

## **Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and**

### **Scrutiny Panel**

#### **County Hall Worcester**

**Tuesday, 28 March 2023, 10.00 am**

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#### **Present:**

Cllr Emma Stokes (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman), Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Marcus Hart (Cabinet Member with Responsibility) and Cllr Adam Kent (Cabinet Member with Responsibility)

#### **Also attended:**

Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities  
Adam Kent, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication  
Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities  
Jonathan Fitzgerald-Guy, Assistant Director Transformation and Commercial  
Rob Morris, Head of Business Intelligence  
Rachel Datlen, Countryside Greenspace Gypsy Service and Road Safety Education Manager,  
Jo Dalton, Head of Communications and Engagement  
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance 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 19 January 2023 (previously circulated).

#### **401 Apologies and Welcome**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Councillors Emma Marshall, Natalie McVey and Craig Warhurst.

#### **402 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip**

None

### **403 Public Participation**

None.

### **404 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **405 Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring (Q3 October - December 2022)**

The Panel considered the performance and in-year budget monitoring information for Quarter 3 (October – December 2022) for services relating to Commercial and Change (CoaCH), and Community Services. The information was provided in the Agenda Report and in Power BI format, accessible via the Councils website [Our performance | Worcestershire County Council](#)

The Panel was piloting the use of Power BI, which would be rolled out to the other Scrutiny Panels in due course. The Chairman thanked the officers involved for making this happen.

The Strategic Director for CoaCh introduced the report and during the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Council's new website had a link to Power BI which would become the 'Hub' for residents to view the performance of Council services.
- Further development of Power BI would include the design of reports and the standardisation of branding.
- At the Chairman's request, a new performance indicator for Bikeability had been included in the dashboard.
- Accessibility had been addressed to enable all residents to be able to access this information.
- Training would be provided for Members and officers.
- Performance relating to registration of deaths within 5 days had deteriorated. However, the Council continued to work with GPs to improve this whilst challenging the National Registration Office as to the achievability of this particular target.
- In response to a question regarding the process for registering deaths overseas and out of the Worcestershire area, the Assistant Director for Communities confirmed that out of area deaths could be registered with other authorities by proxy and agreed to provide further detail on this to the Panel.
- Staff engagement through annual and pulse surveys continued to show good responses.
- A Member questioned why sickness rates were high between December 2021 and December 2022. The Director of CoaCh explained that sickness rates for short term sickness overall had increased and was in line with other authorities. The Council was continuing to focus on staff wellbeing

and was due to launch a staff benefits portal in April and had planned a wellbeing week for May.

- In response to a question whether 'hot desking' was impacting on staff wellbeing, the Strategic Director for CoaCh confirmed that, staff at County Hall were in the office 2-3 days which felt like a good balance.
- In response to a question regarding the cost of agency staff in comparison to permanent staff, it was confirmed that agency staff were not necessarily more expensive than permanent staff, it would depend on the role. The Panel were advised that the Council's use of agency staff had not increased dramatically.
- A Panel member asked if there was any data available on the number of days lost by staff with caring responsibilities. The Strategic Director for CoaCh agreed to check if information was available in this area.
- In response to a question regarding the availability of activities outside of work for staff, the Panel was advised that there was sports activities were included as part of a wellbeing package for staff.
- With regard to the 6.5% vacancy management savings target, the Strategic Director for CoaCh advised that where possible there would be a delay in recruitment to vacant posts which would result in a cost saving, in addition efficiency opportunities would also be considered from restructuring or increasing the use of technology.
- It was confirmed that the cost of agency staff was broadly the same as previous years, but varied considerably according to the role.
- The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Communication advised that technology such as Chat GPT and Artificial Intelligence would have an impact on roles suggested that this was an area the Panel should add to its work programme.
- A Member suggested that the increased use of audio books and E-newspapers/magazines from libraries was connected to the reduction of footfall and it was important to make paper copies of newspapers available to provide choice and increase footfall. The Panel was advised that there was a correlation but the provision of hard copy newspapers in libraries was managed on a case by case basis and figures showed that E-products were being very well used. The Panel did acknowledge that where newspapers had been reintroduced, data showed visitor numbers had increased.
- Clarification was provided on the difference between gross and net amounts detailed in the In-Year Budget Monitoring information. It was explained that the net figure was less generated income, capitalisation costs and any recharges. The Assistant Director for Communities advised that with regard to the Communities Budget, a large number of grants were included eg Household Support Fund and Homes for Ukraine.

## **406 Corporate Procurement Strategy - Service Transformation and Key Performance Indicator Delivery Plan**

The Panel was provided with an update on developments relating to the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2022-25, including the service transformation activities and the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) delivery plan.

The Strategic Director for CoaCh introduced the report explaining that the Procurement Team were using category management to facilitate and control the procurement decisions taken by the Council.

During the discussion, the following main points made were:

- The Procurement Team had been restructured and had implemented an 8 step category management model which had moved away from typical tendering and contracting and had more focus on up front market engagement and contract management.
- A Commercial Board, chaired by the Council's Chief Executive had been set up to provide support and direction on all above threshold commercial activity.
- The management approach to each contact would change depending on its categorisation. The categories were Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze with the Platinum category receiving the regular commercial and operational performance meetings and the Bronze category being managed by exception.
- The Intranet site had been simplified and focussed on the customer journey.
- Staff induction included the 'Worcestershire Pound' which gave guidance to staff on how to approach commercial activity on lower spend activities by treating every pound as their own.
- The Council had recently joined the West Midlands Procurement Group which enabled the sharing of best practice.
- In response to a concern raised by a Panel Member regarding how the Council ensured that its suppliers had fair employment policies for their staff, the Panel was assured that all suppliers were contractually required to follow employment law. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication advised the Panel that if members had specific evidenced concerns they should be escalated accordingly.

## **407 Income Generation at the Council's Countryside Sites**

The Panel had requested an update on the Council's income generation opportunities at countryside sites.

The report was summarised by the Countryside Greenspace, Gypsy and Traveller Service and Road Safety Education Manager and the main points noted were:

- The Service no longer had a base budget but was funded by income and the Public Health Ring Fenced Grant, however the Council had a history of generating income.
- A number of countryside sites were protected areas and unsuitable to hire out for events therefore, the Council had moved away from income streams which led to management issues which outweighed the benefits of the income brought in.

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had reduced income to the service by £100,000.
- In response to a member question about whether car boot sales could be reconsidered for Worcester Woods, the Assistant Director for Communities advised that that it had been re-looked at and the Highways Department and the Police had advised that they were not feasible in terms of cost v benefit and the Council were left with management issues after these event such as removal of litter and there was not the capacity within the Team to deal with this. analysis.
- With regard to arboreal services on highways, the Panel were advised that the Council had an Arboreal Officer within Property Services who looked after the Council's tree estate including school grounds and other properties. Officers that worked in this Team all had a basic level of tree inspection training and were involved in basic tree felling only. For any significant arboreal issues, the Council would have arboreal contractors brought in to assist with any specialist jobs. The Highways Department managed their own tree stock and the Greenspace Team were not involved.
- Suggestions such as farmers markets, potential to create green energy on Council sites, wedding receptions, marquee hire and television and film drama locations were put forward as potential income streams. It was confirmed that farmers markets already took place and the Council was looking to do more of those. The potential for creating renewable energy on Council sites could be explored with the potential for wind farms on suitable sites. The Council already had a Use for Film Sets Policy for Worcestershire which would be circulated to the Panel for information.
- In response to a question as to whether the Council had any land suitable for allotments. The Panel was advised that this was a district council responsibility.
- Hosting wedding receptions presented challenges due to staffing levels at weekends, but the Council was getting more requests for more informal wedding arrangements. The Panel requested that the potential of using Council sites for weddings should be considered at a future meeting.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the report and requested that the Council's venues suitable for hiring should be marketed within the Council's publications.

## **408 Resident Roadshows**

The Panel had requested an overview of the Council's Resident Roadshows and reinforce their purpose. It included a summary of outcomes from the 2022 roadshows and the proposals for delivering Resident Roadshows for 2023.

The Panel was supportive of the roadshows and agreed that they were a useful way of engaging with local residents and could see the value on holding them during other public events throughout the county. Members of the Panel would be appreciative of more member involvement in the process.

In response to a question about the purpose of the roadshows, the Panel was advised that the roadshows were a mechanism to engage with residents about

the services provided by the Council, answer questions and provide signposting to other services within the System.

The Head of Communications advised that the 2023 Roadshows would provide printed promotional literature which would include for example, information on fostering, registration services and countryside services.

#### **409 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24**

It was agreed that following items would be added to the Work Programme which would be considered by Council at its May meeting:

- Member Portal – looking at the case management system
- AI and the implications of Chat GPT .

The meeting ended at 12.22 pm

Chairman .....