



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 13th June 2016

PRESENT : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Pearsall (Spokesperson), Hilton, Lewis, Morgan, Wilson, Haigh, Dee, Hampson, H. Norman, Finnegan, Hawthorne, Melvin and Smith

Others in Attendance

Cllr. Noakes, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Cllr. Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment

Cllr. Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Mr Jon Topping, Head of Finance, Gloucester City Council

Mr Andrew Cummings, Management Accountant, Gloucester City Council

Mr Bruce Carpenter, adviser to the Waste and Recycling Review Members Project Group

APOLOGIES : Cllrs.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

RESOLVED – That the appointments made at Annual Council on 23 May 2016 be noted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Melvin declared a personal interest in agenda item 9.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

Mr John Ewers, a Gloucester resident, addressed the Committee. Mr Ewers referred to agenda item 7, Catering Service Review, and asked why, in view of the importance of the services offered by the City Museum in the promotion and regeneration of Gloucester, was the Council considering closing the Museum Café. Mr Ewers queried why better marketing and other measures could not be employed

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to meet any income shortfall. The Chair thanked Mr Ewers for his public question and explained that the Committee would also be asking the same questions. The Chair advised Mr Ewers that the most appropriate forum for his questions was the meeting of Cabinet on 22 June 2016.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

6. CATERING SERVICE REVIEW

The Chair welcomed Councillor Noakes, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, and Mr Jon Topping, Head of Finance, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which requested approval for a number of measures to ensure that the Council provided modern, cost effective and attractive catering services in the future following a recent review of the catering service. Councillor Noakes highlighted the key points in the report and acknowledged the comments made during Public Question Time.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member queried the annual turnover figures for the Museum Café and the catering facility at Herbert Warehouse. The Head of Finance agreed to supply this information to Committee Members.
2. A Member referred to a café in his Ward which operated successfully as a social enterprise. He speculated whether the reason the Museum Café was running at a loss was because of the quality of the food offer. Turning to the Herbert Warehouse facility, he questioned whether bringing services together, rather than contracting them out, had been considered, along with catering for civic events. The Member stated that the Herbert Warehouse facility was used by staff. He referred to the lack of facilities for Councillors in the evenings and mentioned that in the past Councillors had been told that they would be provided with a vending machine for refreshments, but that this had never been the case. Councillor Noakes responded that staff had access to a kitchen area on each floor and that this, combined with a reduction in staff numbers, had led to dwindling turnover at the facility. She applauded the Member for mentioning the café in his Ward which was run as a social enterprise and commented that this was the way forward. Councillor Noakes added that food production was not the core business of the Museum.
3. A Member asked if costings had been made for a trolley service to replace the Herbert Warehouse facility. The Head of Finance confirmed that there were no plans to introduce a trolley service.
4. A Member refuted the comment that food provision was not the core function of the Museum and observed that this was part of the visitor attraction.

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5. A Member expressed concern over plans to close the Museum Café and queried why the MYA Consulting report had not been provided as an appendix as it was difficult to judge whether the interpretation of its conclusions in the Committee report matched the study's findings. Councillor Noakes responded that not all of the recommendations had been considered appropriate to the catering review, but that she was willing to share the report with Members.
6. A Member asked if any attempts had been made to market the café at the Museum. Councillor Noakes replied that the Museum itself had been recently rebranded and marketed.
7. A Member asked why it had taken so long to determine the feasibility of a shared entrance/café space within the City Library. Councillor Noakes responded that the position was not clear on this a year ago and that joint working initiatives were being worked up with the City Library.
8. A Member acknowledged the difficulties in getting the catering offer right at the Museum in the face of competition from other catering outlets and the Museum's location. He stated that as guardians of the public 'purse' the Council had an obligation to review the future of loss-making activities.
9. Turning to paragraph 5.2 of the report, a Member asked whether outsourcing of catering services under one umbrella had been market tested. Councillor Noakes replied that organisations were unlikely to take on loss making enterprises and said that it was important to look at alternative ways to operate in the future, citing the joint working with the City Library. She added that the catering services which were performing well would continue to be developed. The Member replied that she did not believe that the report had demonstrated a case for closing the Museum Café and Herbert Warehouse facility.
10. A Member observed that in his view there was insufficient information in the report to recommend closing the Museum Café and pointed out that most Museums boasted a café as part of the visitor experience and that the fact that it was under-performing was not enough justification to close it down. In terms of its location, the Member stated that a catering facility in Parliament Street did extremely well and that the Museum Café had the potential to flourish with the right management and imagination. He commented that any joint initiative with the City Library would take years to bring to fruition. Councillor Noakes acknowledged the Member's comments.
11. A Member reflected that the position was not ideal and said the Museum Café should be closed down and revamped in partnership with the City Library.
12. A Member suggested that the Council could advertise to see if there was a local catering operator interested in taking over the business. Councillor Noakes indicated that she was willing to take that option to Cabinet. Another Member suggested that the Committee should accept Councillor Noakes' offer and ask Cabinet to undertake a market testing exercise to gauge the

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interest of local operators in the business and that the Museums Café should remain open whilst this work was carried out.

13. Members then had a debate regarding the catering facility at Herbert Warehouse with most Members agreeing that whilst closure was regrettable, that there was no possibility of increasing footfall to the facility and that losses would increase if it continued to operate in its current format.

The Chair drew the debate to a close by summarising the extra recommendation which Cabinet was being asked to consider. He thanked Councillor Noakes and the Head of Finance for their presentations.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That the Museum of Gloucester Café continues to function in the short term pending the results of a market testing exercise which will be undertaken to gauge the interest of potential local catering operators in the business.

7. REVIEW OF THE WASTE AND RECYCLING SERVICE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Porter, Cabinet Member for Environment, and Mr Bruce Carpenter, from the Somerset Waste Partnership who had acted as an adviser to the Waste and Recycling Review Members' Project Group, to the meeting.

Members were presented with a report which outlined the work undertaken during the Waste and Recycling Review. The report recommended a new model of delivery that would deliver savings, enhance recycling performance and futureproof the service for future challenges. Councillor Porter highlighted the key points of the review and thanked Members of the Working Group who had worked well together on the project. He commended the staff in the Environmental Projects Team who he described as 'innovative' in their approach.

Members discussed the following matters:-

1. A Member sought clarification on the increase in income resulting from additional commodity sales as detailed in Appendix 3 to the report. Councillor Porter and Mr Bruce Carpenter explained the rationale behind the figures.
2. A Member welcomed the report and echoed praise for the Environmental Projects Team. Turning to Appendix 2, 'Upgrading of Sorting Line', the Member asked what this entailed. Councillor Porter explained that the intention was for Amey to collect mixed plastics at the same time and the capital expenditure reflected the costs of accommodating the required additional facilities at the Depot.
3. A Member queried whether there would be any effect on the existing contract with Amey and how long the contract had to run. Councillor Porter responded that there were 5 years left on the contract and that the new model would not have any impact on the current contract.

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4. A Member referred to paragraph 3.9 of the report which stated that whilst no changes were proposed to the frequency of refuse collections at this time, the new model would not preclude the possibility of reviewing this in the future. Councillor Porter confirmed that fortnightly collections had been resisted at this stage, but could not be ruled out in the future if the service was faced with financial pressures.
5. A Member asked if the new model would improve collection rates in HMO's, densely populated terraced homes, apartment blocks, and areas where there was a transient population and asked if there would be better 'policing' of overflowing bins. Councillor Porter acknowledged the Member's comments and said that some of the problems emanated from the poor design of waste facilities in buildings and that he had explored measures with Development Control to ensure that buildings had adequate facilities for waste storage at the planning application stage. Councillor Porter added that the 'closed bin policy' would continue to be upheld following the death of an operative in Cheltenham.
6. Another Member welcomed the report and expressed thanks to Amey and to Officers for the work and said that he looked forward to some good outcomes.
7. A Member who had been part of the Member Working Group echoed Councillor Porter's comments and confirmed that the exercise had been a thorough one which had examined all the different aspects of the Council's relationship with Amey and that this could lead to a review of the service in the future. The Member thanked Mr Bruce Carpenter for his assistance to the Group.
8. A Member queried what would happen if hessian sacks went missing and asked whether evidence had been gauged from other authorities in the County regarding their effectiveness. Councillor Porter responded that whilst there was no firm evidence from other authorities, he had been assured by Officers that the hessian sacks would work well and that they had previously been used in Gloucester for garden waste. He added that the sacks were durable and he was confident they would not wear out. Replacement sacks would be provided for residents in line with the policy applied to requests for replacement green boxes.
9. A Member asked if wet corrugated card had a reduced value. Councillor Porter said it was important to keep it dry and referred to problems with residents who were not prepared to cut up cardboard for it to fit inside the sack. The Member commented that some residents might not be physically able to cut cardboard. Mr Bruce Carpenter advised the Member that the service was not intended to cater for bulky cardboard such as that from a flat pack kitchen. Mr Carpenter added that whilst it was important to keep the card as dry as possible to retain its value, weekly collections would ensure that deterioration was minimised as far as possible.

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10. A Member observed that recycling figures had improved because of the proactive work undertaken by the Environmental Projects Team including their bin 'audits'. He commended the Officers for their efforts.
11. A Member queried whether food caddies which were unused by residents would be recovered. Another Member commented that it was important to encourage residents to use them and that taking them away would be a negative step. Councillor Porter responded that he was keen to encourage the promotion of food recycling.

The Chair drew the debate to a close and thanked Councillor Porter and Mr Bruce Carpenter for their presentations.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That the report be noted.

8. 2015-16 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

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

Members were presented with a report which detailed the final Council position against agreed budgets for the 2015/16 financial year including a summary of how the Council had progressed against key savings targets for the year. The report also highlighted some key performance indicators. Councillor Norman concluded by saying that the challenges of budgeting continued to become more complex.

Members discussed the following matters.

1. The Member sought clarification on the amount written off in respect of the historic Icelandic Bank debt of £413K and information on earmarked reserves and the level of the General Fund. The information was provided to the Member by the Head of Finance. The Member then asked why some savings targets had been rolled forward. Councillor Norman acknowledged the Member's comment and added that he would be meeting with Officers in the next few weeks to make it clear that the challenges of achieving the targets could not be avoided.
2. A Member discussed the Council's reserves as set out in paragraph 10 of the report and questioned whether money should be set aside for potential challenges to Planning Committee decisions. Councillor Norman acknowledged the Member's comment and said that it was important seek good legal advice and to take a prudent approach as reserves could not be set aside for every possibility. Councillor Norman agreed to discuss the Member's views with Officers.
3. A Member questioned why the Council had not employed the level of apprentices that were originally budgeted for (paragraph 5.4). The Head of Finance advised the Member that there had been no demand for them from service areas during the year, but that there would be a recruitment drive shortly.

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4. A Member sought clarification on paragraph 9 of the report concerning Business Rates and Business Rates Pooling and questioned how much had been spent on appeals. The Management Accountant explained the position to the Member.
5. A Member queried the reserve for the Three Choirs Festival as set out in paragraph 10.1 of the report. The Management Accountant explained the background to the reserve.

The Chair thanked Councillor Norman and the Officers for their presentations.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET – That the report be noted.

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.

9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2015-16

The Chair introduced the Annual Report which summarised the activities of the 2015-16 Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Three Members from last year's Committee commended the report and placed on record their thanks to the previous year's Chair, Vice-Chair and other Members.

RESOLVED – That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2015-16 be endorsed to go forward to Council on 21 July 2016

10. CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Members examined the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Plan and suggested items for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

11. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the latest version of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. The Chair agreed to consider amendments and additions requested by Members.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

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12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 11 July 2016 at 18.30 hours.

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Time of commencement: 6.30 pm

Time of conclusion: 8.40 pm

Chair