



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 28 November 2023

Councillors present:

Gina Blomefield – Chair
David Cunningham
Angus Jenkinson

Gary Selwyn – Vice-Chair
Tony Slater
Clare Turner

Jon Wareing

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Ana Prelici, Democratic Services Officer
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services
Officer

Gemma Moreing, Business Information Lead
Stuart Rawlinson, Business Manager
Resources, Data and Growth
Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst
Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property
and Regeneration

Cabinet Members

Councillor Joe Harris – Leader of the Council
Councillor Mike Every – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

OS.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Michael Vann, Roly Hughes and Dilys Neill.

OS.2 Substitute Members

Councillor Patrick Coleman substituted for Councillor Dilys Neill.

OS.3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OS.4 Minutes

The Chair stated that amendments had been made to the online version of the draft minutes, following the publication of the agenda.

Several actions were discussed from the previous meeting;

- OS.294 on paragraph 6: In relation to Anti-Social Behaviour, the ERS Service lead was asked to provide more information to members.

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- OS.294 on paragraph 6: In relation to the multi agency approach to crime prevention, an information sheet had been produced and would be shared with the Committee
- OS.299 on p10 Paragraph 2: In relation to Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Jenkinson's written report was to be circulated but had not been attached to the agenda papers*

*It was later stated by the Democratic services Officer that the report had been published on the website but had not been included in the agenda due to a technical error. The report had been emailed to members prior to the meeting.

The Chair stated that 'matters arising from the minutes' should be added to future agendas, in order to ensure completion of actions.

The minutes were proposed by Councillor David Cunningham and Seconded by Councillor Gary Selwyn.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023.

For- 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0

OS.5 Chair's Announcements

The Chair made reference to the meeting with GWR that had occurred the week prior. The Chair stated that the meeting was a useful exercise, and that the Committee now had open lines of communication with GWR, who they hoped to work closely with them in the future.

The Chair also stated that they hoped the Committee papers had arrived to members who had opted into receiving print copies.

Members introduced themselves.

OS.6 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.7 Member Questions

There were no member questions.

OS.8 Draft Cotswold Housing Strategy

The Forward Planning Manager introduced the item.

The purpose of the item was to seek approval to consult with partners and the public on a new five year Cotswold Housing Strategy. The strategy directly responded to the Council's Corporate Plan that seeks to address housing affordability and increase the supply of affordable housing.

As this was an item for pre-decision scrutiny, members were being asked to comment on it, making any relevant recommendations to Cabinet. Members discussed the report, including various points on the report itself, and the broader work surrounding it.

Members raised the following points on the report itself, which the Forward Planning Manager stated they would take away to amend or action necessary:

- Members commended the quality of the report and the utility and relevance of the work.
- On page 42 and 43, the housing need number was higher than in the Council's Housing Supply report. The Forward Planning Manager stated that the housing targets were being met. The figures on this page would be reviewed by the Forward Planning Manager after the meeting, as the table may be out of date.
- The Forward Planning Manager stated that the map on page 50 would be amended to include a key. It was also suggested that Waterloo Road be amended to 'The Waterloo'.
- In objective 3.2, members asked whether reference to retrofit could be included.
- It was also stated by the Forward Planning Manager that the consultation questions would be shared with the Committee once they were ready.
- It was confirmed by the Forward Planning Manager that the technical document would be available as part of the consultation.
- The Committee commented on the elements surrounding the strategy, including the neighbourhood and environmental elements to the housing. The Forward Planning Manager stated that the local plan included this information and they would not want to duplicate it, but would reflect on this as part of the strategy.

Members discussed the strategy, raising the following points;

- Members asked the Forward Planning Manager about the costs surrounding the proposal. The Forward Planning Manager stated that a digital consultation would be carried out using a platform that had been secured through grant funding. There was a marketing budget associated with it in order to engage residents, particularly younger people. Although uncertain of the specific figure, the Forward Planning Manager stated that it would be relatively modest.
- Members asked whether a Tourism Tax could be added as a part of this, or similar work. The Leader stated that they would welcome this, but were constrained by central government legislation, but they would continue to lobby on this. The Forward Planning Manager stated that paragraph three of the report also addressed this point.
- Members stated that the consultation on the strategy should be undertaken in such a way as to inform the public on issues outside of the Council's scope (including the above example) and potentially include a video explanation. The Forward Planning Manager stated that this was a good suggestion, and they would consider how to best incorporate this as part of the consultation.
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) inhabited by students were discussed. Specifically, it was stated that certain areas in Cirencester had over 10% of the housing utilised by students in HMOs. The Committee, Officers and the Leader discussed this, and it was stated that engagement with the Royal Agricultural University was already carried out through other documents associated with the work plan, but ways to include it within the housing strategy would be evaluated. The Leader caveated this by stating that HMOs were largely delivered through the private rented sector.
- Members discussed how social housing was allocated, and referenced a perception held by some that housing was made available to non-local people. The Leader stated that a local connection was necessary unless there was an exceptional circumstance, but stressed that the importance was to ensure plenty of provision of affordable housing.
- Members also stated that it was important to engage with the private rented sector to ensure quality provision of long term rented housing and dissuasion of short-term holiday rentals.

RESOLVED:

- 1) To recommend to Cabinet that the Council consults with the Royal Agricultural University to ensure that there is suitable provision of accommodation for students.
- 2) To recommend to Cabinet that the Council consults with businesses to ensure local employees have access to housing within the district.
- 3) To request that the consultation questions for the housing strategy are shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor David Cunningham proposed the resolution and Councillor Coleman seconded the resolution.

For- 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0

OS.9 Proactive Delivery of Affordable Housing

The Leader introduced the item.

The purpose of the item was to outline the Council's aspiration for a more proactive approach to increase the supply of affordable housing within the district, outline of how this can be achieved, and the resources required.

The Leader stated reported to the Committee that a senior officer to drive the housing level at a strategic level would be employed. The Leader hoped that this would provide more in-house expertise in this area, which was a Council priority

Members discussed the recommendation, which was 'to note' the report. Members highlighted that it is generally not the role of Cabinet to note reports, and that the Cabinet recommendations should highlight this. The Leader stated that the Officer would remove the "note the suggestion to" in the report.

The Committee discussed the definition of affordable housing, as it was highlighted that there are many types. The Leader stated that the form of affordable housing that the Council was aiming to deliver was tenure blind social rented housing. The Leader also stated that there needed to be more state built affordable housing, with the long term aspiration being for the Council to build housing.

RESOLVED: To note the Cabinet report.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Jenkinson and seconded by Councillor Turner.

For- 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0

OS.10 Q2 Performance Report

The Chief Executive Officer introduced the report, and provided highlights, including;

- Work had been undertaken on transitioning services from the GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership, including the funding of the growth hub.

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- Another round of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme had been undertaken, to deliver food and activities for eligible children across the district over the holidays.
- The Collaboration Agreement entered into by the Council and Bromford Housing to deliver the Down Ampney housing development had been delayed due to drainage concerns, but progress was now underway with drawings approved by members and a Planning Application due to be submitted in November.
- "Spotlight on Planning" Town & Parish Council Forum events were held during September in Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh.

Members discussed the report and raised the following points, which the Chief Executive Officer stated written responses would be provided to;

- 'Deliver our Climate Change Action Plan' was considered to be off-target, but did not contain an update, could this be provided?
- On the asset management strategy, the report stated that costs were being finalised with the consultant, Members asked for more details on this cost.
- The 'Make My House Green' scheme was considered to be a success, what were the KPIs and the business arrangement with MakeMyHouseGreen regarding any discounts offered or fees paid to CDC?
- Who were the the installers for the EV charging points?
- 'Work with Ubico to adopt ultra-low emission vehicle technology', as the delivery of this was constrained by the technology available, should the action be removed?
- Further details were requested on the ecological emergency work, in relation to what this included?
- More details in the narrative were requested generally, and the Chief Executive Officer stated that this would be taken forward for future reports.
- Further details were requested on decarbonisation, and work to deliver decarbonisation, including a member briefing. The Chief Executive Officer stated that in light of the decision not to recruit a replacement sustainable transport officer, the Council were working alongside the County Council, to ensure this was still being carried out.

Members also asked for clarification on the council tax collection targets, these were clarified by officers as being cumulative targets.

The Democratic Services Officer added that Member training had been arranged on Biodiversity Net Gain and Retrofitting Historic Buildings but was not aware of decarbonisation training, and would follow this up with the Head of Climate Action.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Jenkinson and seconded by Councillor Turner.

For- 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0

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RESOLVED: To note the report.

OS.11 Q2 Financial Performance Report

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report. The purpose of the report was to set out the latest budget monitoring position for the 2023/24 financial year.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that they would provide further detail of the variations at Annex A.

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Members asked for further details of reserves. The Cabinet Member for Finance stated that the reserves existed to ensure resilience in case of overspend, and was reviewed as an annual process.

Members made reference to the Publica Review, and asked if there was a reserve for this. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that £200,000 had been allocated from the Council priority fund to the Publica Review.

Members asked whether a visual overview could be added to the financial reports to make these more accessible to members of the public. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that this was considered good practice in accounting and would look at ways to do this.

The Committee also asked the Deputy Chief Executive whether there were any aspects of the report that stood out as being unusual or which Members should pay particular attention to. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that building control, land charges and public conveniences were the main reason for shortfall in income, which were historic shortfalls which would need to be addressed in the next budget.

Planning fee increases were also discussed, as these had recently been announced. The Cabinet Member stated that a report would come forward to Cabinet in February on this.

RESOLVED: To note the report, and ask that the amendments be made to the report accordingly.

For – 7, Against 0, Abstention 0

OS.12 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

Councillor Coleman had left the room at 19:21.

The Chair introduced the reports, which had been shared as a supplement before the meeting. The Chair thanked the members for the reports and their succinctness.

OS.13 Update on the Public Conveniences Review Group

Councillor Tony Slater introduced the item as the Chair of the Review Group and summarised the work that had been done.

The next meeting of the working group would take place on 5 December, and the group would review the costs provided by Danfo. The Group had engaged with Town and Parish Councils, who largely were not keen to take on responsibility for managing Public Conveniences.

The deadline for reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was January 2024, and the Committee asked that the Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration review the terms of reference to see whether that needed to be sooner due to the need to report to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

OS.14 Work Plan

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The Chair stated that an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been scheduled for 8 January 2024 in order to discuss the Local Plan and Corporate Plan.

RESOLVED: To note the work plan.

The Meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.30 pm

Chair

(END)