

Cabinet
04/July2022



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 4 July 2022.

Councillors present:

Rachel Coxcoon
Andrew Doherty
Mike Evemy

Jenny Forde
Joe Harris - Chair
Juliet Layton

Lisa Spivey

Officers present:

Angela Claridge – Director for Governance
Jan Britton – Managing Director, Publica
Frank Wilson – Group Finance Director, Publica
Paul James, Economic Development Lead
Andrew Turner - Business Manager for Assets and Council Priorities
James Brain - Forward Planning Manager

Observers:

Councillors Stephen Andrews, Gary Selwyn

11 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Dale.

Apologies were received from Officers, Rob Weaver, Chief Executive and Jenny Poole, Deputy Chief Executive.

12 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from councillors

There were no declarations of interest from officers

13 Minutes

The Deputy Leader Councillor Evemy stated:

Minute 8 (para 3) “The Council noted that Ubico had been approached had but was currently unable to provide this service” should read, “The Council noted that Ubico had been approached ~~had~~ but was currently unable to provide this service”, and (para 4) “...the annual cost had increased by £13,000 which was not been included in the current budget” should read, “...the annual cost had increased by £13,000 which *had* not been included in the current budget”

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RESOLVED: Subject to the amendments being made, the Cabinet agreed the minutes of the meeting of the 060622 were approved as a correct record

Voting Record – For 6, Against 0, Abstentions 1, Absent 1,

14 Chair's Announcements

The Chair stated that the Stars and Stripes was flying from the Trinity Road flagpole to recognise American Independence Day and the close ties that the Cotswolds had with the USA.

A group of Councillors and Officers had attended the LGA Conference and returned inspired with ideas and shared learning.

Michael Gove had announced a 2 year settlement for councils that would enable improved financial planning.

A new Local Government Office had been established by the Government

Directly Elected Mayors continue to be appointed across the country however this was not considered to be a good fit for Gloucestershire.

15 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

16 Member Questions

There were no Member questions

17 Old Station - interim update and request for funding

The purpose of the report was to seek agreement to fund the production of design options and the preparation of a business case on the Old Station Building and the Old Memorial Hospital Cottages, and to use the Old Station as a case study in the Historic England project to develop a climate risk mitigation framework. The business case to be considered by Cabinet in October 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report stating that the buildings had fallen into disuse and disrepair since being closed in 1965, and the report was a first step to bringing these historically important heritage assets back into use.

The Cabinet noted that the Council would be working in partnership with Historic England who were committed to preserving and repurposing historic buildings across the country, and this would hopefully enable the project to move forward in a timely manner.

The Cabinet welcomed the initiative and the intention to bring the grade-two listed buildings back into use after such a long period of decline, and recognised the efforts of the Councillors and Officers who had previously contributed to moving this initiative forward to this point.

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The Cabinet noted the important contribution that the independent 'Living Memory Historical Association' made to the overall museum and heritage offering of Cirencester and the Cotswolds, and stated that further enquiries would be made to determine how this could be brought within the Council's museum service.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet agreed to allocate funding of up to £16,500 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the development of design options and preparation of a business case on the Old Station Building and the Old Memorial Hospital Cottages for consideration by Cabinet in October 2022 and to support participation in the Historic England project to be a case study for creating a climate risk framework.

Voting History – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1,

18 Green Economic Growth Strategy Update - Six Monthly Update

The purpose of the report was to update Cabinet on the progress in delivering the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and provided context for the focus on Economic Development and highlighted examples from across the District including: the Royal Agricultural University, town centre regeneration, the Applied Digital Skills Centre, development of the former Mitsubishi site and the development of disabled access changing places.

The Cabinet noted that the disabled access changing places located within commercial sites that charged admission, would remain accessible free of charge for those that needed to use them.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet noted the progress in delivering the Green Economic Growth Strategy.

19 Submission of Investment Plan for UK Shared Prosperity Funding

The purpose of the report was to seek agreement for the Year 1 projects and Year 2 & 3 key areas of focus which will be included in the Council's Local Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and to agree delegations to enable sign off of the final plan before submission and progression with projects requiring expenditure in 2022/23.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report stating that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund of approximately £1m that partially replaced former European funding, would be allocated over three years. In the first year, approximately £100,000 would be provided, with a further £220,000 in year two, and the remainder in year three.

Further details of how the allocation of funds in year one would be utilised were provided and it was confirmed that these would be in line with the Council's three key priorities.

The Cabinet noted that a small part of the funding would be used to provide an additional resource (across the three Publica Councils) to enable the detailed work, required for each item of funding, to be completed.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet agreed to:

- support the inclusion of the projects, interventions and indicative allocations listed in this report in the Council's Local Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund,

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- delegate authority for the final decision on the evaluation of projects and interventions to be included, and approval of the Local Investment Plan submission to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation,
- agree a variation and pay Publica the £20,000 revenue allocation from the UKSPF for the Local Investment Plan preparation, the application of which is to be approved by the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation
- agree that 4% of the fund is used for administration of the Programme, with the total sum of £40,000 over the life of the project being paid to Publica to employ a shared UK SPF Programme Manager, to monitor and manage project progress and undertake the required reporting,
- delegate authority for the award of contracts to consultants/contractors to deliver projects for delivery in 2022/23 to the Group Manager - Property and Regeneration in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and the Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation.

Voting Record – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1,

20 Financial, Council Priority and Service Performance Report - 2021/22 - Quarter Four

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance and to provide information on the Council's financial position.

In the absence of the Chief Executive, and the Deputy Chief Executive, the Director for Governance introduced the report and provided examples of the council's priorities and performance including:

- the success of the Flood Warden volunteers scheme that had been attracted 6 members from towns and parishes
- parking enforcement that had been brought back 'in house' from 1st March
- the success of the Town and Parish Forums held at Moreton and Cirencester that had attracted 29 and 14 participants respectively with further Forums taking place on 5th and 12th July.
- the successful partnership working with 'Electric Blue Charging' who were supporting the Council's application for partial Government funding for the installation of 20 charging connections (10 EVCPs) across Bourton-on-the-Water, Cirencester and Moreton-in-Marsh.
- Crowdfund Cotswolds being put forward for a number of awards.
- securing £130,000 from Gloucestershire County Council to support vulnerable families with supermarket vouchers and help with energy and utility bills
- although there had been concerns over the performance of the Development Control & Planning (DC&P) department this had stabilised and improved over the past few months, although the recruitment and retention of Planning Officers remained challenging for the Council, and all other Council's across the country.
- overall customer service satisfaction was high with 95% of customer responding positively to telephone services.

The Group Finance Director, Publica reiterated the improvements made in Q1 of the current year and added that Benefits processing had also improved.

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The Cabinet noted that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) data that compared CDC's performance against other Councils of similar size and demographic did not always show like for like performance for exactly the same period and was therefore of limited use.

The Cabinet noted the Council's key performance indicators were being reviewed through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that they provided an appropriate, accurate and timely assessment of the performance of the Council.

The Committee noted that the Planning Advisory Service had undertaken an independent review of the DC&P service across the 3 Councils. Their report had indicated that increasing the Extension of Time Mechanism (used extensively by nearly all other councils), would significantly improve the Council's DC&P service.

The Committee noted that the end-to-end planning application process was being assessed to identify parts of the process (e.g. early validation, communication with applicants) that could be handled by well-trained, qualified support officers. This would leave more complex work requiring professional judgement to be handled by fully qualified, experienced Planning Officers. This approach would also enable the Council to produce a "home-grown" pool of future Planning Officers, rather than competing with the private sector.

The Cabinet noted that the Parking Enforcement service had been brought back in-house successfully and a less 'authoritarian' and more 'ambassadorial' approach would be taken with future management of parking.

Finance

In the absence of the Deputy Chief Executive, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced this part of the report, summarised the Council's financial performance for 2021-2022 and drew the Cabinet's attention to some key highlights including:

- The Council had reported a net annual underspend against budget of £64,384
- Income from car parking had reduced by 75% (£749,000) against budget (due to the effects of the pandemic), although this was partially offset by a Government grant of £245,225
- Income from garden waste annual subscriptions had increased by £156,000 above budget and licensing income had increased and was £54,000 above budget
- Recycling income had also increased and was £252,000 above budget and bulky waste income had also increased to £54,000 above budget.
- The rental income from the Dyer Street property that had previously been paid to a repair and maintenance reserve, was now being recognised as income into the general fund of £119,000.
- The Ubico contract that provides the Council's Environmental Services had delivered an underspend of £401,000, however Ubico's additional chargeable costs of £555,000 (due to the effects of the pandemic), had led to a net overspend of £154,000
- The Publica contract, that included the majority of staffing costs, had also delivered an under-spend of £77,803.
- Discretionary pension payments, paid to the Gloucestershire Local Government Pension Scheme, has also been £111,000 less than budgeted.
- The Government had provided a grant of £377,000 (excluding the income compensation scheme) to cover additional costs incurred due to the pandemic.
- Details of other finance, budget and reserve items were also presented

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RESOLVED: The Cabinet reviewed overall progress on the Council priorities, service delivery and financial performance for 2021-22 Q4

- approved the transfer of £90,000 from the New Burdens Fund Reserve to the Council's Priorities Fund (as set out in paragraph 4.41 of the report)
- noted the other movements in earmarked reserves set out in paragraph 4.43 of the report.

Voting Record – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1,

21 Local Plan Update Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground and Planning Reforms

The purpose of this report was to note feedback and report on the recent Local Plan consultation, note planning reforms and expected consultations later in the year, approve the Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground and note progress on the Local Plan and related projects to date.

The Cabinet Member for Change and Forward Planning introduced the report stating that the statement of common ground had been established across all Gloucestershire authorities to ensure cross-border working is adopted where this makes sense.

The Cabinet noted that not all Gloucestershire authorities were in complete agreement with the approach and Tewkesbury Council in particular had expressed some reservations. The Forward Planning Manager stated that the statement of common ground instilled a duty to cooperate, but not a duty to agree. It was therefore still legitimate and useful to capture the areas of agreement and difference.

The Cabinet noted the feedback and responses from the spring planning consultation, and that further consultation would take place in the winter for presentation to Cabinet before the 2023 Election purdah.

The Cabinet noted that the North Meadow Special Area of Conservation Mitigation Strategy remains outstanding and continues to prevent approval of planning applications in a number of Wards. It is still unclear when this will be completed.

The Cabinet noted the proposals in the Regeneration and Levelling Up Bill which include changes to the planning system that may effectively centralise planning to Whitehall without either public or Parliamentary consultation.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the findings from the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation set out in ANNEX A, and the proposed changes in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill as summarised in ANNEX B,

- approved the Draft Statement of Common Ground set out in ANNEX C,
- noted the Local Plan milestones presented at ANNEX D and
- noted the Cirencester Projects update in ANNEX E.

Voting Record – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1,

22 Legal Services Commissioning Review

The purpose of the report was to consider the outcome of a commissioning review of the Council's legal service.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report stating that a review of the Council's Legal service had been conducted with submissions being sought from Your Legal (the legal team currently serving CDC, West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean Councils) and One Legal (a legal partnership currently serving other councils across Gloucestershire). An independent 'fit for purpose' review was also conducted to determine the future Legal Service needs of the Council.

The Cabinet noted that Your Legal and One Legal had made presentations and been scored against a set of key requirements with 30% weighted to cost and 70% to quality. Further representation were available in response to questions raised by the selection panel.

The Cabinet noted that the One Legal proposal excluded West Oxfordshire Council and did not include indicative costs for their service. This would be determined by the completion of a three year business case. One Legal also declined to commit to the provision of a Deputy Monitoring Officer.

The Cabinet noted that, whichever service provider was selected, a review of Legal Services was required to ensure appropriate systems and processes are used to deliver an optimised, efficient and effective service in the future.

The Cabinet noted that approximately the same amount of Legal work was currently being completed for each Council, however the current funding agreement (where each Council pays the salaries and on-costs of its Legal staff) leads to a disparity in the actual financial contribution made by each Council.

The Cabinet noted that a salary review had been conducted across the Legal teams in each of the three Councils and salary differences had been levelled out.

RESOLVED: The Cabinet considered the evaluation of the proposals from Your Legal Services and One Legal, agreed the Deputy Chief Executive's proposal that the Council's legal service continued to be provided by Your Legal Service, supported a review of the service for economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and supported the formalisation of the shared service under a Collaboration Agreement and Section 101 agreements.

Voting Record – For 7, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1,

23 Schedule of Decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and/or Individual Cabinet Members

The purpose of this report was to review the decisions taken by the leader of the Council and/or individual Cabinet Members.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and other Members

24 Issue(s) Arising from Overview and Scrutiny and/or Audit

There were no issues arising from Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit Committee.

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The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.52 pm

Chair

(END)