



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING** : Monday, 1st March 2021

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. Coole (Chair), Ryall (Vice-Chair), Bowkett, Dee, Finnegan, Hilton, Hyman, Lewis, Organ, Pullen, Stephens, Taylor, Toleman, Tracey, Walford and Wilson

### **Others in Attendance**

Councillor Norman, Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Performance & Resources

Councillor Watkins, Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods

Gloucester City Safe Manager, Steve Lindsay

Sergeant Andrew Doyle, Gloucester Neighbourhood Police Team

Head of Policy & Resources

Head of Communities

Housing Innovation Manager

Community Wellbeing Team Leader

Democratic & Electoral Services Team Leader

Democratic & Electoral Services Officer

**APOLOGIES** : Cllrs.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no declarations of party whipping.

### **4. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** - that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

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

There were no public questions.

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

There were no petitions and deputations.

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

- 7.1 The Chair reminded Committee Members that there was a Special Meeting scheduled for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021 where the Committee would consider the Waste, Streetscene and Grounds Maintenance contract.
- 7.2 **RESOLVED:** - That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the forward plan and work programme.

### **8. HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY - STRATEGY & RECOVERY UPDATE**

- 8.1 The Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods, Councillor Watkins, introduced the report and highlighted key elements. She noted that this was the first yearly review of the Housing, Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy, and that this had been a busy and significant time in respect of this due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She thanked Officers in the housing team for their work, particularly during the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, in bringing people indoors who were rough sleepers, and for work carried out in securing the £3.8 Million County-wide bid for the Next Steps programme which would see 51 extra units across the County, as well as providing extra capacity for Officers and support for affected Individuals. Councillor Watkins also noted the importance of driving up standards and informed the Committee of the appointment of the new Housing Innovation Manager who would be carrying out work in private sector enforcement amongst others. The Cabinet Member for Planning & Housing Strategy thanked staff in the Housing team for their work and noted that there were two new appointments in the team. He also added that housing was a very important issue for him and was pleased to note that the affordable housing target had been exceeded with the creation of 295 affordable homes in the last year.
- 8.2 The Chair agreed that housing was a key issue, noting that most of their case work as a Councillor concerned housing, that the Council could not have foreseen the importance of the strategy and how crucial it had become in the last year. They also commended the cross-party approach which had been taken to tackling housing issues. Councillor Stephens echoed his thanks to Council Officers for their work, credited Councillor Watkins and Councillor Gravells for briefing meetings which they had held and highlighted the importance of collaborative work going forward. In response to his queries Councillor Watkins and Officers responded as follows. Firstly, with regard to the lifting of the eviction ban in the future, he was advised that there was work being carried out in respect of this county-wide through the accommodation supply sale which was set up as part of the response to COVID-19. Various avenues were being explored through this, for example,

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utilising the number of Ministry of Defence properties in the City, and leasing properties. Moreover, Officers were also working with lettings agents county-wide, and, from this work anecdotal evidence suggested that a number of the proposed evictions concerned low priority groups and instances where the landlord wanted to move back into the property for example. Secondly, regarding assistance for people experiencing issues with mortgage defaults, it was noted that assistance was available on a national level through measures such as mortgage holiday breaks and the furlough scheme. Nonetheless, work was also being carried out by the housing team to draw up plans based on best practice for mortgage rescue alongside potentially working with lenders to secure accommodation. The creation of the new projects and strategy team was significant as it would enable work not only on strategy but also quick projects, for example, looking at best practice.

- 8.3 On the issue of moving individuals out of hotel accommodation, it was outlined that the 51 units from the Next Steps were anticipated to be ready by July 2021 at the latest. Alongside this, the county-wide partnership had signed up to a leasing scheme which would deliver 100 units, and it was anticipated that these would be available within the next 6 months. There were currently around 50 individuals in hotels, and thus, any surplus accommodation would mean that individuals could be moved out of B&Bs. Whilst there were some B&B providers who provided a good service, the aim would always be to move people out of B&Bs as this was not considered to be the best option for placing people.
- 8.4 In response to Councillor Lewis' query about the numbers of people who did not want to be placed in accommodation, Councillor Watkins explained that although there was a rough sleeper count, this number varied day by day. In terms of why some people did not want to be placed in accommodation, she advised that this was complex, and there was a myriad of possible reasons unique to the individual. The focus was on engaging with these individuals, being mindful and understanding of their lived experiences, and Officers on the ground made it part of their work to get to know the rough sleepers. Further, there was also a focus on looking at how to help individuals from ending up in situation where they become rough sleepers in the first place. Finally, whilst the Council was fully committed to the government's pledge to end rough sleeping by 2024, eradicating rough sleeping was not always on the Council's terms but rather also depended on the individuals concerned. Nonetheless, it was also about finding the correct interventions to help people where traditional approaches did not work.
- 8.5 In relation to Councillor Pullen's query about the progress being made in private sector housing, Councillor Watkins stated that there were plans for work to carry on with driving up standards, as well as ongoing work around the incentives scheme. Furthermore, the Housing Innovation Manager outlined that within the Housing Projects and Strategy team there was a team member whose work focused on working with private landlords helping secure accommodation for families who presented as homeless or were threatened with homelessness. This remained an important piece of work

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looking at maximising the number of properties which could be secured through the private sector as the largest housing sector in the County and the Country. Further, there was also enforcement work being carried in respect of any rogue landlords of which they were a very small minority of all landlords.

- 8.6 The Head of Communities highlighted that the County-wide Housing Partnership had agreed for all the district Councils in the County and the County Council to contribute to a small team to support individuals who were not in accommodation under the Next Steps Programme, including, for example, individuals with support needs who were in the private sector and struggling with sustaining their tenancies. Likewise, there were plans for staff to be mobilised to work with individuals currently in hotel accommodation to ensure they were tenancy ready depending on the individuals. Lastly, support remained a key priority.
- 8.7 Both the Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods who noted this would be her last Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy thanked the Chair and the Committee for the manner in which they received Cabinet Members attending the committee's meetings.
- 8.8 **RESOLVED:** - that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

## **9. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3**

- 9.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance & Resources, Councillor Norman introduced the report and highlighted key elements, noting for example that there were now 31 key performance indicators, a significant increase from 2019-2020 report.
- 9.2 Responding to questions from Councillor Stephens, Councillor Norman outlined that data from service areas was regularly reviewed by Officers, and this informed service plans and other work within the service areas. In addition, there was work being carried out to set up dashboards for Cabinet Members to enable them to have ongoing sight of data. In terms of extending these licenses to other Members, Officers would get back to Members. On the topic of environmental crime, Councillor Norman outlined that there would be a report going to Cabinet on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March which would provide a breakdown of enforcement undertaken recently, the difference in penalty notices that were established in the first year of the contract and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic amongst other data. Regarding the collation of the data on affordable homes, she outlined that a request would be made to Officers, however it was possible that this could only be changed for the next civic year.
- 9.3 In relation to Councillor Pullen's query about the potential impact of The Gateway closing on telephone waiting times and the number of staff answering calls, Councillor Norman advised that this would be confirmed with Officers and a response would be circulated to Members.

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- 9.4 Pointing to KPI WR31, Councillor Lewis noted that it was encouraging to see higher levels of recycling.
- 9.5 **RESOLVED:** that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

### **10. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 3 2020/21**

- 10.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance & Resources, Councillor Norman introduced the report and highlighted key elements and major headlines from the report, noting that many of the budget pressures in the report could be attributed to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. There were no questions from Committee Members and thus, Councillor Norman proceeded to thank the Chair and Committee Members for their work on the Committee during the last 5 years. Councillor Coole also thanked Cabinet for its willingness to always engage with Overview & Scrutiny.

- 10.2 **RESOLVED:** - that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

### **11. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 11.1 The Chair, Councillor Coole, introduced the report and noted that the past year had been unprecedented, and that the Committee should be proud of the work it had carried out. Alongside scrutiny of COVID-19 recovery work, the Committee had continued with its scrutiny of ordinary Council business. Councillor Coole then thanked Committee Members for their contributions, Cabinet Members and Officers who had supported the Committee. They then highlighted the parity of esteem between Scrutiny and Cabinet at Gloucester City Council, the high regard in which scrutiny at Gloucester City Council was viewed nationally, and hoped that this would continue beyond the current administration. Councillor Stephens echoed Councillor Coole's comments and extended his thanks to the Chair, Councillor Coole, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Ryall and Spokesperson, Councillor Lewis. Councillor Lewis stated that Overview & Scrutiny had carried out work for the betterment of the City, and thanked the Chair for their work. Councillor Coole closed the meeting stating that he had enjoyed working in their role as Chair, and hoped that the work carried out had helped to dispel the public perception of politicians.

- 11.2 **RESOLVED:** - that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

### **12. REVIEW OF PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER**

- 12.1 The Cabinet Member for Communities & Neighbourhoods, Councillor Watkins introduced the report and highlighted key elements. The Gloucester City Safe Manager added that the PSPO had been a useful tool in tackling the issue of street drinking in the City for both City Protection Officers and the Police, particularly with engaging people on the ban on street drinking.

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- 12.2 Councillor Ryall thanked the Gloucester City Safe Manager for the written response he had provided to the Committee with respect to questions raised by Councillor Ryall. Following on from this, the Gloucester City Safe Manager responded to Councillor Ryall 's question around whether all instances of this were being reported to the police explaining that there were ongoing issues with reporting to the 101 telephone number which could have long waiting times. Nonetheless, there was access to the City Safe Secure System which escalated any instances into crime reports which would be automatically emailed to the 101 number and a crime would then be created. Recently, there were some good results with prolific shop lifters either receiving custodial sentences or criminal behavioral orders of up to three years with the police doing a good job of putting together these files. In addition, the yellow card system which was used for young offenders and prevented them from going through the criminal justice system was also working well.
- 12.3 In answer to queries raised by Councillor Hilton, Councillor Watkins, the Community Wellbeing Team Leader, and Sergeant Andrew Doyle advised as follows. Firstly, the alcohol-free zone did not extend to Kingsholm, however the city wide PSPO did cover alcohol related nuisance amongst other things. There were powers in place for the police, and several measures were being carried out to deal with these issues. For example, Police Officers worked on a rota basis to go to areas and had the powers to remove alcohol from people in order to prevent or stop a nuisance from occurring. However, residents were still encouraged to report any issues to ensure that they could be resourced accordingly. Secondly, it was highlighted that this was a complex issue with potentially other factors at play which had to be considered, such as the fact that some individuals who were in temporary accommodation did not have places to drink socially with friends. Therefore, it was not necessarily simply about having a PSPO, but also working with individuals to understand why there were issues. Nevertheless, Sergeant Doyle outlined that London Road was a key priority for the Police alongside the City Centre. As such, there was other work being carried out beyond the PSPO such as a three pronged approach which had been used with street beggars which initially started with working to support the individuals, and then having more punitive measures such as the Community Protection Notice as a last resort. Moreover, the police were also working with some of the temporary accommodation providers to tackle the problem. However, it was not always residents of these accommodation places who carried out the street drinking. Lastly, he explained that they fully supported the PSPO, however it was one of several measures which were available to them. Councillor Hilton thanked them for their responses and agreed that it was a complex problem which also required other positive actions.
- 12.4 In response to a query about other measures being undertaken, Sergeant Doyle explained that there was plain clothed work being carried out as an example. However, the issues at hand were complex, and hence there was other work being carried out such as in relation to drugs outreach.
- 12.5 **RESOLVED;** - that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the report.

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**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 2021.

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

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

**Chair**

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