



Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 1 March 2022 at 4pm.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews

Claire Bloomer

Richard Norris

Gary Selwyn

Ray Theodoulou

Nikki Ind

Ray Brassington

Julia Judd

Officers present:

Jenny Poole – Deputy Chief Executive, Cotswold District Council

Caleb Harris – Strategic Support Officer Democratic Services

Jan Britton – Managing Director – Publica

Rob Weaver – Chief Executive, Cotswold District Council

Phil Shaw – Business Manager, Development Management

Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services

Joseph Walker – Community Support Officer

Observers:

Councillor Tony Dale, Councillor Juliet Layton, and Councillor Jenny Forde

OS.128 Apologies

There were apologies given from Councillor Gina Blomefield, Councillor Roly Hughes and Councillor Patrick Coleman. There was also an apology given from Ben Patel-Sadler for Democratic Services. Councillor Nigel Robbins was absent with no apology given before the meeting.

OS.129 Substitute Members

Councillor Julia Judd substituted for Councillor Gina Blomefield and Councillor Ray Brassington substituted for Councillor Roly Hughes.

OS.130 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to note from Members or Officers present.

OS.131 Minutes

The Chair of the meeting outlined points of clarification and changes to the wording which had been provided to Democratic Services in advance of the meeting.

There were no further comments on the minutes provided.

RESOLVED: That subject to the changes identified by the Chair, the Committee approves the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 1st February 2022.

Voting Record

6 For, 0 Against, 2 abstention, 1 absent

OS.132 Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted the length of the agenda and emphasised the need for focus on the key issues.

OS.133 Public Questions

The Chair noted a question that was submitted to him and advised that had been forwarded to the Police and Crime Commissioner to provide an answer. There were no additional public questions submitted.

OS.134 Member Questions

There were no member questions submitted for the Committee.

OS.135 Called-in Decisions

There were no called-in decisions for the Committee to consider.

OS.136 Police and Crime Commissioner Presentation

The Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner (Deputy PCC) Nick Evans and Inspector Ellson attended to give a presentation to Members. . Apologies were noted for the Police and Crime Commissioner due to a meeting in London which was unavoidable.

Councillor Forde joined the meeting at 16:07.

The Deputy PCC opened the presentation to the Committee by outlining his aim to be visible to the public and partners such as Cotswold District Council to discuss the Police and Crime Prevention Plan (the Plan) and to address issues within communities.

The Deputy PCC gave an overview of the priorities set out in the Plan to tackle crime within rural communities. These included anti-social behaviour and crime prevention at the source.

Moreover, a number of steps were outlined as to how the police are improving their engagement within the communities, increasing the number of police officers and providing appropriate support for victims.

The Committee asked the Deputy PCC about victims of domestic violence, both men and women and what is being done to support them.

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Deputy PCC said that the focus is on women as they are more likely to be a victim of domestic violence but there is support available for both men and women in Gloucestershire.

The Committee asked the Deputy PCC about a number of the priorities within the Plan and of the commitments of the PCC to increase the number of police officers.

The Deputy PCC explained that the aim was to increase the number of police officers by as much as possible. He also outlined that there was a focus on helping to facilitate the reporting of crimes which are currently underreported such as sexual assault and domestic abuse.

The Committee asked about the issues of reporting crime and the problem of getting through to the police via the 101 service.

The Deputy PCC outlined how there had been sustained pressure on the police with an increase in the number of 999 and 101 calls.

The Committee asked the Deputy PCC about the measures being taken to tackle the problem of speeding in rural communities which was a significant concern for Members.

The Deputy PCC highlighted that he was well aware of this within his role as a district councillor in the Forest of Dean. It was outlined how a strategy of enforcement and engagement with partners was key to reduce instances. Inspector Ellson outlined that a report was circulated to Members about the specific enforcement measures for the District.

Due to time constraints, the Chair closed this item. The Deputy PCC undertook to answer any questions that are sent to him via email.

The Chair thanked the Deputy PCC and Inspector Ellson for attending and for providing an update to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

The Committee NOTED the presentation given by the Deputy PCC.

OS.137 **Financial, Council Priority and Service Performance Report - 2021-22 Quarter 3**

The Chief Executive, opened the item and provided some updates on items and targets within departments

It was noted that Q3 had seen improvements in a number of areas such as call waiting times and the processing of benefit claims. It was also noted some departments such as planning were seeing improvements and that areas like food hygiene inspections are expected to be back to target in Q4.

The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the financial section of the report to the Committee.

It was outlined how the financial position of the Council had reduced from Q2 with a £165,000 underspend in Q2 being reduced to £18,000 as the Council's income had slowed from areas like car parking.

It was noted that some Covid-19 financial support had been provided to the Council although this was £127,000 less than expected in Q1. However, additional support was being provided for the Council Tax Rebate from central government.

In summary, it was noted that the end of year forecast for the budget surplus had reduced from £173,000 to £47,000.

The Committee wished to know more about the reduction of food hygiene inspections.

The Group Manager for Resident Services explained that there had been a reduction due to recruitment issues but these had been resolved. It was further noted that this had not impacted Health and Safety inspections.

The Committee asked about the issue of changing places and how Tetbury was not included within the proposed list of sites. The Leader of the Council outlined the commitment to provide for suitable places within The Cotswolds and for officers to examine any proposed sites within Tetbury.

The Committee raised the issue of affordable housing within the district and specifically the Kemble Community Gardens site. The Leader of the Council explained that whilst the site had not been ruled out geographical challenges were causing delays.

A briefing note for the Committee on delays in Kemble from officers was offered and deemed appropriate by the Chair.

The Committee noted the challenges presented to them such as fuel and wage costs and that they will have an impact on the Council's financial position.

The Committee asked about the provision of broadband services to rural communities and the £500,000 allocated for investment in the Cotswold District.

The Leader of the Council explained that negotiations were ongoing to ensure that the provision was in place. The Chief Executive added that the approach is market-led with the Council stepping in when this process does not deliver and needs further support.

The Chair commented about homelessness in light of aid being refused by some rough sleepers. It was noted by the Leader of the Council that this issue is one which cuts across other social challenges like drug addiction.

RESOLVED:

The Committee NOTED the report.

OS.138 Consultation on the Update of the Council's Corporate Plan (2020-2024)

The Chief Executive introduced this item to the Committee which included a copy of the current Corporate Plan and the draft update to it.

It was outlined how the plan was being revisited to ensure focus on the key priorities of the Council.

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A final draft would be presented to Cabinet for consideration and then presented to approval Annual Council for approval in May 2022.

The Leader of the Council added that this would be provide officers with direction and ensure delivery of the priorities going forward up to 2024.

The Committee asked about additional information within the table of actions for specific measures taken for each of the priorities. In addition, feedback was requested for Cotswold's Let's Chat and Cotswold New Start.

This undertaking was given from the Chief Executive regarding feedback. It was also explained that the two documents presented would be merged into one version.

The Committee commented on the use of Crowdfunding and the total of £300,000 which had been raised, and wished to know the financial commitments from CDC to these projects. The Community Support Officer confirmed that the Council had committed £100,000.

The Chair asked about deadlines and if the actions can be picked up in future.

The Chief Executive confirmed that work was ongoing to give dates to specific actions rather than having them listed as 'ongoing' within the plan. It was outlined to the Committee that affordable housing was the umbrella term for a number of different schemes as opposed to traditional social housing. It was also explained to the Committee that some housing had to be remodelled or demolished as it is no longer meeting local needs. .

The Committee raised the issue of Council Tax and multiple occupiers and how this applies to Cotswold.

The Deputy Chief Executive indicated that she would need to take this away for further examination with officers.

The Committee discussed how the plan might be reviewed for military veterans following the re-signing of the Military Covenant by Full Council, including health and wellbeing, housing and how the Council might collaborate with the military in future.

RESOLVED:

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and invited Members to raise queries with the Managing Director of Publica Jan Britton.

The Committee asked about any references to biodiversity and what actions are being taken in light of the departure of the biodiversity officers.

The Managing Director of Publica highlighted references within the document to biodiversity. The Business Manager for Development Management assured Members that the process for recruitment was underway for replacement officers.

The Chair asked about Publica and its process for delivery of the Council's priorities.

The Leader of the Council outlined the position of Publica within the organisation when it was set up. This was re-emphasised by the Managing Director of Publica and made it clear that Councillors set the policy for Publica to deliver.

A request was made by some Members for further guidance regarding the relationship with Publica. In the first instance this would be via a Member briefing session to be scheduled to assist new and/or existing Councillors in understanding how the relationship had matured since the signing of those documents in 2017. In addition a summary commissioning statement would be prepared.

RESOLVED:

The Committee **NOTED** the plan and requested that Cabinet considers the comments made.

OS.140 **Development Management Improvement Update**

As the Cabinet Member tasked with looking at this item the Cabinet Member for Economy introduced the item to the Committee. .

It was outlined how the planning department had been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and how a change in working practices was required.

The Group Manager for Resident Services supported by the Cabinet Member for Development Management provided an update on the areas where work was being undertaken to improve the work of the Planning Department.

This included areas such as customer satisfaction and increasing the efficiency of the Planning Department through the recruitment of planners.

The Committee asked about the resources within the Planning Department. They also asked about the qualifications officers hold when issuing official responses specifically in the Environmental Health Department.

The Group Manager for Resident Services explained that whilst recruitment of these officers has been challenging with the impact of Covid-19, there has been recruitment of trainee

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officers to help provide capacity. The sign-off procedure utilised before official planning responses are given was also outlined to the Committee.

The Committee asked about the number of invalid applications that are received by the Planning Department.

It was explained by the Business Manager for Development Management that a system of validation checklists was being introduced to reduce the number of applications arriving which were invalid.

The Chair asked for information around validation feedback and the number of applications being received that turn out to be invalid.

The Chair then indicated to the Committee that the 3 hour time limit had been reached and a vote was required to continue proceedings beyond 3 hours.

Voting Record

7 for, 0 against, 2 absent

The Committee reaffirmed the key role of the Planning Department in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. It also asked to receive information on the trends in the movement of staff coming to and leaving the planning department.

RESOLVED:

The Committee **NOTED** the presentation.

OS.141 **Quarterly Digest (including County Matters)**

The Chair invited Councillor Ray Brassington as a member of the Police and Crime Panel to run through some key points of the minutes of the meeting of the Police and Crime Panel which was held on 4th February 2022

Councillor Ray Brassington outlined to the Committee how the increase in staff pay would help with the recruitment in areas like the 101 service and that the pledge on the increase in the number of officers by the Police and Crime Commissioner came under scrutiny during this meeting.

The Chair also outlined the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Winter Sustainability Plan for Urgent and Emergency Care review which was to be discussed on the 8th March.

OS.142 **Work Plan 2021/22 and Executive Forward Plan**

There was nothing to change on the Work Plan

No items for scrutiny were identified from the Executive Forward Plan.

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The Chair reminded Members that a Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan meeting would take place on 23rd March.

The Chair reminded Members of the additional Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 26th April 2022, which will be a single item meeting to consider the Leisure Services Contract and make recommendations to Cabinet.

It was noted following the conclusion of the meeting that a response from South West Ambulance Foundation Trust had been received following a letter from the Chair on behalf of the Committee.

The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm

Chair

(END)