to the approach for attendance management. Human Resources Managers had an increasingly proactive and preventative role and had made effective use of early intervention measures.</p> <p>The Panel was informed that at the start of the pandemic</p> |

the Council had received advice that up to 21% of the workforce could be affected by COVID-19 at any one time. The Assistant Director was pleased to report that this had not been the case due to the fact that the large majority of staff were able to work from home and for those who did need to work in Council premises, the buildings had been made COVID secure.

The Assistant Director reported that there had been regular communication with staff during the pandemic via briefings and updates from the Chief Executive, the Director of Public Health and himself. A dedicated Human Resources Guidance Team had dealt with day to day queries from employees and managers. Weekly update sessions had also taken place with the trade unions.

The most vulnerable staff had been identified at an early stage and following a detailed risk assessment had been given the extra support they needed. Mental health and well-being had been a key focus with a dedicated area on 'Our Space' with training and one to one counselling being provided where required.

Members raised a number of issues which the Assistant Director responded to:

- In terms of remote working, staff had been supported with the provision of equipment to enable them to be able to work at home more effectively. In total, over 1,000 pieces of equipment had been provided.
- The development of the information technology allowing staff to be able to see colleagues for meetings or on a one to one has been extensively used and had been a huge bonus.
- It was highlighted that the shorter days and dark evenings did not help with being isolated at home. The Assistant Director advised that they were aware that some employees were starting to find the isolation increasingly difficult now and signs of stress were becoming more evident. A Well-being Strategy was currently being developed which would help to support staff through the next few months.
- In response to a question about how new employees were inducted into the organisation, the Panel was informed that all recruitment had been online since March and that a virtual induction programme had been developed, with some face to face time where appropriate. It was noted that a Strategic Director and three Assistant Directors had been inducted successfully online. They had been involved early on in a range of online meetings to aid their

understanding of the Council's infrastructure and had met their Teams of staff virtually, to gain an awareness of roles and activities. The Strategic Director added that it had proved crucial that they were all self-starters and were keen to make a difference. He also highlighted that the benefit of having friendly colleagues across the Council had very much helped all new employees to settle in more easily. The Panel was advised that this was an evolving process with induction procedures being enhanced as experience was gained.

- Feedback from new starters about their experience was carried out by a variety of means. In the recent staff survey, employees were specifically asked what was working well for them, whether their expectations were met etc. New apprentices starting during lockdown had received dedicated one to one support through the Vocational and Accreditation Team.
- It was questioned whether the figures included in the sickness rate and staff turnover graphs were cumulative totals and the Assistant Director advised that they appeared to be cumulative totals for this stage in the year, but that an explanatory note would be included in the next report to provide more detail.

The Cabinet Member with responsibility (CMR) for Transformation and Commissioning thanked the Assistant Director and his Team for all their hard work and for the support they have given to staff during the pandemic. The Chairman added the Panel's appreciation.

#### Registration and Coroner's Services

- The Chairman thanked the Officers for the enhanced descriptions included with these indicators.
- Registration of deaths within 5 days was showing as red and deteriorating. The Assistant Director for Communities explained that there were sufficient appointments available for death registration and whilst acknowledging the additional pressures currently on GP surgeries, there was a reliance on them sending through the death certificates promptly. There had however, been some improvement this month.
- Coroners Inquests – it was noted that there was a backlog of cases waiting for an Inquest date. The Assistant Director advised that some inquests were now being carried out online, but the Panel would be provided with details of the backlog, including the

- numbers and length of delay.
- Marriage and Civil Partnership ceremonies – there was a much-reduced income for this area as ceremonies were currently not allowed during lockdown.
- The CMR for Communities praised the commitment of the Registration staff who were now back on track with birth registrations, having recently completed 800 registrations in one week.

#### Communications and Consumer Relations

- The Panel was informed that the complaints indicators related to quarter 1 as opposed to quarter 2. A Member asked whether lessons were being learnt as to why there were delays in the completion of complaints. The Strategic Director advised that the increasing complexity of complaints was a key factor. In addition, the pace of investigations was being affected with Officers across the Council having COVID related issues taking priority over their time. A full report was due to be presented to the Panel in January.
- Communications with residents and staff was at an all time high. The Communications team had carried out an outstanding job, using innovative means of getting the messages across. The Chairman thanked the Team and also the Cabinet Members for the significant role that they performed in this area.

#### ICT

- It was highlighted that there was great progress in ensuring that there was an increasingly resilient Local Area Network infrastructure in place, which had been enhanced further by a stronger firewall which had been installed in recent weeks.
- The Chairman offered his congratulations to the ICT teams for their efforts this year in very ably supporting the fundamental shift in working patterns.

#### Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU)

- The Panel welcomed the new performance indicator setting out the timeliness of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, Environmental Information requests (EIR) and Subject Access Requests (SAR's). They queried the deadlines that the performance was measured against. The Strategic Director advised this was 20 days for FOI/EIR requests and 30 days for SAR's. It was requested that this information be

included in future reports to aid understanding.

- The Strategic Director advised that the Team were currently working on categorising the FOI's, details of which would be included in the next report.
- A Member queried whether the data collected to respond to a request was made available to other interested parties. Following the previous Panel meeting when this issue had been raised, the Strategic Director advised that he had asked that a review take place to ensure that data was readily available, to reduce duplication of efforts.

### Libraries & Museums

- The Assistant Director advised that in line with national guidelines, libraries continued to be open during this second lockdown for a click and collect service and to allow access to pre-booked computer slots.
- The Chairman queried whether corporate sponsorship was permissible to support some of the library services? The Assistant Director explained that there was a statutory duty to provide libraries free to the public at the point of delivery. She stressed, however, that they were always keen at looking to generate income through grants and such like to be able to provide extra services and courses.
- The CMR for Communities praised the innovative work being carried out by the libraries team to support local residents' well-being. Connect bubbles was a new idea to link people together who were isolating, via creative and engaging activities.
- Members were informed that the Worcester Museum Service had won a Cultural Bid of £96,000 to enable digital work to be progressed in three of the County's museums.

### Countryside Standards

- Members were pleased that the country parks were being very well used by residents during this time. They were, however, dismayed to learn that this had resulted in excess littering and fly tipping. They suggested that a targeted media message might be timely as a reminder to residents that whilst enjoying the facilities and open spaces, they also had the responsibility to treat them with respect.
- The Assistant Director praised the Countryside Team for their additional efforts to ensure that the standards were maintained.

**294      Update on  
Here2Help in  
response to  
COVID-19**

**Financial Issues**

The Panel was informed that the overall forecast for CoACH was an underspend of £559,000 and for the Chief Executive's Unit, £113,000. The Strategic Director commented that the very positive quarter 2 figures were the result of ongoing sustained efforts to continually try to over-achieve against budget. The Head of Finance added that value for money was the key focus for all areas, to ensure that client needs were being met, but on the basis of essential spend only.

A major underspend was highlighted relating to property services where the variance was -55.5.%. This related to reduced contract expenditure and a reduction in planned works for administration buildings.

The Panel was reminded that the forecasted position excluded the impact of COVID-19, which was anticipated to be funded via various external funding sources, the most significant of which was the Central Government COVID -19 grant. The Strategic Director commented that this area was particularly complex, and he commended his finance colleagues for their work in this area.

In terms of emerging pressures, the Panel had received details of key areas currently being reviewed by Directorates, including the likely impacts from COVID-19 and Brexit. In addition to these, the Panel was reminded that the usual annual issues such as rent, or salary increases would need to be factored in.

The Panel was provided with an update on the Council's Here2Help response as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The Assistant Director for Communities reminded the Panel that Here2Help was launched at the onset of the pandemic as a One Worcestershire community action response to support residents. The service was designed to capture and co-ordinate offers of help from individuals and companies to help meet the demand from those having to self-isolate and/or who had additional needs as a result of the pandemic, which could not be met by family, friends or neighbours.

Originally, the demand on the service was very high, but during the summer as lockdown restrictions eased, plans were put in place to keep the Here2Help service

operating at a lower level. From 1 September, the Customer Service Contact Centre took over responsibility for telephone and case work and there was a period of transition, which included a team of 4 Well-being Advisers being seconded from Community First, bringing specialist knowledge with them. With the second lockdown commencing in early November, demand had sharply risen again with the requests for help in November equalling those received in August, September and October as a whole. The Panel was informed that library staff had been swiftly redeployed again to help with this additional demand. Offers of help from members of the public were still being received. Many volunteers had been utilised to help with food deliveries and to help administer flu clinics in GP surgeries, though some volunteers had yet to be deployed.

The Assistant Director advised that the Here2Help service had proved a valuable learning experience as to how communities and partners could work together to support residents across a range of areas of need. She explained that the experience and knowledge gained would be used to provide a foundation for an Integrated Health and Well-being Hub Programme. The Hub Programme was to be developed with partners to develop positive outcomes for residents, with regards to their health and well-being needs. Members offered their praise and support for the service and expressed their hope that it could be taken forward in a positive way for the future. The CMR for Communities stressed the crucial importance of working closely with partners. She was currently working with other Cabinet Members in terms of how the service could be taken forward.

Members raised a number of issues as follows:

- In response to a query regarding a lack of availability of supermarket online delivery slots for vulnerable residents, the Assistant Director advised that it was understood that this issue only related to one supermarket and that reassurance had been obtained that the matter was being resolved.
- The Assistant Director explained that the Here2Help scheme was a multi-layered structure of partnerships, with offers of help being directed according to where a volunteer was able to offer support. For instance, if a volunteer wanted to work within a particular District Council area, then their details were forwarded to that Council for matching with local volunteering opportunities. If a volunteer



**295 Corporate  
Redesign  
Programme  
Update**

was willing to work in different areas, the County team would match them up with suitable opportunities according to need across a wider area.

- Members suggested that some additional publicity would be helpful to provide guidance to the public and aid their understanding of the set-up and structure of Here2Help and the role of the different partners; what it was able to offer residents as well as what was beyond its remit. It was felt that managing expectations was a crucial aspect to avoid an adverse response from members of the public who might be misguided about what the service offered. The CMR for Communities highlighted that there had been publicity via wraparounds on newspapers, but the Panel felt that much more publicity was required going forward.
- The importance of maintaining the momentum created by Here2Help was raised by a Member. Here2Help was a very positive initiative that had offered real support especially for those living on their own, feeling isolated or lonely at such a difficult time and should be built on and developed in the future.
- The Chairman commented that Here2Help for businesses had also been well used during lockdown and had proved an effective service.
- A query was raised regarding the arrangements for supporting GP flu clinics. The Assistant Director explained that this had been arranged via the Clinical Commissioning Group which had liaised with GP surgeries directly regarding the deployment of Here2Help volunteers.

The Chairman thanked the Assistant Director for the comprehensive update. The Panel praised the work of the Here2Help service and the joint working with local authority and partner organisations. They fully supported the work to build on the initiative for the benefit of residents going forward.

The Panel received a report which provided an update on developments relating to the Corporate Redesign Programme. The Strategic Director reminded the Panel that a major reorganisation of the Council was commenced last year, with a strategic long-term view in mind and key aspects including restructuring, centralisation, digitalisation and the establishment of One Worcestershire. The work was to be largely managed internally to ensure that costs were kept to a minimum. Work on the Programme was in progress, for instance a new Director for People had been appointed and a

number of Assistant Directors roles had been filled. With the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic in March, most of the corporate change activity had been paused to allow the Council to focus attention on its response on the day to day challenges of the pandemic.

The Assistant Director for Transformation and Commercial advised that since August, the Transformation Programmes Team had been able to focus on how small-scale changes to the following five initiatives could be taken forward to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and capability, without the need for major structural change:

- Creation of a Centralised Transformation and Programmes Team
- Development of a Category Led Commercial Team
- Creation of a Centralised Business Support Function
- Redesign of Human Resource (HR) services/operating model
- People Directorate Operating Model Review

The Panel was informed that the projects were being led and delivered in-house using the resource and expertise available within the Transformation and Programmes function.

Members raised a number of issues which were responded to by the Strategic Director and the Assistant Director:

In terms of what had been achieved in response to the pandemic, the Panel was informed that having a single, significant challenge for the whole organisation to focus on and respond to, had changed working practices and removed many of the obstacles that might have come into play during 'normal' times. The strategic way of organising work environments and the use of online meetings had been crucial.

With the refocus and restarting of the work, the Strategic Director advised that the uncertainty and false starts had not helped matters, but that there had been a lot of work carried out on new ways of working. This all needed to be carefully managed and there was a clear understanding that working from home was not a viable option for some staff in the long run. The Assistant Director highlighted that the results of the recent staff survey were feeding into the workforce and property strategy. With regard to

**296      Work  
Programme  
2020-21**

property, focus would be on not just the numbers of buildings, but also how the space within those buildings would be most effectively used. The Assistant Director added that the gold and silver command structure had worked well and encouraged the Chief Officer Group to establish quick wins, but also to be more ambitious supporting strategic long-term goals. The Chairman was pleased to learn of this agile working, with Officers feeling empowered to deliver increased productivity with a reduced level of bureaucracy. He hoped this agile working would be retained going forward.

A Member sought clarification on the reference to people's independence in the People Directorate Operating Model Review. The Panel was informed that this was concerned with maximising the independence of potential service users so that they did not depend on interventions before they were necessary, but that when they were needed the right support was available to them.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, the Strategic Director and the Assistant Director for the report and asked that the Panel receive a further update on the Corporate Redesign Programme next year.

The Panel reviewed its current work programme. The updates on Here2Help and the Corporate Redesign Programme, referred to earlier in the meeting, would be added to the programme.

The meeting ended at 4.22 pm

Chairman .....

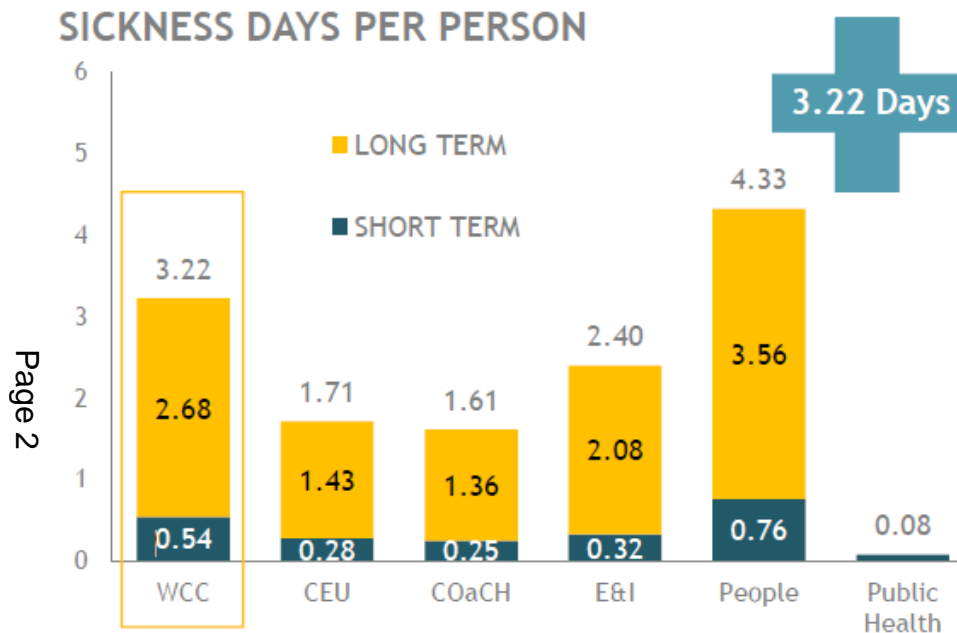
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# Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**HR, OD and Engagement  
18 November 2020**



# Sickness Absence – Q2 2020/2021 summary



Predicted long term sickness at year end based on Q2: **5.36 days** average per employee

Predicted short term sickness at year end based on Q2: **1.08 days** average per employee

Total predicted sickness at year end based on Q2: **6.44 days average per employee**

Q4 2019/20 was 8.10 days average per employee. If we continue as is this would be a year end **improvement of 1.66 days average per employee**. Average local authority (regional) sickness is between 8.5-9.5 days average per employee.

# Sickness Absence – Covid Impact

- Decision taken at onset of Covid pandemic to treat Covid cases as ‘authorised absence’
- Initially advised by PHE impact on workforce (reasonable worse case scenario) could be up to 21% off at anyone time due to Covid (including looking after dependents/self isolation etc.)
- We have not see that impact mainly due to:
  - Being able to support most working from home
  - Maintaining covid secure buildings meaning staff who have to be in can work safely – very minimal workplace transmission
  - Demand has been met throughout Covid pandemic due to these measures
- Sickness absence policy ‘sanctions’ suspended during pandemic – due to be re-introduced in January 2021
- Top 3 reasons for long term sickness absence continues to be musculoskeletal, stress and psychological
- HR Case & Change focussed on preventative approach and policy application – demonstrated huge improvements in last 18 months

## COVID Workforce Response - Summary

- Relentless (high volume) communication and engagement with workforce, residents and partners
- HR Advice and Guidance at the forefront of all workforce comms – stability for managers and employees in a constantly evolving environment
- Employee relations – regular weekly updates with all recognised Trade Unions
- Supporting our workforce – Clinically vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable employees
- Established Employee COVID 19 Testing
- Rapid creation and delivery of bespoke training and specialist PPE training
- Development and implementation of principles to ensure the workforce is safe and well
- Wellbeing of the workforce at the forefront of what we do – dedicated area on 'OurSpace'
- Supporting schools to open and the children of Worcestershire to be safe
- Annual staff survey focused on Covid and its impacts – introduced many quick wins



## COVID Response – Some headlines

- Over 1000 key worker letters issued to enable movement during initial lockdown
- Over 460 Individual risk assessments reviewed for people previously identified as part of the clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable groups who are unable to work from home, enabling a return to duties
- 1572 self assessment forms completed
- 626 people have requested and received equipment, which equates to 990 items of equipment have been collected, posted or delivered to staff members
- 74 people have undergone or are undergoing a DSE assessment with the Health and Safety team for more specific concerns they have raised
- Over 1500 COVID 19 Tests arranged via the Employee Referral Route
- 126 school risk assessments reviewed for June opening and the same number (risk assessment addendums) for wider opening in September
- 37 corporate buildings risk assessed and opened to date
- Total Reach with all social media posts on all channels since March – 13.3million impressions
- 266 press releases sent out to the local, regional and trade media since March

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