

COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018

Present:

Councillor RG Keeling - Chairman  
Councillors -  
SI Andrews RA Morgan (from 10.03 a.m.)  
Andrew Doherty SDE Parsons  
Jenny Forde (until 11.50 a.m.) NP Robbins (until 11.30 a.m.)

Observers:

JA Harris (from 10.35 a.m. to 11.30 a.m.) SG Hirst (from 12.50 p.m.)

OS.4 SUBSTITUTION ARRANGEMENTS

No substitution arrangements had been put in place.

OS.5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(1) Member Declarations

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

(2) Officer Declarations

There were no declarations of interest from Officers.

OS.6 MINUTES

**RESOLVED that:**

**(a) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2018 be approved as a correct record;**

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

**(b) the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018 be approved as a correct record.**

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

Arising on the Minutes of 13<sup>th</sup> March 2018:

A Member expressed his concern that Minute OS.46, Service Delivery Planning, did not give a clear indication to non-Committee Members and members of the public as to the Committee's deliberations and subsequent actions following the discussion of the item. In response, the Head of Democratic Services explained that, in this instance, the Minute needed to be read in conjunction with the related report that supported the item; but confirmed that attempts would be made to ensure that Minutes were of sufficient detail to be able to stand alone, with less reliance on cross-reference with reports.

OS.7 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman wished to extend his thanks to Councillor Forde for her service as previous Chairman of the Committee until May 2018. He explained that Councillor Forde had 'raised the bar' with regard to the Committee's work and actions and reminded Members of the principle that she had promoted that the Committee did not exist solely to 'tick boxes'. The Chairman added that he hoped to continue this approach; and seek to make a positive contribution and recommendations, via the Committee, to help improve the efficiency of the Council.

OS.8 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

OS.9 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been received from Members.

OS.10 CALLED-IN DECISIONS

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

OS.11 PUBLICA UPDATE

The Committee received an update on issues relating to Publica, including service transformation.

The Executive Director (Commissioning) and Group Finance Director of Publica were both in attendance to present the item to the Committee, and to respond to questions.

The Executive Director (Commissioning) amplified various aspects of the Council's Quarter 1 Performance Report for 2018/19, which had been circulated at the Meeting. In addition, she drew attention to various staff engagement sessions and activities that had recently been undertaken; and explained that a new Head of Communications had been appointed and would be starting in mid-September 2018. The Executive Director also confirmed that the Publica Board was reasonably happy with the health of the organisation indicators but that further work would be undertaken to investigate long-term sickness absence figures, although she stressed that the figure was still less than the local government average. It was believed that long-term absence equated to a

period of absence of more than 25 days. The number of staff leaving was reported as being 3.7% for Quarter 1, compared to an acceptable/realistic threshold figure of 10%.

In response to Member questions, Officers confirmed that a breakdown of the £155,000 figure relating to savings and unfilled positions could be supplied, as well as expenditure on overtime and agency staff, as these figures had been provided within a Publica Board report; the FTE staff figure was reported as being 570; and the Key Tasks and Key Performance Indicators listed were as set out in the Council's Corporate Strategy and those listed under the Business Plan Task Tracker reflected those contained within the Publica Business Plan; the Summary of Complaints comprised those made to the Council via a formal procedure, and generally related to issues of service delivery; a breakdown of complaint categories could be provided in future; and the Performance Report was also presented to the Member Liaison Group at its quarterly meetings.

Members thanked Officers for a clear and straightforward presentation, but felt that, in many areas, the very simplistic reporting did not provide sufficient information to enable councillors to get a true feel of how things were going, and what was on track or not, especially as this could be different for different actions. In general, it was felt that some more detail/explanation would be beneficial, perhaps with comparison data for common indicators across the partner councils, information as to how things were measured, and milestones.

The Group Finance Director then presented a Transformation Update. The Director explained that a list of measures was currently being worked through and that the target was to ensure a system of self-service which enabled a customer response at the first point of contact. In addition to highlighting various aspects of the presentation report, the Director explained that the desire was for staff to deliver transformation in their own areas.

In summarising other key points of the update, the Director explained that Publica had been shortlisted for an award following the introduction of the flexible benefits scheme; there was no evidence to date that recruitment had been affected by no longer offering the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS); and that the investment in Salesforce scheduled from October 2018 onwards could not have taken place without the sharing of services and funding between the partner Councils.

In response to various questions from Members, the Director explained that the improvements were to be seen as Council improvements; the definition of customer could vary, dependent upon the service being delivered; and, whilst services had previously been designed around how the Council considered the services should have been designed, user research had been, and would continue to be, undertaken with a view to future services being more customer-led/designed. However, he stressed that there was not currently a capability to gather large volumes of data and data could therefore only be collected in isolated pockets.

A Member supported the approach whereby customer research and need should guide service design, but also highlighted the fact that many customers might not want a solely digital experience. Officers acknowledged the need to provide for a choice of access/delivery methods.

Some Members commented that whilst a number of staff had the experience and knowledge to deal with technical tasks, they were currently being 'bogged down' with more every-day tasks and that attempts to address this aspect were welcome. Whilst acknowledging that an organisation's most experienced staff were likely to be its most expensive, some Members felt that the use of the term expensive on its own was misleading. A Member suggested that an overall 'SWOT' analysis could highlight staffing issues to help address any on-going issues. Another Member added that he considered the update report to have been very technically written and not customer-friendly.

In concluding the item, the Chairman sought to summarise the points raised by the Committee. Whilst generally pleased with the progress, the Committee required more detailed information in future updates, including a strategic overview with timeline.

**RESOLVED that the report, and comments made, be noted.**

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

OS.12 SERVICE UPDATES

(i) Development Management and Planning Enforcement

The Committee received an update in respect of staffing and operational issues, and the Head of Paid Service amplified various aspects of the circulated report.

The Executive Director (Commissioning) drew attention to the broad range of recruitment initiatives now being pursued, including actively seeking newly-trained planning staff by attending university and job fairs, in addition to the more traditional route of recruiting experienced staff. It was also confirmed that, if s recruitment proved unsuccessful, the position would continue to be advertised until an appointment had been secured.

In response to various questions from Members, Officers confirmed that follow-up interviews were undertaken in the event of an unsuccessful appointment; details of FTEs and full and part time positions would be included in future update reports; and that, following the adoption of the Local Plan by the Council, it was expected that there would now be less speculative applications, which would hopefully ease pressures on Officers.

**RESOLVED that the update report be noted.**

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

(ii) Strategic Review of Leisure and Museum Service

The Committee received an update in respect of progress and timescales relating to the formal contract review.

**RESOLVED that the report be noted.**

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

OS.13 SUMMARY FINANCE/SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2017/18 YEAR END

The Committee received a report summarising overall performance by the Council as at 2017/18 Year End, with particular focus on progress towards achieving the Council's top tasks, and efficiency measures. The report also provided information on the Council's financial position, including revenue outturn and budget variances; and capital expenditure, capital receipts and use of reserves.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the item and highlighted various aspects of the circulated report. She explained that, by 2020, there would be a number of changes to local government financing; cost pressures from Ubico related to the age of vehicles, but the Council was working with Ubico to address the issue and some replacement vehicles were being introduced; £750,000 from the under-spend in 2017/18 would be made available to support one-off projects such as the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan and improved parking facilities; and the total Publica underspend for 2017/18 was £256,000.

**RESOLVED that the report be noted.**

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

OS.14 SUMMARY FINANCE/SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2018/19 QUARTER 1

The Committee received a report summarising overall performance by the Council during Quarter 1 of the 2018/19 financial year, with particular focus on progress towards achieving the Council's top tasks, and efficiency measures. The report also provided information on the Council's financial position, including revenue outturn and budget variances; and capital expenditure, capital receipts and use of reserves.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the item and highlighted various aspects of the circulated report. She explained that compilation of the Quarter 1 figures and data had coincided with the time when the Council was preparing the Annual Accounts for 2017/18, in line with the new, earlier deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> July. She confirmed that the Council was currently predicted to have underspent during the Quarter and that there was nothing significant to report to the Committee at present.

In response to various questions from Members, Officers explained that the Council was currently awaiting more information with regard to Fastershire; work was being undertaken in connection with Publica and Ubico for the Council to improve financial forecasting; major planning applications would be reviewed more closely in 2018/19, given planning performance impacts, but minor applications did not have such time restrictions; Cabinet had approved the smaller funding allocations from the 2017/18 under-spend in July 2018 and had commended to the Council the funding allocations to the Council Priorities Fund for approval at its Meeting in September 2018.

**RESOLVED that the report be noted.**

**Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 2.**

OS.15 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.

With reference to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee Meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, which had been held at Cotswold District Council, a Member suggested that the Committee would benefit from seeing the detailed responses that were due to be provided after the Meeting in relation to the questions posed under the Cotswold item.

**RESOLVED that the report be noted.**

**Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 2.**

OS.16 WORK PLAN 2018/19

The Committee was requested to consider its forward work programme, including the identification of any other matters for possible consideration.

During the Committee's deliberations, it was agreed that a further Publica update should be presented to the November 2018 meeting, and that the scheduled update for December 2018 could be removed.

**RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Work Plan be approved.**

**Record of Voting - for 5, against 0, abstentions 0, absent 2.**

OS.17 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business that was urgent.

The Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 12.55 p.m.

Chairman

(END)