



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 21 June 2022.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews - Chair
Gina Blomefield
Patrick Coleman

Gary Selwyn – Vice Chair
Roly Hughes
Richard Norris

Nikki Ind
David Cunningham

Officers present:

Philippa Lowe – Business Manager, Localities
Hannah Fountain - Sustainable Transport Officer
Stuart Rawlinson – Business Manager, Resources Data and Growth
Jan Britton – Managing Director, Publica
Michelle Burge – Chief Accountant
Phil Shaw – Business Manager, Development and Sustainability
Angela Claridge – Director for Governance
Caleb Harris – Democratic Services
Wayne Smith – Democratic Services

Observers:

Councillors Mike Evely, Juliet Layton and Julia Judd

OS.167 Apologies

No apologies had been received.

It was noted that verbal confirmation of Councillor Robbins absence had been received prior to the meeting.

OS.168 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

OS.169 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from members

There were no declarations of interest from officers

OS.170 Minutes

OS 164 (para 2) "...Olympic Games in Chipping Camden..." should read, "... Olimpick Games in Chipping Campden ..."

OS 166 Councillor Blomfield, should read, Councillor Blomefield
The time stamp should read, "The Meeting commenced at 16.00 and closed at 17.52"

RESOLVED: The Committee resolved that, subject to the amendments being included, it was agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting from 24TH May 2022

Voting Record – For 8, Against 0, Abstentions 1, Absent 1

OS.171 Chair's Announcements

There were no Chair's Announcements

OS.172 Public Questions

There were no Public Questions

OS.173 Member Questions

There were no Member Questions.

OS.174 Called-in Decisions

There were no Called-In Decisions.

OS.175 Cotswold Water Park Project Update

The purpose of this report was to provide an overview of the Cotswold Water Park Project and an update on progress.

The Chair temporarily adjourned the meeting for five minutes to enable the officer's presentation to be linked to the display screens.

Following the meeting being resumed, the Business Manager for Localities, Philippa Lowe introduced the Cotswold Water Park Project Overview that provided an update on the work that had been carried out.

The Committee noted that a strategic multi-agency approach had been taken to encompass the multiple boundaries, and definitions that applied to what was known as 'The Cotswold Water Park' (CWP). The largest of these being Natural England's, 'National Landscape' definition, through to smaller individual 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest'.

The Committee noted that Ecological and Climate Change emergencies had been declared by Councils, and the CWP was considered to be a place that could play a significant part in addressing these issues.

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The Committee noted that with an increase in the number of visitors using the CWP following the easing of the lockdown, there had been an increase in the number of the incidents of anti-social behaviour and littering.

The Committee noted that there was a focus on funded projects that could be developed, implemented, and delivered by December 2022, using available resources. Testing and learning as this work progresses would inform current and future priorities and project phases.

The Committee noted the 4 strategic elements of the project were: Nature, Communication and Education, Tackling Wider Issues and Active and Sustainable Travel. A summary of what had been achieved within the first 3 of these elements was provided by the Business Manager, Localities, and the Sustainable Transport Officer, Hannah Fountain provided an overview of the Sustainable and Active Travel element of the project, what had already been delivered and what further work was planned.

The Committee asked how the mandate for the project had been initially put together and whether it had been approved at Committee. The Business Manager for Localities confirmed that, although the project had not been to Cabinet, the priorities had been agreed at early partnership group meetings, and these had been developed through the Council's project management processes.

The Committee commented that a number of transport initiatives that could have been included in the project, had been missed (e.g. the canal, the Fairford/Lechlade railway, the Thames Pathway etc). The Business Manager, Localities stated that the scope of the current phase of the project extended to funded projects that could be completed within a defined timescale (December 2022), and further initiatives could be included in future consultations and considered in future phases once funding had been identified and secured.

The Committee noted that the project had been externally funded and not directly funded by Cotswold District Council (CDC), although the Council had enabled the funding to be focussed on priority areas.

The Committee noted that the project had worked in partnership with the Cotswold Lakes Trust and with consideration for their plans and priorities, in order to maximise funding opportunities and ensure work and effort was not duplicated.

The Committee noted the £130,000, 'Contain Outbreak Management Fund' (COMF) funding that had been provided through the County Council, and that this was held separately from CDC budgets and accounts. Regular accounting reports had been returned to ensure the funding was utilised appropriately on the agreed priorities.

The Committee noted that the Ward Member for Siddington and Cerney Rural, Councillor Every welcomed the project update and thanked the officers, and Councillor Layton (the lead Member for the project) for the work that had been, and will be, completed for Ward residents within the CWP and for visitors outside of the district.

The Committee noted the Ward Member for South Cerney Village, Councillor Layton's update on the successful partnership groups that had worked well together to deliver such important improvements. A detailed personal view of the positive impact the project had local residents of South Cerney and the Cotswolds was also presented.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the overall progress on the project.

OS.176 Performance Task and Finish Group Update

The purpose of this item was to receive a verbal update on the work of the Performance Task and Finish Group.

The Business Manager, Resources Data and Growth, Stuart Rawlinson provided a verbal update on the progress of the Performance Task and Finish Group and confirmed that the group had been established to look at the Council's key performance indicators to ensure they are fit for purpose. The group had met with Members of the Cabinet in order to understand their priorities and what data and information should be gathered and presented.

The Committee commented that the next agenda item was to consider the Council's performance for the previous quarter. This information had been captured using the current set of performance measures, and this would be a perfect time to assess whether these measures should be retained, changed or replaced.

RESOLVED: The Committee noted the work of the Performance Task and Finish Group.

OS.177 Q4 2021-22 Performance Report

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with progress on the Council's priorities and service performance, and to provide information on the Council's financial position.

The Director for Governance introduced the report stating that it provided a list of the corporate priorities and detailed data sets of the Council's services' performance against those priorities for the Fourth Quarter from January – March 2022.

The Committee commented that as financial performance of the Finance and the Development Management and Planning department were of particular interest these would be discussed individually after the Committee had discussed performance measures of any other services.

Priorities and Performance

The Committee noted that 'Electric Blue Charging' was 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.

The Committee commented that volunteers for Flood Warden had been found from 4 Town and Parish Councils, and enquired how many had been expected to volunteer across the Cotswolds. The Director for Governance stated that the number was not currently available, but would be provided for Members at the next Committee meeting.

The Committee commented that the Town and Parish Forums at Moreton and Cirencester had attracted 29 and 14 participants respectively, and enquired whether more detail could be provided of the numbers of Towns and Parishes represented, the number of participants from each one, and whether this was in line with the number expected. The Director for Governance stated that as Town and Parish Council consultation had not taken place for some

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time it was not known how popular the new forums would be. The number of parishes attending was not available, but would have been captured and would be provided for

Members at the next Committee meeting. Further Town and Parish Forums would be taking place on 5th and 12th July with around 20 attendees already booked into each event.

Finance

The Chief Accountant Michelle Burge summarised the Council's financial performance for 2021-2022 and drew Members attention to some key highlights and invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee noted:

- The Council was reporting 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, were also £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 and budget items were also presented..

The Committee noted that the increase in green waste income did not appear to have been as a result of easing the policy limiting the number of green bins serving a property. The Director for Governance confirmed definitive reply would be obtained and provided to Members at the next Committee Meeting.

The Committee requested that analysis of the actual costs incurred by the Council due to the pandemic (e.g. additional costs, lost revenue) is calculated and set against the total grants provided by the Government, in order to determine the true impact.

Development Control & Planning

Business Manager Development and Sustainability, Phil Shaw presented a comprehensive assessment of the previous issues that the Development Control and Planning (DC&P) service had experienced (particularly the recruitment and retention of officers), the current month on month improving service performance, and the steps that are being taken to return the service to full strength and efficiency.

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The Committee noted that the quarterly reporting of processed applications processed means that, as some applications can take between 8 and 13 weeks to reach a decision and so sometimes cross different reporting periods, they appear to have failed timescales.

The Committee noted that ensuring the validation of applications had been a particular focus and reports were now available showing: the number of applications received, the number that were valid, the reasons for applications not being valid, the submitting individual or agent, and the agents submitting the highest and lowest number of invalid applications. This report had revealed that, of 1,215 applications submitted between January and May 2022, 495 were not valid when submitted, and of these, 352 were submitted by planning agents (and only 143 by individuals).

The Committee noted that the speed of registration of applications had improved with most applicants now being initially contacted within 5 days, with Case Officers contacting applicants within 10 days and with work in hand to roll out to further contact after the 25 day consultation periods. There were however still delays receiving responses from consultees

The Committee noted that a high percentage of recent applications that could not be delivered to time was due to delays in consultee responses (e.g. The Environment Agency, Natural England etc.), and this was beyond the control of the Planning Case Officers.

The Committee noted that the 3rd round of Development Management and Planning recruitment consultation was taking place and several staff that had joined in September 2021 had now left. Wider recruitment to fill 3.5 vacant planning posts was currently taking place that included £5,000 'golden hellos' to attract and retain applicants. In the meantime, agency staff had been appointed to maintain the service. The recruitment market continued to be challenging and it was still difficult for CDC and other Councils to compete with the private sector for Planning Officers and Specialist staff.

The Committee noted that the Planning Advisory Service had undertaken an independent review of the DC&P service across the 3 Councils. Their report indicated that by increasing the Extension of Time Mechanism (used extensively by nearly all other councils) and taking a less risk averse approach to if and when consultees were consulted the DC&P could improve its service delivery from bottom to top quartile.

The Committee noted that any change in approach would need political approval, and the Planning Advisory Service would need to present and discuss the proposal with Councillors in an appropriate setting.

The details of other Development Management and Planning initiatives were presented and discussed.

The Committee commented that it would be helpful if the report of open cases could identify inactive cases which had not been signed off, and of these, were identified to distinguish them from active open cases.

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

OS.178 **Quarterly Digest**

There were no items for the Committee to consider from the Quarterly Digest.

The Chair advised the Committee that the next Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be in July will be looking at the Acute Emergencies Services and the perceived reduction in suitable responses being achieved.

OS.179 **Work Plan 2022/23 and Executive Forward Plan**

The Chair advised the Committee that a possible amendment to the work plan should be considered, to convene an additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to spread the load of an increasingly full agenda. The 25th October had been suggested.

The Committee accepted that the additional meeting was required and also suggested the 18th October 2022 as a possible date along with an earlier start to the meeting.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Plan 2022/23 was noted.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.31 pm

Chair

(END)