

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA FOR**

# **General Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Monday 4 March 2013**

**10.00 am**

**The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford**

	<b>Pages</b>
<b>6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC</b>	1 - 4
<b>8. WEB-BASED TECHNOLOGIES (DIGITAL CHANNELS)</b>	5 - 18



## **General Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Held at 10.00am Monday 4 March 2013

Agenda Item 6 – Questions from the Public.

Agenda Item 6 invited the public to submit questions for consideration at the meeting so long as the question is directly related to an item listed on the agenda.

The Following questions have been received. Where possible or appropriate answers have been provided.

### **Agenda Item 7 – Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership**

#### **From Mr Packman**

I should like to suggest that the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee should seek answers from the Commander of the Herefordshire Division of the West Mercia Police Force to the following questions. I believe the subjects are important because, in the past, contacts with the West Mercia Police Force by means of PACT meetings and through members of local policing teams attending parish council meetings have proved to be very useful, not only in resolving problems but also in raising the profile of the police in the local area and helping to dispel the widely-held, albeit possibly inaccurate, belief that uniformed policemen and PCSOs are generally invisible.

The questions are:

Q1. During the last three years, PACT meetings in Herefordshire have been allowed to wither on the vine. Bearing in mind the West Mercia Police Force website indicates that the Force regards such meetings as being important, I should like to know what Superintendent Powell intends to do to reintroduce them?

#### **Answer from Superintendent Powell**

*Successful policing is a community-based activity that requires the commitment and active engagement of our communities, citizens and partners. Effective engagement gives us the opportunity to understand community and individual concerns, needs and vulnerabilities. It also gives us the opportunity to maximise our visibility within our communities, another known key driver of confidence, and to reinforce the fact that Herefordshire has low levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, and is a safe county in which to live, work, study and visit. What is also important is to ensure our engagement strategies and tactics are effectively targeted maximising those opportunities.*

*The delivery of PACT is tailored to meet the needs of each local community, and in Herefordshire these engagements take the form of community meetings, surgeries and postcard surveys.*

*Currently issues arising are recorded on the Local Policing webpage and if appropriate are elevated to a more in depth and multi-agency tasking approach with partners.*

*However, the time is right for a review of PACT as part of a wider approach to engaging with our communities. This follows the restructure of policing both locally and nationally, as well as reflecting on the significant changes to the way in which we all communicate, including through social media.*

Q2. What is Superintendent Powell's policy regarding members of local policing teams attending parish council meetings?

**Answer from Superintendent Powell**

*With 134 parish councils holding regular meetings, the police in Herefordshire simply do not have capacity to attend every one that is held. Confidence is most impacted upon by engagement, visibility and problem solving any issues raised. We would encourage parish councils to communicate more dynamically with us, for example by email, telephone. We will continue to engage to cover key issues within communities when it will be appropriate to attend some parish council meetings, with a safer neighbourhood sergeant or constable attending by invitation.*

**Agenda Item 9 – Freedom of Information and Arm's Length Companies**

**From Mrs E Morawiecka**

Question 1.

AS Hereford Futures Ltd has no shareholders, but is wholly funded by Herefordshire Council, could the situation regarding FOI and private companies limited by guarantee please be clarified?

**Answer**

*For the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act, Hereford Futures is not wholly owned by Herefordshire Council, it is owned by the directors and Herefordshire Council has only a minority interest. Hereford Futures has a number of public and private funding sources, and for these reason does not come under the terms of Section 3 or Section 6 of the Freedom of Information Act. Hereford Futures does not hold information on behalf of Herefordshire Council, it holds information as a company in its own right.*

*With reference to the point raised in question one:*

*"As Hereford Futures Ltd has no shareholders, but is wholly funded by Herefordshire Council.." I am informed that "Hereford Futures is not wholly owned by Herefordshire*

*Council, it is owned by the directors and Herefordshire Council has only a minority interest. Hereford Futures has a number of public and private funding sources, and for these reason does not come under the terms of Section 3 or Section 6 of the Freedom of Information Act.”*

*“...could the situation regarding FOI and private companies limited by guarantee please be clarified” I consider that Geoff’s report more than adequately sets out how FOI works in relation to information held by companies for and on behalf of a public authority (9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 9.8,9.9, 9.11, 10.3 and 10.4)”. As detailed in para 10.4 if Hereford Futures holds information commissioned by the Council, or relating to a council core function which it carries out on the council’s behalf this may fall under the remit of FOI, however information relating to the general running of Hereford Futures is unlikely to fall under the remit of FOI.*

Question 2.

(a) Can it please be explained how the chief executive of an “arms length” private limited company can become a member of the local County Council pension fund?

In the event of the winding up of such a private limited company, would the Local Authority have to fund future pension liabilities of an employee or would this liability fall on the Company?

(b) Likewise, could the officer please confirm how a private limited company that is “arm’s length” can access the valuable resource of other officers of the Local Authority, who are seconded to such private limited “arms length” companies, and yet the responsibility and the cost of their pay and pension, remains with the Local Authority?

(c) Are officers of the local authority available free, on secondment to other private limited companies in Herefordshire, and if so, how can companies access this valuable resource?

Question 3.

(a) If a company is an arm’s length private limited company, surely to meet the Local Authority and EU procurement, a contract of any reasonable value should go out to public tender?

(b) Would the officer please confirm that no advantage is ever given, or has been given, to any company in securing work for Herefordshire Council, purely by virtue of the fact that it has been established by the Local Authority as an arm’s length private limited company?

(c) If Hereford Futures Ltd is an “arms length” private limited company, and had responsibility for delivering the Yazor Brook Flood Alleviation scheme, why is Herefordshire Council having to provide in its’ own accounts for over £420,000 of remedial works, just over 12 months after this project was successfully completed?

Question 4.

(a) As Board minutes of Hereford Futures Ltd are not held by either the chief executive or leader of Herefordshire Council, how does the local authority ensure continuity and effective handovers on change of personnel, especially as these documents are outside the control of the local authority?

(b) Could this be a reason why Cllr Roger Phillips had to continue to attend board meetings of Hereford Futures until the end of February 2012, to quote the company “to ensure continuity and a smooth handover to Cllr John Jarvis”, despite the company’s Articles of Association clearly stating that appointment as a director of the company “will at all times be conditional on such staff maintaining their position as ...Leader of Herefordshire Council” (para 12.3).

Mrs E Morawiecka,

**Answer**

*The rules under which Overview and Scrutiny Committees of the Council operate include the restriction of public questions to those that are directly related to an item listed on the agenda. This is stated in the agenda of each and every Scrutiny Committee meeting. At the 4 March meeting there is an item on Freedom of Information and Arm's Length Companies only. The Monitoring Officer has therefore confirmed that questions 2-4 should be disallowed on the basis that these do not directly relate to that subject.*

# Update on the Digital Channels Programme

## 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013



# The purpose of the presentation

- Summarise the work the council carried out on the digital channels project
- Describe what has been achieved and what will be achieved
- Outline the approach for the next phase of digital channels work
- Invite a discussion around these issues



# The digital channels project

- Part of a programme of work to radically improve customer service, drive efficiency & manage customer channels
- Intended to enable customers to transact online, alongside improved phone and face-to-face contact

# The DCP set out to deliver

- Stage 1: beta website, pilot intranet
- Stage 2: services online, improved intranet
- Stage 3: more services online including via 2-factor authentication
- Stage 4: Migrate content from microsites

By December 2012

- Stage 5: value-add functions

By December 2013

# The business case was

- The technology in use at the start of the project was expensive in terms of license fees
- The platforms in place were not appropriate to meet the vision of public services to provide greater self service, more open and transparent services and to link public services seamlessly online
- By investing in the development of new web projects based on new platforms over the first two years of the project, public services would realise significant net cost savings over the four-years of the project

# Key risks (at inception)

- Dependencies. The project had a large number of dependencies to other work across public services in Herefordshire
- Resources. The highlight reports suggest that the availability of developer resource created a severe constraint on the project.

# Benefits achieved to date

- The Council has a modern, flexible and powerful web-platform which can be used as the basis for a radical shift in the quality of online service provision.
- The Council has a small but very effective and flexible digital team able to operate in an agile environment and respond rapidly to user demands
- The Council is now able to develop digital services in an interactive and flexible manner in response to user demand and the experience of how local people use the web site.
- The Council also has the capability to transfer this approach to internal channels.

# **Our aspirations for our customers**

- We want to support people to be independent and to live in resilient communities
- We want citizens to have easy access to the information and advice that can help them when they need it
- We want to intervene early so people don't need our services later

# Key strategies for us

- Making every contact count
- Root and Branch reviews

# Not a project, a way of life

- we will move to a constant development environment
- every month we will improve the content, structure, design and functionality of the website
- we are driven by what works for citizens (“users”)



# Move digital by default

- Not forcing customers online
- Providing excellent online transactions
- Build products and services that work elegantly for citizens
- Sees digital as fundamental
- Works to help the digitally excluded access digital services

# Open data and engagement

- a very open, level relationship between the Council and its citizens
- build coalitions across communities in the county with on-going conversation responsive to individuals and groups
- opening all our depersonalised data and then making this useful to citizens

# Risks

- There is a lot of work to do. Prioritising the right work will be crucial
- The work will need to be resourced
- As we focus more online, we will need to reduce those offline. But we need to reduce those at the right pace

# What do you think?

- What would you like to see in terms of strategy, priority and delivery?
- What have we missed?
- How should the Council continue this debate internally and with our citizens?