

Minutes of the
Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
County Hall Worcester
Tuesday, 26 March 2024, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Emma Stokes (Chairman), Cllr Emma Marshall (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Kyle Daisley, Cllr Natalie McVey and Cllr Craig Warhurst

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
Richard Taylor, Assistant Director for HR, OD and Engagement
Sandra Taylor, Assistant Director for IT and Digital
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Rob Morris, Head of Business Intelligence
Jo Dalton, Head of Communications and Engagement
Philippa Tinsley, Museums 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 18 January 2024 (previously circulated).

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

453 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

Apologies had been received from Councillors James Stanley and Richard Udall.

454 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

455 Public Participation

None.

456 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

457 Council Notice of Motion: Online Recording of Public Meetings

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication introduced the Item by clarifying that although it had not been possible to webcast all public Council meetings whilst the Council Chamber was not available, there was no legal requirement for Council meetings to be broadcast live or recorded.

Full Council had taken place around the County and either streamed live or recorded and then uploaded to the internet. There had been difficulties in finding a single location for the meetings set and each District Council location had different equipment and options for recording.

The Lakeview Room in County Hall had been modified in order that a meeting could be recorded and subsequently uploaded to the internet. This had involved moving a fixed camera to provide a room overview.

In response to the Notice of Motion, Officers had provided the CMR with 3 technical options and these were outlined in the Agenda Report.

The Chairman invited questions and in the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- With reference to the location for full Council meetings, various district council options were discussed. Officers advised that all options would be considered
- In relation to the discovery of RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete) at County Hall, resulting in the upper floor being closed since 8 September 2023, the CMR reported that the County Council faced considerable challenges regarding the County Hall building
- The Panel agreed that the sound quality of any media was more important than whether a meeting was broadcast live or recorded

- The Strategic Director explained that as there was no legal necessity to broadcast public meetings, the value of broadcasting live was negligible and the lowest cost option should therefore be considered
- When asked about any security risk of broadcasting live meetings, as referred to in option 2 and option 3, Officers were not unduly concerned
- Members agreed that Wi-Fi connectivity at a recent Full Council meeting held at a District Council site was poor, however, it was recognised that increased use of the amount of devices may have impacted on the system
- There was agreement that it was not viable to spend any further money on a solution that was short term. The Assistant Director clarified that all 3 options were low cost, however, option 2 and option 3 would involve increased staff time and training
- It was clarified that all 3 options were based on Microsoft Teams solutions, however, a live broadcast offered limited benefit as it would not be interactive
- The Chairman referred to the 11 January 2024 Notice of Motion to Council and clarified that it referred to the recording of meetings
- Members hoped that smaller public committee and panel meetings which had taken place off site could be brought back to County Hall if the room was available, for example Planning Committee. As District Council charges varied, the Strategic Director agreed that if space permitted, that would be the expectation. The CMR added that if an Item was likely to attract public attention, an alternative larger venue could be used
- A Member suggested that a single location for Full Council meetings was beneficial, as was livestreamed meetings, to encourage public engagement
- When asked whether it was possible to determine how many people had watched a livestream or recording, an example was given of a recent Full Council meeting where it had been viewed 422 times, however, it was not possible to determine whether this was Officers, Members, the Public or repeat views by any individual
- A number of queries were raised, such as whether a recording could be paused or whether it could be edited and Officers agreed to investigate
- The Chairman advised that the Panel was not a decision making Body, however, the Panel could make a recommendation to the CMR. The Panel agreed to recommend to the CMR, Option 1 as a way forward in his decision making, that meetings held at County Hall were recorded using Microsoft Teams and uploaded to the County Council website after the meeting had concluded to enable viewing by the public.

458 Update on Worcestershire County Museum

The Assistant Director for Communities reminded the Panel that in October 2023, Cabinet had been presented with a vision for the County Museum's future at Hartlebury Castle. The museum's current 60-year lease was due to end in February 2026. Significant work was required to develop the site and it was vital to build a museum which was fit for the future. Visitor numbers were

growing and as part of the preventative strategy, health initiatives were programmed. Furthermore, there was a desire to increase school visits.

The challenges included working with Grade 1 and Grade 2 listed buildings and awaiting the outcome of funding applications. An expression of interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund had been successful meaning an application could be submitted. It was hoped the outcome would be known by the end of 2024. Several other funding opportunities were also being explored. The Council was the sole trustee of the Tickenhill Collection, which had charitable trust status with the associated benefits.

During the discussion, the following points were made:

- The Panel welcomed the Report and agreed the Museum was a valuable asset to Worcestershire and support for its future was agreed
- Although there was a Joint Museums Service between the County Council and Worcester City Council, Hartlebury Castle was purely a County Council asset. The Joint Museums Committee made shared decisions and in the case of the County Museum, made recommendations to the County Council's Cabinet to inform the decisions made
- A Member referred to the Agenda and commented that they would not expect to see health advice as part of the strategy. In response, it was reported that there were already some health and wellbeing activities taking place, for example hosting Dementia groups and using the Museum's collection to help with 'suitcase stories'
- Evidence was available to suggest that interacting with cultural activity could help people live a longer life
- The Museum did not currently have any partnership with the new Worcestershire Film Office, however, there were real opportunities across all sites
- Volunteer opportunities were available for all aspects of the Museum
- A Member referred to the Agenda which outlined that the current Lease ended in February 2026, yet any successful Heritage Lottery funding would not be secured until August 2026. It was suggested that an interim lease would be the likely outcome in such circumstances
- When asked of the risks to the Council if funding was not secured, the Cabinet Report was referenced which outlined that to spend no money was not an option. Other funding opportunities would be available and match-funding was a further option, however, it was likely that a repeat application would also be made
- Clarity was given that the Heritage Lottery Fund was only one avenue and additional opportunities were available to the Trust, rather than the Council
- In terms of plans to increase revenue, it was confirmed that visitor numbers had increased beyond expectation post Covid-19 and revenue was good
- The Panel Chairman welcomed the report and was pleased with the positive update. Reference was also made to Evesham's Almonry, which had recently secured over £2m Government funding.

459 Performance and 2023/24 In Year Budget Monitoring

The Strategic Director reported there was nothing of concern in the Quarter 3 (October to December 2023) budget and performance report, although the link to the Power BI report at the time of the meeting was incorrect and a new version would be circulated to Members and uploaded to the internet.

Performance discussion points included:

- Members were pleased to see an upward trend in the numbers of children undertaking Bikeability training
- Museum and Library visitor numbers were rising, currently at around 72% of pre Covid-19 pandemic figures which was slightly above national performance. When asked whether the data included Libraries Unlocked visitors, it was clarified that it did not, however future performance reports would include the data. It was agreed to provide data on the number of library visits and library issues for the County Mobile Library, which toured the County on routes outlined on the Council website
- A Member suggested that the increase in the number of days lost through long-term sickness was disappointing. The Assistant Director for HR explained that the definition of long term sickness had been changed from 28 to 21 days and intervention was therefore happening earlier. This was a positive step, however had resulted in the comparison data being skewed. It was agreed to provide more narrative in future reports. Short-term absence had seen a decrease of 6.6% compared to the same quarter in 2022/23. For clarity, the Council was not seeing an increase in sickness rates
- When asked whether the Council had an Occupational Therapist, it was reported that there was an Occupational Health Unit, with staff able to undertake risk based assessments in the workplace. Alongside this, an employee assistance programme which included elements such as referral to a physiotherapist at an early stage, rather than referral through GP services
- To combat sickness rates, a Member enquired whether consideration had been given to close Council offices for the winter period. In response, it was stated that seasonal sickness affected more front line staff than those who were office based
- Members agreed that a session on the use of the Power BI would be beneficial and would be scheduled in due course

Budget discussion points included:

- The Deputy Chief Finance Officer reiterated that nothing had dramatically changed since Quarter 2 and there were clear reasons for the reported overspend in the Commercial and Change Directorate, mainly income variances from vacant space on the County Hall complex
- The Council was trying to maximise income as best as it could, including inviting Liberata (HR partner) back into County Hall
- The Chief Executive/Finance/HR functions were expected to broadly break-even with an improved position from Quarter 2

- The Panel noted that Government funding had been received earlier than expected, meaning the Council was able to invest it earlier and therefore earn interest earlier than anticipated. The Council was also not borrowing as much money
- The Panel Chairman noted the good fiscal management and referred to the Treasury Management Strategy which was considered by the Audit and Governance Committee
- A Member asked whether the Greenspace and Gypsy Services budget was ringfenced as the service was self-funding, to be informed that it was not and contributed to the overall Portfolio of community services
- In response to a query as to the costs associated with The Hive, Members were informed that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract would continue for a further 20+ years. Assurance was given that adjustments had been made in the next financial year to offset costs
- A six month rent-free period on Wildwood offices was questioned. Members were advised that a company had invested greatly and there was possibility of additional income, however preparations were required in the building and the agreement was fair. It was suggested that 325 seats were still available within the offices and Wildwood was a very attractive offer.

460 Resident Roadshows

The Panel had received a comprehensive report on Resident Roadshows, of which there were 9 in 2023. Their purpose was to promote the County Council brand and allow officers and councillors to talk face to face with residents. Learning had been taken from the 2023 events to inform the programme for 2024.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- In 2023, a number of Town Centre events had been trialled, however it was felt that people were more time limited on these occasions. As such, in 2024, all 10 planned resident roadshows were to happen at summer family events and across Worcestershire
- Learning from 2023, it was hoped that if events had multiple County Council stands, such as Fostering or Recycling, all Council stands would be placed together if possible. A Member also suggested that if District Councils were represented at events it may be helpful to residents if they were also located in the same area
- Officers stressed that it was important to spend the limited budget wisely
- In response to a question as to where comments were collected and analysed, it was reported that 2024 would see the introduction of online reporting and Quick-Response (QR) codes were also being investigated as a way of collecting feedback. These would provide instant results in addition to paper responses. This would also help with residents being able to follow up and take control of their enquiry
- Ensuring the Local Member and the area Highways Liaison Engineer were present at an event ensured that residents had confidence they

were speaking with people who knew the area well and appreciated any problems encountered

- A Member cautioned against the use of Worcestershire Children First branded products as the company was to be brought back under the Council from 1 October 2024. However, there was agreement that the communications around Fostering and Foster Carer recruitment were vital
- A Member emphasised the importance of Members and Officers being adequately prepared to talk with confidence and knowledge about initiatives being promoted at events
- When asked about the lack of Redditch events, it was reported that there had been a Town Centre event planned in 2023 which ultimately could not take place. 2 events were planned for 2024, although it was noted that the Hanbury Show was away from the Town
- Clarity was given that the Council tried not to attend the same event two years running
- In addition to Roadshows, the County Magazine, recently issued to all households, was another way to promote the work of the Council
- The CMR stressed that Fostering must be a focus for the Council and recruitment of Foster Carers was an area he hoped could be simplified, ensuring safe practice was adhered to. The Panel fully supported this approach
- A Member asked whether Officers could consider what free merchandise was given away
- The Strategic Director reminded the Panel of the other ways the Council heard from residents and the rich data which was provided. Reference was made to the Viewpoint Survey and the ongoing work in relation to compliments, complaints and comments, an area which the Panel had an Annual Report.

461 Refresh of the Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/25

The Panel considered it's Work Programme and suggested the following items be added to the draft Work Programme for 2024/25:

- Report It (Website function to report an issue)
- Member Portal
- Communication Policies for Social Media

The draft Work Programme would be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board for consideration on 25 April before being considered by Council at its meeting on 16 May 2024.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Chairman