



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 30 January 2024

Councillors present:

Gina Blomefield – Chair
David Cunningham
Angus Jenkinson
Dilys Neill

Michael Vann
Tony Slater
Clare Turner – Vice-Chair
(acting)

Patrick Coleman
Tristan Wilkinson

Officers present:

David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business
Manager
Ana Prelici, Democratic Services Officer

Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and
Development (Monitoring Officer)
Kira Thompson, Election and Democratic
Services Support Assistant
Beth Boughton, Ubico Managing Director
Rob Heath, Ubico Operations Director

Cabinet Members:

Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Culture

OS.27 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Jon Wareing and Gary Selwyn.

OS.28 Substitute Members

Councillor Patrick Coleman substituted for Councillor Gary Selwyn. Clare Turner acted as Vice-Chair in the absence of Councillor Selwyn.

OS.29 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OS.30 Minutes

There were no amendments to the minutes.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2024.

OS.31 Actions Arising from the Minutes

The Chair noted that this item was now a regular agenda item and welcomed its addition, stating that the document summarising actions was very useful.

It was noted that the next budget consultation survey would be added to the work plan for 2024/25 to be presented before publication.

OS.32 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Councillor Tristan Wilkinson onto the Committee and thanked Councillor Roly Hughes for their work. Councillor Hughes resigned from the Committee due to a diary conflict.

The Chair stated that they would not be able to attend the next meeting and that Councillor Gary Selwyn, the Vice-Chair would Chair it, with Councillor Clare Turner acting as Vice-Chair.

The Chair also referenced the recommendation to Cabinet and Council to form a Moreton-in-Marsh Working Group, stating that this had been agreed by Council, which was welcome.

The Chair stated that a work planning meeting would be set up in March, inviting all Members to have an input onto the Committee's work plan for 2024/25.

OS.33 Public Questions

There were no Public Questions.

OS.34 Member Questions

Councillor Angus Jenkinson asked a Member Question, addressed to Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing;

“I am pleased to see the policy of encouraging active transport for both health and climate benefits, and indeed — often — social benefit. Are there other situations in the Cotswold District like one in Moreton-in-Marsh and will the cabinet member work with planning to identify what can be done to address such issues? The reference problem is this: Fosseyway Garden Centre is a major destination retail centre in the town providing a very much wider variety of services and products than its name suggests. These include leisure activities for children. It is located a little outside the centre of town and could be a pleasant walk, but it is not. The path that was supposed to be built has never happened because it was contingent on other developments. Meanwhile, a large estate is being built almost opposite with regular periods of roadworks. Even without these the road has heavy traffic, including freight, and yet there is no path to reach the centre from the town without walking on the road or along a muddy track/grass verge. We have people in the town without cars, who are effectively cut off from this. Mothers with pushchairs or young children cannot possibly walk to the retail centre. The situation that is being called out is therefore one in which developments are failing to provide essential infrastructure that supports active transport in a timely way. Can we not make the creation of such fundamental infrastructure an early or prior requirement rather than a residual one that can await years?”

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Councillor Hodgkinson thanked Councillor Jenkinson for their question, stating that they would discuss it with Councillor Layton to provide a full response to Councillor Jenkinson but agreed that the Council was committed to enabling active transport wherever possible.

OS.35 Review of Leisure and Cultural Services provision

The Cabinet Member for Health, Leisure and Culture introduced the purpose of the report, which was to consider the Council's role in contributing to healthy communities through its leisure and cultural services.

The report provided updates on the delivery of the Active Cotswold leisure strategy, mobilisation of the new leisure and cultural contract and the Council's work with other health and wellbeing partners.

The recently adopted playing pitch strategy was referenced and future plans and initiatives were described.

The Cabinet Member provided an update to members stating that they were confident that the service provision was improving after the appointment of Freedom Leisure as the provider. The Cabinet Member also took the opportunity to highlight community based leisure initiatives such as the Mr Motivator session. The Cabinet Member also highlighted the importance of the Council's cultural services provision.

The Cabinet Member thanked officers for their work.

The Committee discussed the report, asked questions on the various aspects of the report;

- Questions were raised about missing information in the printed report. It was explained that this was an issue with printing the bold text which had not affected the online version.
- Questions raised about Chipping Campden and the need for information.
- Members asked about the Active Environment work stream, and the fact that the recruitment of a new Sustainable Transport Officer was on hold. The Cabinet Member stated that in light of financial pressures, there was no budget to replace the role in the upcoming or current financial year, but that they would discuss this with Senior Officers.
- There was discussion on the economic value of cultural investments, and the Cabinet Member emphasised the value of this in retaining young people within the district and promoting tourism.
- The Business Manager for Health and Wellbeing confirmed that Social Prescribers were working across their communities, including training as walking leaders and working with GPs. The Health and Wellbeing Business Manager also added that once a new Community Support Officer was appointed they would be working closely with Town and Parish Councils to do this.
- Work was undertaken through the Community Food Programme to recognise and utilise the benefits of allotments to wellbeing.

As part of this, the Cabinet Member stated that written response would be circulated to the following;

- Members discussed that references to bowls were not made in the strategy despite being a popular sport in the Cotswolds. The Cabinet Member stated that this was due

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to Sports England classification, and stated that a written explanation would be recirculated to Members.

- Members asked for the costs for the capital programme of work, including figures on the capital fund required to complete works and the quotes that were behind target on page 25 of the report.
- Members requested further detail on the 14 projects within Crowdfund Cotswold.

The Committee agreed to review the future performance of leisure provision against performance indicators on a yearly basis.

RESOLVED: To note the update and revisit the topic in a year's time.

OS.36 24/25 Ubico Business Plan Engagement

The Ubico Managing Director introduced the item and presented the Ubico business plan, highlighting successes in their 'people' pillar and the adoption of in-cab technology.

Members asked about potential challenges for Ubico over the next few years. The Ubico Managing Director highlighted financial risks, particularly in the face of rising fuel prices and inflation. The need for efficient use of resources and exploring cross-boundary opportunities was emphasised. Additionally, risks related to workforce retention and the impact of climate change on operations were discussed.

The use of technology and data was also discussed, with the Managing Director stating that there was an abundance of data from in cab technology, and highlighting the importance of identifying the relevant information for informed decision-making. They provided examples of data utilisation, particularly in optimising vehicle routes and improving operational efficiency and reducing missed collections.

Members congratulated Ubico's performance, particularly in streamlining waste collection processes and their good staff retention.

Members discussed Ubico's finances. The Officer explained the challenges of being a Council-owned company, as the company held no reserves and the need for transparent business cases when seeking additional funds. Regarding improvement methods, the Officer mentioned ongoing discussions about adopting methodologies like lean project management.

The Chair thanked the Ubico representatives for the clear presentation and commended the organization for its valuable service.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

OS.37 2024/25 Budget – Fees and Charges Report

The Chair reminded members to focus on the budget items at the strategic level due to the busy agenda.

The Deputy Leader as the Cabinet Member for Finance provided an overview of the fees and charges report. They highlighted that the Council reviews fees annually and the current report considered a 6.7% inflation change. Certain charges were proposed to remain unchanged, especially where services were already delivered at a cost basis. Specific attention was given to

the garden waste charge, with a proposed increase to £64 for a green bin license and a 50p increase for sacks and containers.

Members asked questions on which the Cabinet Member stated a written response would be provided. The response would be provided on specific fees and charges relating to crematorium use including the scattering of cremated remains, and casino charges, where the charge existed but did not seem to be applicable.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

OS.38 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25

The Deputy Leader (as the Cabinet Member for Finance) introduced the item and outlined the Council's financial position. Following debate at the Full Council meeting in November the Council resolved to request a budget with a surplus, which the Deputy Leader stated was reflected within the budget.

The Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) added that they were still awaiting the final Local Government settlement, which was due in February.

Members discussed the report, and asked questions of the Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader, during which the following points were raised;

- The risks outlined in the report, and how this related to the Publica review. The Deputy Leader stated that the assumption was that there was no update in the cost of services for the 2024/25 financial year, but that the Committee would be updated if this were to change.
- Members highlighted the value of member training on financial matters, and the Deputy Chief Executive took the opportunity to remind Members of the upcoming briefing on the Budget the following week.
- Members also discussed that other authorities had been able to charge more council tax following a referendum, but the Deputy Leader stated this would be too risky due to a cost of £200,000 to hold a referendum with no guarantee on income. It was also stated that the Council had lobbied the Government through the LGA for a raising of the council tax limit without a referendum requirement from £5 to £10 (for a band D property), but this had been declined.
- Some minor typographical and syntax errors were noted. It was confirmed that they would be addressed.
- Members discussed that the only tools available to the Council to achieve a balanced budget were to increase charges and cut spending on services, the Deputy Leader stated that it was important to look at ways to reduce cost through efficient delivery, and take difficult decisions as early as possible to maximise income. However, there was still an expected funding gap between spending and Government funding in future years, which is why the Council required a surplus in the coming financial year.
- Efficiencies through better use of technology were also discussed, which various service areas such as planning were exploring.
- Members asked for further detail on the environmental spending, which the Deputy Chief Executive stated could be found in Annex D of the report.
- Members also asked about further investment of £1.2million into leisure centres which was being made, noting that the service had been contracted to a new provider. It was stated that this was for refurbishment and improvement to these, such as structural improvements and roof works.

The Chair recognised the work of Officers and Members and thanked them.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

OS.39 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

At 18:21 the Committee took a break before commencing onto the next item and resumed at 18:28. Upon reconvening, the Chair reordered the agenda, looking at external scrutiny reports before proceeding on the agile working and public convenience reports.

The Chair thanked the Members who represented the Council on external scrutiny bodies for their clear and detailed reports, which was on Members' desks and on the website.

Councillor Dilys Neill was asked what the acronym "ACE" in the report referred to. Councillor Neill explained that this was "adverse childhood experiences".

Councillor Angus Jenkinson explained that the Committee meetings due to be attended were cancelled, but that they had shared work undertaken outside of meetings.

RESOLVED: To note the updates.

OS.40 Work Plan

Members discussed the items on the work plan raising the following points;

- The Head of Climate Action had departed the organisation, so the emphasis would be on the ecological emergency instead.
- The Publica Transition Plan was due to be looked at by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting in February but was contingent on external partners, so an additional meeting would provisionally be set up in March in case of slippage.
- The Democratic Services Business Manager encouraged Members to consider what they wished to consider as part of the Sewage item.

A Work Planning Meeting would be set up in March or April. The Chair encouraged members to consider items they would like to consider at this.

RESOLVED: To note the work plan.

OS.41 Matters Exempt from Publication

The Chair explained that annexes related to the subsequent items were exempt, and proposed entering a private session so that these could be discussed.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Cunningham.

The proposal was agreed by the Committee unanimously and carried.

RESOLVED: That the Committee exclude the public and press for the remainder of the meeting under section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, with the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighing the public interest in disclosing the exempt information.

OS.42 Agile working and future tenancies at Trinity Road Council Offices

The Deputy Leader introduced the item. The purpose of the item was to update Cabinet on the work that has been completed to make changes to the Trinity Road offices to facilitate agile working and free up space for tenants and to make recommendations on a future tenant for the space created.

The Committee discussed the item, and the business case behind the proposals.

The Deputy Leader also explained that as the MTFS did not yet assume any income from the let of offices, the resultant letting would generate a boost in income to the MTFS regardless.

RESOLVED: To note the proposal.

OS.43 Report of the Public Conveniences Review Group

Councillor Tony Slater, as the Chair of the review group introduced the report. Councillor Slater summarised the report, which had been distributed to Members ahead of the meeting. The Chair of the review group thanked members of the group and officers on the

The charge was discussed, and Members of the working group explained that bringing the charge up to 70p was considered to be a good balance. The Cabinet Member welcomed the recommendation, but stated that they would wait until more data was available following the installation of card readers in order to make a decision on this.

The Cabinet Member thanked members and officer for their work on the report.

OS.44 Exempt Annex A- Agenda item 13

OS.45 Exempt Annex B - Agenda Item 14

The Meeting commenced at 4.01 pm and closed at 7:15pm

Chair

(END)