

Minutes of the Corporate and Communities

Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall Worcester

Tuesday, 25 July 2023, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Emma Stokes (Chairman), Cllr Emma Marshall (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Natalie McVey and Cllr James Stanley

Also attended:

Cllr Adam Kent, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services
and Communication

Jonathan Fitzgerald-Guy, Assistant Director Transformation and Commercial
Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities
Sandra Taylor, Assistant Director for IT and Digital
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Rob Morris, Head of Business Intelligence
Sharon Caldwell, Registration and Coroners Services Manager
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Jo Weston, 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 8 June 2023 (previously circulated).

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

417 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Panel Member, Councillor Richard Udall,
Councillor Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
and the Strategic Director for Commercial and Change.

The Chairman advised that Item 8 (Update Report: Registration of Deaths within Five Days (and Out of Hours Registration)) would be taken as Item 6 and the rest of the Agenda re-numbered accordingly.

The Chairman thanked Panel Members for their recent contribution to the Scrutiny of the relocation of Redditch Library.

418 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

419 Public Participation

None.

420 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

421 Performance and 2022/23 Year End Budget Monitoring

The Panel had received performance information for Quarter 4 2022/23 and the year end budget monitoring report.

Performance

The Head of Business Intelligence reminded the Panel that the performance report was also available to view on the Council's website utilising Power BI to make the data more visual.

Following a Notice of Motion to Council in July 2022 on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, performance data had been requested on the take up of Bikeability sessions and the Panel had been provided with data relating to children. For future meetings data relating to adults take up of Bikeability sessions was requested. It was agreed that further information would be provided after the meeting, however, some adult sessions had taken place in Wyre Forest, funded through Public Health.

Bikeability for Children continued to be delivered across the County in a range of schools and there was no particular area of concern. Officers reported that participation was where they hoped it would be post COVID-19 pandemic.

Year End Budget Monitoring 2022/23

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer reported that the Council had a net overspend of £7.3m on a £373.2m net budget. Overspends had occurred in the demand led areas of adult social care, children's social care and home to school transport. The areas in which the Panel monitored the budget had all reported an underspend and had ended the year in good financial health.

A Member highlighted the reduction in library income and questioned to what extent ongoing vacant library space would impact the budget, to be informed that Officers were mindful of the requirement to continue paying for utility bills and other associated costs and were working to find alternative solutions.

The overspend in Legal and Democratic Services was due to a significant increase in child-care cases which required court support. It was reported that the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Children First was fully aware of the fees involved and Officers would scrutinise the impact of such cases.

The Panel Chairman welcomed the positive report and thanked Officers for their diligence.

422 Update Report: Registration of Deaths Within Five Days (and Out of Hours Registration)

Members had received a comprehensive Agenda Report and were invited to ask questions. During the ensuing discussion, main points included:

- There was concern that the process for registration of deaths appeared to be disjointed. When asked what could be done to make the process more streamlined, Officers agreed that it was not easy and the situation was challenging for all involved
- The introduction in 2019 and subsequent national roll out of the Medical Examiner (ME) Service was the main contributing factor. The System was now more complicated; however, the Department of Health and the Home Office was looking at the overall death management process
- Opportunities to improve the system nationally may include electronic death certificates or the possibility of registration via a telephone appointment
- Challenge by family members had always been present at GP and Registration Service level, however, an additional level of challenge was now present with ME intervention
- In relation to the statutory timeframe, whereby all deaths (excluding those referred to the coroner) were registered within five days of the date of death, there was uncertainty when the clock began. This point was being discussed at a national level and the Panel hoped for a sensible approach
- The Worcestershire Registration Service was doing everything it could to speed up the process locally. Internal monitoring suggested that a death registration was currently 4.7 days, although it did not take much to impact the flow
- It was reported that performance within the statutory timeframe was highest during the COVID-19 pandemic, partly due to lack of other transactions being undertaken. In 2018/19 82% of deaths were registered during the statutory timeframe, with performance declining since, a picture shared nationally
- A Member highlighted the positive report that there had been no impact to funerals which were required to take place within a specific period for religious reasons

- The Head of Service for Registration, Coroners and Resettlement was working with the Team to ensure appointments were appropriate in number and available when needed. One example of a lengthy wait was given, where a family had waited 6 days for an appointment due to the family not being able to confirm a Funeral Director
- The Panel agreed that it was unfair to monitor Service performance when factors were outside of the Council's control. It was agreed that there would be a trial of using the performance information gathered internally which the Council had control over, in the next performance update.

423 Update on Developments Relating to the Power BI Project

The Panel was reminded that Power BI had evolved over the past year and its use had increased to become a Council wide business intelligence tool. Progress had been made, building capacity and skills from a small defined team to a wider network of developers. An outside consultancy had been engaged to help configure the system and provide some training to ensure consistency across the whole Council. The use of Power BI had grown from a small number of internal documents to publicly available data, such as part of the Agenda for this meeting. It was good practice for standardisation and next steps included the management of the cultural shift for Officers from 'point in time' reports to the same report being accessed through Power BI as live data. Training materials would be available and Officers and Members would be able to access support to navigate the system. It was noted that behind every data set, further management information was available and Power BI was a huge benefit to the Council.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication was clear that Power BI was a vital tool, enabling access to accurate, real time, information. Its use was also driving digital transformation.

The Panel Chairman welcomed the update and was pleased with the Council's progress over the year. On inviting comments and questions, the following points were made:

- In relation to version control, it was clarified that the data would be built upon to enable comparisons and trends over time. There was a difference between performance and intelligence and performance reports, such as the one at the meeting, were signed off as an accurate record at that time. In comparison, intelligence was based on the latest information available and could change in an instant. There was general agreement that it was important to be clear about what was performance and what was intelligence
- For clarity, the information for the meeting which was on the Council website would remain as a record in a point in time
- Member training on Power BI was planned, however, the Cabinet Member believed that Members would not benefit from the data in the majority of resident cases, rather the data could help build a picture
- The transparency for the Council and Members was welcomed, however, it was agreed that visual standardisation was key. When

asked what involvement there had been with those adults, such as the visually impaired, who had difficulty accessing online resources it was clarified that the same principles had been applied as the development of the Council website. These included a limited colour palette for example

- It was reported that Microsoft, the organisation behind Power BI, had openly reported that it was committed to accessibility, however, at present, its software was not always accessible and it was a global issue.

424 Web Redevelopment Project

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility opened the discussion and thanked the Team for its success in the redevelopment of the Council website, making it attractive for residents to engage with the Council through improved navigation.

The new website was designed for mobile devices in the first instance, had been developed in partnership with both internal and external stakeholders and was populated with the resident in mind. Testing had taken place, feedback gathered and changes had been made. Accessibility for all users was key and a standard approach had been adopted.

In the ensuing discussion, main points included:

- For clarity, reference to Silktide in the Agenda Report was the Silktide Website Content Accessibility Guidelines Score. It was explained as an audit of all Council websites with nationally recognised standards. The Council had scored 93% for its website compliance with the accessibility standards, which was excellent
- When asked whether a laptop was deemed a mobile device, it was clarified it was not, however, the website was based on a responsive framework and would therefore adapt to the device it was being displayed on
- One Member explained that they had accessed the new website on a number of different devices and was very impressed, to the extent that it was easier to report issues on the website than it was the dedicated Member Portal. Officers agreed to look at individual concerns outside of the meeting
- The Cabinet Member reported that he empowered his residents to report incidents themselves as they would be best placed to accurately report the required information.

425 Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted.

The meeting ended at 3.20 pm

Chairman