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Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26/April2022



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting held of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 26 April 2022.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews (Chair)
Gina Blomefield
Claire Bloomer
Patrick Coleman

Gary Selwyn
Roly Hughes
Richard Norris
Ray Theodoulou

Nigel Robbins
Nikki Ind

Officers present:

Rob Weaver – Chief Executive
Jenny Poole - Deputy Chief Executive
Angela Claridge – Director of Governance and Development
Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operations and Enabling
John Hyde – Programme Manager
Scott Williams – Business Manager - Contracts
Caleb Harris – Democratic Services
Wayne Smith - Democratic Services

OS.143 Apologies

There were no apologies

OS.144 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members present

OS.145 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest for the Committee to note

OS.146 Minutes

The Chair stated that consideration of the minutes of the meeting of 1st March 2022 would be held over until the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26th May 2022.

OS.147 Chair's Announcements

There were no Chair's Announcements

There were no Public Questions

OS.149 **Member Questions**

There were no Member Questions

OS.150 **Discretionary Funding Policy - Energy Council Tax Rebate**

The Chair addressed the meeting and advised that he was content that there had been no substantive change since the policy had been reviewed by O&S and therefore its decision to waive the right to Call-In of this decision should stand, allowing the policy to be acted upon immediately following the Cabinet decision without any further Call-In consideration.

The Officer presented the policy that included the proposed criteria for entitlement to payments from the Discretionary Fund

The Committee noted that the report had been brought to Overview and Scrutiny to enable the committee to consider the proposed eligibility criteria of the Discretionary Scheme.

The Committee noted that this report would focus on the Discretionary scheme, for which, the Council had been awarded £152,850

The Committee welcomed the scheme as a serious attempt to focus on those that were hard to reach, and suggested support groups that could help to contact eligible people including Town & Parish Clerks Citizens Advice Bureau and other charitable trusts. The officer confirmed that work was already underway to contact all of these support groups.

The Committee commented that the eligibility criteria appeared to be complex and may be difficult to administer. The officer agreed that the scheme was relatively complex but the proposed eligibility for the support would prioritise relieving hardship.

The Committee queried how potential recipients (especially those without web access) would find out about the scheme. The officer confirmed that the Council's comms team was working to promote the scheme and a leaflet had been included with every council tax bill

The Committee commented that those without a bank account would find it difficult to receive payment. The officer confirmed paper applications would be available for those without web access and recipients without a bank account would be sent a barcode that could be taken to a Post Office for cash payment.

The Committee queried if it was possible to reduce the eligibility for E-H Council Tax households and include/increase A-D Council Tax households. The officer confirmed that the Council could chose to extend eligibility to A-D households to provide an addition to the mandatory £150 council tax rebate. However, the size of the fund available would mean that

the Council would be administering thousands of small value payments which would have less impact than the proposed scheme.

The Committee noted that as the Discretionary Scheme closes at the end of November and eligible households needed to be identified as quickly as possible, and asked if the number of Direct Debit payers had been identified. The officer confirmed that 67% of Council households pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit. Those eligible for Mandatory Scheme payments had already been identified and work would begin to identify those eligible for Discretionary Scheme payments will begin once the eligibility criteria had been agreed

The Committee noted that there was an initial risk that insufficient funding would be available, but projection modelling now indicated there may a small surplus.

The Committee commented that, should there be a surplus, consideration should be given to providing additional support for heating to eligible groups. The officer confirmed that, should there be a surplus, an options report will be brought back to agree how this should be utilised.

RESOLVED: The Committee has considered the eligibility criteria as set out in Annex A, provided feedback to the Cabinet for the consideration on 9th May 2022, and agrees to waiver call-in arrangements for this item following Cabinet consideration on 9 May 2022, subject to there being no fundamental change to the recommendation.

Voting Record

For 10, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 0,

OS.151 Active Cotswolds Programme Update

The Officer presented the Active Cotswold Programme that had the three aims to provide an Active Environment, a Healthier District and Connected Communities

- The Active Environment work stream has focussed on a sustainable transport strategy, the provision of cycle and walking infrastructure across the District including utilising former railway routes and an assessment of the Kemble to Cirencester public transport provision.
- The Healthier District work stream had developed the Leisure Management options appraisal that was being considered later in the meeting and making services more digitally accessible to residents.
- The Connected Community work stream had engaged with the public to assess digital accessibility utilising the Digibus around the District.

The Committee welcomed Active Cotswold Programme Update and commended the wider brief to promote Active Lifestyles, including facilitating cycling and walking, rather than just providing fitness centres.

The Committee commented that the Tetbury to Kemble line had not been mentioned in the work looking at former railways despite it being promoted by many support groups within the

town, and asked if the playing pitch review included the new rugby club that was being built in the town.

The Officer stated that more work was being completed on the development of cycle routes that included the Tetbury to Kemble line.

The Committee noted that the development of cycling routes were designed to both promote healthy lifestyles and improve green access to towns for shopping, leisure and employment.

The Committee noted that the improvements to walking and cycling facilities within the Cotswold Water were grouped in one area and future work would be more widespread.

RESOLVED: The Committee reviewed overall progress on the programme

OS.152 Options Appraisal of Leisure and Culture Management Arrangements

The Officer presented the Options Appraisal and summarised the proposal

The Committee noted the Options Appraisal of Leisure and Cultural Management Arrangements and its recommendations

The Committee noted that the “locally focussed” reference applied to the management approach being closer to that of the Council, rather than describing the cultural approach of the museum or its displays.

The Committee commented that the ‘Leisure Only’ option (i.e. without the Museums) was not offered, although the ‘Culture Only’ option had subsequently been soft market tested. The officer stated that the details of a ‘Leisure Only’ option was not available when the initial options appraisal had been developed.

The Committee commented that the manner in which success was achieved should be considered in any decision making as the report did not currently identify that the success of the museum had been widely attributed to a talented, dynamic curator.

The Committee commented that care should be taken with Council owned assets/buildings, to ensure these were not given away if an external contractor was chosen.

The Committee commented that there is provision for an extension to the current contract and that a robust negotiation process would be required to ensure a good settlement is delivered if this option is taken.

The Committee commented that when the current contract was agreed the Council’s leisure centres were the principle facilities in Cirencester, but that there are now a number of similar facilities and it was important that the Council’s facilities should remain a preferred option. The officer agreed that the leisure market was now more challenging particularly in Cirencester, but that the swimming pool remained a valued community facility and public areas

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and changing facilities at the centre were also being maintained and refreshed. The officer also stated that ensuring the attractiveness of dual use facilities was more difficult, however there were currently good relationships with the management of each of the dual use facilities.

The Committee welcomed the decision to undertake a second evaluation with criteria that gave a higher consideration to the costs involved in delivering each option, rather than just considering whether the option would deliver against the Council's identified outcomes. The Committee noted that the second evaluation indicated that the cost of delivering the services was significantly less if an External Contractor provided them, compared to either the In House, or the LATC/NPDO option.

The Committee commented that the drafting of the service contract was key to ensuring that the External Contractor clearly understood the expectations and service standards of the Council and that they were able to deliver them.

The Committee commented that the Council understood the need to share risk with an External Contractor, as this was now commonly done, however it did not want to be left to pick up the pieces if the contract requirements were not met and the service failed. The drafting of the final service contract would be key to avoiding this.

RESOLVED: The committee considered the outcomes of the Leisure and Culture Management Option Appraisal and provided feedback to Cabinet and Council as part of the decision making process.

OS.153 Quarterly Digest

There were no issues arising from the Quarterly Digest to consider

OS.154 Executive Forward Plan

There were no additional areas for inclusions in the Executive Plan

The Meeting commenced at 4.00pm and closed at 6.00pm

Chair

(END)

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