

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 7 December 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Alan Amos (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Shirley Webb and
Cllr Richard Udall

Also attended:

Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of the Council

Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 September, 20 October and 25 October 2022 (previously circulated).

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

1288 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Alastair Adams, Matt Dormer, Steve Mackay and Tim Reid (Church Representative).

1289 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

1290 Public Participation

None.

1291 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meetings

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 29 September, 20 October and 25 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1292 Budget Scrutiny 2023/24

The Leader and Chief Executive were invited to attend the meeting to update Members of the Board on the new and emerging pressures for the Council likely to impact on the 2023/24 budget and medium-term financial plan.

By way of introduction, the Leader made the following introductory points:

- This year was the first post Covid year without the Covid support funding from Government.
- The demand for adult social care was reverting to pre-Covid patterns. The demand for residential care was increasing and the cost and complexity of care packages was rising.
- Whilst the Council had invested heavily in children's social care and reducing the number of children entering the care system, there were placement pressures on the number, complexity and cost of packages.
- There were significant cost pressures around home to school transport, inflation pressures relating to staff pay and fees and charges which were not unique to Worcestershire.
- The Autumn Statement was better than expected.
- The adult social care reforms had been delayed until October 2025.
- It was expected that the Government Settlement would be announced around 21 December and the draft Budget Report would be published around 23 December 2022.

During the opportunity for questions, the following main points were made:

- Last year, there had been a provision of 1.25% for staff pay increases in the Budget, whereas the actual increase was approximately £2000 per member of staff equating to a £4m cost pressure this year.
- It was suggested that there were pressures around staff shortages and some councils were offering pay levels which could not be matched in Worcestershire and were not sustainable in the long term. Recruiting experienced social workers was challenging and Worcestershire had lost some staff to London Councils. Although pay rates in Worcestershire were not the highest, the Worcestershire package was good and Worcestershire was a nice place to work.
- A Member suggested it was a 'perfect storm' in terms of staff recruitment. In response, the Chief Executive explained that there was a 'hot' market for recruitment. Worcestershire was able to recruit and had recently appointed a Director of Public Health and a Monitoring Officer; the process was just taking longer.
- Worcestershire had adopted a flexible working model between office and homeworking (according to business need) with staff working 2

days (pro rata) in the office. General feedback from staff was that they welcomed the mixed model.

- A Member raised a concern about the difficulties of recruiting staff to work in domiciliary care, which the Chief Executive acknowledged was a challenge.
- The Chief Executive believed that the Integrated Care System was a real opportunity for Worcestershire partners to work together to deliver more efficient services to its communities.
- In response to a Member question about whether consideration had been given to disposing of some of the Council's assets to raise money, the Leader confirmed that this was not an option being considered as the use of the Council's assets were being maximised.
- In terms of fees and charges, this was not an area which had been looked at yet as there was limited scope for alteration as most were set nationally.
- It was acknowledged that the lateness of the Government Settlement meant the timescale for developing the Budget proposals would be tight. The Chief Executive explained that there was baseline data and some assumptions made in developing the proposals before the final Settlement was received. Also the Local Government Association and County Council's Network were a source of information in the planning process.
- A Member suggested that Scrutiny should be involved in the Budget setting process earlier in the year in order to have a more meaningful policy development role.

It was agreed that given the tight timescale around the Government Settlement, the involvement of the Scrutiny Panels in the Budget setting process would be around scrutinising the draft Budget Proposals. Looking ahead to 2023, Scrutiny Panels should use the quarterly performance and budget monitoring information to identify trends and challenges and help develop policy.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for attending the meeting.

1293 Scrutiny Chairmen and Lead Member Update

The Scrutiny Panel Chairmen/Lead Members provided an update on recent Scrutiny meetings and activities.

Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Shirley Webb)

Since the November Panel meeting, Members of the Panel had been meeting with the local social worker teams.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Steve Mackay, Chairman of the Panel had submitted a written update, which would be circulated to the Board.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Emma Stokes)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting which included an update on the Council's Strategy for Museums, Arts and Culture and a Corporate Procurement Strategy Overview.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Meeting (Cllr Tony Muir, Vice-Chairman)

The Vice-Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent November meeting which had included a report detailing the background of the Waste Contract prior to a more detailed report being provided post completion of the contract's extension and a progress report on the Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan.

Looking ahead, the Panel would be looking at home to school transport jointly with the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The Vice-Chairman of the Panel suggested that consideration should be given to Scrutiny Panels having member champions for key areas of the Scrutiny Panels.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Brandon Clayton)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting which had included an update on patient flow and winter planning, including how this would impact on ambulance hospital handover delays and a tour of the new Urgent and Emergency Care Unit.

Crime and Disorder (Cllr Richard Udall)

The Lead Member for Crime and Disorder reported that he would be doing some background research in animal welfare and the impact of the rising cost of living on sex workers in Worcestershire.

Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

It was agreed that:

- A report on Member substitution at Scrutiny meetings would be added to the Agenda for the February 2023 meeting.
- the Adult Social Care Charging Review which was a Key Decision for Cabinet on 2 February 2023 would be added to the January agenda of the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

The meeting ended at 12.35 pm

Chairman

