

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

Council Chamber, County Hall, Worcester

Thursday, 19 October 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr David Chambers, Cllr Brandon Clayton,
Cllr Matt Dormer, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Richard Udall

Also attended:

Cllr Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing
John Campion, West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
Gareth Boulton, Office of the PCC
Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health
Andrew Boote, Head of Service for Safer Communities (Public Health)
Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner
Simon Wilkes, Head of Regulatory Services
Andrew Strong, Advanced Public Health Practitioner
Kate Griffiths, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alyson Grice, 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 6 September 2023 (previously circulated).

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

1340 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been received from Tim Reid (Church Representative).

1341 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

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Date of Issue: 17 November 2023

1342 Public Participation

None.

1343 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1344 Worcestershire County Council Community Safety Update Report

Attending for this item:

Karen May, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing, Worcestershire County Council (WCC)

Lisa McNally, Director of Public Health, WCC

Andrew Boote, Head of Service, Safer Communities, WCC

Paul Kinsella, Senior Public Health Practitioner, WCC

Simon Wilkes, Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Andrew Strong, Advanced Public Health Practitioner (Lead on Drugs & Alcohol), WCC

John Campion, West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)

Gareth Boulton, Chief Executive, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) had been asked to consider the annual update on developments in relation to Community Safety in Worcestershire.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Health and Wellbeing reminded the Board that Community Safety was at the heart of all remits relating to public health and was also an area of concern to residents. There was a need to address the issues pro-actively.

The Director of Public Health noted that not all Directors of Public Health had Community Safety as part of their portfolio. However, she felt that this was the right place for Community Safety as issues were transferable across all areas of public health for both children and adults. Community Safety was very much embedded in the whole public health approach.

The Head of Service for Safer Communities provided an overview of the agenda report and in doing so made the following main points:

- The Community Safety function was not a service as such but rather was there to oversee a wide-ranging set of statutory duties and Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) and Worcestershire Children First's (WCF) response to those duties. The function was delivered through commissioned services and partnership working.

- Members were reminded that in January 2023, OSPB had considered the draft drugs and alcohol strategy which had now been published. Current commissioning expenditure was set out in the report including additional government support which was now beginning to lead to significant service improvement.
- A particular focus was on delivering continuity of care from prison into the community, something that historically the service had struggled with. Cranstoun (the substance misuse treatment provider) had staff who were part-based at Hewell Prison aiming to build relationships and continue care out of prison. There had been encouraging results in Worcestershire and the rate of engagement had more than doubled in the last 2 years (from 18% to 52%) and was now higher than the England average.
- The Director of Public Health reiterated the importance of ensuring good continuity of care saying that it was among the three top outcomes to get right. Those coming out of prison were particularly susceptible to relapse with the consequent impact on the individual and the wider community. The service involved small numbers but had a big impact.
- In relation to the PREVENT duty (part of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015), a focus of work was on preparedness for Martin's Law which covered the protection of buildings.
- Positive feedback had been received from the Home Office in relation to the Worcestershire Channel Panel and a request had been made to use the Council's iterative agenda and minutes process as best practice.
- The Council's approach to its statutory duties in relation to youth work was to provide a universal offer which was targeted at the most disadvantaged. This nuanced approach aimed to encourage young people to attend and then used the skills of youth workers to identify those who may be getting involved in risky behaviour. The aim was to support young people away from a life of crime and disorder.
- The model of commissioning of youth work allowed for a greater influence of a locally determined youth offer, including the involvement of young people and innovative approaches.
- A key priority for the Trading Standards Team related to illicit tobacco including underage sales of vapes and other tobacco products.
- In relation to Domestic Abuse, rates were broadly stable although it was acknowledged that reporting rates did not always reflect reality. Members were reminded that the Sanctuary Scheme enabled victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes where it was safe to do so.
- The Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) aimed to give additional credence to the service user voice and would be front and centre in future service development.

The Board was invited to ask questions and the following main points were made:

- An update was requested on the delays being experienced in the criminal justice system something that the Board had discussed at a previous meeting. The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed that, although the situation in Magistrates' courts had recovered, Crown

courts had not. The situation varied across West Mercia with additional judicial capacity having been secured after a recent recruitment exercise and a solution having been identified to issues in Hereford. It was acknowledged that the system was not as joined up as it could be with some elements not being democratically accountable.

- In response to a suggestion that night courts might sit to clear the backlog of cases, the Police and Crime Commissioner suggested that this was unlikely to help given the reason for the backlog was lack of judicial capacity. However, he went on to suggest that there was some scope for courts to be used differently.
- A Member of the Board expressed concern about the lack of a visible police presence in Redditch and Bromsgrove and the continuity of officers in the safer neighbourhood team. She was also concerned about the performance of the 101 service. In response, the PCC suggested that Councillors may wish to raise concerns with relevant representatives on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel (PCP). He went on to remind the Board that he had already stated publicly that the 101 service was currently not good enough, being overwhelmed with demand, often as the result of the failure of other services. For example, when a member of the public experienced acute mental health issues, the police were often called as they were available and accessible.
- The Chairman of the Board noted the PCC's previous statement that there were currently more police officers in West Mercia than ever before. He went on to ask how many of these officers were in front line roles. In response, the PCC reminded the Board that the meaning of frontline had changed in recent years given the different nature of modern crime. For example, some aspects of domestic abuse often took place digitally or virtually.
- A Board Member expressed further concern about the 101 service. In his local area, he had been actively encouraging residents to report incidents to the police and suggested that the service had to improve if residents were to have confidence in reporting concerns and perceptions were to be changed.
- In relation to drugs and alcohol, a question was asked about prevention work. In response, the Board was informed that evidence was building that developing young people's resilience was key to prevention and this was being taken forward in schools and through youth work. This nuanced approach aimed to change behaviour and build confidence. The Director of Public Health added that building resilience, self-esteem and self-confidence was also key to other issues (such as knife crime), the aim being to build a young person's confidence to make the right choices. Grant money had been used to allow schools to develop health and wellbeing ideas, as well as funding from the PCC.
- Members were reminded that youth work was targeted at those young people who were most at risk of undertaking risky behaviour. It was confirmed that this work was commissioned by the County Council and delivered by various organisations across the county.
- In response to a question about the detox grant, the Board was informed that inpatient detox was provided where it was felt to be clinically necessary. In Worcestershire treatment places were accessed

as part of a West Midlands consortium with capacity to support 20 people per year. Members were informed that the jury was out on how effective in-patient care was when compared to community detox but it was acknowledged that, where symptoms were particularly severe, it could be beneficial to take a person out of their usual social context.

- As well as primary prevention (aimed at those who had never taken drugs) prevention work also supported those who wanted to reduce their drug use (especially in relation to opioids). The Board was told that the distribution of naloxone (a medication used to stop the effects of overdose) was beginning to gain a district-by-district profile across the county.
- In response to a question about the prison housing pathway, Members were informed about a project to establish a joint partnership approach to support those being released from prison. A protocol had been developed but had not yet been enacted. It was agreed that the Board would receive a further report back on the prison release partnership protocol once it had been implemented.
- Although the data included in the report was welcomed, it was suggested that the inclusion of year-by-year figures would be more useful in that they would allow trends to be identified. It was agreed that further data would be provided (for example on number of drug related deaths, number of hospital admissions) including year-by-year data.
- A Member referred to reports in the local press about drug dealing in Evesham which often took place in the same locations. It was suggested that a police presence in the area would go some way to deterring this activity and it was not clear why the police did not step in to stop dealing in known locations. In response the CMR said that any such activity should be reported to the police. She went on to suggest that dealing with such behaviour was a shared responsibility which required action from planning and licensing authorities as well as clear intelligence from the community to support bids for CCTV cameras and other crime prevention measures. The Director of Public Health reminded the Board that Cranstoun were among the best in the country at outreach work. In terms of enforcement, there was concern that closing one 'hotspot' would simply move the problem to another location. It was important to engage people with treatment services.
- A question was asked about whether repeat offending may be due to a lack of drug rehabilitation places being available to courts at an early stage. It was confirmed that community sentences could include requirements for treatment in relation to drugs and alcohol. It was agreed that further data would be provided in relation to drug and alcohol treatments required as part of community sentences (including year by year trends).
- In relation to domestic abuse, although fewer incidents were being reported, this should not necessarily be seen as a positive. It was suggested that an increased number of reports would indicate greater faith in the system. The Police and Crime Commissioner informed the Board that, after speaking to victims and seeing crime data and operational advice, in his opinion levels of domestic abuse were not falling. As understanding improved, it was clear there was a greater range of what was understood to be abuse.

- With reference to drug treatment, Members were reminded that public health services were predicated on harm reduction rather than crime reduction. It was suggested that there was a causal link between undertaking drug treatment and not reoffending, although this was difficult to measure.
- In response to a question about whether custodial sentences were effective in relation to drug use, Members were reminded that this was a controversial area. Evidence suggested that where it was policy to be tough on enforcement and impose a custodial sentence, it was important to also provide effective treatment options. The Board was reminded that offenders would not be sent to prison for taking drugs but rather for the criminality which often surrounded drug taking.
- It was confirmed that prevention was front and centre in relation to drugs and alcohol work. As previously noted, primary prevention initiatives aimed to build young people's resilience and self-confidence, and therefore may not be immediately recognised as being related to drug and alcohol misuse.
- The rate of hospital admissions related to drug poisoning and alcohol specific episodes was noted. It was agreed that further data would be circulated to the Board to allow trends over time to be identified.
- A Member noted the importance of ensuring easy and safe disposal of needles and highlighted the availability of a GIS map on the County Council website which showed the location of pharmacies offering secure disposal. However, concern was expressed about the lack of such facilities in Bromsgrove and it was agreed that this would be followed up after the meeting.
- A Member of the Board thanked the Police and Crime Commissioner for his support for the Worcester Safe Space scheme organised by Worcester BID (Business Improvement District) and asked whether any data relating to the project was yet available. The PCC agreed to look into this and to circulate any data to the Board.
- A Board Member asked whether there had been an increase in incidents of hate crime in recent weeks as a result of the current situation in the Middle East. In particular he asked whether there had been an increase in incidents targeting Worcester's Jewish population. In response, the Board was told that this was a live issue and partners were continuing to monitor the situation across the county. Initial analysis gave no indication of any increase in antisemitic incidents. Members were reminded that they should report any issues to the police. The PCC added that, in general, the level of hate crime was down, although he acknowledged that there was in a lag in reporting which meant that any recent incidents would not yet be included. He agreed to circulate information on the 'I am ME!' project (which aimed to support greater understanding of hate crime).
- In response to a question about what was meant by 'serious violence' it was agreed that a definition would be circulated to Board Members.
- In response to a question about whether there could be unintended consequences to the siting of bleed kits around the county, in that it may make some people less wary of carrying a knife, the PCC acknowledged that that was an interesting challenge which would need a balanced approach.

- It was confirmed that paragraph 34 set out key success measures against which partners would be measured.
- Members were reminded that Get Safe activity (to support and protect young people at risk of criminal exploitation) was led by Worcestershire Children First.
- In relation to youth work, a question was asked about how quality of provision was measured. Members were reminded that the youth service had recently been redesigned and recommissioned and was supported by £500k of public health funding. Each district council had ownership of funding and services were designed based on need. It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Board on the evaluation of youth work including data and case studies.
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Health and Wellbeing encouraged Members to watch the 'We are Westlands' film which had been produced by the Public Health Team and aimed to show the strength of the local community.
- The Director of Public Health noted that the Board would welcome the presentation of additional data as part of the next annual update and noted specific requests arising from the discussion. She reminded Board Members that, if they would like to request any further data in the meantime, they were welcome to contact the Public Health Team.
- It was confirmed that references in the report to illegal tobacco included vapes, as the majority of those seized in the county were nicotine based.
- It was agreed that further data would be provided on Trading Standards' work in relation to food, including year on year trends. Members were reminded that there was a difference between county council and district council responsibilities in this area.
- Members were reminded that a government consultation was currently underway on introducing restrictions on vapes to tackle the rise in youth vaping. It was clear that the government was taking this issue seriously. It was confirmed that shisha (smoking specially prepared tobacco through a pipe) was also regulated.
- The Director of Public Health told the Board about a survey of 3000 school children in Worcestershire which had found that the prevalence of young children using vapes was slightly lower than the national average. It was agreed that further data from the survey would be circulated to Board Members.
- In response to a Member's question about whether the Council had sufficient resources to implement government proposals to raise age restrictions on the sale of tobacco year by year, it was suggested that this would become an issue for businesses as they would need to check id at the point of purchase. It was confirmed that £30 million had been announced nationally for enforcement but it was not clear how that would filter to local authorities.
- In relation to fireworks, it was confirmed that the County Council had a duty to license premises which were selling explosives. The majority only had a limited license relating to a specific period of time and visits were made to all new applicants. If Councillors heard reports of members of the public making or selling fireworks from home, they were encouraged to report this to Trading Standards.

- In response to a Member question, the Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that the colocation of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and Trading Standards was helpful in facilitating a supportive working relationship.
- With reference to animal welfare, Members were reminded that no public body had a duty to enforce the Animal Welfare Act. The County Council focused on the welfare of farmed animals and was only sufficiently resourced to respond to concerns raised by vets from the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA).
- In response to a question about how reporting of domestic abuse could be encouraged in all cultures, the Board was told that the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) was designed to identify the experience of marginalised communities and, in partnership with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), videos had been produced to engage various communities including recent migrants.
- A Member of the Board expressed concern about the Sanctuary Scheme as he suggested that it may mean that the abuser still had access to the family home. The Board was reminded that participation in the Sanctuary Scheme was risk assessed and allowed survivors to avoid having to move area. In addition, agreements were being set up with housing providers across Worcestershire to provide units of safe accommodation (according to the government definition) available for survivors of domestic abuse.
- In response to a question about the DRIVE programme, Members were reminded that this was a voluntary scheme which worked with perpetrators to encourage engagement with other programmes such as drug, alcohol, employment and social services. The Police and Crime Commissioner reminded the Board that the programme had initially operated in Worcestershire only but was now available across the West Mercia area. Participation in the scheme was not instead of a criminal justice outcome.

At this point the Board took a short break, after which it was agreed that:

- Given the concerns expressed by the Police and Crime Commissioner, a letter should be sent to the Chief Constable of West Mercia Police on behalf of OSPB to request further data in relation to the performance of the 101 service.
- 'Youth Work should be added to the OSPB work programme long list.

1345 Scrutiny Chairmen and Lead Member Update and Work Programme

The Scrutiny Panel Chairmen provided updates on recent Scrutiny meetings and activities.

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

The Panel's last meeting had included updates on developments relating to the Adult Front Door and how the Council worked with partners on homelessness.

Although housing was a district issue, there were many connections with adult social care.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr David Chambers)

At its last meeting the Panel had considered the budget situation in relation to Children’s Social Care Placements. The Panel had been reassured that, despite the budget difficulties, the focus of Worcestershire Children First’s work remained on the safety and wellbeing of children.

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

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel’s most recent meeting which had covered a large agenda with a focus on the Corporate side of the remit, including the customer contact centre, the Council’s future strategy for artificial intelligence, the member portal, performance of comments, compliments and complaints, and data relating to performance and budget monitoring.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Brandon Clayton)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel’s recent meeting which had included discussion of changes to mental health services, children’s hearing services (paediatric audiology), and winter planning.

The Chairman went on to suggest that it may be helpful to set up a task and finish group to look at the Disabled Facilities Grant, a fund that was administered by the district councils.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Alastair Adams)

The Panel’s last meeting had included updates on the Worcestershire on Demand bus scheme and community transport.

The Chairman expressed concern that he had still not heard when the report of the Section 278 scrutiny task group would be taken forward.

Scrutiny Task Groups

The Board considered suggestions received to date for possible topics for the next scrutiny task group. It was agreed that an informal meeting of the Board would be held to prioritise the suggested topics.

The meeting ended at 1.04 pm

Chairman

