

COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4TH DECEMBER 2018

Present:

Councillor RG Keeling - Chairman

Councillors -

SI Andrews
Andrew Doherty
Jenny Hincks

RA Morgan
SDE Parsons (until 12.25 p.m.)
NP Robbins (until 11.50 a.m.)

OS.18 SUBSTITUTION ARRANGEMENTS

No substitution arrangements had been put in place.

OS.19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(1) Member Declarations

Councillor SDE Parsons declared an other interest in regard to Agenda Item (10), as he served on Gloucestershire County Council's Pension Fund Committee.

There were no other declarations of interest under the Code of Conduct for Members or Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

(2) Officer Declarations

There were no declarations of interest from Officers.

OS.20 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4th September 2018 be approved as a correct record.

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

Arising on the Minutes of 4th September 2018:

A Member expressed the view that, whilst the Minutes of the Meeting gave a clear indication as to the action points considered necessary by the Committee following discussion of the items at the Meeting, these could be easily forgotten/overlooked without appropriate monitoring. In this connection, another Member wondered whether the production of an Actions Arising Sheet in addition to the Minutes would also be helpful for the Committee and Officers.

OS.21 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman wished to extend his thanks to Councillor Jenny Forde for her significant service on, and contribution to, the Committee until she had relinquished Committee membership in September 2018 - both as Chairman and as Committee Member.

The Chairman also welcomed Councillor Jenny Hincks to her first Meeting of the Committee and stated that he and the Committee looked forward to working with her in the future.

OS.22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received.

OS.23 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been received from Members.

OS.24 CALLED-IN DECISIONS

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

OS.25 PUBLICA UPDATE

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

The Managing Director and Executive Director (Commissioning) were both in attendance to present the item to the Committee, and to respond to questions from Members.

The Managing Director amplified various aspects of the Publica Quarter 2 Performance Report for 2018/19, which had been circulated at the Meeting. He explained that Performance Reports were also presented to the Member Liaison Group on a quarterly basis, with membership of such Group comprising Cabinet Members, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Leader plus one representative of the of the Liberal Democrat Group.

The Managing Director was pleased to confirm that Publica was over-achieving on its financial performance, delivering more savings than had been budgeted. He also expected that similar performance would be maintained throughout the year. In terms of specific items, he explained that pension savings had increased; staff costs had reduced; and the establishment of one, as opposed to three, companies had proved more financially efficient.

It was explained that the series of promises set out to staff in January 2017 had been fulfilled, regarding protection of leave, flexible working, pensions and protection of length of service. In addition, car mileage rates had now been standardised across the company in line with the HMRC recommended level of 45p per mile; and a flexible benefits scheme with salary sacrifice had been introduced for staff. In addition, a new IT system (Salesforce) was currently being developed which would provide an enhanced customer experience; automated performance monitoring data including length of time taken to

respond to enquiries and the number of completed and outstanding cases; and valuable user data, including in respect of need.

In response to Member questions, Officers confirmed that the two keys tasks listed as unfinished - a change management strategy and evidence of the benefits of transformation - had now been completed; the change management strategy related to a service design review of each service area over the next 12 months which required a change management strategy; meetings had been held with the Cabinet Member for Resources at Cheltenham Borough Council which had resulted in that Council showing interest in the upcoming new Salesforce IT system; staff sickness levels in quarter one were lower than in quarter 2 and long-term sickness had also seen a reduction; and the number of staff leaving had increased to 11.2% against a 'threshold' of 10%, of which it was estimated that approximately 8% of departures were due to new employment opportunities.

A Member expressed the view that the report again featured a lack of information, especially in regards to performance monitoring and a strategic transformation programme timeline, notwithstanding the Committee's request for this information at its last Meeting. In response, the Managing Director explained that dates were set against each action in the Business Plan but agreed that more information could be included to provide greater context in the future. He added that the Transformation Plan would be presented to the Committee at its Meeting in February 2019.

Another Member commented that the report could only represent a 'snapshot in time', which made it difficult to compare trends across quarters; and also enquired as to the Publica 'vacancy rate'. In response, Officers explained that Publica had a savings target related to the 'vacancy rate' built into its budgets; and that the savings target could have been higher in the 2020 Vision business case, but there had been a desire for the savings within the Business Case to be achievable and the financial business case had already been well made.

In concluding his presentation, the Managing Director explained that Publica was currently preparing its 2019 Business Plan and that he felt confident that the company would achieve its financial targets and agreed delivery targets. He added that Publica had created great interest within the local government sector given its wide service delivery model.

The Chairman thanked the Managing Director for his attendance at the Meeting and sought to summarise the points raised by the Committee. Whilst generally pleased with the progress, the Committee considered again that more detailed information was required in future updates, including a strategic overview with timeline.

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

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

OS.26 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2019/20 TO 2028/29

The Committee was invited to consider and comment on the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, and to provide feedback to the Council.

To assist Members in their deliberations, the Chief Finance Officer amplified various aspects of the circulated report, particularly in relation to the key themes.

In so doing, she explained that little information had as yet been provided by the government in regard to likely financial impacts from April 2020 onwards, and that final details were not expected to be released until approximately December 2019.

In response to a Member's question, the Chief Finance Officer explained that savings were created from the Council being part of a Business Rates Pool, as 50% of the rates were retained within the County as opposed to being returned to government.

A Member highlighted that With regard to Question 8 of the Consultation on the Budget Strategy, a Member suggested that any proposals to change the existing garden waste collection arrangements should be clearly explained.

In response to a further question, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that she was currently undertaking discussions with the Council's key providers, such as Ubico, to determine if there would be any impacts from Brexit post-March 2019.

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

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

OS.27 USE OF CONSULTANTS

The Committee received a report regarding information on consultancy spend for the 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years.

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that, having now received the information contained within the report, the Committee should be in a better position to make recommendations to the Council to enable greater transparency regarding the use of consultants and to ensure information regarding consultants, and those who sanctioned their payments, were made readily available in the future.

The Executive Director (Commissioning) was present and responded to various questions from Members. She explained that the Council commissioned Publica to deliver services on its behalf and that, therefore, most of the actual on-going commissioning work was now undertaken by Publica. The Committee was informed that there was a desire to ensure that, in future, commissioning was undertaken in a co-ordinated approach. Moving forward, investigation would be undertaken to determine if, say, an Officer appointment across the partnership would remove the need for an external contractors/consultant appointment.

A Member commented that, whilst appreciative of the work undertaken by Officers in relation to this item, further research was required regarding budgets and any 'hidden' spends, and an evaluation following the use of any consultants. In response, the Executive Director (Commissioning) explained that a review of commissioning framework would be presented to the Committee at its Meeting in February 2019 and that a commitment had been made for some more specific work to be produced highlighting areas where the use of consultants was most likely to be required.

In response to further Member questions, Officers explained that those expenditures that were listed as 'not stated' were over and above any delegation amount; sundry supplies, in the view of Officers, represented an internal control

issue to be addressed; Officers would be made aware of the requirements of appointing consultants to ensure the control measures were correct; all QC advice requests would have been signed off by the Head of Land, Legal and Property; and, dependent on levels, budgetary requirements would be reported to the Cabinet, but personnel chosen would be dealt with by the individual Officers under delegated powers.

The Chairman welcomed the report and the profile that it had given to the subject. He expressed the hope that the other partner councils would undertake a similar exercise, with a view to introducing a consistent approach across the partnership in the future.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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

OS.28 SUMMARY FINANCE/SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT - 2018/19 QUARTER 2

The Committee received a report summarising overall performance by the Council during Quarter 2 of the 2018/19 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. Officers amplified various aspects of the circulated report.

In response to a Members' question, the Executive Director (Commissioning) explained that she understood that a Member's concern regarding Housing Benefit was linked to the roll-out of universal credit. It was, however, pointed out that performance was still in the top quartile.

A Member commented that the Housing Needs Assessment was due in January 2019 and that, as a rolling document, it would require updating before this deadline. The Executive Director (Commissioning) also explained that a refreshed Council Plan would be produced the period 2019-2023, but after the forthcoming May 2019 elections.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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

OS.29 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 20th June 2018, a Member enquired as to progress in relation to National Parks and the AONB. The Head of Paid Service reported that the government had announced the Glover Review Call for Evidence in respect of protected landscapes, which was currently on-going, and explained that the Council would respond in due course. At an appropriate time in the review process, the Head of Paid Service

would provide a briefing note for all Members to assist communications with town and parish councils in regard to this matter.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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

OS.30 WORK PLAN 2018/19

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

The Committee was informed that the South West Ambulance Service Trust (SWAST) had been requested to provide an updated document relating to Trust activities and performance, particularly in respect of ambulance response times in the District. The Head of Paid Service explained that he would circulate the document to the Committee as soon as it was received and in preparation for discussion of the item at the January or February 2019 Committee Meeting.

Given the identified work plan topics, the Committee agreed that the Local Enterprise Partnership Presentation could be scheduled after the May 2019 elections; and that the Bromford Housing Presentation scheduled for March 2019 should also include a presentation by Cottsway Housing as they were another key housing provider within the District.

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

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

OS.31 OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business that was urgent.

The Meeting commenced at 10.00 a.m. and closed at 12.45 p.m.

Chairman

(END)