

Minutes of the Corporate and Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall Worcester

Monday, 23 May 2022, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Emma Stokes (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
Sharon Caldwell, Registration and Coroners Services Manager
Alan Barber, Enterprise Architect
Becki Staite, Information and Governance Compliance Manager
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, 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 17 March 2022 (previously circulated).

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

361 Apologies and Welcome

Councillor Emma Stokes introduced herself as the new Chairman of the Panel, having been appointed to the post at the Council meeting on 19 May 2022.

Apologies were received from Councillor Laura Gretton and Cllr Marcus Hart (Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities).

362 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

Councillor Emma Marshall declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 (The Council's policy on support for refugees) in that she is a Trustee of a charity which has been helping with the Ukrainian crisis.

363 Public Participation

None.

364 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

365 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23

The Panel was asked to consider suggestions for its 2022-23 Work Programme, prior to being submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board. Members confirmed they did not have any additional items to be added.

The Chairman requested whether a version of the Cabinet Forward Plan could be provided which covered a longer time period, compared to the few months shown on the current published Plan. She highlighted that this would help the Panel to be able to plan more effectively as to which issues needed to be slotted into their work programme. The Strategic Director of Commercial and Change advised that the Corporate Plan was the responsibility of the Leader of the Council, but he undertook to feedback the Panel's request to the Leader.

366 The Council's Policy on Support for Refugees

The Panel had requested an overview of the Council's policy on support for Refugees. The Assistant Director for Communities (Assistant Director) and the Registration and Coroners Services Manager (RSCM) were in attendance to respond to any questions.

Members asked a range of questions, to which the following points were made:

- A Member asked for detail about the end-to-end journey for a refugee when they arrived in the country. The Assistant Director explained that this could be set out for 3 of the resettlement programmes that the Council was involved with, but not yet for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The RSCM set out the steps in the refugee journey as follows:
 - The Home Office informs local authorities of the expected arrival of refugees.
 - Each Local Authority would indicate how many families it was able to accommodate.
 - The Home Office then matched families to areas and supplied initial information on the needs of those families.

- The Council looked to identify a sustainable long-term property for the family.
- The family was met at the airport and transported to their new home.
- In the following weeks a variety of support was provided including guidance on the local area, help with any immediate needs they had, signing up with a doctor's surgery, applying for universal credit, securing school places for family members, and arranging english language support.
- Support continued to be made available for the first year as required, including help with employment needs. After this period the Council would step back in a controlled manner to allow the family to be able to lead more independent lives.
- With regard to checks that were undertaken on host families for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, the Assistant Director advised that there was a 'One Worcestershire' approach and that a range of checks were undertaken on sponsors and guests. These included Disclosure and Barring Service, safety and welfare, accommodation, and any relating to the specific needs of a family. Contact was maintained with guests and the sponsor also received some level of support. The Assistant Director confirmed that there had been a few potential sponsors who had failed checks, including safeguarding checks. Most of the checks were able to be completed prior to the arrival of a family, in which case if the checks were failed a re-matching process was carried out to identify a new sponsor. If the family had already arrived, then they would come under the homeless category for re-matching purposes. She explained that they now had access to the full data set of households that had expressed an interest in hosting a family but had not been matched. They were therefore currently working through this with the District Councils.
- The Panel was informed that Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations were encouraged to register on the Here2Help website and then their services could be promoted to the Ukrainian guests. District Councils had a particularly active role as they were working closely with communities on providing support. In response to a follow up question, the Panel was informed that whilst certain checks were made on the status of a charity or group offering support and for instance whether they had someone identified as being responsible for safeguarding, physical, in person checks were not part of that process.
- The RSCM advised that free bus travel was being made available to the Ukrainian families from 30 May for 3 months. It was also intended to extend this offer to other refugees. In response to a question, the Panel was advised that bus passes were a helpful start for families, but if it was found that the travel pass could be usefully broadened, the Officers would look to pursue that.
- In response to a Members request, the Assistant Director confirmed that that promotional material aimed at Ukrainian families, would be issued in dual languages.
- Asked about how previous experience of accommodating refugees was informing the current approach, the RSCM advised that the knowledge acquired when operating previous resettlement programmes was

helpful, but she also the situation with the Homes for Ukraine scheme differed in that the Council's had a less active role, with the host sponsor offering support and help directly with many aspects where needed.

- In terms of data being available to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programmes, the RSCM advised that for the Ukraine scheme, this was a rolling programme of support, and that no data would be available as yet. In respect of the Afghan schemes, which had started Summer 2021, the Panel was advised that an update would be available next year.
- The Panel was informed that there was a Central Government system whereby data on Ukrainian guests was updated daily. It was also reported that the local authorities in Worcestershire had worked together to build a system to ensure that key information on all Ukrainian guests in the County was able to be seen by those involved and that progress and updates would be shared. This system was at an early stage, but its usefulness was expected to increase over time.
- The range of support on offer to Ukrainian guests was detailed including adult learning courses in libraries, support for those seeking employment and support with education and health needs. The Panel was informed that adult learning courses could be taken to other areas if there was need in a particular location.
- A Member asked whether the Council could consider joining the Cities of Sanctuary scheme which provided best practice in this area. The Assistant Director agreed to look at the scheme and report back.
- Members commented on how useful they had found the positive stories of individual families which had been included in the report, and the benefit that would be gained by getting that message out to the community at large.
- In terms of the £10,500 that the Council would receive from the Government for each guest that was accommodated under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, the Panel was informed that no monies had been received as yet and when it was received it would be split between all of the local authorities in the County. It was highlighted that for the other resettlement schemes, expenditure has been focused on the needs of particular families but included kitchen appliances, basic furniture and fittings, supporting the adult education programme, transport costs and nursery places. The funding did not need to be spent in one year, so if there was any money left this would probably be carried forward, although it was highlighted that this would be a rare occurrence. The RSCM advised that all expenditure was processed through the Council's financial system and was therefore subject to the usual audit processes.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for their work in this area and also the individual families and communities in the County for the way they had come forward to offer support.

The Panel requested that a further update on the Council's Policy on support for refugees be provided, to include details of the re-matching process. This would be added to the Panel's Work Programme.

367 Council Compliance with Freedom of Information and Data Protection Legislation

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication (CMR) and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change had been invited to update the Panel on how the Council complies with requests for information made under the freedom for information and data protection legislation.

The CMR commented that this was an issue that the Panel had delved into in the past in some detail and that it had been recognised that there was a difficult balance between what service was reasonable to offer and the strain on services that resulted. He was striving to ensure that the launch of the website in the future would mitigate some of the issues so that the public could have access to questions that had already been asked. He also wanted to focus on the FOI's which were sent to all local authorities in general and the time and resource implications of this. The Strategic Director advised that they tried to make the process as efficient as possible and that new systems were in place to assist with this process. He highlighted that pre-publishing of information was a useful way forward so that enquirers could be signposted to the relevant information on the website. He reported that all staff were required to complete mandatory training on this issue, so knowledge levels and understanding were good. Whilst the numbers of cases had been slowly rising in recent years, there had been an improvement in performance, however, the complexity of cases had increased, leading to a greater level of work needed to respond which was more costly.

Members asked a range of questions, responses to which are set out below:

- A question was raised as to how the Council held up the 7 key principles, referred to in paragraph 8 of the report. The Strategic Director advised that they were taken very seriously, and the Information and Governance Compliance Manager (IGCM) added that there was a balance between the theory and the practice, and that their work had to be based on the purpose of what the Council does. She felt confident that the team's advice and guidance arrangement worked well with staff making good use of this service. They were currently proactively working on programmes relating to data minimisation and storage limitation. Whilst the Council was not there yet, there was a continual improvement process in these areas.
- The impact on available budgets to resource the data requests was raised. The IGCM explained that data protection requests were not time limited, some Subject Access Requests (SAR's) for instance from care leavers, led to a huge amount of work because of the quantity of records involved and the need for them to be carefully worked through and information redacted where other persons were referred to. In terms of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, the Panel was advised the first 18 hours of work could not be charged for, but that any additional hours could be, provided the person making the request was notified first.

- Considering the care leavers situation referred to above, a Member suggested that such requests could be pre-empted and all care leavers given this information automatically. Whilst the Cabinet Member suggested this might be achievable in the future when records were all digitalised, unfortunately it was not something they would seek to do at this time, with the Strategic Director advising that it would create a huge additional pressure on resources.
- The Chairman commented that she was pleased to see the overall improvements shown in the data. In terms of FOI requests, she queried whether in a situation where protesters were making requests would these be classed as FOI requests. The IGCM advised that all requests were treated as anonymous and there could be no account taken as to who was making the request. An FOI had to be in written form and if a protestor was seeking 'recorded' information then that would be a valid FOI request. If on the other hand they were seeking an opinion, that would not be a valid FOI request, unless the opinion was written down within the Council. For requests made under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) she highlighted that a request was still valid if it was made orally.
- Noting that the costs of processing FOI and EIR requests was increasing, the Panel asked that details of the specific figures be supplied to the Panel. The Strategic Director confirmed that he would be able to supply this information from the quarterly reviews of budgets.
- The Cabinet Member stressed that technology was the answer to making these processes more streamlined in the future. With a FOI knowledge base, people would be able to check this before they submitted a request. The IGCM advised that the publication scheme was being revised, so it was clear all the information that had been published by the Council.

368 The Council's Implementation of Microsoft Intune (Mobile Device Management)

The Panel had requested an update on the Council's implementation of Microsoft Intune, part of Microsoft EndPoint Manager. Microsoft Intune was used in the Council to control how devices were used including mobile phones, laptops and tablets. It enforced a conditional access policy that ensured that devices were compliant with the Government's security standards. Connectivity to Council services was no longer allowed from devices that were not verified as compliant with the above standards.

The Cabinet Member and the Strategic Director were in attendance to respond to any questions. The Cabinet Member commented that he had personally been affected by this change, which had resulted in his device suddenly not working. A potential solution was being sought which would balance the needs of security and efficiency. The Strategic Director explained that there was a balance to be reached between having data readily available on all devices and ensuring the system was secure. It was essential that the Council was in a position whereby other organisations were willing to share their data with us for all aspects of Council work.

The Panel was informed of the background to this issue that in February the Council had undergone its reaccreditation of Public Services Network (PSN) but had failed due to the position taken on managing mobile phones. The Council were, however, informed that a pass would be granted if the Council committed to implementing full conditional access of all mobile phones to corporate data by the end of April 2022. The Panel was advised that accreditation with PSN was crucial for the Council and therefore the implementation of Microsoft Intune had been taken to ensure accreditation was confirmed.

The Enterprise Architect advised that mobile device management solutions were not designed for users who had separate identities and profiles in different organisations. Since becoming aware of the issue that some Councillors had faced with software from different organisations being used on the same device, meaning they couldn't access their emails and diary from this Council, a solution to the problem was being actively sought. There was an acknowledgement and apology that communication and testing of Councillors devices before Microsoft Intune had been implemented could have been better. In looking for a workable solution, with Microsoft, discussions were taking place as to the possibility of whether a 'shared tenant' arrangement could be introduced, which would be a trusted arrangement whereby identities were shared with other tenants, this however, was not a solution at this stage.

Members expressed their frustration that this situation had been allowed to happen and the inconvenience that they had experienced being unable to access the Council system on their device. They were dismayed that they had not been consulted or received any communication or guidance about what was happening or offered any advice about what they could do. They were concerned at the idea that their device could be wiped of data, despite the assurance that consultation would take place beforehand. Members understood the security issue that had been explained but felt strongly that they wanted a solution which would enable them to be able to use one device to access all systems used at any time, for co-ordination and efficiency reasons. They also did not appreciate the idea of new phones being purchased, because of the negative environmental impact of such a move. They felt that being able to access all of their needs on one device was something that should be achievable and expected that urgent work was ongoing to solve this problem.

The Strategic Director apologised that the change had not been communicated better to Members and that he could understand members frustration. It was confirmed that seeking an urgent way forward was being sought. A meeting was being held later that week with technical staff in the Cabinet Office who oversaw the PSN accreditation process to seek a solution to the situation. The strength of the Panel's views would be conveyed at that meeting.

A Member asked whether the Local Government Association (LGA) had been approached to find out about other Councils' experience in this area. The Enterprise Architect advised that he would raise this at the next meeting of the LGA Cyber Security Group. The One Worcestershire Information Technology

group were also discussing this problem and would ensure that any approach would be standardised across Councils.

It was agreed that the Panel's views would be articulated at the meeting with the technical staff at the Cabinet Office, following which the outcome would be reported back to the Panel.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

Chairman