

MINUTES of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday 3 October 2012 at 1.30 pm

Present: Councillor A Seldon (Chairman)
Councillor JW Millar (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: AM Atkinson, WLS Bowen, MJK Cooper, EPJ Harvey, MAF Hubbard, TM James, Brig P Jones CBE, JLV Kenyon, GA Powell and R Preece

In attendance: Councillors MD Lloyd-Hayes, PM Morgan, GJ Powell and AJW Powers

Officers: D Taylor (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services), C Baird (Assistant Director People's Services Commissioning), R Ball – (Assistant Director Place Based Commissioning); R Gabb (Assistant Director – Homes and Community Services), J Lewis (Assistant Director, People, Policy and Partnerships, P Nicholas –(Regulatory Services Programme Manager), J Jones (Head of Governance), and T Brown (Governance Services).

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors PL Bettington, PGH Cutter, RC Hunt, and SJ Robertson and from Ms E Lowenstein and Mr P Sell.

42. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor GA Powell substituted for Councillor SJ Robertson.

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were none.

46. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were none.

47. ROOT AND BRANCH REVIEWS PHASE 1

The Committee considered in turn the findings and proposals of each of the Phase 1 reviews in the Root and Branch review programme: Older People; Customer Services; Housing, Economy and Regulatory Services and Streetscene.

A general observation was made that given the significance of the Root and Branch reviews and their proposals that the Council and partners do things differently, it was essential that the language used in the review reports reflected this.

Older People

A revised version of the report was circulated at the meeting.

The Assistant Director People's Services Commissioning (ADPSC) presented the report, highlighting that, as set out at paragraphs 18-23 of the revised report, fundamental change to the way the whole Council operated was required, alongside fundamental change to the way in which the Council worked with citizens and partners. The report identified the need for change in four areas: diverting demand, improvement and transformation, achieving best value and establishing a sustainable budget.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- The ADPSC commented that rather than just focusing on and delivering statutory services consideration needed to be given to ways of diverting demand.
- The importance of housing policies recognising the needs of the growing numbers of older people in the County was emphasised.
- Concern was expressed about the findings of some of the benchmarking exercises undertaken that showed Herefordshire was incurring higher costs for some services compared with other authorities. The Cabinet Member – Health and Wellbeing reported that further analysis of the data was required and was being undertaken. Members proposed that assurance should be sought that current contracts are delivering value for money and that future contracts are benchmarked to ensure that they too, provide value for money.
- Concern was expressed about the likelihood of achieving the indicative savings target for adult social care. It was suggested that paragraph 34 of the report to Cabinet, although it did not state this explicitly, meant that current budget targets for the adult social care budget would not be met. This was a perennial problem. A realistic, sustainable budget for adult social care needed to be established as a priority.

Customer Services

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services (DCEX) presented the report. The review had concluded that whilst the current strategy and model had served the council well, there was now a need to move away from solely a centralised and standardised call management system towards broader contact strategy. As part of this, service redesign was needed to anticipate and manage demand to prevent service requirements where self-help and signposting is a better option. The proposals would save money and deliver better outcomes.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- That communication needed to be improved. Members gave examples of a number of difficulties they had personally experienced in obtaining satisfactory responses to enquiries and monitoring progress.

- There was a need for clear, well defined communication processes that were followed consistently. It was important to integrate these communication processes with partners and ensure that the processes operate with simplicity and work correctly and responsively.
- Some concerns were expressed about the effectiveness of the current communications strategy and what confidence Members could have that the new Strategy would be an improvement, would be successfully implemented and save money. The DCex emphasised that the current Customer Strategy had delivered benefits upon which the proposals in the review, which it was estimated would generate savings of £0.5m pa, would build.
- It was confirmed that the review was drawing on best practice from other authorities, as named in the report.

Housing, Economy and Regulatory Services (HERS)

The Regulatory Services Manager presented the report focusing on the key proposed changes and key benefits as set out at page 36 of the agenda papers: reducing demand on the planning service, fundamentally changing Council policy on housing, joining up enforcement service activities with increasing focus on the public health agenda; developing a single delegated grants service for the Council; and bringing together a Strategic Development Service Block to encourage and support Economic Development, supporting vulnerable people and other key priorities.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- A number of aspects of housing policy were raised to which the Assistant Director-Homes and Community Services responded.
- It was proposed that the HERS vision for the future, as set out at page 67 of the agenda papers, should recognise the role that encouraging responsible behaviour can play in reducing both the need and demand for services.

Streetscene

The Assistant Director – Placed Based Commissioning (ADPBC) presented the report. This implemented Cabinet's decision to re-commission the services within the scope of the existing Service Delivery partnership and take forward the commissioning of property services. He commented that the estimated savings of £2-2.7m per annum had been benchmarked and were considered to be realistic.

It also proposed the transformation of public convenience service provision. This was expected to deliver a better service with some modest financial savings.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Attention was drawn to the principles for future service delivery set out at paragraph 17 of the draft Cabinet report. Concern was expressed that these made no reference to the wish expressed by a number of Members that, as far as is practicable, contracts should be let through the local supply chain. It was proposed that this principle should be added.

The ADPBC assured the Committee that efforts had been and would continue to be made to engage with local suppliers and publicise opportunities.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Infrastructure acknowledged the desire to engage with local businesses. He added that the Council had to ensure that it obtained value for money and ensure significant assets such as the highway network were preserved.

- The scope for Town and Parish Councils to take on delivery of services was discussed. Concern was expressed that there had been insufficient proactive preparatory work with councils to help them develop the capacity to take on this new role. This needed to take place quickly. The failure to provide some financial resource to support the transfer of service delivery, at least to some reasonable extent, would be a huge disincentive to councils considering this option. This aspect also needed to be addressed promptly as the time for budget setting drew close. There had to be transparency over current service costs and the savings it was hoped to achieve. It was important to achieve some early successes upon which other councils could then build.

The Cabinet Member – Education and Infrastructure commented that there were a number of services that could be managed better by local councils. The Market Towns were perhaps best placed to pioneer new approaches. He acknowledged that the funding of the transfer of responsibilities would need to be addressed soon.

It was proposed that the Council should redouble its efforts to ensure that work with Parish and Town Councils on their potential role in service delivery is taken forward swiftly to deliver an outcome that is to the benefit of the County as a whole and that appropriate support be provided to Town and Parish Councils to prepare them to take on the additional responsibilities.

RESOLVED: That the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet in respect of each of the four phase 1 reviews as follows:

Older People

- 1 That the Committee is broadly content with the proposals in the review of older people;**
- 2 That it is essential that it is clearly stated that housing policies recognise the needs of older people;**
- 3 That assurance be sought that current contracts are delivering value for money and that future contracts are benchmarked to ensure that they too provide value for money; and**
- 4 That it be highlighted to Cabinet that, whilst this is not explicitly stated in the report, the saving target for Adult Social Care for the current financial year will not be met, emphasising the need for a realistic, sustainable budget for adult social care to be established as a priority.**

Customer Services

- 1 That the Committee is broadly content with the proposals in the review of customer services; and**

- 2 That there is a need to integrate communication processes with partners and ensure that the processes operate with simplicity and work correctly and responsively.

Housing, Economy and Regulatory Services

- 1 That the Committee is broadly content with the proposals in the review of Housing, Economy and Regulatory Services;
- 2 That the HERS vision for the future should recognise the role that encouraging responsible behaviour can play in reducing both the need and demand for services.

Streetscene

- 1 That the Committee is broadly content with the proposals in the review of Streetscene; and
- 2 That with particular relevance to the Streetscene review the general principles set out at paragraph 17 of the report should be amended to incorporate a principle that as far as is practicable contracts should be let through the local supply chain; and
- 3 That the Council should redouble its efforts to ensure that work with Parish and Town Councils on their potential role in service delivery is taken forward swiftly to deliver an outcome that is to the benefit of the County as a whole and that appropriate support be provided to Town and Parish Councils to prepare them to take on the additional responsibilities.

General

That as a general principle, given the significance of the Root and Branch reviews and their proposals that the Council and partners do things differently, it is essential that the language used reflects this. It has to be clear to all Members, employees and partners exactly what is being proposed and how the changes are going to be implemented.

The meeting ended at 3.55 pm

CHAIRMAN