



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 5th October 2020

PRESENT : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Dee, Finnegan, Haigh, Hilton, Hyman, Lewis, Pullen, Stephens, Taylor, Toleman, Tracey, Walford and Wilson

Others in Attendance

Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance & Resources
Corporate Director

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Organ

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: - that the minutes of the meetings held on the 7th of September 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

5. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

6. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

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

7.1 The Chair suggested that the Gloucester (Covid-19) Recovery Plan – *Visitors and Cultural Recovery* is considered alongside the Cultural Strategy

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
05.10.20

Update on the 30th of November as there would likely be crossover between the two items. Committee Members agreed with this.

- 7.2 Councillor Haigh stated that she would be keen for the Committee to look at the Council 's Public Art Strategy, an issue which the Committee had taken an interest in the past. The Chair stated that they would look at how best this could be brought before the Committee when they met with the Vice-Chair and Spokesperson.

RESOLVED that: - the Gloucester (Covid-19) Recovery Plan – *Visitors and Cultural Recovery* would be moved to the 30th of November meeting ; the Chair alongside the Vice-Chair and Spokesperson would look at how best to fit the Public Art Strategy into the Committee work programme.

8. GLOUCESTER (COVID-19) RECOVERY PLAN: CITY COUNCIL SERVICE RECOVERY

- 8.1 The Cabinet Member for Policy & Resources, Councillor Norman, introduced the item outlining that the presentation would focus on the impact of COVID-19 and key aspects in the recovery of City Council Services. She then expressed her thanks to City Council staff for their commitment, drive and dedication to their work during these unprecedented times, with many having to adjust to working exclusively from home for the first time.
- 8.2 The Corporate Director conducted the presentation informing Members that it would address the approach and scope of work carried out in relation to City Council Services recovery since lockdown was eased. He explained that at the start of the pandemic most staff were working from home except for staff from some certain service areas who were not able to do so. This included key staff from the Crematorium, Waste Services, in addition to other staff who needed to work in the office. He added that the Council's investment in IT and shift to agile working such as the implementation of Microsoft Teams had supported working from home for both staff members and Councillors. Furthermore, some staff had helped with the Community Hub and others had volunteered to standby to supplement waste staff although they were ultimately not required. Moreover, the Corporate Director outlined that communication was maintained through fortnightly Q&A sessions with all staff which frequently had over 100 participants, regular staff and Councillor bulletins, and regular meetings with Group Leaders during the period when Committee meetings had been cancelled. Lastly, he explained that the Corporate Director (Partnerships) had attended meetings as part of the County Council Resilience Response Forum Group.
- 8.3 In relation to the easing of lockdown and implementing recovery plans, the Corporate Director highlighted that several measures had been put in place. This included holding Council and Committee meetings online, customer services delivered through the phone and online, the development of the City Council Recovery Plan, and publishing risk assessments for different areas of the Council and they returned to operations. Regarding the risk assessments, he outlined that these had been drafted by service managers

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

05.10.20

and reviewed by Health & Safety/ Environmental Health Team – in consultation with Trade Unions. In relation to the return to work on premises, the Corporate Director outlined that for those who decided to work in the office, there were socially distanced and designated workspaces and a booking system which staff were required to use in order to record the number of staff present at premises. Staff were also required to wear face coverings in areas where social distancing was difficult to maintain. On average, there were approximately 15-20 staff in the office each day. Furthermore, meeting rooms were available but with limited capacity. The Corporate Director highlighted that current government advice had however changed to stay working from home if you can and the advice to staff had been changed to reflect this. Nonetheless, some staff chose to continue working in the office due to their personal wellbeing or circumstances.

- 8.4 Regarding The Gateway which had been closed since March 2020, the Corporate Director informed the Committee that preparations had been underway to reopen on an appointment only basis, however, these plans had been put on hold in line with the change to the government's work from home guidance in September 2020. He added that Customer Services and Housing were able to provide their services online and via telephone whilst working from home with some limited in person services for Housing. These changes to working from home had seen some improvements such as: reduction in call waiting times to 44 seconds, reduction in missed calls from around 17% to 4%, email response time to less than 2 working days. Moreover, although there had been a 20% increase in the percentage of calls for housing, the number of missed calls had reduced to 0.7% from 1.2%.
- 8.5 The Corporate Director informed Members that regular feedback had been sought and received from all staff, for example, through the Change Champions. Some of the positives included: increased productivity, increased flexibility and thus the ability to balance work and home life, and reduction in travel related costs. Some of the drawbacks identified included: no distinction between work and home life, an anticipated increase in utility bills, and decreased social interaction with teams and other staff members. The Corporate Director outlined that the feedback had been taken on board and would be addressed by Leadership. Some of the potential measures which they would look at included IT stock to cover for faulty equipment to minimise downtime, arranging for teams to work in the office on the same days, and looking at how to make home workstations more appropriate for the long term. The Corporate Director outlined that Leadership would consider a response to the financial issues raised by working from home for example in relation to bills and planned to issue Best Practice Guidance which would provide guiding principles for staff. As well as considering any views and recommendations from the O&S Committee, he explained that next steps would include keeping abreast of the latest government guidance, developing further risk assessment for service areas as the need arises, remaining mindful of the 5'Rs' in the Gloucester Recovery Plan and integrating City Council Services Recovery with the other recovery streams.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
05.10.20

- 8.6 The Chair echoed the sentiment that working from home had presented some challenges, however both staff members and Councillors had managed this well. They then invited questions from Committee Members.
- 8.7 Councillor Wilson thanked the Corporate Director for the update. Responding to Councillor Wilson 's queries around meeting rooms, the Corporate Director advised that the rule of six did not apply to people at work and only applied to social gatherings. However, meeting rooms would have limited capacity relative to the room in order to ensure that appropriate social distancing could be observed. Moreover, meetings were limited to one meeting in each meeting room in a day. This would be monitored by the Custodians alongside the meeting room booking system. In relation to Councillor Coole 's question, the Corporate Director outlined that there was differing advice from the Local Government Association (LGA) and elsewhere on whether Councillors were considered employees for the purposes of the rule of six.
- 8.8 In response to Councillor Haigh's question around potential limitations to accessing Council Services for those who would normally access council services in person and did not have access to phones or the internet, Councillor Norman outlined that her understanding was that the freephone which could also be dialled from public phones had worked well for people who would potentially fall under this category. Similarly, she was not aware of anyone not being able to access services due to a lack of phone/internet access. Councillor Norman added that homeless individuals in the City had been put in hotels at the start of the national lockdown in line with government rules, and those not in these services were being engaged with partner services. There were several channels available to access Council services. In relation to Councillor Haigh's question on the Council's out of hours powers, the Corporate Director stated that the Council did not have any additional powers as a result of COVID-19 regulations. However, the County Council Public Health did have a number of powers and the City Council alongside other district councils were working with them as partners through the Response Recovery Group and with the police. Moreover, the Licensing and Enforcement teams were also working closely with the police. Finally, he explained that his advise would be that members of the public who have seen a clear breach of the COVID-19 regulations should contact the police's non-emergency/emergency phone number (depending upon whether the situation was life threatening) as necessary.
- 8.9 Councillor Pullen echoed Councillor Norman's comments commending staff for their hard work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Corporate Director and Councillor Norman then responded to his queries as follows. On the topic of the induction process for new staff joining the Council during the pandemic, the Corporate Director advised that the Council was employing the best and safest ways to bring new staff on board. This included, interviewing new appointees online, delivering IT to them, and, where appropriate, socially distanced work with their teams. The best practices would be included in guidance for managers in due course. Secondly, on the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
05.10.20

topic the support available to staff in customer services who had to deal with difficult situations without the usual face to face interaction they would have with team members to discuss these incidences, Councillor Norman explained that Customer Services had excellent management support and team leaders who dialled into calls to check how the team was getting on and could takeover calls which were particularly difficult. She added that the teams' observation was that there had actually been less difficult and problematic calls during lockdown, and more positive responses to the customer feedback survey. Additionally, the new contact centre had helped the team with working from home. Lastly, in relation to the potential financial implications of working from home, the Corporate Director added that Leadership had listened to staff's concerns and they were considering how to respond in a fair and equitable way.

- 8.10 In reference to the earlier discussion around booking meeting rooms, Councillor Finnegan noted that common sense must prevail. Councillor Finnegan then outlined a case she had dealt with in her ward involving a young person who had experienced difficulties accessing key services. Councillor Norman advised that this seemed to be a more complex case involving different key services. She added that if Councillors had issues with assisting individuals such as in that case, they should contact the relevant Cabinet Member.
- 8.11 Councillor Hilton commended staff for their work during the pandemic. The Corporate Director and Councillor Norman then responded to his queries as follows. Firstly, current legislation did not allow hybrid Council and Committee meetings, however, this could potentially change in the future. Secondly, the Council was looking at the potential benefits of webcasting in the future, however all factors were being considered. For example, the Policy & Governance Manager was keeping an eye on viewing figures with the current online Council and Committee meetings to ascertain interest. Thirdly, the Corporate Director noted that Councillor Hilton had identified a lot of the relevant issues with regard to future elections in the new COVID-19 world. These issues were being considered by the Returning Officer and the Democratic Services team.
- 8.12 Councillor Haigh expressed her concern that members of the public would not have access to a Freephone during the planned IT outage between the 9th of October to the 11th of October. The Corporate Director outlined that a response would be circulated to Committee Members.
- 8.13 Councillor Norman addressed questions raised by Councillor Tracey as follows. On the topic of the gateway reopening, she reiterated that whilst it had been the administration's plan to reopen The Gateway, the change to the government's work from home in guidance in September had put these plans on hold. Furthermore, she advised that she would look into the signage at The Gateway and whether it needs to be changed. Additionally, all Officers had a direct dial from which they could be contacted and there was

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
05.10.20

an out of hours number which was staffed by the Senior Management Team for emergencies.

8.14 The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking Councillor Norman and the Corporate Director. They also noted the importance of looking after mental health during these unprecedented times and reminded Committee Members of the provision of the Employee Assistance Programme.

8.15 **RESOLVED:-** that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee NOTE the update.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 2nd of November 2020.

Time of commencement: 6:30pm

Time of conclusion: 7:55pm

Chair