

COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6TH DECEMBER 2016

Present:

Councillor Jenny Forde - Chairman

Councillors -

SI Andrews
Julian Beale
RG Keeling

Jim Parsons
SDE Parsons
NP Robbins

Observers:

Lynden Stowe (until 10.50 a.m.;
invited to speak on Minute OS.43)

OS.36 SUBSTITUTION ARRANGEMENTS

No substitutions had been put in place for this Meeting.

OS.37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(1) Member Declarations

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members under the Code of Conduct.

(2) Officer Declarations

There were no Declarations of Interest from Officers.

OS.38 MINUTES

RESOLVED that, subject to the following three amendments, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th September 2016 be approved as a correct record:-

(i) deletion of Councillor Julian Beale from the list of Members present and inclusion of his name in the list of apologies;

(ii) amendment of the subsequent Records of Voting to reflect Councillor Beale's absence;

(iii) addition of the words 'it was suggested that performance should be measured against population and not solely by increases in membership' in the seventh paragraph of the preamble to Minute OS.27.

Record of Voting - for 4, against 0, abstentions 3, absent 0.

OS.39 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had attended the recent South-West Overview and Scrutiny Network Meeting, and she amplified aspects of her experience. The Chairman and the Head of Democratic Services took the opportunity to apprise the Committee of the background to South-West Overview and Scrutiny Network.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that it would be useful for notice of questions to be submitted in advance of Meetings so that responses could be prepared.

OS.40 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

OS.41 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been received from Members.

OS.42 CALLED-IN DECISIONS

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

OS.43 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017/18 TO 2020/21

The Committee was invited to consider and to comment on the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2017/18 to 2020/21, and to provide feedback to the Cabinet and the Council as part of the formal Budget consultation process.

The circulated report had been considered by the Cabinet at its Meeting on 17th November 2016. The Leader amplified various aspects of the report, including in relation to budgetary pressures faced by the Council. The Leader drew attention to the proposed 1.99% rise in Council Tax, and explained that such proposal would depend on the Government's financial settlement for the Council, and the final budget outturn. The Leader stated that the draft MTFS would be subject to public consultation, and he expressed the hope that the response rate would be higher than it had been in previous years.

In response to various questions from Members, it was reported that the Secretary of State had consulted on the future of New Homes Bonus (NHB); as a rural District, the Council would wish to see NHB protected as it constituted a significant income stream; a reduction in NHB from six to four years would have an adverse financial impact for the Council; the Council received significantly less financial support from the Government than it had received five years ago as NHB had not replaced other funding streams which had been lost; the capital sum which had originated from the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of the Council's housing stock in 1997 had diminished, and could become exhausted in

the near future due to permanent demands, such as mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants; in the opinion of the Leader, it was unlikely that the Council would hold significant capital reserves in the future as its asset base was finite; there was no ratio between capital and revenue reserves; the Council was able to borrow to fund capital projects if it could afford to finance such borrowing, but would consider using its own funds before going out to the market; it was unlikely that any forthcoming expenditure would be met by the Local Enterprise Partnership, which tended to lead on highway infrastructure projects; only short-term unavoidable budget pressures had been detailed at Appendix A2 to the circulated report as the Government made annual financial settlements for local government; if public sector wages increased by more than 1%, the Council would have to consider alternative methods for the control of salary budgets; and business rate relief for small businesses would be continued in the financial year 2017/18.

In respect of that specific point in respect of business rate relief, the Leader urged Members to encourage small businesses within their Wards to apply for the maximum rate relief available. In response to a further question from a Member, the Leader reminded the Committee that this Council had no remit in relation to funding for public transport services, which was a function of the County Council. Notwithstanding that, the Leader hoped that Gloucestershire County Council would continue to support community transport initiatives, and he stated that he would be willing to support a campaign to increase the use of public transport, but not to commit the Council to funding such services. In response to questions from another Member, it was reported that, while the outcomes of the recent re-valuation of the Pension Scheme were not in the public domain, the Leader was 'comfortable' with the sums detailed at Appendix A2 to the circulated report in that respect; and that the figures detailed in the circulated report related specifically to this Council.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Leader expressed the view that the Cirencester Car Parking Project constituted an opportunity for the Council, rather than a risk. It was further reported that the procurement of any additional car parking would be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Rules.

RESOLVED that the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 to 2020/21 be noted.

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

Note:

The Chief Finance Officer undertook to circulate details of the budget-setting process to all Members of this Committee.

OS.44 SUMMARY FINANCE/SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2016/17 QUARTER 2

The Committee received a report summarising overall performance by the Council during Quarter 2 of the 2016/17 financial year, 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 the use of reserves.

In response to concerns over performance in relation to the Building Control service, it was reported that the recently-appointed Joint Service Manager was in the process of drawing up a plan to address the issues. A Member suggested that the increase in the number of planning applications received by the Council should translate into more income for the service. The Member commented that it was not possible to contact Officers in Environmental and Regulatory Services directly by telephone or e-mail. It was noted that the circulated report detailed the Council's position up to 30th September 2016, and that the report for Quarter 3 would detail the position up to 31st December 2016.

The Strategic Director undertook to provide further information to the Committee in respect of occupation of the new waste depot at South Cerney; discussions with the Parish Council and landowner over control of the main watercourse through Poulton; orders for new and replacement vehicles for the Ubico fleet; and progress on the Local Plan.

A Member reminded the Committee that this Council was responsible for the collection and removal of dry leaves whilst Gloucestershire County Council was responsible for the collection and removal of wet leaves. The Member contended that there would be fewer instances of leaves blocking gullies and drains if this Council was to acquire an additional leaf-clearing vehicle.

In response to comments relating to performance, it was reported that Officers were addressing customer satisfaction issues, and that staff were only recruited on short-term contracts when there was a justification for doing so. In response to a question from a Member in relation to budget monitoring, it was reported that, at this stage, no significant underspend or overspend had been identified in respect of the 2016/17 budget. Officers also apprised the Committee of various aspects relating to abandoned vehicles and statutory burials.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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

OS.45 QUARTERLY DIGEST (INCLUDING COUNTY MATTERS)

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

A Member amplified aspects of the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings, drawing attention to the Ambulance Response Programme; the review of Minor Injuries and Illness Units in Gloucestershire; the Sustainability and Transformation Plan; and the Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group Performance Report. Another Member amplified aspects of the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel Meetings, commenting that there would be no reduction in the commitment to neighbourhood policing.

No other specific issues were highlighted.

OS.46 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business that was urgent.

The Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 11.35 a.m.

Chairman

(END)