



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 22 July 2024

Members present:

Gina Blomefield – Chair
David Cunningham
Angus Jenkinson
Dilys Neill

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

Tristan Wilkinson
Patrick Coleman

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and
Development (Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business
Manager
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services
Officer
Ana Prelici, Governance Officer

Claire Locke, Interim Executive Director
Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst
Jon Dearing, Interim Executive Director
Gemma Moreing, Business Information Lead
Stuart Rawlinson, Business Manager
Resources, Data and Growth

Cabinet Members:

Councillor Joe Harris – Leader

OS.75 Apologies

The Committee introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Vann.

OS.76 Substitute Members

Councillor Patrick Coleman acted as a substitute for Councillor Michael Vann.

OS.77 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

OS.78 Minutes

The Chair explained that minor amendments had been made to the minutes prior to the meeting.

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- OS.69 Councillor Turner seconded Councillor Jenkinson's motion to review resources allocated to Biodiversity (not Councillor Selwyn).
- Start and end time of meeting showing incorrectly

There were no further amendments to the minutes.

OS.79 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair explained that the Asset Management Strategy would be added to the Work Plan so that the Committee would receive a recurring yearly update on it.

OS.80 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report, which highlighted the work that the Committee had achieved throughout the year.

The Chair also asked that Members kept their questions succinct, noting the full agenda.

OS.81 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.82 Member Questions

There were no member questions.

OS.83 Report back on recommendations

The Committee had made a recommendation to Cabinet to increase resourcing to Ecology. The Leader of the Council explained that this would be taken into account as part of the Publica Review. The response from Cabinet would be formally reported at its meeting on 25 July 2024.

OS.84 Publica Review- Detailed Transition Plan

The Democratic Services Business Manager explained that the Council had sought legal advice, and as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not a decision-making body (unlike Cabinet or Full Council), Officers employed by Publica could remain in the room for the duration of the item.

The purpose of the report was to consider the Detailed Transition Plan and to note its content.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item, he explained that:

- The shareholder Publica councils had felt that they had experienced difficulty making decisions under Publica, which had led to the decision to transition most of the Council's employees to directly employed contracts.
- Employees would be transferred through a phased approach.
- He hoped that the transition would better reflect member priorities and promote a cultural shift in the Council.

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The Chief Executive explained that the first phase of staff would be transferred to the Council in November and staff consultation would be undertaken imminently. He asked that members refrained from asking specific questions on team structures.

Members discussed the report, and the following points were raised during this discussion:

- The same processes for reviewing vacancies filled by agency staff would be followed, so this was not included in the cost. If any of these underlying assumptions regarding temporary staffing changed the Committee should be updated.
- The Leader stated that he believed that the decision would allow the Council to have greater autonomy over staffing costs, as the other member councils would not have to be consulted on staffing and service decisions.
- Members stated that it was important to engage with staff and ensure continuity and retention. The Chief Executive explained that engagement with staff had taken place, which had included question and answer sessions. The transition date of 1 November included the necessary timeframe for carrying out consultation with staff who were affected by the changes.
- The impact of the increased employer pension contributions resulting from the transition was discussed. In the immediate short-term, employer pension contributions will increase by £346k in a full year. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that due to how the Local Government Pension Scheme functioned, the longer-term impact on the Council would not be clear until the results of the next actuarial valuations in March 2025 and March 2028 were known. Therefore, the short-term financial impact is as set out in the Waterfall Chart contained within the report.
- It was recognised that Business Continuity was important for maintaining services. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the largest risks were the numbers around the financial details not being accurate, (although they were confident in the accuracy of these) and keeping 'business as usual' operating through a period of change. The Leader added that delivering cultural change was important to the transition, but that this could be difficult to monitor.
- The Committee thought that there were a lot of aspirations for what the transition would achieve, but that some of these goals were not necessarily translated into tangible objectives.
- Members asked for more numbers around the information within the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which the Deputy Chief Executive stated they would provide a written response to.
- The Committee felt that it was important to receive an update on the success of the phase one transition before Phase 2 commenced.

The Chair summed up the debate, stating two key outcomes that she believed had arisen from the Committee's discussion;

1. That the Committee receives a report reviewing the implementation of Phase 1, before proposals for Phase 2 are brought forward for decision.
2. That the Committee recommends to Cabinet that more clarity is provided on what success looks like, sounds like and feels like and what key actions will deliver the Council's objectives (service quality, greater control and cost reductions).

The resolution was proposed by Councillor David Cunningham, and seconded by Councillor Tony Slater.

1. NOTED the report
2. AGREED to receive a report reviewing the implementation of phase one before proposals for phase 2 are brought forward
3. AGREED to recommend that Cabinet provide more clarity on what success looks like, sounds like and feels like and what key actions will deliver the Council's objectives (service quality, greater control and cost reductions).

Voting Record

10 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstentions

OS.85 Channel Choice and Telephone Access Update

The Interim Executive Director introduce the item. They stated that a trial had been undertaken to close phone lines at 2pm, this was considered successful as contact by phone had decreased and utilisation of digital services had increased. Making this change permanent would save the Council £125,000 per annum.

The purpose of the report was to propose that the trial becomes a permanent arrangement following the data gathered. The trial of reduced telephone access hours from 9am – 2pm, to the public was considered to have proved the concept, with customers continuing to shift to digital channels.

The Committee discussed the report and raised the following points;

- It was recognised that there would be certain 'peak times' during which there would be more demand on the customer services team, and the Committee asked whether more staff could be dedicated to the service during this time. The Interim Executive Director stated that the service could be flexible, in part owing to the large amount of ex-Customer Services staff in other Council departments. However, the Leader emphasised that proposals were led by the Council needing to make difficult financial decisions.
- The method under which the number of calls were monitored was raised. The Interim Executive Director stated that the number of attempted calls during closures were monitored.
- Providing an inclusive service for residents who were digitally excluded was important, and the Leader confirmed that the Council had been working with community networks to help reach digitally excluded residents. He also challenged the assumption that all people preferred to contact the Council by phone, as some residents could find it stressful. The Interim Executive Director would circulate routes by which members of the public could access personal support when they could not access services via the standard routes.
- Members felt that the service had improved as a result of proposals, as higher satisfaction metrics were reported.

The Chair summed up the debate, summarising the following recommendation to Cabinet.

- That the Cabinet ensures services are accessible to everyone including those who cannot access via digital channels and ensure the route for support is publicised.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

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1. NOTED the report
2. AGREED to recommend that Cabinet ensures services are accessible to everyone including those who cannot access via digital channels and ensure the route for support is publicised.

The resolution was proposed by Councillor Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Wilkinson.

Voting Record

9 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstentions

OS.86 2023-24 Final Revenue and Capital Outturn Report

The Deputy Chief Executive (Chief Finance Officer) introduced the item. The purpose of the report was to set out the outturn position for the 2023/24 financial year.

The report outlined the updated material variances, including;

- Improved treasury management investment income due to continued higher investment balances and interest rates. Outturn for the financial year was £1.783m; an income surplus of £0.966m
- ICT underspend not previously forecast of £169,000 due to lower than budgeted cybersecurity, software and IT licence costs.
- Additional expenditure incurred during the financial year was £113k in respect of Elections costs, including staff costs, postage costs and equipment expenditure.
- There was an underspend of £0.986m across the total Publica contract sum for all Councils. The amount that was applicable to Cotswold District Council was £0.305m. The underspend had largely arisen due to vacancy management. £0.086m saving achieved from reduction in contact centre staffing and travel costs

Members discussed the report, raising the following points;

- Additional information was requested on the ICT underspend, the Deputy Chief Executive stated that they would provide this
- The Deputy Chief Executive explained that costs set aside for judicial reviews did not include assumptions on recovering these costs.
- The Leisure contract deficit was discussed. The Deputy Chief Executive that the 10-year contract with Freedom Leisure included the repayment of this.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee NOTED the report.

OS.87 Service Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four

The Chief Executive introduced the item. The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance.

The report was discussed, raising the following points;

- The Deputy Chief Executive explained that if anyone was impacted by changes in bin collections, they could report this via the Council's website. They would distribute more information on this to the Committee.
- Further information would be provided on the number of Long-Term Empty Properties, and the Senior Performance Analyst stated that a report was going to the Cabinet in September.

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- The Committee suggested that planning enforcement numbers should be reported on as part of Quarter one.
- The Interim Executive Director would distribute further information about street name plates in the second phase of the replacement programme.
- Members reported that green bins were collected even though there was no license for them, the Chief Executive stated they would pick this up with Ubico.
- The future reports would include clear references to which Council services were statutory and which were discretionary.
- Future reports would also include improved benchmarking with other similar councils.
- The reference to affordable housing in Evenlode was actually on Evenlode Road in Moreton-in-Marsh.

RESOLVED: To NOTE the report

OS.88 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

The Chair introduced the item.

Members discussed the report which was presented for the first time in this format, commending its quality and clarity of content which reflected the work of the Committee over the year. This included the special meeting called with GWR which had laid the way to an improved working relationship with CDC.

The Committee suggested that one recommendation was missed from the summary. The Democratic Services Business Manager stated that they would pick this up and make the amendment to the report before it goes to Full Council.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend that the report be received by Full Council at the Meeting on 31 July.

OS.89 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

The Members who represented the Committee on the Gloucestershire County Council Health Overview (HOSC) and Scrutiny and Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC) had circulated written updates, which they summarised;

- The GEGSC had not met in 2024 owing to ongoing cancellations by the County Council. Cllr Jenkinson had written to the chair of this committee to express concern.
- The recent meeting of HOSC had centered around updates about cancer waiting times and the South West Ambulance Service. There were backlogs and delays in both of these areas but there was a new cancer diagnosis centre at Gloucester Docks and research trials were well funded.

OS.90 Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Interim Executive Director summarised the work plan, there were no further comments from the committee on this.

RESOLVED: To NOTE the work plan.

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The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm

Chair

(END)