

Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and

Scrutiny Panel

County Hall Worcester

Monday, 17 January 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

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

Also attended:

Cllr Adam Kent, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services
and Communication
Andrew Spice, Strategic Director of Commercial and Change
Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities
Michael Hudson, Chief Financial Officer
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Rob Morris, Head of Business Intelligence
Jonathan Fitzgerald-Guy, Assistant Director Transformation and Commercial
Samantha Morris, Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The Members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2021 (previously
circulated).

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

338 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from Panel Members Aled Evans, Laura Gretton
and Craig Warhurst. Matt Dormer, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for
Communities, had also given his Apologies.

339 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

340 Public Participation

None.

341 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

342 Budget Scrutiny 2022/23

The Chief Financial Officer presented a summary of the 2022/23 draft budget, which highlighted that the proposals included pressures of £44.2m. Of particular interest was £6.2m of pay inflation, £4m of contract inflation and £28.2m of net service demand. Within the remit of the Panel, £0.4m was specifically due to service demand within the Directorate of Commercial and Change and Chief Executive's Unit. To achieve a balanced budget, the £44.2m pressures were to be funded mainly through Council Tax and Adult Social Care Levy, Settlement Grant and Directorate and Corporate efficiencies.

During the discussion on pressures and efficiencies related to the remit of the Panel, the following points were noted:

Corporate Areas

- Investment of £200k in Information Communication Technology (ICT) was required to support key systems affecting Adult and Children's services and £100k investment for Human Resources (HR) support of the Social Work Academy
- To find further service efficiencies, Senior Leaders were challenging Officers on non-essential spend and promoting good housekeeping
- It was anticipated that demand and inflation would be mitigated by service efficiencies, including contract savings. One example was given whereby discussions with the NHS were taking place in relation to discharge into social care
- £5.1m of corporate savings related to the continuation of the Organisational Design target set in 2020/21, including the way in which the Council worked were also included
- The Panel was concerned about the Council's proposal for £6.2m for pay inflation given that a resolution on the national pay award had not yet been reached. Alongside this, recruitment continued to be a concern, especially in specialist roles such as Finance, HR and ICT. It was reported that London authorities had advertised roles based on remote working, yet included salary based on London weighting. The Panel was supportive of the Cabinet Member lobbying Government about this concern

- The Panel was aware that the Cabinet Member encouraged succession planning across the organisation, including the expansion of Apprenticeship schemes
- When asked whether the Council was proactive in bid writing and seeking grants, it was reported that there was a good record of activity, however the Strategic Director acknowledged that more could always be done
- There was general concern about the Government funding review, at this stage, parts of the allocation were based upon data going as far back as 2001, and thus any review of this would bring both opportunities but also associated risks. Likewise, there was concern about the White Paper on Adult Social Care, which proposed that residents who were self-funders would be able to access Local Authority negotiated rates, likely resulting in market rates for care levelling out.

Communities (budget within the People Directorate, remit of the Panel)

- Proposals included a £2m investment into the Here2Help scheme
- Additional £1m demand relating to pay inflation and general inflation
- The savings of £0.9m are as a result of income generation and the continuation of the library strategy e.g. 'open libraries' and partner agencies utilising buildings. Also, library use was changing and evolving following the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked about the resilience of the draft Budget the Chief Financial Officer was clear that he had a duty to present a robust and deliverable draft Budget and was confident that there should be no surprises due to the rigour of monitoring throughout the year.

The Cabinet Member supported the draft Budget and the Panel agreed with the proposals put forward.

343 Data Sharing and Analytics

The Panel had received a Report which provided an overview of data sharing and analytics. The Strategic Director outlined the main teams responsible for data management and governance and explained that digital strategies were being developed to make better use of data. Worcestershire County Council used data well, however, more could be done if challenges were overcome.

During the ensuing discussion, key points included:

- When asked what WODA was, it was explained that a number of Worcestershire organisations, around the one Worcestershire estate and including West Mercia Police, had come together as a 'Worcestershire Office of Data Analytics' to develop ways of working. The group ceased to exist, but Officers continued to work together, especially as software now enabled real time reporting and therefore increased collaboration

- The Head of Business Intelligence reported that the COVID-19 response had increasingly required partners to work together and share data and the introduction of Integrated Care Systems would result in health and social care data being shared across local NHS and care organisations. Data Sharing Agreements (DSAs) were already in place and others included areas such as safeguarding and community safety
- Data analytics main purpose was to create intelligence in order to influence decision making or improve performance, which could lead into predicting future service demand
- Examples of Council systems that captured data were given, including Pentana KPI, a new corporate performance management system which would give Officers and Members a greater insight into performance. InstantAtlas was a new project where data from across a number of organisations would result in a single point of access for Worcestershire residents, partners and commissioners
- The Cabinet Member was in complete support of the Council developing a corporate approach to increase the use and potential of Power BI. As a powerful interactive data visualisation software, it had been used to successfully create the COVID-19 dashboards as seen on the Council website. A developer group had been established and licensing was being investigated
- In response to a query about data sharing protocols, Officers were clear that any protocol would be explicit on what data could be shared
- The Council website was currently under review, with the resident at the forefront of any change. It was thought that in due course, individuals may be able to log in and view levels of data, sharing information which would be of interest to them
- If a Council App were to be developed, the Cabinet Member assured Members that it would be web based with the same function and visibility across all platforms, including mobile phones and tablets for example
- When asked whether the Council hoped to achieve a standardised data reporting system, Officers suggested that this was unlikely as the system used for adult social care was unlikely to be improved
- The Chairman thanked those present for a very informative overview and the Panel agreed it would wish to look at developments further with particular interest in Power BI, InstantAtlas and the framework on what is suitable to be shared with residents.

344 Annual Update on the Council's Energy Purchasing Arrangement via the West Mercia Energy Joint Committee

The Strategic Director explained that West Mercia Energy (WME) was part owned by Worcestershire County Council (the Council), alongside three other local authorities and managed by a Joint Committee. It was a unique arrangement providing brokerage services to both Member authorities and wider public sector clients. The Council had three separate contracts with WME covering both metered and unmetered electricity and gas. The

unmetered electricity contract, which covered street lighting, would end on 31 March 2022.

During the discussion, key points included:

- WME provided a relatively small risk for the Council and not to the extent of other local authorities, such as Warrington Borough Council having a 50% stake in Together Energy, which had recently collapsed
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that increased energy prices was an area of concern for the Council and the draft Budget had been amended accordingly
- Discussions around Best Value were ongoing, especially whether entering into contracts for 2, 3 or 4 years would provide some security
- Monitoring of market intelligence was continuous and it suggested that a large price fall would not occur until at least 2022/23. The energy market was extremely volatile and would likely remain so for some time
- In response to a question whether the Council prioritised Green energy, the Assistant Director of Transformation and Commercial reported that all energy was 100% renewable. In addition, when asked whether the Council had considered producing its own energy, it was reported that the Council estate had made good use of solar panels to date
- To mitigate potential price increases, the Council was considering how the programme to install LED streetlights could be accelerated. The Panel learned that 55% of streetlights were now LED, however, any acceleration was dependent on maintenance contractors
- The Cabinet Member stated that there needed to be a careful balance in relation to Green initiatives, however, believed that technological advances would also benefit the County. Officers stated that lower consumption would also help to make the Council estate more efficient
- The Joint Committee's Business Plan would be shared with the Panel at its March meeting, after review and publication in February.

The Chairman thanked those present for a useful discussion and was assured that the Cabinet Member and Officers were monitoring the situation carefully.

345 Work Programme

The Panel agreed to amend the Work Programme as follows:

- Add Data Analytics, with a particular focus on the Power BI Strategy, InstantAtlas and the Framework for publicly accessible data
- Add West Mercia Energy Joint Committee Business Plan to the March Agenda
- Amend the May Item on Libraries to Update on the Libraries Strategy/Transformation (post COVID-19), to include the E-Library
- Add Update on the Council's Strategy for Museums, Arts and Culture
- Add Future of Redditch Library.

The meeting ended at 12.10 pm

Chairman