



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 30 November 2021.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews
Gina Blomefield
Patrick Coleman
Roly Hughes

Gary Selwyn
Richard Norris
Ray Theodoulou
Nigel Robbins

Nikki Ind

Officers present:

Jan Britton, Managing Director (Publica)
Michelle Burge, Chief Accountant
Angela Claridge, Interim Monitoring Officer
Caleb Harris, Strategic Support Officer
Ben Patel-Sadler, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Jenny Poole, Deputy Chief Executive
Rob Weaver, Chief Executive
Frank Wilson, Group Finance Director (Publica)

Observers:

Councillor Mike Every

OS.102 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Claire Bloomer.

OS.103 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

OS.104 Declarations of Interest

Frank Wilson, Group Finance Director (Publica) declared an interest in agenda item 12 'Extension to Support Services Contract with Publica Group (Support) LTD'. Mr Wilson was an employee of Publica.

This declaration would not prevent Mr Wilson and other staff employed by Publica from participating in the meeting.

OS.105 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2021 were agreed as written with the following amendments:

The Interim Monitoring Officer would provide the Committee with information on when a briefing note relating to social contracts would be provided and also when a training session for Members would be held on performance trends.

At page 9 of the minutes, paragraph two, the word 'complimenting' should read 'complementing'.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2021, be approved as a true record:

Record of Voting – for: 8, against: 0, abstention: 1 , absent: 1.

OS.106 Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements made by the Chair.

OS.107 Public Questions

There were no public questions submitted.

OS.108 Member Questions

There were no Member questions submitted.

OS.109 Called-in Decisions

The Committee noted one decision which had been called-in.

The decision was made by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Joe Harris on 16 November 2021 and related to Election and Electoral Registration Printing Procurement.

This was classified as an exempt decision due to commercial confidentiality as it related to a procurement process.

The decision had been called-in due to the Committee not knowing what the decision was about until after the due call-in date had passed.

The call-in enabled the Committee to understand the decision and why it was taken.

The Committee was content with the decision as made by the Leader of the Council on 16 November 2021.

The Committee noted the importance of Members being made aware of any exempt decisions.

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Councillor Joe Harris addressed the Committee and assured Members that going forwards, Members would be made aware of all exempt Cabinet Member decisions.

The Committee noted that the decision taken by the Leader of the Council had direct benefit to the Council.

The Chair proposed that the decision be endorsed.

RESOLVED that the Committee agreed to endorse the decision taken by the Leader of the Council on 16 November 2021.

Record of Voting – for: 9, against: 0, abstention: 0, absent: 1.

OS.110

Work Plan 2021/22

The Chair of the Committee, Councillor Stephen Andrews introduced the item and provided the Committee an opportunity to raise any points in relation to the Committee Work Plan.

The Committee noted that the Review of Development Management item scheduled for the 1 March 2022 meeting would include the Council's Planning department.

The Committee noted that Ubico would be attending the 1 February 2022 meeting to provide an update on performance. This would be facilitated via the delivery of a presentation at the meeting. Following the conclusion of this presentation, the Committee would take a decision on whether a waste collection task and finish group would be established.

The Committee noted that the Chair had invited the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner to deliver a presentation at the 1 March Committee meeting.

The Committee further noted that an informal meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Members would be arranged following the completion of the 1 March meeting. This meeting would enable Committee Members to discuss and agree topics for consideration at the 24 May and future Committee meetings.

The Chair proposed that the Committee accept the Work Programme and note that the presentation from the Police and Crime Commissioner would be added to the Work Programme if he was able to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee agreed the current version of the Work Programme.

Record of Voting – for: 9, against: 0, abstention: 0, absent: 1.

OS.III **Financial, Council Priority and Service Improvement Report – 2021-22 Quarter Two**

The Chief Executive, Rob Weaver introduced the report, identifying areas where performance against key performance indicators had dropped and what processes and procedures had been put into place to address these areas.

The Committee noted that leisure centres and gyms were operating at around 80% of capacity. Marketing activities were being undertaken to attempt to return usage to pre Covid-19 levels.

The Committee noted that in July 2021, the Council had become part of the Green Finance Institute and Abundant Investment and Climate Bonds Campaign.

It was further noted by the Committee that Crowdfund Cotswold, facilitated by Spacehive had become one of the most successful community funding schemes in the country.

Town and Parish Councils had attended two Council forums in October 2021 which focused on improving relationships, working together and supporting each other as well as discussions on planning and budgets. The Committee noted that future engagement events with Town and Parish Councils were being planned.

The Committee noted that performance indicators relating to the time taken to process Council Tax support and determination of planning applications were showing a performance decrease against the specified targets. An injection of resource across both of these areas was helping to reduce the backlog. This included the addition of temporary, experienced staff.

The Committee noted that performance improvements had been made in relation to customer satisfaction (feedback and advice provided by Council staff over the telephone) and food safety team inspections being conducted within the specified 28 day timescale (for new businesses and those flagged as being high risk).

The Committee noted that missed bin collections were also decreasing despite the national shortage of HGV drivers.

The Committee noted that the Council was experiencing a reduced demand for car parking due to the continuation of the Covid-19 pandemic which had impacted on revenue generation.

The Committee further noted that during school holidays, car parking income increased significantly.

Additional waste collections run via Ubico were being undertaken due to the increase in waste being produced by households which had generated further expenditure for the Council.

The Committee noted that income from garden waste collections and planning applications had increased.

Due to the increases in certain revenues, the Council had not been required to fully utilise the grants offered by the Government.

The Committee noted that negotiations in relation to the 2022 pay award remained ongoing.

The Committee noted that whilst the Council continued to experience financial challenges, the projected budget by the end of the financial year was showing a potential underspend.

In relation to climate bonds, the Committee noted that further work was being undertaken by the legal team in relation to the contractual information before a report would then be submitted for Cabinet consideration. It was anticipated that there would be a bond issuance of around £1 million to be invested in the Council's green agenda (electric vehicle charging points, improving energy efficiency in Council owned buildings, etc). The bonds would enable members of the public to invest should they wish to do so.

The Committee noted that the money generated by the issuing of bonds would be received by the Council to fund Council projects.

The Committee noted that a briefing note would be circulated to outline the role of Gloucestershire County Council in contributing to Spacehive projects, specifically how they might work with the Council in any future projects.

The Committee noted that an annual charge was payable to Crowdfund Cotswold by the Council for them administering the community funding scheme.

The Committee noted that the Council was currently actively recruiting to three vacancies within the planning team. Seven planning staff were now operating on a career-graded scheme which would assist in retaining staff as they developed throughout their employment.

The Committee noted that the Performance task and finish group might be best placed to analyse staff turnover within the Council.

The Committee noted that discretionary pension payments were payments which needed to be made by the Council into the Gloucestershire Local Government Pension Scheme. The payments were made to individuals who had retired many years ago and as such their contributions needed to be topped up.

RESOLVED that the Committee reviews overall progress on the Council priorities, service delivery and financial performance for 2021-22 Q2

OS.112 Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals 2022-23

The Deputy Chief Executive, Jenny Poole introduced the report with the Committee noting that the Local Government Provisional Settlement for 2022-23 had not yet been finalised. The report would be updated when this figure had been confirmed (likely December 2021).

The Committee noted that a scenario planning exercise had been undertaken based on possible Government Settlement Figure levels. These included a cash neutral position, New Homes Bonus figures. The Government's ongoing Fair Funding Review could also have an impact on the Council.

The Committee further noted that a full-time Director of Governance and Development position was provided for in the budget which would replace the part-time Monitoring Officer position.

The recruitment of drivers for Ubico would continue as well as the investment in Council software packages. Provision for the Flood Warden Programme had also been included.

The Committee noted the funding which had been attributed to additional specific Council projects.

The Committee further noted the £800,000 of savings which had been outlined in the 2022-34 budget.

The Committee noted that further work needed to be undertaken before a decision was taken in relation to the Waterloo Road car park. This was partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic as it was not yet known what the future demand for car parking in Cirencester would be.

The Committee further noted the risks as outlined in the report, including the potential impact of rising inflation. This would be looked at in more detail by Officers to determine what exact mitigations might be put in place via the budget.

The Committee noted that the receiving of the Local Government Provisional Settlement for 2022-23 was key so that appropriate planning could take place in advance of the final budget and associated risks being produced.

The Committee noted that the Cabinet would be receiving a summary of the budget consultation exercise at the January 2022 meeting.

The Committee further noted that the Council was playing an active role in the regeneration of Cirencester along with other partners (including the Town Council) and so was contributing towards some of the costs related to this work.

In relation to the yet to be agreed staff pay award, the Committee noted that there was no indication currently as to when negotiations between the relevant trade unions and local government employers would conclude.

In relation to the allocation of funding for broadband, the Committee noted that a report would be considered at the January 2022 Cabinet meeting which would provide further information around the specifics of the project (including gap identification).

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- (a) Considers the updated to the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the draft 2022/23 budget.
- (b) Following due consideration, agrees any feedback to be provided to the Cabinet.

OS.113 Extension to Support Services with Publica Group (Support) LTD

The Chief Executive, Rob Weaver introduced the report with the Committee noting the services covered in the report under 'support services'.

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Due to the existing agreement expiring during 2022, now was the opportune time to enter into a new contract.

The Committee noted that the Council retained flexibility in terms of how future services could be delivered.

The Committee noted that there was currently a HR review being undertaken.

The Committee further noted the terms of the proposed agreement as outlined in the report.

The Committee noted that the services provided by Publica provided good value for money and further acknowledged the work undertaken by Publica and Council staff during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee noted that the Council's planning staff were appointed and retained under a separate agreement under a longer-term arrangement which was due for renewal in 2024.

A request was made by the Committee that the Publica report due to be considered by the Committee in March 2022 includes a section detailing the link between the Council and each service provided by Publica (services covered by each contract, time left on that contract, etc).

The Committee welcomed the opportunity to review the item before a decision was taken by Cabinet, noting that at the present time there was no other viable option in terms of seeking appropriate support services from a different provider at this time.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

(i) discuss the Cabinet report and identify any points to be presented before Cabinet, which could include alternative recommendations;

(ii) delegates authority to the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee to provide the Committee's feedback to Cabinet on 6 December 2021.

OS.114 **Draft Terms of Reference for the Performance Task and Finish Group**

The Interim Monitoring Officer, Angela Claridge introduced the report, with the Committee noted that at the meeting on 6 September 2021, Cabinet had agreed that a task and finish group be established to focus on performance.

The purpose of the report was to formally agree the terms of reference and to determine the membership of the group.

It was anticipated that the work of the Performance task and finish group would commence during early 2022.

The Committee noted the importance of ensuring that the data to be used as part of the work was of sufficiently quality so that the task and finish group could determine performance trends and to compare performance with comparable authorities (where appropriate).

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The Committee agreed that areas of focus for the Performance task and finish group would be determined by each respective Cabinet Member and their specific areas of responsibility (depending on what specific aspects of performance were being looked at by the group). This would enable Cabinet Members could also be involved in the process, along with the relevant Officer(s).

RESOLVED that the Committee agreed that Councillors Stephen Andrews, Patrick Coleman, Ray Theodoulou and Nigel Robbins would form the membership of the Performance Task and Finish Group.

The terms of reference for the task and finish group would be amended to reflect the discussions held during this meeting which would then be shared with Cabinet.

OS.115 **Quarterly Digest (including County Matters)**

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the Quarterly Digest update.

The meeting closed at 6.25pm

Chair

(END)