



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 31st October 2022

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Dee, Evans, Gravells MBE, Hilton, Hudson, Kubaszczyk, Sawyer, Wilson, Zaman and Tracey.

Others in Attendance

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Richard Cook.

Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman.

Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, Councillor Tree Chambers-Dubus

Managing Director

Accountancy Manager

Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead

Financial Services Manager

Graduate National Management Trainee

Policy and Development Officer

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Durdey and O'Donnell

43. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

44. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

45. MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd October were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

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46. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

47. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions nor deputations.

48. ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the updates.

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

49.1 The Chair introduced the latest version of the Council Forward Plan and invited suggestions as to any items Members wished to add to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. It was agreed that the Gloucester City Plan be added to the agenda for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9th January 2023.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be amended to reflect the above and
- 2) To **NOTE** the Work Programme.

50. 2021-22 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

50.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report and explained that the cyber incident of December 2021 continued to have a significant impact on the work of the Finance team. She paid tribute to the Finance Team and thanked Officers for their hard work in finding manual work arounds to enable them to provide the detailed reconciliations set out in the report.

50.2 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources informed Members that the year-end position for the financial year 2021/22 was a decrease to the General Fund Balance of £252k against a budgeted increase of £129k. She explained that the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cyber incident in 2021 had created significant financial challenges for the council. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources referred Members to the figures set out at 4.1 in the report and confirmed that areas in a favourable position were the Communities and Neighbourhoods and Environment and Leader portfolios. She advised that there were pressures in the Performance and Resources portfolio, which had seen an £80k overspend in IT and further noted that the Council had seen a release of £6.1m from the Section 31 Grant Repayment Reserve.

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- 50.3 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that throughout 2021, the City Council was still very much facing pressures from Covid-19, through lost income from car parking revenue whilst lockdown restrictions were still in place, lost income from the Arbour whilst there were restrictions on funeral wakes, and a lack of appetite of businesses to take on new commercial leases due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. She expressed the view that difficulties in local government finance nationally would not have had a major impact on the council's budget. The Financial Services Manager further confirmed that Covid-19 restrictions were only relaxed towards the end of the Summer of 2021 which coincided with the end of the financial year.
- 50.4 The Chair asked whether the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources expected the income from parking to fully recover to pre-Covid-19 levels. He also asked whether there was still an appetite for car parking levels to recover fully, noting that there needed to be a balance between generating revenue and meeting the council's net zero aspirations. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that parking levels were increasing, and that they were now close to pre-Covid-19 levels. This said, she acknowledged that as a society, more needed to be done to encourage environmentally friendly travel into city centres. She expressed the view that a balancing act was needed, and that the council needed to move at the pace of consumers.
- 50.5 In response to a further question from the Chair regarding whether active travel facilities and infrastructure were being accounted for in the ongoing regeneration taking place in the city, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that there would be bike racks in the Kingswalk Shopping centre area. She also explained that the construction of the city could adapt to these needs in the future.
- 50.6 Councillor Wilson referred to paragraph 3.1 in the report and the statement that the financial performance in the months since December 2021 was based on the best analysis that the finance team could achieve using the manual records. He asked how the team planned to share the records with the council auditors when the end of year estimates were due. The Financial Services Manager explained that the council had not yet provided the end of year statement to the auditors but would ensure that when it was due, the figures would be correctly pulled together. In response to a follow-up query from Councillor Wilson, the Financial Services Manager confirmed that the Finance team were still in discussion with Deloitte who needed to sign off the previous end of year statement before receiving the statement for this financial year.
- 50.7 Councillor Hilton referred to the adverse variance of £381k and raised concerns that the council was at a disadvantage moving into the 2022/23 budget. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources commented that she would rather that the council was in surplus than deficit, however she was confident in the council's Section 151 Officer and the Finance team.

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She noted that some areas, such as recycle sales, were performing very well compared to previous budget expectations.

- 50.8 Councillor Hilton referred to paragraph 3.3. in the report and the statement that the council had secured central Government funding to support recovery from the cyber incident totalling £250k. He asked for assurances that the total cost of the cyber incident recovery would not exceed £1m, and whether the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources was confident that the council would be in a position in the near future where all applications were restored and protected. In response, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources referred Councillor Hilton to the answer she provided during the latest full Council meeting on 29th October and confirmed that the council would always ensure that value for residents' money was a key consideration in any decisions. She also advised that the IT team had put additional protection in place, such as moving many applications onto the cloud and noted that the cyber incident had adjusted the timetable of planned investment, such as the new laptop rollout.
- 50.9 In response to an additional question from Councillor Hilton as to the reasons behind the £117k overspend in HR and Communications, The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources referred to 5.11 in the report which highlighted that the overspend was a result of a budget pressure around apprenticeships which had since been alleviated. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that the majority of this pressure was in relation to apprenticeships.
- 50.10 In response to a query from Councillor Wilson in relation to paragraph 4.4. and the statement concerning delays in 2021/22 income receipts, the Financial Services Manager confirmed that this was to do with the manual processes which the finance team needed to adopt as a result of the cyber incident. He explained that the council generated income from a variety of areas and the council had received the relevant funds.
- 50.11 Councillor Pullen referred to paragraph 5.9 and noted that he found it difficult to believe that the St Oswalds and Eastgate properties were performing well, referring to the empty units in Eastgate shopping centre. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources commented that the council had taken on the Eastgate shopping centre because of the viable lease opportunities, nearby car park and its key location in the city centre. She also highlighted out that the budget set aside for the Eastgate centre was very moderate and that income was tracking along those moderate levels.
- 50.12 Councillor Pullen raised concerns regarding the additional £112k cost pressure from the Aspire Leisure Trust. He noted that the council continued to support the Trust and asked for further information about what was causing the cost pressures. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that the majority of those cost pressures were down to the council paying the Aspire Trust's utility costs during the Covid-19 pandemic. She confirmed that conversations between the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure and the Head of Culture were ongoing as to how the council would support Aspire going forward.

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- 50.13 In response to concerns raised by Councillor Tracey regarding the council's agile working policy and whether this was causing officers to duplicate work, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources provided an overview of the City Council's 'hot desking' system. She explained that processes were in place to support staff to work efficiently both from home and in the office. In response to further comments from Councillor Tracey regarding office equipment and printing, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that DSE (Display Screen Equipment) assessments were standard in office jobs and reminded Members that the council tried to operate as paperless as possible.
- 50.14 Councillor Tracey asked for clarification as to whether all officers would be expected to return to the office to work in the future. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the City Council would continue to offer hybrid working opportunities for staff and noted that many officers found that the option to work from home had helped them achieve a better work life balance. She also noted that hybrid working assisted the council to look for skilled employees outside the local area and further afield.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

51. GREEN TRAVEL PLAN PROGRESS REPORT 2021-22 AND UPDATE

- 51.1 The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report and explained that its purpose was to provide Members with oversight of the Gloucester City Council Green Travel Plan. He explained that the plan pertained to Gloucester City Council employees and that section 4 of the report provided an overview of the staff travel survey results. The Leader of the Council highlighted that the conclusions and recommendations were set out in sections 6 and 7 of the report.
- 51.2 The Leader of the Council also referred Members to the Energy Saving Trust's transport decarbonisation hierarchy at 7.2 in the report which set out what the council's preferences ought to be when developing policy. He explained that some of the recommendations included maintaining the council's agile working policy, working with Gloucestershire County Council to map safe, low-pollution walking routes, and improving the shower and changing facilities at council offices to promote active travel.
- 51.3 In response to a query from the Chair as to whether City Council employees had ever previously used domestic air travel for work purposes, the Managing Director confirmed that such journeys had taken place in the past.
- 51.4 The Chair asked whether the shower and changing facility improvements would be made to the Eastgate office. The Managing Director confirmed that the shower facilities at the Eastgate office were already operational, and that options for the other City Council office sites were being explored.

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- 51.5 The Chair queried whether Gloucestershire County Council had a similar Green Travel Plan and whether the City Council was working with the County Council as the transport authority for Gloucestershire. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead explained that some of the recommendations included in the report were caveated as the City Council would need to work and liaise with the County Council in some areas, particularly those pertaining to roads and cycling infrastructure. He confirmed that initial conversations with County Council colleagues had been positive, but it was likely that some of the recommendations would require additional funding. The Chair expressed further concerns regarding the need for safer cycling infrastructure in the city as he felt residents may be reluctant to travel via bike in the county.
- 51.6 Councillor Hilton raised concerns about the City Council's agile working policy, commenting that he had experienced difficulties meeting with Officers face to face. He was concerned that the decarbonisation hierarchy might be too prescriptive in that if officers were being discouraged from travelling to work by car, they might be more likely to work from home. Councillor Hilton also expressed the view that where possible, the City Council should make an effort to employ staff living locally, particularly where roles require local knowledge of the city.
- 51.7 The Managing Director acknowledged that with some roles, local knowledge was important, but noted that if the City Council were to limit recruitment of staff to candidates living in Gloucestershire, it would deprive itself of valuable skill sets. In respect of the council's agile working policy, the Managing Director explained that there was a tension between encouraging officer footfall in the city and the council's green travel aspirations, however it was his view that if the council were to withdraw the agile working policy, the organisation would struggle to meet the zero-carbon target by 2030. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead further commented that the world of work had changed nationally and employers who were unwilling to offer agile working could well be placing themselves at a disadvantage. He confirmed that officers undertaking practical roles did not work remotely, and that although the report noted that on average, officers work an average of 2 days per week in the office, it was his experience that often the office was busier than this figure suggested.
- 51.8 The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead further explained that the agile working policy reflected the preferences of staff, and that the expectation to work in the office on a permanent basis could be a barrier for some staff who might have challenges with accessing childcare.
- 51.9 In respect of concerns raised regarding a recent tree planting initiative, the Managing Director explained that the Open Spaces Team Leader had reviewed all planting programmes and that they had also been shared with Councillors themselves for comment.
- 51.10 Councillor Pullen referred to the bus assistance scheme referenced at 7.14 in the report and noted that it was being utilised by two officers. He asked why the council had not promoted this initiative further and fully adopted the

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scheme to date. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead explained that his predecessor had trialled the initiative however it had not been formally adopted. He noted that in order to formally adopt the bus assistance scheme, it would need to be fully costed by the Finance Team. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead added that some staff find travelling to the office very difficult without a car and noted that an electric vehicle lease scheme was included in the report as a possibility to consider.

- 51.11 Councillor Gravells noted that he agreed with Councillor Hilton in relation to agile working challenges and that he also felt that ideally, the City Council should try and recruit staff locally. This said, he acknowledged the challenges with filling vacancies and expressed that he would rather see those vacancies filled than remain open. Councillor Gravells paid tribute to the work of the Open Spaces team but noted that there had been challenges with the tree planting location in his ward. He also expressed the view that encouraging residents to cycle was a positive move, however it was important that the condition of cycle paths was properly assessed and managed. He suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to speak with representatives from Gloucestershire County Council and local transport operators to ascertain the steps they were putting in place to ensure public transport ran on time and met the needs of residents.
- 51.12 The Chair noted that he had found a recent ward walk with City Council Officers very useful. He expressed the view that it was important that Members were able to meet with Officers in person when necessary, as Members had local knowledge of their communities and awareness of residents' views. He felt strongly that Members and Officers needed to retain a personal connection.
- 51.13 The Chair agreed that contact would be made with colleagues in Gloucestershire County Council to request that some representatives from the Highways team attend an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to provide an update on their discussions with public transport operators.
- 51.14 The Leader reminded Members that Gloucestershire County Council was the responsible authority for transport matters and that it was his expectation that they were in regular contact with transport operators. He also noted that he had an upcoming meeting with the Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Bus Transport. The Leader of the Council added that raising car parking fees beyond a certain level would be counterproductive as the council relied on this income stream to fund services. He felt that the council could not afford to cut car parking income at this time.
- 51.15 In response to a request from Councillor Sawyer to explain what was meant by transport-related benefits for staff, the Managing Director explained that this related to the existing bus assistance scheme which was currently utilised by two members of staff, and additional schemes such as Bike2Work. He noted that the council no longer paid staff driving allowances. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead expressed the view that a full literature of the transport-related benefits on offer across the local

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authority was needed. He noted that the easier and cheaper it was for residents to travel to the city by car, the less likely they were to look at alternative means.

- 51.16 Councillor Sawyer asked whether the results of the report had been shared with colleagues in the County Council's Highways team. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead confirmed that they would receive the data.
- 51.17 In response to a further question from Councillor Sawyer regarding Mobilityways and the importance of ongoing communication with Stagecoach West, the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead confirmed that this was already in hand, and he was awaiting a response from Stagecoach.
- 51.18 Councillor Sawyer queried whether in light of the climate emergency, the City Council might need to make different decisions about car parking in the city centre in the future. The Managing Director confirmed that this was something that the council needed to revisit in the future but could not be changed overnight. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead noted that there were additional challenges in that the City Council does not have responsibility for roads.
- 51.19 Councillor Tracey commended the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead for his report and noted that she was pleased to see footfall in the city centre increasing. She suggested that some amendments could be made to car parking charges to support visitors after work hours. The Managing Director explained that even if all cars in the city were electric cars, the amount of vehicles in the city centre would still need to be reduced by 10% to achieve the Council's decarbonisation goals. He confirmed that this was a national issue and that the UK as a whole needed to reduce the number of vehicles on the roads.
- 51.20 Councillor Tracey expressed the view that it was important to employ local people wherever possible, particularly in service areas such as planning. In response to a query from Councillor Tracey regarding officer start times, the Managing Director confirmed that in the current agile working climate, officers might not have fixed start and finishing times in the same way they did pre-pandemic.
- 51.21 Councillor Hilton reiterated his concerns that the hierarchy in the recommendations might be too rigid. It was his view that the council should not be too authoritative in their approach to advising staff how to commute into work and that a balance needed to be found. The Leader of the Council referred to the statement in the narrative that the 'inverted pyramid shows, in descending order, what the council's preferences ought to be when developing policy', noting that that this was not definitive. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead further added that the decarbonisation hierarchy was consistent with central Government policy. He acknowledged that Gloucestershire tended to be more car dependent however across England as a whole, 80% of journeys were being made by car and nationally

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local authorities would need to think of initiatives to make car travel less attractive to meet their green ambitions.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair asked the Committee whether they would be happy to extend the meeting beyond the scheduled end time so that Members had sufficient time to consider and scrutinise the Task and Finish Group Report. This was put to a vote and Members voted unanimously in favour of extending the meeting.

52. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- 52.1 Councillor Chambers-Dubus introduced the report and informed Members that as Chair of the Task and Finish Group, she along with Councillors Gravells, Radley, O'Donnell and A. Chambers had met regularly from March until September 2022. She advised that the Task and Finish Group had worked collaboratively with each other and Officers to establish how the City Council currently engaged with young people, and any improvements which could be made to involve young people in the council's decisions in the future.
- 52.2 Councillor Chambers-Dubus explained that although some service areas did have processes in place to engage with young people, the Task and Finish Group felt that there were certainly ways in which the council could improve to ensure that the voices of young people were heard. She advised Members that the full findings of the Task and Finish Group were outlined in Appendix 1, and the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group were set out on pages 21 and 22 of the report. Councillor Chambers-Dubus paid tribute to the officers who had supported the Task and Finish Group's enquiry and invited questions from Members.
- 52.3 The Chair thanked the Task and Finish Group for what he felt was an excellent report. He expressed the view that the recommendations were good and illustrated that there was more the authority could do to engage with young people. The Chair was particularly interested in the role of Councillors in communicating and engaging with young people and suggested that more young people should be encouraged to stand in local elections to give a truer representation of society.
- 52.4 Councillor Pullen thanked the Task and Finish Group for their report. He felt that the Group had focused their enquiry on the right service areas and asked whether the Task and Finish Group felt that Officers understood that more needed to be done to engage with young people across the council and were open to change. Councillor Pullen noted that the response rate on the public consultation was low with 15 responses in total, and acknowledged that the Group were likely hoping for a higher rate. He also requested further information about the appointment of the Youth Engagement Officer Lead.

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- 52.5 Councillor Chambers-Dubus expressed the view that the interactions with Officers across the five service areas had been positive. She confirmed that the recruitment of the Youth Engagement Lead was in the very early stages and that the Community Wellbeing Team had informed the Task and Finish Group of the new role towards the end of their enquiry. She expected that further information would be available in due course.
- 52.6 Councillor Dee referred to the recommendation to produce a child friendly guide on the role and responsibilities of the City Council and queried whether consideration should be given to amending the wording to 'young person'. Members indicated support for this suggestion.
- 52.7 In response to a query from Councillor Wilson, the Policy and Development Officer explained that there had been challenges with consulting young people under the age of 13 years old due to GDPR constraints. He confirmed that there were still ways in which the authority could engage with young people under the age of 13, including through Members as leaders in their respective communities.
- 52.8 In response to a query from Councillor Sawyer regarding engagement with Primary Schools and hosting school visits, Councillor Chambers-Dubus expressed the view that this could be taken further, and that offering school visits would provide an exciting learning opportunity for young people to learn more about local democracy.
- 52.9 Councillor Gravells reflected on his experience of engaging with young people in his ward through visits to local primary schools. He felt that it was important to listen to residents' views and ideas, regardless of their age. Councillor Gravells explained that a local school in his ward had suggested that the council could approach the school with child-friendly summaries of options under consideration and asking them to choose their favourite. Councillor Gravells reiterated that the Task and Finish Group had worked constructively and collaboratively with each other and paid tribute to the Chair of the Task and Finish Group for bringing the motion forward to Council.
- 52.10 A discussion ensued regarding Members' use of the Civic Suite to facilitate school visits.
- 52.11 Councillor Pullen referred to the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group to reconvene and meet with the Youth Engagement Officer leads in 12 months' time and suggested this be amended to 'it is recommended that the Task and Finish Group reconvene in 6 months' time for a meeting with the new Youth Engagement Lead Officer to discuss progress on implementing their recommendations'. Members indicated support for this amendment.
- 52.12 Councillor Pullen also suggested adding an additional recommendation to include a section on council reports pertaining to Climate Change and Planning on the implications for young people. Members indicated support for this amendment.

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53.13 Councillor Tracey asked how the City Council was funding the appointment of the new Youth Engagement Lead role. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the Community Wellbeing Team had recently succeeded in obtaining funding and it was this funding which would be used to fund the new role, rather than existing council budgets. Councillor Tracey reflected on her experience of engaging with young people as Sherriff and Deputy Mayor and noted her support for welcoming more children in the Civic Suite through school visits.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **APPROVE** the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Engagement with Young People for consideration by Cabinet, subject to the following amendments:

- (1) Amending the wording of the recommendation to develop a ‘child-friendly’ guide on the roles and responsibilities of Gloucester City Council to ‘guide suitable for young people’.
- (2) Amending the wording of the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group to reconvene in 12 months’ time to 6 months’ time.
- (3) Adding the following additional recommendation:

‘It is recommended that all City Council reports pertaining to the Planning and Climate Change service areas include an additional section outlining how the council has engaged with young people in respect of the proposed decision.’

53. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 28th November 2022.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.46 pm hours

Chair