



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 8th January 2018

PRESENT : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Finnegan (Spokesperson), Pearsall, Hilton, Lewis, Wilson, Dee, Melvin, Pullen, Taylor.

Others in Attendance

Steve Wightman, Amey
Anthony Hunter, Amey
Kristine Stokes, Amey
Meyrick Brentnall, Environmental Planning Manager
Jonathan Lund, Corporate Director
Jon McGinty, Managing Director

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Lewis, Hawthorne, Smith and Patel

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

7.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

8. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

8.1 There were no declarations of party whipping.

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

9.1 That the minutes of the meetings held on the 27th November 2017 and 4th December 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

10. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

10.1 There were no public questions.

11. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

11.1 There were no petitions or deputations.

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

12.1 The Committee considered the Work Programme and the Council Forward Plan. The Chair subsequently brought to the Committee's attention that a Special meeting had been arranged to consider the upcoming roll-out of Universal Credit in the City. He advised that it would take place on Wednesday 17th January at 6.30pm.

12.2 The Chair made the Committee aware of the intention to take agenda item 9 – Initial Report on the Peer Review - prior to agenda item 12 – the Fleece Inn.

12.3 **RESOLVED:** To note the Work Programme and the Council Forward Plan.

13. AMEY MANAGEMENT UPDATES: SUPERVISION OF THE GROUNDS CREW AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

13.1 The Chair welcomed Anthony Hunter, Kristine Stokes and Steve Wightman, Account Director of Amey, to the meeting who provided an overview of the Grounds Crew Supervision report.

13.2 Mr Wightman acknowledged that Members had previously expressed concern on how the service was supervised and that, since then, Amey had undertaken a review of its operations and had taken on a full-time manager. He advised that this manager (Kristine Stokes) had been appointed in October and had strengthened the management team. He further stated that this had freed up other operational managers/supervisors.

13.3 Mr Wightman outlined the audit regime at Amey and their attempts to maintain a safety culture. He restated that their key focus was both customers and staff. He further outlined his view that this had had a positive impact in that all staff wore PPE and that concerns were being addressed through measures such as gate checks on vehicles and random inspections.

13.4 Councillor Pullen raised the previous issue that managers were not able to get out into the community to supervise and conduct quality assurance and questioned whether there would be improvements in this area. Mr Wightman responded by stating that two new appointments were made so that operational managers could supervise. He advised that, while operatives knew that supervisors would attend, they did not know when this would occur.

13.5 Councillor Hilton highlighted concerns a number of residents had expressed over the recent disruption to waste collection and informed the Committee that Members had received considerable contact from the public. He stated that the recent snow was not unexpected and questioned who approved the rescheduling of collections – whether it was an officer of the Council or Amey. He further enquired whether the Cabinet Member for Environment was consulted.

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- 13.6 Mr Wightman stated that the bank holidays had always led to revised schedules. He advised that the operational plan was developed in the summer which was then prepared and agreed in the autumn in consultation with the Cabinet Member and Officers of the Council. The Cabinet Member had received a number of briefings also. Mr Wightman also stated that the situation had been compounded by staff absence over the Christmas period. Councillor Cook, the Cabinet Member for Environment, advised that it was also a significantly more difficult operation because there was a considerably greater volume of recycling than previous years.
- 13.7 With regards to safety, Councillor Hilton asked whether Amey provided staff with PPE such as boots and shoes and whether these were readily available. Mr Wightman confirmed that all operatives were required to wear PPE and did so.
- 13.8 Councillor Melvin stated that there had been weather warnings and, in fact, there had been less snow than expected. She shared her view that shoes specifically to deal with ice would have stopped slipping and would have saved money. She further stated that, in her view, the wrong people were the target of public anger and that in future there should be an Amey helpline to deal with enquiries rather than the Council.
- 13.9 Mr Wightman stated that Gloucester did mobilise at the initial point of disruption and that Officers were looking at an Amey helpline. He highlighted to the Committee that staff and the public must be kept safe and if it was decided that it was too dangerous to operate, he would support that decision. He stated that he would be particularly uncomfortable if there was an accident. Councillor Melvin stated that Members felt the same but that Amey should have been liaising with the County Council on the gritting of roads.
- 13.10 Councillor Hampson stated that he was sympathetic with the decisions made regarding safety but enquired as to whether there were specific staffing issues during the period. Mr Wightman responded that he had been aware that there had been difficulties with recruitment and retention previously but that this had improved and there were no staffing issues at present.
- 13.11 Councillor Pullen shared his view that the decision to suspend collections was the correct on the basis of safety. He stated that Christmas was the busiest time of year for waste management and that it appeared Amey did plan for extra waste but he questioned the apparent lack of contingency for the possibility of poor weather and that there appeared to be no plan for such an eventuality.
- 13.12 Mr Wightman highlighted that Amey did recognise that there would be additional waste and that there were additional vehicles as well as other resources. In response to Councillor Pullen's intervention questioning why 16 streets in his ward still hadn't had their rubbish collected, Mr Wightman stated that residual recycling had almost been completed and that they were catching up. Councillor Ryall questioned whether the same result would be seen next Christmas and Mr Wightman advised that Amey would be learning lessons and preparing contingency better.

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- 13.13 The City Improvement and Environment Manager, Meyrick Brentnall, introduced the report on the Grounds Maintenance Schedule. He outlined that there had previously been issues around areas of open spaces not having grass cut. He advised that reassessing this was the first total re-appraisal of open spaces in the city. He continued by informing the Committee that the Council and Amey had attempted to make the current regime more efficient and that the service would be better managed.
- 13.14 Councillor Wilson welcomed aspects of the new arrangements, particularly the increased levels of strimming. He questioned, however, what other models of operation were being examined. Mr Brentnall advised that all options were open and that various proposals would come forward.
- 13.15 Councillor Hilton highlighted the fact that the contract was first agreed in 2007 and that the Cabinet Member for Environment had previously stated that it was one of the worst contracts he had seen. He expressed concern that 2022 (the year the contract would expire) was a considerable time away and queried whether the Cabinet Member would consider establishing a new service by 2020 or whether the Council would consider ending the contract sooner.
- 13.16 The Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Cook, advised that the contract did not allow for unilateral withdrawal and were this to happen, the Council would face the possibility of having to pay damages. He further advised that penalties would go live in 2018.
- 13.17 Councillor Pullen stated that he was pleased to see consultation with a number of members of staff. He expressed concern that poor pay for workers would result in a poor service. In response, Mr Wightman stated that Amey was investing £1m in development, would be taking on new apprentices and had reviewed the pay package. Councillor Pullen further queried whether the pay review had resulted in an increase in staff to which Mr Wightman responded that he was not aware of any vacancies and that Amey was looking at fixed term contracts.
- 13.18 Councillor Hampson expressed concern over health and safety as well as the quality of work that had been undertaken. He also queried the level of supervision that had been undertaken. Anthony Hunter of Amey advised that the City had been divided into four geographical parts which allowed one team member to oversee one area with an additional support member with general oversight. As such, he continued, supervisors had one point of contact for the relevant area. Mr Brentnall advised that the Council had some oversight also.
- 13.19 Councillor Melvin stated that she accepted the point made by the Cabinet Member. She highlighted that Liverpool Council had come to a mutual withdrawal arrangement.

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13.20 **RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the Supervision of the Grounds Crew and Grounds Maintenance Schedule reports.

14. SHOPMOBILITY CONSULTATION

- 14.1 The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods, Councillor Jennie Watkins, introduced the report regarding a proposal for a new fees and charges structure for the city's Shopmobility service.
- 14.2 She highlighted that the report would be considered by the Cabinet and that, whilst there was initial feedback, this was not complete as the consultation had recently closed. Councillor Watkins stated that there had previously been concerns about charging but that fees and charges had not been reviewed in five years. In that period, a proposed transfer of the service to the third sector had not gone ahead.
- 14.3 Since the service had moved after the Together Gloucester restructure, the Visitor Experience Manager began a review of Shopmobility and had suggested changing the charging structure in order to strengthen its financial position. It was held that the provision of such a non-statutory service at the rate it was being charged at would be difficult to justify.
- 14.4 Councillor Watkins advised that a questionnaire which contained the possible changes formed part of the consultation and the public had had the option to communicate directly with the Visitor Experience team. With regard to the questionnaires, 110 were completed by members. Of these, 71% indicated that they would continue to use the service at the proposed rates while 18% indicated that they would be less likely to continue using the service.
- 14.5 Of the non-members who responded, 75% indicated that they would continue to use it at the proposed revised rates and 20% indicated they would use it less. Councillor Watkins also highlighted that, compared to some other authorities, Gloucester was relatively inexpensive. By way of example, she stated that the average annual cost for a Shopmobility user was £94.
- 14.6 Councillor Watkins stated that it was necessary to put the service in a good position in order to maintain it as a quality service. Comment by the Committee was subsequently invited.
- 14.7 Councillor Wilson enquired as to whether the annual membership fee was paid as one payment and if so, was there the possibility that the annual fee be increased and paid monthly. Councillor Watkins stated that, while she would not rule out such a proposal, she understood there to be a costs implication to collect fees more regularly. She further advised that many had chosen to pay a daily fee also and that this had worked well.
- 14.8 While Councillor Hampson sought confirmation of the sample size, Councillor Watkins stated that, as had already been stated due to the recent

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close of the consultation, feedback from other organisations had not yet been given. She advised that the full results of the consultation would be circulated to Members. She further advised that, in response to a query from Councillor Hampson on whether any work had been conducted to assess any impact on vulnerable people, a full People Impact Assessment (PIA) had been undertaken and would be circulated to Members. Further, she brought to the Committee's attention that a number of users of the service were in receipt of Personal Independence Payments (PIP), an element of which was to fund mobility.

- 14.9 Having examined the comparison of charges with regard to other local authorities, Councillor Ryall noted that where Shopmobility was operated by the third sector, charges were greater. She suggested that were the third sector to run Shopmobility in Gloucester, charges would increase for service users.
- 14.10 Councillor Watkins stated that different areas operated within different structures and that the Council was considering other revenue streams. She further stated that it may be that the Council would always have to be involved.
- 14.11 Councillor Pullen highlighted the decrease in membership number and queried whether it would be more advantageous to actively promote membership of the scheme. The Corporate Director, Jonathan Lund, advised that the proposed changes would be creating a pricing structure which would incentivise membership and Councillor Watkins advised that many individuals were happy to pay a 'per use' fee.
- 14.12 Councillor Hilton noted that the scheme provided parking at no charge and queried whether this would be maintained were the proposed changes to take effect. Councillor Watkins advised that there were no plans to revise this.
- 14.13 Councillor Hilton continued and suggested that, while transferring the service to the charity sector should be looked at, it would be preferable for it to remain as part of the Council as a charity might find it difficult to keep costs low.
- 14.14 Councillor Melvin stated that the service's continued existence should be celebrated having helped some of the most vulnerable people. She further stated that, not only had it had a positive social impact on the City but a positive economic impact had been achieved also with residents who would not usually be able to enter the City Centre take advantage of the City's offer.
- 14.15 **RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

15. FESTIVALS AND EVENTS PROGRAMME

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- 15.1 The Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Noakes, to the meeting. She advised that the Festival and Events Programme was being prepared and would be ready for the next meeting of the Committee. At the request of the Chair she would, instead, provide an overview of her portfolio's work.
- 15.2 As part of her report Councillor Noakes referred to the cultural strategy, support from the Arts Council, the preparation of a 5 year venues development plan (including new approaches to audience development and participation, marketing, volunteer development, income generation and collections management), the establishment of the Gloucester Culture Trust and exciting partnerships with national organisations based on a shared ethos of inspiring a new generation as part of National Partnership Projects. She highlighted that the partnership with the Roundhouse had been helped by a further £200,000 grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- 15.3 Councillor Noakes outlined the seven strands of the Great Place Programme and provided a brief update on each strand.
- 15.4 In response to questions Councillor Noakes informed the Committee that the formal accreditation of the City's museums was not at risk, despite rumours to the contrary. She expected the assessment to be finalised in February and believed there to be no reason to think that accreditation would be withdrawn. Once completed and received the accreditation report would be available for public inspection.
- 15.5 Whilst recognising that the full Festival and Events Programme would be presented at a later date, Councillor Ryall questioned whether there was anything involving sport which could be part of the programme. Councillor Noakes advised that, whilst there was not at this point, it would be encouraging for Councillor Ryall to discuss this with her.
- 5.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (1) note the Cabinet Member's update on Culture and Leisure and; (2) consider the Festival and Events Programme at the next Committee meeting.

16. INITIAL REPORT ON THE PEER REVIEW

- 16.1 The Leader, Councillor Paul James, outlined that what the Committee had sight of was not a final report of the Local Government Association Peer Challenge Team and that this would follow in due course.

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- 16.2 Councillor Hampson moved that discussion take place once the final report had been circulated. This was seconded by Councillor Hilton and agreed by the Committee.
- 16.3 **RESOLVED:** That the Report on the Peer Review be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee upon its publication.

17. THE FLEECE INN- GLOUCESTER

- 17.1 The Leader of the Council, Councillor James, outlined the report and that it had been to Cabinet. He advised that it had been resolved to put plans around the Fleece Inn out to market and that investment had been undertaken in order to stabilise the building.
- 17.2 Councillor Hilton expressed his view that he was content with the decision and that it was important that restoration work was carried out. He further stated that the partnership approach which was being pursued was a good one and that it was important that the appropriate work would be done.
- 17.3 Councillor Hampson concurred with Councillor Hilton's view and stated that he felt it important that a historic building such as the Fleece was protected. Councillor Melvin stated that while the ability of the City Council to control interference with the property was limited, it still remained a valued asset.
- 17.4 Councillor James advised that a further report would be published in due course outlining further plans.
- 17.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the report.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 18.1 17th January 2018 at 6.30pm in the Civic Suite, North Warehouse.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.30 pm hours

Chair