



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 28th October 2019

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Hilton, Hyman, Lewis, Organ, Pullen, Stephens, Toleman, Tracey and Wilson

### **Others in Attendance**

Jacquie Douglas, Chief Executive of the Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust

Robin Brown, The Chair of the Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust  
Major Projects Consultant

Transformation Manager at Civica

Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy

Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Head of Policy and Resources

Intelligent Client Officer

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs. Dee, Finnegan, Patel, Taylor and Walford

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Taylor declared an interest in agenda item 8 by virtue of being a Board Member for Aspire Trust.

### **2. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30th of September 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)**

There were no questions from members of the public

### **5. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)**

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There were no petitions or deputations.

**6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN**

- 6.1 Councillor Haigh requested that the *Green Travel Plan Report 2019 and Update* be considered before the Committee at the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 meeting. It was noted that the Committee had a long-held interest in this area.
- 6.2 The Chair stated that he would like to look at the *Annual Report on the Grant Funding provided to the Voluntary Community Sector* at the Committee 's 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 meeting.
- 6.3 Councillor Hilton drew Members' attention to the *Demolition of Wessex House and Intended Land Use Report* and the *Wessex House, Provision of Homeless Support Service reports*. He submitted that as the Ward Councillors for Kingsholm and Wotton, him and Councillor Brazil should have been briefed by Cabinet and the relevant Officers, given that both reports affect their ward. The Leader of the Council explained that Cabinet is happy to consult with Members where appropriate, and therefore Cabinet would brief them both. Councillor Organ asked Councillor Hilton whether Wessex House had not been considered at the Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG), of which he was a Member. Councillor Hilton responded to say that whilst it had been considered by the PPWG, there had been no direct contact from officers to him and Councillor Brazil.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED:** - (1) That the *Green Travel Plan Report 2019 and Update* would be included on the Committee 's 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 meeting agenda. (2) The *Annual Report on the Grant Funding provided to the Voluntary Community Sector* would be included on the Committee 's 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 meeting. Councillor Hilton would be briefed on the Wessex House reports, and then it will be re-assessed whether the two reports still need to come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**7. ASPIRE TRUST ANNUAL UPDATE**

- 7.1 The Chief Executive of the Aspire Trust, Jacquie Douglas, presented the Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust Performance Review Annual Report 2018-19. She summarised the report and brought to Members' attention key aspects including the financial statements and the Trust's proposed next steps. Further, she stated that the Trust continued to value the partnership with Gloucester City Council.
- 7.2 Councillor Ryall opened the discussion and asked whether they were working on an exercise prescription as part of their partnership with Gloucestershire NHS Trust. The CEO stated that they did have an exercise prescription programme, and that they had done so for 8 years. She added

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that they were working with a range of health providers, including mental health providers, physiotherapists and people who welcome patients in GP surgeries.

- 7.3 Councillor Pullen stated that he welcomed the report, moreover, that the developments showed that GL1 had become more than just a sports centre, but a community centre. Noting the £48,000 investment in the gym, he asked whether this had made a difference. Further, he asked whether they had been successful in retaining good staff. The CEO replied to say that the investment was largely about retaining the customer base, as they had lost a number of customers to competitors in the past. On the topic of retaining staff, she explained that this was difficult as they were in competition with neighbouring companies such as Asda, as well retail stores within the City. She added that the difficult hours, as well as the fact that several the roles were only minimum wage exacerbated the issue. As an example, she highlighted that Front of House and Lifeguard roles had a higher staff turnover, compared to others such as Swimming Instructor roles.
- 7.4 Councillor Stephens observed that from its conception, affordability had been a key aim of The Aspire Trust. He therefore questioned whether they offered concessionary rates for the less privileged, and whether the Health and Wellbeing Hub could be rolled out across poorer parts of the City. The CEO advised that concessionary rates of up to 40% which were offered, particularly for individuals on benefits. Moreover, the Health and Wellbeing Hub was currently only £2.50 per visit, with even lower rates being offered for individuals who stay with the Hub in the long term. She further explained that the Aspire Trust would be looking to other initiatives within the community. Robin Brown, the Chair of the Trust added that the Health and Wellbeing hub had the dual benefit of attracting those who wish to use the gym, as well as helping the community.
- 7.5 Councillor Hilton questioned how healthy the Trust 's financial accounts were. He pointed out for example that in the previous financial year, they had a £44,000 deficit. Moreover, he queried whether the Section 104 Officer had seen the accounts of the last financial year. The CEO responded to say that deficit was to be dealt with by the Aspire Trust as a separate entity on whom any liability would fall. The accounts were in the public domain, and the Section 104 officer saw the trust 's financial accounts every quarter.
- 7.6 Councillor Haigh congratulated the CEO and the Chair of the Trust for achieving what she felt were difficult targets in a tough financial climate, particularly as the Trust was no longer receiving management fees from Gloucester City Council. In particular, she believed the fact that the Trust had remained inclusive for everyone was particularly noteworthy.
- 7.7 Councillor Tracey questioned how many staff the Trust employed. She was informed by the CEO of The Aspire Trust that there were 185 staff currently in employment – with 70 of them on full-time contracts. Further, she asked whether they had experienced issues with attracting people due to parking. The CEO responded to say that there were neighbouring car parks in the

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area, as well as good transport links. Lastly, she informed Councillor Tracey that GL1 's busiest hours were between 4-7pm in the evenings and also on Saturdays.

- 7.8 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure stated that he was delighted to hear the positive news. He noted that The CEO had been passionate and enthusiastic in her role and commended her for looking outside the box even in challenging times.
- 7.9 Councillor Organ remarked that in the 10 years that Gloucester City Council had been involved with the Aspire Trust, GL1 had evolved a lot in those years, thus, becoming a Leisure Centre.
- 7.10 The Chair echoed these sentiments and congratulated the CEO and the Chair of the Aspire Trust.
- 7.11 **RESOLVED:** - That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the Report.

**8. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

- 8.0 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources presented the report and highlighted key aspects. It was noted that since 2013, Gloucester City Council has maintained an up to 100% reduction scheme. However, changes needed to be considered, and hence a public consultation was carried out.
- 8.1 Councillor Wilson asked whether households had been warned of the increase. Moreover, he queried whether the scheme was worth it, considering only £46,000 in savings would be made. In response, the Intelligent Client Officer explained that they had engaged households most likely to be affected by the scheme, through voluntary organisations and social media amongst others. Additionally, The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that £43,000 was a good figure in terms of budget saving.
- 8.2 Councillor Ryall expressed her concern with the way the survey had been constructed, which she believed was difficult to understand, even for someone with a PHD. In her view, some of the survey responses suggested people were unsure how to respond to some of the questions, with such answers as 'unsure' and 'I don't know'. The Intelligent Client Officer responded to say that she accepted this, and that the complicated part of the consultation was to simplify what was an intrinsically complicated issue. Prior to launching the consultation, they had engaged with service users such as housing associations, and ultimately, had done the best they could in the circumstances.

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- 8.3 Councillor Ryall asked whether it would be possible to be sent the summary of the survey. The Intelligent Client Officer said that this would be sent to Committee members.
- 8.4 Councillor Stephens suggested that the scheme would affect the poorest in society, who would struggle to make the payments. Further he questioned whether an equality impact assessment had been carried out. Similarly, he submitted that, ultimately, the costs would only be picked up elsewhere. Finally, he observed that the scheme was being looked at without the Budget which he felt was problematic. Responding to Councillor Stephens' queries, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised that the responses from the public consultation would be taken on board, and the responses would be included in the report going to Cabinet.
- 8.5 The Transformation Manager explained that around 36.4% of local authorities had taken up a local council tax support scheme. In addition, he pointed to studies which support a local authority's ability to collect council tax if government cuts are over a certain amount. He added that there were plans in place to deal with any potential pressure on low income households. In particular, the Discretionary Housing Scheme would help to alleviate any pressure on low income households.
- 8.4 Councillor Stephens asked whether it was known how much the Discretionary Housing Scheme costs now and would cost in the future. The Transformation Manager advised that as the scheme had only been introduced towards the end of the last year, there were no figures currently available.
- 8.5 Councillor Haigh pointing to paragraph 3.9 questioned why all war pensions could not be fully disregarded. The Transformation Manager explained that the £10 was only relevant to people who were not in receipt of Universal Credit. On the other hand, households who were in receipt of Universal Credit would still have their war pensions fully disregarded.
- 8.6 Councillor Hilton argued that the local council tax support scheme was flawed. His reasons were as follows; firstly, that only a small amount of money was being collected. Secondly, he suggested that it would affect the poorest in society, and potentially put these households in debt. Finally, he stated that the scheme needed to be reconsidered, and that the Council should try by all means to maintain a 100% discount.
- 8.7 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources answered Councillor Hilton 's queries as follows. There was a collections process in which those who found themselves in trouble would be treated fairly, with a different

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process being considered for smaller balances. She added that the policy for this would be circulated to members. Furthermore, the City Council had protected those most challenged in society since 2013, however maintaining this would be financially challenging. Moreover, they would need to look at this with Gloucestershire County Council as the billing authority. Lastly, she added that the proposals for the scheme would be going through multiple rounds of scrutiny, and all options were still open at this stage.

*The Chair extended the meeting by 15 minutes.*

8.9 **RESOLVED:** - That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- (1) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee does not accept the proposal of the minimum payment scheme. Cabinet is asked to reconsider the scheme and look at alternative options
- (2) Notwithstanding the recommendation above, if Cabinet decides to go ahead with the scheme, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that (a) introduction of the scheme is phased out over two years (b) all war pensions to be disregarded under the scheme.

## **9. REDEVELOPMENT OF THE FORMER FLEECE HOTEL SITE**

9.1 The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy introduced the report and highlighted key aspects. He explained that they had gone through the Competitive Dialogue process and were pleased with the appointment of Dowdeswell Estates as a Partner.

9.2 Councillor Pullen opened the discussion. He questioned what would happen with the Longsmith Street Car Park in the redevelopment, and, moreover, what lifespan it had. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy responded to say that the car park was largely no longer fit for purpose, something which was evident from its current condition. The Major Projects Consultant explained that the existing structure of the car park could potentially be used, however there were likely to be several archaeological considerations. He added that the car park had perhaps reached the end of its usefulness, however the question of what to do with it was still being considered. Councillors Pullen and Tracey commented on the dilapidation of the car park – namely the staircases, the doors and the parking spaces which were now too small for modern vehicles. Councillor Tracey in particular was of the opinion that any redevelopment proposals should also include redevelopment of the car park. The Major Projects Consultant responded to say that the main focus will be the redevelopment of the former Fleece Hotel. Additionally, whilst Longsmith Street Car Park would remain a public car park in the interim, this was likely to change in the future with the possibility that it would become a private car park.

9.3 Councillor Organ asked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy and the Major Projects Consultant how far into the legal process of the sale they were. The Cabinet Member for the Regeneration of the

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Economy advised that it was not a straightforward sale as it was likely to be a Joint Venture relationship - the Council 's lawyers, One Legal, and Dowdeswell 's lawyers were currently in contact about this. The Major Projects Consultants added that Dowdeswell Estates appealed as a partner given that they have end users in the form of the proposed hotel and restaurants. Lastly, he informed the Committee that due to the complexity of the project and the planning required, it could take at least 5 years.

- 9.4 Councillor Hilton commented that he was pleased with the progress made thus far. He stated that the development would be good for both Westgate Street and the City of Gloucester as a whole. In relation to the Longsmith Street Car Park, he asked whether the structure was safe, and whether it had been assessed by engineers. The Major Projects Consultant explained that they would need to take samples of the structure, but that there were ways to strengthen the core structure, if needed. Noting the issues with the car park, Councillor Toleman asked whether any maintenance costs had been set aside. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and the Economy stated that they did not have the detailed cost of figures at this stage. Additionally, it was also about striking the right balance, looking at how prudent it would be to spend money on maintenance of the car park before the development itself had started.
- 9.5 Councillor Tracey stated that she welcomed the report and asked whether the development could be brought forward. Councillor James responded to say that they would need to gain permission as it was a Joint Venture between the Council and Dowdeswell Estates. He re-iterated that from start to finish the project would likely take 5 years.
- 9.6 **RESOLVED:** - That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the Report.

**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Friday 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2019.

**Time of commencement: 6:30pm**

**Time of conclusion: 20:31pm**

**Chair**