



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 29th November 2021

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Castle, S. Chambers, Dee, Evans, Hilton, Kubaszczyk, O'Donnell, Organ, Padilla, Wilson, A. Chambers and Conder

Others in Attendance

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

Head of Policy and Resources
Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. Sawyer and Zaman

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

54. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

55. MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 1st November 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

56. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

57. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

58. ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

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

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

- 59.1 The Chair introduced the latest version of the Council Forward Plan and suggested that the Committee examine the Gloucester City Monuments Review in January 2022. The Committee agreed to add this item to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme. In response to a question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding what would happen to monuments where connections with trafficking of enslaved African people had been identified, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the report would include suggestions and noted that it might not be a one size fits all approach. She noted her view that it was a good thing that the Race Relations Review and Monuments Review were separate pieces of work so that each could be given appropriate consideration.
- 59.2 Councillor Hilton noted that the Forum Phase 2 Approval and Appointment of Main Contractor report was no longer being considered by full Council and asked for an explanation as to why this was the case. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that the Council had recently received advice from One Legal which confirmed that this was a decision which could be made by Cabinet and that it did not need the approval of main Council. She noted that if Members had any questions which they would like to put to Cabinet on this item, they were welcome to submit a written question in line with the recent changes to the Council Procedure Rules, and could also attend the Cabinet meeting in person if they had a supplementary question.
- 59.3 Following a request from the Chair to expand on the new question process for the benefit of new Members, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that following the recent constitutional changes to the Procedure Rules, there was now a requirement to provide notice of questions three clear working days in advance of Cabinet meetings. She explained that if Members wanted to ask questions, they could put them in writing to Democratic Services ahead of this deadline.
- 59.4 The Chair asked whether the Committee would like to consider the Festival and Events Programme and it was agreed that this item would be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the meeting on 31st January 2022.
- 59.5 Councillor Dee asked whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee needed to consider the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Model Design Code. The Chair expressed the view that due to the technical nature of the report, this might be more of a planning matter and it was agreed that the Committee could revisit the item at a later date if necessary.
- 59.6 In response to a query from Councillor A. Chambers regarding the Armed Forces Community Covenant, the Chair confirmed that the Committee had

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already considered the 2021 report back in October and if Councillor A. Chambers had any specific questions, he could approach Councillor Lewis as the Member Armed Forces Champion.

- 59.7 In response to a further question from Councillor A. Chambers on the Temporary Negotiated Stopping Places Report, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that there were no plans for bringing this particular item forward following initial discussions and that it was very likely that it would be dropped from the Forward Plan in due course.

RESOLVED –

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

60. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTER 2 REPORT

- 60.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report and explained that the purpose was to confirm the Council's current financial position against the agreed budgets for the 2021/22 financial year. She noted that the current forecast year-end position for the financial year was an increase to the General Fund balance of £173k against a budgeted increase of £123k.
- 60.2 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that areas facing pressures included Planning, Environment and Performance and Resources. She further noted that areas that were seeing stability and therefore forecast to be on budget were Communities and Neighbourhoods and Culture and Leisure. In relation to parking, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources highlighted that the number of people parking in the city had slowly increased since May 2021 which had resulted an improvement to the year-end forecast outcome to a £500k shortfall, however this was being closely monitored.
- 60.3 The Chair noted his interest in the Culture and Leisure portfolio in particular and asked for the Cabinet Members' comments as to whether any preparation was underway in light of the latest Covid-19 developments. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she was not aware of any issues at that time, however she noted that where there had been restrictions on cultural venues during earlier stages of the pandemic, staff had handled the rearranging or cancelling of events excellently. She noted that she was confident that staff would do their best to minimise the impact on impact on services in the event of further restrictions.
- 60.4 Councillor Pullen expressed concerns that car parking income was an ongoing problem with little sign of improvement. He referred to the Sales, Fees & Charges claim which the Council had submitted for Quarter 1 and

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asked whether the Council could place a further bid to help towards the £500k shortfall in this area. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources clarified that the previous Quarter 1 return was the last Quarter Councils could submit Sales, Fees & Charges claims from Government. This said, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that should the Covid-19 situation worsen, local authorities would look to central Government to re-establish funding. She also reiterated that the Council were seeing some incremental increases in parking revenue.

- 60.5 In response to a further question from Councillor Pullen regarding the budget pressures and £326k shortfall from cemeteries and crematorium services, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the lost income was mainly as a result of a reduction in income from wakes at the Arbor. She noted that she had been advised by colleagues in crematorium services that the next few months were predicted to be a busy period for the Arbor crematorium and further income would depend on whether people had the confidence to hold wakes. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that if further support was available from Government in due course, the Council would be at the front of the queue.
- 60.6 Councillor Pullen referred to the action point update included in agenda item 7 which confirmed that the Council was not currently pursuing historic debt or repayment of the rolling credit facility from Aspire Leisure Trust. He noted that the narrative at 5.12 suggested that the costs incurred by the Council were being recovered in full and asked for clarification on this point. The Head of Policy and Resources clarified that during the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and prior to May 2021, the Council had not sought repayment for energy and overhead costs from Aspire however since the restrictions were lifted in May 2021, the Council would seek to recover the costs incurred since May 2021.
- 60.7 Councillor Wilson noted that the calculations outlined in the report were based on the assumption that there would not be further lockdowns. He asked for the Cabinet Member's thoughts on whether the same level of support would be provided by Central Government in the event of further lockdowns. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources and the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that they had not yet received assurances from Central Government regarding further financial support for local authorities. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources referred to previous comments made by Councillor Hilton where he noted that the Government had done the right thing in supporting local authorities and confirmed her expectation that this would be the case in the event of further restrictions.
- 60.8 Councillor A. Chambers asked for clarification on the 2021/22 budget, year-end forecast and forecast variance figures which the Head of Policy and Resources provided.
- 60.9 Councillor Hilton referred to the narrative at 5.14 confirming that the planning service was forecast to be adverse to budget by £253k. Councillor Hilton noted that the narrative confirmed that this was as a result of a surge in

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smaller-scale planning applications and asked whether the Council had needed to take on more staff to cope with the additional workload. He also asked whether the Council needed to plan for an increase in budget for this portfolio area.

- 60.10 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the shortfall in larger planning applications was behind the adverse position and noted that she was not aware of any changes to planning staffing. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further confirmed that she had asked colleagues in planning services to tighten the forecast as much as possible to help avoid further adversity.
- 60.11 In response to an additional request for clarification from Councillor Hilton, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that Councillor Hilton was correct in stating that the slowdown in major planning applications was behind the shortfall and stated his hope that the income from major development projects within the city would boost income in the next year.
- 60.12 The Chair referred to 5.16 in the report stating that the homelessness budget for the year was forecast to be favourable to budget by £199k as a result of efforts to increase temporary accommodation. He asked for further information as to the progress which had been made in this area. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that 14 months ago, a business case was made to move forward with the acquisition of Potters Place to help provide supported and temporary accommodation for homeless people. She explained that the decision was subsequently ratified by Cabinet and that the Council then entered into an agreement with YMCA Cheltenham to help manage the facility on behalf with the Council. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further noted that during the Cabinet meeting on 13th October, Cabinet had ratified a similar decision relating to Jubilee House and it was hoped that a similar approach would be adopted for this site.
- 60.13 Councillor Pullen requested clarity on the narrative at 5.14 in the report which stated that the statutory nature of the fees that could be charged for small scale planning applications prevented the full costs of providing the service from being recouped. He asked whether this meant that the Council was facing a loss as a result of being unable to access subsidies to help cover the costs of domestic planning applications and if this was the case, whether the Council had received any indication that this was going to be reviewed by central Government. It was agreed that further clarification would be sought from the Head of Place on this matter and that this would be shared with the Committee by way of follow-up.
- 60.14 In response to queries from Councillor A. Chambers regarding planning recruitment, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that planning recruitment was generally a challenge for local authorities as it was important to employ people with the appropriate skills.
- 60.15 In response to a further question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding the £915k budget for Revenues and Benefits and the favourable forecast

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variance, the Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that expected government grants had been received at the start of the financial year and expenditure across the year was in line with the budget.

- 60.16 Councillor Durdey referred to the Review of the City's Corporate Management Function in Appendix 3 and asked whether Members could have confidence that the savings target would be achieved. The Head of Policy and Resources confirmed that the review had been completed and that he was confident that the target would be met.
- 60.17 Councillor Durdey asked whether the Council was expecting significant investments as a result of the Capital Programme and whether any projects would come to fruition before next year's budget. The Head of Policy and Resources noted that the Kings Square redevelopment was close to completion and that it was expected that the main works would be completed by the end of the year. He also referred to the development of the new Food Dock and noted that he expected progress to continue but did not have an exact date for completion.
- 60.18 The Chair asked for the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources' views on whether it was increasingly difficult to make savings. Referring to Appendix 3, the Chair also asked for an update on plans to reduce the Member Grant allocation. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources expressed the view that it did get increasingly difficult to identify and make savings, particularly in light of the pressures caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In relation to the Chair's question on Member Grant allocation and community grants, she confirmed that this was monitored on an annual basis and that the Council considered the type of grants which could be allocated to community groups. She noted that some Members struggled to spend their grant allocation, but the situation would be reviewed and monitored.

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

61. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 2 REPORT

- 61.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report and explained that the purpose was to inform Members of the Council's performance against key measures in Quarter 2 of 2021/22 and noted that the data was set out in Appendix 1. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further noted that where targets exist, they were included along with a narrative to explain the data. She confirmed that measures seeing an improvement were homelessness preventions, the number of environmental-crime FPNS and Museum of Gloucester footfall, whereas areas showing a declining trend were recycling collection and staff absence rates.

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- 61.2 Councillor Pullen referred to performance indicator CWB-13 relating to the percentage of broadly compliant food premises. He noted that the narrative indicated that the reduction of broadly compliant food premises was down to a shortage of qualified Food Safety Inspectors (EHPs) with the appropriate level of training. Councillor Pullen asked how many EHPs were currently employed by the Council and how many EHPs should be employed by Councils.
- 61.3 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she had received some background advice from the Head of Communities and that the reason for the increased demand in food safety inspections was due to an increase in new businesses opening after the restrictions on the hospitality industry were lifted. She confirmed that premises were inspected on a priority basis and this was based on risk, for example, premises handling raw meat were considered to be riskier than bakeries. It was agreed that further enquiries would be made with the Communities team regarding the staffing situation.
- 61.4 Councillor Wilson referred to the measure relating to average customer waiting time (CS-8). He noted that during the previous year, the average waiting time was 45 seconds – 1 minute which was considerably shorter than the current target of 2 minutes and asked why this was the case. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that part of the reason for the reduced call volume during 2020 could be explained by people facing other challenges during lockdown. She confirmed that setting targets was an operational decision made by senior management. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources further noted that there had been other challenges such as the training of new staff and that the issues which were being dealt with by the customer service team were more complex, such as bulky waste collection. This said, she noted that work was underway to enable residents to order bulky waste collection online.
- 61.5 In response to additional concerns raised by Councillor Wilson regarding whether the current target was ambitious and whether officers were being challenged enough, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she would share the feedback with the Head of Communities and Customer Services Manager at the next Cabinet Member briefing.
- 61.6 In response to a question from the Chair regarding whether there was any other way that residents could report missed recycling collections aside from the online Report It facility, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that residents could also report the issue via My Gloucester. She referred to her own experience of having two separate My Gloucester accounts, noting that she used one as a resident as the other account to report issues on behalf of constituents.
- 61.7 Councillor Hilton referred to the measure WR-15 relating to the percentage of recycling collected on time. He noted that the performance measure confirmed that 99.88% of recycling was collected on time in September 2021 however he still received many complaints from residents regarding missed

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collections. He expressed the view that the situation needed to be closely monitored and asked why the KPIs had been suspended.

- 61.8 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she had sought clarity from the Head of Communities and was advised that the data collected was from residents who had reported missed collections via contacting the Council's switchboard or using the Report It facility. In response to further comments from Councillor Hilton regarding previous assurances from the Leader of the Council that the recycling situation would improve, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that the Leader had advised that the Council had managed to recruit additional drivers, however as new employees, they were in a period of probation. She also noted that there had been challenges as a result of drivers self-isolating. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources expressed the hope that once the new drivers had passed their probation, a full fleet should be operational.
- 61.9 Councillor Hilton asked for further clarity on how data on missed recycling collections was captured as he felt this could be useful ahead of the transfer of waste and recycling services to Ubico in Spring 2022. It was agreed that further enquiries would be made, and further information would be provided to the Committee in due course.
- 61.10 Councillor Durdey commended the staff absence rate figures included at HR-3 and asked whether the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources had received information on staff retention and turnover rates. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that it was a matter which was routinely discussed with the Council's HR business partner. She confirmed that the retention level was well within the Local Government standards average and that she had no concerns in this regard. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the figures were reviewed on a regular basis but expressed the view that some turnover of staff was healthy for local authorities.
- 61.11 In response to a question from Councillor A. Chambers about fees and charges, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that these were set as part of the Council's Budget. She also confirmed that all Cabinet portfolio holders held discussions with their Heads of Service about whether it was appropriate to charge more in a competitive market would form part of these discussions. The Head of Policy and Resources further noted that the Money Plan report in the Budget papers which is being considered at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee contains the agreed assumptions on increases to the fees and charges.

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

62. REVIEW OF OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

- 62.1 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources introduced the report and explained that the purpose was to outline viable options for ongoing

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office accommodation for City Council staff. She confirmed that the report was asking Cabinet to resolve that the option to relocate to the Eastgate Shopping Centre in 2022 be approved and that negotiations were commenced with Gloucestershire County Council as to the current rental levels. She noted that the report outlined 4 options, namely to remain in Shire Hall but negotiate a lower rent, to relocate to the Eastgate Shopping Centre office space, to move to North Warehouse or to relocate to alternative accommodation. It was noted that the option to move to North Warehouse was not available in the short term due to the tenancy agreement with Regus.

- 62.2 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that if the Committee wished to discuss the savings outlined in Appendix 3, the Committee would need to move into private session. She also confirmed that City Council staff had been briefed on the proposed move and that an overwhelmingly positive response had been received. She referred to the narrative at 8.3, and confirmed that elected Member accommodation and parking were under review and that a detailed briefing session could be provided in due course if requested by Members.
- 62.3 Councillor Wilson noted that he had first read about the proposals in the press. He referred to the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources' comments regarding favourable feedback from staff and asked how this feedback was gathered. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that the matter was raised by the Managing Director during a recent staff Q&A session. The Head of Policy and Resources further confirmed that staff had been invited to take any feedback to the change champions group. He noted that the main concerns raised were changing facilities for staff who cycled to work and parking provision.
- 62.4 Councillor Wilson requested clarification on the statement in the report that the option to relocate to the Eastgate was a temporary move subject to the review of long-term portfolio and office requirements. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources indicated that this wording alluded to the possibility of City Council staff returning to North Warehouse at some point in the future, however there was no option to end the tenancy contract with Regus in the short-term.
- 62.5 Councillor Pullen thanked the Cabinet Member for her assurances on stability and noted that he felt that the recommendation was sensible in principle. He expressed the view that the location was ideal and that it was sensible for the Council to take an opportunity to make savings. Councillor Pullen referred to a recent press release which described plans to bring the Council into the heart of the city. He noted that although relocating to the Eastgate Shopping Centre would move the Council into the city centre, customer services would still be located at the Gateway on Westgate Street and asked for the Cabinet Members' comments on the rationale behind this decision.
- 62.6 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources explained that the utilisation of the Gateway had changed as the city emerged from the

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pandemic and that there was now an appointment system with the vast majority of queries dealt over the telephone or by email. She confirmed that since there were very few appointments taking place, there were no proposals to change the Gateway location at that stage. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources indicated that there had been a suggestion to review the position after the new system had been in place for 12 months, which would be July 2022, and that would be the time to determine whether the Gateway needed to be moved. She confirmed that there was no space available at the Eastgate Shopping Centre to accommodate customer services facilities.

- 62.7 Councillor Pullen expressed the view that the customer services should be more accessible for residents and that there could be grounds for confusion with the different locations. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that the City Council website and appropriate signage would be in place to direct residents who needed to access customer service appointments to the Gateway location and it would be down to the City Council and Communications team to raise awareness.
- 62.8 In response to a further question from Councillor Pullen regarding car parking provision for City Council staff and a request for assurances that there would be no increased charges for staff who continued to drive into work, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she had no hesitation in giving those reassurances and that the Council would look at the best options for staff parking provision.
- 62.9 Councillor Hilton noted that he previously supported the move from the HKP Warehouse as the Westgate Street location was more public. He raised concerns that the Council was shrinking, and by reducing office space, staff might be put off from working in the office and visiting the city. Councillor Hilton felt that the fact that the Council was not yet able to occupy the North Warehouse was an example of the Council retracting. He stated that the report was a disappointing one and that he did not feel that relocating to the Eastgate Shopping Centre was the right decision, expressing concerns that the City Council was a Council with no home.
- 62.10 The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources expressed the view that rather than vanishing, the City Council was nimble and could adapt and evolve with the times. She noted her view that the decision should be based on the best value option for residents and how the Council could best meet their demands.
- 62.11 Councillor A. Chambers expressed the view that the proposal to relocate to the Eastgate Shopping Centre was a good idea and that it was good common sense to use the Council's own assets to make savings. He asked whether there were any plans to make energy efficiency improvements to the Eastgate office space, such as insulation upgrades or solar panels. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that any energy efficient improvements would be undertaken as part of the broader regeneration project in the Eastgate area and such options would be considered provided the business case was supportive. She also confirmed

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that the office furniture currently used by staff belonged to the City Council and that it would be moved into the new office to avoid wastage.

- 62.12 In response to further questions from Councillor A. Chambers regarding lift access and whether the Council would be using local contractors to assist with the move, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that there was lift access at the Eastgate Shopping Centre space. She noted that the Council generally did rely on local contractors where possible but would have to follow the appropriate tender processes.
- 62.13 Councillor A. Chambers referred to the visualisation plans in Appendix 2 and asked whether this was the final design. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that Appendix 2 was the current indicative design, however the Council would be seeking advice from contractors regarding technical issues such as charging facilities.
- 62.14 In response to an additional question from Councillor A. Chambers regarding meeting rooms and whether there would be facilities for hybrid or virtual meetings, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that there were 5 meeting spaces in the Eastgate Shopping Centre office space and that it was possible that one could be used as a Leaders' Officer. She also confirmed that there was direct access into the Guildhall from the Eastgate Shopping Centre, and that there were multiple meeting rooms at the Guildhall which the Council could look to utilise if necessary.
- 62.15 Councillor Dee expressed the view that North Warehouse was a more appropriate location for the City Council as it was a prestigious building with direct access to the Council meeting chamber at the Civic Suite. She asked whether it was possible to delay the decision for the ongoing office accommodation beyond March 2022 to establish what Regus' future plans were. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that she did not believe that Regus would be looking to vacate North Warehouse in the near future. She noted that in the current climate, the North Warehouse building was too large for the Council as many staff were still working from home. She also confirmed that the open plan office layout in the plans was preferred by officers as it helped promote collaborative working.
- 62.16 Councillor Durdey stated that he agreed that the Council needed to be agile and expressed the view that where savings needed to be made, the Council should make them to make the best use of resources. He asked what the estimated timeframe for the relocation was. The Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources confirmed that if the option to relocate to the Eastgate Shopping Centre was approved, discussions with the County Council regarding the exit strategy and a potential extension to the lease would commence around mid-December. She confirmed that the current timeline for the relocation was June or July 2022.
- 62.17 In response to a question from the Chair regarding a review period, the Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources noted that any changes to

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the North Warehouse tenancy agreement between the City Council and Regus would be unlikely to take place before 2028.

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

- (1) The option to relocate to the Eastgate Shopping Centre be approved and that improvements are made to public accessibility by moving the Gateway customer services into the unit as soon as possible, or as and when a suitable alternative unit is available.
- (2) Long-term options for office accommodation for City Council staff are kept under review unless there is a significant change in circumstances.

63. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business (Agenda item 13) 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 of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended.

64. PROPERTY INVESTMENT REVIEW

RESOLVED – As per the recommendations in the confidential report.

65. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 6th December 2021.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 8.26 pm hours

Chair