



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 30th April 2018

PRESENT : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Pearsall, Hilton, Lewis, Wilson, Dee, Hampson, Hawthorne, Smith, Patel, Pullen and Taylor

Others in Attendance

Councillor Colin Organ, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning
Councillor Richard Cook, Cabinet Member for Environment
Corporate Director (Partnership Working)
Head of Place
Head of Housing Services
City Centre Improvement Manager
Strategic Housing Officer
Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader
Councillor Kate Haigh

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Finnegan and Melvin

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

50.1 There were no declarations of interest.

51. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

51.1 There were no declarations of party whipping.

52. MINUTES

52.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2018 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

53. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

53.1 There were no public questions.

54. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

54.1 There were no petitions or deputations.

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

- 55.1 The Committee considered the Work Programme and the Council Forward Plan.
- 55.2 The Chair brought to the Committee's attention that a one evening session would be held to examine on possible changes to the deep clean regime in some parts of the City to which County Council Members and Officers would be invited.
- 55.3 Councillor Hilton thanked the Chair for the suggestion and stated that the issue required discussion. He also stated that the County Council's Highways Manager was keen to attend the session.
- 55.4 Following discussion regarding when the session would be held, it was agreed that it was necessary the most appropriate individuals were in attendance and it should be timed as such.
- 55.5 The Chair informed the Committee that, following public consultation, a proposed Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) would be considered by the Cabinet and, as such, it was appropriate for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the matter. This was agreed by the Committee.
- 55.6 Councillor Hilton noted that the Festival and Events Programme for 2019/20 was scheduled to be signed off in January 2019. He suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider the programme sufficiently in advance of January 2019 in order to have input.
- 55.7 **RESOLVED:-** (1) That the Group Leads organise a special session to examine the potential changes to deep cleans in four wards; (2) That the Festival and Events Programme be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the October meeting and, (3) That the Work Programme be noted.

56. EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION & HOUSING SERVICE TRANSFORMATION AND OPTIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- 56.1 The Chair welcomed Councillor Organ - the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, the Head of Place, the Head of Housing Services and the Strategic Housing Officer.
- 56.2 The Chair informed the Committee that a presentation would be provided.
- 56.3 Councillor Pullen stated that he welcomed the fact that a presentation would be shown. He shared his view that, if there was a plan and/or policies, it was necessary for the Committee (where requested) to have sight of these in advance of a decision being made. He asked the Chair to check with the Monitoring Officer whether presentations rather than reports were the appropriate medium through which to deliver the scrutiny function.

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- 56.4 Councillor Wilson concurred and suggested that this could arise in the future.
- 56.5 Councillor Organ advised that the general idea was that the presentation was a form of consulting and that it was important to understand an outline of any potential proposals. In response to a query from Councillor Pullen as to whether the policy would come back to the Committee when it was formulated, Councillor Organ confirmed that it would and that it was important to keep the Overview and Scrutiny Committee abreast of developments. The Chair confirmed that he would write to the Monitoring Officer for clarification.
- 56.6 The Head of Housing Services and the Strategic Housing Officer gave the presentation on Options for Affordable Housing and Proposals for Homelessness service transformation and provided an overview of the key issues.
- 56.7 It was noted that Central Government believed that the housing market was dysfunctional. It was further noted that, while Gloucester was more affordable than other districts, the ratio of income to housing costs had risen in recent years.
- 56.8 The Strategic Housing Officer informed the Committee that housing need in the City would be dealt with over the period of the Joint Core Strategy and that 194 affordable properties per year was planned.
- 56.9 With regard to homelessness, the Committee was informed that the number of households that had been prevented from becoming homeless had decreased and that this was, in part, due to the fact that there was considerable difficulty in securing private sector accommodation with increased rents. Affordable housing targets and what had been achieved were outlined as were the new Joint Core Strategy requirements and targets.
- 56.10 The Head of Housing Services explained the new Homelessness Reduction Act which followed some Welsh legislation and had been welcomed as broadly positive. She further explained that this required a personal housing plan and the Council could end its obligations in the event of non-compliance.
- 56.11 With regard to possible options, the Committee was informed that what proposals could be put was being examined. It was also stated that working with Tewkesbury Borough Council was very important as was ensuring that Gloucester's housing needs were being built.
- 56.12 Councillor Hampson enquired as to what proportion of homeless cases were due to evictions. Councillor Patel further queried what proportion of evictions were due to unpaid rents. The Head of Housing Services stated that the Council does not record the number that were due to unpaid rents. With regard to evictions more generally, the Head of Housing Services advised that she did not have the figure immediately to hand but that it was increased.

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- 56.13 Councillor Lewis noted that planning regulations presented real difficulties in terms of providing affordable housing and queried what the position would be were Tewkesbury to not cooperate.
- 56.14 The Head of Housing Services advised that the JCS strategic assessment took into account all three districts and that Cheltenham was also involved. Councillor Organ further advised that there was a duty on the three districts to cooperate.
- 56.15 In response to a query from Councillor Lewis regarding at what point would the Council examine the need to take land, Councillor Organ stated that brownfield sites would be the focus. The Chair queried whether, given issues with profit viability, developing brownfield sites would make the provision of affordable housing less likely. Councillor Organ advised that every case would be judged on its respective merits.
- 56.16 Councillor Wilson cited the number of affordable housing provided both last year and this year in the context of the target of building 194 units each year. He queried whether there was a target to make up the shortfall. Councillor Organ stated that part of the JCS was to make the whole area work and that the Council did not control the physical act of building properties.
- 56.17 In response to the Chair's query as to why the Council could not initiate its own housing company as suggested by the former Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Councillor Organ stated this would be possible if the correct resources were in place. He also noted that it was a high risk strategy given the number of factors beyond the Council's control such as a rise in interest rates.
- 56.18 Councillor Hilton stated his view that it was good the issues were being examined as, for example, the number of families on waiting lists was unacceptable. He stated that there could be a housing company that doesn't build properties and that the Council should seriously consider purchasing properties.
- 56.19 Councillor Taylor shared his view that it was necessary to tell Central Government that more housing was required.
- 56.20 Councillor Organ stated that regeneration was a key part of resolving housing issues and further highlighted the issues with land occupancy. The Corporate Director further advised that it was important to recognise that organisations involved in building and housing had a number of interests.
- 56.21 **RESOLVED:-** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the presentation consider policy proposals when they are due to be put forward to Cabinet.

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57. EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL INVESTMENT FUND

- 57.1 Councillor Cook, the Cabinet Member for Environment and the City Centre Improvement Manager provided an overview of the joint bid with Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough Councils and the University of Gloucestershire for funding from the European Structural Investment Fund. Councillor Cook outlined that there would be a £1m spend in the City which would reduce flood risk, improve air quality and enhance bio-diversity.
- 57.2 Councillor Cook advised that it was intended that the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust would be consulted and that Gloucester City Council would act as project lead.
- 57.3 The Chair queried the timeline for consultation and what the position would be if communities wanted something different.
- 57.4 The City Centre Improvement Manager advised that there would be consultation on a number of matters and that at the end of the three year period, sites would be surveyed. He further advised that if there were objections, interventions could be relatively modest and his team was confident community desires could be combined with improving bio-diversity.
- 57.5 Councillor Hilton shared his view that it was to be welcomed in principle but queried whether the funding would be secure after the UK's departure from the European Union. Councillor Cook advised that the funds were already in the relevant UK account. The City Centre Improvement Manager highlighted that, in addition to the ESIF funding matched funding was also available.
- 57.6 **RESOLVED:-** That the Overview and Scrutiny note the funding awarded by the ESIF.

58. TASK AND FINISH: HIGH STRENGTH ALCOHOL

- 58.1 The Chair welcomed Councillor Haigh and Councillor Wilson who highlighted key aspects of work undertaken and the report.
- 58.2 Councillor Haigh highlighted the Task and Finish Group's consideration of the Local Government Association's report on 'Reducing the Strength' and that the Group had examined best practice across the country.
- 58.3 Councillor Haigh further highlighted the recommendations contained within the report and that best practice elsewhere was to work with partner agencies.
- 58.4 Councillor Wilson informed the Committee that it was not possible to compel licence holders to cease the sale of high strength products and that working with communities themselves would be the best approach. He further advised that legal advice had been taken and that this confirmed there were limited powers to restrict sales.

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- 58.5 Councillor Hilton highlighted the good example of work undertaken in Ipswich where outreach work was a key part of success in that area. He suggested that this be attempted in Gloucester. He expressed disappointment that no off-licences had responded to the initial consultation and suggested that the district plan be examined to discourage the 'clustering' of off-licences. Councillor Hilton further suggested that an additional recommendation be included for planning and licensing committees to consider whether licences and planning applications be granted in 'cluster' areas.
- 58.6 The Vice-Chair shared her view that the recommendations should be followed up at a later date. Councillor Lewis acknowledged the detail of the report and highlighted that there were enforcement issues to be considered, particularly in terms of the sale of products to intoxicated persons.
- 58.7 Councillor Pullen noted the prevalence of under-age sales and stated that enforcement should be bolstered. He noted that a Voluntary Code of Practice could be taken up by some licence holders in 'cluster' areas but not by others in order to benefit from the displacement of trade. Councillor Wilson stated that such an approach had been successful elsewhere.
- 58.8 **RESOLVED:-** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **ACCEPT** the recommendations in the report with the addition of a further recommendation that the Planning and Licensing Committees consider the refusal of applications in 'cluster' areas identified within the report.

59. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 59.1 4th June 2018 at 6.30pm in the Civic Suite, North Warehouse.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.25 pm hours

Chair