

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

The Council Chamber, County Hall, Worcester

Monday, 30 January 2023, 2.00 pm

Present:

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

Also attended:

Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of the Council
Cllr Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing
Cllr Karen Hanks, Vice Chairman, Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Matt Burke, Cranstoun
Superintendent Paul Judge, West Mercia Police
Superintendent Melanie Paley, West Mercia Police
Claire Richardson, West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner

Paul Robinson, Chief Executive
Steph Simcox, Acting S151 Officer
Liz Altay, Interim Director of Public Health
Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Andrew Boote, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 December 2022 (previously circulated).

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

1294 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Alastair Adams and Matt Dormer.

Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board Monday, 30 January 2023
Date of Issue: 20 March 2023

1295 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

Councillor Alan Amos declared an interest in Item 6 – Worcestershire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy as he was a Member of the Advisory Council for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH).

1296 Public Participation

None.

1297 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 December 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1298 Budget Scrutiny 2023/24

Attending for this item:

Simon Geraghty, Leader of the Council
Paul Robinson, Chief Executive
Steph Simcox, Deputy Finance Officer

The Leader, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Finance Officer attended the meeting to update Members on the budget proposals and hear the feedback from Panel Chairmen following the discussions on the 2023/24 draft budget during the January Scrutiny meetings.

Following the discussion, the Board would agree comments to be considered by Cabinet on 2 February 2023 and by the County Council on 16 February 2023.

The Leader and Chief Executive had previously attended the December meeting of the Board to provide an update on the on the new and emerging themes following the government's autumn statement.

The Leader highlighted that the Local Government Settlement announced on 19 December was a one-year settlement, and that the funding included net additional grant funding of £26.3m which was welcomed. The core spending power had been increased to upper tier Authorities to recognise significant demand pressures and included an increase to the Council's Settlement Funding assessment of £8.4m and further funding of £19.5m to recognise significant pressures within Adults and Children's Social Care.

During the opportunity to question the Leader and Chief Executive, the following main points were made:

- The wage inflation pressure was significant this year, a 2-3% increase had been budgeted for when the actual pay inflation was 6-7% (£4m).

For 2023/24, the budget was £11.6m which included making good the increase from 2022/23 plus a 4% budget provision for pay inflation for 2023/24. The Chief Executive explained that wage inflation was always an estimate, however, for 2022/23 there had been a flat rate increase for all staff which equated to approximately 4.9%, due to the number of low paid workers in the Council.

- In response to a question about whether the Adult Social Care Levy would continue in the medium term, the Leader explained that it was not assumed that the Levy would continue, it was a judgement call each year; last year the increase was 1% and this year it was 2%. The Chief Executive added that the Levy did not cover the total budget for adult social care and would only be sustainable if it was increased. The Council was continuing to lobby for a fair funding formula review.

A summary of the budget feedback from the January Scrutiny meetings was circulated as part of the agenda (attached at Appendix 1). In addition the Scrutiny Panel Chairmen highlighted the following points:

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

- It was acknowledged that in respect of the Communities budget, there was a blanket 1% efficiency saving across all service areas. It was suggested that this was not a very sophisticated method of achieving efficiencies as some areas may have more efficiency savings to be made than others. The Chief Executive explained that Directorates had a combination of fixed and targeted reductions to meet, in order to make the required efficiencies. The Deputy Chief Finance Officer further explained that the full effect of the 2022/23 1% efficiency would be seen in 2023/24 and was not a new initiative.
- During the year, this Panel would be looking to analyse each budget area in time to feed into the Council's Corporate Strategy Planning process in September. Noting that these services were front facing to the community, the Panel was keen to ensure that they were funded equitably.
- In response to the Panel Chairman's request for more sophisticated data in respect of libraries unlocked in time for the June scrutiny meeting, the Chief Executive agreed to discuss the detail outside of the meeting.
- The Panel had noted that there had been a £0.5m increase in investment for Legal Services to support the continuing demand for childcare cases. Previously, efficiencies had been used to offset demands in the Legal Team, but this was no longer possible due to the scale of increased demand on this Service.

Adult Care and Wellbeing Panel (Cllr Shirley Webb)

- Members of the Panel welcomed the 2% Adult Social Care Levy for 2023/24 and were pleased to hear that the Cabinet Member and Officers were taking every opportunity to lobby Government for fair funding.

- Recruitment was of ongoing concern in health and social care. Although the Council advertised posts with salaries which included a Market Forces supplement, the pool of applicants was in short supply across the sector and neighbouring authorities were equally able to increase pay offers. The Council was looking at innovative ideas to attract people to work in Worcestershire which included highlighting the benefits of the overall job package on offer, not just pay.
- The Panel agreed that choosing care work as a career could make a huge difference to people's lives and the Council and its Members could do more to share some of the positives. A video had recently been produced to promote working in Social Care in Worcestershire which would be shared with Panel Members to enable further promotion in their communities.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Steve Mackay)

- A number of concerns were raised about the funding of Home to School Transport (HTST) including ensuring value for money for the Council, the rising costs for providers, extending use of greener vehicles and seeking to gain an understanding of the breakdown of figures for areas of spend and types of vehicles used. The Panel was informed that a deep dive was taking place on all aspects of HTST.
- There had been a £4m increase in the budget for HTST (this included £2.4m for demand and £1.6m for inflation). The overall budget had therefore increased from £18.4m to £22.4m.
- HTST was an area of focus for the March Panel meeting. The Leader thought that this was a good area to scrutinise as the transport budget was increasing year on year as was the demand and more effective transport options needed to be identified. This was also a national issue.
- The impact of the vacancy management target was raised. With some key vacancies already difficult to recruit to, concern was expressed that this would have a negative impact on the recruitment of key staff, and thereby the quality of service provided to children and young people. The Chief Executive reassured the Board that the vacancy management savings target did not apply to critical functions.
- With regard to the High Needs Block funding deficit, the Panel was informed that £5m had been allocated in this year's budget to start to provide for the historical deficit which would need to be addressed over the next 3 years. The Delivering Better Value (in SEND programme) would be the key route to deliver a sustainable plan and inform future policy alongside the other 54 authorities included in the programme.
- The Chairman of the Board raised an issue, which the Leader agreed to look into about providing home to school transport for Ukrainian children. Currently, host families were responsible for taking children to school if they were not eligible for home to school transport, this obligation was not made clear at the outset and was now putting some placements in jeopardy of breakdown. The Chairman suggested that consideration should be given to providing HTST transport where appropriate, to help to avoid host family breakdowns.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) (Cllr Brandon Clayton))

- It was positive that historically, the Public Health Ring-Fenced Grant (PHRFG) allocation to Worcestershire had been favourable compared to other councils, however HOSC members were concerned that the budget allocated by Government had remained at a similar level over several years and had not kept pace with inflation.
- HOSC members were keen to see the PHRFG fully made use of and were therefore pleased that there was a 3 year plan in place for the use of the reserves which had accumulated during the Covid pandemic due to services being paused. This would include directing funds towards health and wellbeing, health inequalities and the impact of Covid.
- HOSC was planning to scrutinise the NHS health checks for those aged 40-74, national screening programmes and falls prevention work at a future meeting.

Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Karen Hanks)

- The Panel asked to what degree, the predicted reduction in inflation would alleviate pressures on council budgets and were advised that this would vary according to the dates of contracts and loans.
- A question was asked about how the Council's total expenditure for 2023/24 was split across the district areas. The Officers advised that this was a difficult question to answer mainly because so much of the Council's activity was cross-county, and dependent on needs at a particular time, for example major infrastructure projects. The Leader advised that much of the Council's spend was demand led and so the systems needed to respond to where the need was and so it was not possible to have an even spread of services across the districts.
- In general terms, Panel members were keen for the Council to encourage new businesses, for example by ensuring available small units on flexible terms and were advised that the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills fully supported this aim.
- In relation to Malvern Technology Park, it was learned that the Council was investing in enabling infrastructure along with work being done to adapt the Park after the pandemic – the Panel suggested that occupancy could be offered to a broader range of businesses whilst retaining the technology theme.
- With regard to the vacancy management savings target of 6.5% on all staffing budgets (projected at £419,000 for staffing areas related to the Economy Panel remit), it was explained that this was to budget for what tended to happen and was in no way budgeting for less staff. Vacancy gaps would be risk assessed and would not be appropriate for some areas such as highways, therefore there was a council fund to ensure service delivery continued.
- In terms of the Council's plans for active travel in Worcestershire, the Leader explained that the development of (Local Transport Plan) LTP5 would include a target reflecting the governments ambition that 50% of local journeys should take place by sustainable means by 2030. This target was set at a very high level and would be more achievable for

some areas than others and would be a challenge for the more rural counties like Worcestershire. The Leader explained that any funding bids would need to be reflective of the national target in order to have a chance of success.

- The Chairman of the Board suggested that there were three sources of funding available for active travel schemes in Worcestershire, government funding, S106 monies and capital funding from the Council and he was concerned about how the target set by government would be achieved. The Leader explained that resources for meeting the target in Worcestershire would not be achieved by government funding alone, there were a number of other funding sources including money from developers and that active travel was a central priority for Worcestershire. Good progress had already been made in recent years in terms of key infrastructure programmes.
- In response to a Member's question about whether there were plans to complete the North Worcester Orbital (following the completion of the Southern Link Road), the Leader advised that there were not any plans in next year's budget for this.

General Discussion Points:

- A Member expressed concern about whether the PHRFG was sufficient for the needs of Worcestershire and whether there was an opportunity for this to be topped up when the Council's allocation was confirmed. The Leader explained that historically, Worcestershire had received a reasonable grant and also had the benefit of reserves in this area. The PHRFG would be prioritised and allocated accordingly. If Members were aware of any areas that should be considered for PHRFG funding, they should advise the Interim Director of Public Health. The Chief Executive added that the creation of the Integrated Care Board was a real opportunity to focus on the prevention agenda moving forward.
- Members of the Board were keen to emphasise the importance of the policy development role of Scrutiny and for 2024/25, would like the opportunity to feed into the Corporate Strategy Planning process in September 2023 and to get involved in the budget setting process earlier in the year in order to achieve this and have a more meaningful role. The Leader acknowledged the importance of Scrutiny's policy development role and the need to look at trends and demand led pressures. The timing of the government settlement could also impact on the role of scrutiny as was seen this year and should be taken into account as part of the budget scrutiny process. The Chief Executive added that the Council had to set a legal budget every year (and didn't have a free reign as such) and the formality of this process could limit the ability for scrutiny to forward plan.
- A Member requested that detailed breakdowns of the budget areas should be provided to Panels to facilitate a more detailed approach to budget scrutiny next year – the Leader agreed to consider this request.
- A Member of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel attended the meeting to put on record that they had not agreed with the wider views of the Panel at the January meeting. The Member questioned whether there would be any changes made to the budget as a result of

the Scrutiny which had taken place in January. The Leader confirmed that the comments made so far had been reflected upon and that he believed that there was general support for the budget in that it reflected the demand led pressures that the Council was facing and that the key themes were covered. The Leader pointed out that the process was not yet finished and that he was still in listening mode. The Board was informed some recent changes had been made to the Budget which included a refinement of inflation provision, an uplift to the Parish Lengthsmen Scheme and provision for road closures for the King's Coronation, later in the year.

- A Member (who was not a Member of the Board) echoed the earlier comments about the importance of early scrutiny in order to make a difference.
- In response to a question about how it was possible to identify specific active travel schemes from the budget detail provided, it was explained that the detail of smaller individual schemes was not included in the draft budget, as the information provided was at a higher level and such schemes may be funded from a number of sources. The LTP included the detail of specific schemes and work on LTP5 was due to commence later in the year.

The comments from the Board's discussion would be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration on 2 February 2023 and then to Council for its meeting on 16 February.

The meeting was adjourned from 3.40-3.50pm.

1299 Worcestershire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy

Attending for this item:

Cllr Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Health and Wellbeing
Liz Altay, Interim Director of Public Health
Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Andy Boote, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Superintendent Paul Judge
Superintendent Mel Paley
Claire Richardson, Head of Policy and Development for the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
Matt Burke, Cranstoun

The CMR for Health and Wellbeing introduced the Worcestershire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy Report and explained that under the Health and Social Care Act (2012), local authorities had a duty to reduce health inequalities and improve the health of their local population by ensuring that there were public health services aimed at reducing drug and alcohol misuse. Improving outcomes from Drug and Alcohol treatment services was a requirement of the PHRFG.

The Interim Director of Public Health explained that during 2021, Dame Carol Black was commissioned by the Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to undertake a two-part independent review of drugs, to inform the government's thinking on what more could be done to tackle the harms that drugs cause. The report outlined key themes for improvement, including increasing access to treatment and recovery services.

The Government accepted the findings of the review and in 2021 published 'From Harm to Hope' a 10-year plan to cut crime and save lives by reducing the supply and demand for drugs and delivering a high-quality treatment and recovery system.

To support the delivery of 'From Harm to Hope' the development of new local 'Combating Drugs Partnerships' (CDP) were mandated. These partnerships brought together local stakeholders to better understand their populations and identify challenges and solutions. CDP's were accountable for delivering the outcomes in the National Outcomes Framework. The West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner was the named Senior Responsible Officer for Worcestershire.

Accordingly, a Worcestershire Drug and Alcohol Strategy was co-produced by members of the Substance Misuse Oversight Group (SMOG) and was supported by Public Health. The new strategy was aligned with 'From Harm to Hope' and was reflective of local priorities and governance arrangements.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- In response to a Member question about where in the Strategy alcohol prevention work was included, the Senior Public Health Practitioner advised that in November 2022, a 2-year service level agreement was set up with Trading Standards to target illicit sales of alcohol, tobacco and vapes, acting on local intelligence from schools and hospital admissions, for example.
- The Public Health Team were also working with retailers to ensure that there were responsible premises and to encourage them for example to use challenge 25 (the retailing strategy that encourages anyone who was over 18 but looked under 25 to carry acceptable ID if they wished to buy alcohol). The Police also run a MATES: Multi Agency Targeted Enforcement Strategy, which allowed the police to tackle organised criminality, anti-social behaviour and the sale of illegal products.
- In terms of Illicit counterfeit alcohol, there was a robust process in place which was triggered in response to intelligence received.
- A Member questioned in terms of drugs misuse; the number of people who reoffended or were like to reoffend after they had been given support from Cranstoun. In response, it was explained that it was a complex picture, not everyone accessing support would have committed an offence in the first place and some data was tracked locally and some was tracked nationally. Officers were also unsure of re-offending levels in respect of offenders who were released from prison. It was therefore agreed that consideration would be given to what data could be shared with the Board to demonstrate the outcomes and trends (including re-offending rates after accessing support) arising from the Strategy.

- A Member questioned in relation to County Lines and vulnerable young people whether a recruited individual would be considered as a victim or offender. In response, it was explained that the Police would look at an offenders profile and although they may be breaking the law, they were also a victim. The Police did a lot of work around child exploitation and considered each case on a case by case basis. The Board was also reminded about Get Safe programme (the Worcestershire name for the multi-agency support and protection for children and young people at risk of Criminal Exploitation).
- The Church Representative (for education matters) queried whether there were any plans to roll-out the prevention programme for vaping to primary age school children. In response, the Senior Public Health Practitioner advised that there was more to do tackle vaping in the younger age children, however, the Public Health Team worked with schools around the prevention work in respect of drugs and alcohol misuse.
- A Member suggested that the Strategy should be a Drugs, Alcohol and **Tobacco** Strategy. In response, the Interim Director of Public Health explained that there were separate plans relating to smoking cessation although not a specific strategy.
- In response to a Member's concern about how the Strategy supported victims and the vulnerable, the CMR explained that the Strategy was about having pathways that were clear and concise and each case was different and required a bespoke approach to support whilst recognising the needs of the victim.
- A Member suggested that a programme which had worked well elsewhere was to provide information on how to access help in retailers where alcohol was sold. It was suggested that his should be considered in Worcestershire.
- A Member highlighted how the support provided by Cranstoun in Bromsgrove was working well, particularly the work around prevention which was key.

It was agreed that the Chairman would write to the CMR for Health and Wellbeing to highlight the main points from the Boards discussion.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance.

1300 Scrutiny Chairmen (and Lead Member) Update, Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

Noted.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm

Chairman