



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 11 July 2023.

Councillors present:

Gina Blomefield
David Cunningham
Angus Jenkinson
Michael Vann

Gary Selwyn
Tony Slater
Clare Turner
Helene Mansilla

Ian Watson

Officers present:

Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)
Michelle Burge, Chief Accountant

Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration
Ciaran Okane, Senior Procurement Business Partner
Kira Thompson, Election and Democratic Services Support Assistant

Observers:

Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

OS.261 Apologies

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Members, Officers and the public watching online.

The Chair invited the Committee Members to introduce themselves before proceeding.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that apologies received from Councillor Neill and Councillor Hughes

OS.262 Substitute Members

The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that Councillor Watson and Councillor Mansilla were the substitutes for the meeting.

OS.263 Declarations of Interest

There were none received from Members or Officers present.

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OS.264 **Minutes**

There were comments made regarding OS.254 regarding a briefing note which was to be circulated by the Chief Executive.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer indicated that the Director of Governance would take the briefing note away as an action. This note was subsequently circulated after the meeting.

There was also a point raised regarding OS.258 and an action to circulate the calculations of costings for planning applications.

It was noted that both of these responses would be included in the minutes of the meeting.

It was also clarified by the Senior Democratic Services Officer that the Constitution Working Group would be looking at the process of referring applications to Planning Committee as part of its work plan.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be confirmed as an accurate record.

Voting Record

6 For, 0 Against, 3 abstention

OS.265 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair addressed the Committee regarding the timings of the meetings, and asked for succinct questions and responses. The Committee noted that the Chair would intervene if necessary to keep to time.

It was also noted that it was important that Members read the documentation provided. The Chair apologised for the lateness of the arrival of the paper copies due to issues in the print room.

It was also confirmed that Councillor Angus Jenkinson was nominated as the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee representative, and Councillor Patrick Coleman was the substitute.

It was also noted that the Local Plan Item was removed from the Cabinet agenda due to further consultations being required, and it would be brought forward at a later date.

OS.266 **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

OS.267 **Member Questions**

There were no member questions.

The Economic Development Lead introduced the report and provided a background to the fund for the benefit of members.

It was noted the fund was £764,000 for the years 2024/25 for capital projects. The officer noted that the fund would be used to increase rural productivity and connectivity within the Cotswold District.

It was highlighted that this would include grants to businesses, village halls and community organisations, active travel, and cultural and heritage buildings.

The Gloucestershire authorities receiving funding are Cotswold, Tewkesbury, Stroud and Forest of Dean. The administration of funds would benefit from a common framework.

It was noted that there would be a joint procurement with Tewkesbury Borough Council and Forest of Dean to appoint a provider who would administer the funds on behalf of the authorities.

It was highlighted that Cabinet was being asked to endorse the overall strategy for the use of funds, it was also asking for the delegation of authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation to enter into a contract with a third party provider to administer the funds.

The Committee then made the following points in discussion of the item;

- There were questions around the monitoring of the 4% administration fee within the report and the makeup of the Assessment Panel. It was noted that the administration fee had been used to jointly fund a Project Manager, who was managing the fund and reporting requirements for CDC as well as FODDC and WODC. On the Assessment Panel, The Director of Governance would check to see how monitoring of the administration fee could be reported.
- There was a question in regards to the match funding. The Economic Development Lead clarified that advice had been sought for the funding amounts that would be offered for grants and the amount of match funding that would be suitable. The Cotswold Economic Advisory Group had advised on the grant funding range for businesses. On the question of match funding, it was noted that businesses would need to make a bigger capital commitment for projects than community organisations or active travel.
- There was a question about what the strategic plan was for developing The Cotswolds through this fund. It was noted by the Economic Development Lead and the Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration, that this was set out in the report for the submission to Government approved by [Cabinet on 7th November](#).
- There was a question around the criteria for the approval of applications. It was noted by the Economic Development Lead that there would be an evaluation framework created by the third party administration organisation. It was also highlighted that there would be flexibility in approving applications within the framework of rules set out by Government.

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- The Chair asked about the type of businesses and organisations applying under the Active Travel criteria. The Economic Development Lead highlighted that applications would come in from all routes including the County Council. The Assistant Director also noted that this would be under the Councils developing Sustainable Transport Strategy which is already identifying opportunities for infrastructure like cycle routes.
- The delegation in the recommendation was noted and there were questions regarding oversight.

RESOLVED: That the Committee NOTED the report

OS.269 **Review of the Cotswold District Local Plan Housing Requirement**

Following the Chair's Announcement, this item was not considered as it was no longer on the Cabinet Forward Plan.

OS.270 **Procurement and Contract Management Strategy - Draft for Consultation**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report.

It was noted that further updates from the Government were expected to follow. This meant that the strategy needed to be an interim update this year.

The Senior Procurement Officer, Ciaran Okane, addressed the Committee on the strategy.

The new strategy was required to be in line with new procurement regulations following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- The procurement strategy in the context of Publica's wider role within Cotswold District Council for providing services. Following a subsequent question about adding an explanation to the document, the Cabinet Member indicated that the request for additional clarity would be considered as part of the presentation or to the minutes of Cabinet and/or Council
- The inclusion of considering social value in procurements.
- The balance between considering environmentally sustainable procurement options and cost.
- Accountability with a need to hold providers to account.

The Chair summarised that it was a timely report, and noted that it was important that public money should always be managed carefully alongside delivering services to residents.

There were no recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but the Chair thanked the officer for the report.

RESOLVED: The Committee NOTED the report.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Evemy, introduced the report on behalf of the Leader.

The Director of Governance was then invited to introduce the report and the key points to Members.

It was noted that there was a lot of data to consider but it was important to monitor the performance of Publica who provided services on the Council's behalf.

It was highlighted that the current cost of living challenge was the main theme, as seen in the increase in call volumes, business rate challenges, inflation of costs. It was highlighted that the Cost of Living Working Group had been re-established in light of the ongoing pressures.

It was noted on page 43 that there has been significant improvement of Development Management and Planning and that this was a key example of the Council working with Publica and other partners to improve services.

It was noted that whilst the Council wished to help affected residents, this had to be balanced against the Council's financial challenges.

It was commented that the report mentions some previous Cabinet Members who held previous portfolios before the May 2023 District Elections. It was confirmed that this report was based on the information from that time, but it would be updated for the future performance reports.

A correction was also noted regarding the Changing Places Toilets in Cirencester Abbey Grounds from 'awaiting to be installed', to now being open.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- The current work of the Performance Task and Finish Group in examining key performance indicators.
- Affordable homes comparisons with Publica partner councils.
- The timetable for the installation of electric vehicle charging points, and the layout of the chargers for the public and council vehicles.
- The addition of contactless payment for public toilet facilities.

In response to questions regarding electric vehicle charging, it was highlighted that these were likely to be 7KW chargers, but that the Assistant Director would come back to the Chair to confirm this.

RESOLVED: The Committee NOTED the report and approved for it to go on to Cabinet.

The Chair handed over to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance to introduce the report.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and outlined that the report was referring to the management information of the finances on a revenue and a capital basis. It was noted that the Audit and Governance Committee had specific responsibilities for the accounts.

The following points were noted:

- It was highlighted that the 2022/23 budget approved in February 2022 was affected immediately by the invasion of Ukraine by Russian Forces. This changed budget assumptions and added a number of cost pressures such as rising fuel costs.
- It was also noted that the national pay award in 2022/23 was a 6% rise for Publica staff and 7% rise for Ubico staff in comparison to the 2.5% estimated.
- The Chief Accountant reinforced that the £1.2 million deficit was due to the increases in pay, fuel and energy costs. It was noted that these comparisons would have to be taken into consideration for the 2023/24 budget.
- It was also noted that there was a shortfall in car parking income, and a reduction in income from planning services and land charges.
- However, investment income had continued to perform well with rising interest rates, which led to a £510,000 favourable variable against the budget.
- It was noted in Annex C that there was an underspend in the capital programme of £1.3 million outlined which included a loan to Cottsway Housing, the purchase of vehicles through Ubico, and the changing places toilets scheme, which would be carried forward.
- The Committee was also informed in Section 3 (Table 3) of the General Fund closing balance which had been budgeted as £4.2 million and the outturn was now £1.7 million. This was partly due to the higher than budgeted deficit position and because of a transfer to the newly established Financial Resilience Reserve. There was also a £1.6 million budgeted transfer into the General Fund following the lump sum payment made to the pension fund in 2021 which provided capacity in the budget to increase the general fund.

There were comments made about the introduction of cashless parking and the link to the reduction of car parking income. It was also asked whether the higher cost had been factored in to electric vehicle charging points. The Deputy Leader outlined that the reduction was £24,000 which wasn't felt to be a material deterioration. It was also noted that the 2023/24 revenue was projected to grow without a change in the current tariff.

In response to the question on electric vehicle charging points, the Chief Accountant noted that the increase in energy costs would be counterbalanced by income from chargers.

It was noted for the benefit of new Members that the Medium Term Financial Strategy presented at Full Council looked ahead 4 financial years into the future whereas this report was retrospective. It was noted that with the £861,000 used to balance the 2023/24 budget from reserves, there was a High Risk Budgets report going to Cabinet on 17 July, which would make Members aware of the challenges ahead.

It was also noted that the Cabinet was working closely to deliver the savings needed alongside the Council's partners in Ubico and Publica.

It was commented that a simpler table of reserves might be useful for general reading. The Chief Accountant would take this away for future presentations.

The Committee entered into discussion on the following points:

- The allocation of money into specific funds.
- The future financial position of the Council and how it may increase its revenue and capital receipts.
- The constraints of income from central government.

The Committee asked about the question of the Green Bond and how this was accounted for. The Chief Accountant noted that this would be part of the report to the Audit and Governance Committee on the accounts. It was also noted that the funding could be seen on the Capital Programme as it was used for funding electric vehicle charging points and solar photovoltaic improvements to the Council Offices.

RESOLVED: That the Committee NOTED the report.

OS.273 **Review of Work Plan and Agenda items for September**

The Chair introduced this item and invited the Committee to comment. It was noted that Quarter One Service Performance Reports, Crime and Disorder, and the Review of Local Plan would be included on the Committees September agenda.

The Assistant Director noted that there were two additional items: the Performance Task and Finish Group, which was in regards to benchmarking performance statistics and Car Parking. The scope for car parking outlined by the previous Committee on car parking strategy, electric vehicle charge point implementation, the impact on local businesses, and looking at individual car parks if required.

There was a suggestion that a review of car parking, could be delayed to a later meeting but it was also noted that the expected increase in revenue would need to be scrutinised.

The Committee commented that the Local Plan item would need to be considered at a later meeting but it was not yet known when the report would be ready. It was highlighted that this item would need sufficient time for appropriate scrutiny. It was also noted by the Vice-Chair how pre-decision scrutiny had helped the Committee become more efficient, and the comments by the Chair regarding officer contribution were important to note.

The Meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.30 pm

Chair

(END)