

MINUTES of the meeting of Cabinet held at The Chamber, Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Thursday 23 July 2015 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor AW Johnson (Chairman)

Councillors: H Bramer, JG Lester, GJ Powell, PD Price, P Rone and FM Norman

In attendance: Councillors WLS Bowen, TM James, RI Matthews, AJW Powers, J Hardwick, D Summers, EJ Swinglehurst

Officers: Mr A Neill, Mr B Norman, Ms H Coombes, Mrs J Davidson, Mr G Hughes, Mr P Robinson

84. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors PA Andrews, JM Bartlett and PM Morgan.

85. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

In accordance with paragraph 4.1.23 of the council's constitution, Councillor FM Norman attended as a substitute member for Councillor JM Bartlett.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

87. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chairman.

88. UNDERSTANDING HEREFORDSHIRE - THE JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND HEREFORDSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The cabinet member for economy, communities and corporate introduced this item which included a joint strategic needs assessment which the council had a statutory duty to produce. This would ensure that service priorities are based on key issues and that decision-making is informed in order to meet the needs of the population.

A presentation on Understanding Herefordshire was given by the adults and wellbeing directorate's research and intelligence lead. The presentation provided a picture of the county and key issues in terms of health, social, economic and demographic factors.

The leader thanked officers for the presentation and the report.

The group leader for Herefordshire Independents welcomed the recognition in the report of the military population and defence as an employer in the county, which had not been

recognised previously. It was noted that it was intended to develop work on this sector of the community.

The group leader for It's Our County gave thanks for this work and commented that it would be useful to have a trajectory to enable tracking of data using the JSNA as a primary reference. He asked for assurance that data was comprehensive and accurate.

The cabinet member for economy, communities and corporate explained that there were additional areas in this year's report including the military sector and the economy making the data more comprehensive. There were two further documents that inform decision-making, and these were the mental health needs assessment document and the children's integrated needs assessment. It was noted that the trajectory had changed in response to the evidence base and quality assurance. All data was quality assured before publishing and statistics were based on national databases and were therefore robust. The research and intelligence lead welcomed enquiries from any member interested in the data.

In response to a further question from the group leader for It's Our County, the research and intelligence lead confirmed that data was quality assured and scrutinised and that reports were also quality assured by stakeholders and other partners.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee referred to a recent meeting with Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service (HVOSS), highlighting a need to consider the voluntary sector in Herefordshire. Volunteers played an important and powerful role and were relied upon yet could withdraw from providing valued services at any time. It was noted that there was also an aging volunteer population. The clergy was also cited as a valuable yet shrinking resource in the community. In response, it was confirmed that HVOSS were involved in the JSNA and mapping work and it would be possible to develop more support for voluntary organisations to deliver services.

The cabinet member infrastructure commented on data regarding leisure activity and unemployment which suggested that there was a high proportion of people on pensions who cannot afford leisure activities. It was clarified that in the 16% classified as workless this did not include retired people.

The leader commented on an article in today's Hereford Times reporting on an increase in employment in the county.

The group leader for the Liberal Democrats commented that for the report to have impact it needed to demonstrate how it affected decisions.

The group leader for Herefordshire Independents commented on data regarding fatal and serious road incidents. In response the cabinet member for economy, communities and corporate referred to the Community Safety Partnership and work with the police and highways as a priority. He added that a worrying factor was that of the number of people, particularly young people, in vehicles involved in such incidents.

With regard to the health and wellbeing strategy, the health and wellbeing board was required to identify priorities through the JSNA, and consult and engage with stakeholders. Work on this by public health was noted, and thanks given to the health and social care overview and scrutiny committee for supporting the work. The strategy comprised a strategic aspirational framework and a National Health Service outcomes framework, endorsed by feedback from the public. The report showed how priorities and indicators were agreed.

The cabinet member for economy, communities and corporate acknowledged that in the past two years of his working with the adults and wellbeing directorate there had been significant challenges including a total workforce reorganisation and reshaping of the social care market. There had also been work on preparing for the better care fund and care act, serious budgetary work and a difficult journey for service users. Noting that this was the last cabinet meeting for the director of the service, Helen Coombes, he thanked her for her patience, humour and knowledge that had led to the directorate's achievements and wished her well for the future.

The leader endorsed the cabinet member's comments on behalf of the cabinet, and Ms Coombes was congratulated and wished well by the group leaders of It's Our County and Herefordshire Independents. In reply, Ms Coombes stated that it had been a privilege to work in Herefordshire and thanked cabinet, members and senior management for their support.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (a) the evidence base of Understanding Herefordshire and the underpinning data be noted to inform future planning, decision making and commissioning; and**
- (b) the health & wellbeing strategy be noted for publication.**

89. CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

The cabinet member, young people and children's wellbeing, presented a letter of 24 March 2015 from the secretary of state addressed to the leader which confirmed the removal of an improvement notice. The letter congratulated the council for bringing about significant change and it was noted that staff had worked hard to achieve the notice being lifted. He added that whilst the letter was welcomed, there is no time for complacency.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee made enquiries about the efficiency and efficacy of the social care system, Frameworki. He further noted concern about the red ratings in relation to the ratio of permanent and agency staff and asked about the impact of the social work academy.

The head of safeguarding and quality explained that Frameworki remained a challenge although it compared well with other similar systems; improvements have been made and there is more performance information available. Recruitment and retention impacting on caseloads remained an issue but problems could be identified much earlier. A major project was planned for next year on data migration and upgrading between Frameworki and Mosaic which would ensure that the system was more user friendly. Progress was being made and priorities were clearer, including work on a module for looked after children.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee enquired further about concerns that were reported regarding the use of tablet devices and their interface with Frameworki. It was clarified that there remained a reliance on access to secure wi-fi at bases such as the multi-agency offices. There was work in progress to integrate devices with systems such as Agresso and HR.

The Liberal Democrat group leader commented that at least two leavers had cited to him their reason for leaving was Frameworki.

The cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing expressed confidence that strategies were in place to address recruitment and retention issues and that the results would be seen in the long-term.

In answer to a question from the chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee regarding the social work academy, it was confirmed that there were a number of recruits progressing through the academy who were working well and there was evidence that they intended to stay with Herefordshire. The first cohort had formed a peer group that was committed and putting down roots in the county. It was expected that the academy would pay dividends in the long term.

The group leader of Herefordshire Independents asked about the time taken to establish high-quality supervision. He further enquired about steps towards workers' access to information on missing children, and multi-agency safeguarding training.

The director children's wellbeing commented on the importance of understanding the reality of the position that the directorate was in and the reasons for the intervention. It was not the case that no progress had been made and the report charted progress in the move towards "good". The red ratings indicated that there needed to be faster progress in those areas.

Responding to the question regarding supervision, the head of safeguarding and quality explained that there was progress towards re-establishing a management group with skills in reflective supervision. Feedback was that there was supervision in place but there needed to be a clear record of it and consistency with managers trained in the practice. Changes in the management group meant that there were new managers who also needed training and development.

The head of safeguarding and quality clarified that with regard to missing children and child sexual exploitation, there were multi-agency systems and reporting mechanisms in place. The system had improved in the last 12 months; however there were still significant improvements to make in this area of emerging practice. It was also noted that there was a significant number of looked after children who were not from Herefordshire. With regard to safeguarding training, there needed to be regular refresher training as one-off training was not sufficient. There were more professional forums and information being cascaded from the safeguarding board. Training costs were at a premium but more training was coming up and there was continuous improvement.

In response to a question from the group leader of the Herefordshire Independents regarding schools and safeguarding, the head of safeguarding and quality expressed concern that schools were reporting increased expectations and clarified that there had been no changes to the system or increased bureaucracy.

The Chief Executive commented that it was a relatively small number of points that were red-rated and that this should be seen in context. Whilst there should be no complacency, the red ratings showed that reporting was more transparent and should not be cause for embarrassment.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee welcomed the clarity on the red ratings and progress, and the reassurance that looked after children were known and were notified to the council when coming into the county. It was noted that it was the role of the placing authority to notify the council and systems were in place to ensure children were on the system and concerns responded to.

RESOLVED

That:

- (a) the lifting of the intervention notice by DfE be noted; and
- (b) progress to date on the Ofsted improvement plan be noted.

90. END OF MAY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET REPORT

The cabinet member for economy, communities and corporate introduced the report which used to be presented as two separate reports. Performance is RAG-rated (red, amber, green) and although there were some high risks, there were controls in place. Feedback on format of reports and the information presented was welcomed in order to make them as useful as possible.

The director of resources presented the financial highlights from the report. The overall projection of overspend was not a concern and there was confidence that this would be addressed through the year. The contingency fund and reserves could cover the overspend if things remained unchanged. There were concerns regarding safeguarding spending and plans not being achieved. Spending was at the same rate as last year alongside significant reductions in budget. However the HIPPS programme was proving successful. It had been anticipated that external fostering costs would reduce during the year but they had not reduced in line with the plan, hence the variance. Plans were in place to review all cases to ensure children did not stay in external fostering longer than necessary. It was not expected that safeguarding would come within budget this financial year. Plans were in place to reduce agency staff, but there remained a need to staff the service. The 'grow our own' strategy through the academy was working but was a long term plan. Consideration was to be given to how to address budget plans for 2016/17 as there were plans to reduce the budget further.

The budget for adults and wellbeing and economy, communities and corporate directorates were spending within budget.

Budgetary control across the board was considered to be good.

In relation to interest rates, the director of resources explained that they had been low for a number of years but an increase at the turn of year was anticipated by the Bank of England. The impact on the council would be minimal as the majority of borrowing had been fixed at low interest rates.

In answer to a question from the group leader of the Herefordshire Independents regarding the monetary policy committee, it was clarified that this was made up of economists.

The director of adults and wellbeing answered his further question regarding the risk referred to in appendix D and non-compliance of the Care Act. The council remained in dispute with the clinical commissioning group regarding the amount of budget available to support the existing commitments and therefore the contracts had not transferred to the local authority. Ongoing dialogue was taking place and the actual service provision was continuing. Phase 2 of the Care Act was due to be implemented from April 2016; however the government had just announced that phase 2 would now be delayed until 2020. This risk would be amended in light of this announcement. In terms of phase 1, the information, advice and signposting function was now fully commissioned though would not be fully operational until later this year and so remained a risk to the council though mitigation actions were in place.

The group leader for the Liberal Democrats commented on the level of borrowing and the ability to maintain interest payments in the event of an economic down-turn, and asked about the impact on business rates and council tax. The leader commented that councils tended to be risk averse but it was not an option to not borrow for fear of rises in interest rates. The director of resources gave assurance that treasury management was sound, the economy was growing as was employment in Herefordshire. Rates and taxes continued to be paid during periods of recession and concerns were more about the level of grants.

The group leader for It's Our County referred to reported performance improvements in safeguarding, commenting that the report suggested delays and costs because of the system and noting that there was no variance reported for adults and wellbeing between net budget and outturn. The director of resources explained there were both positive and negative variances and there was confidence that expenditure would be within the overall budget. It was too early in the year to be precise on the level of overall spend against budget.

The director for adults and wellbeing commented that the nature of referrals was reflected in a culture of not turning issues away which are recorded on the system thus creating a workflow to be responded to. Training was implemented in March and the impact could be seen as workers could challenge the definition of adult protection issues and advise the police whether or not to take action or refer elsewhere. This was improving and staff were more confident in challenging other organisations. As regards performance, there was an issue of meeting self-imposed targets in the workflow and completing investigations, and by the next quarter performance would be improving.

The group leader for It's Our County commented on the capital programme. There appeared to be a steep increase in capital budget for the ECC directorate. Clarification was welcomed on the relationship between capital spend within the period and considerations of what was projected within the re-profiling.

The leader commented on the need to guard against making changes to the format of report to ensure there is an understandable baseline.

The director of resources confirmed that it was good practice to show reasons for variances and this would be detailed in future reports.

The cabinet member for infrastructure requested that information regarding re-profiling be shared with group leaders rather than reporting in detail here.

The group leader for the Herefordshire Independents noted the excellent work presented in the report.

The chair of the general overview and scrutiny committee referred to the re-profiling spend, noting that projects such as LED street lighting were already showing visible changes in the county. In response to his question regarding the installation of solar panels on public buildings, the director for economy communities and corporate explained that a number of buildings were under consideration and final decisions would depend on best returns. This scheme was to be implemented from the autumn and a shortlist of three providers was identified.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (a) the projected overspend of £0.6m be noted; and**
- (b) performance for the first two months of 2015/16 be noted.**

Cabinet members were asked to note that the next meeting will be on Friday 11 September at 2pm in the Council Chamber.

The cabinet member for transport and roads was congratulated for the postponement by one week of the planned roadworks on Belmont Road, Hereford to avoid their coinciding with the Three Choirs Festival.

The meeting ended at 3.41 pm

CHAIRMAN