

Minutes of the meeting of the Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Monday 29 January 2024 at 2.00 pm

Committee members present in person and voting: Councillors: Jenny Bartlett, Simeon Cole, Pauline Crockett (Chairperson), Dave Davies, Mark Dykes, Richard Thomas and Kevin Tillet (Vice-Chairperson)

Others in attendance: B Baugh (Democratic Services Officer), Carole Gandy (Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing), L Good (Service Director - Communities), H Hall (Corporate Director Community Wellbeing), J Lilley (Community Wellbeing Communications Lead), E Lowe (Talk Community Development Lead), A Rees-Glinos (Governance Support Assistant) and D Webb (Statutory Scrutiny Officer)

19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

All committee members were present.

20. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

23. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

25. COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORT SERVICES

The Chairperson made opening comments about the value of the activities supported by volunteers in the county, the need to use limited resources effectively, and the formation of Talk Community to promote and foster partnerships to reach out to individuals and

communities. The Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing invited the committee to input into the strategic review of Talk Community.

The committee received the presentation 'Strategic Review of Talk Community' ([link to the presentation](#)).

The Service Director Communities presented the slides:- *Strategic review of Talk Community; Aim and methodology; Strategic context; Need; Vision, aims and outcomes; and Delivery model.*

The Talk Community Development Lead presented the slides:- *We asked our community groups what Talk Community was to them; Talk Community hubs; Hub case study; Community debt centres; Debt centre case study; Community action network meetings; Funding delivery; Talk Community delivery; Additional projects; Talk Community brokers; Case study – youth; Case study – market town; Case study – funding; and Talk Community has supported.* The Service Director Communities presented the final slide, *Issues.*

The principal points of the discussion included:

1. The Chairperson suggested that the presentation should be shared with local partner organisations such as Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, and West Mercia Police.
2. A committee member noted that the scrutiny activity that could be undertaken was limited as the strategic review was at an early stage.
3. A committee member expressed concerns about the implications of changes to the national funding structure. The Service Director Communities said that this was being worked through currently. The Corporate Director Community Wellbeing noted the cessation of some one-off sources of funding but emphasised that there was core funding to support the consistency and continuity of the Talk Community service. The Chairperson noted some of the challenges associated with short-term funding streams.
4. In response to observations made by the Vice-Chairperson, the Talk Community Development Lead advised that: data obtained from Community Debt Centres was clear, as reporting mechanisms had been established from the outset; data from Talk Community Hubs was difficult to pin down, due to differences in scale and ways in which they operated; the identified '25,000 visits per annum to a Talk Community Hub and being connected to support' related only to those hubs that had responded; the lack of granularity was recognised; and a further breakdown of the figures received could be shared.
5. The Service Director Communities reported that all 75 hubs across Herefordshire would be audited to understand the offer being provided, the spaces being used, and the level of engagement with Talk Community. It was noted that there had been a seed funding grant scheme to support the establishment of each community group/hub (e.g. for computer equipment) but there was no contractual relationship with the council. The committee was advised that the potential for a more systematic approach would be explored through the review.
6. In response to an anecdote about equipment not being used at a hub, the Chairperson commented on the need for assurance around value for money.

7. In response to comments by a committee member, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing: explained that it had been envisaged that Talk Community would adapt to whatever structure worked for a particular community, resulting in varied approaches in different areas; and the risk of Talk Community becoming a 'jack of all trades', due to differing perceptions internally and externally, was acknowledged and this reinforced the need for the council to establish what it wanted from Talk Community, whilst continuing to work collaboratively with communities.
8. In response to a question, the Chairperson considered that a change of title or branding at this stage would result in additional confusion about the programme.
9. A committee member commented that: councillors could promote the Talk Community [newsletter](#) to parish councils and other local groups; the 'Talk Community Strategic Approach' report, considered by Cabinet on 24 September 2020 [[minute 179 of 2020/21 refers](#)], demonstrated that much had been achieved through Talk Community during the Covid-19 pandemic; there had perhaps been too much focus on the number of hubs subsequently; there was a need to develop a communications strategy; Talk Community should be aligned with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and should underpin and create value for other council strategies; and the evolving, long-term strategy for Talk Community should be included in the work programme for the committee.
10. A committee member suggested that an index of services for each hub, depending on the volunteer resources available, could help to raise public awareness. The Service Director Communities said that the audit would provide the opportunity to reconsider the number of hubs needed, and to size and shape them appropriately.
11. The Talk Community Development Lead responded to questions, the key points included: in addition to regular training on the Talk Community Directory, other training opportunities were offered to Talk Community volunteers whenever possible; an overview was provided of the work of the Healthy Lifestyle Team which sat within Talk Community but was funded by Public Health; and the development officers provided ongoing support for the hubs which could include working with partner agencies or other organisations to assist individuals with more complex needs.
12. Whilst it was noted that information about Talk Community was being circulated to clerks, it was suggested that the review could consider opportunities to work more closely with parish and town councils. The Service Director Communities reported on work that was underway to develop a new charter between Herefordshire Council and local councils.
13. Questions were asked about performance and the merits of concentrating efforts through the larger or more active hubs. The Talk Community Development Lead said that: apart from the initial seed funding, there was no ongoing funding or associated assessment of performance; and the smaller hubs were often in very rural areas and, even if infrequent, these could be critical to some people in those areas and may help to reduce isolation.
14. In response to questions about alignment to the County Plan given that there was no plan beyond 2023/24 currently, the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing advised that the slide on *Vision, aims and outcomes* [agenda page 26] reflected the original purpose of the programme which would be assessed during the review and it was not considered that this would be out of kilter with the ambitions likely to come through as part of the new County Plan which was in development.

15. The Vice-Chairperson noted that one size did not fit all but, given that the branding was the same, questioned whether there were reputational risks if some hubs were not meeting the needs of particular communities. It was suggested that it would be useful to engage with groups that had not chosen to be part of Talk Community.
16. In response to a question, the Talk Community Development Lead acknowledged that 'Cost of Living Roadshows' had not been well attended, although had resulted in positive outcomes for some individuals. It was reported that this had led to the development of the 'Winter of Wellbeing' (WoW) programme, including signposting to cost of living advice and support, and events had been well attended and good feedback had been received.

There was a short adjournment to enable the committee to consider potential recommendations to the executive.

The meeting recommenced, draft recommendations were displayed and read out by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer, and the following resolution was agreed by the committee.

At the conclusion of the agenda item, the Cabinet Member Adults, Health and Wellbeing thanked the committee for the debate and commented on: the challenges around data and how a robust evidence base could support applications for external funding; the need to assess both the gaps and possible overlaps in provision; and the need to consider outreach opportunities to engage with vulnerable people who were unable to access a hub or other community group.

Resolved: That it be recommended to the executive that:

1. **Herefordshire Council works with partners to identify funding for community-based services.**
2. **The service further develops its management information concerning the activity and outputs of Talk Community hubs.**
3. **Talk Community develops a communications strategy to provide a clear understanding of the service's purpose.**
4. **Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee reviews the forthcoming draft strategy.**
5. **The draft strategy explicitly takes into account the extent to which Talk Community underpins other strategies.**

26. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The committee noted the work programme for the remainder of the municipal year 2023/24. The Statutory Scrutiny Officer commented on arrangements being made to schedule meeting dates and to undertake work programming activity for 2024/25.

Resolved: That the work programme 2023/24 be noted.

27. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as Monday 25 March 2024, 2.00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.11 pm

Chairperson