



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 5th February 2024

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Ackroyd, Campbell, Castle, Dee, Evans, Hilton, Hudson, Kubaszczyk, Morgan, Wilson, Zaman, A. Chambers 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

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor  
Stephanie Chambers

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis

Managing Director

Head of Culture and Leisure

Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead

Housing Innovation Manager

Investment Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs. Durdey, O'Donnell and Sawyer

### **88. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **89. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING**

There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **90. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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

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There were no public questions.

**92. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)**

There were no petitions nor deputations.

**93. ACTION POINT ITEM**

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

**94. LEASE OF LAND AT HEMPSTED MEADOW**

94.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman, introduced the report and explained that it outlined how the Council proposed to formalise a long-term lease for Hempsted Meadow. She reminded Members of the previous licensing arrangement and outlined the resolutions that Cabinet were being asked to approve, as set out in 2.2 of the report.

94.2 The Chair referred to Appendix 1 and asked for clarification on the map and site plans which Councillor Norman and the Investment Manager provided. The Investment Manager advised Members which areas of the map included grass and hard standing for the car park area, and noted that in order to accommodate toilets and office space on the site, the new leaseholder would look after a larger parcel of estate than the current arrangement.

94.3 Councillor Morgan queried whether there was a proposal to extend the lease to the land to the right of the access road which had been previously used for alternative purposes. The Investment Manager confirmed that the proposals covered the site included in Appendix 1 only, and the other parcels of the estate would be available for other leases or purposes, including events.

94.4 Councillor A. Chambers asked why the proposals for a long-term lease with regular break clauses were not in place previously. He further asked whether there would be joint break clauses within the new agreement. Councillor Norman advised that a license in respect of the site had been issued initially, following the hiatus where the land was used as a testing site during the Covid-19 pandemic. She expressed the view that now was the appropriate time to provide the license holder with the opportunity to continue to operate while the Council considered longer-term provision for the land. Councillor Norman also advised that the break clauses would need to be mutual.

94.5 In response to a further query from Councillor A. Chambers regarding the possibility of a replacement provider, Councillor Norman stated that there would be a competitive lease process and that the Council would be seeking a tenant who was committed to the site and financially stable.

94.6 In respect of the narrative at 3.6 and the fixed rate income, Councillor Wilson asked whether the proposed long-term lease arrangement would be index linked. Councillor Norman confirmed that this was the expectation however

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the valuation of the land would need to be considered for various uses to enable to Council to have the best possible consideration.

- 94.7 Councillor Wilson asked what the Council's powers would be in the event of another pandemic. The Investment Manager advised that pandemic clauses were now common in lease agreements, and if there were pandemic restrictions on trading in the future, it would likely be in the new tenant's best interest to work with the Council.
- 94.8 In response to a question from Councillor Pullen as to whether the new leaseholder would be able to sublease on the site, Councillor Norman advised that consideration would need to take place as part of the tender process.
- 94.9 Councillor Pullen referred to 3.4 in the report and the narrative concerning ground conditions. He asked whether any improvement works had been carried out and if so, what were the costs of these works. Councillor Norman explained that ground repairs had been needed prior to the pandemic and that the NHS had undertaken some repairs on the site. She noted that the Asset Management team would be looking at a maintenance schedule to improve the ground conditions.
- 94.10 In response to a query from Councillor Hilton regarding the control the Council would have over events on the site, Councillor Norman advised that the Council had the option to put restrictive covenants on the site if operators looked to operate outside of the lease agreement and that the police would also have the option to object to events. This said, Councillor Norman was open minded to proposals from potential tenants who wished to operate on the site.
- 94.11 Councillor Hilton agreed that the Council should be open minded but impressed his view that the Council should ensure that it kept some control when drafting the lease agreement. Councillor Norman confirmed that there was likely to be some stipulation in the competitive lease agreement. The Investment Manager noted that operators may also need to apply for a one-off license or planning permission for certain events.
- 94.12 In response to a query from Councillor Tracey as to whether the new leaseholder could sublet, Councillor Norman stated that it was her expectation that the new leaseholder would engage with the Council as landowner on such proposals.
- 94.13 In response to additional questions from Councillor Tracey, Councillor Norman advised that some events would require a license and the leaseholder or operator would need to adhere to the terms of that license. She noted that she had confidence that the Council's Officers and legal team would ensure that the Council was protected in this area. She also noted that the idea of a 15-year lease was to provide incentive for investment in the site, as potential leaseholders would require a longer-term business plan when bidding for the competitive lease. If there were additional requirements

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for events, she noted that it was likely that these would be handled through a license.

- 96.14 Councillor Hiton asked whether the lease would include a clause to protect the Council should the operator and any associated business be bought out. Councillor Norman confirmed that this could be worked in as part of the negotiation process.
- 96.15 Councillor Zaman asked whether the lease would include provision for repairs. The Investment Manager advised that this would generally be subject to negotiation with the leaseholder.
- 96.16 In response to a further question from Councillor Zaman as to whether Members could be provided with a copy of the lease, Councillor Norman advised that this would usually be a task delegated to Officers.

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

**95. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**

- 95.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Cook, introduced the report and explained that Cabinet was being asked to recommend to Council to resolve that the Climate Change Strategy be adopted and issued for public consultation. He reminded Members of the background of the strategy, which was outlined in paragraph 3 in the report, and advised that Section 4 of the Climate Change Strategy, provided in Appendix 1, outlined in significant detail how the Council intended to approach decarbonisation. Councillor Cook thanked WSP consultants and senior Officers for their efforts in producing the strategy, as well as Members who had provided comments and contributions.
- 95.2 The Chair expressed the view that the report was very detailed and made for good reading. He asked how the Council could best influence areas, such as transport and highways, which were not under its control but were considered to be significant drivers of emissions. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead agreed that the Council was not the responsible authority for highways, however it was his hope that Officers would work collaboratively with colleagues in Gloucestershire County Council. He also noted that the Climate Leadership Gloucestershire group was key in driving collaboration between the District and County Councils. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead further commented that the Council was leading by example, through its hybrid working model and green travel initiatives, and could use its assets to assist the highways authority, such as providing more electric vehicle charging points in car parks and promoting green infrastructure.
- 95.3 The Chair referred to the Council's ambition to plant more trees, and asked whether there would be provision for tree lined avenues as a requirement in

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new planning applications. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead confirmed that developers were now required to include tree lined streets in planning applications, which also had public health and social value benefits. Councillor Cook further confirmed that under current planning legislation, developers were required to show how they would contribute to biodiversity net gain.

- 95.4 Councillor Pullen thanked Officers and Councillor Cook for the detailed report. He asked for further details as to how the Council proposed to consult on the Climate Change Strategy. He wondered that as the strategy was such an important piece of work for the city, whether consideration could be given to consulting through roadshows as well as the usual online consultation methods. Councillor Cook responded that the detail around how consultation would be undertaken was yet to be developed. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead noted that as a District Council, the Council was more limited in funding than larger authorities but would look to improve consultation, particularly in its discussions with young people.
- 95.5 Councillor Pullen referred to the narrative in the report at 3.8 concerning Member engagement, and asked whether consideration could be given to a Member Briefing following the 2024 local elections to brief new Councillors on the Climate Change Strategy. Councillor Cook noted his agreement, and confirmed that this could be included as part of the new Council induction cycle.
- 95.6 Councillor Pullen expressed the view that the Climate Change Action Plan needed to be driven at the highest possible political level owing to the importance of the strategy. He commented that a designated Cabinet Member for Climate Change or a Member Champion would be best placed to drive this forward. Councillor Cook noted his agreement but commented that this would have to be a matter for the Council administration post-May elections.
- 95.7 Councillor Morgan queried whether the Climate Change Strategy ought to have been put out for public consultation as a draft document. Councillor Cook noted that the strategy was a live document and would incorporate any changes which the Council felt had merit. The Managing Director further explained that the Council was keen to avoid any further delay and wanted to publish the document for public consultation so as not to push the strategy into the new Council term following the upcoming local elections. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead stated that the Council would be required to undertake biannual reviews of its progress.
- 95.8 Councillor Wilson observed that an evolving Climate Change Roadmap had the potential to be capital-intensive and asked whether the Council was aware of a steer from central Government in respect of long-term funding for such projects. Councillor Cook stated his agreement that additional funding would need be needed from central Government, and provided an overview of an initiative he was aware of where private sector businesses were working in partnership with the public sector to deliver climate change commitments. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead asserted that

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there was a high degree of assumption that central Government would need to release capital investment in this area.

- 95.9 Councillor Hilton referred to the commitment of the Council to reach net zero across its functions by 2030 and noted that there was no detailed action plan in place as to how this would be achieved. He further noted that many residents in Gloucester would not be able to self-fund green improvements such as solar panels, and that Gloucester had an added challenge in that there were extensive conservation areas throughout the city. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead confirmed that the Council had contributed to lobbying central Government to remove VAT on solar panels.
- 95.10 In response to additional comments from Councillor Hilton regarding the use of hydrogen fuel as an alternative green fuel, the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead noted that in relation to buses, the use of hydrogen fuel was not widely applied owing to the cost and electric vehicle batteries being much cheaper. He agreed that hydrogen fuel did have significant potential in industries such as heavy shipping.
- 95.11 In response to an additional question from Councillor Hilton, Councillor Cook clarified that 'HVO' was an acronym for Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil fuel.
- 95.12 Councillor A. Chambers queried why there was no reference to the Strategic Local Plan (SLP) in the report and Climate Change Strategy. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead noted that this was an oversight and confirmed that the Council would need to develop within its planning policy framework when delivering the Climate Change Strategy.
- 95.13 Councillor A. Chambers asked for the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead's view on the proposed future housing development at Podsmead. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead noted his understanding that the site had been scoped for additional tree planting, and that there was significant housing demand in Gloucester which needed to be balanced with the Council's green aspirations. The Managing Director reiterated that the developer would need to demonstrate biodiversity net gain as part of any planning application.
- 95.14 In response to a question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding the latest waste recycling rates in the city, Councillor Cook confirmed that the percentage of total waste recycled currently stood at around 43%.
- 95.15 In response to additional points from Councillor A. Chambers regarding what was meant by the GHH acronym at 4.9 in the report, the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead highlighted that the strategy document included a glossary of terms, and confirmed that minor text errors would be taken up with WSP consultants and amended prior to the document being put to public consultation.
- 95.16 Councillor A. Chambers asked how many electric vehicle charging points were available in Gloucester currently, and how many additional charging points were likely to be in place by 2023. Councillor Cook advised that a report concerning electric vehicle charging points was being brought to

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Cabinet in March. It was explained that Gloucestershire County Council were the responsible authority for on-street charging points, however if approved, phase 1 of the Council's electric vehicle plan provided for an additional 6-9 charging points, with phase 2 aiming to deliver 68 additional points in Council-owned car parks.

- 95.17 Councillor A. Chambers referred to the 4-step Process of Climate Mitigation Assessment at 3.1 in the strategy document and asked for an idea of expected timeframes. The Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead explained that the strategy before the Committee was a strategic document which needed to be read in conjunction with a Climate Change Action Plan.
- 95.18 In response to concerns raised from Councillor A. Chambers regarding a previous tree planting initiative, the Climate Change and Decarbonisation Lead pointed to the challenges of unusual planting conditions as a result of extreme weather but acknowledged that woodland planting would be done differently in the future, through further coordination with the Open Spaces team.
- 95.19 Councillor Pullen proposed the following recommendations, which were agreed and approved by the Committee.

**RESOLVED** that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **RECOMMENDS** that:

- (1) Consideration be given to undertaking consultation in the form of roadshows, as well as online consultation, with a particular focus on ascertaining the views of young people on the Climate Change Strategy.
- (2) A Member Briefing be offered to new Councillors on the Climate Change Strategy following the 2024 local elections.
- (3) The development of the Climate Change Action Plan be driven at the highest political level, either through a designated Cabinet Member for Climate Change or a Member Champion.

**96. HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

- 96.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Stephanie Chambers, and the Housing Innovation Manager delivered a presentation outlining the background of the Council's current Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2020-25 and the timeline for the production of the next Housing Strategy, which would be due for adoption in 2025. The Housing Innovation Manager explained that he was keen to seek the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scope this work, and that Officers would use the suggestions to prepare a draft strategy on which residents and stakeholders would be consulted towards the end of 2024. He confirmed that the Council aimed to adopt the new Housing strategy in Spring/Summer 2025.

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- 96.2 The Housing Innovation Manager suggested Members consider whether there was a case for a longer strategic strategy with annual action plan updates, whether the timeline of the strategy could be aligned with other corporate strategies, how the Council should monitor outcomes and how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wished to be involved in such monitoring.
- 96.3 The Chair reminded Members of the recommendation of the Peer Review panel for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to have more of a role in policy development, which was the idea of bringing this strategy forward to the Committee at the earliest stage of development.
- 96.4 Councillor Hilton asserted that more affordable homes were needed to meet the demand for housing in Gloucester, and that there was an additional challenge as there was very limited developable land available in Gloucester. He expressed the view that it would be useful for Officers to consider local brownfield sites and their potential for development into housing. Councillor Hilton felt that the Council needed to continue to lobby central Government through the Local Government Association (LGA) and that the Council should aim to provide appropriate accommodation alongside the prevalent houses of multiple occupation (HMOs).
- 96.5 Councillor Pullen suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider establishing a Task and Finish Group to work with Officers to develop the new Housing Strategy. It was agreed that this could be a useful way forward and a future work consideration for the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the 2024 local elections.
- 96.6 Councillor Tracey noted her concerns about the number of empty homes in the city which could otherwise be used to meet the current housing demand.
- 96.7 Councillor A. Chambers noted that there would always be a need for HMOs in city provided that they met the necessary Council building regulations. He further commented that any issues with anti-social behaviour should be reported and dealt with via the correct route.

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

**97. LEISURE SERVICES UPDATE**

- 97.1 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis, introduced the Leisure Services Update Report which had been requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following a previous update.
- 97.2 Councillor Hilton asked how much outstanding debt the former Aspire Leisure Trust owed the Council. Councillor Lewis confirmed that he would make follow up enquiries and that this information would be provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in due course,



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- 97.3 Councillor Pullen asked for clarification as to what was meant by the LTS acronym. The Head of Culture clarified that this referred to Learn to Swim.
- 97.4 Councillor Pullen referred to the current membership figure which stood at 450, compared to a pre-closure membership of 1,032. He asked how soon it was likely to be before membership reached pre-closure figures. Councillor Lewis advised Members that the situation was improving, and that the new provider was also attracting users from outside of Gloucester.
- 97.5 In response to a further query from Councillor Pullen regarding membership figures, Councillor Lewis reiterated that he was encouraged by the latest figures and he felt it was positive that membership had reached 450 just 9 weeks following the closure of Aspire.
- 97.6 Councillor Pullen expressed the view that free car parking in Asda for Freedom Leisure customers and staff was a good idea, and queried whether the use of the car park came at a cost to the Council. Councillor Lewis confirmed that it did not, and that Asda had become open to the idea due to the potential for increased footfall from Leisure service customers in store.
- 97.7 Councillor Castle referred to the narrative at paragraph 13 in the report, and asked what the Council's plans for investment were should it not succeed in its bid to Sport England for capital investment funding from the Swimming Pool Support Fund. The Head of Culture advised that a decision from Sport England was imminent, however the Council would still invest capital works on GL1 and Oxstalls in the event that it was not successful, and this would take place during the lifetime of the next permanent Leisure Services contract.
- 97.8 In response to a further query from Councillor Castle as to how much the Council planned to invest, the Head of Culture confirmed that the Council planned on putting forward £8m of capital investment over the course of a 10-15 year contract.
- 97.9 Councillor Castle referred to the successful PR figure of 71% in the Freedom Leisure performance report. She asked how this figure had been calculated. Councillor Lewis agreed to seek clarification from Freedom Leisure and it was agreed that this information would be circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course.
- 97.10 In response to a query from Councillor Wilson regarding which facilities had been reopened since the closure of Aspire Leisure, Councillor Lewis advised that all facilities had been reopened apart from the GL1 sauna.
- 97.11 In response to a question from Councillor Zaman regarding discounts for local leisure service users in Barton and Tredworth, the Head of Culture advised that the operator would be offering discounts for certain groups, but not for specific areas of the city.
- 97.12 Councillor Zaman asked whether leisure vacancies could be advertised within the Council's workforce. Councillor Lewis confirmed that vacancies

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were open to anyone to apply. The Head of Culture added that one of the conditions the Council considered when assessing tender applications was social value, and if an operator demonstrated a willingness to employ local people, it would increase their chances of being awarded the tender.

- 97.13 Councillor A. Chambers asked how many former Aspire staff had been re-employed by Freedom Leisure. Councillor Lewis advised that 86 out of 100 staff had been re-employed, with some former staff finding alternative employment.

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

**98. MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE**

- 98.1 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis, introduced the Museum Development Plan Progress Update report and invited questions from Members.
- 98.2 The Chair asked whether the Council was confident that the Museum of Gloucester would retain its accreditation. Councillor Lewis confirmed that he was as confident as he could be.
- 98.3 In relation to the former Folk of Gloucester Museum decant, the Chair asked whether all of its collections were being decanted to the Museum of Gloucester. The Head of Culture confirmed that there were a large number of items belonging to the Museum of Gloucester which were still at the Folk of Gloucester Museum. He noted that there was previously a list of around 1000 objects which the Folk of Gloucester wished to retain, however the position had now changed and it was likely that all items would be decanted to the Museum of Gloucester.
- 98.4 In response to a further question from the Chair as to whether there were any security concerns around this collection, Councillor Lewis replied that he was not aware of security concerns from the Folk of Gloucester Museum.
- 98.5 Councillor Pullen referred to 8.4 in the report regarding discussions with the county Library service and asked for clarification that the building was in the ownership of the County Council rather than the City Council, to which Councillor Lewis confirmed that it was.
- 98.6 Councillor Pullen asked whether it would make sense for the museum to expand into the library building when it became vacant. Councillor Lewis advised that conversations regarding the future use of the space were ongoing with the County Council and confirmed that the library was due to relocate to the former Debenhams building towards the end of the year.
- 98.7 Councillor Hilton referred to 3.5 in the report regarding the accreditation renewal for the Museum of Gloucester. He asked what the deadline of the submission of returns was, and how onerous a task it would be for Officers. He also asked whether there would be any budgetary impact as a result of

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this process. The Head of Culture advised that the Council had not yet received a timeframe and that the submission could take several months to prepare. This said, he confirmed that the culture service had systems in place and that he did not believe it would require additional financial resource.

- 98.8 Councillor Tracey referred to surplus disposals and asked whether there were any opportunities to sell on some collections such as clothes and pottery. The Head of Culture explained that good collection management did require disposal, however in order to achieve accreditation, the museum needed to follow a designated process rather than opting to sell items at first instance. He noted that financially motivated sales could take place, however other options, such as decanting to other museums, should be considered first.
- 98.9 In response to a question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding collection digitisation and the prospect of an online portal, Councillor Lewis explained that collections needed to be recorded and catalogued properly and that a portal was a future ambition of the Council.
- 98.10 Councillor A. Chambers asked for an explanation as to what was meant by decolonisation project. The Head of Culture explained that this involved looking at the origins of collections and whether they were linked to colonialism and ensuring that the history of those items were put into context.
- 98.11 In response to a further question from Councillor A. Chambers, the Head of Culture confirmed that there was no intention to remove such artifacts from the city's collections.
- 98.12 In response to an additional question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding the prevalence of RAAC in the Museum of Gloucester, the Head of Culture advised that there was a small amount of RAAC present in a small area of the roof of the building. He advised that an initial assessment had confirmed that this was stable, and that as the Museum was currently undergoing MEND works, a structural engineer was investigating further and would establish whether any additional work needed to be undertaken.
- 98.13 Councillor Dee asked whether loan boxes for schools were still on offer. The Head of Culture advised that loan boxes were very popular and that sometimes schools tended to keep them longer than anticipated. He noted that the team were looking into improving the service going forward.
- 98.14 Councillor Lewis noted that the Head of Culture was shortly leaving the Council for an alternative role, and paid tribute to him for his work. The Chair reiterated thanks on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Head of Culture.

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

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

**RESOLVED** – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the Work Programme.

**100. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at Civic Suite, North Warehouse.

**Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours**

**Time of conclusion: 9.03 pm hours**

**Chair**