



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 5th July 2021

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field, Pullen, Lewis, Wilson, Ackroyd, Castle, S. Chambers, Dee, Durdey, Evans, Hilton, Kubaszczyk, Organ, O`Donnell, Padilla and Zaman

Others in Attendance

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman
Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Steve Morgan

Head of Culture
Head of Policy and Resources
Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader

APOLOGIES : None.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

10. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

11. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 7th June 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

12. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

13. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

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14. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

- 14.1 The Chair introduced the latest version of the City Council's Forward Plan. He informed Members that they could intervene at any point during the meeting and were also welcome to contact him outside of Committee sessions with their suggestions of items they would like to see on the Work Programme.
- 14.2 Councillor Lewis requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee examine the Green Travel Plan and Black Friars Priory Update, both of which were included on the Council Forward Plan. Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Norman, noted that the Forward Plan was likely to become more heavily populated over the next few months and further clarity on dates would be available in due course. It was agreed that both items would be added to the Committee Work Programme with dates to be confirmed.
- 14.3 Councillor Lewis referred to the Armed Forces Community Covenant and requested that this also be added to the Work Programme as he had become aware of concerns relating to housing provision for some former members of the armed forces. The Committee agreed to add this item to the agenda for the meeting on Monday 4th October 2021.
- 14.4 The Chair noted his interest in examining how the Council was progressing in terms of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Councillor Norman mentioned that various recovery cells had been aligned to different Cabinet Members and asked whether there was a specific area the Committee wanted to scrutinise. The Head of Policy and Resources noted that if the Committee wanted an overarching view of how the Council was progressing more broadly, the Leader of the Council could provide this alongside input from the Head of Place. It was agreed that the Committee would request a general overview of the Covid-19 pandemic recovery progress in the city and that this item would be added to the agenda for the meeting on Monday 1st November 2021.
- 14.5 In response to a request from Councillor Hilton for the Committee to receive an update on the latest position on the City Council's commercial income, the Head of Policy and Resources explained that a report was being brought forward on the Council's Property Investment Strategy in due course and one of the recommendations from recent Internal Audit activity was for such a report to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that the Property Investment Strategy Update would be added to the Committee Work Programme and a date would be confirmed in due course.
- 14.6 Councillor Hilton asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could receive an update on the financial position of Gloucestershire Airport. He noted that the airport was jointly owned between Gloucester City Council and Cheltenham Borough Council, with each local authority having 50% ownership. Councillor Lewis confirmed his agreement with this suggestion.

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- 14.7 It was suggested that the Committee may wish to consider conducting a joint scrutiny session with Cheltenham Borough Council. It was agreed that contact would be made with Cheltenham Borough Council to ascertain their interest in being involved. It was noted that a separate date for this session may be needed outside of the current Committee Work Programme calendar, in order to accommodate both local authorities.
- 14.8 The Chair reiterated that the Committee was not bound by the Forward Plan and although it may be difficult, Members were welcome to consider whether they wanted to invite outside organisations such as the NHS or Gloucestershire Police to a scrutiny session.

RESOLVED –

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

15. 2020-21 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

- 15.1 Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Norman, introduced the report and explained that the year-end position of the general fund balance for the financial year had decreased to £122k against a budgeted decrease of £48k. She noted that a positive improvement of £100k had been made at the year end against a reported position of £222k back at Quarter 3. Councillor Norman confirmed that the level of earmarked reserves had increased by £9.738m to £13.771m which included the creation of a Section 31 Grant Repayment Reserve of £8.929m.
- 15.2 Councillor Norman confirmed that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact on variances between Council portfolios, with a net difference for Performance and Resources. She referred to an increased cost of providing housing subsidies, confirming that the Council had managed £36m in housing subsidy and benefit payments. Councillor Norman explained that the final quarter saw an adverse movement which resulted in a final overspend of £931k in this area, however she highlighted that this was out of the control of the Council. Councillor Norman confirmed that the Outturn figures included unrestricted Government support grants of £4.5m, as well as a final claim which was submitted in May 2021 for the period from December 2020 to March 2021. She also confirmed that the table included at 6.1 of the report showed the movement in the Council's earmarked reserves.
- 15.3 Councillor Wilson thanked Councillor Norman for the report and referred to the significant items of lost income included in the narrative at 5.1. He noted that the Government had supplied the Council with £4.5m in specific Covid-19 related funding but noted that the lost income figures appear to total

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£6.2m. Councillor Wilson asked for clarification as to how the Council had managed to fund the shortfall.

- 15.4 The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Council had managed to cover some of the additional costs through unbudgeted commercial income, such as the purchase of St Oswalds and cost savings as part of the ongoing disposal of the HKP warehouses.
- 15.5 In response to a further question from Councillor Wilson about the Property Sinking Fund Reserve and the current earmarked balance of £300k, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Council previously aimed for the fund to reach £1m, however this was unlikely whilst the City was recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Head of Policy and Resources noted that the Council may be in a different position in a few years.
- 15.6 The Chair invited the Cabinet Member and Head of Policy and Resources to comment on the lost income in Cultural and Leisure Services amounting to £0.901m, and the additional costs in Cultural and Related activities amounting to £0.936m. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that he would provide Members with a detailed breakdown of these figures.
- 15.7 In response to a further question from the Chair about the Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust, the Head of Culture confirmed that the costs were included in the £600k target and noted that the lost income could be explained by the closure of leisure facilities and restrictions on events due to Government pandemic restrictions. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Council was also unable to charge overhead costs for the Aspire Trust during the previous financial year.
- 15.8 Councillor Pullen stated that he was pleased to see an improving picture in relation to the year-end figures for the general fund balance. In relation to the requirement for residents to work from home as much as possible over the past year, he asked how this had impacted the Council and for comments on the future outlook. Councillor Pullen also asked how much grant funding had been received by Aspire Leisure and whether they would receive any further funding from the Council.
- 15.9 The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Council had not seen any significant costs or savings from home working other than a slight impact on losses from car parking income. He stated there had been little financial impact from home working requirements, but noted that this may change in the future as the city emerged from the pandemic. In response to Councillor Pullen's question on the Aspire Trust, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the Trust had resumed paying for utility costs from May 2021. He referred to the figures in the narrative at 5.19 confirming that the council had met additional costs of £314k to support the Trust, however some of this had been recovered from Government grants and repayments. He noted that some cash flow was still outstanding, however the Aspire Trust were not looking for any further support from the Council at the moment and hoped that they would recover well.

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- 15.10 Councillor Pullen noted that he previously had concerns about the Aspire Trust but was pleased to hear that they were now in a more stable position.
- 15.11 Councillor Hilton expressed the view that the Outturn position seemed positive given the challenges the Council faced during the pandemic. He noted that the support from Government had lived up to promises. Referring to the narrative at 6.1 in the report, Councillor Hilton asked for an update on the latest position on the installation of defibrillators around the city, noting that the earmarked reserves had a closing balance of £6k.
- 15.12 Councillor Norman reminded the Committee that prior to the recent election, the Council had had undertaken a mapping exercise of defibrillator locations. She confirmed that this exercise had concluded and that officers were now in the process of identifying gaps around the city. Councillor Norman expressed her view that defibrillators were only as useful as they were accessible and confirmed that the Council was willing to consider whether external defibrillators would be more accessible for emergency services.
- 15.3 The Chair noted that BT were looking to remove decommissioned phone boxes in some city wards and Councillor Norman suggested that BT may be supportive with infrastructure issues such as power supply. Councillor Hilton confirmed his interest in the costs associated with installing external defibrillators and Councillor Norman agreed that these would be made available to the Committee in due course.
- 15.4 Councillor Durdey referred to the figures relating to prompt payment performance. He noted that the narrative at 8.1 confirmed that the Council had maintained a strong performance in supplier payments over the past financial year, with 97% of invoices paid within 30 days of receipt in spite of the challenges brought about by the pandemic. He asked whether there were any concerns about this positive position changing in the future.
- 15.5 Councillor Norman confirmed that the City Council worked with local businesses and suppliers and that it remained a priority to invoice payments as soon as possible. The Head of Policy and Resources explained that several years ago, there was a drive from Government to encourage councils towards local suppliers. He confirmed that the City Council had continued to take this approach since and tries to pay invoices immediately wherever possible. Councillor Durdey expressed the view that the Council should be commended for this.

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

16. GLOUCESTER CULTURE TRUST UPDATE REPORT

- 16.1 The Chair noted that the purpose of the report was to provide an update on the City Council's Cultural Strategy and to confirm the intention to submit expressions of interest to the Cultural Development Fund and the UK City of Culture 2025. The Chair noted that a press release had been issued which confirmed that the expressions of interest were going ahead.

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- 16.2 Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Morgan, introduced the report and clarified that the submission of expressions of interest for UK City of Culture was being led by the Gloucester Culture Trust with input from Gloucester City Council. Councillor Morgan expressed the view that even if the Trust proved unsuccessful in reaching the final 6 longlisted cities, there would be significant value in making expressions of interest for the UK City of Culture bid. Councillor Morgan clarified that the Government had introduced a new expressions of interest stage which he felt had made the process simpler and less expensive. Councillor Morgan paid tribute to the hard work of officers who had dealt with significant challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. He also acknowledged the hard work undertaken by Councillor Organ who assisted with the organisation of the Retro Festival.
- 16.3 In relation to the Kings Square redevelopment, Councillor Morgan confirmed that the project was on track, however he noted that the pandemic had affected progress. In relation to the update on the City Council's Cultural Strategy, Councillor Morgan confirmed that the details were set out in Appendix A.
- 16.4 The Chair thanked Councillor Morgan for the report. Referring to the narrative in the report at 3.2 concerning the new Cultural Investment Funds, the Chair asked for an update on discussions between the City and County Councils regarding a potential application for a Libraries Improvement Fund Grant.
- 16.5 The Head of Culture confirmed that he was in contact with the Head of Library Services at Gloucestershire County Council and assistance had been offered to Gloucester Library to submit a bid for an Improvement Grant. The Head of Cultural Services understood that there may have been capacity issues preventing the Library from submitting a bid despite the offer of help from the local authorities. The Head of Culture confirmed that the deadline for the Libraries Improvement Fund was 5th July, and this was the same deadline for the Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND). He noted that priorities for investment in Gloucester Museum and the Brunswick building had been identified and that an application had been submitted for a £375k grant. The Head of Culture expressed his view that the City Council had done well to submit this application, but £18m had been made available nationally so this was a competitive fund.
- 16.6 In response to a further question from the Chair relating to the latest position of the Guildhall, Councillor Morgan confirmed that the Council was looking to put together a bid to help improve the facility. He noted that engagement work with residents was underway. The Head of Culture confirmed that a full Guildhall development plan would be brought forward later in the year, and the Cultural Development Fund bid would include £2.5m to be invested in the Guildhall. He emphasised that the City Council was at the expressions of interest stage, however if successful, further detailed plans would be developed.

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- 16.7 Councillor Hilton noted that he was surprised to receive a press release that afternoon confirming that Cabinet Members, the Leader of Gloucestershire County Council and the Vice Chair of Gloucester Culture Trust were supportive of a bid for UK City of Culture 2025. He noted his disappointment that the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had not been sought beforehand.
- 16.8 Councillor Morgan confirmed that the deadline for expressions of interest was the 19th July 2021 and was included in the report at 8.1.
- 16.9 Councillor Hilton referred to the statement in the narrative at 3.5 that Gloucester was strongly positioned to take up the opportunity and asked for Councillor Morgan's comments as to how.
- 16.10 Councillor Morgan clarified the difference between making expressions of interest and a full City of Culture bid. He explained that the Government had issued guidelines four weeks ago in relation to the new expressions of interest stage. He also noted that the new guidance confirmed that the City of Culture process had been widened to include smaller cities and felt that this showed that Government had understood that the process needed to be more accessible. Councillor Morgan explained that there was a tight timeframe between receiving the updated guidance and submitting the expressions of interest and there was a need to act quickly. Councillor Morgan confirmed that a low level of detail was required at the expressions of interest stage and that it would be considered by a panel which would then make recommendations to the Culture Minister. He further clarified that Gloucester Culture Trust had taken on the burden of submission with no additional costs to the City Council at the moment.
- 16.11 In response to an additional question from Councillor Hilton on how Coventry had benefitted from the UK City of Culture title, Councillor Morgan confirmed that Coventry City Council had recently invited cities which were thinking of making expressions of interest to Coventry to see the benefits of City of Culture success and to provide an opportunity to put any questions to the panel. Councillor Morgan noted that the past year had been extremely difficult for the cultural sector due to the Covid-19 pandemic but was confident that if Gloucester made expressions of interest and any future submissions to bid for UK City of Culture if successful in reaching the longlist, it would make a transformative difference to the city. The Head of Culture added that due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, Coventry could not hold events until May 2021 however he felt that the city had experienced transformation regardless, with a particularly extraordinary transformation of public spaces.
- 16.12 Councillor Hilton expressed his view that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needed further information on next steps and asked whether the Committee could be provided with a timetable to this effect. Referring to the statement that neighbouring district councils were supportive of Gloucester making a City of Culture bid, Councillor Hilton noted that Cheltenham already had a well-established culture scene and asked for assurances that the city would benefit from the bid as well as other districts.

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- 16.13 Councillor Morgan referred to the title of the bid 'Gloucester for Gloucestershire' and confirmed that it would be Gloucester Culture Trust who would lead and drive the focus of the bid.
- 16.14 The Head of Culture clarified that the £40k funding to deliver a more detailed bid if successful at the expressions of interest stage was not automatic and that longlisted cities would need to demonstrate how they planned to use the funding to form a full bid. The Head of Culture confirmed his understanding was that the district councils were supportive, but reiterated that the project was being led by Gloucester Culture Trust and that local authorities would not see pressure falling on their officers.
- 16.15 The Chair raised concerns about the lack of involvement from cross-party Members in the expressions of interest so far. He noted that there were no Members aside from Councillor Morgan on the Culture Trust Board and asked for clarification on whether the Board could expand to include more Councillors. The Chair also expressed his view that regular updates should have been provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 16.16 Councillor Morgan noted his agreement with the Chair and stated that projects always work better with cross-party support. He apologised that the Cabinet was not in a position to discuss the matter with groups in any great detail prior to the expressions of interest stage, due to the proximity of the deadline. Councillor Morgan confirmed that if the City were to reach the longlist stage, the Trust would reach out to Members and noted that the administration had a good track record of consulting with other groups. In relation to the Chair's suggestion of other Members sitting on the Culture Trust Board, Councillor Morgan noted that Gloucester Culture Trust was a charity and that appointing one Member of the City Council was determined by the charity's constitution.
- 16.17 In response to a further question from the Chair, Councillor Morgan confirmed that a new Chief Executive of the Culture Trust was due to take up their post in August 2021 and noted that the flow of information was likely to improve thereafter. Councillor Morgan stated that he was available to answer any questions from Members in the meantime.
- 16.18 Councillor Pullen noted that when a bid for UK City of Culture was initially considered, a commitment was given that any bid would not go ahead without cross-party support. He reflected on previous statements from the former Culture Trust Chief Executive that without cross-party support, the bid was unlikely to succeed and asked whether this position had changed. Councillor Pullen also asked for evidence confirming that the district councils were supportive of the project.
- 16.19 Councillor Morgan commented that the situation had changed following the introduction of an expressions of interest stage which required much less detailed initial submissions. He confirmed that discussions had taken place with district council leaders and some had noted their support. Councillor Morgan confirmed that if successful at the expression of interest stage,

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further opportunities would be given to district councils to confirm their support.

- 16.20 In response to a question from Councillor Pullen on the intention of the Culture Trust to consult with the public, Councillor Morgan confirmed that the decision to submit expressions of interest was a decision for the Culture Trust with support from the City Council, however public consultation would be vital for a future bid if the city was longlisted after the expressions of interest.
- 16.21 In relation to the Cultural Development Fund bid, Councillor Wilson referred to the statement in the narrative at 3.3 that funding between £2m and £5m may be applied for with evidence of match funding of a minimum of 15%. He asked whether the City Council would need to find this match funding ahead of the 19th July deadline. The Head of Culture confirmed that officers were still in the process of identifying the match funding however investment from the Guildhall was under consideration. He confirmed that further information would be available closer to the deadline.
- 16.22 Councillor Durdey thanked Councillor Morgan for the report and noted that he was proud that the city was being put forward for a possible City of Culture bid. He asked whether the Trust had any intention to highlight the City's environmental credentials within the bid. Councillor Morgan confirmed that green credentials would be vital if the City were to reach the longlist stage, and that this would certainly be highlighted alongside other considerations such as the City Council's digital and equalities strategies.
- 16.23 Councillor Lewis noted his support for the project and expressed his view that Members should also support the bid as it would be a prime opportunity for the city to showcase itself. Councillor Lewis confirmed his agreement that cross-party support would be very important if the city reached the longlist stage but noted that the Culture Trust were in the best position to lead on the project with their expertise.
- 16.24 Councillor Padilla asked how the Trust planned to promote cultural events outside of the city centre. He also commented that Gloucester was a culturally diverse city and asked Councillor Morgan to clarify whether there were any plans to reach out to ethnic minority communities during the City of Culture process. Councillor Morgan confirmed that there would be an all Gloucester approach and confirmed that the City Council would be reaching out to communities in due course.
- 16.25 Councillor Organ noted his support for the UK City of Culture project and emphasised the need for a positive approach.
- 16.26 In response to a question from Councillor Kubaszczyk on the South West Museum Development, the Head of Culture confirmed that the City Council had been approached and that discussions were ongoing.

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16.27 The Chair reminded Members that the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to be a critical friend to Cabinet and to scrutinise potential decisions impacting the city.

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

- (1) Enquiries are made of the other Gloucestershire districts as to their level of interest in being part of a bid for City of Culture 2025 and;
- (2) The Overview and Scrutiny is consulted at all stages of the bid process should Gloucester be on the longlist following consideration of the Expression of Interest.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 6th September 2021.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.30 pm hours

Chair