



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 7th March 2016

PRESENT : Cllrs. Lugg (Chair), Hampson (Vice-Chair), H. Norman (Spokesperson), Haigh, Gravells, Lewis, S. Witts, Dee, Beeley, Hansdot, Toleman, Etheridge, James, Noakes, D. Norman, McLellan and Smith

Others in Attendance

Cllr. James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy

Cllr. Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Cllr. Noakes, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Cllr. Smith, Chair of Housing Task and Finish Group

Cllr. McLellan, Chair of Employment and Skills Task and Finish Group

Mr. Ashley Green, Chief Executive, Gloucester City Homes

Mr. Ross Cook, Corporate Director

Mr. Jon Topping, Head of Finance

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Field, Pearsall and Randle

99. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Lugg, Beeley, Hansdot and Toleman declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, Gloucester City Homes Progress Report, by virtue of their roles on the Board of Gloucester City Homes.

Councillor S. Witts declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, Recommendations from Employment and Skills Task and Finish Group, by virtue of her employment at Gloucestershire College.

100. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

101. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from members of the public.

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102. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

103. GLOUCESTER CITY HOMES PROGRESS REPORT

Vice-Chair Councillor Hampson took the Chair for this item as Councillor Lugg had declared a personal interest.

The Chair welcomed Mr Ashley Green, Chief Executive of Gloucester City Homes, to the meeting.

Mr Green explained that this was an interim report on the organisation's progress and that a full 'RAG' rated report would be produced for the City Council's client team at the end of the financial year.

Mr Green set out the eight promises which had been made to tenants when Gloucester City Homes became a registered housing provider with ownership of the City Council's homes and provided updates for each of the promises:-

1. Repairing and maintaining homes
2. Improving homes and neighbourhoods
3. Delivering excellent housing services by putting customers first
4. Involving, engaging and empowering tenants
5. Supporting independent living
6. Delivering services which represent value for money, ensuring every penny counts
7. Building more affordable homes
8. Investing in tenants and the community

Mr Green informed Members that following a comprehensive inspection process over Christmas and the New Year, the organisation had been awarded a G1 rating for governance by the Homes and Communities Agency – its highest rating – and a V2 for financial stability. Mr Green saw this as a strong and positive outcome for an organisation which was less than 12 months old.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. The impact of the Government's proposals to restrict social housing to the poorest, referred to as 'Pay to Stay'.
2. Affordable housing in the context of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). During the debate a Member suggested that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning should be invited to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to outline the Council's housing strategy. It was also agreed that a presentation on CIL given to the Council's Planning Committee would be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Members.
3. Tenant engagement and the creation of a new Tenants' Panel.

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The Chair thanked Mr Green for his presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the progress report be noted.**
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning be invited to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the Council's housing strategy.**

104. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON ACTIONS TO IMPROVE HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Councillor Lugg returned to the Chair.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Smith, Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Smith presented the report and recommendations. She said that the work had been far reaching and had changed people's lives and prevented potential fatalities.

Councillor Smith took the opportunity to thank the Lead Officers and the Democratic Services Officer.

Councillor Smith added that she was keen for Overview and Scrutiny to monitor the recommendations in future and ensure that the project continued to be funded.

The Committee was advised that the Centre for Public Scrutiny had expressed interest in the study and was considering highlighting the work on its website.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member asked how the properties were chosen for inspection. Councillor Smith explained that the Private Sector Housing Officer was now able to recognise a potential unlicensed house in multiple occupation (HMO) from 'tell-tale' signs, and that intelligence came from different sources.
2. A Member of the Task and Finish Group commended the Private Sector Housing Team for the valuable work they carried out in difficult and challenging circumstances.
3. A Member asked if the proactive inspections could be extended to all private rented properties in the City. Councillor Smith responded that this would not be possible because of staffing resources, but that should the Government decide to extend mandatory HMO licensing this would result in a wider programme of inspections being required.
4. A Member sought clarification on the Private Sector Housing Officer's enforcement powers and how quickly corrective actions could be taken.

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5. A Member voiced concern regarding a building within her Ward which had been converted into an HMO. Councillor Smith advised the Member to contact the Private Sector Housing Officer.
6. The Committee agreed that a copy of the report should be sent to the Council's Senior Planning Compliance Officer for information.

Members strongly endorsed the report and commended the work of the Private Sector Housing Team.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smith for her presentation.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations be endorsed and that the report be presented to the next available meeting of Cabinet.

105. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chair welcomed Councillor McLellan, Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor McLellan presented the report and recommendations. He thanked his fellow Task and Finish Group Members, the Democratic Services Officer and the Lead Officer for the study.

Councillor McLellan requested that the report be subject to monitoring by the Committee in the future.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member asked whether any work had been carried out with young people with mental health issues. The Member was advised that this had not been looked at in depth because of the short timescale for the study. It was acknowledged this could be an area for further study in the future.
2. A Member commented on the barriers identified during the study relating to travel and transport issues.
3. A Member sought clarification on the difference between traineeships and apprenticeships.
4. A Member noted that the need to attain maths and English GCSE was a barrier to some young people in obtaining employment. Another Member referred to the courses run at Gloucestershire College for these qualifications.
5. A Member remarked that the Group had not interviewed groups of young people. Councillor McLellan responded that whilst there had been insufficient time to organise groups of young people as witnesses, the Group had been able to obtain anecdotal evidence of the views of some young people at a Youth Centre and those of a few young people working in the retail sector. Another Member suggested that the Committee should add an

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extra recommendation to the Chair of next year's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Task and Finish Group to be reconstituted in order to carry out the work with young people.

The Chair thanked Councillor McLellan for his presentation.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the recommendations be endorsed and that the report be presented to the next available meeting of Cabinet.**
- (2) That the next Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to reconstitute the Task and Finish Group in order for the work with young people to be carried on.**

106. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 3 REPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, and Mr Jon Topping, Head of Finance, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which set out the the financial monitoring details including budget variances, year end forecasts and progress made against agreed savings targets for the 3rd quarter ended 31 December 2015.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. There was a debate on the impact of not meeting the projected savings in Neighbourhood Services for 2015/16. Members were informed that significant savings were expected in 2016/17 and were currently being explored with Amey. Clarification was also given on the Council's contractual position with Amey. Councillor Norman assured Members that he and the Cabinet Member for Environment would continue to robustly challenge the organisation in order to ensure that the necessary savings were achieved.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

107. RUGBY WORLD CUP FINAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy, and Mr Ross Cook, Corporate Director, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which summarised the outcomes of Gloucester's Host City project as part of the Rugby World Cup 2015 (RWC) celebrations. The report also set out the ongoing legacy priorities for the RWC Legacy Group.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member asked when the case study report (paragraph 3.5.2) would be available. Councillor James confirmed that it was expected shortly and that

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it would be shared with all Gloucester City Councillors. Members agreed to await the report before deciding whether to take the matter post-scrutiny.

2. A Member queried the position on sponsorship of the commemorative bench in King's Square. Councillor James responded that he did not have data to hand, but that he believed that the sponsorship was close to the target figure.
3. There was a discussion on the importance of continuing to reap the economic benefits of the tournament.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

108. CULTURAL STRATEGY

SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 6

On the motion of the Chair, and in accordance with the Constitution, the Committee resolved that the meeting be extended beyond two hours.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Noakes, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which set out the proposed draft Cultural Strategy 2016-2026, for the City of Gloucester. The strategy identified 6 key objectives and informed Members of the proposed establishment of a Cultural Board.

1. A Member stated that 'culture' needed to reflect diversity and not just be focused on art and music. The Member used Plymouth as an example to amplify this point. Another Member commented that the cultural strategy needed to cater for all sectors of the community and that it was important that no one was marginalised. The Member asked Councillor Noakes not to forget the role of the library service.
2. A Member queried the relationship between Marketing Gloucester Limited and the strategy. Councillor Noakes confirmed that Marketing Gloucester Limited would continue to deliver events and that it was anticipated they would sit on the new Cultural Board.
3. A Member sought clarification on the fund raising figure set out in the indicative outline budget for the project. Councillor Noakes explained that this figure had been recommended by the consultant who had produced the strategy and that she believed the figure was achievable.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

109. CLOSING ADDRESS BY CHAIR

The Chair thanked the Committee and the Democratic Services Officer for their support during the year. The Chair noted that some of the current Members would

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be retiring from the Council and not standing in the local elections in May. The Chair also expressed her best wishes to Mr Ross Cook who was to leave the organisation later in the month to take up a new position at Wolverhampton Council.

110. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 13 June 2016 at 18.30 hours.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.50 pm hours

Chair