



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 27th February 2017

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

Others in Attendance

Councillor Jennie Watkins
Councillor David Norman MBE
Councillor Colin Organ

Anne Brinkhoff, Corporate Director
Jon Topping, Head of Finance
Julie Wight, Private Sector Housing & Environmental Protection
Team Service Manager
Emily Jones, Senior Community Safety Officer
Rhys Howell, Democratic Service Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Smith

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

84. MINUTES

The Chair asked the Committee if they had any comments regarding the minutes of the meeting of the 30th of January 2017. Councillor Hawthorne referenced Page 9 of the minutes, which said that details of the organisations and partners that were consulted about the impact on the Public Realm on people with disability were to be circulated after the meeting of the 30th of January. Councillor Hawthorne stated that he had not yet received the information and asked that the Democratic Services Officer follow this up. The Democratic Services Officer assured Councillor Hawthorne that he would do so.

The minutes of the 30th January 2017 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

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85. EXEMPT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair agreed to revise the order of the Agenda to consider Exempt Minutes directly after Minutes of the previous meeting, as none of the members had comments on the exempt minutes and no members of the press or public were present.

The exempt minutes of the 30th January 2017 were approved as a correct record of the proceedings.

86. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no questions from the public.

87. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations from the public.

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

The Chair reminded the Members of the Special meeting of the Committee on Monday the 6th of March, in which an update on the deployment of police resources and crime reduction strategy will be delivered by representatives of the Community Safety Partnership and Superintendent Cooper, Head of Local Policing.

Councillor Haigh requested that an item be added to the Committee Work Programme to scrutinise the implementation of the Together Gloucester restructure. The Committee discussed at what stage of the implementation of the restructure it would be appropriate to do this. It was proposed that a brief update be requested by the Committee during the summer and that full scrutiny of the implementation be completed before the end of 2017. The Chair said that he and The Lead Members would look to add this to the work programme.

The Chair made the Committee aware of the intention to take Agenda Item 9 – Monitoring of Task and Finish Group recommendations on Improvements to Private Sector Rented Housing prior to Agenda Item 8 – Review of Safe and Attractive Streets policy after 6 months implementation, due to exempt information within the appendices of Agenda Item 8.

89. QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL MONITORING

The Chair welcomed Councillor D. Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, and Jon Topping, Head of Finance to share the report on the Quarter 3 Financial Monitoring.

Councillor D. Norman provided a brief overview of the details of the report, emphasising the forecast year end position of the Council's General Fund Balance to be £109,000, an improvement of £23,000 since Quarter 2. Councillor D. Norman stated the overall improvement in the figures over the year was impressive, but the Council should remain prudent and that vacancy management upon the

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implementation of the Together Gloucester restructure would be key in maintaining positive financial developments.

Councillor Wilson asked for further details of paragraph 9.2, regarding the increased costs of development management due to work required on a planning appeal. Jon Topping explained this was the Winnycroft appeal and had cost £62,000, which he explained was a large amount but such high cost appeals were unusual.

Councillor Wilson asked for clarification of what would happen if the end of year figures were less than forecast. He asked if this deficit would carry forward and if the 17-18 budget would be amended accordingly. Jon Topping stated there would be no amendment and that should such an event occur, it would result in the general fund being used to balance the 16-17 budget.

Councillor Wilson queried if the general fund was held at 10% of net revenue required and if 10% was a standard level amongst councils. Jon Topping informed him that the 10% was the general principle of the general fund and that this was at similar level to other councils.

Councillor Hampson drew attention to the £187,000 overspend within Culture and Leisure, as stated in Paragraph 8.1. and asked for clarification on the reason for this. Jon Topping explained this was due to the museums not delivering on saving targets but that they had improved and they had recently delivered a successful robots exhibition. Councillor Hampson emphasised that even if there had been improvements, then a shortfall of such a large amount was not sustainable. Councillor D. Norman agreed with Councillor Hampson that this performance needed to be improved further and stated that the Cabinet would continue to look at areas in which this portfolio could act in a more commercial manner.

Councillor Hampson asked if there were any plans to bring in outside consultants to advise the museums in how to increase revenue. Councillor Norman said this was not being considered, as the expected costs of outside consultation was not deemed cost efficient with regards to potential improvements. Jon Topping said that the robot exhibition, which had been free, had had 55,000 people attend. He said that if a small charge had been levied for this, the majority of the saving target could have been met and there needed to be a maximisation of potential revenue streams and secondary spending.

Councillor Haigh reiterated the need to maximise secondary spend and raised the matter of the decrease in Guildhall cinema ticket prices. She stated she understood the reasoning behind reducing prices in the hope of increasing attendance but queried if this had had the desired result. Councillor D. Norman agreed with Councillor Haigh that it was desirable to maximise revenue from secondary sources. He explained that he was unaware of the impact of the cinema ticket price change, and he asked the Democratic Services Officer to liaise with his Cabinet colleague, Councillor Noakes, who held the Culture and Leisure portfolio and to circulate the information to the Committee Members.

Councillor Hawthorne asked for clarification of why there was an almost £6 million under spend between the revised budget for 16/17 and the forecast, as shown in

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appendix 2 of the report. Jon Topping explained that capital spending was spread over a number of years and that this required an element of assumption as to during which financial years specific costs would be incurred. As such in this case, capital projects which had been expected to incur larger costs during 16/17 had not done so, so the forecasted spend was reduced for the 16/17 financial year.

Councillor Pearsall stated it was good to see an improvement in the financial situation since the end of Quarter 1.

Councillor Ryall asked for details regarding the Council Advertising Network, on the Council website, and if the ads were monetised via click-throughs or page views. Jon Topping stated he was unsure but would find out and circulate the information to the Committee Members.

Councillor Morgan asked for details on what Flex Replacement, as stated in Appendix 2, was. Jon Topping said it was the new ticketing system and online management system for the Crematorium and Guildhall. It was designed to improve upon the customer experience when accessing these services.

The Chair thanked Councillor D. Norman and Jon Topping for their presentation.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

90. MONITORING OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPROVEMENTS TO PRIVATE SECTOR RENTED HOUSING

The Chair welcomed Councillor Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, Julie Wight, Private Sector Housing Service Manager and Anne Brinkhoff, Corporate Director to share the report outlining the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group on improvements to private sector rented housing.

Councillor Organ provided an update regarding the implementation of the recommendations made by the Task and Finish group. He explained that the implementation of unannounced inspections had resulted in 6 successful prosecutions and the discovery of many addresses which were in a poor state of repair. He explained that many of these had been adapted for residential use without the correct licence and on occasions when this was discovered, a report was made to Council Tax to update their records so that correct taxes could be collected. He said that the programme was having a positive impact with the City.

Councillor Haigh commended the programme and praised the success it had had. However, she noted it was only funded until the end of April 2017 and queried what the future of the programme was to be. Councillor Organ answered that he was unable to give an answer at that time, as the upcoming Council restructure meant all methods of service delivery were being looked at and potentially changed. He said that it was his hope that the programme would continue, even if in an altered form.

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Councillor Haigh asked if, given the financial constraints on the council, selective licensing should be considered in the future. Councillor Organ said that the commercial side would need to be considered, not only with regards to financial implications but also in light of the secondary benefits gained by officers through a greater understanding of the situation at street level.

Councillor Haigh stated she was appalled that so much of this substandard housing was funded by the public purse, via housing benefit payments and urged the Cabinet Member to continue the scheme after April. Councillor Organ said that work would continue to be undertaken on this issue, even if it was done so in a different manner.

Councillor Hyman stated that many tenants with short term leases were worried about reporting substandard accommodation, in case of reprisals from their landlords. He asked if there was an anonymous manner by which concerns could be reported. Councillor Organ said that it was not solely landlords who caused an issue with ensuring accommodation was suitable, some tenants did not allow access for repairs and modernisation to occur. He said that anyone with concerns could report them using the Council's system and that a diplomatic approach would be used when dealing with such matters.

Councillor Wilson asked about the statutory obligations that the Council held on this issue and if Council would always investigate when asked to. Councillor Organ said the Council would not turn anyone away but may not always be able to assist them. On such occasions, he explained that the Council would direct them towards other agencies which could be of assistance.

Councillor Wilson asked for the definition of poor quality accommodation and if poor quality accommodation was illegal. Julie Wight said the quality of the accommodation which had been inspected did vary from poor to very poor. She explained that the majority failed by a large margin rather than just needing minor improvements in order to pass. Councillor Organ explained that for some residents of the City what was deemed unacceptably poor accommodation by the Council was an improvement on where they had previously lived. Due to this the residents were unaware that anything needed to be changed in their current accommodation.

Councillor Hawthorne praised the work which had been carried out and noted it was an excellent use of resources. He asked for clarification on what was meant by proactive work regarding Houses of Multiple Occupancies (HMOs) and how this was done. Julie Wight explained that the proactive work did not rely on the tenants to report issues, but issues such as a large number of bins outside, a large number of doorbells and reports from other landlord's on properties of concern may lead to a proactive visit to a property.

Councillor Ryall asked if the local constabulary reported issues surrounding poor housing, which they came across during the performance of their usual duties. Julie Wight explained such reporting only tended to happen if there was a build-up of incidents at a specific property.

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Councillor Haigh asked if there was an objective standard of what constituted suitable housing. Councillor Organ stated that there were standards regarding to health and safety which had to be adhered to.

Councillor Melvin praised the work which had been carried out and stated it would be a shame if the work ended at the end of April. Anne Brinkhoff said due to the changes in the Council structure, service planning would be important and the Council would be continuing to deliver more services with less funding. Due to this, she said, the work would not necessarily stop but may be delivered in a different manner.

Councillor Haigh proposed that the Committee recommend that the Cabinet Member reports to the Committee regarding progress and developments 6 months after the implementation of the new Council structure. This was passed unanimously.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET – That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning delivers a report on the continued progress and development of the implementation of the Task and Finish Groups recommendations 6 months after the implementation of the Together Gloucester restructure.

91. REVIEW OF SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE STREETS POLICY AFTER 6 MONTHS IMPLEMENTATION

The Chair welcomed Councillor Watkins, Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhood, Emily Jones, Senior Community Safety Officer and Anne Brinkhoff, Corporate Director to present the review of the Safe and Attractive Street Policy after 6 months of implementation.

Councillor Watkins provided a brief overview of the policy and stated that it had been broadly successful in its aims. She explained that of the 42 individuals who had been engaged with since July 2016, 24 were no longer discussed in Multi-Agency Meetings (MAMs) for a variety of reasons and only 8 of the remaining 18 are regularly seen in the City Centre. She said that 8 of the 18 were housed as of January 2017. Councillor Watkins emphasised how this was a challenging area, as individual's progress was rarely linear and necessitated an approach which built relationships not barriers via overly zealous enforcement. Councillor Watkins highlighted the £900,000 Social Impact Bond (SIB), from central government, which was expected to make an impact in addressing this issue. She also stated that the implementation of a PSPO was still in consideration for the City Centre. She explained the development of a media campaign, which would emphasise the collective responsibility held by the public and businesses to adopt a city wide consistent approach to street issues.

Councillor Hampson asked for further details about the relationship between the local media and the promotion of the Safe and Attractive Streets Policy. Councillor Watkins stated that they Council did speak to *The Citizen* about the Council's work but that due to the nature of the press, it was not possible to dictate how stories and incidents were reported.

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Councillor Ryall stated her full support for the policy but raised a concern that the policy was having the effect of only moving street issues out of the City Centre into other parts of the City rather than addressing the issues. She explained that a number of university students had expressed to her their disquiet in going out in Gloucester due to safety concerns and stated that there had been an increase in incidences of begging and rough sleeping on London Road. Emily Jones sympathised with this concern and said that she shared it. Emily Jones said begging was only an issue in the City Centre as it relied upon heavy footfall to be effective and the furthest afield she was aware of this occurring was Barton Street. Councillor Watkins asked that Members officially report any incidences of begging or rough sleeping they witness as anecdotal evidence, whilst appreciated, could not be acted upon. Emily Jones said that they would look into the situation around London Road.

Councillor Dee praised the generosity of the residents of Gloucester towards beggars and rough sleepers but stated that giving to people on the street was not a wise idea, as it encouraged the behaviour and did not ameliorate the underlying problems. Councillor Watkins agreed with this and promoted alternate methods of giving. She said that changing the perception of residents as to how they should assist homeless people was challenging and would take time. She explained that sometimes this message was misunderstood by the public as an overly harsh reaction to homeless people. Councillor Hawthorne commended the work being done on this, recognised the challenges faced and encouraged the Cabinet Member to continue promoting this message.

Councillor Wilson asked what was the best way to report concerns surrounding the issues being discussed. Emily Jones stated that it was best to report welfare concerns for rough sleepers via the Streetlink website or app. She said that anti-social behaviour concerns should be emailed to asb@gloucester.gov.uk. Councillor Lewis asked if there was a phone number to ring for those without internet access. Councillor Watkins informed him there was but that she did not have the number to hand. She explained that a new leaflet to increase public awareness of how to report matters would be available in the following weeks and distributed in City Centre locations. Councillor Dee asked if it could be credit card sized and Emily Jones said they would look into the possibility. Councillor Haigh said she had rung before to report concerns but been directed to use the website. Councillor Watkins said she would look into this, as this was not how the system was designed to operate.

Councillor Hampson raised concerns that, during the transition in service provision from St. Mungo's to P3 during December 2016, there had been a period when there was no referral service in operation. He was concerned about the timing of this, as it had been during the winter and asked how this could be avoided in future. Emily Jones stated that there had not been a reduction in referrals during this time and that there had been no new reports of vulnerable people during the Christmas period. She said she was not aware of any individuals falling through the cracks in the time period specified. Councillor Watkins said that if there had been a need for a referral during a gap in service that Social Services would have been able to provide this. She said she would investigate his concerns and inform Councillor Hampson of any developments.

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Councillor Ryall stated that the case studies shared were useful but all highlighted success stories and people who no longer needed assistance. She said it would have been useful to have a case study which was still in progress or had been unsuccessful, so that a wider understanding could have been gained by the Members. Emily Jones explained that due to the truncated nature of the case studies, it didn't provide a comprehensive report of each situation. She explained that 3 of the individuals stated in the case studies were still being engaged with, so could not currently be deemed a complete success. Councillor Watkins stated that many people engaged with did not progress in a linear manner and individuals situations constantly changed. She explained that there was a need for individuals to be ready to be helped before agencies could assist them. She said that this was something which needed to be improved, as individuals would resist accessing support until they were ready to do so, but the support could not always then be given as quickly as needed. She explained that at times this meant the window of opportunity to assist individuals closed before support could be provided. Anne Brinkhoff stated that the SIB would help ease this pressure.

Councillor Melvin said that an Off License on London road was fueling anti-social behaviour through its sales of cheap alcohol. She asked how the retailer could be engaged with and if there was any legal recourse that could be taken. Emily Jones said that this was being worked on with Project Solace and that an extended license for the retailer in question had been denied. Councillor Watkins stated that as business is driven by demand, removing the licence entirely from the retailer would most likely move the issue elsewhere. She highlighted the need for working with retailers in such situations.

Councillor Haigh emphasised the impact that mental ill health had upon rough sleepers and that this was often a contributing factor to the individuals finding themselves in such a situation. Councillor Watkins said there needed to be more support housing for those with mental ill health and that this was a complex facet of the issues being discussed, as mental ill health was not always diagnosed. She said that with the "Time to Heal Project" and changes in the Central Government's and County's approach to mental ill health that there would be positive developments in this area.

The Chair thanked Councillor Watkins, Emily Jones and Anne Brinkhoff for their presentation.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

92. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair and Members agreed that it was not necessary to exclude the press and public as the Members had already approved the exempt minutes, without comment.

93. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6th March 2017 6.30pm

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Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.10 pm hours

Chair