



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 28th November 2022

PRESENT : Cllrs. Pullen (Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Campbell, Dee, Evans, Gravells MBE, Hilton, Hudson, Kubaszczyk, Sawyer and Wilson

Others in Attendance

Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman.

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Stephanie Chambers.

Head of Culture.

Head of Place.

City Growth and Delivery Manager.

Financial Services Manager.

Housing Innovation Manager.

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer.

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Field, Castle, O'Donnell and Zaman

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

55. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

56. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 31st October were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

57. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

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58. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions nor deputations.

59. ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

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

60.1 The Chair, Councillor Pullen, 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 Work Programme. It was noted that the Chair and Vice-Chair had proposed some amendments to the Work Programme due to revised report dates on the Cabinet Forward Plan.

60.2 Members indicated their support for removing the City Plan from the meeting on 9th January and replacing this item with the Council Plan 2022-24 Update Report.

60.3 Councillor Gravells emphasised that it was important for Members to bring suggested items to Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. He asked whether the Committee could receive an update on the 'Here to Help' reporting facility, and how well it was working for residents and Members raising issues on their behalf. Councillor Wilson and the Chair indicated their support for this idea, and it was agreed that this item would be added to the Work Programme.

60.4 In response to a request for an update from Councillor Gravells on the items which had yet to be allocated a date on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, the Democratic and Electoral Services Officer explained that she was in touch with colleagues in Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucestershire NHS Trust and would confirm dates for the Transport and Integrated Care System sessions in due course. It was agreed that items which had been removed from the Forward Plan would also be removed from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, and would be reinstated should they receive a new Cabinet date.

60.5 The Chair noted that the Group Leads had been advised that several local authorities were establishing Task and Finish Groups to investigate whether there were any widespread systemic mould and damp issues within local social housing. The Chair asked Members whether the Committee would like to commission a similar Task and Finish Group. It was agreed that enquiries would be made with all Councillors to ask Members who were interested in taking part in the Task and Finish Group to put themselves forward, and if there was sufficient interest, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would formally approve the membership.

RESOLVED –

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

61. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 REPORT - 2022/23

- 61.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report and explained that the report set out the council's performance against a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the second financial quarter of 2022. She noted that there were 28 key indicators, and that the performance data was set out in Appendix 1 of the report. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further explained that where targets existed, they had been included along with a narrative to explain the data.
- 61.2 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised Members that areas seeing an improving trend were the average customer telephone waiting time, the percentage of domestic waste collected on time, footfall at the Museum of Gloucester and staff absence rate. She confirmed that areas seeing a declining trend included the number of unique visits to the Visit Gloucester website.
- 61.3 Councillor Hilton referred to KPI CCM-2 and the narrative confirming that only one Enforcement Officer was currently operating in the team. He asked for clarification as to how many officers would usually be operating in a normal established team, and whether the Cabinet Member could provide more information about how the council was supporting the contractor with their recruitment. The Cabinet Member noted that this was the portfolio area of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, and it was agreed that follow-up enquiries would be made with the Communities team to ascertain this information.
- 61.4 In response to a query from Councillor Wilson relating to CWB-13 and the percentage of compliant food premises, the Financial Services Manager confirmed that Councillor Wilson was correct that food inspection visits were still being undertaken however there were ongoing issues with recording the data due to the cyber incident.
- 61.5 Councillor Wilson asked whether this data would be backdated. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that it would be, however she was not yet in a position to confirm the date as to when this data would be available.
- 61.6 The Chair referred to KPI CS-7 and the target of customer telephone waiting time to be below 1 minute 55 seconds. He expressed that in his view, this was still a long time for customers to wait and asked whether the Customer Services team had access to data detailing how many customers ended their call before it could be answered. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that Customer Services did have this data, however there was no way of establishing whether calls had been dropped due to

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listening to the various prompt messages signposting alternative ways in which to access council services. She suggested that this matter could be covered in further detail during the 'Here to Help' Overview and Scrutiny Committee session.

- 61.7 Councillor Wilson asked whether the target time of 1 minute 55 seconds included the amount of time taken to read out the prompt message, The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she would follow-up the query with the Customer Services team and the information would be circulated to Members in due course.

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

62. AFFORDABLE HOMES DELIVERY - UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE

- 62.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy introduced the report and confirmed that its purpose was to update Members on the Council's role in the delivery of affordable homes. She noted that Gloucester City Council does not manage its own housing stock but does provide temporary accommodation for homeless households in need of urgent short-term accommodation.
- 62.2 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy informed Members that current planning policy requires housing developers to provide a minimum of 20% affordable homes when seeking planning consent for large planning developments unless there were viability issues with the scheme. In this case, developers would need to outline why the scheme would not be viable if they were to deliver the 20% requirement. She confirmed that the Housing Strategy team worked closely with providers and that there were national issues affecting affordable housing delivery across the UK.
- 62.3 The Chair noted that the council was seeing increasing numbers of Homeseeker applications and expressed that in his view, there were too many people in temporary accommodation in Gloucester. He felt that the 20% affordable housing target should be treated as a minimum and ideally, developers should be looking to exceed this target. The Chair referred to the housing developments along Horton Road and Great Western Road and commented that it was unlikely that those developments would meet the 20% affordable housing requirement. He asked for the Cabinet Member's comments as to whether the council should be stricter in enforcing this requirement.
- 62.4 The Housing Innovation Manager noted that planning policy dictated that new developments should include a provision for 20% of the development to be affordable homes, however it was open to developers to cite viability challenges. He referred to the information provided at 3.8 in the report confirming that viability is often influenced by a number of factors, including the sale value of affordable homes. He confirmed that the Great Western Road development was currently going through the planning permission process and that Officers were considering viability issues. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy further confirmed that Officers

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took affordable housing policy very seriously and that she was confident that they would challenge developers where necessary.

- 62.5 Councillor Wilson referred to the narrative at 3.22 in the report regarding the requirement in the Joint Strategic Plan that 35% of new homes built on the boundary of Gloucester and Tewkesbury should be affordable homes and asked how legally enforceable this provision was. The Head of Place confirmed that as this was a policy, this was not enforceable by law but would be something that Officers would carefully consider alongside other planning considerations. The Housing Innovation Manager added that there were many planning balances that Officers needed to look at when assessing an application.
- 62.6 Councillor Gravells reflected on his previous experience serving as Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy and asked whether the team made use of a consultant for additional advice where appropriate. The Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that where developers argued that a reduction of affordable homes was necessary due to scheme viability, the team did use a consultant as an additional checking tool.
- 62.7 Councillor Durdey queried how much influence the council had in terms of their discussions with developers about hitting or exceeding the 20% affordable homes target. The Head of Place confirmed that the council had an open dialogue with developers. He advised that cases varied but land value was a challenge in Gloucester. The Head of Place further noted that affordable housing provision would always be the most expensive subsidy and therefore typically was the first thing developers reduce. He confirmed that the council would largely follow the advice of the surveyor consultant.
- 62.8 In response to an additional query from Councillor Durdey as to whether the council had ever been challenged by a developer on a ruling, the Head of Place confirmed that he had been involved in challenges in previous roles and explained that in the case of a challenge, the matter would go to appeal and the inspector would take an objective view. He noted that a common example would be where a Planning Committee refused an application against the advice of Officers.
- 62.9 Councillor Hilton raised concerns that the City Council had not met its affordable housing target of 234 homes since 2012. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy highlighted that the Council had delivered 275 affordable homes in 2020/21 which had exceeded this target. She also noted that in terms of the 2021/22 figures, officers would be carrying out an audit of the 231-figure due to the cyber incident.
- 62.10 Councillor Hilton commented that it might be a challenge for the council to meet the target of 234 affordable homes for the 2022/23 year given that it had delivered 75 over the first half of the financial year. The Housing Innovation Manager noted that the point of delivery was when the contractors started work on site and the project was handed over to the relevant Housing Association.

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- 62.11 Councillor Hilton referred to the St Oswalds development and noted that two thirds of those properties were shared equity ownership. He asked how the council managed to deliver so many affordable homes in this development but limited affordable homes in others. The Housing Innovation Manger explained that as the council owned St Oswalds, it was part of the development and was setting an example. The Head of Place further highlighted that grant funding also made a significant difference.
- 62.12 In response to a further question from Councillor Hilton as to whether the council had considered whether a way forward might be to establish its own housing company to manage its own housing stock, the Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that a report had been undertaken a number of years ago assessing this option and it was not the recommended approach at that time. The Head of Place confirmed that he was aware that different authorities had opted for this approach, however this tended to be areas where land availability and viability were not so much of a challenge as they were in Gloucester. He noted that in his view, there was not sufficient available land in the city for this to be a viable option.
- 62.13 In response to further comments from Councillor Hilton regarding challenges with meeting the affordable housing target in the future, the Head of Place confirmed that due to the limited available land, it was important for the City Council to work with its neighbouring authorities. He advised Members that the council worked closely with Tewkesbury Borough Council through the JCS to help manage Gloucester's affordable housing need.
- 62.14 In response to a question from Councillor Durdey as to whether the affordable homes delivered in Gloucester included circumstances where residents had been allocated housing in Tewkesbury as part of the JCS arrangement, the Head of Place confirmed that this was correct.
- 62.15 Councillor Durdey queried whether the council could forecast the projected number of affordable homes the council was on track to deliver. The Head of Place confirmed that Officers reported on an annual basis on the number of affordable homes delivered as well as future projection based on the number of large-scale planning applications granted.

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

63. LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES OPTIONS APPRAISAL UPDATE

- 63.1 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure advised Members that SLC consultancy had undertaken an options assessment back in 2021 into Gloucester's Leisure and Culture Services. He noted that the report included recommendations which had been reviewed and approved by Cabinet, and confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were being updated on the implementation of the 6 major SLC recommendations for Leisure provision and the remaining 7 for Cultural Services. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure noted that implementation of all of the recommendations

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was underway and noted that most were on track or completed. He paid tribute to the Culture team for their hard work.

- 63.2 In response to a query from Councillor Hilton in relation to some of the larger biannual and triannual events taking place in Gloucester and plans for the years where those events were not taking place, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure emphasised that there was a need to make the culture scene in Gloucester sustainable. He accepted that it was important for some events to be held annually however he noted that his team could not take a one size fits all approach. The Head of Culture further noted that the team were limited by budget and capacity and that funding from external sources was important. He advised Members that the team were working on submitting an Arts Council bid for more funding in due course.
- 63.3 Councillor Hilton asked whether the City Council had held discussions with Gloucestershire County Council over the future plans for the former Debenhams building. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure stated that although the City Council might aspire for it to be returned to its ownership, it was important that the building condition was fit for purpose.
- 63.4 In response to a follow-up question from Councillor Hilton regarding whether extensive restoration works were needed, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that a survey would be needed to ensure that the building was sound.
- 63.5 Councillor Dee referred to Cultural Recommendation 2 highlighting that the council should challenge its current approach focused on cultural buildings and asked for further information about this approach. The Head of Culture explained that the SLC consultancy had analysed the council's investment in listed buildings which have high running costs. He confirmed that the council needed to consider whether subsidies were being used in the right places and that a number of options were being considered, alongside advice from the culture sector. The Head of Culture further explained that the council had used capital investment to make improvements at the Gloucester Guildhall, and the team were hoping to make similar improvements to the Museum of Gloucester with capital investment.
- 63.6 Councillor Durdey thanked the Culture team for their hard work.
- 63.7 In response to a query from the Chair relating to the Culture budget around Aspire Leisure, the Head of Culture suggested that he raise his query during the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 5th December.
- 63.8 The Chair referred to Leisure Recommendation 3 concerning the Sports and Activity Strategy and asked for further information as to which organisation had been contracted to help deliver this work. He also asked for assurances that this strategy would focus on the needs of Gloucester and that addressing health inequalities would be a key consideration. The Head of Culture confirmed that following a tender process, the council had commissioned Active Gloucestershire to help deliver the Sports and Activity Strategy. He noted that the organisation had sound local knowledge of both

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Gloucester city and the wider county and confirmed that Active Gloucestershire colleagues had been briefed to bring a strong health element to this strategy.

- 63.9 In response to a further question from the Chair, the Head of Culture explained that the QUEST methodology outlined in Leisure Recommendation 3 was the process of bench marking.
- 63.10 The Chair raised concerns about Gloucester Guildhall's visibility and asked for the Cabinet Member's comments as to whether the council might consider purchasing and developing the adjacent building. The Head of Culture noted that the City Council already owned the adjacent building, however the council was in the process of negotiating a commercial lease for the building. It was noted that the floor levels were an added complication which would make it very difficult to incorporate this building into the Guildhall. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure confirmed that additional signage was being commissioned to help make the Guildhall more visible.
- 63.11 Councillor Wilson reflected on his recent experience of attending an event at the Guildhall and commented that he was very impressed with the running of the event and infrastructure. He asked how the council was promoting the venue to artists. The Head of Culture responded that the council had a dedicated music programmer who could tap into promoters and tour operators across the UK. He noted that there were some constraints around the size of the venue, however the city had been able to accommodate larger acts in different venues, such as Llanthony Secunda Priory.
- 63.12 In response to a query from Councillor Sawyer regarding whether a formal assessment had been undertaken to assess whether the council could make use of the adjacent building to the Guildhall, the Head of Culture confirmed that an architectural feasibility study had been undertaken which had identified issues with the floor levels. He confirmed that there was a possibility that the idea could be revisited in the future, however work to bring the floor levels in line with the Guildhall was likely to be costly.
- 63.13 Councillor Hilton commented that he had attended a good event at Llanthony Secunda Priory, however he noted that limited bar facilities at the venue had resulted in large queues. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure noted that the event in question was one of the first of its kind to be held at Llanthony Secunda Priory and that the team were learning from each event.
- 63.14 Councillor Gravells asked that the Sports and Activity Strategy be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. He also requested further details about the Arts Council funding. The Head of Culture confirmed that Gloucester had been identified as a high priority place for culture by Arts Council England and the City Council had recently received £2m in funding from the Arts Council. The Head of Culture further noted that the City Council was working closely with colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. It was agreed that the Sports and Activity Strategy would

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be added to the Work Programme once it was allocated a date on the Cabinet Forward Plan.

63.15 In response to an additional question from Councillor Gravells as to whether the City Council would be working with Gloucestershire County Council to help tackle health inequalities, the Head of Culture confirmed that the City Council was working with the County Council and the authorities were taking a joined-up approach, particularly through working with Active Gloucestershire.

63.16 In response to a request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive a further update on progress in implementing the recommendations from the Culture and Leisure Options Appraisal, the Head of Culture confirmed that he would be willing to provide a further update to the Committee in 12 months' time.

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

64. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

64.1 Councillor Hilton expressed the view that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should not exclude the press and public from the meeting. He felt it was in the public interest for the report to be in the public domain. The City Growth and Deliver Manager explained that there was commercially sensitive information in the report.

64.2 Councillor Hilton's proposal was put to a vote and was lost.

64.3 The Chair resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the item on the grounds that if the press and public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

64.4 **RESOLVED:-** That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public are present during consideration of this item there will be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

65. TRANSFER OF SITES IN PODSMEAD TO ENABLE THE REGENERATION OF THE ESTATE

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report as per the exempt minutes.

66. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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Monday 5th December 2022.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours
Time of conclusion: 8.25 pm hours

Chair