

Minutes of the meeting of General scrutiny committee held at Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Wednesday 6 March 2019 at 10.15 am

Present: Councillor WLS Bowen (chairperson)
Councillor BA Baker (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: SP Anderson, JM Bartlett, AW Johnson, A Warmington and SD Williams

In attendance: Councillors BA Durkin (Cabinet Member)

Officers: R Ball – Acting Director Economy and Place, B Evans – Engineering Manager, D Etherton – Assistant Director – People and Performance, A Lovegrove – Chief Finance Officer, A Neill – Chief Executive, S Vickers, Director for Adults and Communities and J Coleman – Statutory Scrutiny Officer/Democratic Services Manager. Mr P Shipton - Contract Operations Manager – Balfour Beatty Living Places was also present.

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

43. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

None.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2019 be approved as a correct record.

46. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

None.

47. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

None.

48. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered progress made against the recommendations following the Local Government Association corporate peer review held in February 2018.

The Chief Executive gave an introduction outlining the rationale for inviting the peer review and the proposed improvements in response to its recommendations.

The Assistant Director – People and Performance gave a presentation a copy of which had been published prior to the meeting.

The Director for Adults and Wellbeing commented on the “Talk Community” project.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- With reference to the Talk Community project and the establishment of community hubs it was suggested that consideration of their development should involve parish councils and ward members.

It was also suggested that a pilot should take place in a sparse rural parish in addition to the city and market towns.

There was a lack of public awareness of the Talk Community project and social care provision in general. It was important that the communication challenges in promoting the “Talk community” and other community support projects were recognised and an appropriate communication strategy put in place. It would be particularly important to reach those on the verge of engaging with social care.

The key performance indicators, knowledge and learning of how the current hubs are operating should be publicised and utilised to assist the development of the new hubs being proposed.

It was suggested that the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee be invited to consider reviewing the Talk Community project as part of its future work programme.

It was suggested that given that the directorates had different remits and cultures it would be a challenge to achieve the one council objective.

- Within the context of the One Council approach a member questioned whether the accommodation for members of the council could be reviewed. The Chief Executive commented that if members had concerns on this matter he would like these to be communicated to him for consideration.
- The Chief Finance Officer commented on the strategic review of finances that had been undertaken and the peer review team’s comments in response to which a review of reserves had been undertaken and a financial resilience reserve established.
- It was suggested with reference to recommendation 1 of the review that the outstanding natural environment of Herefordshire and a commitment to mitigating climate change should be incorporated into the economic vision and master plan.

The Chief Executive commented that the master plan was focused on economic development and growth. The council had separately made a number of commitments on environmental issues. It had been considered that it would be appropriate to connect the Community Plan to the economic master plan given the key role communities played in economic development.

A motion that when the long term vision was tested more widely that the outstanding natural environment be included in the unique selling point for Herefordshire was lost.

- Further information was also sought on the effectiveness of the new project management tool that had been acquired and how this was being measured. The Chief Executive outlined the history that had led to the adoption of the current system. He noted that while a system may be effective, unforeseen and

unforeseeable circumstances could affect the best planned projects. He confirmed that the Audit and Governance Committee was receiving reports on the matter.

The Cabinet member – finance and corporate services made the following principal comments:

- There was still a need to embed the communication of changes to responsibilities of staff when these occurred to all councillors and staff.
- A single workforce approach was difficult to achieve in a multi-departmental environment. Consideration was being given to holding some corporate days where people from different teams could work together to develop a common shared approach.
- He considered that there was work to do on the communication of the longer term vision for the council. However, it had to be recognised that there was considerable uncertainty on a range of issues at national level that meant there was a lack of clarity as to what funding would be available to the council in the future.
- He wanted to expand working with parish councils and had regrets about the demise of the market towns forum, that had been organised by the town councils not Herefordshire council, as the local economies of the market towns were vital to the county. He hoped that the parish summits would offer some compensation in this regard providing scope for discussion of issues that the forum might previously have considered

A member noted in response that a recent meeting of the mayors of the market towns it had been agreed to reconsider such a forum.

- The resilience reserve would be used to achieve changes in the way of working together with some spend to save proposals having been generated by staff for consideration by cabinet. He hoped this would encourage a cross-council approach.
- Use of electronic contact needed to be reviewed to establish level of uptake. He wanted to explore the possibility of the council making more apps available. A piece of student research into how the council appeared to a person with an enquiry would be beneficial.
- It was important to ensure that there was the ability within the workforce to use the performance management tool effectively to avoid delay to capital projects.
- Economic development was not one of the council's statutory responsibilities but it could make an important contribution to the revenue budget.
- He welcomed the publication of the council newsletter, Herefordshire Now.
- He expressed the hope that it would be possible to increase public interest and awareness of social care pressures that communities faced and the financial implications.

RESOLVED:

That (a) it be recommended that:

- (i) the development of the “Talk Community” approach involves parishes and ward members and that the hubs are piloted in sparse rural parishes in addition to the city and market towns;**
- (ii) the communication challenges in promoting the “Talk community” and other community support projects are**

recognised and an appropriate communication strategy is put in place; and

- (iii) the key performance indicators, knowledge and learning of how the current community hubs are operating are publicised and utilised to assist the development of the new hubs being proposed;**
- (b) a review of progress in response to the corporate peer review is included for consideration in work programming for the Committee in June; and**
- (c) it is suggested that the Adults and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee reviews the Talk Community project as part of its future work programme.**

(The meeting adjourned between 12:05 pm and 12:15 pm.)

49. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE - POTHOLE REPAIRS

The Committee was invited to consider the report of the task and finish group it had commissioned to examine highways maintenance – pothole repairs.

The Chairperson introduced the report and invited the committee to indicate if there were any other matters, having regard to the scope of the review, that members thought should be considered.

No additional matters were identified. Members of the task and finish group present thanked officers and Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) for their support to the review and complimented BBLP on their work.

The cabinet member – transport and regulatory services thanked the task and finish group and praised the work of highways officers and BBLP. He observed that some of the recommendations were already in train, some were soon to be delivered and others would receive consideration, confirming that the executive response would be made after the elections in May. He highlighted the recent publication of a leaflet on riparian responsibilities. This was to be communicated to all parish councils as they would have the closest links with landowners.

He supported the circulation of the report to all parish councils recognising the responses received from them and that the report answered several questions that were regularly asked of the service whilst also making clear the constraints under which the service operated.

The acting director – economy and place (AD) commented that the service was always keen to see how it could improve. It was to be hoped that the report would also help in explaining how services were delivered. The council worked with BBLP in a shared team effort to make the best use of the finite resources available to the benefit of the county.

The contracts operation manager BBLP was invited to comment on steps being taken to address poor driver behaviour involving motorists ignoring road closures and in doing so presenting a safety hazard. He stated that this was an issue that they were seeking to address through hard barriers where practicable and use of cameras to enable evidence to be supplied to the police.

It was suggested with regard to recommendation 11 proposing that parish councils should have a designated person to scrutinise highways works that there may be a number of issues including safety considerations of which account would need to be taken if that were to be pursued.

The question of a template for the locality steward reports to make them more consistent with one another was raised. The AD and cabinet member suggested in response that in some ways the individual character of the reports might be considered to have some merit.

In relation to funding for highway maintenance, reference was made to the recommendations for the provision of additional funding that the Committee had made in considering the public realm contract in January 2018. The AD commented that this was a matter for council in setting the budget and the outcome in relation to the resolution of outstanding issues with the previous contractor.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the findings of the task and finish group report at appendix 1 be agreed and submitted to the executive; and**
 - (b) it be recommended that the report be circulated to all parish councils and all members of the council.**

Chairperson's Closing Remarks

In closing the meeting the Chairperson thanked the members of the committee for their work and officers for their support to the Committee and wished everyone well for the future.

50. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed its work programme.

RESOLVED: That the draft work programme be approved for consideration as part of the future work programming process.

51. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 1 July 2019 at 10.15 am.

The meeting ended at 12.51 pm

Chairperson