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Overview and Scrutiny Committee
01/February2022



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews
Gina Blomefield
Claire Bloomer
Patrick Coleman

Gary Selwyn
Roly Hughes
Richard Norris
Ray Theodoulou

Nigel Robbins
Nikki Ind

Officers present:

Caleb Harris – Strategic Support Officer -
Democratic Services
Jenny Poole - Deputy Chief Executive
Michelle Burge – Chief Accountant
Beth Boughton, Managing Director - Ubico
Marc Osment – Senior Operations Manager -
Ubico

Scott Williams - Business Manager (Publica) -
Contracts, Environmental Services
Angela Claridge – Director of Governance and
Development
Ben Patel-Sadler, Senior Strategic Support
Officer - Democratic Services

Observers:

Councillor Mike Evemy – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

OS.116 Apologies

There were no apologies to note.

OS.117 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members present

OS.118 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest for the Committee to note

OS.119 Minutes

The Committee agreed to approve the minutes of the meeting of 30 November 2021 subject to the following amendments being made:

At minute reference OS.105 in relation to the training on performance trends, the minutes should be amended to read: 'In the light of the discussion later on in this meeting on the

Performance Reporting Task and Finish Group this training will be scheduled to follow its completion’.

At minute reference OS.115, the following text should be added to the minutes: ‘The report to Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the South West Ambulance service was highlighted and the issue of long Ambulance Response times, particularly in rural areas such as the Cotswolds, was discussed. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the CEO of the South West Ambulance service asking for further information and offering assistance from Cotswold District Council in locating new Community Public Access Defibrillators (CPAD’s) and in recruiting Community First Responders (CFR’s).’

At minute reference OS.114 referring to the agreed Task and Finish Group for Performance, the Chair indicated that the terms of reference have been refined with Business Manager Claire Hughes.

RESOLVED: That the Committee considers the minutes a true and accurate reflection of the meeting subject to any amendments.

Voting Record

9 for, 0 against, 1 abstention

OS.120 Chair’s Announcements

There were no announcements from the Chair.

OS.121 Public Questions

There were no public questions submitted for the meeting.

OS.122 Member Questions

There were no Member questions submitted for the meeting.

OS.123 Called-in Decisions

There were no decisions called-in for consideration by the Committee.

OS.124 Ubico Presentation

The officers started by introducing themselves virtually.

The Ubico Senior Operations Manager introduced the Ubico performance report. His presentation included the introduction of a new in-cab system which was used to improve services, the impact of Coronavirus related absences, fuel shortages in 2021 and the increase in demand for the collection of waste from fly tipping which has increased by 90% since 2020.

It was explained by the officer that a number of improvements have been made possible by the introduction of the in-cab system. In particular, missed collections have fallen by 40% and are on a continued downward trend.

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It was noted to the Committee that whilst there is a reduction in the tonnage of household waste and recycling collected, there was an increase in tonnage collected from garden waste and street sweeping operations.

The Committee asked for clarification in relation to the use of agency drivers and temporary staff, and if there is plan to reduce the use of agency staff in the future.

The Managing Director took the question and explained to the Committee that they try to keep a reserve of company staff to ensure that services can be performed. This work was ongoing to increase resilience.

Furthermore, it was outlined that there was an increase in driver's salaries by way of a market forces supplement to encourage the retention of staff and to recruit new staff. There was also work undertaken to provide additional training to ensure that workers are highly qualified.

The Committee wished to clarify the definition of missed collection and the current policy under Ubico.

The Senior Operations Manager explained to the Committee that a missed collection was one that was not collected by the cut-off time at 5pm in the afternoon on the scheduled collection day. It was noted that multiple missed collections would alert management and they would put improvement measures in place to resolve any issues.

The Committee wished to know what measures are in place to protect against competitors attracting staff to move away from Ubico.

The Senior Operations Manager explained to the Committee that whilst there had been instances of this practice, many staff had subsequently returned to Ubico and there was confidence that this would not present an ongoing issue.

The Committee wished to know more about the DVLA Green Status as mentioned in the presentation and crew inspections.

The Senior Operations Manager explained that this status related to complying with regulatory standards for vehicles and fleet management to ensure roadworthiness and efficiency. Crew inspections were carried out on a regular basis, and included basic vehicle checks, documentation for crews and crew personal protective equipment.

The Committee wished to know more about the increase in fly tipping and what specific items were being collected.

It was noted by the Business Manager (Publica) that builders waste and DIY waste were examples amongst many different types of waste that are illegally dumped and this breakdown hadn't changed as a result of the pandemic.

The Committee wished to know about staff absences and the reasons behind them. There was also a request to have comparative statistics for absences with other providers.

The Managing Director explained to the Committee that absence was usually due to personal health rather than anything arising from work. It was noted as an action to seek to provide comparative statistics for absences for other providers and how this might be shared.

The Managing Director then proceeded with the second part of the presentation, which was the Ubico Business Plan for 2022/23.

The Business Plan timeline was outlined to the Committee and the Managing Director explained how the different shareholder representatives engaged with this process.

It was noted that a number of schemes were being introduced to improved Ubico's position as an attractive employer and to improve staff training and development. Furthermore, a number of company projects were explained which included a commitment to climate change and operational efficiency measures

The Committee wished to know how Ubico will respond to challenges such as the rise in inflation. The cost of electrification of the Ubico vehicle fleet was also a concern raised, and the Committee wished to understand how the Ubico fleet compares with other providers.

The Managing Director outlined to the Committee that any cost control issues required consultation with the partners. In addition, work was being carried out with the Deputy Chief Executive to prepare for any financial challenges.

On the question of the electrification of the vehicle fleet, it was explained that the technology was still in the development phase. The Business Manager (Publica) also explained that all technologies were being considered and needed to work with the challenges of a rural area like the Cotswolds.

The Committee asked that Ubico examine the use of uniforms worn outside of work for Ubico due to the likely contamination risk from the type of work that is undertaken.

The Managing Director made a note of this issue and would take this back to the company to see how this might be addressed.

The Committee also wished for Ubico to note the issue of Royal Agricultural University students and the problem of waste collection in this area, which has not been addressed.

The Business Manager (Publica) noted the problem and confirmed that the Contracts Team would investigate and take appropriate action.

RESOLVED: The Committee has noted the presentation from Ubico and, following a meeting of the Committee to discuss the future work programme, the decision for setting up a task and finish group for waste collection would be confirmed.

The Committee was then paused briefly for a short interval.

OS.125 Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget 2022/23

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the item to the Committee and explained that the report has been updated from the version considered by Cabinet in October 2021. Updates included the outcome of the annual calculation of the Council Tax base, the Provisional Local Government settlement and other budget updates.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the business rate estimates were completed at the end of January, and the forecast income to the Council had not changed. The impact of all of the changes detailed in the report had resulted in a revised budget surplus of around £31,000.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that it is proposed that the £1 million Community Municipal Investment will be issued in stages with the decision on the detail of the final terms of the investment delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance.

The Committee wished to know the structure of the investment and how the investments would be issued.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that Abundance, who will be managing the issue of the investments on behalf of the Council, is FCA regulated and that the investments would be issued for a 5 year term. It is proposed to offer the £1 million investment in several stages to ensure that enough capital is raised at the right time and that the projects being funded can be delivered. The capital projects fall within the Prudential Code and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities regulations.

The Committee questioned the investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure and asked whether this would be a profitable investment in the long-term.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Community Municipal Investment return for investors would be higher than the interest paid on bank accounts. However, for Cotswold District Council, issuing the investments supported the priority of tackling the climate change challenge.

The Committee noted the progress with the employee pay deal and how any increase to the pay offer could affect costs to the Council for its directly employed officers, the Publica contract sum and the Ubico contract sum as employees in each of these entities are entitled to the same pay deal. The Committee requested further information, as a written reply, on the financial impact of each tenth of a percent increase in the pay deal.

The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that an update would be circulated to the Committee.

The Committee asked for clarification on funding from the New Homes Bonus and the assumptions used for Government funding in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for future years.

The Deputy Chief Executive referred to page 15 of the report which set out the financial challenges the Council is facing in the next 4 years, the assumptions of the replacement for the New Homes Bonus and the impact on the Fairer Funding Review.

The Chair noted the reference to bus parking in Bourton-on-the-Water and the savings outlined on page 12 under paragraph 2.35. The Chair asked for clarification about how this might impact parking arrangements in the future.

The Deputy Leader responded as the Cabinet member responsible for parking. The response outlined how, in his view, it was not helpful to continue with subsidies of around £22,000 for this type of parking for commercial purposes.

The Committee noted the view that the outlook for local government finance is uncertain and the need to find solutions to shortfalls in revenue in the long-term.

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The Committee raised the increase of car-parking charges and the removal of car parking incentives such as the 'Free Parking after 3pm' scheme, as potential uncertainties. The Deputy Chief Executive and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance highlighted how this was being monitored and that the view of local businesses would be heard.

The Chair requested that for future documents more detail is provided for spending against investment in Priorities. This request was for clarification and more context of the title of spending items, and the amounts.

The Deputy Chief Executive noted the Chair's request and agreed to ensure that there is a better context behind proposals in future documents.

RESOLVED: That the Committee has considered:

- a) The Budget proposals for 2022/23;
- b) The Medium Term Financial Strategy; and
- c) Any amendments to be proposed to the Cabinet and Council.

OS.126 Work Plan 2021/22 and Executive Forward Plan

The Chair noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner had accepted the invitation to present to the Committee, and this item needed to be added to the work plan.

It was further noted that a meeting will be scheduled in March for the Committee to discuss the work plan, including any items of interest, for the new civic year.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the current work plan with the amendments provided.

OS.127 Quarterly Digest (including County Matters)

The Chair noted two items relating to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

There had been a session on Child and Young People mental health. There was also a discussion on the status of primary care and the difficulty of getting face-to-face meetings.

The Chair also brought to the attention of the Committee the Joint Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and invited Councillor Blomefield to provide an update.

Councillor Blomefield, as the Council's representative, outlined to the Committee the Gloucestershire Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF) of £8.4 million which may be of interest to businesses in the Cotswold's.

Further topics outlined by Councillor Blomefield included the strategic planning relating to the National Planning Policy Framework across the whole of Gloucestershire, the improvements to road infrastructure and the Golden Valley Project.

The Meeting commenced at 4.02 pm and closed at 6.29 pm

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Chair

(END)

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