



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 5th June 2023

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Dee, Evans, Hilton, Hudson, Kubaszczyk, Sawyer, Toleman, Wilson and Conder.

### **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

Managing Director

Head of Culture

Head of Finance and Resources

Housing Innovation Manager

Policy and Development Officer

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs. Trimnell and Zaman

### **1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR**

Councillors Field and Pullen were confirmed as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee respectively.

### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Castle and Toleman declared an interest in Agenda Item 8 (Action Point Item) owing to their positions as trustees on the board of Aspire Leisure Trust.

### **3. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **4. MINUTES**

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**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meetings held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 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 nor deputations.

**7. ACTION POINT ITEM**

7.1 Councillor Hilton noted that it was good for Members to have sight of the list of the organisations who were interviewed during the development of the Sports and Activity Strategy, however he observed that local sports clubs or associations were not included in the list. The Head of Culture advised that the list included organisations which were interviewed on a one-to-one basis. He advised Members that dozens of community sport organisations were consulted as part of the wider consultation process by Active Gloucestershire. He also noted that surveys had been sent to local sports clubs and governing bodies.

7.2 In response to additional comments from Councillor Hilton and the Chair, the Head of Culture confirmed that the organisations which took part in the wider consultation would be mentioned in the acknowledgements section of the final published Sports and Physical Activity Strategy. It was agreed that further information would also be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in the meantime.

7.3 In response to a query from Councillor Castle regarding the track between Plock Court and the University of Gloucestershire, the Head of Culture reiterated that Gloucestershire County Council was responsible for maintaining the footpath.

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

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

8.1 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.

8.2 Councillor Hilton noted that he had become aware of some updates relating to the sale of the HKP Warehouses and asked that when a Cabinet Report on this matter was added to the Forward Plan, it be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. It was agreed that this item be added to the Work Programme with a date to be determined.

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**RESOLVED –**

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

**9. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER (CAT) POLICY**

- 9.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman, introduced the report. She advised Members that the City Council was regularly approached by community organisations who wished to take on land or buildings to support their organisational aims, noting that there were currently at least 10 organisations hoping to engage the council into transferring an asset.
- 9.2 Councillor Norman explained that the Policy sought to establish a framework and a process to help ascertain if a proposal from a community organisation was viable, and how the Council could consider supporting an approach.
- 9.3 Referring to Section 3.8 of the report, Councillor Norman noted that the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy would set expectations as to what the Council would need to consider an application, provide an indication of the process including timeframes, allow clubs to better understand the implications of their request to take on an asset and allow the council to better support community organisations through considering applications on an individual basis. She also commented that the policy would enable more transparency around decision making.
- 9.4 The Chair stated that the report was an interesting one and that he welcomed the CAT Policy. He reflected on the experience of an organisation in his ward and stated that any proposals to streamline the asset transfer process would be welcomed.
- 9.5 Councillor Pullen commented that he felt that the CAT Policy was a good document and that in his view the City Council should be encouraging asset transfers to community organisations. Referring to the assessment process outlined at section 8.1 of the Policy, Councillor Pullen expressed concern that some organisations might not have the expertise to compile a full business case and asked whether the Council would be able to offer any support to organisations to assist them with their bid development.
- 9.6 Councillor Norman advised that the assessment process was a guide for organisations to work towards and that some organisations may already have some actions in place. She confirmed that the City Council would offer advice and signpost where appropriate and noted that community groups may pick up expertise from other Community Interest Companies (CICs) and funding arms.

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- 9.7 In response to additional comments from Councillor Pullen, Councillor Norman stated that the policy provided a framework to work towards and aimed to formalise work the City Council was already doing.
- 9.8 Councillor Sawyer reflected on her experience of assisting community organisations in her ward and queried whether the criteria narrative in Section 8 could be amended to explicitly state that the City Council could provide advice and guidance to community organisations during the assessment process. The Head of Finance and Resources confirmed that the council would be willing to assist any organisations struggling with jargon and agreed to amend the wording as suggested.
- 9.9 In response to a query from the Chair, Councillor Norman noted that the community organisation network in Gloucester was already an intertwined one, and that the Council would signpost appropriately.
- 9.10 Councillor Wilson referred to the narrative at 4.3 in the Policy and asked for further information relating to the auditing process and whether the groups would be regularly audited. Councillor Norman explained that the council's Asset Management team would issue rental based on the social value of the organisation, and compliance would be routinely monitored throughout the contractual term. She confirmed that it would be down to individual organisations to prove their social value.
- 9.11 In response to a query from Councillor Hilton regarding the criteria set out at 5.1 in the Policy, the Head of Finance and Resources assured Members that the council would be willing to work with and support organisations, however receiving information to support their request for an asset transfer was important. He noted that the council was keen to transfer assets to community organisations but would want to ensure that organisations look after them appropriately.
- 9.12 Councillor Hilton referred to the different forms of Community Asset Transfers outlined at 2.2 in the report and asked whether the council would consider the disposal of freehold assets as well as leasehold and assets under license. Councillor Norman confirmed that the council was not averse to selling an asset on a freehold basis if the right business case was made, however it was likely that the vast majority of assets would be transferred on a long leasehold basis.

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

**10. 2022-2024 YEAR END COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE**

- 10.1 Councillor Norman introduced the report which provided an update on the progress made in delivering the activities as outlined in the Council Plan 2022-24 to build a greener, fairer, better Gloucester. She reminded Members that the Council Plan was approved unanimously by Council in January 2022, and that the Plan detailed planned projects and activities between

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2022 and 2024 to achieve the ambition of improving the lives of everyone who lives in, works in and visits Gloucester.

- 10.2 Councillor Norman reminded Members of the three priorities in the Council Plan which set out how the council will achieve its vision, namely building greener, healthier and more inclusive communities, building a sustainable city of diverse culture and opportunity and building a socially responsible and empowering Council. She explained that the Plan set out 45 actions, split equally across these priorities and noted that delivery of these actions in the first year was encouraging. Councillor Norman referred Members to Appendix 1 of the report, which provided an update on each action.
- 10.3 The Chair asked whether a timeline for the draft Food Strategy was in place. Later in the meeting, the Managing Director confirmed that this strategy had been considered and approved by Cabinet.
- 10.4 In response to an additional query from the Chair regarding GL4, the Managing Director advised that GL4 was a community organisation based in Matson.
- 10.5 Councillor Wilson referred to the narrative around the plan to set up an in-house Home Improvement Agency and requested clarification as to whether progress on implementing this agency was delayed as a result of the cyber incident alone, or whether it had been delayed prior to the incident. The Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that the delays had been caused by the cyber incident, however as the recovery had progressed, the team now hoped to bring this action forward.
- 10.6 In response to a further query from Councillor Wilson regarding progress made on the Gloucester Digital Strategy, Councillor Norman noted that the Officers responsible for overseeing this strategy had been focusing on the recovery from the cyber incident. The Managing Director confirmed that ongoing conversations were taking place regarding a digital strategy for Gloucestershire, and Officers were deliberating on whether it might be sensible to wait for the outcome of the county-wide strategy discussions before progressing a refresh of the Gloucester Digital Strategy.
- 10.7 Councillor Pullen referred to the plan to deliver a quality leisure offer for residents and asked for further information as to the reasons behind the delay. Councillor Norman confirmed that this was connected to the Leisure and Culture Options Appraisal which had been approved by Cabinet back in 2022 to extend the current contract with the current provider for one year.
- 10.8 Councillor Pullen expressed concerns around the confirmation in the report that the reduction of the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for temporary accommodation by 20% was not expected. He asked whether the council expected to see an increase in the number of households needing temporary accommodation, and whether there were sufficient funds in the budget to support this.

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- 10.9 Councillor Norman noted that Bed and Breakfast temporary accommodation use had improved (i.e. reduced) in 2022/23 but not by the 20% reduction as set out in the Council Plan. She explained that when the target was initially set, 20% seemed realistic however with the uncertainties around the current economic climate, this target was more challenging. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning Strategy, Councillor Stephanie Chambers, confirmed that this was an issue high on her agenda and that she and her team were working on solutions. She noted that there was a need to increase the amount of affordable housing in the city, which was a challenge across the industry, and that she would like to see a coordinated approach with improving temporary accommodation options so that Bed and Breakfast accommodation was not needed.
- 10.10 In response to an additional query from Councillor Pullen regarding the budget implications, Councillor S. Chambers noted that she was not necessarily considering increasing the budget for this area but was considering a range of options.
- 10.11 Councillor Kubaszczyk referred to the action relating to supporting the work of the Commission to Review Race Relations and noted that he had had difficulty finding online information about the Gloucestershire Race Equality Action Group (GREAG). The Policy and Development Officer confirmed that Officers had met with representatives at a soft launch event at the Guildhall back in April 2023 and that GREAG were working towards establishing themselves. He agreed to circulate the contact details of the Chief Executive Officer to Overview and Scrutiny Members following the meeting.
- 10.12 In response to a suggestion from Councillor Sawyer regarding the priority to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for temporary accommodation, it was noted that this would be a good topic for a Member Development Session. It was agreed that this suggestion would be pursued with relevant Officers and the Member Development Working Group.
- 10.13 Councillor Hilton referred to the proposal to increase the number of Green Flag parks to 4 by 2024. He queried whether this was having an implication on Officer resource by taking their time away from smaller green space projects. Councillor Norman reflected on the benefits that the Purple Flag Scheme had brought to the city and the local Night Time Economy, and paid tribute to Councillor Hudson for his work in this area. It was agreed that follow-up enquiries would be made with the Cabinet Member for Environment regarding the Green Flag resource implications.
- 10.14 Councillor Durdey commented that it was good to see lots of actions with an 'on time completion expected' status. Referring to large construction projects taking place in the city, he queried how the council was working to make these projects energy efficient. Councillor Norman confirmed that this was reviewed on a regular basis as part of the detailed major projects dashboard. The Managing Director further explained that for projects over £100k, 10% of any contract tender evaluation must go towards social value contributions, including environmental credentials and employment/skills. He confirmed that the City Council would expect bidders to submit their proposals to help

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the Council reach its net zero targets. The Managing Director further advised Members that Officers alongside development partners at Reef believed that they had reached a net zero in operation solution for the Forum development.

- 10.15 The Managing Director advised Committee Members that following the recommendations in Peer Review report, which was considered by the Overview in Scrutiny Committee in April, twice-yearly Council Plan Update reports would replace routine Performance Monitoring Reports. Councillor Norman confirmed that Cabinet Members would still be able to monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) though the Pentana Performance Management System.

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

**11. BLACKFRIARS PRIORY BUSINESS PLAN 2023-2028**

- 11.1 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis, introduced the report and explained that a 5-year business plan had been produced to gain support for Gloucester City Council to continue to run Blackfriars Priory under a new lease agreement. He confirmed that the council's preference was to negotiate a longer lease of up to 25 years with English Heritage in the future. Councillor Lewis referred Members to the mission and values outlined in the Blackfriars Business Plan at Appendix 1, and expressed the view that if a 25 year lease could be secured, Blackfriars could become the 'jewel in the crown' of Gloucester City. Councillor Lewis expressed his view that Blackfriars Priory was an excellent venue and thanked staff for their hard work.
- 11.2 The Chair commented that the Blackfriars Priory Business Plan was a good report. He queried whether the proposal was to expand into other activities over time or focus on weddings. Councillor Lewis responded that a balance needed to be found, as he felt that with such an historic building, it was important to retain a multi-use element for educational purposes. The Head of Culture further explained that under the current lease, a certain amount of public access needed to be provided.
- 11.3 In response to further comments from the Chair regarding acoustic challenges, Councillor Lewis agreed that Blackfriars Priory might not be the most appropriate venue for singing and although he was open to exploring the possibility of concerts, he would not want to change the appearance of the historic building.
- 11.4 Councillor Hilton observed that Blackfriars Priory was a fine historical building and commented that it was good to see the venue being used. He noted that some challenges facing the venue included lack of accommodation on-site, lack of storage, acoustics, and that the surroundings might not be seen as luxurious as other venues. He asked how these challenges could be overcome, and whether the Cabinet Member was confident that the 5-year plan would achieve the projected £47k profit by 2028. Councillor Lewis stated that he was confident that this figure could be

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achieved, highlighting that Blackfriars Priory was an award-winning venue. In response to Councillor Hilton's concerns around on-site accommodation, Councillor Lewis noted that the Forum development, which when completed would include hotel accommodation, was nearby. Councillor Lewis advised the Committee that the venue had already taken in around £130k worth of bookings this year, and stated that he was confident of more bookings being made. He noted that the forecast suggested that the venue should be self-sufficient by 2028.

- 11.5 Councillor Hilton asked for the Cabinet Member's views as to whether boutique accommodation in Phillpotts Warehouse would be more suitable due to it being within shorter walking distance. Councillor Lewis advised that the future use of Phillpotts Warehouse was at that stage unknown, however the Forum development was underway.
- 11.6 Councillor Wilson asked for further information around the rationale behind not pursuing a 25-year lease straight away. He wondered whether after 5 years, English Heritage might be tempted to retain the asset if it was seen as a profit-making venture. The Head of Culture explained that the proposal was to try and secure a 25-year lease with a 5-year break clause. He noted that this clause would allow either the City Council or English Heritage to step away if appropriate.
- 11.7 In response to an additional query from Councillor Wilson regarding the business model of English Heritage. The Head of Culture explained that although the organisation oversees and owns heritage attractions, it was moving towards a model of seeking partners to manage those assets on their behalf.
- 11.8 In response to a query from Councillor Dee regarding education opportunities in the Scriptorium, Councillor Lewis confirmed that the Scriptorium was not currently used as wedding venue and was not part of the existing lease arrangements. The Head of Culture noted that Councillor Dee's suggestion was a good one and that it was an aspiration to make use of the venue as an educational resource.
- 11.9 Councillor Conder raised concerns that the volunteers at the Civic Trust were unsure as to the opening times or events taking place at Blackfriars Priory, and expressed the view that it was important that the Civic Trust was kept up to date. Councillor Lewis confirmed that his team were in regular contact with the Civic Trust, however he agreed that Officers would contact the organisation with a view of reiterating the Blackfriars Priory opening times.
- 11.10 Councillor Castle asked for further information regarding the heating arrangements at the venue. Councillor Lewis noted that there were radiators in the building and that the team were looking at further heating solutions for the autumn and winter. The Head of Culture advised that Blackfriars Priory was a challenging building to heat, and although options such as blowers could be used, the council needed to be mindful of energy consumption.



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- 11.11 In response to an additional query from Councillor Castle relating to the possibility of year-round weddings, the Head of Culture confirmed that weddings tended to take place during the summer months, and that dates between March and November were most common.

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

**12. TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT – DAMP AND MOULD**

- 12.1 As Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group on damp and mould in Gloucester's rented accommodation, Councillor Conder introduced the report and provided Members with an overview of the project. She reminded Members that the Task and Finish Group was commissioned by the Committee back in January 2023, following the publication of a coroner's report in November 2022 linking the death of a two-year old child in Rochdale to exposure to mould in his home environment.
- 12.2 Councillor Conder confirmed that the Task and Finish Group had met regularly between February and May 2023 and had held evidence sessions with Directors and Senior Managers of several local Registered Social Housing Providers, local voluntary advice agencies and the City Council's Private Sector Housing Team. She advised Members that the full findings of the Task and Finish Group were outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, which included summaries of the sessions, conclusions, and recommendations.
- 12.3 The Chair commented that the Task and Finish Group deserved credit for their report and evidence gathering. He felt that the recommendations were sensible, however in relation to Recommendation 6, he suggested adding reference to circulating the information document via the council's social media channels.
- 12.4 Councillor Wilson referred to the transfer of housing stock and asked whether the stock was of decent home standard. The Housing Innovation Manager reminded the Committee that the Task and Finish Group investigation and report was Member-led. He noted that he was aware of a small number of properties with problems however these tended to be linked to the age of the properties, with particular issues amongst homes built during the 1960s and 1970s. In relation to the broader housing stock, he noted that properties tended to be in reasonably good condition.
- 12.5 In respect of Recommendation 1, Councillor Wilson queried whether the City Council had sufficient resources to implement a landlord accreditation scheme. The Housing Innovation Manager noted that this had not been a priority in the past, however the idea would be to provide responsible landlords with accreditation confirming that they were good landlords. Councillor Conder confirmed that despite the evidence gathering of the Task and Finish Group, there was still limited information on the private rented sector as there was currently no national regulation in this area.

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- 12.6 Councillor Pullen commented that the enquiry had been fascinating and thanked the Officers, Social Housing Providers and the local voluntary advice agencies who had taken part and supported the project. He stated that Task and Finish Group Members had learnt that in the past, damp and mould growth was more likely to have put down to a lifestyle issue. He noted that the project had confirmed that the issue was far more complex, with the condition of properties being a major factor. He also outlined that it had been made evident to Task and Finish Group Members that there was a correlation between damp and mould growth and the rising cost of living, as some residents were struggling to heat and ventilate their homes due to rising energy bills. Councillor Pullen advised the Committee that all of the Social Housing Providers who took part in the project were very responsive and appeared keen to move the issue forward, with some providers going the extra mile to undertake extensive checks on residents.
- 12.7 Referring to the recommendation to implement a landlord accreditation scheme, Councillor Pullen stated that he recognised the resource implications, however as a Task and Finish Group Member he felt that this was a recommendation that he felt strongly about, and expressed the view that it would be a positive move for the council to recognise the quality of standards in private sector housing.
- 12.8 Councillor S. Chambers noted that she had a keen interest in this area and outlined some innovative new solutions she had been made aware of such as balcony ventilation.
- 12.9 Councillor Durdey expressed the view that the Task and Finish Group Report was a good report, however he noted that there were wider challenges with limited housing stock.
- 12.10 Councillor Hilton noted his support for a landlord accreditation scheme. Referring to Recommendation 3 to hold a Member Development session on the role of the Private Sector Housing Team, he commented that it was important that the session included practical advice and a detailed process for Members reporting housing hazards on behalf of residents. The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer noted that this recommendation had been widened during the final stages of the project to include reference to all housing hazards, rather than focusing only on damp and mould. The Housing Innovation Manager further noted that he was happy to offer more than one Member Development session, acknowledging that this was a complex area.
- 12.11 Councillor Campbell paid tribute to the Task and Finish Group for their work and noted that they had covered lots of ground in the report. She reflected on her recent experience of assisting a resident who was experiencing an issue with damp and mould, and noted that the Social Housing Provider dealt with the issue very swiftly. Councillor Conder noted that there could be additional challenges with leasehold flats and absentee landlords.
- 12.12 Councillor Castle asked for clarification as to what was meant by Category 1 and Category 2 hazards which the Housing Innovation Manager provided.

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**RESOLVED** – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **APPROVE** the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group on Damp and Mould in Gloucester’s Rented Accommodation for consideration by Cabinet, subject to the following amendment:

- 1) Amending the wording of Recommendation 6 to include reference to sharing the information resource on the City Council’s social media channels.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023.

**Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours**

**Time of conclusion: 8.38 pm hours**

**Chair**