



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 4th July 2022

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Castle, Dee, Evans, Gravells MBE, Hilton, Kubaszczyk, O'Donnell, Organ, Sawyer and Wilson

Others in Attendance

Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources, Councillor Hannah Norman

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Stephanie Chambers

Director of Policy and Resources

Director of Communities

Housing Innovation Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Pullen and Hudson

11. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

Councillors Field and Pullen were confirmed as Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee respectively.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

14. MINUTES

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14.1 The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer noted that she had been advised by the Housing Team that the temporary accommodation acquired by the council in October last year was Jubilee House, rather than Potters Place as the minutes suggested.

14.2 **RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th June 2022 be corrected with the above amendment and signed as a correct record by the Chair at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

15. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

16. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

17. ACTION POINT ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

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

18.1 The Chair introduced the latest version of the Council Forward Plan and invited suggestions as to any items Members wished to add to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. A discussion ensued about the agenda for the meeting on Monday 5th September and it was agreed that the Committee's preference was to consider the 2021-22 Financial Outturn Report, Green Travel Plan Progress Report 2021-22, and the Community Safety Partnership update. The Committee agreed that they were content not to consider the Financial and Performance Monitoring Quarter 1 reports.

18.2 Councillor Hilton asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could receive an update later in the year on the council's bid for the second round of the Levelling Up Grant Funding. The Director of Communities noted that the submission deadline had changed and agreed to follow the timeframe up with the Head of Place. It was agreed that this item would be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme with a date to be confirmed.

18.3 Councillor Gravells queried whether the Committee would be interested in receiving an update on the Integrated Care System. He offered to pass on details of colleagues in Gloucestershire County Council to the Democratic and Electoral Services Officer who might be able to assist with facilitating a

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meeting. The Chair agreed that many Members had an interest in how the local Health Service was operating, and it was agreed that this item would be added to the Work Programme with a date to be confirmed. The Director of Communities further noted that as the City Council had a seat on the Integrated Locality Partnership (ILP), it might be useful to request a briefing on their work during this session.

- 18.4 The Chair reminded Members that they were welcome to bring suggestions outside of the Forward Plan.
- 18.5 It was noted that an update on the Leisure and Cultural Services Options Appraisal had been added to the Work Programme for 28th November 2022, and that an update on how the implementation of the Gloucester Commission to Review Race Relations' 'Calls to Action' were progressing would be added to the agenda for the meeting on 9th January 2023.

RESOLVED –

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

19. HOMES FOR UKRAINE - GLOUCESTER HOUSING UPDATE

- 19.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy introduced the report and explained that the Homes for Ukraine Scheme had been launched by central Government on 14th March 2022. She explained that the scheme, which was being administered on a county-wide level in Gloucestershire, enabled Ukrainian nationals who do not have family in the UK to apply to be sponsored to come and live in the UK.
- 19.2 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy paid tribute to the sponsors in Gloucester who had welcomed Ukrainian families in need of housing. She noted that she was proud that the city and county as a whole had come together to support Ukrainian guests and thanked officers in the Housing Team for their work in administering the scheme. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy noted that all necessary security checks for guests and sponsors in Gloucester had been completed prior to guests' arrival. She thanked the Gloucester Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) for assisting with the delivery of the scheme.
- 19.3 The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy explained that the key responsibilities for the various Homes for Ukraine workstreams was set out in 3.15 in the report, and that 3.14 confirmed which areas were under Gloucester City Council responsibility. She further noted that where there were cases of relationship breakdown between guests and sponsors, guests were eligible for homelessness assistance from the City Council if a rematch

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could not be achieved before the guest was required to leave the sponsor's accommodation.

- 19.4 The Chair asked for the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy's views as to whether the Homes for Ukraine Scheme had been a success locally so far. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing confirmed that in her view it had been a success, particularly in view of the urgency needed to deliver the scheme quickly in response to the Ukraine crisis. She noted that she was not aware of any complaints from guests or sponsors within Gloucester.
- 19.5 In response to an additional query from the Chair as to whether the scheme had put a strain on officer time and resources, the Housing Innovation Manager explained that the Housing Team were used to having to deal with urgent and time sensitive issues and therefore they could be flexible in their response.
- 19.6 Councillor Wilson expressed the view that the report was a reassuring read. In relation to the narrative concerning rematching, he asked whether it was likely that there will be instances of people needing to be rematched and if so, whether the Council had the resources to find alternative accommodation. The Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that the UK as a whole had started to see an increase in the number of guests and sponsors requesting a rematch and although not as great, the Housing Teams were seeing a slow increase in Gloucestershire. He explained that Gloucester, along with the other districts, had processes in place if they needed to respond to such requests.
- 19.7 Councillor Organ asked whether the Housing Team had seen any particular trends in terms of the reasons for re-match requests. The Housing Innovation Manager responded that there had been an early case of accommodation not being suitable and this had been dealt with. Aside from that, he confirmed that no other trends had been seen. The Housing Innovation Manager was mindful that a requirement of the scheme was for sponsors to offer accommodation for a minimum of 6 months, and therefore he did anticipate a spike towards the end of the 6-month period.
- 19.8 In response to a further query from Councillor Organ as to whether more housing stock might be needed, the Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that he hoped not, as there had been around 3,000 offers of accommodation from sponsors across Gloucestershire and many had not yet been taken up by Ukrainian guests. He confirmed that Gloucestershire County Council would be contacting sponsors to establish whether they were still able to provide accommodation, in the event of an influx of Ukrainian guests. He explained that authorities were starting to see a trend of guests deciding not to travel, as they were monitoring how the conflict in Ukraine progresses.
- 19.9 Councillor Hilton referred to the figures at 3.16 and 3.16.3 and observed that Gloucester had the lowest number of properties and arrival levels in the county. He asked why districts like Gloucester and Cheltenham were receiving fewer applications and wondered whether it was to do with the

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prevalence of larger properties in areas like Tewkesbury and Forest of Dean. The Housing Innovation Manager agreed that the trend could well be due to socio-economic and demographic reasons as well as the size of properties. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy expressed the view that citizens of Gloucestershire had stepped up to help and paid tribute to the sponsors who had offered accommodation.

- 19.10 Councillor Gravells asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be provided with some figures detailing the breakdown of sponsor numbers and guest take up in each council ward. The Housing Innovation Manager agreed that this information could be circulated to Members in due course.
- 19.11 Councillor Sawyer queried whether enhanced DBS checks were required for sponsors who had been matched with lone women as well as families. The Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that all potential sponsors were required to have a national check. However, under the requirements of the scheme, enhanced DBS checks were reserved for sponsors of families with children. He confirmed that the Housing Team had an effective safeguarding process in place if they became aware of any safety concerns.
- 19.12 Councillor Sawyer asked whether there were any statistics available concerning lone female guests. The Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that the vast majority of Ukrainian guests were women, children, and elderly men due to the imposition of martial law in Ukraine. He reiterated that it was unlikely that enhanced checks would be undertaken for sponsors offering accommodation to lone females as this was not a requirement of the scheme. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy confirmed that she shared Councillor Sawyer's concerns. She noted that the United Nations had recently undertaken a large piece of work on this element of the scheme and confirmed that she had contacted the organisation for advice.
- 19.13 In response to an additional query from Councillor Sawyer regarding school places for Ukrainian children in Gloucester, the Housing Innovation Manager noted that Gloucestershire County Council was the responsible authority for education matters including school places. He confirmed that as far as he was aware, school places had been found for all Ukrainian children in Gloucester and that the County Council had relaxed the school admissions rules. He also confirmed that additional funding had been made available to facilitate additional pupils.
- 19.14 In response to a query from the Chair as to whether additional resources were needed for translation services for Ukrainian children who may not speak English, the Housing Innovation Manager confirmed that it was his understanding that it was a mixed picture but that that would again be a matter for Gloucestershire County Council
- 19.15 The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy and officers for their time and for preparing the report.

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

20. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that –

The press and public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public are present during consideration of this item, there will be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A (para 3) of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

21. ICT RECOVERY UPDATE

RESOLVED – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** the verbal update as per the exempt minutes.

22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 5th September 2022.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 7.50 pm hours

Chair