

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Richard Morris (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Mike Rouse, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Richard Udall

Also attended:

Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of the Council
Cllr Karen Hanks, Vice-Chairman, Economy and Environment Overview and
Scrutiny Panel

Paul Robinson, Chief Executive
Michael Hudson, Chief Financial Officer
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
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 27 November and 15 December 2021 (previously circulated).

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

1228 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

1229 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Alastair Adams, Brandon Clayton, Kyle Daisley, Mark Hughes (Parent Governor Representative) and Tim Reid (Church Representative).

The Chairman reflected that public attendance at Board meetings was welcome and urged that proactive promotion of Scrutiny activity by the Communications Team would be very welcome.

1230 Public Participation

None.

1231 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November and 15 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1232 Budget Scrutiny 2022-23

The Leader, Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer had been invited to attend the meeting to hear the feedback from Panel Chairmen following the Overview and Scrutiny Panels' discussions on the 2022/23 draft budget during the January Scrutiny meetings. Written feedback had been circulated prior to the meeting. Scrutiny comments would be fed back and considered by Cabinet on 3 February 2022.

The Leader commented that the Budget Scrutiny process had worked well, particularly in light of tight timescales.

The written feedback from Scrutiny was considered and during the discussion, the following main points were made:

Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- The Leader commented that Adult Services was an area of significant pressure for the Council, due to the demand and complexity of cases. The Council was proposing a commitment of £17.1 million gross investment to meet the demand led Adult Social Care pressures funded by 3% Adult Social Care Council Tax precept (£8.1 million), an increase in social care grant (£6.1 million covering adults and children with £3.5 million for adults), an Increase in Improved Better Care Fund income (£0.5 million), Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care (MSFCC) Fund (£1.6 million) leaving the funding to be bridged at £3.4 million, for which the potential for joint funding was being explored with health.
- There were also concerns around the pressures in the care market and the challenges around the new Care Act.
- In response to a members question about whether the dependence on external funding meant that the budget for adult social care was fragile, the Leader provided reassurance that, although there was a significant funding package for adult social care and national funding was helping, he was confident of the budget's sufficiency. The Fair Funding Review was welcomed and for future years, the number of domiciliary care packages which the Council would need to fund was unknown and would influence future budgets. The Chief Executive added that

although the Council was in a strong position this year, there was always pressure in the market and the Fair Funding Review was critical. The Council had an obligation to meet all eligible demand on the service; there was no choice, demand was growing as was the type and length of care required. The increase in National Insurance was also a big issue.

- The point was made that the demand pressures and fragility of the care market in Worcestershire and the impact of Covid was a concern. The Leader explained that this year had seen the most significant increase in demand for adult social care since 2005, and that the majority of the Budget was for adult social care and that there was also provision in reserves to mitigate any market shocks. An indication had been received that the Fair Funding Review would take place in 2023/24
- The Chief Financial Officer explained that £300m (81%) of the Councils Budget was from Council Tax, £60m was from Government grants (which would be subject to the Fair funding Review) and that there were also some one-off grants of £12m.
- A Member suggested that more communication about how the Council's budget was allocated to the services it provided was important in helping residents to understand how the Council spends its money and the reasons why.
- The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that he was confident that by the year end, the variance in the outturn would be balanced and that there was an adequate level of reserves being held.
- A Member expressed concern about the fragility of the domiciliary care market and providers handing back of care packages to the County Council. The Leader explained that it was hoped that the new zonal arrangements being put in place would provide more stability to the market. Work was also being undertaken to promote care work as a career to attract staff
- The Chief Executive suggested that the potential for assistive technology to help manage demand for adult social care was part of planning for the next decade or longer, and that scrutiny might be able to support work on this longer term view and plan.
- A member suggested that in due course, it would be good to restart the Council Roadshows travelling around the County, Previously the roadshows had been well received and it was a good way to communicate with residents to hear their views.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- In response to a members concern about the increasing budget for the Home to school transport, the Chief Executive explained that it was demand led budget which was continually monitored. It had also been subject to an ongoing review for 24 months.
- It was confirmed that during the Covid lockdown, transport providers were paid for their contracts for home to school transport which in some cases were still needed to transport children and young people to school. Where needed transport was repurposed to meet other demands eg transport to hospitals. It was agreed that the Chief Financial Officer would provide the Board with a briefing on how the

home to school transport budget was utilised during the Covid lockdown.

- In response to a question about whether the County Council was meeting its statutory obligation for youth work, the Leader explained that confirmation of the allocation of funding for targeted supported was awaited and when received some of the funding would be used to align services around families on the edge of care.
- The Leader referred to the additional allocation to the High Needs Block which had been better than expected and very much welcomed.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- In general terms, the Panel was concerned about recruitment and retention and more specifically that some London Borough Councils were employing staff on a work at home basis and paying salaries which included a London weighting and resulted in salary levels in excess of what Worcestershire could afford to pay. The Chief Executive shared these concerns and over the coming months would be looking at retention strategies and maximising and promoting the benefits of working in Worcestershire.
- The Council would be supporting a hybrid model of office and home working (according to the business need) and would be picking up the threads to review the organisational re-design which had been put on hold during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Acknowledging that the Here2Help (H2H) Service had been well received and commended by residents during Covid, there was a concern about how the service would grow, following the pandemic. The Chief Executive provided reassurance that funding being put into H2H Service would be used to develop a model for the future which avoided duplication of services.
- The Leader confirmed that County Hall would continue to be the Headquarters for Worcestershire County Council and any spare space could be used in a collaborative way. It was noted that the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel would be looking at smarter, greener ways of working at its February meeting.

Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- In response to a question about whether the additional investment in the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate would equate to increased outcomes, the Leader explained that the Council was trying to ensure that there was increased capacity to be more responsive and the 2 year capital programme gave some certainty to plans, but it would be important for the Panel to track the funding and the outcomes particularly at the mid-year point.
- With reference to the capitalisation of the funding for the road budget, it was questioned whether appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) were in place and whether there would be an appropriate return on investment. The Leader confirmed that roads were easily measured and that the Council wanted to be in the top quartile for roads with less

roads needing work or intervention but would be kept under review to ensure a return on investment.

- The Leader acknowledged a members' point about the importance of ensuring that there was transparency of information to inform the public about the condition of the roads including a maintenance schedule in a self-select format.
- Members were pleased to see that the number of Highways Liaison Officers were increasing
- The Vice-Chairman of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel thanked the Leader for his comments and as suggested agreed to track the budget throughout the year.
- The Leader confirmed that climate change was a key priority for the Council and gave examples of where progress had been made in this area eg reduced emissions, LED Street lighting rollout programme (which was being accelerated to achieve faster progress), the Council's green energy purchasing policy and working with the Environment Agency on small flood alleviation schemes. The point was made that consideration of the impact of climate change should be business as usual throughout the work of the Council.

It was agreed that the Leader and Chief Executive would attend the Board's March meeting to present the refresh of the Councils Corporate Plan.

The possibility of webcasting all future Scrutiny meetings was questioned to which the Leader and Chief Executive agreed that it would be possible to consider.

The meeting was adjourned from 12.25pm – 12.30pm.

The Board endorsed the Panel's comments which, would be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 3 February.

The Chairman noted that there had been a rigorous Budget Scrutiny process this year which, had been in depth and meaningful. Thanks were noted to the witnesses and Scrutiny Officers who had supported this process.

1233 Member Update, Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

Member Update

The following issues were discussed:

- At its last meeting, the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel discussed the Fair and Transparent Care Project
- The Vice-Chairman referred to a recent news report about looked after children (LAC) being aware of siblings and suggested that reassurance should be sought from Worcestershire Children First about how LAC children in Worcestershire were made aware of their siblings.

- At the next meeting of Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel the Panel would be looking at smarter, greener ways of working.
- A concern was expressed about member attendance and Panel meetings which would be discussed further outside of the meeting.
- The Lead Member for Crime and Disorder advised that he was looking into Environmental, rural and wildlife crime and if needed would report back to the Board with a view to bringing a future report.

Work Programme

- It was agreed that February's meeting was not needed and the next meeting of the Board would be 23 March.
- The following issues were added to the Work Programme:
 - ❖ Future of Redditch Library
 - ❖ Corporate Plan.

The meeting ended at 12.45 pm

Chairman