



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING : Monday, 6th December 2021

PRESENT : Cllrs. Field (Chair), Pullen (Vice-Chair), Durdey (Spokesperson), Ackroyd, Castle, Dee, Hilton, Kubaszczyk, O'Donnell, Organ, Padilla, Sawyer, Wilson and Morgan

Others in Attendance

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Richard Cook

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

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Councillor Andrew Lewis

Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods, Councillor Justin Hudson

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor Andrew Gravells

Head of Communities

Head of Culture

Head of Place

Head of Policy and Resources

Financial Services Manager

Democratic and Electoral Services Team Leader

Democratic and Electoral Services Officer

APOLOGIES : Cllrs. S. Chambers, Evans and Zaman

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

67. DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIPPING

There were no declarations of party whipping.

68. MINUTES

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RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **NOTE** that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 1st November had already been approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair during the meeting on Monday 29th November 2021.

69. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (15 MINUTES)

There were no public questions.

70. PETITIONS AND DEPUTATIONS (15 MINUTES)

There were no petitions and deputations.

71. FUTURE PLANS FOR GROUNDS MAINTENANCE PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

71.1 The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report and explained that the purpose was to outline the options for the delivery of grounds maintenance services from April 2022. He confirmed that Cabinet was being asked to note the options in the report and to resolve that Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucester City Homes were thanked for their cooperation and support, that arrangements were made to progress with option B in the report and that licensing elements were considered under a separate report to Cabinet in due course.

71.2 The Leader of the Council explained that option B involved negotiating a more equitable arrangement with Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucester City Homes for the future delivery of grounds maintenance services. The Leader of the Council noted his view that option B would provide environmental benefits as well as further clarity for residents as to which organisation was responsible for providing the service. He also explained that there would be a positive implication for the Revenues and Benefits budget as the City Council would no longer be subsidising the other organisations. The Leader of the Council further explained that if negotiations failed with either party, option A, to terminate the agreement, would be considered however there would likely be staffing and resource issues with this route. He confirmed that option C, to continue subsidising Gloucestershire County Council and Gloucester City Homes, was not being considered.

71.3 The Chair noted his view that option B was a logical way forward and asked for the Leader of the Council's comments on whether there was a risk of negotiations failing with either Gloucestershire County Council or Gloucester City Homes. The Leader of the Council confirmed his understanding that Gloucestershire County Council were close to agreeing to the proposed changes. He confirmed that in order to make the agreement more equitable, Gloucester City Homes were facing a cost increase and there was a concern that they may look for an alternative grounds maintenance partner. This said, the Leader of the Council noted that the risk was relatively low in his view.

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- 71.4 Councillor Hilton referred to the narrative at 3.4 in the report which stated that the 2008 Highways Mini-Agency Agreement outlined arrangements for the City Council to deliver highways, grounds maintenance, pavement licensing, gating orders and weed control. He asked the Leader of the Council to clarify whether this also included tree maintenance trees as this was a frequent casework issue for Members and that in his experience, it was difficult to establish which authority was responsible for tree maintenance. The Leader of the Council clarified that the new arrangement would include an agreement for the City Council to provide grass cutting, hedge and tree maintenance services however it would no longer deal with pavement licensing and gating orders. The Leader noted that if a more equitable arrangement was reached under option B, this would help avoid confusion over responsibilities. He reiterated that the County Council was broadly in agreement with the new agreement.
- 71.5 Councillor Hilton commented that the report did not include a breakdown of the current costs of providing grounds maintenance services and how much additional income the Council was likely to receive under the proposed new arrangements. He asked for clarification as to whether option B would have a positive impact on the Council's budget. The Leader noted that he did not have the exact figures to hand, but there could be an estimated additional cost of £100k for Gloucestershire County Council and an estimated £250k increase for Gloucester City Homes. He confirmed that the budget would be reviewed if additional funding was available, and any possible improvements to the service would be reviewed as part of that process.
- 71.6 In response to concerns raised by Councillor Hilton regarding budget pressures in the department, the Head of Communities explained that the current figures under the 2008 agreement were deliberately not included in the report, as the costings had recently been updated following the mapping exercise referred to at 3.6. She confirmed that the intention was for Councillors and Members of the Public to be able to view the maps in due course.
- 71.7 In response to a further question from the Chair regarding the new costing figures, the Head of Communities clarified that the final figures had not yet been negotiated and therefore could not be included in the report. She reiterated that the current figures were historical and therefore no longer valuable.
- 71.8 Councillor Pullen expressed disappointment that up to date costings could not be provided and also expressed concern that the report suggested that the City Council had been providing an underpriced service for several years. He expressed the view that the City Council needed to take a strong position during negotiations and needed to drive discussions. Councillor Pullen asked for clarification on the proposed new contractual period and what the review process would look like.
- 71.9 The Head of Communities confirmed that the contract would be cost based and would likely be reviewed annually over a 10-year period. She noted that new arrangement would be a net contract and that there might be some

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increased costs with inflation. The Leader of the Council further explained that it would have been difficult to terminate the arrangement any earlier but the mapping exercise had provided clarity on how much the City Council was subsidising both organisations. He noted that with the 12-month notice period coinciding with the upcoming transfer of waste services to Ubico, the timing for these negotiations was sensible.

- 71.10 In response to a question from Councillor Castle regarding whether maintenance of dog waste bins were part of this exercise, the Leader of the Council confirmed that dog waste bin maintenance was not included within the grounds maintenance negotiations, however there was a separate mapping exercise underway for dog waste bins within the city and this was ongoing.
- 71.11 Councillor Wilson raised concerns about whether the timelines for the negotiations were long enough with just 3 months until the termination of the grounds maintenance contract in March 2022. The Leader of the Council responded that there had been detailed discussions over the past 9 months between the organisations and that these were now at the concluding stage. He again confirmed that there was substantive agreement between the City and County Council and that proposed costing figures had been shared with Gloucester City Homes.
- 71.12 Councillor Wilson expressed concern that the £250k referred to by the Leader earlier would be a significant increased cost for Gloucester City Homes. He suggested that the Committee may wish to consider putting forward a recommendation that any extra income generated from the grounds maintenance arrangements should be ringfenced to improve the service. In response, the Head of Policy and Resources explained that the City Council was still negotiating the final contract with Ubico as the new waste service provider from April 2022. Referring to increased fuel and equipment costs as a result of rising inflation, he advised that some of the income from the grounds maintenance arrangement may help towards these costs.
- 71.13 A discussion ensued about Councillor Wilson's suggested recommendation, following which the Leader of the Council offered to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the grounds maintenance arrangements and negotiations in due course. It was agreed that the recommendation would be reserved until the update had been received.

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

72. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 6th December 2021.

Time of commencement: 6.30 pm hours

Time of conclusion: 6.55 pm hours

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Chair