

Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and

Scrutiny Panel

County Hall Worcester

Wednesday, 21 September 2022, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Emma Stokes (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths and Cllr Emma Marshall

Also attended:

Cllr Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
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
Sandra Taylor, Assistant Director for IT and Digital
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Annette Stock, Complaints Manager
Rachel Datlen, Countryside Greenspace Gypsy Service and Road Safety
Education Manager,
Donna Parker, Group Manager, Worcestershire Children First
Sarah Flanagan, Learner Engagement Team Lead
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Deborah Dale, Community Engagement Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2022 (previously circulated).

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

377 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Councillor Mel Allcott.

378 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None

379 Public Participation

None

380 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

381 Update on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Services

The Panel received an update on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Services.

The Assistant Director for Communities introduced the report and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities advised the Panel that as Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Services was within his portfolio he had visited sites at Worcester and Stourport, had met with tenants and would visit further sites in the coming twelve months.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- Clarification was requested as to how the debt recovery process worked and if there were issues arising from unrecovered debt. The Strategic Director for Communities confirmed that there was an arrears process and the Gypsy, Roma Traveller Team worked closely with the Council's Legal Team. There was also joint working with Warwickshire County Council who had shared the documentation they used to recover arrears. It was possible for any arrears to be paid back in instalments as part of an agreed payment plan. Any arrears recovered would be reinvested in sites, however, the recovery process could be a long-term process.
- With regard to the shortage of Council traveller sites it was confirmed that there was a waiting list of 50 families. The Panel noted that some sites, rarely had vacancies and other sites had more turnover. The waiting list was frequently updated and those on the waiting list would be contacted as soon as a vacancy occurred.
- A Member referred to the Joint Protocol for the Management of Unauthorised Encampments of Gypsies and Travellers on Local Authority Land and it was confirmed that although the Protocol was a joint protocol with District Council's, the Council would only deal with unauthorised encampments on its own land. The Protocol was reviewed every 3 years with the last review being January 2021.
- It was confirmed that there was a national definition of a travelling community and that in Worcestershire the widest definition was used

to identify 'real need' and would include roadside and private sites. The Council managed 7 residential traveller sites in total.

- It was confirmed that tenants on the Council sites would pay Council Tax.
- The Panel received clarification regarding the point system which was used to allocate plots and took into account any occurrences of damage to property or anti-social behaviour. The Panel noted that instances of malicious damage were very rare.
- The Council would take action with regard to unauthorised encampments using the legal process where necessary.
- It was confirmed that members of the travelling community were able to vote if they lived permanently on one of the Council's managed traveller sites.
- It was noted that a bid for funding training for social workers in Adult Services and Worcestershire Children First had been made which if successful would assist professional to understand and engage better with the Gypsy Traveller community.
- Unauthorised temporary encampments were very challenging but Council Officers would where possible carry out welfare checks and signpost to other public services.
- The Panel was advised that in situations where Gypsy Travellers crossed county lines, Council Officers would work with neighbouring authorities to arrange joint visits. In addition, the National Association of Gypsy Traveller Officers (NAGTO) was useful for sharing best practice.

382 Performance and 2022/23 In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Panel had requested an update on performance and financial information for services relating to Commercial and Change, and Community Services.

Performance Monitoring

The Chairman referred to the presentation of the performance data provided and requested that the future reports were less confusing. In response, the CMR for Corporate Services and Communication suggested that the Panel may wish to consider reviewing its performance data in Power-Bi. It was therefore agreed that as a trial, this would be arranged for the next Panel meeting.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- A Member queried why sickness rates were red and deteriorating. In response the Assistant Director for Human Resources advised that the main reason was related to sickness absence due to Covid. During the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 – April 2022) Covid had been reported as authorised absence rather than sickness absence (and was therefore excluded from the data). Since April 2022, Covid related

sickness was being reported as sickness absence and therefore included in the data provided. In addition, the rates of long term sickness had increased some of which was related to a small number of staff being ill for a long time or the impact of access to treatment resulting from Covid. Nationally, Worcestershire compared well to other authorities.

- With regard to museum visits, it was confirmed that the number of visits was increasing. Despite the impact of the pandemic, which had seen less face-to-face visits and more remote engagement, in person visits had increased.
- The Council was looking at maximise the use of vacant space in libraries by co-sharing spaces and meeting rooms. The Assistant Director for Communities acknowledged this was a challenge and was working closely with Property Services.

In-year Budget Monitoring

By way of introduction, the Deputy Chief Finance Officer made the following main points:

Commercial and Change (CoaCh)

- The P4 forecast position for CoaCh was a broadly break even position
- The most significant variances from the budget were:
 - A forecast £600k overspend in Legal and Democratic Services due to a significant increase in childcare cases which required pre-proceedings and court support. The overspend was planned to be offset in year by the use of the COVID grant reserve
 - £200k forecast inflationary pressures within Property Services which had been offset by a decrease in forecast costs expected within the reactive maintenance budget
 - CoaCh had contributed £430k towards the £5.1m target for corporate savings.

Communities

As at P4, the year end forecast for Communities was a broadly break even position after delivery of £25k towards the corporate savings target. This included the following managed risks, which had been managed by vacancy control and increased income in Registration Services:

- An increase in the vacant space within county libraries, which was resulting in a reduction of income,
- An increase in utility costs; and
- An increase in the Hive PFI RPI rate higher than initially budgeted.

Chief Executive Unit (CEU)

The CEU was also reporting to deliver in line with its cash limit after identifying c£150k of savings within Human Resources and c£185k within Finance to contribute to the corporate savings target.

383 Performance Monitoring of Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Members were updated on the performance of Stage 2 Children's Social Care complaints completed inside 65 days, Stage 2 Corporate complaints in 25 days, as well as compliments received. In addition, the Local Government and Social care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter for 2021/22 was discussed.

The Complaints Manager introduced the report and Members of the Panel were given the opportunity to ask questions. During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Panel were pleased to note that LGSCO Annual Review Letter for 2021/22 was an improving picture, although a Member suggested that it was difficult to collate the numbers stated in the letter to the key performance indicators provided in the report.
- It was noted that as complaints were becoming more complex the Ombudsman had recommended the Council spend more resources in this area.
- The CMR for Corporate Services and Communications was pleased with the improvements made and looked forward to this continuing and receiving LGSCO Annual Review Letter next year.
- The Panel was also pleased to note that the performance of Stage 2 Children's Social Care complaints completed inside 65 days had also improved.
- It was noted that there had been 176 complaints in 2021-22 relating to service delivery. The Complaints Manager explained that these were being reviewed with the aim of limiting the number of complaints received.
- It was noted that the Consumer Relations Team were now located within IT Customer Service.
- The Panel acknowledged the compliments made for good reading and would be used to replicate good work across the Council.

It was agreed that there would an annual update.

384 Work Programme

The Panel's Work Programme was considered and noted.

The meeting ended at 11:35am

Chairman

