

Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and

Scrutiny Panel

County Hall Worcester

Thursday, 17 March 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Mike Rouse (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Emma Marshall, Cllr Natalie McVey and
Cllr Craig Warhurst

Also attended:

Cllr Matt Dormer, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
Cllr Adam Kent, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services
and Communication
Cllr Richard Morris, Vice-Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Performance
Board
Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities
Jonathan Fitzgerald-Guy, Assistant Director Transformation and Commercial
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Sandra Taylor, Assistant Director for IT and Digital
Pauline Harris, Head of People Programmes
Geoff Hedges, Senior Project Manager, Digital Centre of Innovation
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Emma James, 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 14 February 2022 (previously
circulated).

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

354 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies had been received.

355 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

356 Public Participation

None.

357 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

358 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring

Performance Monitoring

The Assistant Directors for Transformation and Commercial and for Communities provided a summary of the performance information for Quarter 3 (October to December 2021) which was included in Appendix 1 of the Agenda report.

During the discussion which took place, the following main points were raised:

- Referring to previous concerns about the poor performance of registration of deaths within 5 days, which had prompted a letter from the Panel (to Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group), the Assistant Director for Communities was very pleased to report that performance was now back on track; December's percentage of deaths registered was 80.1%, which also compared well nationally.
- The balanced scorecard was in the process of being reviewed to ensure it remained relevant.
- Sickness rates were shown to be deteriorating, however the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication reassured the Panel that having raised this with the Assistant Director for Organisational Development, Human Resources and Engagement, he could report that performance was in fact improving and that the data, which related to 2020 would be updated to show the correct position.
- The CMR also advised that staff turnover was considerably healthy compared to similar public sector organisations and was an area of focus corporately.
- Responding to Panel members' questions, the Assistant Director for Transformation and Commercial confirmed that as part of the Council's sickness policy, staff were not paid for the first three days of sickness, although they could take up to two days annual leave; this was not

typical of local authorities although there were a number which took the same approach.

- A Panel member stated that she felt this was a bad policy, however another Panel member who was also an employer, felt that the approach mirrored statutory sick pay and was a satisfactory approach.
- The CMR advised that long term sickness rate was currently an area of key concern which had been impacted by Long Covid-19; the performance data may need to be presented differently to clarify this, which the Panel Chairman agreed would be helpful.
- In terms of any impact on sickness figures from staff returning to working in office on some days, as opposed to home working, trends had remained relatively static over the past three months although during Covid lockdowns there had been a reduction in sickness from people mixing less.
- The Assistant Director for Communities acknowledged Panel members' concerns about the fact that visits to libraries were half that of pre-pandemic levels. Regarding what was being done to encourage footfall to libraries and museums, she referred to press coverage and promotion of facilities. Social connection groups, which had paused during the pandemic, were being re-introduced in person. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the older population were using libraries less since Covid, however work was needed to explore patterns of usage, as well as looking at how to promote the various hubs and services available. Footfall at museums was often low in January, however general figures were pretty good and there was ongoing events publicity, therefore this sector was less of a concern.
- A Panel member congratulated Officers on the diversification of libraries so far.
- When asked about the envisaged approach moving forward for facilitating groups provided through libraries, which had needed to move online during the pandemic, the Panel was advised that a mix of online/in person provision was likely to cater for people's wants but also recognising libraries' role in connecting communities – for example there were children who had never had the opportunity to go to a library because of the pandemic.
- In terms of encouraging teenagers to use libraries, the imminent launch of career information and guidance for young people should hopefully help however it must be recognised that libraries were not for everyone; it would be important to focus on complimentary activities, for example being able to pick up a lateral flow test as well as borrow a book.
- A Panel member made the point that there must be a degree of acceptance of changing behaviours in changing times.
- The CMR for Corporate Services and Communication suggested that the next Viewpoint Survey should also provide more insight into library use, and pointed out that December figures for the hospitality sector had been affected by lockdowns. The CMR for Communities agreed and also pointed out that many people had moved to online groups during the pandemic, with some reluctant to return to in person approaches, and it remained unclear how to restore book borrowing to previous levels.

- The Assistant Director for Communities did not believe that data on libraries showed any trends from before the pandemic which were relevant to the discussion, but would check.
- The Chairman agreed that work to understand the different patterns of library visits would help further the discussion, since it was important to look into the reduced number of visits to libraries, and the Panel would like to consider the findings later in year, with July suggested. In acknowledging the request, the Assistant Director cautioned that whilst some data could be collected through automated systems, other information would be more resource intensive.

In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Head of Finance drew the Panel's attention to the financial information for Quarter 3, summarised in Appendix 2 of the Agenda report. A change to this reporting cycle was that the area of Communities and Partnerships was now being reported to the Panel (rather than to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel).

During the discussion which took place, the following main points were raised:

- A Panel member asked for budget information for the new library planned for Redditch and the Head of Finance advised that this was not yet available and was subject to negotiations.
- The Panel Chairman reminded members that plans for Redditch library were due to be discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 23 March, which everyone was welcome to attend.
- The Chairman asked why the area of Communities and Partnerships now reported to this Panel and the Assistant Director for Communities explained that much of the activity involved related to Here2Help which was part of communities.

359 Customer Experience

The Assistant Director for IT and Digital provided a summary of customer experience, including what it concerned, the range of customers, the Council's customer touch points, headlines from the Viewpoint Survey, corporate complaints, and the Customer Experience Programme.

The Council's website which enabled the public to access information and services and report issues, was being redeveloped, with feedback being sought to inform the new site. Engagement with customers was the ultimate route to judging the effectiveness of services, and the Viewpoint Citizens Panel was one route, with members asked to access services and track their journey.

Engagement and co-design of facilities was so important and took place with resident focus groups as well as a range of organisations and service user groups. Residents were also invited to submit compliments or complaints, which resulted in an Action Plan. Looking ahead, the Customer Experience Programme, which evolved from the 2019 Re-imagined Front Doors project,

aimed to bring about improvements, the first phase of which would be focussed on adult social care.

The Chairman invited discussion and the following main points were made:

- The Cabinet member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication highlighted the opportunities of using customer experiences to gain insight through getting closer to the customer and considering all aspects of their feedback. The data was there and the website presented a major opportunity to use IT in a more effective way.
- Panel members were pleased to gain more insight into customer interaction and capturing feedback.
- The CMR suggested that the latest Viewpoint survey would be useful to the Panel in identifying trends, although greater representation from young people was needed.
- Panel members asked what customers preferred from the communication channels available and the CMR acknowledged the importance of understanding people's needs and reflecting feedback from those who use them, not just officers and councillors; the transfer of the Consumer Relations Team to the IT and Digital Department would help to provide more feedback.
- As a follow up question, a Panel member enquired which communication methods worked best to be advised by the CMR that simple and efficient online reporting was key. The Assistant Director for IT and Digital explained how feedback was captured, including inviting customers to rate interactions. The Officers also advised that a new survey would be presented at the end of a call or chatbox – and the Panel Chairman also added that a 'was this page useful' webpage question worked well.
- The Vice-Chairman welcomed work to capture data on quality of experience and asked when this would be available to scrutinise. The CMR explained that increasingly, performance reporting would be real time information, and consideration could be given to a dashboard on the website, although in progressing the Directorate's work there was a need to prioritise use of resources. The Officers advised that once the aforementioned feedback capture had been implemented, this data could be shared with the Panel. The Panel was also informed that corporately, a data observatory was being looked into.
- The CMR for Communities cautioned that whilst data was helpful, its availability did need thought and too much could cause animosity.
- The Panel asked how online service requests or forms for the public were checked to ensure they were simple to use for non-professionals, following a Panel member's experience of difficulty in reporting a concern through the Family Front Door (FFD) portal. The Officers acknowledged the need to learn from experiences and advised that through the Customer Experience Programme online forms including for the FFD and adult social care would be tested on real people.

Summing up, the Chairman thanked everyone present for the initial overview, and based on the discussion, suggested possible areas of focus for future agendas were:

- how to ensure usability
- customer satisfaction feedback processes
- the voice of the customer and preferences.

360 Work Programme

The Panel added the following topics:

- The Council’s Refugee Policy - 23 May meeting
- Gypsy / Traveller Services - September

The following changes were made to the work programme, subject to checking officers’ diaries:

- Update on Libraries Strategy/transformation (post Covid) to include the E-Library – moved from May to July
- Liquidlogic – moved from May to July
- Community Engagement (Here2help) Update – September
- Monitoring of comments, compliments and complaints –September
- Update on the Council’s Strategy, Museums Arts and Culture - November
- Update on the Procurement Strategy - November

The Scrutiny Officers would check when the West Mercia Energy Joint Committee Business Plan would be available.

A copy of revised work programme to be circulated to the Panel.

The meeting ended at 11.30 am

Chairman