



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 7th June 2021

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field, Lewis, Wilson, Ackroyd, Castle, Chambers, Chambers-Dubus, Dee, Durdey, Evans, Hilton, Kubaszczyk, O'Donnell, Padilla and Zaman

Others in Attendance

Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Richard Cook

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Andrew Gravells

Head of Communities

Head of Policy and Resources

Housing Innovation Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Pullen and Organ

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meetings held on Monday 1st March 2021 and Wednesday 3rd March 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.06.21

There were no public questions.

5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

6. 2020-21 YEAR END PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 6.1 Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Norman introduced the Year End Performance Report, explaining that the report assisted in tracking the Council's performance against 30 key measures. She noted that where targets existed, they were included within the report alongside a narrative to explain the data. Councillor Norman noted that the City Council had seen an improving trend in the average number of households in temporary accommodation, the average number of households in B&B or shared facilities and homelessness preventions. She went on to note that the Council had seen a declining trend in terms of footfall at Gloucester Museum, minor planning applications and complaints. Councillor Norman pointed Members towards Appendix 1, which set out the performance data, and invited comments or queries from the Committee.
- 6.2 Councillor Wilson referred to the measure concerning the year-end Financial Outturn vs Budget (F-13), noting that this measure had been given PI warning status. He asked whether the warning status was based on Quarter 3 or Quarter 4 figures. The Head of Policy and Resources clarified that the figures refer to Quarter 3 and explained that Quarter 4 figures were still being calculated. The Head of Policy and Resources acknowledged that 2020 had been a very complex year and noted that he expected to see an improvement in Quarter 4 figures. It was anticipated that they would be ready by the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Councillor Wilson welcomed the positive outlook on the Quarter 4 figures.
- 6.3 In response to a query from Councillor Wilson regarding percentage of 'broadly compliant' food premises in the City (CWB-13) and that approximately one third of food premises were non-compliant in 2020/21, Councillor Norman noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had had some impact. The Head of Communities confirmed that the sample was targeted towards premises deemed as higher risk, rather than food premises where there were no previous concerns. She also noted that the Council was currently awaiting further guidance from the Food Standards Agency as to how samples should be taken going forward.
- 6.4 The Chair referred to Financial Outturn vs Budget measure (F-13) and drew attention to the statement in the narrative that there was great uncertainty as to what the new normal will look like. The Chair asked whether Councillor Norman and Officers had any specific areas of concern in relation to this. Councillor Norman expressed the view that income from car parking was a concern, but noted, following her own recent experiences in the City, that she was hopeful that footfall in the City was increasing. Councillor Norman also referred to the planned return of events in Gloucester over the coming

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.06.21

months and expressed hope that this would also result in more footfall in the City. Councillor Norman noted that the Eastgate retail area was likely to remain a challenge, however, both the St Oswalds Redevelopment and planning applications were progressing well. The Head of Policy and Resources commented that other areas to expect to see recovery could include having wakes at the crematorium and footfall at cultural sites such as the Museum of Gloucester and the Guildhall.

- 6.5 Referring to the same measure (F-13), Councillor Hilton commented that the City Council overspend was likely to be less than the red threshold of £200,000 but was still over budget. He referred to the narrative that stated the Government had provided £3 million in Covid-19 support grants and asked whether the Council had received the payments in full. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Council had received everything they expected to receive from Government and all the initial expenditure had been covered. He also noted that the Council had made a further claim from Government in Covid-19 support grants which would cover the first 3 months of the financial year. By way of follow-up, Councillor Hilton queried whether any of this money would be put back into Council reserves and the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the numbers had been included in the Delta return for the quarter.
- 6.6 In response to a request from Councillor Castle to clarify the term Delta, Councillor Norman explained that Delta was the system used to process related claims.
- 6.7 The Chair referred to the performance measure relating to the percentage of information governance responses such as FOI or Subject Access Requests (PG-24). The Chair noted that the data indicated that deadline response times appeared to show a decline and asked the Cabinet Member whether she had any comments. Councillor Norman stated that she was not concerned about these figures and noted her view that the Council was performing very well. The Head of Policy and Resources noted that over 93% of all information governance requests had been responded to within the statutory deadline, which is in excess of the monitoring target of 85%. He referred to the new council target of 90% which showed that the Council had been improving.
- 6.8 On the topic of recycling and reduced waste packaging, Councillor Lewis asked for the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment's comments on recycling progress in Gloucester as the City emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Leader expressed his view that this was a time of flux and noted that the Government was currently consulting on new waste and recycling reforms, such as a plastic bottle deposit return scheme. The Leader confirmed that over the past year, there had been a big increase in household recycling as a result of people working from home but a corresponding decrease in recycling from businesses due to reduced staffing levels in offices. The Leader noted that the increase was clearly reflected in the latest figures but emphasized that the outlook for when people return to the workplace alongside new Government schemes was unknown at this stage.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.06.21

- 6.9 Referring to the performance measure relating to average customer waiting times (CS-6), Councillor Hilton observed that the waiting times for customers to speak to officers had increased over the past year and asked why there appeared to be particularly lengthy waiting times during December 2020.
- 6.10 Councillor Norman explained that the December waiting times could be explained by the Council's decision to defer green waste renewal for residents, which extended residents' paid for garden waste services by four months and pushed the renewal period into Quarter 1. She also noted that there was always an increase in Council Tax queries at the start of the new financial year, which coincided with some colleagues moving positions. Councillor Norman explained that this had inevitably resulted in less resources while new members of staff were training.
- 6.11 The Head of Communities confirmed that she and Councillor Norman were monitoring the situation and were confident that waiting times could be managed back down. It was noted that reopening some face-to-face services at the Gateway may help relieve some pressure on Customer Services. In response, Councillor Hilton noted his wish to see an improvement and expressed the view that waiting 4 minutes for a call to be answered was too long. Councillor Norman noted that the telephone options do offer prompts whilst calls are in the queue to be answered, signposting to the City Council website or other sources of information. Councillor Norman reiterated that if an officer was available, the telephone would be answered, and noted that some customers may welcome signposting prompts if they were not as knowledgeable as others.
- 6.12 The Chair thanked Councillor Norman for attending and invited the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Gravells, to answer questions from Members.
- 6.13 The Chair referred to the number of families currently in temporary accommodation increasing from 2019/20 (H-13) however he noted that both the short- and long-term trends were improving and invited comment from Councillor Gravells. Councillor Gravells briefly introduced himself to the Committee and mentioned that he had retained a key interest in housing issues over his time spent as a Councillor. Councillor Gravells paid tribute to the hard work of his predecessor, former Councillor Jennie Watkins, and acknowledged the positive rapport she developed with partners throughout the City and County during her time in Cabinet. In response to the Chair's question, Councillor Gravells noted that the values contained in Quarter 4 were less than Quarter 3. Councillor Gravells noted that the large peak in Quarter 1 of 2020 was as a result of the implementation of the 'Everyone In' initiative, where people who were homeless were encouraged to present themselves to their local housing team to secure emergency accommodation during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 6.14 The Chair expressed the view that the Covid-19 crisis showed that bold initiatives could significantly decrease homelessness numbers. He asked whether this idea would feed through to the housing strategy and whether

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.06.21

the Council had any bold ambitions. Councillor Gravells acknowledged that in his view, although the idea of completely eradicating homelessness was something everyone desired; there would likely always be a need for temporary housing due to the reality of family life and the nature of relationship breakdowns. Councillor Gravells noted that he would always welcome new ideas and felt the Covid-19 pandemic had increased community spirit.

- 6.15 Councillor Hilton referred to the measure relating to the number of affordable homes delivered (CDG-16). He acknowledged that the Council seemed to be performing well as 275 affordable homes had been built during 2020/21, ahead of the red threshold of 187.2. Councillor Hilton went on to note that 180 affordable homes had been built in 2019/20 and 96 in 2016/17. He asked how confident the Cabinet Member was that the number of affordable homes delivered would be greater in 2021/22.
- 6.16 Councillor Gravells noted in response that the figures last year were the best in 10 years and expressed the view that the Council and previous administration should be given credit for this. Councillor Hilton expressed concern that the Council needed to see a continuation of progress and referred to the need for affordable housing in Gloucester and the challenges Gloucester faces in terms of land availability. In response, Councillor Gravells offered to continue a previous monthly housing briefing arrangement with Group Leaders and welcomed the idea of sharing ideas and taking a collaborative approach.
- 6.17 Councillor Gravells noted that in the City plan, a commitment was given to ensure that at least 25% of newbuild homes would be affordable housing which he understands was a first for a City Council plan. He confirmed that the proposals were currently with the planning Inspectorate under consideration. In terms of the challenge of land availability, Councillor Gravells referred to the 'duty to cooperate' and noted that one solution to the issue was being met by Tewkesbury offering Gloucester residents housing.
- 6.18 Councillor Durdey raised concerns about the expiration of the emergency legislation which suspended eviction notices coinciding with the end of the furlough scheme. He noted that together this could have the potential to increase homelessness and asked for assurances that the Council had the capacity to deal with additional demand for housing. The Housing Innovation Manager noted that the Covid-19 pandemic illustrated that the Council could be flexible in responding to the needs of residents. He confirmed that if additional resources were needed, the department would look at solutions such as increasing temporary staff. He also confirmed that the department had not seen evidence at this stage that there will be a significant problem but gave assurances that if demand increased, the City Council would be in a good position to respond.
- 6.19 Councillor O'Donnell raised the issue of a need for larger accommodation to support families in need of 4 bedrooms properties. Councillor Gravells noted that the Council had established a group to look at this issue and confirmed that discussions were underway with Housing Developers and Housing

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

07.06.21

Associations to ensure that appropriate properties would be available for larger families in need of accommodation.

- 6.20 Councillor Castle asked whether there were any incentives to help tenants keep their accommodation in good living condition. Councillor Gravells responded that this was a matter usually covered in a tenancy agreement, which all tenants regardless of whether they are in private rented or social housing are required to sign.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

- 7.1 The Chair introduced the latest version of the City Council's Forward Plan and a discussion ensued about what should be carried forward on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. The Chair asked Members to consider the Committee's priorities and direction over the coming months. He explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not governed solely by the City Council Forward Plan and invited suggestions from Members on areas they would like to cover over the months ahead. The Chair informed Members that the Group Leads had already requested an update on the Gloucester Culture Trust Report at the next meeting. The Chair also suggested that the Committee examine the 2020-21 Financial Outturn Report at the July meeting.
- 7.2 Councillor Hilton asked whether the City Forward Plan would be refreshed in due course as he felt that the Committee needed some clarification on what the Cabinet would be looking at over the next 12 months. It was agreed that the Committee would receive an update on the 2021-22 Gloucester City Council Forward Plan, along with the Financial Monitoring Quarter 1 Report and Performance Monitoring Quarter 1 report during the meeting on 6th September 2021.
- 7.3 The Chair referred to the Transition of the Waste Street Scene and Grounds Maintenance Services contract which was due to expire in Spring 2022. He suggested that the Committee examine this during the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 4th October. Members decided that the Committee would request an update from Cabinet as to where the Council is on the contract, any progress which is being made and what still needs to be done ahead of the transfer of services in April 2022. It was agreed to add this item to the agenda for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 4th October, alongside the City Council Energy Costs and Reduction Projects Annual Report at the suggestion of the Chair.
- 7.4 Councillor Wilson referred to the Report by the Gloucester City Commission to Review Race Relations and noted that this is an important piece of work which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should examine. It was agreed that this item be added to the Work Programme and agenda for the O&S

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
07.06.21

meeting on 29th November 2021. Supporting officers resolved to update the Work Programme and circulate it to Members following the meeting. The Chair thanked Members for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be amended to reflect the above and

2) To **NOTE** the Work Programme.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 5th July 2021.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 7.45 pm hours

Chair