

COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1ST DECEMBER 2015

Present:

Councillor Jim Parsons - Chairman

Councillors -

SI Andrews
JA Harris
RG Keeling

SDE Parsons
NP Robbins

Substitutes:

SG Hirst

Observers:

Juliet Layton

Apologies:

Julian Beale

OS.32 SUBSTITUTION ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor SG Hirst substituted for Councillor Julian Beale.

OS.33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(1) Member Declarations

Councillor JA Harris declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item (13) - County Matters - because he was also a Member of Gloucestershire County Council.

Councillor SDE Parsons declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item (9) - Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19 - because he was a Trustee of the Gloucestershire Pension Fund.

Councillor SDE Parsons declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item (13) - County Matters - because he was also a Member of Gloucestershire County Council.

Councillor NP Robbins declared an interest in respect of Agenda Item (13) - County Matters - because he was also a Member of Gloucestershire County Council.

(2) Officer Declarations

There were no Declarations of Interest from Officers.

OS.34 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 1st September 2015 be approved as a correct record.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstentions 1, absent 0.

Arising thereon:-

Work Plan 2015/16 (OS.30)

Some Members expressed their grave concern that the review of the contract with Eunomia, the consultants who had advised the Council on its acquisition of the SITA depot/waste transfer site in South Cerney, had not been the subject of a formal, specific report to this Meeting, as requested.

In response, the Chairman explained that information relating to the contract would be circulated later in the Meeting. The Head of Democratic Services explained that the document he was preparing for the Committee would contain information which was already in the public domain. Such information should enable the Committee to determine how it wished to proceed, and the Head of Democratic Services outlined the options available to the Committee in that respect. He stated that his understanding was that a formal review of the contract had been requested by the Member and reiterated that its inclusion of the item in the Committee's Work Programme provided an opportunity for the Committee to consider the options for taking this item forward.

OS.35 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had recently attend a Health Performance Workshop.

OS.36 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

OS.37 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been received from Members.

OS.38 CALLED-IN DECISIONS

No executive decisions had been the subject of Call-In since the Committee's previous Meeting.

OS.39 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016/17 TO 2018/19

The Committee was requested to consider an update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 and to provide feedback to the Cabinet and Council as part of the Budget consultation process.

The Chief Finance Officer amplified aspects of the circulated report, which had been considered by the Cabinet at its Meeting on 19th November 2015. It had also been discussed at the recent Town/Parish Council Liaison Meetings, and would be subject to public consultation before being considered further by the Cabinet and the Council in February 2016. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the implications of the Chancellor's recent Autumn Statement, and the forthcoming local government settlement, would be fully assessed and included in the subsequent reports to the Cabinet and the Council. It was considered that a Special Meeting of this Committee should be convened prior to the Cabinet Meeting on 18th February 2016 so that the Committee could also consider the report and forward its comments thereon to the Cabinet and the Council.

In response to various questions from Members, it was reported that the Valuation Office would continue to deal with appeals in relation to business rates; an estimate of the impact of outstanding business rates appeals would be included in the updated report which would be considered by this Committee, the Cabinet and the Council in February 2016; the Chief Finance Officer would draft a rationale for the long-term financial stability of the Council following her consideration of the impact of the Autumn Statement and the forthcoming local government settlement, and would meet the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to discuss the proposed MTFS, in advance of its formal consideration; and the current assumption was that Council Tax could be increased by up to 2% across the life of the MTFS.

The Committee thanked the Chief Finance Officer for her report. It was suggested that future such reports should include a spreadsheet detailing the risks faced by the Council. It was noted that work was progressing in relation to the proposal for devolution across Gloucestershire, which could have financial implications for the Council, and that a Business Case in relation to the Counter Fraud proposals would be submitted to a future Meeting of the Committee. The Chief Finance Officer also undertook to update the Committee on the content of the consultation document, following its approval by the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19 be noted;**
- (b) a Special Meeting of the Committee be convened to consider the final budget proposals in advance of their consideration by the Cabinet and the Council.**

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

Note:

It was subsequently agreed that the Special Meeting referred to in Resolution (b) above would take place on Tuesday 9th February 2016 at 10.00 a.m.

OS.40 DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY 2016-2019

The Committee was requested to consider, and comment on, the draft Corporate Strategy 2016-2019,

It was reported that the draft Strategy had been approved by the Cabinet at its Meeting on 15th October 2015, and would be submitted for public consultation alongside the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2018/19 (see Minute OS.39 above).

The Strategic Director amplified various aspects of the circulated report, drawing attention to the suggested Council priorities, objectives and associated key tasks. The Strategic Director reported that Performance Indicators would be included in the final version of the draft Strategy, which would be submitted to the Cabinet and the Council in February 2016. In response to various questions from Members, it was reported that the draft affordable housing objective accorded with the current Government strategy of providing housing within a range of affordabilities; the issue of affordable housing, including for elderly people, would be addressed through the Local Plan process at the appropriate time; a report on the Community Infrastructure Levy would be submitted to a future Meeting of the Cabinet; and monitoring was carried out through the Service/Finance Performance reports, which were submitted to both the Cabinet and this Committee on a quarterly basis, and at regular meetings with Strategic Directors and Heads of Service.

It was considered that the issue of 'C2' and 'C3' housing should be addressed. It was noted that the wording of some of the objectives and key tasks would be revised to reflect the latest position in the finalised version presented to the Cabinet at its Meeting on 18th February 2016.

RESOLVED that the draft Corporate Strategy 2016-2019 be agreed, subject to the above-mentioned comments being forwarded to the Cabinet.

Record of Voting - for 6, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 1.

OS.41 SUMMARY FINANCE/SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2015/16 QUARTER 2

The Committee received a report which summarised the overall performance of the Council during Quarter 2 of the financial year 2015/16, with particular focus on progress towards achieving the Council's top tasks, and efficiency measures; and which also provided information on the Council's capital expenditure, capital receipts and use of reserves.

Concern was expressed over performance in some areas, particularly in relation to Building Control, the processing of Council Tax and Housing Benefit claims, and the number of long-term empty domestic properties.

In response to a question from a Member, the Chief Finance Officer undertook to forward details of the original budget for the acquisition of the SITA depot/waste transfer site to the Committee and to reconsider the wording of the second

sentence under 'Comments' in relation to 'Flood Recovery Capital Grant' on page 66 of the circulated report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

OS.42 COUNTY MATTERS

The Committee received updates in respect of Gloucestershire County Council's Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel.

It was suggested that it might be useful for representatives of the Local Enterprise Partnership to be invited to give a presentation on the work of that Partnership to a future Meeting of the Council.

A Member expressed the view that the review of services at Cirencester Hospital had not been handled well in the local Press, where the implication was that service levels had been reduced. The Member reminded the Committee that there was twenty-four hour cover at the Hospital, but that overnight cover was provided by on-call Doctors, rather than by on-site Doctors.

The Chairman amplified aspects of the recent Health Performance Workshop he had attended and reported that, in January 2016, an additional ten trained paramedics would enter the Gloucestershire Ambulance Service. A Member urged colleague Members to visit the ambulance control centre in Bradley Stoke, Bristol to see how it operated. Another Member referred to the need for volunteer first responders in the north of the District and reported that discussions were on-going with the Fire Service over its potential for acting as 'co-responders'.

OS.43 QUARTERLY DIGEST

The Committee was requested to identify any issues arising out of the Quarterly Digest for future debate and/or action.

No specific issues were highlighted.

OS.44 WORK PLAN 2015/16

A suggested Work Plan for the remainder of the Council Year was circulated for consideration.

Arising thereon:-

1. Cotswold Water Park Trust

RESOLVED that representatives of the Cotswold Water Park Trust be invited to make a presentation to the Committee at its Meeting scheduled to be held on Tuesday 1st March 2016 in respect of the review of the Cotswold Water Park Master Plan.

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

2. Elections Review

RESOLVED that Councillors SI Andrews and JA Harris be appointed to support the final phase of the Elections Review, as an approved duty.

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

3. Eunomia Contract

RESOLVED that a report on the contract with Eunomia, the consultants who had advised the Council on its acquisition of the SITA depot/waste transfer site in South Cerney, be submitted to the Special Meeting of the Committee to be scheduled to deal with the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Record of Voting - for 7, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 0.

OS.45 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business that was urgent.

The Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 12.10 p.m.

Chairman

(END)