

## **Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Friday, 24 September 2021, County Hall Worcester - 10.00 am**

### **Present:**

#### **Minutes**

Cllr Mike Rouse (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman), Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Aled Evans, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Emma Marshall and Cllr Natalie McVey

### **Also attended:**

Cllr Matt Dormer, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities  
Cllr Adam Kent, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication

Andrew Spice (Strategic Director of Commercial and Change)  
David Griffiths (Head of Commercial)  
Hannah Perrott (Assistant Director - Communities and People)  
Steph Simcox (Head of Finance)  
Samantha Morris (Scrutiny Co-ordinator) and  
Catherine Astley-Morton (Democratic Clerk)

### **Available Papers**

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 July 2021 (previously circulated).

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

### **320 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Craig Warhurst.

### **321 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

#### **Item 5 Here2Help**

Cllrs Mike Rouse, Emma Marshall, Natalie McVey and Cllr Peter Griffiths declared interests as they were connected with charities involved with the Here2Help Scheme.

### **322 Public Participation**

None.

**323 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**324 Here2Help**

The Assistant Director for Communities updated the Panel on the Council's community action scheme (Here2Help).

Here2Help (H2H) was originally dedicated to helping those who needed support during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 shield, self-isolate and/or who had additional needs as a result of the pandemic, which could not be met by family, friends or neighbours. Due to the success of H2H, it was now being evolved to offer advice, support and help on a wide range of services across Worcestershire.

The Chairman invited questions and the following points were raised.

- A Member made the point that the success of the H2H service was reliant on a collaborative approach and queried how robust the links were with the various partners involved. The Assistant Director explained that there were always challenges for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) but funding had been made available for the recruitment of a Strategic VCS Lead to sit in the VCS Sector, which would add capacity.
- It was confirmed that the mobile library service would have access the H2H to a degree, as they would be able to access the Community Services Directory.
- As part of the next stage of development in the H2H Service, the Assistant Director advised of plans for the residents focus group to become more localised in districts in the future.
- It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with a breakdown of the 'other requirement' category detailed in the Request for Help by Category of Support (Page 9 - Appendix 1).
- A Member suggested that the Panel should recommend to the CMR that as the VCS were suffering from a reduced uptake of volunteers, the H2H Service in their role as community outreach, should run a volunteer recruitment drive

highlighting the benefits of volunteering ie that it was rewarding, good for career development etc. The Assistant Director was supportive of this suggestion.

- It was confirmed that the H2H telephone number was charged at a local rate charge.
- In response to a Member query about whether a cost analysis was available in respect of the Service, the Assistant Director advised that longer term, there would be a performance matrix to show costs and links with statutory services.
- The future funding of H2H was questioned, the Assistant Director advised that there was uncertainty around whether grants would continue. It was expected that the demand for the Service would continue to increase, with potentially no additional resource. Where funding was available for the VCS to bid for, the Council would signpost.
- A Member questioned whether a contingency was in place should the H2H Service be withdrawn, the Assistant Director explained that the Council was not providing additional investment in the Service but using current resource and smarter working to ensure resilience and sustainability.
- A Member queried whether there was an Exit Strategy for H2H and was advised that eventually H2H would become business as usual.
- The reliance of the VCS was discussed and how the Council managed risk in this area, whilst also being supportive. In response, the Panel were advised that although the Council was risk averse, it could never be totally eradicated. A DBS check was always required by the Council for any formal volunteering but there would always be informal volunteering.
- The Assistant Director agreed to check whether H2H Directory could be provided to Members in PDF format (with the proviso that a PDF version would be quickly out of date).
- A Member queried the cost of DBS checks to VCS and whether the Council could assist with this. It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with a briefing on the process with a view to considering if the Council could provide support with the costs.

In summary, the following action points were agreed:

- A breakdown of the Request for Help by Category of Support Requests Reviewed by Category and

**325 The Council's Commercial and Procurement Work**

Month relating to “other requirements” would be provided to the Panel

- The Assistant Director would check whether H2H Directory could be provided to members in PDF format
- The Panel would be provided with a briefing on the process and the costs of DBS checks on Volunteers with a view to considering if the Council could provide support with the costs.

The Strategic Director for Commercial and Change introduced the Report explaining that the Council’s Commercial Team was responsible for ensuring whole life value for money from the Council’s and Worcestershire Children’s First spend with third parties, which was approximately £632m during the 2020/21 financial year. The Team tendered and managed contracts ranging from a few hundred pounds, up to hundreds of millions of pounds over the life of the agreement.

During the past 18 months, the Team’s focus had been shared across corporate procurement activity, restructure, and in delivering COVID-19 response initiatives. In respect of the Covid-19 response, significant resources and effort has been committed to ensure timely and effective achievement of the response requirements, including the set-up of the community test hubs, sourcing and distributing over 2.5 million items of personal protective equipment (PPE), negotiated leases for the Council’s test and vaccine centres, as well as working with local manufacturers and hotels to secure the capacity required.

The Corporate Procurement Strategy 2022-2025 was in the process of being re-written to reflect the changing social, economic and legislative landscape in which the Council now found itself. Greater focus would be placed on driving social value and promoting local economic growth as part of the Council’s support for the COVID recovery initiatives. An outcomes framework had been developed that reflected both national and local priorities, and the Team would continue to challenge themselves at all stages of the procurement process to ensure these outcomes had been considered and facilitated in so far as was reasonably practicable and effective.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication highlighted the challenges around recruitment, retention and succession planning, emphasising the importance of apprentices in

this process. Effective procurement was vital for the Council and the CMR was pleased with the success to date in reducing costs and achieving better value, but acknowledged that there was still work to do in very challenging times. The CMR was keen that the Procurement Strategy made it easy for local businesses including micro companies to get involved with providing services in Worcestershire.

The Chairman invited questions and the following points were raised

- A Member queried the communications activity to attract suppliers to Worcestershire County Council, the Head of Commercial advised that suppliers needed to register through In-Tend (the Council's E-tendering portal) which would also send alerts to suppliers. The Director suggested that consideration should be given to setting up an award scheme for local providers.
- In response to a query about whether the Council's Procurement Strategy was agile enough to meet the demands of the future. The Director explained that government legislation was changing which, would require Councils to operate in a different way and have an emphasis on achieving social value wherever possible.
- It was questioned whether the skills set for Council staff should be akin to those of private sector staff, the CMR advised that if employees were developed through the Council under the apprenticeship scheme, they would have the correct skills set.
- In response to a Member query about the EU procurement rules and Request for proposal (RFP) scoring for contractors. The Head of Commercial advised that local suppliers were targeted but, there was a challenge around the definition of a local supplier.
- A Member asked at what level of Social Value (currently 5%) became detrimental. The Head of Commercial advised that each tender would need to be considered on an individual basis to assess this.
- In response to a question about whether Council specifications routinely included questions about the carbon footprint, the Head of Commercial advised that this was not routinely included but elements of the Council spend did take this into account eg all of its energy purchase was green energy. The point was made that this should

**326 Member Portal Update**

underpin all of Council's procurement.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change updated the Panel on the Member Case Management System (Members Portal) development.

Prior to the County Council elections, the Panel was provided with an update on work to develop a system to manage Member queries to Service Area managers, since there was no consistent system in place. Prior to development of the Portal, Members made an enquiry by emailing a known contact in a Service Area and did not have oversight of how a query was progressing and in several cases no reply was been received to the query.

Queries and comments raised by Councillors and officers during this early phase of the Portal are reviewed by Member Support and IT colleagues to amend the process as necessary. A business case was being submitted for further development of the Portal in areas such as refinements to the map facility, 'fine tuning' the process to improve handling of enquiries and integration with the Report it system to minimise duplication in the handling of enquiries. If approved, the work on the second phase was planned to be carried out between November 2021 and January 2022.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The CMR advised that in the case of any queries or concerns about the Portal, contact should be made with him.
- Cases should only be closed when a satisfactory response had been received.
- Group leaders would be asked to encourage all members to use the system, as there were still 13 members who had not used the system.
- The Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager would be asked to provide some Member Training on the use of the Portal.

**327 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring**

Referring to the Agenda Papers, the Chairman invited questions on the Performance information provided. The following main points were raised:

- The Strategic Director for Commercial and Change advised that the data relating to sickness and turnover of staff was being reviewed.

**328 Work Programme 2020/21**

- The Assistant Director for Communities highlighted that although Registration of Deaths within 5 days was red and deteriorating, it was now an improving situation.
- Libraries and museums were now fully re-opened (as per pre-Covid) and usage had increased but were not yet but not back to pre-pandemic levels.
- The Panel was pleased to note that Library E-Issues were increasing and it was suggested that further promotion of this service should be carried out. It was agreed that the Panel would be provided with a detailed briefing about this service.

The following items were agreed to be added to the Work Programme for discussion at future meetings:

- The Corporate Procurement Strategy – January 2022
- Library Issues: e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines, and e-newspapers – Effectiveness of promotional campaigns – May 2022.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

Chairman .....