



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 7 May 2024

Members present:

Gina Blomefield – Chair
Angus Jenkinson
Dilys Neill
Michael Vann

Gary Selwyn – Vice-Chair
Tony Slater
Clare Turner
Jon Wareing

Tristan Wilkinson
Len Wilkins

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and
Development (Monitoring Officer)
Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property
and Regeneration

Sophia Price, Heritage and Design Manager
Ana Prelici, Democratic Services Officer
Debbie Smart, Legal Services Change Manager

Cabinet Members Present:

Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services
Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Council Transformation

OS.61 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor David Cunningham.

OS.62 Substitute Members

Councillor Len Wilkins was a substitute for Councillor David Cunningham.

OS.63 Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 9. Ecological Emergency Update, Councillor Angus Jenkinson stated that he was the member with responsibility for Ecology but that as that as he was not the Cabinet Member, he could not fully take part in the discussion on the item.

OS.64 Minutes

The following corrections were made;

- Minute OS.56 'CD' should be CB
- Minutes OS.55 and 56, Councillor David Fowles had asked to be referred to as 'he/him' instead of 'they'.

RESOLVED: Subject to the aforementioned amendments, to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April.

Voting record – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 3

OS.65 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Members raised the Programme Initiation Document, as referenced in minute OS.54 of the previous meeting. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that this would be included in July's Cabinet report on the Publica review, which would also be coming to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

There were no further comments on matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

OS.66 Chair's Announcements

The Chair stated that two all member briefings would be held the following week:

- 14 May, 12.00pm- Affordable Housing and;
- 14 May, 5.15pm- Waste and Recycling.

The Chair encouraged members to attend the briefings and had no further announcements.

OS.67 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.68 Member Questions

There were no member questions.

OS.69 Ecological Emergency Update

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulatory Services introduced the report.

The purpose of the report was to update the Committee on progress in implementing the Ecological Emergency Action Plan. The report stated that The Ecological Emergency Action Plan continued to be delivered, focusing on the mandatory elements, for example planning applications (including Biodiversity Net Gain), local plan policy, etc; however, due to lack of resources no action was currently underway to address the new enhanced biodiversity duty requirements. In addition, there was scope for the Council to increase its activity to address the Ecological Emergency in more depth, particularly with local communities and in the context of Green Infrastructure.

The Cabinet Member also congratulated Olivia McGregor on her recent appointment as the new Climate Change Lead.

The Committee discussed the report, commending the quality of it, and raising the following points of discussion which were also addressed by officers;

- While Biodiversity Net Gain could be monitored through the Council's annual monitoring of development, the remainder of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan

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would be prohibitively expensive to monitor (i.e. incurring costs larger than the Council's budget). External data, e.g. by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) could not be pinned to the Council's specific interventions.

- All planning applications (with the exception of self-build, retrospective and householder types) made after April 2024 would be liable to the new Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.
- Members raised concerns over resourcing, making reference to the Ecological emergency. The Chief Executive was aware of the need for the further resource, but challenges affected the entire Council and many departments. They suggested that any resource requests would be dealt with as part of the Publica Review.
- The legal monitoring responsibilities under the Environment Act were referenced, which would be partially covered by developer contributions towards Biodiversity Net Gain requirements but would not be fully cost neutral to the Council.

Councillor Angus Jenkinson proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny recommend that Cabinet considers the necessity to increase resourcing for Ecology, given the Council's goal (green to the core), declared climate and ecological crisis and increased legal monitoring obligations. Councillor Jenkinson appreciated the Chief Executive's comments but referenced an urgency of need for additional resource for Ecology.

Councillor Gary Selwyn seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny

1. Note the report
2. Recommend that Cabinet considers the necessity to increase resourcing for ecology, given the Council's goal (green to the core), declared climate and ecological crisis and increased legal monitoring obligations.

OS.70 Adoption of Asset Management Strategy

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report, which was an item that had come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for pre-decision scrutiny. The Cabinet was due to make a decision on the report on Thursday 9 May 2024.

The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to agree to adopt the Asset Management Strategy to provide a clear strategy for future decision making and investment in the Council's land and property assets.

The Deputy Leader stated that a previous interim Chief Finance Officer had recommended that an asset management strategy be put in place. The Deputy Leader explained that at Councils which had issued Section 114 notices recently, a lack of a register of assets had been an issue, which highlighted the importance of the work.

Noting the list of assets at Annex B, members raised some local concerns in their wards, such as;

- Parking concerns in Bourton on the Water and ensuring sustainability for businesses.
- Referencing the local plan partial review, major strategic development in Moreton-in-Marsh, for which strategic engagement with Members would be needed.
- The path and verge in Broadwell were strategically significant in regard to a planning application.

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The Chair assured members that these concerns would be dealt with by officers but that they were out of scope of the report they were considering.

Members welcomed the report and stated that it was important. In discussion, members raised the following points which were addressed by the officers and Cabinet Member:

- The Cabinet Member explained that the purpose of the strategy was to plan how assets would be used, not the strategic acquisition of sites. The Deputy Chief Executive added that the strategy followed advice in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) guide on asset management and that if the Council's priorities around assets shifted, this would be picked up as part of a Corporate plan refresh.
- An LSVT was a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer, in this case it was from the Council to the Housing Association.
- The list of assets at Annex B was fluid and liable to change but it would be updated at least annually. If there were large scale property acquisitions or disposals then the list would be updated more regularly in line with these.
- A 'ransom strip' was a piece of land which would enable a future strategic acquisition of an otherwise landlocked site.
- The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the valuations around these assets were for accounting purposes and would not necessarily reflect a sale price.

RESOLVED: To NOTE the report.

OS.71 Legal Services Partnership Agreement and Transformation Programme Update

The Cabinet Member for the Economy and Council Transformation introduced the report, which was an item that had come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for pre-decision scrutiny. The Cabinet was due to make a decision on the report on Thursday 9 May 2024.

The Cabinet Member stated that legal services at all three Publica councils had been shared since 2016. The Monitoring Officer had felt that it was necessary to review the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the arrangement. The Cabinet Member added that the situation around legal services was positive although they were not fully staffed at all councils, there were no fewer than four members of legal staff at each Council. A case management software (Iken) had also been procured.

Members discussed the report and raised the following points which were addressed by the officers and Cabinet Member:

- The partnership agreement would be different to the Publica arrangement, as only expertise would be shared.
- Members noted the financial challenges faced by the Council and asked how service levels, in particular those around statutory obligations would be maintained in light of these. The Cabinet Member stated that the challenges were evident but that sharing expertise as much as possible would help to alleviate these.
- Members perceived an increased risk of employment tribunals due to the transfer of services from Publica to in-house, and this may impact the legal team's workloads. The Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer) stated that they hoped that would not be the case. Members also mentioned that there was a risk of unbudgeted legal costs arising through planning appeals, which would involve additional support from legal services, and potentially needing to pay compensation if an appellant is successful.

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- The Council's procurement processes had been followed in procuring the Iken software. The time tracking feature on the software would be used to look at broader trends but not scrutinised on an individual level.

RESOLVED: To NOTE the report.

Councillor Tony Slater departed the meeting, apologising to the Chair as he needed to attend a Parish Council meeting.

OS.72 Report back on recommendations

There were no comments from the Committee on the item.

OS.73 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

Councillor Angus Jenkinson stated the GEGSC had not been meeting while the Cities Region Board was being reorganised.

Councillor Dilys Neill had attended the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting as the representative on this Group on 12 March. Councillor Neill summarised the challenges faced by the NHS, but also shared good news such as a new diagnostic tool for cancer. At the suggestion of the Chair, Councillor Neill stated that she would send her full written report to the Democratic Services Officer to include as a supplement to the minutes.

OS.74 Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Chair introduced the work plan and stated that it would be likely to change throughout the year.

Members discussed the work plan, noting the following points:

- On the meeting held on 8 July, the Publica Transition Plan would be considered. The Chair asked that this be dealt with as the first item.
- Housing should be brought forward as an item as well as a member briefing.
- Audit matters were mentioned, but this was the remit of the Audit and Governance Committee, so outside of the scope of the work plan.

RESOLVED: to recommend the work plan to the incoming Committee for 2024/25.

Voting record

For 9, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent/Did not vote - 1

The Meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at Time Not Specified

Chair

(END)