

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 15 December 2021, 12.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Richard Morris (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Mike Rouse
and Cllr Richard Udall

Also attended:

Samantha Morris, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager

1223 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Cllr Shirley Webb.

1224 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

1225 Public Participation

None.

1226 Budget Scrutiny 2022/23

The Board was asked to consider the initial feedback provided from the November Scrutiny meetings in respect of the emerging pressures and challenges in relation to the 2022/23 Budget.

The draft Council Budget 2022/23 was due to be presented to Cabinet on 6 January 2022. Comments from the January Scrutiny Panels discussions of the Cabinet Report would be submitted to the Board on 26 January 2022 and final comments would be formulated for Cabinet on 3 February 2022.

The Board was provided with written feedback from the November Scrutiny meetings in the Agenda Report and the following main points were discussed:

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 8 November 2021

- The Panel Chairman highlighted to the Board that a post pandemic review of operations had identified a number of key pressures which would impact services, including the rising costs of transport, energy and pay. It was noted that in the Commercial and Change Directorate (CoaCh), the majority of the budget related to staffing. The Government had confirmed that it would return to an annual pay award, but the pay award had not yet been set for this financial year.
- There were difficulties in recruiting key specialist staff and agency staff were therefore being used to support certain specialist roles, leading to significantly increased costs.
- With the Retail Price Index (RPI) increasing and likely to be at 3% by the end of the calendar year, the Panel was advised that inflationary factors were putting pressure on services just to remain at the status quo.
- The Panel would be looking at smarter and greener ways of working in 2022.

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

- The future use of County Hall would be discussed as part of smarter and greener ways of working.
- In terms of the concerns about recruitment and retention of staff particularly in specialised areas, the Panel would add the recruitment process and the engagement of consultants to its work programme.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel - 12 November 2021

- The Panel Chairman highlighted the Panel's concerns about the previously reported pressure on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) from the High Needs Block, a pressure that was in line with the national picture.

During the opportunity for questions, the findings of the recent consultation on the school improvement grant which had suggested a 50% reduction into the grant provided to local authorities was queried. Specifically, if there had been any consideration of the possible impact that it would have on services that Worcestershire Children First offered to schools. It was agreed that the Chairman of the Panel would look into this and report back to the Board.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – 3 November 2021

The Chairman of HOSC explained that the Committee had been provided with a brief overview of the budget for Public Health, which took the form of a Public Health Ring-Fenced Grant. The budget of approximately £30m was allocated at the start of the year against strategic functions, which included preventative work in Adult Services, Children's Services, and some in Community Services, for example support to trading standards in preventing disease and the role of

libraries in helping people to interact. Additional funding was received for Covid related activities and this had enabled a more rounded support to be provided.

HOSC had noted that the budget announcement for 2022/23 was awaited, and the typical annual increase in recent years had totalled around 1% (£300,000), although increases in other financial years had been between 2-5%.

A Member suggested that the PHRFG was inadequate for the needs and that the Committee should look at suggestions for supplementing the grant with core funding.

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 9 November 2021

The Chairman of the Panel talked through the detail provided in the Agenda Report and in doing so he clarified Members' queries.

The Chairman was pleased to advise that a Budget Scrutiny Task Group of the Panel had been set up to examine cost centre detail of the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate. This also included looking at the budgetary trends over the previous 4 years. The information gathered from the Task Group would feed into the consideration of the draft Council's 2022/23 Budget.

During the discussion of the Report, the following main points were discussed:

- A Member referred to a recent discussion at OPSB about community speed watch schemes and the Panel Chairman confirmed that he had followed up on the number of Schemes that were being set up with the Road Safety Team and was pleased to confirm that progress was being made.
- In response to a query about the increase in the amount of pollution following more frequent flooding, the Board was advised that Severn Trent were investing significantly in this area and relevant information would be shared with Board Members.
- In response to a Member suggestion that there should be an integrated approach to tree maintenance and gully maintenance, the Panel Chairman advised that Parish Lengthsmen could remove leaves that were blocking gullies but not cleanse them. It was suggested that when a gully had been cleared then a photograph should be uploaded to the Council's website for complete clarity and transparency.
- A Member queried the process for LED street lighting upgrades and whether there was a planned replacement programme. The Panel Chairman advised that there was a programme of upgrades across Worcestershire but acknowledged that progress was not always quick enough. It was suggested that the programme of LED street lighting updates should be publicised when they had been carried out.
- The Chairman of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel advised that his Panel would be looking at smarter and greener ways of working and as part of the that there was an aspiration for a My Worcestershire App to make better information available to residents. The Economy & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Chairman was fully supportive of this approach but made the point that it was important not to duplicate systems.

- In response to a Member suggestion that before a road was resurfaced, it was important to ensure that any drainage issues had been addressed. The Panel Chairman advised that prior to resurfacing roads, utility checks were carried out and following the resurfacing a S58 order could be put on a road to ensure that it wasn't dug up for 5 years unless there was an emergency. The Panel Chairman was unsure of whether drainage issues were part of the checking process but would make enquires and report back to the Board.

Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel (15 November 2021)

The report was noted.

OSPB – Crime and Disorder

At its meeting on 17 November 2021, the OSPB as part of its role as the statutory Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee, considered how the County Council could support its Councillors to empower communities to manage speeding.

Whilst the Board noted that advice had been prepared for Councillors in the form of a toolkit, it considered that further, more targeted, guidance could be developed to support Councillors in advising residents more specifically about the options open to them with speeding issues. Members of the Board suggested that some resource was made available from within the Council to assemble this guidance.

It was agreed Scrutiny comments would be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration at 6 January 2022 meeting and that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would attend the meeting to present those comments.

1227 Member Update, Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

No further updates were added.

The meeting ended at 1.55 pm

Chairman