

Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group

Meeting 1, Wednesday 27 January 2010, 1.30pm – Notes / Action sheet

Members

Worcestershire County Council

Bob Banks (lead)
Lucy Hodgson
Beverley Nielsen
Stephen Peters
David Thain

District Councils (co-optees)

Graham Ballinger (Wyre Forest District Council)
Laurie Evans (Wychavon District Council)
Roger Sutton (Malvern Hills District Council)
Kit Taylor (Bromsgrove District Council)
Geoff Williams (Worcester City Council)

Observing: Serena Croad and John Waring (Malvern Hills District Council)

Officers

Patrick Birch, Director of Corporate Services (DCS) – items 1-3

Rachel Hill, Head of Customer Service (HCS) – items 1-3

Scrutiny: Suzanne O'leary, Overview and Scrutiny Manager, Emma James and Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers (job-share), Annette Stock, Policy & Review Officer and Emma Breckin, Performance Improvement Officer (Scrutiny Liaison Officers)

Available papers

Agenda

Item 3 – presentation handouts and performance information

	Action
<p>1. Welcome/Apologies The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Nathan Desmond (Worcestershire County Council) and Robin King (Redditch Borough Council).</p> <p>The Malvern District Council representative had changed since circulation of the agenda, to Roger Sutton, in place of Serena Croad.</p> <p>Bob Banks declared a personal interest, as a member of the Worcestershire Hub Board. Lucy Hodgson declared a personal interest in relation to her district councillor role with Worcester City Council, as she was the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Customer Care and Citizens' Engagement, and also a member of the Hub Shared Service Management Board.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Manager had taken advice on these declarations of interest, and confirmed that they were not prejudicial interests as the terms of reference for the scrutiny did not involve scrutinising decisions already taken. Additionally, Bob Banks did not have voting rights on the Hub Board.</p>	<p><i>Circulate additional papers</i></p> <p>Include item on all future agendas</p>
<p>2. Background and Terms of Reference of the Scrutiny The Scrutiny Manager clarified that this was a county council informal task group, with co-opted district members and not a joint committee. The scrutiny proposal had been circulated to district councils before being endorsed by the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB).</p>	

The agreed terms of reference for the scrutiny exercise are to look at:

- **The development of the Worcestershire Hub, including the shared service**
- **How to make the Worcestershire Hub fit for purpose in the future**
- **Differences in provision across Worcestershire, what they are and why they exist?**
- **What are the gaps in provision and what are the opportunities?**

The chairman stressed the importance of looking towards the future development of the Hub.

Should, during the course of this meeting, the Task Group want to make changes to the terms, then this would need to be cleared by the OSPB. However, the detail set out in the proposal was not intended to be exhaustive and could be added to, such as the list of potential interviewees. It was planned to take evidence during February/March, and report findings in early Summer 2010.

3. Overview of the Worcestershire Hub – the Head of Customer Services gave a presentation overview which included the background, achievements, current position, performance, future direction, customer focus, challenges, opportunities and thoughts on areas for improvement. (Handouts were provided)

- At the time of its establishment, one sole contact centre was felt to be a step too far, and therefore a network of smaller teams and centres had been put in place, building on the existing one stop shops
- at a later stage, the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service was set up, incorporating Worcester City, Malvern, and Worcestershire County Councils. The new contact centre for the shared service was at Perry Wood (Worcester). Feedback from staff there, and from visitors to Perry Wood was very positive
- 70% of the range of Worcestershire County Council services were now channelled via the Hub
- the HCS and DCS hoped that one of the outcomes of the scrutiny would be to encourage members' understanding of the Hub and its aims, as it was felt that there were a number of misconceptions
- one misconception was that the contact centres used 'a plethora' of automated options (e.g. press 1, press 2) – to date this had not been true, although more use could be made of it, as the pattern of customer demands changed
- it was not the intention of the Hub to remove choices for customers and it was recognised that some customers would always prefer face to face service. However, the way in which people accessed information and services continued to change, especially towards self-service electronic use, and it was important to maximise on this demand. There were areas such as pupil admissions where it would not be hard to increase self service from 20% to 50%. Many parents already accessed services online, which gave them greater flexibility around their other commitments
- payments made in person was also an area to work on
- the Hub lay at the heart of service transformation, the BOLD programme (better outcomes leaner delivery) and WETT (Worcestershire enhanced two-tier working)
- investment in IT was important for the WETT programme, and this had

been carefully programmed, for example with plans for the shared regulatory service

- the Hub contact centres used Sisco call centre software (via Hewlett-Packard). Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software was also used, although it was not fully integrated across all services across the county. Many authorities used the Sisco system and a number use CRM. The contract with Hewlett-Packard was due for renewal in 2013.

Question and answer session with the Head of Customer Services and Director of Corporate Services

Main points from discussion

- it was confirmed that most local authorities had corporate contact centres, though not all had one stop shops. There was huge variation in the range and depth of services which were incorporated. The Worcestershire Hub participated in benchmarking, but it was extremely difficult to make comparisons because of the differences in provision
- the HCS visited other local authorities, especially when introducing a new service
- several members felt that although many people had complained about getting through to the Hub by phone, once they had made contact they had found the staff very helpful
- some north Worcestershire representatives felt that the Hub contact centres served their areas well, and that the recent problems related to the shared service . They did not feel the performance information table reflected this
- each local authority had its own complaints procedure
- the centres making up the Worcestershire Hub monitored satisfaction by various means, such as requesting customers to complete feedback cards, or by calling them back. The HCS said that more monitoring would be desirable
- the main factor for the recent problems had been the economic downturn, and the vastly increased demand for revenues and benefits' services in the south of the county, via the shared service. Many of these enquiries were complex, and from people who had not previously claimed benefits
- it was clarified that although this may have been the trigger for the scrutiny, the resulting terms of reference were much broader than just the shared service, and were very much focused on the way forward for the Hub. The scrutiny had not started earlier because the county scrutiny programme had not been agreed until September, following the county council elections in June 2009. The OSPB agreed the proposal on 10 December 2009
- some members had previously been involved in an earlier district council scrutiny of South Worcestershire Revenues & Benefits Shared Services
- it was clarified that national performance indicator NI14 (Avoidable contact) was misleading, and actually referred to reducing the amount of contact a customer had to make to resolve their enquiry. It was not a target aimed at reducing overall contact with the customer
- members had mixed views on whether there was growing demand for online services and self-service. Some argued that a high proportion of people, especially older people, continued to want a face to face, walk-in service. Others felt that increasingly, people preferred to access services and information electronically, and that this gave greater flexibility around their other commitments

- everyone agreed that the website needed improvement, especially to make information easier to find
- during the recent snow, the shared service contact centre had been open at the earlier time of 6.30am everyday (usually 8am) and on peak days had experienced an additional 500 calls. The HCS felt the shared service had been very responsive to the weather situation, which impacted greatly on services such as highways and refuse collection
- by the end of 2008, it had become evident that the vast majority of contacts made in person were related to district council services (and not county). This prompted a realignment of county council funding from April 2009 to better reflect this balance, though the re-aligned funds remained within the overall Hub. The districts were given quite a lot of notice of these plans and discussions were held with them. Members asked whether the funding arrangement could be reviewed annually, and the HCS advised that she was unsure what the current arrangements were, but that theoretically this would be possible
- the HCS advised that in comparison with other local authorities, the Worcestershire Hub had progressed much further in winning over services to the Hub. Social care was an example where the initial perception had been that very few calls could be routed via the Hub, but in practice many instances had been revealed
- the transfer of the blue badge scheme to the Hub was an example where the process had been dramatically improved, cutting average waiting times from 8 weeks to 30 minutes. The former process had been vastly speeded up by making clear what information was required for the application beforehand
- the HCS confirmed that in respect of the Hub management structure and board, she felt enabled to make decisions quickly
- there was very little information on financial savings brought about by the Hub, mainly because its original development was based on joined-up services, rather than on substantial savings, and had been developed in conjunction with other directorates and local authorities – members found this incredulous and it was agreed that in hindsight this was regrettable
- when asked about the impact of incompatibility of IT systems (between the Hub and the service) in hindering the flow of information relating to an enquiry, members were advised that full integration had not yet been agreed. The HCS was very keen to speed this process up, and considerable improvement had been made in some areas. E.g. for highways related enquiries, the flow of information from the Hub to Highways had progressed very well. The flow of information back was not so good, but it was hoped to improve this by the Summer. Other improvements had been made further down the line in the process, for example with the contractor.
- for contact centres using the customer relationship management service, it was much easier to monitor satisfaction
- members felt that a single software provider would be beneficial and that the Hub needed to start preparing for the approach of 2013, when current contracts were up for renewal

4. Planning the scrutiny

Agreed points:

- All task group members who had not already done so, should visit the Perry Wood contact centre (shared service)
- members should also visit other Hub centres (initially those who had

EJ/JW to
liaise with
RH

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> already been to Perry Wood) 	Task Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it was important that task group members actually used the Hub, especially in view of recent improvement 	Task Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the district council co-opted members should act as liaison points for the scrutiny and provide feedback from their district 	EJ/JW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> there was very little information which had been captured for savings made as a result of services being channelled via the Hub. However, the Group was keen to look at anticipated future savings, and discuss this with appropriate representatives from the district councils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ask about measures taken to assess costs and savings? What was the potential slippage, especially when factoring in potential increased IT costs? ➤ include arrangements for task group to prepare for this discussion 	EJ/JW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> verify the importance of compatibility between IT systems in speeding up the flow of information relating to an enquiry, from start to completion 	?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> was there another local authority provision which we could learn from and perhaps visit? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Request comparative information, accompanied by commentary to explain the differences in provision (Gloucestershire was a possibility) 	RH to suggest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consideration was given to how to incorporate the views of the public. Key areas included the quality of response to an enquiry, from start to finish. Where possible, this should make use of existing communication channels / consultations e.g. citizens panel, parish bulletins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ it may be possible to survey users at random points during the process? 	Check citizen panel dates/ CALC bulletins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consideration was given to a councillor questionnaire, similar to that used during a previous Highway Maintenance scrutiny (2007) 	EJ/JW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lucy Hodgson was participating in a pilot for a small group of county councillors to log enquiries via the Hub – the results from this could be a further source of information 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> look at example(s) of services already routed through the shared service 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it would be important to inform the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier programme (WETT) of the findings from this scrutiny 	EJ/JW
<p><u>Information requested:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organisational chart (units, location, how they link, what services, who accountable to, also governance arrangements) 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performance information broken down for separate area contact centres e.g. Bromsgrove / Redditch, and for problem hot spots 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any financial information relating to savings made so far (the Scrutiny Liaison Officer reiterated the advice that unfortunately very little had been captured, although some information was available, for example savings made through closure of buildings) 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> statistics to compare performance info with other area Hubs (acknowledged that v difficult to compare like for like as the types of services routed via the Hub varies considerably). Gloucestershire has some similarity, would need commentary to define differences 	RH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> statistics for customer feedback 	RH

- results from pilot for a small group of county councillors to log enquiries via the Hub
- Hub shared services newsletter

RH

RH

Next steps

Arrange dates for future meetings

Set up full task group meeting talk about future savings with appropriate members and officers from the districts.

Emma
James / Jo
Weston
would be
in contact
with Task
Group

In the meantime visits to Perry Wood / other Hub centres could be arranged.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm