



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 2nd September 2019

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

### **Others in Attendance**

Councillor Andrew Gravells, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy

Councillor Hannah Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources

Anne Brinkhoff, Corporate Director

Jon Topping, Head of Policy and Resources

Ian Edwards, Head of Place

Claire Haslam, Principal Planning Officer

Adam Gooch, Planning Policy Team Leader

David Durden, Strategic Housing Officer

Miranda Bopoto, Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs. Dee, Finnegan and Hawthorne

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

1.1 No declarations were made on this occasion.

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

2.1 There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **3. MINUTES**

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2019 were confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

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

4.1 There were no questions from members of the public.

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

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5.1 There were no petitions or deputations.

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

- 6.1 The Committee considered the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and Council Forward Plan.
- 6.2 Councillor Stephens suggested that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme Report should be considered before the Committee prior to going to Cabinet. Noting the importance of the report, the Committee agreed that it should be added to the Work Programme.
- 6.3 Furthermore, it was noted that there had been a slight delay in the Performance Monitoring Quarter 1 report. This would now be considered alongside the Quarter 2 report at the Committee's 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 meeting. This was due to the fact that there was a new post for a Performance and Improvement Officer, and the individual would need time to settle in before producing the report.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED that:** - (1) Enquiries would be made as to when the local Council Tax Support Scheme Report would be going to Cabinet and added to the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme accordingly; (2) Both the Performance and Monitoring Quarter reports would be added to the agenda for the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 meeting.

## **7. CITY PLAN**

- 7.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Gravells, began by thanking the Chair and the Committee for agreeing to look at the City Plan. He then thanked the Officers who were involved in producing the plan, pointing to the hard work required to bring it to fruition. Councillor Gravells then stated that much of the City Plan had been considered at the Planning Policy Member Working Group meetings, and as such, nothing would come as a surprise for those Members who were part of the working group.
- 7.2 Councillor Gravells then proceeded to highlight key aspects of the City Plan in turn. First, he considered Policy A2 (Affordable Housing). He felt that the 25% affordable housing requirement (on housing sites of 10 or more/ or sites with a gross site area of 0.5 hectares or more) was a major leap for the City. He explained that had this been in place beforehand, ongoing major developments such as Winnycroft Farm may have been subject to this requirement, meaning that there would have been a good proportion of affordable housing built as part of the development.
- 7.3 Furthermore, he brought the Committee's attention to Policy B6 (Protection of Public Houses), Policy A5 (Specialist Housing – Housing Choice for older, frail and disabled people), Policy C4 (Hot Food Takeaways), Policy C7 (Fall Prevention from Taller Buildings) and Policy F3 (Community Safety).

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- 7.4 Lastly, he informed the Committee that the version of City Plan which was being presented to them was not yet completed.
- 7.5 Adam Gooch, Planning Policy Team Leader, added that a number of the introductory sections were missing from this version of the report, however, the key sections were all there. Moreover, the appendix on the policies map would be available by the time the report would go to Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September. He added that everyone had been waiting a long time for the City Plan, and it had been written in a way that complimented the work of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS), the co-ordinated strategic development plan between Gloucester City Council, Cheltenham Borough Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- 7.6 The floor was then opened up to the Committee for questions.
- 7.7 Councillor Stephens opened up the discussion and stated that City Plan was an excellent piece of work. He said that he welcomed the inclusion of Policies B6 (Protection of Public Houses), C8 (Changing Places Toilets), and, Policy A2 (Affordable Housing). He then made some suggestions on further improving the City Plan. First, he suggested that homelessness and climate change could be added within the vision statement. Secondly, he felt that there should a specific policy on moving towards sustainable transport. Lastly, he explained that whilst he welcomed the policy A5 on Affordable Housing, he also questioned its viability in practise.
- 7.8 Responding to Councillor Stephens, Adam Gooch started by thanking him for the positive feedback. On the issue of climate change and sustainable transport, he informed Councillor Stephens that City Plan included policies on both climate change and renewable energy. With regard to Policy A5, he stated that this increase to 25% was progress and felt that it was viable, and that as much as they would like this to be higher, they had to comply with national policy.
- 7.9 Further to the above, David Durden, Strategic Housing Officer explained that the Local Housing Needs Guidance from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government provides the framework on the housing needs of the City. For example, how much affordable rent/social rent properties should be made available. Moreover, the 25% had been rigorously tested and then approved by the Consultants with whom the Council had worked with. This was echoed by Claire Haslam, Principal Planning Officer who felt that the majority of sites could meet the 25% requirement. Moreover, the benefit of having this policy is that it would save developer and officer time. In the exceptional circumstances where this policy could not be met, the G8 review mechanism would be available.
- 7.10 Councillor Wilson questioned whether a policy could be included on making homes solar panel friendly. In answer to this, Claire Haslam explained that there is not anything specific on solar panels within the City Plan as it would not be feasible for the Council to do the evidence base for this on its own as it would be too time consuming and expensive. However, she added that the

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Council was hoping to take the issue back through the JCS review and collaborate with the neighbouring authorities. This would have a wider impact across the JCS area. Claire Haslam explained that solar panels can be installed on homes without the need for planning permission if installed in accordance with the General Permitted Development Order.

- 7.11 Pointing to Policy A8 (Static Caravan Sites), Councillor Pullen asked why there was not anything in the policy on protecting transit sites. He felt that in its current state Policy A8 only covered permanent sites. Adam Gooch informed him that the version of the City Plan going to Cabinet would also include information on transit sites. Moreover, the report on Gypsies, Traveller and Travelling Show People Sites Position Update which was due to go to Cabinet on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September would outline the Council 's position in more detail.
- 7.12 Councillor Pullen then moved the discussion to Policy C7 (Fall Prevention from Taller Buildings). Whilst he welcomed the introduction of this policy, he questioned how it would be carried out in practise. Claire Haslam outlined that the policy had been put together in consultation with Public Health England, Gloucestershire Suicide Prevention, and the Police, and had been designed to be straightforward for applicants. Essentially, anyone putting in a planning application for a building or structure above 12 meters in height would only be granted permission if they can show that mitigation measures have been put in place to prevent suicide and accidental falls.
- 7.13 Addressing the Planning Officers, Councillor Haigh said that whilst she welcomed Policy C4 (Hot Food Takeaways), she would also like to see a policy on gambling houses. Secondly, she queried whether the proposed allocated key sites for residential development would be adequately served by public transport to accommodate people who may not have access to their own transport. Lastly, she asked whether a policy on cellar extensions could be included in the City Plan.
- 7.14 The Planning Policy Team Leader and the Principal Planning Officer replied to these queries in turn. In relation to gambling houses, they stated that they would investigate this further. Secondly, on the issue of public transport at the key sites, they explained to Councillor Haigh that as much as they have a desire to see all sites served by Public Transport, it is something over which they do not have much control. Thirdly, responding to Councillor Haigh 's query on cellar extensions, they informed her that it is not something which is straightforward as it gives rise to archaeological and flooding concerns and would be picked up through the development management process. Moreover, the Nationally Described Space Standard which the plan seeks to adopt would apply to cellar conversions.
- 7.15 Councillor Hilton was concerned with the way Policy A4 (Student Accommodation) had been drafted. Whilst it discussed purpose-built student accommodation, he felt that there was nothing to restrict the continued conversion of family homes for student accommodation use. He felt that the final report needed to be clear on this. In addition, he felt that Policy G5 (Broadband Connectivity) could be made clearer by defining the minimum

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threshold for 'high speed'. His view was that this would help to future proof broadband provision and allow room for technological developments.

- 7.16 Similarly, he felt that Policy G3 could be improved by removing the 2% threshold. He explained that Policy G3 which sets out that there will be electric charging points 2% of spaces within 100 or more car parking spaces might prove to be insufficient and restrictive in the future. He then referred the Committee to Policy C4 (Hot Food Takeaways) which he thought could be enhanced by including guidelines on waste disposal. Finally, turning his attention to Policy SA19, he suggested that the land off Myers Road would need to be sorted out before any residential development was permitted on the site.
- 7.17 In answer to Councillor Hilton 's query about the conversion of family homes into student accommodation, Claire Haslam advised that they supported the comments made previously at the Planning Policy Working Group which they had taken on board. The City Plan now included a statement on 'saturation' by conversion into flats or large Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Moreover, there was now a clear definition of 'saturation' within Policy A1. This would go some way to resolve the issue in the future. However, she also acknowledged the policy 's limitations in that the Council could only enforce the policy in relation to Flats/HMOs which come through planning applications which the Planning department look at. They would not be able to do this for smaller HMOs that do not require planning permission. With regard to the 2% threshold in Policy G3, she explained that it may well be that this policy would be changed in the JCS Review. Indeed, authorities are required to review their policies every 5 years. Furthermore, the way policies are framed provides a base position but that is not to mean that they cannot be changed if the need should arise. On Policy SA19 (Land off Myers Road) she explained that before any development is given planning permission, it would have to comply with the relevant local and national planning policies. This would protect any future residents should a planning application be made for industrial uses on the adjacent site.
- 7.18 Councillor Organ submitted that the City Plan was a good document which had been carefully written and reviewed. Nevertheless, he emphasised to the Committee the importance of design aesthetic in order to avoid unsightly designs which would be detrimental to the City. He proposed that there should be a process whereby any plans would be checked and approved by a Board. Further, he asked that this is included within the City Plan.
- 7.19 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy reiterated his thanks to both the Committee and the Officers. The Chair also thanked the Officers and the Councillor Gravells on behalf of the Committee.
- 7.20 **RESOLVED that:** - Cabinet be asked to implement the recommendations made at the meeting.

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### **8. UNIVERSAL CREDIT - GAP MEETING UPDATE**

- 8.1 The Chair informed the Committee that he had attended the Gloucester Advice Partnership meeting on the 30<sup>th</sup> of July. He stated that Universal Credit had undergone changes since being launched. In October, the repayment cap would be lowered from the current 40% maximum, down to 30%. Moreover, the Department for Work and Pensions would be working closely with housing agencies in order to upscale job opportunities.
- 8.2 Expressing his disappointment that Green Square would no longer be operating as part of the reception move to 'The Gateway', Councillor Toleman asked the Officers and Cabinet Members present whether there would be a replacement advice centre to provide help to those in need. Councillor Norman, Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources responded to say there were ongoing talks with advice centres to put in place a replacement, and that there should be an update soon.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED that:** - The Committee NOTE the update.

### **9. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 1 REPORT**

- 9.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Norman presented the report. She explained that the figures within the report forecast the best estimate at the current time of the year-end position in the Council's general fund. She then highlighted key aspects in each portfolio.
- 9.2 Members asked for clarification on why there was an overspend in the budget of £40,000. In particular, Councillor Hilton questioned why it appeared that no savings had been made. In response, Jon Topping, Head of Policy and Resources stated that this discrepancy could largely be attributed to transformation costs. However, there would be the option to drawdown if necessary.
- 9.3 Furthermore, Councillor Norman explained that in order to understand why there was currently an overspend in the budget and predicted savings had not been made, there were several factors which had to be considered. Firstly, the reception move to 'The Gateway' had taken place later than expected. Secondly, the disposal of the Herbert Kimberley and Phillipotts Warehouses was still an ongoing process, and the Council was still paying business rates. However, the warehouses were being marketed until the closing date in September. Thus far, there had been over 50 declarations of interest. Taking the above into account, it was expected that savings would be realised in the long term after the warehouses have been disposed.
- 9.4 Referring to the Culture and Leisure portfolio, Councillor Ryall queried what the total figure received from voluntary donations at the museum was. The Head of Policy and Resources stated that he would respond to Councillor Ryall and the Committee in writing.
- 9.5 **RESOLVED that:** - The Committee NOTE the report.

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**10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

10.1 30 September 2019 at 6.30pm in the Civic Suite, North Warehouse.

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

**Time of conclusion: 8:00pm**

**Chair**