



CABINET

MEETING : Wednesday, 9th December 2020

PRESENT : Cllrs. Cook (Chair), H. Norman, Gravells, Melvin, Morgan and Watkins

Others in Attendance

Cllrs Hilton and Stephens

Managing Director

Corporate Director

Corporate Director

Head of Place

Head of Policy and Resources

Head of Cultural Services

City Climate Change and Environment Manager

Community Infrastructure Levy Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : None

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

55. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2020 are confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair in due course.

56. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

57. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions or deputations.

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58. LEADER AND CABINET MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

Councillor Hilton referred to the liquidation of Debenhams and expected closure of their Gloucester department store. He asked if the Leader of the Council agreed that a strong retail presence should be kept on the site which he regarded as anchoring Kings Square whose renovation has recently begun. The Leader of the Council replied that he considered reserving the building for retail alone not to be in the best interests of the city and that he wanted all options to be kept open to ensure the building remains in occupation. Councillor Hilton enquired if talks had taken place with the owner of the building over its future use. The Leader of the Council confirmed that although officers had been in talks, he did not believe it necessary for them to have a direct role while the owners appeared to be progressing towards the building remaining in use for the foreseeable future. Councillor Hilton reminded Members that the Debenhams building frontage was regarded as a positive feature of the City Centre Conservation Area and sought reassurance that it would be preserved. The Leader of the Council reiterated that all options would be considered with nothing ruled in or out at this stage.

Councillor Stephens asked if there were plans to purchase the Debenhams building in the light of the acquisition of the Eastgate Shopping Centre, St Oswalds Retail Park and other properties by the Council. The Leader of the Council stated that although it was for sale, there were no plans to buy it. Councillor Stephens expressed concern at relying on the market when a similar approach had kept other premises empty for extended periods in the past and reminded Members of the valuable work being done by the Economic Recovery Task Force. Given the importance of the site to the Kings Square renovation project he enquired if a task force might be established to forward its development and that Councillors receive regular updates. The Leader of the Council stated that regular updates would be given and noted that the future of the site would likely be addressed by the City Centre Commission at their next meeting in January 2021. He further commented that he did not think a task force was necessary and could get in the way of negotiations between the owners and potential developers. The Leader of the Council expressed confidence that progress would be made quickly.

Councillor Stephens noted that the reported proportion of COVID-19 infections in Barton and Tredworth were amongst the highest in the South West of England and that the level in Gloucester as a whole was not only higher than the rest of the county but more than that in London where stricter Tier 3 measures were said to be under consideration. He sought clarification of discussions with the Director of Public Health (Gloucestershire County Council) into why the city had such relatively high figures and what control measures might be used. The Leader of the Council shared the concern at the numbers and confirmed that the Director of Public Health took them extremely seriously and was taking steps to lower the rate of infection including contacting all households in the worst affected areas.

59. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

Cabinet considered the report of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment that presented the findings of a report into how the City Council can reduce our carbon emissions to zero by 2030 in line with our climate emergency resolution.

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The Leader of the Council outlined the background to the report, gave examples of actions being taken to reduce emissions and hoped that the City Council would demonstrate leadership in this matter. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure drew Members' attention to the report by CLS Energy (Appendix 1) and commented on its thoroughness, the importance of meeting the targets the administration has set itself and the expectation among residents that the challenges posed be risen to. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy reminded Members that the CLS Energy report described financial as well as environmental benefits to its recommendations.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the draft action plan be subject to a targeted consultation with the Environment and Ecology Forum and the Climate Change cross-party Member Group
- (2) authority be delegated to the City Council Climate Change Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment, to make any changes to the actions following the consultation referred to above prior to submitting a report to Full Council in early 2021.
- (3) the steps needed to move the whole City towards carbon neutrality by 2050 are noted as per the appendix report, and that officers continue to develop this city-wide action plan.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (4) subject to (1) and (2) above, the actions contained in the CLS report (appendix 1 of the report) are adopted as a plan for achieving the goal of net zero carbon emissions by the city council by 2030.

60. CULTURAL STRATEGY SIX MONTHLY UPDATE

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure that provided an update on progress made against the Cultural Strategy for the period April 2020 to September 2020 and sought to present the plan to update the actions in Gloucester's Cultural Vision & Strategy for the period 2021-2026.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure advised Members that the report represented growing confidence in the cultural activity of the city with tangible progress having been made despite COVID-19. He gave examples of some of the most successful cultural achievements listed in the report and thanked the Gloucester Culture Trust (GCT) and officers for them. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure further emphasised the importance of culture to health and wellbeing as well as an economic driver. He referred to the Public Art Principles (Appendix 3) and recommended that Members adopt them recalling the discussion of the report at Overview and Scrutiny Committee (30th November 2020) when the issue of public art removed from buildings, such as the British Home Stores murals, was raised (minute 9.5). The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure commented that existing artworks had to be made the most of as well as new works created.

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The Cabinet Member for Environment stated that an amazing job had been done to produce any cultural offerings at all despite COVID-19, even more so given the good quality of many of them including the 'Of Earth and Sky' and 'Gaia' projects. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods commented that the difficulties had been overcome by seeking opportunities to bring cultural resources to people such as using the volunteer food distribution network to deliver art packs. She commended the collaborative work by the GCT and Active Gloucestershire among others that had contributed to the achievements and stressed that the benefits of taking culture direct to communities must continue in future. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure reiterated that the success had been accomplished through partnership and building relationships. He asked the Head of Cultural Services to pass on Cabinet's comments to all colleagues and partners.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the report is accepted and progress against the objectives noted
- (2) the plan to update the Cultural Strategy for the next five years is accepted
- (3) the Public Art Principals are adopted.

61. DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS (INCLUDING MONEY PLAN AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME)

Cabinet considered the report of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought Members to review the Council's Draft Money Plan for recommendation to Council.

The Leader of the Council advised Members of the uncertainty at this stage of knowing the income and expenditure position come year-end. He further commented on the prudence that has resulted in no forced savings this or next year despite COVID-19 disruption. The Leader of the Council thanked all officers, especially the finance team for their work and took the opportunity to urge residents to comment on the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources reiterated that there was uncertainty due to COVID-19 and central government's settlement not being provided before Christmas. She cautioned Members to anticipate changes to the budget prior to discussion at Council in February 2021 such as a Budget Equalization Reserve to be created should the settlement be greater than expected. Regarding her own portfolio, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources highlighted potential savings and additional revenue of £415,000 to be achieved by the now completed disposal of the Herbert, Kimberley and Phillpotts warehouses among other measures (Appendix 3). She echoed the Leader's thanks to all staff for their work in such a challenging year, and especially to the Section 151 Officer for his excellent support to Cabinet.

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The Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods particularly thanked officers in her own portfolio who had gone to the sharp end of the pandemic to meet the needs of communities across the city. She commented that Gloucester was in a healthier financial position than many other authorities due to prudent and timely decisions taken over the last decade by an administration she was proud to be a member of. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy offered his own gratitude for a proposed budget he was confident in, especially to the Head of Policy and Resources, Head of Place, Head of Communities and Housing Innovation Manager.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) that the assumptions contained in the Council's draft Money Plan from 2021/22 to 2025/26 and revisions to the draft revenue budget be approved
- (2) the uncertainties regarding future incomes, as shown in the report and Appendix 1, and the need to update the Draft Money Plan when there is more certainty regarding Central Government financing, be noted.

62. TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE - MID YEAR REPORT 2020/21

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that updated Members on treasury management activities for the six month period of 1st April 2020 to 30th September 2020 in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Code of Practice for Treasury Management.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources placed the key features of the report in the context of the current economic climate and confirmed that there had been no new long-term borrowing. The Cabinet Member for Environment noted that there was no change in practice which he believed demonstrated the prudence of officers.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

63. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 2, 2020/21

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought Members to note year-end forecasts and the financial pressures on the Council during the 2nd Quarter ended 30th September 2020.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised Members that the report did not include the impact of the second COVID-19 lockdown. She summarised the overall position and that of her own portfolio. The Cabinet Member for Environment commended the work of the Section 151 Officer and finance team. He stated that most of the areas overbudget were due to COVID-19 and would he hoped receive reimbursement from central government. The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure informed Members that all staff in his portfolio were mindful of current financial pressures and were actively seeking commercial opportunities that would lay the groundwork for better in future.

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RESOLVED it be noted that:

- (1) the forecast year end position is currently for a decrease to the Council's General Fund balance of £99k against a budgeted decrease of £49k
- (2) the uncertainty surrounding the exact levels of grant income to be received from Government will affect the eventual financial outcome for the year
- (3) the details of specific budgetary issues identified by officers and the actions being taken to address those issues
- (4) the current level of Capital expenditure as shown in Appendix 2 of the report.

64. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTERS 1 & 2 2020/21

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that informed Members of the Council's performance against key measures in quarters 1 and 2 of 2020/21.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources commented on the necessary delay to the quarter 1 account due to COVID-19 and that the number of performance indicators included was significantly greater than in previous reports.

RESOLVED that the Quarters 1 & 2 Performance Report 2020/21 at Appendix 1 of the report be noted.

65. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought approval to retain the current Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2021/22.

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources advised Members that although the scheme was unaltered from 2020/21 it was important that there was a provision for any government emergency changes to be enacted immediately in the context of recent initiatives announced to tackle COVID-19. She informed them that no questions had arisen since circulation of the report to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2020.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (1) the current Local Council Tax Support scheme, as the approved scheme for Gloucester City in 2020/21, be adopted for 2021/22

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- (2) the scheme approved at (1) above be updated to align with any legislation changes in January 2021 and to be implemented from 01 April 2021
- (3) any urgent amendments to the scheme approved at (1) above, in the event of a national emergency and authorised by the government, be adopted and implemented immediately.

66. ENERGY CONTRACT RENEWAL

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources that sought approval to enter into a new contract for the supply of energy (gas and electricity).

The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources reminded Members that the existing contract expires in March 2021. She drew their attention to the benefits of budget certainty and the facility to buy and sell energy within a controlled environment of the proposed arrangement with West Mercia Energy (WME). She further noted that both the Gloucester and Tewkesbury Borough authorities had been satisfied with the service provided by WME. The Cabinet Member for Environment commented that it was sensible to be able to sell energy with the possibility of generating some income.

RESOLVED that the S151 Officer and the Property Commissioning Manager be authorised to enter into a formal partnership with Tewkesbury Borough Council to jointly procure the Council's energy supply by entering into a new 3 year contract with the option to extend by up to 2 years with West Mercia Energy on terms agreed by S151 Officer and the Council's Solicitor.

67. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT (IFS)

Cabinet considered the report of the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy that updated Members on the preparation of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for 2020 including the required 'Infrastructure List'.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy outlined the key features of and background to the report. He made it clear that the Infrastructure List (Appendix 1) was shared across all the Joint Core Strategy authorities and that the schemes included were not necessarily to be funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) but were included as a focus for CIL funding. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy emphasised that the very technical language and format of the report had been dictated by central government.

RESOLVED that:

- (1) the publication of the Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) for 2020 be approved; and
- (2) it be noted that the Annual Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Rates Summary Statement will be published alongside the IFS.

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**Time of commencement: 6.00 pm
Time of conclusion: 6.50 pm**

Chair