

Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group Meeting

Wednesday 14 April 2010, 10.30am – Notes / Action

Members

Worcestershire County Council

Bob Banks (Lead Member)
Nathan Desmond
Lucy Hodgson
Stephen Peters
David Thain
Liz Tucker

District Councils (co-optees)

Laurie Evans (Wychavon District Council)
Jinny Pearce (Redditch Borough Council)
Roger Sutton (Malvern Hills District Council)
Kit Taylor (Bromsgrove District Council)
Geoff Williams (Worcester City Council)

Officers

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

Item 2 – Kathy Kirk, Interim Head of Culture and Community Service/Strategic Libraries and Learning Manager and Steve Mobley, Quality and Standards Manager

Available papers

Agenda

Item 2 – short report from discussion

Paper copy of Agenda report to SW SS JC 19 April 2010 (update on progress with WHSS and operational performance in particular)

	Action
<p>1. Welcome/Apologies The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Graham Ballinger.</p> <p>It was noted that the membership of the group had changed. Liz Tucker had replaced Beverley Nielsen as a County representative and Graham Ballinger had replaced Jenny Greener as the Wyre Forest District Council representative.</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>	Include item on all future agendas
<p>2. Library Service Kathy Kirk, Interim Head of Culture and Community Service/Strategic Libraries and Learning Manager Steve Mobley, Quality and Standards Manager</p> <p>The officers gave an overview of the library service and the changes that were being implemented as part of the wider library review.</p> <p>The review report found that the service needed to be modernised and there</p>	

was a general desire to remove some of the work undertaken by the back office staff, mainly the more routine and manual tasks. Equally, it was noted that a lot of time was being taken up by library staff by answering routine calls from the public. One of the problems that arose was when staff were dealing with customers face to face and the telephone was ringing, it was difficult to please everyone.

At the same time as this review, the Worcestershire Hub was talking to other services of the Council about transferring services across.

After a full evaluation and a thorough business case, it was agreed that the Hub should be used as the initial point of contact for library queries and a single telephone number be publicised for library enquiries and for renewals. A phased approach has been adopted and all calls will be dealt with by the Hub shortly.

Using the Hub meant there were extended hours for customer queries and had led to increased customer satisfaction. Equally, the use of the website to renew and search for books has been promoted further and the uptake of this service is seeing a gradual increase. Using the Hub was allowing the Library Service to improve its service.

Although the library service is now enjoying new ways of working, these efficiencies have been achieved without having to make any redundancies.

Members asked whether the Hub's increased call demand during the Summer of 2009 (when it was dealing with increased calls for revenues and benefits) had impacted on the library service. It was acknowledged that there had been a significant drop in performance and there were many complaints. However, the Head of Culture and Community felt very well informed by the Hub, was provided with an action plan and had confidence that the service was doing what they could to improve its performance. The Library Services was mindful of its reputation and continually reviewed whether using the Hub is the best thing for the service.

Steve Mobley explained that by using the Hub to handle calls, it allows data to be collected on a live basis and therefore allows the Hub to plan for busy times etc.

Asked whether the relationship with residents was being compromised due to calls being taken centrally, it was indicated that customers actually have a better experience. By having routine calls taken away, staff have improved the quality and amount of time given to face to face contact, therefore making library visits more meaningful.

It was noted that the Hub contact centres in both Malvern and Upton are co-located with the Library, but with different opening hours there has been much more integration.

Members were interested to learn that the Management Team are supportive of the changes made, with a uniform approach across the County. Library Managers have held meetings at branches to discuss ways forward and Customer Service Advisors have integrated with library staff to learn key skills. It is worth mentioning that one key message throughout the process has been to build up relationships with all staff and emphasise the importance of an extended team.

The majority of telephone calls are dealt with at first point of contact, however, there is still the need to transfer specialised enquiries. Approximately 14% of calls are transferred through to branch, some of which are from the likes of mobile or home library service users. 40% of calls were book renewals, 18% were queries about opening hours and 8% were requests to reserve a book.

As these changes precede BOLD, it is unknown where the future lies and whether further efficiencies will need to be found. The headcount has been reduced, although there have been no redundancies, more that vacancies have not been filled and temporary contracts not renewed.

The Library Service was recharged £750,000 for the Hub. This had been calculated using 2007 data and in the last five months the Hub had only been receiving about 70% of the calls that had been estimated in 2007. This meant that on a basic calculation, the cost of the Hub dealing with a library call was £14 per call, which did not appear to be good value for money. It was noted that previously it was an inefficient use of library staff time to answer calls and that staff now had extra capacity, although there was no data about how much dealing with a call had cost. Members asked for further briefing about how the Hub's recharges were calculated.

When asked what lessons could be learned when transferring a service area to the Hub, Members were told that communication with staff was vital, to ensure that threats of redundancies could go. Staff then know and try to understand the reasons why the process is happening and could input as well.

The officers were thanked for their presentation and thoughts.

3. **Planning the Scrutiny**

Following on from the mind mapping exercise with Tony Dipple, Suzanne O'Leary distributed a plan for future consideration and asked Members to feed back any comments to the scrutiny team directly.

4. **Performance Information**

Apologies had been received from Rachel Hill due to illness and this item would be included on the next agenda.

5. **Next steps**

Members discussed the issues raised and concluded that the next meeting should focus on financial and performance information as a matter of urgency.

EJ/JW to
progress