



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
01/March2022

Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 1 March 2022.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews	Gary Selwyn	
Claire Bloomer	Ray Theodoulou	Ray Brassington
Richard Norris	Nikki Ind	Julia Judd

Officers present:

Jenny Poole – Deputy Chief Executive
Caleb Harris – Strategic Support Officer Democratic Services
Jan Britton – Managing Director – Publica
Rob Weaver – Chief Executive
Phil Shaw – Business Manager, Development Management
Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services
Joseph Walker – Community Support Officer

Observers:

Councillor Tony Dale, Councillor Juliet Layton, and Councillor Jenny Forde

OS.128 Apologies

There were apologies given from Councillor Gina Blomefield, Councillor Roly Hughes and Councillor Patrick Coleman. There was also an apology given from Ben Patel-Sadler for Democratic Services. Nigel Robbins was absent with no apology given.

OS.129 Substitute Members

The substitute members for the meeting were Councillor Julia Judd and Councillor Ray Brassington.

OS.130 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note from Members or Officers present.

OS.131 Minutes

The Chair of the meeting outlined points of clarification and changes to the wording which had been provided to Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

There were no further comments on the minutes provided.

Voting Record

For, 6 Against 0, 2 abstention, 1 absent

OS.132 Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted the length of the agenda and emphasised the need for focus on the key issues.

OS.133 Public Questions

The Chair noted a question that was submitted to him but this was forwarded to the Police and Crime Commissioner to provide an answer. There were no additional public questions submitted.

OS.134 **Member Questions**

There were no member questions submitted for the Committee.

OS.135 **Called-in Decisions**

There were no called-in decisions for the Committee to consider.

OS.136 **Police and Crime Commissioner Presentation**

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Nick Evans opened the presentation to the Committee. Apologies were noted for the PCC due to a meeting in London which was unavoidable.

Councillor Forde joined the meeting at 16:07.

The Deputy PCC outlined his aim to be visible to the public and partners such as Cotswold District Council to discuss the Police and Crime Prevention Plan to address issues within communities.

The Deputy PCC gave an overview of the priorities within the plan to tackle crime within rural communities. These included anti-social behaviour and crime prevention at the source.

Moreover, a number of steps were outlined as to how the police are improving their engagement within the communities, increasing the number of police officers and providing appropriate support for victims.

The Committee wished to ask the Deputy PCC about victims of domestic violence against men as well as women and what is being done to support them.

Deputy PCC said that the focus is on women as they are more likely to be a victim of domestic violence but there is support available for both men and women in Gloucestershire to report this.

The Committee asked the Deputy PCC about a number of the priorities within the document and of the commitments of the PCC to increase the number of police officers.

The Deputy PCC explained that the aim was to increase the number of police officers by as much as possible. It was also outlined to the Committee that there was a focus on helping to facilitate the reporting of crimes which are underreported such as sexual assault and domestic abuse crimes.

The Committee asked about the issues of reporting crime and the problem of getting through to the police via the 101 service.

The Deputy PCC outlined how there had been sustained pressure on the police with an increase in the number of 999 and 101 calls.

The Committee wished to ask the Deputy PCC about the measures being taken to tackle the problem of speeding in rural communities which was a significant concern for Members.

The Deputy PCC highlighted that he was well aware of this within his role as a district councillor in the Forest of Dean. It was outlined how a strategy of enforcement and engagement with partners was key to reduce instances. Inspector Ellson outlined that a report was circulated to Members about the specific enforcement measures for the District.

Due to time constraints, the Chair closed this item. The Deputy PCC undertook to answer any questions that are sent to him via email.

The Chair thanked the Deputy PCC for attending and for providing an update to the Committee.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the presentation given by the Deputy PCC.

OS.137 Financial, Council Priority and Service Performance Report - 2021-22
Quarter 3

The Chief Executive, opened the item and provided some updates on items and targets with departments

It was noted that Q3 had seen improvements in a number of areas such as call waiting times and the processing of benefit claims. It was also noted some departments such as planning were seeing improvements and that areas like food hygiene inspections are expected to be back to target in Q4.

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the financial section of the update the Committee.

It was outlined how the financial position of the Council had reduced slightly with a £165,000 underspend in Q2 being reduced to £18,000 as the Council's income had slowed from areas like car parking.

It was noted that there was some Covid-19 financial support had been provided although this was £127,000 less than expected in Q1. However, additional support was being provided for the Council Tax Rebate from central government.

In summary, it was noted that the end of year forecast for the budget surplus had reduced from £173,000 to £47,000.

The Committee wished to know more about the reduction of food hygiene inspections.

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Jon Dearing, Group Manager for Resident Services explained that there had been a reduction due to recruitment issues but these had been resolved. It was further noted that this had not impacted Health and Safety inspections.

The Committee asked about the issue of changing places and how Tetbury was not included within the proposed list of sites. The Leader of the Council outlined the commitment to provide for suitable places within The Cotswolds and for officers to examine any proposed sites within Tetbury.

The Committee raised the issue of affordable housing within the District and the Kemble Community Gardens site for affordable housing. The Leader of the Council explained that whilst the site had not been ruled out but geographical challenges were causing delays.

A briefing note for Councillor Selwyn on delays in Kemble from officers was offered and deemed appropriate by the Chair.

The Committee noted the challenges presented to the Committee such as fuel and wage costs which will have an impact on the Council's financial position.

The Committee asked about the provision of broadband services to rural communities and the £500,000 allocated for internet in the Cotswold.

The Leader of the Council explained that negotiations were ongoing to ensure that the provision was in place. The Chief Executive added that the approach is market-led with the Council stepping in when this process does not deliver and needs further support.

The Chair commented about homelessness in light of aid being refused by some rough sleepers. It was noted by the Leader of the Council that this issue is one which cuts across other social challenges like drug addiction.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the report and provided appropriate comments.

OS.138 Consultation on the Update of the Council's Corporate Plan (2020-2024)

The Chief Executive introduced this item to the Committee which included a copy of the current Corporate Plan and the draft update to it.

It was outlined how the plan was being revisited to ensure focus on the key priorities of the Council since the adoption of the plan in 2020.

A final draft would be presented to Cabinet for consideration and approval by Annual Council in May 2022 once comments have been taken into consideration.

The Leader of the Council added that this would be provide officers with direction and to ensure delivery of the priorities going forward up to 2024.

The Committee asked about additional information within the table of actions for specific measures taken for each priorities. In addition, feedback was requested for Cotswold's Let's Chat and Cotswold New Start.

This undertaking was given from the Chief Executive regarding feedback. It was also explained that the two documents presented would be merged into one version.

The Committee commented on the use of Crowdfunding and the total of £300,000 which had been raised, and wished to know the financial commitments from CDC to these projects

Officer Joseph Walker confirmed that the Council confirmed it was 100,000 submitted by the Council.

The Chair asked about deadlines and if the actions can be picked up in future.

The Chief Executive confirmed that this work was ongoing to give dates to specific actions rather than having them listed as 'ongoing' within the plan.

The Committee examined social housing and affordable housing listed within the document as part of the priorities of the Council.

It was outlined to the Committee that affordable housing was the umbrella term for a number of different schemes as opposed to traditional social housing. It was also explained to the Committee that some housing had to be remodelled or demolished as they were not attractive to be used as affordable housing.

The Committee raised the issue of Council Tax being charge of multiple occupiers and how this applies to Cotswold.

The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that she would need to take this away for further examination with officers.

The Committee discussed by the Committee how the plan might be reviewed for military veterans following the passing of the re-signing of the Military Covenant by Full Council. These included health and wellbeing, housing and how the Council might collaborate with the military in future.

RESOLVED: That the Committee has noted the report and has provided appropriate comment.

OS.139

Draft Publica Business Plan 2022-2025

The Leader of the Council introduced the item as a chance for Councillors to raise queries with the Managing Director of Publica Jan Britton about the plan.

The Committee asked about any references to biodiversity and what actions are being taken in light of the departure of the biodiversity officers.

Managing Director of Publica highlighted references within the document to biodiversity. Phil Shaw assured Members that the process for recruitment is underway for replacement officers.

The Chair asked about Publica and its process for delivery of the Council's priorities.

The Leader of the Council outlined the position of Publica within the organisation when it was set up. This was re-emphasised by the Managing Director of Publica and made it clear that Councillors set the policy for Publica to deliver.

A request was made by some Members for further guidance regarding the relationship with Publica through documentation being provided with the articles of association, high level commissioning statement and a Member briefing session to assist new and/or existing Councillors understand how the relationship had matured since the signing of those documents in 2017.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the plan with comments for Cabinet to consider.

OS.140 Development Management Improvement Update

Cabinet Member for Economy as an observer Member introduced the item to the Committee as the Cabinet Member tasked for looking at this item.

It was outlined how the planning department had been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and how a changing in working practices required changes to be made.

Jon Dearing supported by the Cabinet Member for Development Management outlined the presentation to provide an update on the areas where work was being undertaken to improve the work of the Planning Department.

This included areas such as customer satisfaction and increase the efficiency of the Planning Department through recruitment of planners.

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The Committee asked about the resources within the planning department. Specifically the qualifications these officers hold when issuing official responses specifically in the environmental health department.

Jon Dearing explained that whilst recruitment of these officers has been challenging with the impact of Covid-19, there has been recruitment of trainee officers to help provide capacity. Furthermore, a sign-off procedure was outlined to the Committee before official planning responses are given.

The Committee asked about the number of invalid applications that are received by the Planning Department.

It was explained by Phil Shaw that a system of validation checklists had been introduced to reduce the number of applications arriving which were invalid.

Chair asked for information around validation feedback and the number of applications being received that turn out to be invalid which was agreed to.

The Chair then indicated to the Committee that the 3 hour time limit had been reached and a vote was required to continue proceedings beyond 3 hours.

Voting Record

7 for, 0 against, 2 absent (Councillor Claire Bloomer and Councillor Nigel Robbins who had left the meeting early).

The Committee reaffirmed the key role of the planning department in fulfilling the statutory responsibilities. It also wished to ask for trends in the movement of staff coming to and leaving the planning department.

RESOLVED: Committee noted the presentation given and provided appropriate comment.

OS.141 Quarterly Digest (including County Matters)

The Chair invited Councillor Ray Brassington as a Member of the Police and Crime Panel to run through some key points of the minutes.

It was outlined to the Committee how the increase in staff pay would help with the recruitment in areas like the 101 service. It was also noted that the pledge on the increase in the number of officers by the Police and Crime Commissioner came under scrutiny during this meeting.

The Chair also outlined the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Winter Sustainability Plan for Urgent and Emergency Care review which was to be discussed on the 8th March.

OS.142 Work Plan 2021/22 and Executive Forward Plan

There was nothing to change on the Work Plan and Executive Forward Plan.

The Chair also noted the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan meeting on 23rd March which would take place informally.

The Chair noted for the Committee the additional Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 26th April 2022 for the consideration of Leisure Services Contract and recommendations for Cabinet.

It was noted following the conclusion of the meeting that a response from South West Ambulance Foundation Trust had been received following a letter from the Chair on behalf of the Committee.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00pm and closed at 7.15 pm

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Chair

(END)