



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 21 March 2023.

Councillors present:

Stephen Andrews (Chair)
David Cunningham
Gina Blomefield
Claire Bloomer

Gary Selwyn (Vice-chair)
Patrick Coleman
Richard Norris
Nikki Ind

Nigel Robbins

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property
and Regeneration

Stuart Rawlinson, Business Manager
Resources, Data and Growth
Ana Prelici, Democratic Services Officer

OS.241 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Roly Hughes.

OS.242 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

OS.243 Minutes

The Chair commended the minutes of the previous meeting, highlighting that they believed them to strike a good balance of political neutrality.

Members suggested an amendment to the minutes, on page seven;

“(c) The matter does not require a Full Council decision, that there are sufficient grounds to refer it to Council and a request is therefore made for it to be added to the next Council agenda”

Should read:

“(c) The matter does not require a Full Council decision, ~~that there are sufficient grounds to refer it to Council~~ and a request is therefore *not needed* for it to be added to the next Council agenda”

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RESOLVED: To approve the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting held on the 1st of February, subject to the amendments being made.

Voting record- For 6, abstentions 2, absent 1*

*Councillor Patrick Coleman arrived to the meeting after this item of business and therefore did not vote on the minutes.

OS.244 **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Claire Bloomer declared that she was a member of the Cirencester Food Pantry. The Chair advised that this interest did not explicitly relate to an agenda item, but welcomed any additional knowledge that came along with it.

OS.245 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair decided to take this item at the end of the meeting.

Although not on the agenda, Councillor Cunningham updated the Committee on the work of the Employment Policies Task and Finish Group at the Chair's Discretion. He stated that the body of work was larger than initially envisaged, and that the work had been finished but the recent industrial action had slowed the consultation process with trade unions down. An update will be provided early into the next political cycle.

The Chief Executive noted that this was the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the political cycle and thanked the committee for its work and robust scrutiny.

The Chair reciprocated this thought, and thanked members for their diligence. The Chair remembered the late Councillor Theodoulou, who had not sat on the Committee for the last year, but had done so for many years prior, providing salient commentary.

OS.246 **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

OS.247 **Member Questions**

There were no member questions.

OS.248 **Council Priority and Service Performance Report 2022-23 Q3 (30 minutes)**

The Chair highlighted that there were two aspects to the item, the Council Priority and Service Performance Report included in the report pack, and the Q3 Finance Performance Report, which had been circulated as part of the updated supplementary pack. The Chair therefore invited the Committee consider them separately.

Council Priority and Service Performance Report

The purpose of the item was to provide the committee with an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance.

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The Chief Executive introduced the report. The Chief Executive highlighted Local Government Association peer review which had taken place in October, and that the recommendations, such as performance indicators would be implemented in future reports. The Chief Executive highlighted the key findings of the report;

- Council tax collection was up 1% since the previous year but could still be impacted by the cost of living crisis.
- The call centre response times have improved despite an increase in complex calls.
- The council has completed the £150 Council Tax rebate programme, with £3.8m distributed, and an additional £135,000 under the discretionary scheme.
- The Council tax support scheme for the next financial year was approved by Cabinet in 2022.
- The Council continued to support the Homes for Ukraine Programme with 150 sponsors.
- Following the Legal Services review, the Phase 2 Service Review had been started with Cadence being appointed to assist strengthening the existing service.
- There were improvements in determination times for all application types.
- Severe weather towards the end of 2022 had caused challenges, notably related to waste collection.

Before inviting the committee to comment, the Chair reminded the committee of the pre-election period and the resultant need for the Committee to refrain from any political remarks.

The Committee asked for further detail regarding missed bins. The Chief Executive answered that this was caused by extreme weather, and were therefore not missed through any human error.

The Committee asked for a number of specific details, which the Chief Executive explained he would circulate following the details after the meeting;

- Are Habitat designations affecting the performance of 'other' types of planning applications disproportionately?
- Leisure centre breakdowns by ward/area.
- Could the Committee have an update on whether the Development Management team was still at full capacity in regard to staffing?
- Open Portal does not contain any information on Council tax support for those who are struggling, can this be included?
- Winter and summer sport assessment for playing pitches- has a response been received from Sport England?

The Committee congratulated David Morren on his work in his time as Interim Development Manager and asked what Publica's plans were for making this role permanent. The Chief Executive explained that Publica was recruiting an Assistant Director for Planning and Strategic Housing, and that once this person was in post, they would recruit a permanent Development Manager.

The Committee commented on the change of circumstances affecting Council tax support, as referenced in the report and wanted to know how the Council dealt with instances where individuals had been overpaid Council tax benefit. The Chief Executive explained the mechanism that used, and highlighted that each situation is dealt with on a case by case basis,

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for instance, setting up a payment plan to ensure that individuals are not put into a difficult situation if having to repay benefit.

The Committee discussed how other councils are used for benchmarking. The Chief Executive explained that only councils which were considered similar by use of comparators would be used, but was also open to looking at neighbouring authorities such as Wiltshire.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note overall progress on the Council priorities and service delivery for 2022-23 Q3.

Financial Performance Report Q3 2022/23

The purpose of the report was to set out the latest budget monitoring position for the 2022/23 financial year.

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report and explained that there had been a slight improvement in the financial position despite the pressures caused by inflation, though it was noted that the impact of these pressures had not changed, and significant pressures were expected around the Staff Pay Award. The Chief Finance Officer also stated that interest rates remained high but inflation was expected to fall according to independent forecasts.

The Chief Finance Officer reassured members regarding the recent collapse of Credit Suisse and Silicon Valley Bank, that the Council had no exposure to types of deposits which would be considered at risk following these events. The Bank of England had also issued a statement stating that the UK banking system remains safe, which the Chief Finance Officer made reference to.

Councillors asked whether a breakdown of car park charges could be provided, which the Chief Finance Officer committed to providing after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the financial position set out in this report.

OS.249 Task and Finish Group - Performance Management and Reporting (30 Minutes)

Councillor Coleman as Chair of the Task and Finish Group thanked the Business Manager for Resources, Data and Growth on their work on this.

The Business Manager introduced the item, highlighting that phase one had been undertaken, which identified quick fixes to the suite of indicators, and ensuring that all areas of the corporate plan were looked at.

Members discussed whether indicators on leisure centre use would be included, the Business Manager highlighted that this would be included in the recommendations to the incoming Cabinet, but the Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration added that the scope should be limited to areas within the Council's control.

Members asked that the incoming Chair look at the indicators upon completion of the work, to highlight a small number (around two or three) which would simplify the Committee's work in scrutinising performance.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- I. NOTE the update and endorse recommendations contained within

this report.

2. **RECOMMEND TO CABINET** to develop and adopt performance indicators related to the areas included at Section 2.6 of this report; and work with Overview and Scrutiny to develop a programme for Phase 2 of this review.

Voting Record- For 9, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1

OS.250 Update on Informal Work Planning Meeting (15 Minutes)

The purpose of the item was to provide an update from the informal work planning Meeting held on 1 of March for members who were not in attendance and to discuss and recommend the work plan to the incoming committee.

The Assistant Director for Properties and Regeneration, in their capacity as the Locality Lead, introduced the item. The Assistant Director summarised the meeting, explaining that a number of items were looked at including the scrutiny process, pre-decision scrutiny, a time limit on the length of meetings, and that the Committee underwent a thorough process in prioritising work plan items to recommend to the next committee in the new political cycle.

Pre-decision scrutiny was highlighted, as attendants at the informal meeting felt that if it had been in place, it could have prevented the recent call-in of a Cabinet decision. The Committee felt that pre-decision scrutiny was a positive step.

The Committee commented that the planning committee process for deciding which applications to consider was a worthwhile topic to review in the new year, and welcomed its inclusion on the work programme, but noted that this was up to the new Committee to decide on.

The Assistant Director advised that the incoming Committee in June should explore these topics in more detail, in order to look at topics such as heritage assets, which were mentioned at the meeting.

RESOLVED: To note the work planning meeting discussion and recommend the provisional work plan to the new Committee

Voting record For 8, Against 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 1*

*As Councillor Coleman had left the meeting at this point, he did not vote.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 5.30 pm

Chair

(END)