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Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26/September2023



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 26 September 2023.

Councillors present:

Gina Blomefield – Chair
David Cunningham
Roly Hughes
Angus Jenkinson

Gary Selwyn – Vice-Chair
Dilys Neill
Tony Slater
Clare Turner

Jon Wareing
Clare Muir

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and
Chief Finance Officer
Caleb Harris, Senior Democratic Services
Officer

Claire Locke, Assistant Director for Property
and Regeneration
Jon Dearing, Assistant Director for Resident
Services
Angela Claridge, Director for Governance and
Development

Observers:

Councillor Patrick Coleman and Mike Evely

OS.274 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Vann.

OS.275 Substitute Members

Councillor Clare Muir substituted for Councillor Michael Vann.

OS.276 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OS.277 Minutes

The following addition to the minutes was suggested under the 'Review of Work Plan' item.

'After the meeting had been closed, the Chair noted comments by Councillor Cunningham that it was necessary to present the report on the Employment Policies Task and Finish Group work to Cabinet, before a full report could be given to the Committee. This had been agreed with the Chief Executive and the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group had completed the task set by Full Council on 22 November 2022,

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including an expanded remit to encompass the full suite of HR policies to ensure that they align with those used across the partner councils. It was noted that a report would come back to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26 September'.

RESOLVED: That subject to the amendments being made, that the Committee APPROVE the minutes from 11 July 2023.

The minutes were approved without objection.

OS.278 Chair's Announcements

The Chair stated that they had attended the recent Scrutiny Essentials training, alongside other members of the Committee. The Chair described the training as a valuable experience and hoped it would help improve the work of the Committee.

It was also noted that any updates on County matters, such as the Gloucestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considered at the end of the meeting.

OS.279 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.280 Member Questions

Councillor Jenkinson asked the following question to the Chair;

“The Localism Act 2011 requires an Oversight and Scrutiny Committee when using Leader and Cabinet. In section 9f2 it states the task as review or scrutinise or to make reports or recommendations, including by appointing sub-committees, and specifically (9f4) to recommend that the decision be reconsidered, or to arrange for its function to be carried out. There is no reference to noting. The term is used in our Constitution but only in the context of a minority report with no force. Should our committee not focus on review or scrutinising activities in future?”

The Chair provided the following response:

“Thank you Councillor Jenkinson for the question. Reports simply to note are generally avoided at Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will usually be asked to scrutinise a report and to consider making any recommendations to Cabinet.

Notwithstanding, members will be aware that there are some reports on the agenda for this meeting where the recommendation is for the Committee to ‘note’ the report, or to ‘note and scrutinise’ in the case of the quarterly performance reports.

In respect of the ‘HR Policies and Health and Safety Policies Refresh’ item for this meeting, a decision was taken by Cabinet on 12 September 2023 to approve the 23 employment policies, the health and safety policy and provide delegated authority to the Chief Executive to adopt further employment policies and to ensure they are kept up to date. This decision was directly consequential to the work of the Overview and Scrutiny’s Employment Policies Task and Finish Group. The chair of the task and finish group presented the report to cabinet. At the Cabinet meeting, the chair of the task and finish group confirmed that in his view, the role of the task and finish group had been completed. As such there was no requirement to bring the

HR Policies to the O&S Committee. However for the sake of completeness the reports were added to the O&S agenda for noting to provide transparency (following the task and finish review work which the Committee commissioned on 22 November 2022 and which has now concluded.)

It is considered to be good practice for Overview and Scrutiny Committees to receive information about the outcomes of work they have previously commissioned or undertaken (in this case the task and finish group reviewed and scrutinised the process for updating the employment policies). While the purpose of the item is given as to note on the agenda, the normal statutory powers of the Committee under the Local Government Act 2000 continue to apply, should the Committee wish to use them (e.g. the power to review or scrutinise decisions made and to make recommendations to Cabinet).”

OS.281 Channel Choice and Telephone Access

The item was introduced by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance.

The purpose of the item was to provide scrutiny of the report that was scheduled for Cabinet on 2 October. The report was concerned with trialling new telephone opening times for customers accessing Council services through this channel.

The Committee highlighted that the item was announced as part of the Publica blog which gave the perception that the item had been decided before the meeting. It was noted that this was an unsatisfactory practice which should not reoccur.

It was also noted that the scheme had been agreed by West Oxfordshire District Council, with whom the Council provides a joint Customer Services service. It was noted that both Councils would have to agree the change for it to be implementable.

It was explained that the change would not involve any mandatory redundancies, and would be phased by replacing vacant full time roles with part-time staff and diversifying the work load of full time Customer Services staff to include cross-departmental administrative support.

The following points were raised during the Committee’s discussion;

- The Key Performance Indicators that would be used, which would include customer satisfaction and observing behaviours
- The balance between providing services and meeting the financial challenges, and that if the new operating hours were not accepted after the trial, the savings would need to be found elsewhere

Following questions about the minutes of the previous meeting indicating high call volumes, the Cabinet Member clarified that this was likely to be a specific reference to the cost of living challenges and receipt of council tax correspondence. The Cabinet Member confirmed that overall call volumes had decreased.

The Committee asked if data could be added to show the call volumes. It was noted that the vision information had been provided to Cabinet and if it could be published, it would be.

Following questions in regards to the marking of this item as a Key decision, the Director of Governance and Development clarified that the report was considered non-key as it was

asking Cabinet to approve a trial period. The report after the trial would constitute a key decision as it would make the arrangement permanent.

Cllr Cunningham that the Committee make the following recommendations to Cabinet. This was seconded by Councillor Hughes.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- I) AGREED the following recommendations to Cabinet;
 - The trial set out in the report is approved (the outcome of the trial will be reported back to Overview and Scrutiny before a final decision on the service is made by Cabinet), with consideration of when the report should come forward;
 - That Cabinet Members receive data regarding call volumes for Cotswold District Council and not just the combined figures with West Oxfordshire, and graphs to show trends;
 - That the report that will be received after the six month trial includes an Equalities Impact Assessment;
 - Cabinet Members consider concerns raised by committee members regarding consultation with affected staff, and whether savings can be realised without redundancies.

Voting Record- 10 for, 0 against, 0 abstention

OS.282 Establishment of a Public Conveniences Review Group

The purpose of this item was to consider the establishment of Public Conveniences Review Group under the proposed terms of reference.

The Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee introduced the item.

The membership of the Review Group was confirmed as; Councillors Tony Slater, Gary Selwyn, Roly Hughes and David Cunningham. A further member would be confirmed at a later date.

It was noted that the first meeting of the Review Group would take place on Friday 6 October.

The Vice-Chair agreed to establish the group and confirmed that the draft terms of reference summarised the purpose review group effectively. There were questions over the 50p charge contained within the terms of reference. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance clarified that the charge was 40p for some toilets while others remained free of charge.

Following queries by the Committee, it was asked whether the figure could be removed to reduce confusion. The Deputy Leader commented that since no decisions had been made, a different charge could be recommended by the Review Group.

As part of the Public Conveniences Review, a tour of public toilet sites would be organised by the Democratic Services Business Manager.

It was confirmed that under delegated authority, the Assistant Director for Resident Services had approved for card readers to be installed at all toilets across the district. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the ability to pay by cash was not being removed.

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The Committee asked that disability groups, with specific reference being made to those suffering from Irritable Bowl Diseases, be consulted with. The Committee also discussed Town and Parish Councils, and the Cabinet Member suggested that they be consulted with by the Review Group.

It was suggested that Councillor Tony Slater, as the Chair of the review group, review the terms of reference to reflect the discussion.

The importance of including a female member to the group was noted.

Councillor David Cunningham proposed and Councillor Tony Slater seconded.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1) AGREED to the establishment of a Public Conveniences Review Group;
- 2) AGREED the draft terms of reference presented be amended, with agreement on the final text by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the group being reported to the Committee.
- 3) NOTED that political groups have been asked to nominate Members to serve on this review group, and that the full list of the names of the nominees will be reported to the Committee once known.

The Committee agreed the recommendations by assent.

OS.283 **HR Policies and Health and Safety Policies Refresh**

The purpose of the item was to note the decision that Cabinet had taken to approving the HR Policies and Health and Safety Policy Refresh.

Councillor David Cunningham introduced this item as Chair of the HR policies Working Group.

The Committee wished to note its gratitude for the speed and efficiency in reviewing the policies and commended the hard work by the officers in delivering the project.

It was confirmed by the Chief Executive that the Whistle Blowing Policy was not included within the review, as it had been previously reviewed as part of the Counter Fraud Unit's work.

The Committee stated that future changes to the suite of policies should be brought back to the Committee through an annual review.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Cunningham, and Councillor Muir seconded.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1) NOTED the decision taken by Cabinet on 12 September 2023
- 2) NOTED that an annual review will be brought back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the Chief Executive which would include any policies approved or changes made under delegated authority.

The meeting paused at a 19:00 for a comfort break

OS.284 **Update on the Work of the Performance Task and Finish Working Group**

The meeting restarted at 19:10.

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

Following agreement by the Chair, this item was taken after the HR Policies item due to time constraints of individual members.

Councillor Coleman as Chair of the Group introduced this item.

Assistant Director for Property for Regeneration explained the work carried out;

- The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to review the quarterly performance report with a view to establishing whether the data and presentation thereof were fit for purpose.
- The areas that were reviewed included; Development Management, Forward Planning, Health and Wellbeing, Climate, Economy and Transformation and Waste and Recycling.
- The work was being compiled to be presented to the Local Management Team, who would review the information and confirm that they were happy with it.
- Once the format was agreed, it would be included within the quarterly performance reports, and the Committee should see an improvement in the reporting on these in the future.
- The work was now completed and the Task and Finish Group would conclude, unless the Committee wished that it continued.

The Committee welcomed the work, which they hoped would be an improvement in reporting on performance. The topic was considered to be closed.

The Vice Chair left the room at 19:15

RESOLVED: That the Committee:
1) NOTED the verbal update

OS.285 **Q1 Performance Report**

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

The Chief Executive introduced the report.

Members discussed the report and raised the following points;

- Spending money on utilising consultants for developing an asset management strategy. Officers and the Cabinet Member stated that due to the specialised skills required, this expertise was not available 'in-house'. This recommendation to develop the strategy was made by the previous Interim Chief Finance Officer and was intended to inform the Council's response to the financial challenges it faced.
- Only 11 affordable homes had been delivered, which was below the target. The Chief Executive stated that work in this area had focussed on creating a dialogue with social rent providers, and ensuring that reporting is accurate, and that by Q4 the target would be closer to being met.

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- Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging points in the Rissingtons car park. The Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration stated that the Council was close to receiving an installation date from the contractor.
- The report reflected that several climate related targets were not on track, and members asked what the reason for this was. The Chief Executive stated that there were individual factors outside the Council's control related to several of the projects in this area, such as the aforementioned delays with EV charging points, and having to re-evaluate the approach to the Solar Panel installation, but interest was high.
- Members would like references to a flood officer to also include drought, as this was also a related environmental challenge. The Chief Executive confirmed that work was being undertaken to do this.
- References had been made to Clean and Green, which had been temporarily funded, the Chief Executive and Cabinet Member confirmed this and welcomed that one of the Officers was now part of the broader Environmental Health Team.
- Ensuring meaningful as well as accurate reporting e.g. for missed bin collections.
- Bromford Housing have appointed a new Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) provider. The overall viability of the scheme in Down Ampney was not expected to be impacted.

Members also asked about the overgrowth in the Chesterton Cemetery. The Assistant Director for Property and Regeneration stated that work had begun to remedy this, and would provide a more detailed update to members outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1) NOTED the report contents.

Voting record- 9 for, 0 against, 0 abstention

OS.286 **QI Financial Performance Report**

The purpose of the report was to set out the latest budget monitoring position for the 2023/24 Financial Year.

Due to time constraints, there was no introduction to the item.

There was a question in regards to the certainty of the figures due to factors such as the New Homes Bonus. Members stated that this was an approximated figure but the Deputy Chief Executive disagreed on the basis that the budget which was agreed in February provided a clear rationale behind the figures used. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the Local Government Finance Settlement was fixed and had been finalised in February 2023.

It was noted that no new Government funding was expected to be received within the financial year.

Members made reference to the Cabinet Transformation Working Group, and asked for more detail on the success of this. Cabinet Members stated that they considered it successful, but that it was a confidential group due to e.g. impact on staffing matters. Savings that had been found from the work of this group included the Channel Choice and Telephone Access report discussed earlier in the meeting.

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It was noted that the Government was proposing an increase in planning fees, and members hoped that, subject to Parliamentary approval, this would be taken up by the Council.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1) NOTED the report contents.

Voting Record - For 9, Against 0, Abstain 0

The Meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 8.05 pm

Chair

(END)